

**Article**

**Collaborations and Performative Agency in Refugee Theater in Germany**

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WIMM #1024813, VOL 00, ISS 00

**Collaborations and Performative Agency in**

**Refugee Theater in Germany**

FAZILA BHIMJI

QUERY SHEET

This page lists questions we have about your paper. The numbers displayed at left can be found in the text of the paper for reference. In addition, please review your paper as a whole for correctness.

**Q1.** Au: Should terms such as Lager and Duldung be capitalized? Or perhaps bechanged to italic and lowercase?

**Q2.** Au: Where acronyms are used (e.g., NPD, UKIP), spell out full names on firstmention.

**Q3.** Au: What “this” refers to is unclear (In “This leads to the notion...”).

**Q4.** Au: Please confirm “and deregulation from globalization” is correct.

**Q5.** Au: No match for Gonzales 2011; please add reference.

**Q6.** Au: Check spelling Puggoni. reconcile all.

**Q7.** Au: No ref list match for Tyler 2003; please add reference.

**Q8.** Au: Please confirm “Noborder” is correct or change as needed.

**Q9.** Au: Check spelling of Schiembach, Rygeil. reconcile all.

**Q10.** Au: No match for Galvez 2010; please add reference.

**Q11.** Au: Include year in citation for Castles.

**Q12.** Au: No ref list match for Butler 1990; please add reference.

**Q13.** Au: No ref list match for Butler 2009; please add reference.

**Q14.** Au: Please confirm “precarity” is correct.

**Q15.** Au: Title, Die Asyl-Dialoge, doesn’t match earlier mention; please correct whereneeded.

**Q16.** Au: A formal name: Orange Square?

**Q17.** Au: Replace cites with “other sites”? smaller cities?

**Q18.** Au: Not clear what “this performance” refers to; please clarify.

**Q19.** Au: What should this be? three and a half long duration—3-and-a-half hour longduration?

**Q20.** Au: What “these art forms” refers to is unclear; please clarify.

**Q21.** Au: No match for Tilly. Should this be Tiller?

**Q22.** Au: Preservers to appeal, wins, and raises a family in Berlin? please check previoussentence for errors. Revise as needed. **Q23.** Au: No match for Tyler 2006; please add reference.

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**Q24.** Au: Sentence beginning “What is also important...” doesn’t seem to make sense.

Please check and revise as needed. To an unsympathetic audience?

**Q25.** Au: No ref list match for Jeffers; please add reference.

**Q26.** Au: No ref list match for Gonzales 2011; please add reference.

**Q27.** Au: What “its” refers to is unclear (in “its temporal dimensions”). please specify.

**Q28.** Au: Include page nos. for Castels.

**Q29.** Au: No matching citation for Arendt; please cite in text or delete reference.

**Q30.** Au: Use actual name of “Author”.

**Q31.** Au: Designate Butler, 1997a and b. Which is which? Please match to citations intext.

**Q32.** Au: For Butler 2010, include page nos.

**Q33.** Au: No matching citation for Butler & Athanasiou; please cite in text or deletereference.

**Q34.** Au: For Castles, journal name missing.

**Q35.** Au: No matching citation for Gonzales; please cite in text or delete reference.

**Q36.** Au: No matching citation for Jefferson; please cite in text or delete reference.

**Q37.** Au: For Malkki, include missing information (If journal article, add journal name,volume, page #s; if book, add publisher name and location).

**Q38.** Au: No matching citation for Menjivar 2011; please cite in text or delete reference.

**Q39.** Au: For Puggioni, include page nos.

**Q40.** Au: No citation match for Ranciere; please cite in text or delete reference.

**Q41.** Au: For Rygiel, include author first initial.

**Q42.** Au: For Saldana 2005, publisher location missing.

**Q43.** Au: For Saldana 2012, publisher location missing.

**Q44.** Au: No matching citation for Tiller; please cite in text or delete reference.

**Q45.** Au: for Tiller, publisher location missing.

**Q46.** Au: For Wrench, publisher city missing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS LISTING

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**Collaborations and Performative Agency in Refugee Theater in Germany**

*Fazila Bhimji*

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| 1 | **ARTICLES** |
| 2 | **Collaborations and Performative** |
|  | **Agency** |
| 3 | **in Refugee Theater in Germany** |
| 4 | FAZILA BHIMJI |

1. *Film and Media Studies, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, United Kingdom*
2. *The article contributes to an understanding of the formation of* 7 *political identities of*

*asylum seekers within the context of theater* 8 *in Germany. Thus, this article demonstrates the ways in which* 9 *the identity of the refugee as a political activist is accomplished* 10 *through performative exercise for the German audience. In doing* 11 *so, the refugee-activist does not aim simply toward assimilating* 12 *within German society, but rather her/his identity is formed within* 13 *a context of unjust European and German asylum laws. Much* 14 *scholarship has focused on the concept of networks and citizenship* 15 *in the context of immigrant and refugee protests, but the notion of* 16 *performative agency within the realm of refugee theatre has been* 17 *less discussed. This article by exploring the performative agency* 18 *of refugees contributes to an understanding of refugee political* 19 *activism in spheres other than camps and the streets. In doing so, the* 20 *article contributes to consider alternate modes of refugee activism* 21 *such as the cultural sphere. Data are drawn from the viewing of* 22 *seven performances in Germany of refugee activists from the global* 23 *South as well as from interviews with the theater team.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 24 | *KEYWORDSrefugees, performative agency, activist theater,* 25 *collaboration,* |  |  |
| *Germany* | |  |  |
|  | There has been a wave of activism for refugee rights in the past 2 years in |  |  |
| 26 | **Q1** |  |

1. Germany. A theater production, *Die Asyl-Monologe*, running for 3 years is set 28 within this time period. This article focuses on the ways in which refugees 29 present themselves in their narratives related by three professional actors as
2. well as during the discussion sessions as they interact with the audience. In

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1. doing so, the aim of the article is to highlight and examine the performative 32 agency of refugees.

33 Refugees form alliances with the theater in two main ways: firstly, by 34 lending their stories to the theater in the form of in-depth interviews, which 35 is then related in the form of verbatim theater by professional actors, and 36 secondly, by participating in the follow-up discussion session. Therefore, 37 they use the theater space as a platform to express their views, their sto38 ries of struggles, and their particular campaigns. Thus, the article considers 39 how these collaborative acts between theater and refugee activists actually 40 present their campaigns and experiences on stage. In doing so, the article 41 aims to demonstrate the refugees’ and asylum seekers’ performative resis42 tance against invisibility, isolation, and disconnectedness, which the German 43 state imposed upon them through a legal requirement, known as “Residen44 zpflicht,” until January 2015. According to this law, asylum seekers in some 45 federal district-states in Germany were not permitted to leave the district in 46 which the Auslanderbeh¨ orde (immigration authorities office) at which they¨ 47 registered was located. Although this law was amended in January 2015, at 48 the time of my fieldwork this law was in effect. Furthermore, despite this 49 amendment, the refugees remain isolated since the obligation to reside in a 50 particular place continues to remain.

51 In many instances, the legal proceedings determining asylum cases can 52 take several years. Asylum seekers who failed to comply with “Residen53 zpflicht” simply by travelling to visit friends and relatives in towns outside 54 their jurisdictions were subject to heavy fines. Thus, many asylum seekers in 55 Germany experience alienation, since the asylum process could take several 56 years to complete. These forms of inequalities can be best understood when 57 forced migration and mobility is understood in terms of hidden inequalities 58 wherein the new global economic elites are able to cross borders at will 59 while the poor are meant to stay at home (Bauman, 1998). This article aims 60 to demonstrate the ways in which the asylum seekers aim to contest these 61 forms of demonization within the realm of a theatrical space.

62 RELOCATING THE REFUGEE

63 This article demonstrates that refugees can be understood to resist the isola64 tion imposed on them by the state since they connect and collaborate with a 65 touring theater team within Germany. Although the theater travels to different 66 cities and towns, where refugees reside in their tightly controlled assigned 67 areas of jurisdiction in “Lagers” or “Heims” (residential camps), their will68 ingness to participate with the theater demonstrated their resilience as they 69 asserted their rights and used the theater as a platform to inform the German 70 society about their campaigns and initiatives. However, it is important to rec71 ognize that the theater is not the sole vehicle through which asylum seekers

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| *Refugee Collaboration* | 3 |

1. living in “Lagers” protest about their current status. For example, in the year
2. 2012, several refugees in Germany left their assigned jurisdictions located in
3. Wurzburg—following the suicide of an asylum seeker—travelled to urban
4. cities and set up a protest camp at a square in Berlin in the Green Party
5. district of Kreuzberg. In other instances, individual refugees defied these
6. laws and travelled to neighboring cities to participate in demonstrations,
7. such as in Munich. Although refugees’ engagement and collaboration with
8. the theater company do not always demonstrate overt defiance of these laws
9. because in the majority of instances it is the theater group that may travel
10. to towns where refugees live, these collaborations nevertheless become sig-
11. nificant because it is within these performative spaces that they are able to
12. inform, educate, campaign, express their feelings, and ultimately manifest
13. their political agency in ways that other spaces may not allow.
14. While the German state aims to physically isolate refugees and asylum
15. seekers in distant towns, the media on a metaphorical level aims to further
16. segregate refugees and asylum seekers from German citizens. As Tyler (2013)
17. notes, “News media hate speech against asylum seekers plays a crucial role
18. in circulating the idea that asylum seekers pose a threat to ‘our’ security and
19. happiness.”
20. Europe has additionally seen the rise of extreme nationalism and the



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| 92 popularity of far-right parties such as the NPD in Germany, UKIP in Eng- | **Q2** |

1. land, and the Front National in France. These political factions continue to
2. employ anti-immigrant rhetoric for their political gains, which has led to
3. further divides between noncitizens/citizens and has resulted in anti–asylum
4. seeking discourses making “false” claims and portraying asylum seekers as
5. an economic burden to the host society, which has fostered grounds for

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1. criminalizing and racializing refugees and forming a “Fortress Europe” (e.g.,
2. Krzyzanowski & Wodak, 2009; McDonald, 2005; van Dijk, 1997). However,
3. as has been observed in the German context, refugees and their supporters
4. have not accepted their fate in passive ways but rather have been extremely
5. vocal in articulating the injustices they experience in Germany.

103 REFUGEE ACTIVISM

1. There has been much attention given to forced migration within critical
2. sociology. Forced migration has been understood as a consequence of the
3. growing inequalities between the global North and the South. Castles (2003)
4. contends that failed economies also means weak states, predatory ruling
5. cliques and human rights abuse. He argues:

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| 109 | This leads to the notion of the “asylum-migration nexus”: many migrants | **Q3** |

1. and asylum seekers have multiple reasons for mobility, and it is impos-
2. sible to completely separate economic and human rights motivations,
3. which is a challenge to the neat categories that bureaucracies seek to im113 pose (p. 2003, p. 4). In this regard, the asylum seekers who form part of 114 this study can be understood to have arrived to Germany from differing 115 nation-states because of a host of differing factors.

116 Sociological research on asylum seekers has additionally been con117 cerned with the growing “stigmatization” of asylum seekers and refugees. 118 For example, Castles (2003) points out that forced migration has coincided

1. with processes in the processes of economic restructuring, deindustrializa-



**Q4** 120 tion, privatization, and deregulation from globalization with the result that 121

immigrants and asylum seekers have been understood as a threat to jobs, 122 living standards, and welfare (p. 7). This notion of asylum seekers as the 123 Other and as a threat to the economy has been discussed extensively within 124 scholarship pertaining to asylum seekers (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991; Lutz, 125 Phoenix, & Yuval-Davis, 1995; Solomos, 1993; Vasta & Castles, 1996; Wrench 126 & Solomos, 1993). The creation of “human wastes” (such as asylum seekers) 127 has been understood to be a direct consequence of active formation of ne128 oliberal states that emphasize individualism, choice, freedom, mobility, and 129 national security (Bauman, 2004; Harvey, 2005; Tyler, 2013).

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| *Refugee Collaboration* | 5 |

130 There has been further scholarly concern, which has attended to im131 migrants’ and refugees’ displays of agency countering this growing stigma132 tization and its consequences, particularly in the vein of recent immigrant

1. protests and protest camps and in everyday forms of resistance (e.g., Bhimji, **Q5** 1342014; Cisneros 2011; Gonzales 2011; Galvez 2009; Rigby & Schiembach, 2013;135

Menjivar, 2006; Milner, 2011; Rygeil, 2011; Tyler, 2013). These critical schol136 ars understand refugees’ political acts as “acts of citizenship” in the face of 137 the state’s denial of formal citizenship.

138 Recent scholarship has additionally attended to the positive repre139 sentations of refugees and immigrants within protests. These studies have 140 discussed how refugees, asylum seekers, and solidarity activists have cam141 paigned against unjust legislation and unfair living conditions of undocu142 mented immigrants. These theoretical debates have offered ways of concep143 tualizing the political agency of immigrants who don’t hold formal citizenship 144 rights in the nations in which they reside. In examining the processes and 145 the challenging conditions about which immigrants seek to contest state reg146 ulations, these studies highlight not only the political agency of the refugees 147 but also their participation in nation-states that penalize, reject, and deni148 grate their very presence within the countries in which they reside. Through 149 their various campaigns for their continued rights to stay, asylum seekers 150 and refugees are defined and are assigned wider meanings that the state and 151 the wider society refuses to acknowledge. In the absence of formal legal 152 rights to participate in politics within the state, asylum seekers and refugees 153 have been understood as democratic cosmopolitans, such that “denizens, mi154 grants,



residents, and their allies hold states accountable for their definitions 155 and

distributions of goods, powers, rights, freedoms, privileges, and justice” 156 (Nyers, 2003, p. 1076).

1. While several scholars have demonstrated the ways in which refugees
2. and nonstatus immigrants have attained visibility in protests, other scholars 159 have attended to the idea of activism through the practices of hunger strikes, 160

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| self-mutilation, and lip-sewing (Puggoni, 2014; Tyler, 2003). In this regard 161 | **Q6** |
| the refugees’ body comes to be understood as a site of politics. | **Q7** |

1. There has also been much discussion of advocacy and solidarity efforts
2. and the ways in which these groups interact and affect the images of the
3. refugees themselves. For example, there has been much recent scholarly

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| 165 attention given to Noborder protest camps proximal to the squatter migrant | **Q8** |

1. camps in Calais. The studies demonstrated the ways in which this protest
2. solidarity camp disrupted the borders between citizens and noncitizens and
3. the ways in which they served to transform the image of the migrant camp

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1. to that of a site of contestation (Milner, 2011; Rigby & Schiembach 2013;

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| 170 Rygeil, 2011). While these scholars demonstrate how advocacy groups inter- | **Q9** |

1. act and shape the images of refugees themselves, others have attended to the
2. ways in which solidarity efforts aim to change the national discourse about
3. refugees’ belonging through the invocation of particular forms of memories
4. (e.g., Kleist, 2013). In this regard, Kleist conceptualizes the notion of be-
5. longing as that of belonging to a democratic polity, which could be either
6. communal or civic (p. 669).
7. The idea of immigrant protests and political advocacy, such as organized
8. opposition to government’s refugee policies (Kleist, 2009, 2013; Rygiel, 2011),
9. acts of citizenship of refugees and immigrants such as when “immigrants
10. engage in political, activist activities which enhance their sense of well-being
11. in material, lived and symbolic ways even while their juridicial status remains

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| 182 unchanged” (Galvez 2010, p. 4) has been well attended to in the realm | **Q10** |

1. of demonstrations and protest camps. However, a discussion of refugees’
2. resistance and solidarity work has been less explored as a performative
3. process in collaboration with cultural workers.
4. It becomes crucial to conceptualize refugees’ performative acts as part
5. of refugee politics since these acts aim to facilitate shifts in discourses about
6. refugees as well as mobilize people to take political action. The refugees’ crit-
7. icisms and contestations of the German asylum policy and their expressions
8. of their experiences of their homeland articulated in their own language on
9. stage to a German audience needs to be understood as a process of “polit-

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| 192 ical identity formation in exile” (Castles, p. 14). | In doing so, the notion of | **Q11** |

1. refugees’ political activism as the “doer is then constructed through the deed

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| 194 itself” (Butler, 1990, p. 142). Thus, noncitizens who are repeatedly denied | **Q12** |

1. visibility by the state, consequently, attain voice in the cultural arena. In this
2. regard they help transform the theater into a site of political activity. Butler

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**Q13**



**Q14**

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| *Refugee Collaboration* | 7 |

1. contends that “performativity has everything do with ‘who’ can become pro-
2. duced as a recognizable subject, a subject who is living, whose life is worth

199 sheltering and whose life, when lost would be worthy of mourning” (But200 ler, 2009, p. xii). Thus individuals, when they contest precarity and become 201 vocal, not only assert their agency but also by interrupting the “normative 202 scheme” attain recognizability. In this way, they momentarily come to con203 test their “precarious lives.” Precarious lives are those that do not qualify as 204 recognizable, readable, or grievable (Butler, 2009, p. xiii). Thus, on stage an 205 asylum seeker dispossessed of formal citizenship and the basic right to mo206 bility, is able to reposition her- or himself to the German audience through 207 her or his performative agency. As Butler argues:

208 The subject who exercises freedom in this way is, in turn, defined by 209 this very exercise, which is to say that the subject becomes a form of 210 performative agency ... such a subject breaks out of the established 211 framework within which public politics proceeds, facilitating a certain 212 crisis in the framework, posing anew the question of what can and cannot 213 intelligibly take place within that framework (2010).

214 In this vein, the refugees in collaboration with the theater company 215 break themselves away from the ways in which they are positioned within 216 dominant German society and articulate and convey themselves in novel 217 ways. The refugee is positioned as an object and victim of her or his cir218 cumstances in the minds of the German public, but on stage she or he is 219 able to reposition her- or himself to the audience through speech and bod220 ily gestures. Thus, the asylum seekers who are often depicted as deceitful, 221 since the foreigners’ office rejects a sizeable percentage of asylum cases, 222 gain credibility and disrupt certain frames through their speech acts within 223 the spatiality of the theater.

224 METHODOLOGY

1. This article is based on an ethnographic study of the theater-play *Die Asyl-*
2. *Monologe.* The rationale for employing an ethnographic methodology was227toprovide an analysis of the self-presentation and political performances 228 of refugees within the sphere of theater. Interviews provided further in229 sights into the broader context and helped me gain an understanding of the 230 German and European asylum policies. As O’Reilly (2012) contends, ethno231 graphic methodology allows for the telling of rich, sensitive, and credible 232 stories when it involves direct and sustained contact with human beings over 233 a prolonged period of time. Similarly, Creswell (2003) suggests that a qualita234 tive approach helps facilitate understanding meanings from the participants’ 235 point of view. More specifically, O’Neill (2008) points out that ethnographic 236 methodology helps transform dominant

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understandings and representa237 tions of subaltern groups such as asylum seekers and refugees: “Ultimately

1. biographical research counters the sanitized demonized or hidden aspects
2. of the lived cultures of exile and belonging. In doing so, biography research
3. helps to produce knowledge as a form of social justice” (p. 9).
4. Thus, I decided to employ an ethnographic approach, which involved
5. touring with the theater company and seeing multiple viewings of *Die Asyl-*

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| 243 *Dialoge*. More specifically, I saw seven viewings*,* of which three of the | **Q15** |

1. performances were based in Berlin at the Heimathafen-Neukolln theater.¨
2. The home theater is located in Neukolln, a neighborhood with a significant¨
3. first- and second-generation Turkish population, as well immigrants from
4. Palestine and other Arabic speaking nations. In addition to viewing the per-
5. formances in Berlin, I saw another performance in Neubrandenberg at a
6. university in the department of social work. Additionally, I toured with the
7. theater team to towns, such as Magdeburg and Potsdam where I saw two
8. more performances. Finally, I saw one performance at the refugees’ protest

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| 252 camp at the Orange Square in Berlin, which was held as part of their daily | **Q16** |

1. cultural series “Roses for Refugees.” I interviewed the director as well as
2. the actors focusing collaborative practices within the theater—the subject
3. matter of this essay—and held informal conversations with refugees who
4. participated during the discussion sessions at the theater following the per-
5. formance. The refugees who participated in the theater included individuals
6. from Afghanistan, South Sudan, Mali, and Burkina Faso. I recorded the audio
7. portion of the performances. The refugees who spoke following the theater
8. performance varied with respect to their attainment of legal status. Many of
9. the refugees were staying in their respective assigned area of jurisdiction
10. since the theater travelled to cities and towns where these “Heims” were lo-

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| *Refugee Collaboration* | 9 |

1. cated. Some of the refugees were on Duldung status (toleration by the state),
2. while others were waiting for their asylum-cases to be processed, and yet
3. others were simply staying in Berlin and formed part of an ongoing refugee
4. movement. In order to gain insights into the performative acts of refugees
5. in *Die Asyl-Monologe,* I chose to watch performances in Berlin as well as

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| 268 in towns and cites. Thus I acquired an understanding of how refugees liv- | **Q17** |

1. ing in the nearby Heims participated in the theater. Therefore, I travelled
2. with the theater company to three towns located outside the capital city.
3. The refugees spoke in English and French and translation was provided in
4. German for the German-speaking audience. I discovered very quickly that
5. my Pakistani background facilitated a South-South dialogue with English-
6. speaking refugees particularly from nation-states such as Sudan and Nigeria.

275 THE STAGE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

1. A director, based in Berlin, Michael Ruf started a theater company called

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| 277 Stage for Human Rights in the year 2012. This performance is known as | **Q18** |

1. verbatim-theater or “ethno-drama” (Saldana, 2005), where as in this particular
2. case, professional actors narrate the actual experiences and perspectives of
3. refugees in German on stage based on actual testimonies told to the in281 terviewers who record their voices. However, the interviews were trans282 lated into German for the German-speaking audience. For the non-German283 speaking audience, subtitles were provided in English, French, and Turkish. 284 There is minimum use of aesthetics within the entire performance. The light285 ing is mellow; the three German actors are dressed simply in jeans and 286 shirts, stand and relate the testimonies of the refugees in an even voice with287 out much dramatization. The actors take turns in relating different aspect of 288 the refugees’ narrative—the abstract, problematic events, and resolution. The

289 music performed tended to vary, but it included pieces such as Billy Holiday’s 290 “Strange Fruit,” a protest song sung in Arabic during the Arab Spring protests, 291 and some pieces of cello music. Thus, the music, interspersed within the nar292 rations, served as an interlude during which the audience could reflect on 293 the testimonies and served to further create the ambience for activist theater. 294 In this regard, *Die Asyl-Dialoge* could be regarded in Saldana’s terms as an 295 “ethno-drama,” which by collaborating with

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refugees and refugee activists 296 helps expose oppression and challenge the existing social order (Saldana, 297 2005, 2011).

298 Following the actual performance by three professional actors, there 299 were various forms of discussion sessions with the audience, where the au300 dience received the opportunity to interact with refugee supporters, human301 rights lawyers, the refugees themselves, and human-rights groups such as 302 Amnesty International. Over the past 3 years, *Die Asyl-Monologe* had been

303 performed in several cities in Germany in various spaces such as schools, uni304 versities, churches, and cafes. Although there has been much representation 305 and self-representation of refugees in the arts in forms such as music, liter306 ature, and painting, with the goal of shifting discourses and representations

1. about immigrants, this performance was unique because of its collaboration **Q19** 308with refugee activists and its three and a half long duration, that it can be309understood

to be very much contained within the broader politics of refugee 310 activism within Germany. Thus, the refugee activists who form part of this 311 political documentary theater piece can be understood as political agents, 312 and the actors, the directors, and an intern can be understood to work in 313 collaboration with the refugee activists in transposing refugee politics and in 314 shifting the everyday understandings of refugees. For example, in 2014, in 315 Manchester, UK, a group of refugee women published a collection of testi-

1. monies about their experiences and produced a theater piece entitled *How*



|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Q20** | 317 *I Became an Asylum Seeker*. But these art forms could not be understood to 318 | | be |
|  | embedded within a particular refugee movement or activism in the same 319 manner since | | |
|  | the duration of these projects was limited and not on going as 320 | in the case of *Die Asyl-* | |
|  | *Monologe.* |  |  |

321 The political and performative agency of the refugee activist needs to 322 be underscored, since they accept invitations to be on stage and to interact 323 with the audience. For example, when the theater performed an excerpt of 324 their piece at Oranienplatz as part of the “Roses for Refugees” daily cultural 325 events, one of the key activists of this protest campsite made a speech out326 lining the conditions of the asylum policy and their campaigns to challenge 327 these conditions on the local level. The refugees did not perceive them328 selves as working in isolation but rather in conjunction with differing cultural 329 groups. These collaborations on the part of the refugee activism and theater 330 company could be understood through theoretical paradigms within classic 331 social movement theory such as insurgent consciousness and resource mo-

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| 332 bilization (e.g., Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy & Zaid, 1977; Tilly, 1978). However, | **Q21** |

1. seldom have these concepts been included in discussions within the context 334 of refugee activism. In this sense, the collaboration between refugee activists 335 and the theater can arguably be understood to adopt a radical turn. One 336 refugee activist explained to me that rather than negotiating with politicians 337 and exclusively relying on demonstrations to get their demands heard, they 338 considered it part of their strategy to form alliances with cultural workers 339 and neighborhood groups: “If you start to dialogue with

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| *Refugee Collaboration* | 11 |

politicians, you just 340 end up compromising and then they try to manipulate you. So our strategy 341 is to work with cultural groups and neighbours and we hope that they will 342 support our demands.” The following paragraphs provide further details of 343 some of the actual performance and discussion sessions and the ways in 344 which refugee activists enacted themselves during these sessions.

1. PERFORMATIVITY THROUGH THE ACTORS’ VOICES

346 The first part of *Die Asyl-Monologe* is performed by three professional actors 347 who narrate the actual experiences of three refugees, Safiye from Turkey, Ali 348 from Togo, and Felleke from Ethiopia, who currently live in Germany. These 349 refugees were initially interviewed and the script of the theater is based 350 on their actual interviews. As one of the actors, Asad carefully explained

1. to me,
2. to use the word (for *Die Asyl-Monologe)* the word “creation” is wrong. 353 Because I checked it’s a copy, it’s a text, it’s an experience of somebody 354 who is still alive and even younger than me but just have another life 355 experience. From the moment he gave this interview to Michael and we 356 have it black and white, we read it as a text. But we can’t add something. 357 You can’t give your own personality inside. It’s impossible to say what 358 we want to say because we are just the voice of somebody else. I think 359 for this project we need to be beware of making our own creations. 360 Because it’s not our history we should be careful to consider their voice 361 and our own voice. We can heighten or lighten the voices but can’t say 362 we are the refugees. We can’t say we are the asylum seekers.

363 Excerpts of testimonies of Safiye, Ali, and Felleke, who sought asylum 364 in Germany because of persecution in the public sphere in their respective 365 states, can be characterized as political resistance to German asylum policies 366 as well as expressions of collaborations with aspects of German society who 367 are sympathetic to the refugee movement. For example, Safiye expressed

1. her resistance when upon losing her asylum case the first time, preservers to **Q22** 369appeal, wins, and raises a family in Berlin. Felleke actively resisted depor370tation to

Ethiopia with the support of an active campaign. The testimonies 371 did not simply reveal their challenging experiences limited to their countries 372 of origin, they demonstrated how the three individuals contested the bu373 reaucracies of the asylum-seeking process within Germany, the limitations 374 on their movements, and the substandard housing arrangements for asylum 375 seekers. Butler (1997) forcefully critiques the notion of subjecthood and un376 derstands performativity as a renewable action without clear origin or end.

377 She suggests that speech is finally constrained neither by its specific speaker 378 nor its originating context. She argues, “Not only defined by social context, 379 such speech is also marked by its capacity to break with context” (1997,



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1. p. 40).
2. Therefore, the refugees’ voices performed through the bodies of actors 382 can be understood as a form of resistance against tropes of victimhood and 383 suffering. The testimonies break away from their original contexts such as 384 prisons, detention centers, Lagers, and the foreigners’ office. Furthermore, 385 these testimonies serve to subvert the very basis of the refugees’ identity 386 itself and aim to mobilize the audience into action.

387 Testimony has been understood as problematic because it transposes 388 humans into victims, calling attention to suffering rather than interrogating

1. questions of power (e.g., Tyler 2006; Fassin 2005; Malkki, 1996; Millner,

**Q23** 3902011). But these testimonies, which focus on inverting discourses regard391ing asylumseekers, can be understood in Butler’s terms “in which agency 392 is derived from injury, and injury countered through that very derivation” 393 (1997, p. 41). The following excerpts of the three individuals who provide 394 accounts of their experiences of their asylum-seeking process through the 395 actors demonstrate this point of view. In the following instances, the asylum 396 seekers speak of their experiences. Safiye and Felleke provide accounts of 397 their experiences with their interviewers from the Auslaenderbehoerde. Ali 398 provides his experience with a doctor in Germany.



399 Safiye: I told my story and she was on the phone. She phoned the 400 whole time. If she’d been really interested, she would have tried to un401 derstand from my facial expressions and my mimic, whether I really 402 experienced it or not. I think the interview took 4 to 5 hours. The inter-

403 viewer was very unfriendly. She conveyed to me “What are you doing 404 here? You caused extra work for me. You won’t get what you want

1. anyways.”
2. Felleke: Nearly all interviewers follow the same strategy. They intention407 ally try to mess up the minds of refugees in order to make them fail. For 408 all of my life I had dealt with decent human beings. And then for the first 409 time I was standing in front of this man spitting and beating the table 410 with his fists.

411 Ali: I had an examination of the lungs at the hospital. Electrodes were 412 fixed everywhere. A doctor asked me whether I was smoking or drinking 413 alcohol, but I declined. Then he asked what kind of problem I had. 414 Nothing but the asylum-problem, I answered.

415 These voices of the refugee activists, within the setting of the documentary 416 theater, clearly show they struggle to invert Butler’s notion of “injurous” 417 language that interviewers at the Auslaenderbehoerde directs toward asylum 418 seekers. By recounting and performing the very interview questions and 419 a doctor’s evaluation, the refugees through their performative acts become 420 activists before an audience at a well-known theater space in Berlin. Thus, 421 the experience of the refugees with the doctor and the

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interviewers break 422 away from their actual frames and context, embodying new meanings within 423 new spatialities.

424 Thus, these narratives demonstrate that refugee activism can be com425 prehended through performative acts, since these acts actually disrupt the 426 public sphere such that the logic of the binaries of exclusion/inclusion, which 427 the nation-states impose upon immigrants and refugees, are contested (e.g., 428 Nyers, 2006; Tyler, 2013).

429 The merging of the voices of citizens and noncitizens, the inclusion of 430 refugees onstage during follow-up discussions, the particular narratives of 431 refugee activists, the ideological position of the theater team, the different 432 formats of the postperformance discussions, and the spaces (outside the 433 bounds of formal cultural venues) in which many of the performances take 434 place are some of the elements of this documentary theater that lends itself 435 to these “repeated disturbances between formal theater and political action” 436 (Isin & Nielsen, 2008). In this regard, performance art not only becomes 437 part of a larger political movement for refugees’ rights, but that the refugees’ 438 voices together with the actors’ voices become intrinsically a collaborative 439 political movement, where the voices of refugee activists manifest political 440 expressions and the voices of the theater team express solidarity with the 441 wider refugee movement.

442 What is also important here is to consider that refugees engage in a 443 dialogue between the actors and the audience through which the political 444 agency of refugees is reinforced such that the individual testimonies adopt 445 a collective tone and they ultimately have an impact on the audience even

1. to a sympathetic audience. As an intern working at the theater told me in **Q24**
2. one town in Bremen, the audience spontaneously formed a refugee action 448 group following the theater performance. But these political acts of refugees 449 do not occur in a vacuum, but in conjunction with the actors and the theater 450 team who let such voices manifest themselves. In this manner, the frame 451 within which these divergent voices occur can be understood to be a form 452 of a solidarity between the spectators, actors, the director, and the refugee 453 activists.



1. REFUGEE ACTIVISTS AND THE DISCUSSION SESSIONS
2. Following the 90-minute performance of testimonies of asylum seekers that 456 were related by three actors, the stage came to be transformed into what 457 might be easily construed as a “political event,” comprising refugee-led ac458 tivists and members of the German society sympathetic to the cause of rights 459 from refugees. It becomes useful to consider Butler’s notion of “repetition” 460 and “iteration” in this context. The actors convey the actual testimonies of 461 the refugees, but these testimonies are reinforced, repeated, and reiterated 462 on stage by the bodies of actual refugees. When

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refugee activists and the 463 theater team cooperate, various power dynamics are reshaped, since the 464 refugees speak to the audience in their own voices and languages and their 465 performatives further help construct different layers of meanings.

**Q25** 466Jeffers (2012)suggests that theatrical performances about refugees’ sto467ries becomesspaces of hospitality for refugees and that the “offer of hospital 468 stage” on which refugee stories can be reenacted is just that, a stage, not 469 substantial, not “real.” However, the refugee activists’ actual presence and 470 voices on stage reframe the stage into a significant and concrete site of insur471 gent politics, where refugees through their very presence aim to engage in 472 a dialogue with the audience and create ruptures with respect to discourses 473 about what it means to be a refugee in Germany. This is especially true 474 when refugees who are particularly active in various campaigns speak to 475 the audience. For example, in the following interaction with the audience, 476 Nurjana Ismailova, a refugee activist gave the following account:



477 For three years I am with Youth Without Borders, an initiative for young 478 refugees in Germany. We do conferences and speak to the press. We 479 also fought for the minister who deports the most and that minister is 480 now fighting a lawsuit. We came to Germany five years ago and we lived 481 in three different asylum homes. First in Braunschweig and then in two 482 other towns. We were the only family who didn’t want to do it. And in 483 the morning the police came and gave us three hours to pack our stuff. 484 I was in the refugee home and I felt I could not live there. I asked for 485 some numbers of human rights organizations and I got the number of 486 this refugee council. We meet at demonstrations and press conferences 487 with the Green Party. So the foreign office found out about it. They sued 488 us for that. The police also came to our house and took our stuff. Took 489 our phones and laptop. In this laptop they found a picture of me in 490 Berlin without having a permit to come here. So they sued because I 491 didn’t follow the rules. But they didn’t get anything from that suing. But 492 then my parents came to the federal foreign office and they were very 493 aggressive there. But we still kept on fighting.

494 In this account, Nurjana presents herself not only as a refugee in Ger495 many but as an activist involved in working for the rights of refugees, such 496 as the rights of young refugees. Subsequently, she speaks of her own expe497 riences; but rather than presenting herself as a victim of circumstances, she 498 speaks of the ways in which she continued to claim her rights. In so do499 ing, her very own presentation of self, following the performance, does not 500 only serve to reinforce the earlier accounts of refugees in Germany but also 501 serves to create a juncture at which “performance art and politics become 502 intertwined and the boundaries between them become disrupted” (Isin & 503 Nielsen, 2008). Moreover, the issues she speaks about take on a collective 504 meaning because these matters are not only pertinent to Nurjana, but rather 505 they affect asylum seekers in general. In this way her voice is that of an 506 activist. On stage, Nurjana was also accompanied by a human rights lawyer 507 as well as the director of the performance

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who engaged in a question-and508 answer dialogue with her in conjunction with the audience. But her voice, 509 similar to the voices of the refugees, during the performance remained fore510 grounded. It was not subsumed by the human rights lawyer’s voice or the 511 director’s voice but rather there occurred a dialogue between them as the 512 director and members of the audience asked her several questions. In this 513 way, while the state delegitimizes and disqualifies the testimonies of the 514 refugees, Nurjana’s actual presence in the public can be understood as acts

515 of contestation that defy these characterizations. In sum, Nurjana’s presence 516 and similarly the presence of different refugee activists in the public can 517 be best understood as a form of sustained political movement that differs 518 from the expressions of refugees in hunger strikes, demonstrations, and 519 rallies, (e.g., Puggoni, 2014; Tyler, 2013). However, her performative ac520 tions create ruptures in the conditions of asylum seekers and refugees in 521 Germany. Although the German asylum law of Residenzpflicht was instru522 mental in injuring Nurjana and her family’s sense of well-being, she refused 523 to be paralyzed by it and countered the “offensive call,” producing sev524 eral responses and actions (Butler, 1997). In this regard, her articulations 525 on stage further serve to reiterate and reinforce her prior actions. O’Neill 526 (2008) asserts in writing about the transformative role of art that by “per527 forming narratives of subjectivities, lives and experiences become central to 528 better understand our social world” (p. 20). However, in the case of refugee 529 activists who perform on stage, their enactments of their political identi530 ties in collaboration with cultural workers not only help in understanding 531 their social world but also enable a transformation in their social image and 532 positioning.

533 Similarly, following another theater performance in Berlin, a refugee 534 activist, Asem from Sudan from the refugee protest group Berlin-Refugee535 Strike came forward to speak to the audience about an ongoing prepa536 ration for a refugee protest march from Strasbourg to Brussels; the date 537 of the start of the march, May 20, was to coincide with the European

1. elections.
2. Ruf: Could you please tell us about the Berlin-Refugee-Strike.
3. Asem: The movement had started almost two years ago. It was respon541 sible for campaigning against the movement restriction. And from which 542 the Oranienplatz started. And we set up tents in Oranienplatz and we 543 have been fighting since then. It was a refugee-led movement.
4. Ruf: Could you please tell us about the march?
5. Asem: I’ve been in Germany for 6 years. I have been affected by Dublin 546 case. Two years ago I was in another country. My best friend came to 547 Germany and he said he was participating in a demonstration against the 548 German and European asylum laws. When I arrived to Berlin there was a 549 demonstration. There were a lot of people and a lot of police. I was in the 550 middle of a lot of people in Berlin. People were chanting, “We are here. 551 We will fight. Freedom of movement is everybody’s right.” I then got 552 involved in organizing the march

553 in all these countries organizing

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from Strasburg to Brussels. I have been demonstration, Greece, Belgium, Italy,

554 France, Denmark. I am in the logistic group here. And I said, ‘Okay, I 555 will now organize a march here.’ The idea of the march is to start around 556 20th of May around the European elections. And to continue marching 557 for 29 days. Some of the interior ministers of the EU will meet in Brussels 558 around that time. We will speak of freedom of movement for refugees, 559 recognition of refugee rights, and to stop criminalising refugees and to 560 speak of laws of in countries that kills us which forces refugees to go to 561 other countries. The idea of the march came by connecting with people 562 in different countries in Europe. We meet at Kotti Cafe every Sunday´ 563 afternoon and you can get more information. We are expecting about 564 300 to 500 people to participate in the march.

1. Castles (2003) contends that at one stage the task of sociology of
2. forced migration was concerned with the study of people forced to flee 567 from one society to become part of another. He argues that globalization 568 and transnationalism make this conceptualization anachronistic, since the 569 boundaries of national societies are becoming increasingly blurred. In this 570 regard, Asem’s onstage performative campaigning of a forthcoming Euro571 pean political march demonstrates his connections to differing European 572 nation-states as well as his continued concerns with the situation in the 573 global

South. Thus, the refugee’s identity in the host nation needs to be 574 understood as being consequential to local and global asylum politics. Fur575 thermore, it becomes important to acknowledge that refugees do not accept 576 their position in their host nation in passive ways but rather they engage 577 in “counter-speech.” As Butler notes: The interval between instances of ut578 terances not only makes the repetition and resignification of the utterance 579 possible, but shows how words might through time, become disjoined from 580 their power to injure and recontextualized in more affirmative modes (1997,

1. p. 15).
2. Additionally, Asem’s onstage appearance with Ruf, with Asad an actor, 583 and a human rights lawyer constituted a collaborative frame for the Ger584 man audience who through raising questions became part of this frame. 585 Furthermore, this collaborative framework reinforced not only the notion 586 of authentic theater but additionally helped create an arena for “doing” 587 political activism. In this sense, the activist identity of the refugee is re588 vealed in the public sphere in a manner that the collective nature of 589 demonstrations would not necessarily allow. This does not necessarily un590 dermine the collective power of refugee activism, but rather for refugees

591 whose identities are subject to constant denouncements, these performa592 tive aspects of activism help them acquire an even more visible agentive 593 personhood. The German state immobilizes refugees physically by hous594 ing them in Lagers, in remote towns, and become instrumental in im595 printing demonized images on the minds of German

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consciousness, but 596 refugee activists discover ways to continually resist these fixed ways of

1. being.
2. Whereas Asem’s collaboration with the theater allowed him to campaign 599 for a forthcoming march, in other instances refugees’ engagements with the 600 theater allowed them to tell their narratives of their past experiences. Jeffers 601 (2014) has noted that the telling of testimonies for refugees and asylum seek602 ers in the context of theater becomes consequential since in many instances 603 they desire an audience who is willing to listen to them because in so many 604 situations their voices become silenced. When I met Maqbool, a refugee 605 from Afghanistan from an organization called Welcome2Europe, outside the 606 theater, he briefly introduced himself to me and mentioned to me that he 607 had spent some time in Pakistan where he had learned to speak Urdu and 608 play cricket. He also told me that his mother was still in Peshawar, Pakistan. 609 On stage, he related a rather lengthy and detailed story about his arduous 610 journey from Pakistan to Germany:

611 Maqbool: Yeah, it all began with the NATO occupation in Afghanistan. 612 My family was not feeling safe so we decided to leave and somehow 613 we were pushed by foreign troops to leave the country. So we went to 614 Pakistan. As everyone knows that Pakistan is not safe. Kind of like the 615 same situation like Afghanistan. My mother also thought that I should 616 leave the country and obviously she thought that I wasn’t safe in the 617 country. I also said, “okay” then I will leave the country. I came from 618 Pakistan to Iran and then to Turkey. Quite difficult to cross the bor619 ders, and not to have the legal papers. Sometimes 48 hours without 620 food and water. Being afraid of being shot in the borders or being sent 621 back to the back to the borders. Anyway, after months I made it to 622 Istanbul ...

623 In this manner, Maqbool continued to tell his story of his difficult journey 624 to Germany. Maqbool’s articulation of past experience can be understood 625 as him forming and maintaining some link with his country of origin. Fur626 thermore, Maqbool’s narrative clearly demonstrates how his migration was a 627 direct consequence of stratified North-South relations such as the NATO war. 628 Thus the very notion of the refugee movement to an “autonomous national 629 society” becomes destabilized: the migration process needs to be understood 630 in terms of North-South relations (Castles, 2003). In his interaction with the 631 audience, Maqbool articulated that refugees even without formal citizenship 632 can contest state borders at differing levels. However, it is this very exercise 633 that enabled Maqbool to break away from the discourse of a “victim,” to a 634 survivor, to a “supporter” since he speaks of helping other refugees. Butler 635 (2009) notes referring to Hannah Arendt that when stateless people engage 636 in certain actions in the public, “the right to have rights” becomes a perfor637 mative exercise and that freedom comes into being through its exercise. In 638 this regard, when refugees perform their testimonies to

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the audience, their 639 rights to have the rights to address a German audience in the public sphere 640 becomes an emancipatory act.

641 The collaborations, connections, and intimacies between the theater 642 team, members of the audience, researchers, and the refugee activists could 643 be understood to adopt varying dimensions. On one level, the collaborative 644 framework could be understood in formal terms, where a refugee enters 645 into an agreement with the theater to participate in the public sphere; but 646 on another level, the alliances occur on a platform whereupon refugee and 647 members of the audience as well as in some instances members of the the648 ater team may interact on more informal terms. However, it is important 649 to recognize that the theater team did not simply “host” the refugees since 650 they themselves appeared to fully comprehend the momentum of refugee 651 politics. Because the team aligned very closely to the local refugee activism, 652 the collaborations that occur between the theater’s core team could not be 653 simply understood in terms of Derrida’s (2000) notion of “hospitality”—laden 654 with conditions. Derrida asks, “Must we ask the foreigners to understand us, 655 to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, in all its possible ex656 clusions, and so as to be able to welcome him into our country?” (p. 15). 657 In fact, these onstage and off-stage collaborations subverted the notion of 658 conditional “hospitality,” which the German state demonstrates toward asy659 lum seekers—since on stage the refugees expressed their viewpoints freely

660 and in their language of choice with the audience, with cultural workers, 661 and NGO workers in the language of their choice, with some degree of 662 moderation.

663 REFUGEE ACTIVISTS AND THE LOCAL CONTEXT

664 While Maqbool and Asem expressed their narratives in Berlin within the 665 space of a theater, which accommodated about a hundred people, there 666 were other refugee activists who spoke about specific local issues when *Die* 667 *Asyl-Monologe* performed outside Berlin. For example, during the discussion

668 session in Neubrandenberg, several of the refugees on stage and off stage 669 spoke of racial profiling with much emotion. In one instance, a refugee who 670 was a member of the audience exchanged seats with a refugee who was on 671 stage. As one of the refugees explained to the audience:

672 I have been in Europe for 20 years. Whenever I take the bus I always 673 have to show my license. Just because of my colour I have to show my 674 license. When I go to the train station I have to show my license. I feel 675 that I get controlled in every corner. I feel angry about this situation. Last

1. Saturday I said to the police, “I’m not going to show you my license.”
2. These expressions did not go unheard and one of the German activists on
3. stage told the refugee rather helpfully about an organization called “logging,”

679 where incidents about victims of racial violence could be logged and doc680 umented. She also further explained that they document about experiences 681

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of people who have suffered from racial violence from the far-right party in 682 Germany, NPD.

683 Following this account, there was another speaker from the audience 684 who actually joined the people on the stage to share his experience and 685 viewpoint with regard to racial profiling in Neubrandenberg. He spoke to 686 the audience in a loud, expressive, and theatrical manner:

687 The police do not control German people. They don’t control white 688 people. They come straight to foreigners. Because we are the criminals. 689 Because if you go to Africa you see a lot of Europeans. We give them 690 respect. I don’t understand why they don’t respect us. I don’t know 691 why. I’m not anti-Europe. In Africa we welcome. We welcome. But they 692 control us here. I say that all police are racist here.

693 At this point, a White German man from the audience questioned him about 694 whether the police controlled him because he didn’t have any legal right to 695 be in Germany or if it because he was a foreigner. He responded to this 696 question by stating that they don’t bother citizens. He commented, “Straight 697 foreigner. It’s not about citizens. Only foreigners.”

698 In this way, the discussion about racial profiling, which included target699 ing foreigners, asylum seekers, immigrants, and individuals of colour, and 700 about restricted spaces within Lagers for refugees continued on stage. At 701 this juncture, the moderator observed out loud, “Normally the questions are 702 addressed from the audience to the podium, but tonight since the questions 703 are being addressed from the podium to the audience, the audience should 704 get a chance to respond to them.” This particular comment by the moderator 705 further signified the shift in power relations between the refugee and the 706 German audience and the theater space. Butler contends that acts of trans707 gressions not only occur within speech acts, but rather that these acts break 708 from their social norms (1997). The improvised turn during the discussion 709 sessions arguably invoked a crisis in the established frame of the meaning 710 of a refugee. Furthermore, the refugees in this particular instance did not 711 follow the traditional format, since refugees who were members of the audi712 ence got on the stage. Consequently, their presence on stage allowed them 713 to control the direction of the discussion, ask questions to the German au714 dience, express their experiences of polarization within the German state, 715 make comparisons between the experience of “foreigners” in Africa and Eu716 rope and ultimately demonstrate their political agency during the discussion 717 session, leaving Ruf with the challenge of how best to direct the flow of 718 interaction.

719 Thus, the refugees were in a position to claim their space and to mo720 mentarily cast off their stigmatized and static positions as “foreigners without 721 formal status,” as “asylum seekers,” as “racialized Africans” on that particu722 lar evening in the university’s auditorium in the department of social work 723 and elsewhere, as they challenged the German audience and continued 724 with their discussions for well over an hour. But the refugees did not voice 725 their perspectives in isolation. Interspersed within their accounts

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of police 726 control were discussion of topics such as the issue of translations of forms 727 in German, miscommunication amongst refugees, and overcrowded Lagers. 728 However, the topic of racism, and thereby the performativity of refugees as 729 activists, remained foregrounded since the refugees present in the audito730 rium and on the stage found it difficult to leave this issue, since it seemingly 731 affected their lives. In this sense, the refugees’ voices conveyed performative 732 agency, because not only did they contest racism but they also challenged 733 the bureaucracy of theater since they defied the traditional format where the 734 moderator/director had the ultimate power to govern the onstage conversa-

1. tions.
2. It is important to understand the specificities of the different problems
3. and issues that the refugees experience depending on the towns they resided 738 within. For example, in a town such as Magdeburg, which was bigger and 739 more liberal with a university with more international students, the two 740 French-speaking refugees from Niger and Burkina Faso, who had been living 741 in the area for several years in the local Lagers, did not bring forth the issue 742 of racism but rather spoke about issues such as isolation, language barriers, 743 the lack of adequate medical resources, and ultimately the challenge of filling

744 in time in the absence of a work permit:

745 We don’t want to become dependent on welfare. If you want to work 746 you need to apply for documents. And this application is very hard to do. 747 And again the language is the main barrier. You come to country where 748 you don’t speak the language. And if you get to go to the language 749 course, it’s only once or twice a week and it doesn’t change much.

1. Thus, in this way the refugee repositions himself on the stage for human
2. rights. Within the dominant German society, the refugee is understood as an
3. alien but on stage the refugee exhibits willingness to integrate by display-
4. ing his or her willingness to work and learn the language. Scholars have
5. noted that in several protests and demonstrations, asylum seekers and their
6. supporters have called attention to similar concerns (Bhimji, 2014; Cisneros,
7. 2011; Galvez, 2009; Gonzales, 2011; Menjivar, 2006; Milner, 2011; Rigby &

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| 757 Schiembach, 2013; Rygeil, 2011; Tyler, 2013). However, on stage, in alliance | **Q26** |

1. with a German director and actors, while speaking to German and interna-
2. tional students within the context of a university, these words become even
3. more forceful. The refugee is in an elevated position and standing while the

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1. audience is seated below. Furthermore, the refugee refrains from being a
2. spectacle for the audience, since he is actually present during the theater,
3. voicing his or her concerns and dilemmas.
4. Hence the collaboration between the refugee activists and the theater
5. needs to be understood in dynamic ways since the above accounts demon-
6. strate that refugee activists differed considerably in the ways in which they
7. expressed themselves on stage. However, what is significant here is that
8. through their very presence and their expressions, they managed to, within
9. this liminal space, momentarily subvert and resist the very laws that the Ger-
10. man state imposes upon them. In such a situation, the German audience
11. understands the refugees to be disconnected, victimized, and disengaged.
12. But within the space of the theater, through exercising their rights to speak
13. within a public sphere, the refugees’ imposed identities fade since the Ger-
14. man audience sees the refugee as a social actor who is well connected and
15. active. In this sense, Butler’s (2010) argument of the subject becoming a form
16. of performative agency when such a subject breaks out of the established
17. framework becomes useful. Moreover, these links and connections occur on
18. a face-to-face level rather than in virtual space or a collective sphere such
19. as in demonstrations and protests where it is still possible to maintain some
20. distance. In this way, the audience is not allowed to simply demonstrate “dis-
21. tant compassion” (Boltanski,1999), but rather they are encouraged to engage
22. and self-reflect about local injustices and activism within their own vicinities.
23. These performative aspects of the refugee activists become additionally

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| 784 significant because of its temporal dimensions, which has not been addressed | **Q27** |

1. in the scholarship of immigrant activism. During the actual performance, the
2. actors relate the stories of three refugees who were interviewed 3 years

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787 ago, and their narratives invoked past memories of three refugees. However, 788 the refugees speak of current and topical issues. In this regard, the narra789 tives of the refugees help achieve political continuities between historical 790 accounts and current accounts. Kleist (2013) implies that memories can be 791 politically contested, “Both for their interpretation of the past and their con792 sequences in the present” (p. 669). For the German audience, the theater is 793 transposed from a space where they hear a narration of performed political 794 memories of refugees to a site of contestation, where they witness certain 795 actions in the present and where the refugees themselves are proactive in 796 staging their own circumstance and future course of action toward change. 797 In this way the refugees further help establish authenticity for the German 798 audience.

799 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

800 The sociology of forced migration and asylum have been concerned about 801 the causes, the formation of identities, and more recently the political activism 802 of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants. Castels argues that since the 803 1990s there has been “a politicisation of migration and asylum, marked by

1. heated public debates and competition between the parties to be toughest

**Q28** 805on ‘illegals.”’ This article demonstrated refugees’ aim to sociallytransform806and contestsuch debates and discourses. The refugees arguably perform 807 their political agency on stage as they speak of their various struggles and 808 campaigns to counter the injustices they are faced with.



809 While scholars recognize refugees and immigrants as political subjects 810 and political actors in the context of rallies, protest camps, and demonstra811 tions, the idea of refugee activists as creating disturbances and articulating 812 their own positions is less discussed in the context of performance art. In 813 considering refugees as political and cultural activists, actors, and cultural 814 workers and as supportive interventionists within the realm of theater allows 815 considerations of differing forms of political expression and solidarity and 816 of advocacy work in the public sphere. The refugee activists, the actors, by 817 virtue of performing in differing spaces, of using differing formats, of invit818 ing and being invited by refugee activists, and of contesting state power in 819 the testimonies, invoke a paradox in which the performances translate into 820 political action and art simultaneously. 821 Performance art not only becomes part of a larger political movement 822 for refugees’ rights, but the refugees’ voices together with the actors’ voices 823 become intrinsically a collaborative political movement, wherein the voices 824 of refugee activists manifest political expressions and the voices of the theater 825 team express solidarity within the wider refugee movement. This form of 826 collaboration became even more visible when actual refugees came and 827 spoke to the audience in the second part of the event.

828 Refugees, through their willingness to collaborate with this theater 829 team—who performed and conveyed their narratives of suffering, hope, 830 resilience, and everyday living—ultimately come to reposition themselves 831 through their speech acts and

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| *Refugee Collaboration* | 23 |

performative acts. O’Neill (2008) notes that 832 through this collaborative process with cultural workers, refugees and asy833 lum seekers find the ways and means of representing their stories. Thus, 834 in this manner, the refugees destabilized the categories of “refugees” and 835 “asylum seekers” while they presented themselves as activists, as human be836 ings, and ultimately as survivors of Germany’s and Europe’s difficult asylum 837 policies.

838 In this regard, it becomes significant to consider the notion of performa839 tivity in the context of theater within the spectrum of refugee activism. While 840 scholars who have attended to everyday modes of resistance and collective

841 political acts of refugees and immigrant activists speak of belonging, citizen842 ship, and the freedom of exercising rights, less has been discussed regarding 843 how alternative spaces such as the theater may lend itself to similar ways of 844 being for stateless people. Furthermore, it is in the context of theater that the 845 performative aspects gain prominence in ways that protests and activism in 846 camps may not allow. Within the space of theater, the refugee can elect to 847 “talk back,” “embody,” “parody,” or simply “retell” their experiences. It is in 848 the very “doing” of these actions that the refugee is able to contest assumed 849 representations and become an activist figure. In this regard, refugee political 850 activism needs to be understood in terms of “doing activism,” as the figure 851 of a refugee activist is performatively constituted for the audience. Thus, the 852 refugee is able to subvert and counter certain assumptions about being a 853 refugee in the global North.

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**Q39**



**Q40**



**Q41**

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