‘Where do you come from? Why are you here?’

Representation of migrants in German television during the migrant crisis of 2015

Nikolai Atefie
Abstract

This study examines the representation of migrants on German television during the migrant crisis in autumn 2015. Further it investigates circumstances and actors in the representation of migrants. A case study of two asylum seekers from Syria is presented who were often interviewed for television reports. A qualitative interview about the background of their media representation was conducted and some of the television material was analysed. In addition three journalists from large television stations in Germany were interviewed about their work as correspondent during the migrant crisis. A main finding is that migrants were predominantly represented as well-educated and outspoken. A circumstance for this was language barrier between the journalists and migrants who often needed to talk English, which narrowed the group of potential interviewees. Another finding was that reports and reporters tended to emphasized women and children even though the majority of migrants was male.

Keywords: migrant crisis, refugees, representation, television, Germany
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1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

By the time I write this thesis the migrant crisis is one of the most discussed news subjects in Europe. It divides our society. Most of the debates around this topic are very one-sided, with only little factual discussions in between. There is a group that takes a stand of sympathy for the fleeing people, who support open borders and want to grant as much people as possible asylum, while people on the right part of the political spectrum disagree with open borders. They have a different view on the word ‘responsibility’, which is often used by the left as synonym for ‘solidarity’, this group sees scammers in the migrants and wants the national state to provide help ‘for their own people’ and not for immigrants (who claim to be refugees). Recent elections in Europe and opinion and election polls show that the support of the latter is growing strong. The mass media - as one of the key players in public information and interaction between politics and society – has been reporting intensively about the migrant crisis and tried to explain this very complicated matter, with limited success as we can see in public opinion research, for example in Germany. It seems that a large part of European society has doubts about accuracy of media reporting towards

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1 I am aware that the term ‘migrant crisis’ is conflicted. It would be too extensive to analyse the linguistic origin but there will be some references by journalists interviewed later in this thesis. I have decided to use the term instead of ‘refugee crisis’ just because all people coming to Europe are migrants (as in ‘moving over borders’) but not all will be (or have been) granted asylum and therefor cannot be generalized to be refugees.
2 When referring to the migrant crisis I am focusing on the time between September to December 2015, where most migrants arrived in Europe.
During fall 2015 I have been working myself as reporter during an internship for a large German TV station. My office was based in Vienna from which my colleagues and me covered news from most former communist countries (Balkan region) as well as Austria. My main mission there was to cover the European migration crisis of 2015. Together with a camera team (camera man and sound engineer) I was sent to three different borders. Nickelsdorf, a small village in Austria bordering Hungarian Hegyeshalom; Spielfeld, another border town next to Slovenian Sentilj and Schärding, an Austrian town at the border to Germany. There I found myself in the middle of an historic event. Several hundred thousand migrants crossed European borders illegally in only a few weeks – some were in urgent need of protection from war and persecution, others were rather looking for better opportunities for their lives compared to their home country (as the examination of asylum cases showed later).

As journalists we were interested in these people and one of the main tasks at the border was therefore to interview migrants. Upon every encounter the conversation started with two questions: ‘Where do you come from?’ and ‘Why are you here?’

In the beginning the media presence was enormous and so was the interest of the people in Europe and the whole world. Media reporting has shaped public opinion, as it does in all mayor news events – but how? Accusations came up that the media did not report in a balanced, independent way. Journalists would have transported their own positive emotions towards the migrant crisis and would have only shown ‘the good people’ arriving. A lot of people didn’t trust established media anymore and in

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7 I use the term ‘illegal border crossing of migrants’ under the definition of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which in Article 13 (2) states that ‘Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.’ This doesn’t include the right to enter another country.


Germany the term ‘Lügenpresse’ (‘lying press’) was re-vitalized. These accusations made me think about my reporting, I worked for one of the largest European TV stations, ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen). So I started to reflect, have I been lying? Were there mistakes in representing migrants? And if, which ones were under or overrepresented? Was it really only the educated ones or did journalists actually show mostly uneducated people? To what extend is it possible to represent reality in an historical event like this crisis and is there a single truth?

Both as a TV consumer and as a colleague at the borders I have observed the work of my fellow reporters. I met two (now) asylum seekers at the Austrian-Hungarian border from Damascus who told me that they have been interviewed for many times on their way to - and in - their destination Germany. Out of some 10.000 people that were crossing those borders everyday, those two were being systematically interviewed. That made me question the representation of migrants in media. During reporting the migrant crisis I have identified several aspects that I find are important to analyse in depth. One of the most important questions that was raised (and is still being raised) by the audience is ‘who are these people that come to our country, to our European union?’ The media tried to answer the questions, supported with statistics, expert knowledge and most importantly illustrated by migrant interviews. This is why I want to understand this phenomenon of how media represented migrants during the crisis with an academic analysis.

1.2 Purpose of this Study

The aim of this study is to explain the representation of migrants on German television during the crisis in autumn 2015. I believe that the selection of migrants for interviews played a key factor in public debate and deserve special attention for research. Therefor I interviewed three German TV correspondent journalists who have been on duty during the migrant crisis and conducted interviews with the migrants. I am interested to analyze what factors that influenced their reporting, e.g. how the sample of migrants were chosen by journalists and broadcasted to a large

kritik-hart-aber-fair-dient-der-journalismus-der-politischen-meinungsbildung-14021972.html
Furthermore I will also look into interview situations from a migrant’s perspective with a case of two (now) asylum seekers who were interviewed eight times in only a few days. I interviewed this young Syrian couple. This also raises questions of whom of the migrants did talk to journalists, in which language, what was their motivation et cetera. I also want to research how journalists used these interviews to tell their stories of the migrant crisis in their reports.

1.3 Research Question

The field of IMER (International Migration and Ethnic Relations) is very much concerned by the migrant crisis of 2015 as it links to global migration issues, war, ethnic persecution and the immigration to Western society. I am interested in the representation of migrants in media and the interplay between the journalists and the migrants during the crisis, which for the European television audience can be also seen as a European self (the journalists perspective) and the migrant as ‘foreign other’.

My research questions therefor are

a. How were migrants represented on German television during the crisis?

b. What circumstances and actors influenced this representation?

1.4 Definition of migrant, refugee and asylum seeker

The term refugee in itself is conflicted, there are convention refugees, there are people with subsidiary protection, there are asylum seekers, migrants and people dismissed from the asylum system. For this thesis I will define as a migrant someone who is moving from one country to another, it doesn’t imply whether it was voluntarily or involuntarily, nor if the reason for movement across national borders was for economic or political reasons. On the other hand an asylum seeker is someone who actively claims asylum at a national migration authority and is in the process of
determination whether or not asylum was granted. Whereas a refugee is seen to be an individual who got asylum or a similar subsidiary protection granted for the reasons of persecution, war or similar. 10

1.5 Previous Research

Because I am researching a very recent event there is little directly related literature available. By the time I am writing this thesis all relevant book linked to the migrant crisis of 2015 that I found are still due to be published, most of them earliest in autumn 2016.

An article though by Castañeda and Holmes titled ‘Representing the “European refugee crisis” in Germany and beyond: Deservingness and difference, life and death’ was very helpful. The researchers analysed representation of the migrant crisis (namely the first nine months of 2015) in the media discourse and how Germany positions itself towards refugees on a political and societal level. Their construction of ‘deserving’ refugees and ‘undeserving’ migrants as part of a divided German population are - in my opinion - a very valid analysis of the current debate of the refugee crisis and Willkommenskultur (culture of welcoming).11

Angela Naimou’s article ‘Double Vision: Refugee Crises and the Afterimages of Endless War’ is another very interesting contribution. It analyses the numerous ways of seeing refugees (threat or victims e.g.) in the public debate and provides a good overview on the war-like debate of asylum migration in political and media discourse.12

In a broader frame Benson published a comprehensive analyses of stories by two main French evening news TV shows on TF1 (privatized in 1987) and France 2 (state-owned) and three main French newspapers (Le Figaro, Libération and Le Monde) regarding the continuity of media coverage of immigration. He finds that the journalistic discourse on immigration in France has been fairly stable in the 1970s to

11 Ibid., pp. 12–24.
the 1990s because of a certain set of ethical journalistic rules (that are followed by most French journalists) and the power interaction with the media market, which has been described by Bourdieu as ‘journalistic field’.\textsuperscript{13, 14}

As there is scarce academic research yet published with this thesis I try to contribute to the field of International Migration and Ethnic Relations with an analysis of the migrant crisis in autumn 2015 and to use my first hand reporting experiences as a starting point for the discussion. I will try to bring up new perspectives and explain reasons behind representation of migrants on German television.

1.6 Thesis Outline

In the first section I have introduced the thesis background, aim, research questions, a definition of important terms and presented previous research. In Section 2 I will first introduce methods, which are divided into 3 subcategories: semi-structured interviews, case study and media content analysis. Then I present my methodology as base for my research and reason why the chosen methods fit into my research design. Finally strength, weaknesses and limitations of this study are presented.

Section 3, the material, then gives an overview of material produced/colllected, including presentations of the interview partners and the television reports for my analysis. There I will also discuss the anonymity of the interviewees.

In section 4 I will present the theory. I will define discuss migration on television as well as introduce documentary television and its way to represent reality. At heart of theory is a discussion of the concept of cultural representation by Stuart Hall.

Section 5, the analysis, will critically investigate the interviews and television material and explore it through the theory of cultural representation. I will critically scrutinize answers by the journalists and analyze the case study of the two asylum seekers and discuss their perception of interview selection and their actual


representation, also through the help of the TV reports.

Eventually in section 6 I will provide my conclusion and suggest further research.

2 Method

To understand migrant representation in German television I will interview three TV reporters from large German media corporations and question them about their reporting, their observations and retrospectively if they see irregularities in representation of migrants in their own work. Further I will study a case of two asylum seekers, a Syrian couple, who got interviewed eight times on TV and analyse parts of the reports where they appeared and interview them about their experience and views on their representation.

2.1 Semi structured Interviews

When conducting semi-structured interviews it is important according to Moses and Knutsen to frame

‘(…) the questions in a way that can ensure the questions will not be misunderstood, that the questions themselves are not loaded or learning, and that the interview subject is responding honestly and in good faith.’ \(^{15}\)

Research ethics are of special importance in interview situations as it involves interaction of subjects, which is recorded for research purpose. The researcher has to be aware of the impact gender, race, location, et cetera may have on the interview. The interviewer is supposed to be neutral of his opposite, though a complete objectivity is never completely possible due to the circumstance of the researcher also being a subject. \(^{16}\)

May writes

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\(^{16}\) Ibid., 2 pp. 139-150.
'On the one hand, interviews are constructed to elicit knowledge free of prejudice or bias on the part of interviewers; on the other, a self-conscious awareness on the part of the interviewer is needed to let the interview ‘flow’.17

Clearly every researcher has an impact in the data collection process and my material and my research approach is influenced by my personal experience during my reporting on the migrant crisis. I have a very specific relationship to my interview partners. I am a colleague to the correspondent journalists. I approached the journalist at eye level telling them that I have noticed that there may have been issues with representation of migrants during my work on the Balkan route. Though I tried only to tell them criticism without mentioning what exactly I have observed but rather challenged the general way of working so that I would not influence the interview. They, too, reflected on their work and therefore agreed for the interview. For them it seemed very important that I am a colleague and they do not have to fear any judgment, because I have been working on the same event and therefore I can relate to the experience of being there. This equal relationship between researcher and interviewee turned out to be very important for the accuracy of the answers.

As for the asylum seekers I have not only interviewed them but also hosted them in Vienna one night on their way to Germany and we became friends. It was them who pointed out that they have been interviewed for so many times and this eventually led to my research. Because I was one of the journalists that interviewed them, they knew that I understand what they were telling me, this situation established trust and therefore accounted for very detailed and honest interviews.

2.2 Case Study

My case is studying two asylum seekers from Syria who have been interviewed eight times by different large TV stations. In a random sample the chance to be represented that often out of 10,000 people who have been crossing borders is for each interview selection only 0.01%. I will analyze their TV appearances and interview them to understand their unlikely high representation in media.

As Hammond and Wellington define

‘(…) a case is literally an example of something – a unit of analysis – in which the something could be a school, person, a political system, a type of management and so on, depending on the particular interest of the researcher and the field in which he or she works.’\(^{18}\)

Though the case study is as a method itself, it is in-blurred, as for my thesis with interviews and media content analysis.

### 2.3 Media Content Analysis

According to Wilson

‘Content is analyzed by breaking it up into conceptual chunks that are then coded or named. Qualitative analysis develops the categories as the analysis takes place. The results are used to make inferences about the messages in the text [or audio/visual piece].’\(^{19}\)

Altheide presents a data collection protocol for TV content analyses in order to provide numeric and narrative (descriptive) data collection. Amongst others he would record the origin of the material, appearance of protagonists, the correspondence between audio and video and the overall emphasis.\(^{20}\) I will collect material via online on-demand portals (where the asylum seekers pointed out that they appeared). Then I will organize the material partly following Alheides approach for media analysis. I will analyze the journalists’ voice-overs, as well as the pictures and perspectives shown with a special focus on the context with migrant interviews and representation of crowds of people shown.

It is important for the researcher to be familiar with the way TV news productions works and to be aware that TV news is primarily entertainment oriented. He writes that ‘TV operates with time, meaning that it allocates portions of its newscast to

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\(^{19}\) V Wilson, *Research Methods: Content Analysis*, Evidence Based Library and Information Practice 11.1, 03/2016, Vol. 11, no. 1, University of Alberta, 2016, p. 41-43.

certain topics and that the ones that receive the most air time are usually those regarded as the most important.’  

2.4 Methodology

This thesis follows a constructionist approach as described by Moses and Knutsen.

‘(...) people are intelligent, reflective and wilful and these characteristics matter for how we understand the world. Constructivists recognize that we do not just ‘experience’ the world objectively or directly: our perceptions are channelled through the human mind – in often elusive ways.’  

This way of seeing the world very much relates to journalism because journalism itself often claims to show ‘reality’ as it is. The media is the channel of knowledge for public information, selective, exclusive and made by individuals. This means that knowledge (as well as journalism) is constructed and not ‘images of reality’ and there are many ways to create these constructions and to interpret them. This constructed knowledge can be applied on the journalist who then uses it for reports and creates new knowledge. The consumer then consumes knowledge that has been available for the journalist. So which factors influenced the journalists knowledge at the border and how did he chose what sort of knowledge is used for his reports?

Since ontology is the study of what there is, a question in connection to my subject would be around existence of the migrant crisis and the movement of people during the crisis. What made the people come to Europe? What is war, what is ethnic persecution, what is poverty? Therefore my thesis involves important questions of epistemology with ontological implications of peoples perception of ‘what there is’.

Qualitative material – such as my interviews - is part of the interpretivism branch of ontology. It ‘facilitates understanding of how and why, enables the researcher to be

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21 Ibid.
22 Moses & Knutsen, p. 10.
23 Moses & Knutsen, p. 4.
alive to changes which occur, good at understanding social processes and allows for complexity and contextual factors.\textsuperscript{24}

2.5 Strength, Weakness, Limitations

The event is very recent and therefore there has been little academic research published so far. My advantage is that I have been there, I have been involved, I can establish links and I have personal contacts to migrants and journalists.

The case example of the Syrian couple is very strong as they have been interviewed so many times on their flight over the Balkan out of thousands of people, which raises questions about representation of the migrants. Out of some 764,000 migrants that crossed borders it is worth a lot to have been able to track their route and get their agreement for this study.\textsuperscript{25}

The combination of case study with interviews and media content analysis strengthens the result of the study. To understand the situation it is of significant importance to talk to both players involved, namely the journalists carrying out interviews and the migrants as interviewees. Furthermore the analyses of some of the reports through the media content analysis where the case study participants appear adds another layer of research, because it involves other subjectivities, in the authors of those reports.

The strength of semi-structured interviews is that the participants are allowed to bring up new ideas and let the interviewer spontaneously ask follow up questions during the interview. In both cases with the journalists and with the asylum seekers it was important to give them an impulse for a debate and let them bring up new aspects during the interview.\textsuperscript{26} That helped me to get more ideas out of the interviews than I would have been able to think of before.


\textsuperscript{26} T May, \textit{Social research: issues, methods and process}, Open University Press, Berkshire, pp. 135-143.
The journalists who talked to me represent the three largest media companies and their stations together represent a share of around 40% of the German TV market. This means that their work has a big outreach to the public and can influence public opinion. The more influential the interview partners in my research the more relevant becomes my findings of my analysis.

The weakness in qualitative interviews is the low sample which makes it difficult to generalize the results and there is no certainty that clear patterns emerge. Interestingly the group of German TV journalists reporting on the migrant crisis is quite small, so eventually my research results will even give some implications on collective production of migrant representation.

Another weakness is that my interview partners could try to manipulate my thesis with biased answers on their own agenda. The asylum seekers for example, because they might have an agenda to promote more asylum seekers in Europe or the journalists who may not want to talk about mistakes.

Another way to answer my research question could be to simply compare news reporting from correspondents (newspaper articles, radio and TV reports) with public opinion polls. But that might only show a quantitative connection but would not explain the reason behind the representation. This is why I talked to the actors in the migrant crisis reporting, which also is a limitation as it is not holistic either, but at least will explain the journalists perspective and the migrants perspective.

### 3. Material

In this section I will present my material consisting of journalist interviews (three individuals from different large German tv networks), interviews with two Syrian asylum seekers who often appeared on media and some of these television news reports. I will also state the factor of anonymity of my interview partners.

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3.1 Journalists

There were different parameters of how I chose my interview partners. In order to keep this thesis coherent I decided to limit my research on TV reporters from German TV stations because I have been working with one (and therefor I have most acquaintances there) and Germany is the largest country of the European Union, also with significant audience in Austria. In order to be able to draw a balanced picture of the media landscape I have interviewed altogether three journalists from two stations which are public broadcasters (ARD and ZDF) and a privately owned one (RTL), all of them have several sister channels and are institutions that together count the largest TV audience in Germany. I have considered to also talk to a Journalist from Austrian national TV ORF but as I am currently working for them as Scandinavia correspondent I have neglected this idea due to a potential conflict of interest.

Each journalist interview lasted around half an hour. Two conducted in a public cafés, and one with RTL reporter Jürgen Weichert\textsuperscript{28} was conducted over the phone as he was at that time reporting from the migrant camp in Idomeni, Greece. In order to get most out of my interview partners I conducted all interviews in the mother tongue of the respondents, which was for all but one German. Only Annette Hilsenbeck\textsuperscript{29} from ZDF spoke English, as she was raised bilingual in the US and Germany and because this thesis is written also in English. In total I asked an average of 10 interview questions which were developed upon previous research and my own observations on the field. The first questions were of rather practical nature to understand where the journalists have been working, for which TV stations and on which shows their reports aired. The following ones dealt with their work during the migrant crisis in regard to migrant representation, their experience and a reflection on the way they carried out their reports.\textsuperscript{30}

Annette Hilsenbeck was one of the reporters that supported the office of ZDF in Vienna were I used to work in the autumn. She has been in the industry for over twenty years and was one of the correspondents that covered the migrant crisis most. Annette was at the Slovenian-Croatian border in Dobova in mid-October, reporting

\textsuperscript{28} in the following referred to as Jürgen
\textsuperscript{29} in the following referred to as Annette
\textsuperscript{30} Interview questions and full transcripts available in the appendix
about Croatians dropping migrants at the border river as well as at Sentilj, the Slovenian-Austrian border where there has been a camp set up by UNHCR and the Slovenian government. In peak times she witnessed some 15,000 people transferring there to the Austrian side of Spielfeld were small capacities created a big backlog. Annette was also based at the Austrian-German border in Passau where most of the migrants reached their final destination Germany. She covered this event for all news shows of ZDF, including the morning show, the short news during the days, the European affairs program, the main evening news and the foreign and current affairs programs. According to the her reports reached some 10 million German-speaking audiences, which accounts for almost a quarter of German TV audience.  

Till Rüger is a southeastern Europe correspondent of Bavarian public broadcaster BR, a subsidiary of the national umbrella ARD, one of the largest stations in Germany. I met Till in Nickelsdorf in the beginning of September when some 10,000 people came over the Hungarian border to Austria. Till has basically covered the whole Balkan route. He reported from Idomeni (Greece), Gevgelija (Macedonia), Tabovce, Presevo, Belgrad, Sid (Serbia), Dobova, Bresice (Slovenia), Villach and Vienna West station (Austria). Till also produced reports for all current affairs and news programmes of ARD but also for regional subsidiaries such as MDR, SWR, NDR and even national news and history channel Phoenix (a cooperation with ZDF). The leading German evening news Tagesschau of ARD has some 9 million only and a news prime time market share of 32% in Germany (2015 average).  

Jürgen Weichert is an experienced reporter of the RTL media group, the leading private TV group of Germany. Based in Frankfurt he travels the world to report for RTL and its sister channels RTL2, VOX and the news channel NTV, which together had a market share (viewers 3+ years) of 20% in 2015. I met Jürgen during my work for ZDF in October 2015 at the Austrian-Slovenian border in Spielfeld. He visited every country on the Balkan route and did numerous live standups and reports for the news shows of these four channels.

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31 Arbeitsgemeinschaft Fernsehforschung, loc. cit.
32 in the following referred to as Till
3.2 Asylum Seekers

I made two qualitative interviews with asylum seekers who I have met during my work at the borders. Yara and Alaa ran into me in Nickelsdorf, Austria, right after the Hungarian border, where I interviewed them for the ZDF. They are a young married couple, who fled the Syrian capital of Damascus. Both have a bachelor degree in English literature from the University of Damascus. As researcher I chose Alaa and Yara because of their extraordinary representation in the media. During their flight on the Balkan route they got interviewed eight times. I have been in touch with them since and even visited them in Germany where they settled. Because of our close relationship we established mutual trust, which lead to the agreement for this interview. I asked them for the reasons they talked to the media, why they believe they have been selected, how they believe their statements influenced public opinion and look into other migrants they have met and if they feel they have represented average migrants (if something like this exists). The interview with Yara and Alaa lasted an hour and was conducted in English. Both spoke to me at the same time over Skype in their flat in Germany.

3.3 TV reports

I was able to collect a part of the broadcasts the Syrian couple appeared in and will analyse their representation in the interviews they gave. I will be analysing six reports from ZDF and one from SWR. From ZDF there is a series of five reports which are so-called ‘mutations’, meaning that the first report was broadcasted in a news show at noon and then slightly adapted and updated for four more shows during the day.

These reports aired on September 11th 2015 and are partly based on raw material that I produced myself during the migrant crisis and were shot at the Austrian-Hungarian border. Though another journalist edited the report, so that my influence was limited to the selection of migrant interviews and not to the whole of the final reports. The first report was called ‘Refugee flow doesn’t stop’ (Flüchtlingsstrom reißt nicht ab) and was broadcasted for a short news show at noon called ‘Heute12’, with a length of 1.35min. (I will code this report as Heute12). This report was the basis for the
The largest update was in the current affairs programme ‘Heute Journal’ where the report was extended to 2.51min. (code: Heute-Journal), that is why I will analyse only the first and the last report of that day.\textsuperscript{38}

Another ZDF report was broadcasted on 12\textsuperscript{th} October 2015 on a show for German national news called ‘Heute in Deutschland’ (code: Heute-Deutschland), with a length of 1.53th min. The report is about rules at the asylum camp in German town of Hardheim.\textsuperscript{39}

A report from SWR had the same topic and aired on 8\textsuperscript{th} October 2015. The length of the report is 1.50min and titled ‘Etiquette for Refugees’ (\textit{Benimmregeln für Flüchtlinge}) and aired on the evening news (code:SWR).\textsuperscript{40}

There were also reports on BBC and ABC featuring the protagonists of my case study but I wasn’t able to get hold of all of them and therefore decided to only quickly

\textsuperscript{34} The next report went on air for the European affairs show ‘Heute in Europa’, it was basically the same content, just with another title ‘refugee trek continues’ and with some minor edits. The following report for the afternoon news ‘Heute 17’ and the main evening news ‘Heute 19’ left out Yara’s statement but altogether had a very similar content.

\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Flüchtlingsstrom hält an}, television report, ZDF, Stephan Merseburger, Hungary/Austria, 11 September 2015 (Heute in Europa), retrieved 18 May 2016 <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek/#beitrag/video/2488480/Fl%C3%BCchtlingsstrom-h%C3%A4lt-an>.


\textsuperscript{38}\textit{Flüchtlingsstrom reißt nicht ab}, television report, ZDF, Stephan Merseburger, Hungary/Austria, 11 September 2015 (Heute Journal), retrieved 18 May 2016 <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek/#beitrag/video/2488558/Der-Fl%C3%BCchtlingsstrom-rei%C3%9Ft-nicht-ab>.


mention them but focus on German television.\textsuperscript{41}

3.4 Stages of interview selection

Here I want to outline how a TV report is produced, but moreover how interview selection processes work. Usually journalists produce television material and edit it to a report, but that is not necessarily done by the same person as you can see below. With ‘field’ I refer to journalist that are on the ground where the story is happening, whereas with ‘studio’ I refer to journalists who produce remotely from an office.

- journalist A (field) > selection (field) > Interview > report > broadcast
- journalist A (field) > selection (field) > interview > selection (field) > raw material > journalist B (studio) > selection (studio) > report > broadcast
- Journalist A (field) > selection (field) > Interview > no selection > raw material > another journalist B (studio) > selection (studio) > report > broadcast

3.5 Anonymity of Interview Partners

It is important to mention that all journalists have agreed to have their name published in this thesis. This public appearance highlights that these journalists stand with their firm reputation to their statements. Also the asylum seekers have agreed to publish their full names but I have decided that there is neither relevance nor necessity to accept this offer. Their asylum applications are still being processed and there is a civil war in their home country. Therefore I don’t want to put their safety at risk. Though I had to use their real first names as I am analyzing television material where they appear with their real first names.

\textsuperscript{41}Alaa and Yara did appear on the ABC report but without an interview. Most probably this material was used for several reports (as usual in the business) and there is also at least a part two, yet to be released. Source: Modern Migration: The WhatsApp Refugees Part 1, Online television report, BBC/ABC timesXtwo, Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, August-September 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGLXu38YCqw >.
4. Theory

Besides the field of International Migration and Ethnic Relations my thesis also involves media studies. To analyse the role of migrants and their representation in the media I will mainly use a book curated by Stewart Hall called ‘Representation - Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices’. A chapter by Frances Bonner was helpful to understand how documentary television tries to frame reality. I have consciously chosen to focus on Halls theory of cultural representation rather then theory of mass media as it seemed more suitable to analyse representation of migrants during the crisis and its circumstances and actors.

4.1 Representation - a Cultural Concept

The concept of representation was strongly influenced by cultural theorist Stuart Hall. He starts describing representation by setting a frame of meaning, which he says depends on differences between opposites. 42

Hall writes that

‘…symbolic boundaries are central to all cultures. Marking ‘difference’ leads us symbolically to close ranks, shore up culture and to stigmatize and expel anything, which is defined as impure, abnormal. However, paradoxically, it also makes ‘difference’ powerful, strangely attractive precisely because it is forbidden, taboo, threatening to cultural order.’ 43

Thus, ‘what is socially peripheral is often symbolically centred.’ 44 Contrariwise not differences but commonalities can be positively emphasized too. 45

43 Hall, 2nd edn, p. 226.
By stating that he also remarks the creation process of a ‘self’ and ‘other’ – whereas there can be a different layer to that (for example creating a ‘we’ and ‘them’). Difference, or in other words ‘otherness’ is defined through what the self is or actually is not. In consequence that means that the perception of representation of everything but the self actually creates the latter. Therefore every representation also carries a message, meaning or connotation, which marks difference and establishes a distance between the self and other. 46

Another question is how the self interprets this difference, and then establishes the other. We can think of it in different levels, majority and minority, for example there are more women than men on this planet, but we can also see it in context of migration where migrants are bringing a different culture, religion or even skin colour to their host country. The more the focus of this interpretation of the otherness goes from global to local the more real it gets, because suddenly the other is not only noticed on screens or in texts but experienced in reality. Here Hall notes that ‘stable cultures require things to stay in their appointed place’ 47 which again raises questions of representation in media reporting.

The way ‘otherness’ is perceived also depends on the way it is presented and represented. Representation can also be seen as a concept of power. Mass media is a main source for knowledge and representation in media therefore is essential for public opinion. If large media outlets decide to report on a certain topic it gets public attention, the power of attention or to mute a topic or event, a silence so to say. This fact brings us precisely to the question of how and why television represented migrants during the crisis the way they did.

4.2 Migration on Television

Television has gone through severe changes in the past years, especially the impact of private media companies with dependence on financial revenues has driven the

46 Hall, 2nd edn, p. 219.
47 Hall, 2nd edn, p. 226.
competition for audience. ‘Sex sells’ is a famous saying, but migration does too. It is a topic which suits high emotional storytelling and serves sensationalism, especially when it comes to refugees. 48

Curran writes that

‘With the increasing social complexity and mobility that characterizes late-twentieth-century societies the mass media have been perceived as having an increasingly central role in facilitating dialogue among citizens.’49

Hericourt & Spielvogl ad that

‘public debate on the issues of immigration and migration policy is still broadly determined by the way these issues are covered by the media and by the effects of a certain number of collective beliefs.’

And a study by Shaw & Shannon concludes that mass media enhances group consensus by setting out an agenda partly depending on the audience but also through the editors including attributes such as race, gender and level of education.50 Therefor journalists are also aware about their influence on public debate when reporting.

An emotionalized picture is always incomplete and distant from an objective holistic approach to a certain situation. Therefor television makers risk to reinforce migration prejudices in reporting because of their simplistic sensational presentation of migration issues.51

4.3 Documentary Television - Representing Reality

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51 J Hericourt & G Spielvogl, p. 145-146.
Documentary film and television is the main style of production in audio-visual news reporting. For news shows, as I am analysing, the expository mode is frequently used.

‘Expository documentaries are ones that address the viewer directly, often using ‘voice-of-God’ narration, which means (...) that there is a voice-over narration making claims and assertions and telling viewers how to understand what is being shown.’

The ‘voice of god’ in this case is usually the journalist who also wrote the text and edited the report (often together with a cutter or him/herself as so-called video-journalist), the journalist also sometimes produces the material on the field where he/she would also find and select people to interview and locations to record.

In her chapter of Stuart Halls book ‘Representation’ Frances Bonner writes that ‘Documentary film are representations that claim a privileged relationship with the truth about the material with which they concern themselves.’ Further she argues that ‘raw footage has to be made into an argument, or, (...) filmed actuality has to be treated creatively for it to become documentary film or television’. The production of knowledge in documentaries is therefore rather constructed than descriptive and based upon a number of selections.

In terms of ethics filmmakers and journalists are urged to represent situations fairly and keep propriety of appearing people. Further the audience is supposed to be informed about any bias or misrepresentation in the report in order to avoid misunderstandings. If pictures shown are different to the observation of the journalist it should be said, if archive material is used for another story it should be stated, if a scene is re-built the audience should be made aware.

53 ibid., p 61.
54 Ibid., p 64.
56 Bonner, p 75.
5 Analysis

The analysis is guided by my research questions. First I will outline the background of asylum applications in Germany and then analysing ‘how migrants where represented’ by exploring the television news material. In the second section I will analyse ‘the circumstances and actors that influenced this representations’ by analysing the journalist interviews. There I will also relate the discussion to the first part of my analysis.

5.1 Who are ‘the migrants’?

To start the analysis of my material I think it is important to have a look at statistical data to understand better who the migrants are. We shouldn’t think of migrants as a homogeneous group of people. They are hairdressers, teachers, farmers, doctors, and many more – and yes there have also been illiterates, unemployed and even some amongst the people who cause a security threat, that travelled over the Balkan route. Alaa said in the interview that ‘in Syria there is a whole population displaced’ and that this fact also mirrors in the people coming to Europe. So we can note that all of the people that came over the Balkan route have been individuals, all with their personal unique story but these people also share common experiences.

Let’s have a quick look at statistical data provided by Germany of asylum claims in 2015 (the country with the largest number of asylum applications). There were 476.649 asylum application in Germany 2015, whereas the ten largest countries of origins where Syria (158.657), Albania (53.805), Kososvo (33.427) Afghanistan (31.382), Irak (29.784), Serbia (16.700), Unknown (11.721), Eritrea (10.876), Macedonia (9.083) and Pakistan (8.199). These were also the top ten countries during the crisis months of September to December 2015. Interestingly at least 25,7 % of all asylum application in Germany (where nationality of the applicant was

identified) came from countries of the Balkan, mainly Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia. Only 0.6% or less applications of migrants from these countries were granted some sort of protection in 2015 (whereas it was a large majority for Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan). By stating this I want to highlight that the public debate as well as the media reporting is centred around migrants from the Middle East, especially Syria, but actually more than a quarter of German asylum applications in 2015 came from European countries. Another important detail in the German asylum application statistics of 2015 is that 62.2% of applicants were male (and therefore 37.8% female) and 31.1% applicants said that their age was below 18 years.

5.2 Video Material - How were migrants represented during the crisis?

The idea to research this case with Yara and Alaa came from my own experience. Out of the eight interviews (which translated in some 20 reports where the material was used) I accounted for one of the interviews. I met Alaa and Yara early morning on September 11 on the Austrian-Hungarian border. They were two out of several hundred people that walked past our camera team on the country road trying to figure out how to continue their journey to Vienna and onwards to Germany. I have to admit for my part that I had a very clear reason why I chose to talk to Alaa and Yara – though it was subconscious: Yara was wearing her blond dyed hair visible and uncovered of a veil (which I observed that most migrant women would wear). Alaa was wearing a hoodie and eyeglasses, both looked of middle-eastern decent, they were just sticking out of the crowd. My first – obviously very subjective - impression was that both must be quite liberal and that in my eyes requires a certain level of education and therefore might speak English. In that moment we had no translator so I was dependent on the linguistics of my opposite. My assumption turned out to be correct. In response to my question ‘do you speak English’ I was told in a nearly perfect British accent ‘Of course we speak English. We studied English Literature in Damascus for three years!’ almost as if they got offended by my naïve question. We will come back to this circumstance of journalists choice when I analyze the

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
interviews with the journalists later in the chapter.

It was later that I found out that I haven’t been the only one that interviewed them. Together with a group of other migrants they were followed by a team from the American news station ABC from Greece up to the Hungarian Austrian border. At the Serbian border town with Macedonia, Presevo, they were then interviewed by a journalist from the BBC. In Austria it was me who interviewed them for German public broadcaster ZDF, after they claimed Asylum in Germany they were met in a asylum camp in Hardheim from German national private TV RTL, three times by regional public TV SWR and again by ZDF.

When they told me about the numbers of interviews they have given, I started asking myself how it is possible that this couple have been chosen eight times out of some 10,000 migrants that crossed borders into Europe in peak days in autumn 2015. It seemed to me like a jackpot in lotto, I haven’t heard of a phenomenon like that before.

I have already expressed my reasons to choose Alaa and Yara for my ZDF interviews, but it is worth to mention that out of these approximately three minutes of interview time, the material was used on this day in at least five news programmes on ZDF. Amongst them the main evening news ‘Heute’ and the current affairs programme ‘Heute Journal’, which altogether had some 10 million viewers, which accounts for 1/7th of all German TV consumers (even though there probably has been an overlap in viewers who watched more than one news programme that day).

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60 The first follow-up report went on air for the European affairs show ‘Heute in Europa’, it was basically the same content, just with another title ‘refugee trek continues’ and with some minor edits. The following report for the afternoon news ‘Heute 17’ and the main evening news ‘Heute 19’ left out Yara’s statement but altogether had a very similar content.

61 Flüchtlingsstreck hält an, television report, ZDF, Stephan Merseburger, Hungary/Austria, 11 September 2015 (Heute in Europa), retrieved 18 May 2016 [http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek#/beitrag/video/24888480/Fl%C3%BCchtlingstreck-h%C3%A4lt-an].


The report coded *Heute12* included a quote of Yara ‘we want to work and study, we don’t want to do nothing’ and one by Alaa saying ‘Hungary was like a nightmare for us, we had to walk a lot, it was so cold, no one offered us help and the authorities were I would say cruel’. The translations from English into German were literal.

The report coded *Heute-Journal* was built on the same elements but complemented with 1.16min. more material. Besides Alaa’s quote there were three more migrant interviews who said ‘the Austrians try everything to help, they give us food, clothes no problems’. Interviewed in Hungary two migrants explained ‘it is like Guantanamo here’ and ‘this place is for animals not for humans’. The journalists voice-of-god is very emotional and tries to communicate the desperation of the migrants. The reporter also tells the audience about a border fence built by Hungarian prisoners with the words ‘Europe in 2015, the Hungarians make it possible’ taking the stand that these developments are a shame for the European Union.

It stands out in all mentioned ZDF reports from September 11th that the crowds consist mostly men in the visual material but it is women, families and children that are shown in a large number of close-ups. These close-ups are disproportionate and cause a representation, which leaves out other representations and therefor creates silences, a concept which I shall call partial representation. With an emphasis on images of families and children a certain sympathy is created, it symbolises – as Hall describes - ‘a common humanity’ of the migrant and the TV audience. Everyone can relate to suffering children, because everyone has been a child once, but actually only a small part of the migrants were children. Showing the weak and sick is in opposition to young uneducated men and creates a stereotypical representation. Further in these reports the audience has not been informed about the context of shown images and actual migration, e.g. that women and young children make only a small part of the

65 *Flüchtlingsstrom reißt nicht ab*, television report, ZDF, Stephan Merseburger, Hungary/Austria, 11 September 2015 (Heute Journal), retrieved 18 May 2016 <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek/#/beitrag/video/2488558/Der-Fl%C3%BCchtlingsstrom-rei%C3%9Ft-nicht-ab>.
66 Hall, 1st edn, p. 249.
Yara and Alaa appeared as only migrant interviews in four out of five reports from ZDF on September 11th. That means that for a whole day of news on one of the largest TV station in Germany this couple represented all migrants. Here raw footage is made into an argument, it shows only two educated, western looking migrant interviews, it is a statement and again a partial representation without holistic approach of the situation at the border and of course not at all representative to the other migrants.67

After my interview with them in Austria the next time they talked to the media was in Hardheim, a small town in South-Western Germany, which absorbed a share of 20% of asylum seekers compared to their population. This fact and that they mayor has distributed a set of rules for the asylum seekers has created a strong media interest.

Yara and Alaa tried their best to help at the camp as they said. They have been translating at the second hand clothes shop and at the medical aid station.

‘Whenever a journalist came to the camp the administration would ask us to give an interview. For all the interviews that were held in Hardheim, we were suggested to do the interview there,’ Alaa added.

In SWR people of Hardheim are interviewed who tell the reporter that there have been problems with asylum seekers and that they do agree with the rules sent out by the mayor. Then Yara as asylum seeker is shown with the words ‘We try to tell people that please please don’t throw litters on the street’ and Alaa added that not everyone does that but ‘it depends on their level of education, of the culture they lived in, on their family.’68 Here again Yara and Alaa are the only migrants shown in the report. They dressed fashionably and talk in fluent English with British accent to the reporter – we can note another partial representation where a married couple with the same

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67 Bonner, p 64.
(high) educational background and opinions are shown. The statements which were chosen for the broadcast signalise that there might be problems but actually the asylum seekers themselves try to improve the situation together with their fellow countrymen.

In *Heute-Deutschland* about camp Hardheim Yara was interviewed and stated regarding the guidelines of the mayor - ‘We should tell them you should respect the rules and follow them, this is our task’.69 Another asylum seeker called Kinan added ‘unfortunately there are people that do these things, but not all of them.’70 The journalists voice-of-god concludes ‘many refugees and the people of Hardheim are actually not as far away from each other as some would think’.71 Similar to the report of SWR the journalist creates the image as if those two asylum seekers would represent all migrants, she relates the term refugee to one single group of collective experiences and common acting and not to individuals and their unique stories.

What we can see overall after analysing the reports is that there is always a connotation of keeping stable cultures, and that requires things to stay in their appointed place. Yara said that in the camp they had the feeling that they were saying something the journalists liked, or Alaa added, which was in accordance to what the journalists wanted to hear. Hope, fear, exhaustion are words that were often used by the ‘voice-of-god’. So reports focused on the common humanity between migrants and audience, sometimes with critical remarks, but in general quite positive towards the migrants. Stuart Hall writes that ‘marking difference leads to close ranks, shore up cultures and expel anything which is impure, abnormal’72 and I find that journalists did the opposite. Few differences were shown between the European self and the ‘foreign’ other in order to lower the risk of increasing the fear that migrants could interrupt the stable European culture.

### 5.3 What circumstances and actors influenced this representation?

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70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Hall, 2nd edn, p. 226.
Interestingly all of my interview partners had different ways of calling the migrants. Annette said that in the beginning she would say refugee but ‘that would mean they flee from war, but they already came from Turkey or Greece, so afterwards I would call them simple ‘people / humans’ (Menschen).’ Whereas Till would always use the word refugee (Flüchtling).

‘I avoid using the term migrant and I also think that it’s an exaggeration of political correctness to use the word Schutzsuchender (someone in need for protection). Refugee is refugee, regardless of a convention, it doesn’t matter if refugee or an economical refugee. The people on the streets use refugee and that why I do it too,’ he told me.

None of the TV stations had – or have now - clear guidelines on migrant terminology. What we can see here is that journalists had their individual interpretation how they call these migrants. This means that some migrants have been called refugee (who never got or will not get any sort of protection), similar to asylum seekers whose status wasn’t assessed at the time of reporting. But to the audience all migrants were presented as one group, but with different terms. For example they were called ‘refugees’, which wasn’t correct (statistics in 5.1 shows that only a certain percentage of the migrants have been granted protection), or as ‘humans’, a term which doesn’t provide the audience any information about the migrants. How then should the audience understand the migrant crisis if every media report contained another personalized definition of migrants by journalists?

There were different circumstances that shaped the process of journalists selecting migrants for TV interviews. One was certainly the language, ‘if I can’t talk to you, I can’t interview you,’ said one of the journalists. All of the journalists noted that there have been issues with communication. Annette said that in forty per cent of the cases they had to use English as interview language, for Till it was fifty per cent, for Jürgen even ‘a large majority’. The other interviews were done in the mother tongue of the migrants, mainly Arabic and Farsi (or the Afghani equivalent Dari) or for the case of Jürgen even in German, because he said that he met a lot of people who studied German in their home country or were former guest workers. Alaa and Yara’s experience also highlighted the circumstance of language barrier. ‘Our linguistic skills
were one of the most important things that facilitated all of this, that made us more accessible to the media, more than others’, they said.

So here we can identify a subconscious selection process, which I will call a natural circumstance (natural because it was an unintended, unplanned action). From all migrants only parts were able to participate in the interviews because of their linguistic skills. The non-English speakers were only accessible to the journalists when they had a translator who actually spoke the migrants language. It was an unintended selection process, which created a silence and a partial representation in the migrant interviews. Linguistic skills are closely linked to the level of education, which means that most likely all migrants who were interviewed in English are also better educated. Their representation in television was higher than the migrants who didn’t speak English, and their stories but especially their professions were more sophisticated than from the other migrants. This created a picture that a large part of the migrants are well educated (and will be valuable for the host country and its society).

Another circumstance and actor that shaped representation were translators of which none – according to my interview partners - were actually trained or under oath. Some have been contracted or numerated, though the majority were volunteering. According to my interview partners there were former refugees, NGO volunteers, an Imam, and even migrants themselves amongst the translators. Some of the journalists said that the interpreters might have had an own agenda. Sometimes they noticed that translations were expressed quite mild and that some of the translators would apologize for their fellow countrymen.

Another natural circumstance, which could not be influenced by the journalists, was the actual willingness of migrants to volunteer for interviews. Everyone giving an interview also has an interest in being on camera, we can call it agenda. Annette experienced that there were migrants who wanted to talk to her.

‘It was mostly people who had really bad injuries and wanted to catch my feelings, look at my fingers, you have to help me to get to Germany to get medical treatment, they were very absorbed by their personal fate, it was only men.’
So a migrant who didn’t want to talk to the journalist could not be interviewed and therefore also couldn’t be represented on television.

‘Where ever I’ve been at a bus stop or a camp there is usually someone making a step towards you or smiles and that’s how I chose because you know when I start talking to that person, there is an interest. I would not talk to refugees that would hide or look away’, said Till

These migrants could for several reasons refuse interviews, for example because of political persecution or because they knew they had no real chance to get asylum. This too created again a partial representation and a silence of a group of migrants who were simply not shown on television. Jürgen also believes that there were certain groups left out.

He told me that ‘a lot of people were a bit afraid and just not used to talking to the press, especially women don’t want to talk. But if you would talk to the husband and ask for his agreement the women would start to speak, that’s the trick. It was much more easy to talk to men because of their hierarchy and their standing in society – they were more brave talking to journalists. ’

By saying that he also highlighted the role of gender in migrant representation due to cultural differences of the interviewer and the interviewee.

Here I want to come back to the interview with the asylum seekers. I asked them how they have been chosen for the interviews.

‘We were just waiting in the camp in Presevo and I was holding a book from British novelist D.H. Lawrence in my hands. A British Journalist from the BBC spotted me and found it very funny that I read this ancient author on the road. I had nothing to do, just waiting, it was the only book we had. I don’t think that we were chosen by our look’, Yara said.
‘It was the book that encouraged him to talk to us, it was quite different in a context that is all the same. You can say that everything is grey but there you had a thing that popped out as strange,’ Alaa added. Here we can note that a circumstance was also the ‘otherness’ of the migrants amongst the migrants for getting airtime. Till said that the main story of a refugee is always the same and therefore an outstanding story which shows a larger variety was interesting to use for a report – a very common way for journalists to handle content of their reports. But we can also find a commonality of the British audience and the British journalist with the migrants. Both can identify with the author who was read by Alaa and Yara which might have been a reason behind the choice for the interview. Reading D. H. Lawrence created a ‘we’ (those who read British literature) rather than a ‘them’ (those who are so different from ‘us’).

In the asylum camp in Hardheim a lot of different circumstances came together. There was a pre-selection of the camp administration of who should be presented to the media. It was in their interest to show that asylum seekers are not troublemakers but rather polite and well-behaved people – especially for the local population in Hardheim. The journalists didn’t question this pre-selection and interviewed Yara and Alaa. When I asked them why they were willing to give interviews Yara said

‘There was the image that immigrants are not good people, or not educated and I liked to give another idea or another image, especially at the camp. When it came to the rules, I always said that we had the same rules in our country and we lived the same way the German live.’

Alaa added that they were seeing sweeping television reports that refugees are bad, so that they felt that they have to make a balance. He told me that

‘we felt we have to show the people that we are not different from you, we are human beings like you, we are not coming from primitive societies, we used to have something similar to your lives in your countries.’

We can identify here that Yara and Alaa gave the interviews on their own agenda because they wanted to show that the asylum seekers are not strangers to their host society. The fact that Alaa and Yara were always sent for interviews created a representation of ‘well behaved, educated asylum seekers’ in television reporting
about the asylum camp in Hardheim. They have been rather outstanding role models at the camp but the reports generalized them as representatives of all migrants there.

5.4 Journalist as Actor

Another crucial circumstance was the journalists’ personal choice to approach migrants for interviews. All of the journalists told me that – at least in the beginning of the crisis in autumn 2015 – they were looking for ‘likeable, open faces’. In relation to concept of cultural representation we can say that the bigger the difference to the self, the larger the distance to the other. So when journalists say ‘likable’ they were according to Hall then looking for blond western looking people, because the journalists are European (western) and the audience of their German TV stations are as well. The journalists all said unison that in the beginning of the crisis they have been euphoric and they went through a development as reporter. They reflected on their work and sometimes it even changed the way they reported.

Till said that he found himself in a very particular situation as reporter.

‘I was euphoric and glad to be part of such a big news event. It was breathtaking when the first refugees arrived at the central station in Vienna and the people started to applause. Certainly this mood collapsed at some point when I started asking myself can my home country Germany really absorb one million refugees, will this flow of migrants continue? My view and the questions I asked myself for sure changed but I don’t think that it affected my way of reporting. My reports became more factual and less euphoric, but that was simply because there was no applause anymore and there was a everyday life of refugee reporting, also because in parallel the ‘welcome culture’ got less.’

Annette explained

‘I realized the truth isn’t only nice families who are trying to save their children, you had like 30% young men travelling and a lot of them were
coming from a background were – I guess - life doesn’t count much, (…) that’s how they behaved in the crowd too, so I tried to get them too. (…) we kind of blended out the other groups and after a while I realised I can’t do this because it’s not the whole truth, yes it’s part of the truth but you have also those other people and you have to show them too.’

Jürgen too reflected and noted that he asked himself ‘do I just confirm with my interviews and stories what I read in the newspapers and the news agencies, or do I need to be more critical? I thought that I really need to be careful in order that the audience doesn’t think that all of these migrants who come to Europe are very kind and educated people who perfectly speak English. (…) There wasn’t only small children that slept in the arms of their parents, it wasn’t only nice people and not so nice people.’

Out of these three statements I find that the representation of migrants changed over time, because journalists reflected on their work and on the public debate they have shaped. One circumstance was that journalist were influenced by reports of their colleagues which talked about the great hospitality of the Germans towards migrants. This euphoria seems to have enforced reports focusing on the misery some of the migrants, where others were left out. But later more critical points were raised by the public and journalists would try to resolve these issues with their reports. Another very important circumstance that influenced their reporting was a very in-transparent flow of migrants. Jürgen told me that ‘right in the beginning it was especially educated and outspoken people with a good level in English but later on I couldn’t talk to a single person in English, it was total different people (…).’ Journalists actually had limited access to reliable data because the event of open borders was unplanned and not really regulated. Therefor they had to decide on a daily basis how to represent migrants in their reports, which I find depended very much on the day and location of the report.

Jürgen also linked the way journalists reported about the migrant crisis to the interest of the audience.

‘(…) [kids] appealed to the emotions of people that wanted to help. It was basically pretty easy to make a successful report because you only had to show
people in need, the youngest, the smallest, the ill, people in wheelchairs and old grandmas. That’s what’s caught the people’s attention but I noted that that wasn’t reality because there were other sorts of people too and those needed to be shown as well. (…) We saw that it was tempting to fall into this trap because we wanted to show ‘the best images’ which have not necessarily reflected the whole spectrum of people.’

Here we can see that there is another reason for this partial representation of migrants: the nature of television to sensationalize and the emotional angle to catch the audience’ attention. Analysing what the journalists told me it seems that they were themselves trapped in overwhelming situations, which they as human beings could not always transport with a distant view. Dirty, hungry, sick people, images of old people carried in wheel chairs through mud and rain are of intense nature – and viewer ratings approved the interest of the audience. But not only the audience was fascinated by this extraordinary situation, the journalists too felt sympathy with these people. We find again an emphasis of a common humanity as described by Hall.

Interestingly, Till opposes the idea that migrants were portrayed in a positive way. He said that he showed the weakest, as he would do in other dramatis news events as well.

‘Showing them in a cue, in a tent or in an overcrowded train then it’s just the pictures we had. Secondly especially children and families are the weakest parts in this chain and as media outlet we have the responsibility to show them, to observe them and to communicate their issues.’

Till also said that he has consciously left out people for example from the Maghreb states because they weren’t the majority of migrants. But he also believes that the majority of the audience knows that a news report always just presents the most interesting, emotional and exciting snippet of an event.

Though I find that in general the situation can be described as ‘foreign other entering the western ours’ and according to Hall ‘otherness’ is seen as impure abnormal to the self. But it was not differences (for example as expressed in culture, race and religion) but rather commonalities (for example in high educated professions such as doctors,
translators and engineers) that were highlighted in reports through the choices of the journalists for migrant interviews. Journalists felt with the fleeing people and therefore looked for least differences of migrants to present to their audiences, again also to avoid destabilisation in their reporting country.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate representations of migrants during the migrant crisis of 2015 by analysing a specific case of two asylum seekers who have been interviewed for eight times for numerous television reports. Primary data was collected through a case study including interviews with the asylum seekers and was supplemented by television reports as secondary material. In addition I also conducted interviews with correspondent journalists who have been reporting on the Balkan route during the crisis. The research questions of this thesis were:

a. ‘How were migrants represented on German television during the crisis?

b. What circumstances and actors influenced this representation?

In conclusion I find that in the representation of migrants few differences were shown between the European self and the ‘foreign’ other in order to lower the risk of increasing the fear that migrants could, according to Hall, interrupt the stable European culture. There were several circumstances that led to a representation of migrants on television that was not showing a holistic picture of the crisis. Amongst those were issues such as language barriers and willingness of migrants to volunteer for interviews. A result of my research is that journalists have been the most important actors. They had the power to show or not show their choice of migrants in their reports, or in other words whom to represent. I find that one crucial reason of their choices was their own emotions created by tragic and inhumane observations on the migrants’ Balkan route. But also a sense of responsibility to show the audience the weakest of the migrants, mainly children, women and disabled people, was an important factor for their choices on how to represent migrants. Altogether it was the selection process which influenced representation of migrants on television. These natural circumstances and conscious choices in the selection processes created
silences and a partial representation because groups of migrants, e.g. with a background from the Balkans or the Maghreb and especially with lower educational background where often left out, while others such as women, children, well-educated and outspoken migrants were highlighted in the reports. Generalizations and personal definitions of what makes a refugee (and amongst them later turned out to be also e.g. economical migrants) was an obstacle for the audience to understand the migration crisis of 2015.

6.1 Recommendations for Further Research

This study highlights the importance of further research into the question of representation of migrants and refugees in the mass media. My case study showed that reporting on this issue, specific on the migrant crisis 2015, was in-transparent and for the audience difficult to understand. Therefor I see a need to research how this behaviour of journalists actually influenced policy makers and the public debate throughout Europe. In my interview with Till he draws a connection between the collapse of the ‘culture of welcoming’ and his own reporting. I see a need for further research if it was media that changes the way of reporting about the crisis or the European audience that changed their opinion, which led to this transition of public support of the migrants. Another question which deserves further investigation is if journalists fed the interest of the viewer or actually created it during the crisis.
7 Bibliography


8 Appendix

8.1 Transcription of Recorded Interview with Journalist Annette Hilsenbeck

Where did you stay/report and how long?
Slovenian-Croatian Border Dobova mid-October, reporting about Croatians dropping migrants at border rivers, people walking through sleepy villages of several hundred people and the migrants would just leave a mess behind.

Next Sentilj, Slovenian Austrian border a camp set up by UNHCR and the Slovenian government, 15-18,000 people per day, by train, on the other side the Austrians did take only 1-2,000 people an hour, so it didn’t sum up, it was still a lot of backlog

Austrian-German border in Passau.

For which shows did you report?
Moma, Mima, all Heute Shows, about everything, article heute.de

How often did you talk to migrants?
Actually every time. First time we had an Arab interpreter from Egypt, that was a big help because before that we could only talk to the people in English which of course was a natural filter, you would only get the educated young people actually. We had her 3 days.
In Sentilj we had an Arab interpreter who worked at the camp, of course he could only help us hourly because he had other duties.
Then I went to the Austrian-German border in Passau, he was from Syria as well. He was a migrant himself, he got Asylum granted in Austria and he was a volunteer.

Do you think the interpreters could have caused bias?
Heidi in Dobova: If she would have chosen people, she would have chosen the nice ones, but as I have chosen the people for her it wasn’t so much the case. I realised that when she was on her own with the camera team she would only chose the nice, civilized family type of people (the ones she considered more civilized than the others).

The second time I was in Dobova I had no translator so I had to talk to the people in English, which of course again is a filter because you get someone like the great translator who worked for the American forces in Afghanistan, his English was perfect and he was a very educated man you can tell, that was a certain type of people you would get and the others you would neglect. Then we had for two hours an interpreter who spoke Farsi so we could talk to Afghans as well, and then we got a complete different type of people talking to you.
**Did you proof read the translations in the studio?**
No. I trusted them, I don't think they had any reason to do some pussyfooting, with Heidi maybe she was more careful with the translation than with the others because she was compassionate and she felt so much with the people.

The other two were very honest. Some translation were really breath-taking, I was gasping, because of the high expectations of the migrants they had from Germany, what will happen in the future. He would later on say 'I'm so sorry for my fellow country people and I know not all of them will make it’ he said that maybe five or six times, so I think he was very honest because he felt so bad about it later on and he would always in the end say ‘I'm sorry what I say’ but that’s what he said.

**Which language did you talk to the migrants?**
All the migrants I talked I talked to 40% in English and 60% in their own language.

**How did you chose the people you talked to?**
I’d say in the beginning I was more looking for the nice family kind of type and I was looking for people who would speak English, and somehow you pick them out, but as soon as I got the interpreters it would change and I tried to get an average of people which were around which meant that you also would get young men a lot, which were travelling a lot alone, you would get all different types of nationalities, so we tried to get more an average.

**How did you select which migrant interviews will be broadcasted?**
I tried to get an average out of the answers I had, so if half of them would tell me ‘oh when I get to Germany I know I will get a salary, the German government will give me a house and a car, this and that’ than I would pick also half of that for the piece, same a lot of people saying ‘I want a safe future for my family and children’

**The way of how you chose migrants changed over time?**
Yes because I realized the truth isn’t only nice families who are trying to save their children, you had like 30% young men travelling and a lot of them were coming from a background were – I guess - life doesn’t count much, where their lives didn’t count much, were the life of the others didn’t count much, where they learned that being brutal and ruthless saves their lives and that’s how they behaved in the crowd too, so I tried to get them too.

**How much do you feel do you represented the average migrant?**
I don’t think we can talk of the average migrant. I don’t think that one news story, usually they don’t aim on representing all the migrants. What you do is you have a certain theme and of course you try to find people that talk to you about this certain theme, for example how long have they been on the road, how difficult is it for them. Like if you have different nationalities for them it was easier, for example Syrians knew for sure that they will get asylum, but then you had Pakistani people who just doesn’t apply to so they were different. So if you want to focus on difficulties that not
everyone will be granted asylum of course you will look for Bangladeshis, Pakistanis or even Afghans – these groups will have more problems for that.

**Do you think the general audience understood that these people didn’t represent the average migrant?**

I think that especially in the beginning people believed what they have been shown and a while they realised this is not the whole truth. Because especially in the beginning as I said we focused on families with little children who always said ‘I’m here for my children’s sake, I want to save them I want to give them a future’ and we kind of blended out the other groups and after a while I realised I can’t do this because it’s not the whole truth, yes it’s part of the truth but you have also those other people and you have to show them too. It didn’t go so well with my colleagues in the beginning but I think after a while they realised these people a real too.

**What did you ask the migrants?**

Well in the beginning we asked ‘Where did you come from, why did you come here, what did you experience?’ Later on when the story developed we asked ‘why don’t you stay in Slovenia or another country where it will be easier to get a visa’ and ‘what do you expect from Germany’.

**Was it difficult to proof the answers?**

Everyone said they are from Syria and then the translator would find out that they can’t even speak Arabic.

**How did you chose the words refugee and migrant?**

In the beginning I would say refugee but that would mean they flee from war, but they already came from Turkey or Greece, so afterwards I would call them simple ‘people / humans’ (Menschen). There were and are no guidelines from my TV station on the terminology.

**Do you think the migrants had an agenda?**

Yes, there were migrants that wanted to talk to me, mostly people who had really bad injuries and wanted to catch my feelings, look at my fingers, you have to help me to get to Germany to get medical treatment, they were very absorbed by their personal fate, only men.

**Do you think reporting about the migrant crisis in general was balanced?**

In the beginning it was appropriate to constantly report on it, it was an ongoing event and it got worse and worse, so the audience could understand. At some level people were fed up with it especially when there was no development going on anymore, so what else could you show, only more people. I think the way it was reported in the beginning was really biased, it was all these poor people coming from warzones and we have to help them. It wasn’t said but the way the people were selected, the people we did the interviews with, you would see all these children with big eyes, ‘cute, cute, cute’, and I think that people were worn out emotionally too because they have been played with there emotions so much that at a certain point you can’t take it anymore. But I think over the time it changed, luckily, you also got other things, journalists
would take in different views, I think it was a good thing even though you might have to report things that were not so nice or not pro-migrants but it’s always to keep a balance to say that the case itself that people flee from war is justified but still show the other things happened in the aftermath.

**How do you think did media shape the creation of refugee identities?**

In the beginning it shaped educated families than come here and that is good and important for society because we need workforce, because we get all these experienced workforce, we need more families. It was a big disappointment for the people when they saw ‘hey this is not the whole truth’ and that’s when they started to call the press ‘liar press’. I think that’s a bit harsh, because it was not really done intentionally but it wasn’t real journalism as you should do – you should report about the things happening and not about what’s gonna happen if I tell them that there are also guys which aren’t necessary fleeing from your but rather see it as economic chance.

**In retrospective: did you in your own reporting make any mistakes?**

I think in the beginning in Dobova/Sentilj when I saw that there were so many people who were rude and were society will need much more strength to cope with that people who were also a problem for the other refugees themselves, I should have insisted to more report on this. I did it a bit, but I should have said we have to do it and we have to do it now! I did it in my reports but only as aspect, the whole reports was already so lopsided with all the families and little children that I think it would have been important to show the other side and not only to be fair.

**8.2 Transcription of Recorded Interview with Journalist Till Rüger**

**Where did you stay/report and how long?**

Idomeni (Greece) – Gevgelija (Macedonia) – Tabovce, Presevo, Belgrad, Sid (Serbia) – Dobova, Bresice (Slovenia), Villach, Vienna West station (Austria)

**For which shows did you report?**

Weltspiegel, Tagesthemen, Mittagsmagazin, Morgenmagazin, Tageschau, Rundschau, MDR Aktuell, SWR, NDR, Phoenix

**How often did you talk to migrants?**

Always.

**Which language did you talk to the migrants?**

In the beginning I used English because we didn’t have translators. But in the end of August we got Arabic speaking producers. In Vienna we had one producer for Austria
and Slovenia, who himself was from Syria. The Imam of Skopje was our translator in Macedonia and in Serbia we had a girl from Libya. Because of Arabic we had the chance to get much more intense and deeper insights in the refugees experience - they told us things that they couldn’t even express in English. The interpreters helped us a lot to proof the stories of the refugees if it can actually be true what they told us or if they told us any fairy tales. But after all I had to still interview 50% in English – just because it was easier for me and the translators weren’t always available. All translator have been paid by us. Still I think that everyone brings in a certain bias. The Imam in Macedonia had probably the least bias, the translator in Vienna though has a leftist profil and has certain interests, simply because he advises and helps refugees on how to get asylum on a voluntary basis. On the other hand the girl from Libya who lives in Belgrade had other interests. The producer in Vienna was able to proof read the translations and he didn’t attest any wrong translations.

Under which aspects did you chose the migrants?

Frankly speaking it were the aspects of sympathy and openness. Where ever I’ve been at a bus stop or a camp there is usually someone making a step towards you or smiles and that’s how I chose because you know when I start talking to that person, there is an interest. I would not talk to refugees that would hide or look away, but I think that’s the same thing for all interview situations, also in Vienna on a street I would talk to someone who shows openness. As it is usual in the tv business I was influenced by optical aspects of the refugees, openness, interesting faces etc. But there’s no different practice for other stories. There was for sure a natural bias and selection. Who wants to stand in front of the camera and who is able to say something and talk about emotions, but that’s not different in the city center of Vienna. I have never been choosing the most charming faces or blond hair but rather the ones which came towards me and were open to talk about what they have been through. It is not our job to represent statistics, we show what we see. I also think that the audience understood that, but someone who is just looking for support of his own view will always find it. I think that the majority of the audience knows that TV reports are just a snippet of what is happening there, precisely the most interesting, most emotional and most exciting – and if you understand that you know that the reporting during the refugee crisis was objective and balanced news.

How did you chose which migrant interviews will be broadcasted?

What was their story, where did they come from, how could they express themselves, how much could they reflect on their experiences. We didn’t want to hear for the fifth time that their houses were destroyed, but rather at what time did they make the decision to flee. Who was behind that idea, how did it work, what happened during the flight, would they do it again, would they go back if things won’t turn out as they expected, etc. The main story of a refugee is always the same.

How much do you feel do you represented the average migrant?

For sure not. We always reached out to people that were from a better educated part of society. They were able to express themselves, to reflect on their story, who were able to analyse, have had (and willing) the language skills to express themselves. The
interviews reached for sure not the average migrant. All of the ones I met were doctors, literature students, chemical engineer, but we also had hair dresser, baker and mechanic. Maybe we got hold of some who represented a bit more an average migrant.

What did you ask the migrants?

Where they are from, why they left the country, how was their way, what happened to them, how strong is their emotional connection to their country, if they imagined the flight like that, if they would do it again, what was the most terrible event on their journey, what are their hopes, why precisely Germany, what are their expectations, could they imagine to go back – that were the basic questions?

How did you chose the words refugee and migrant?

I have always said refugee (Flüchtling). There have been and are no guidelines from ARD in this matter. I have never been influenced by my editors in the way I reported or the words I chose to describe the situations. Of course we have been easy on some things but I still use the word refugee. I avoid using the term migrant and I also think that it’s an exaggeration of political correctness to use the word Schutzsuchender (someone in need for protection). Refugee is refugee, regardless of a convention refugee or and economical refugee. The people on the streets use refugee and that why I do it too.

Did you hear contradictory answers?

It normally turned out before we start to record when we met people that we didn’t trust. Once we had the case in Villach that to men first agreed to the interview but when they saw the cameras they reconsidered because they sad they still have family in areas which are ruled by the Islamic State (IS).

Do you think the migrants had an agenda?

Honestly, I don’t think so. They were just nice, regular people. I rather think that the representatives of the Police and of the humanitarian associations had a strong agenda. I can’t remember a single refugee who tried to bias his interview because he knows it will be broadcasted in Germany and he will represent all refugees. This situation was never present but in that case I would have most likely stopped the interview.

Do you think reporting about the migrant crisis in general was balanced?

In my eyes yes, just because there were so many different journalists and media outlets on the Balkan route reporting. Of course there are certain reports and certain journalists who you did report in a certain direction but in the general reporting and the intensity it was balanced. Critics who say that you show too many children and families but that’s just some reports that support this prejudice scheme and not the whole picture, which we actually reported.
I have to stress that refugees can’t be portrayed in a positive way e.g. showing them in a cue, in a tent or in an overcrowded train then it’s just the pictures we had. Secondly especially children and families are the weakest parts in this chain and as media outlet we have the responsibility to show them, to observe them and to communicate their issues. That’s why I strongly oppose the statement that ‘journalists only show kids to create sympathy for the refugees’ that’s just not true, we showed the weakest, similar to other events were the ones are shown who suffer most.

**How do you think did media shape the creation of refugee identities?**

Of course the media shaped the identities of refugees because the audience couldn’t go into the refugee camps. We showed the problems there, misery, defencelessness but I think that if they could have they would have been even more emotionally affected than if the sit at home in front of the TV.

We have definitely not showed all different refugee destinies. We have consciously left out people for example from the Maghreb states because they weren’t the majority of migrants. Syria, Irak and Afghanistan were the vast majority. Lately we have reported about stranded Magrheb migrants in Belgrade.

**In retrospective: did you in your own reporting make any mistakes?**

Of course the situation as reporter was particular in the beginning, I was euphoric and glad to be part of such a big news event. It was breath-taking when the first refugees arrived at the central station in Vienna and the people started to applause. Certainly this mood collapsed at some point when I started asking myself can my home country Germany really absorb one million refugees, will this flow of migrants continue? My view and the questions I asked myself for sure changed but I don’t think that it affected my way of reporting. My reports became more factual and less euphoric, but that was simply because there was no applause anymore and there was a everyday life of refugee reporting, also because in parallel the ‘welcome culture’ got less.

8.3 Transcription of Recorded Interview with Journalist Jürgen Weichert

**Where did you stay/report and how long?**

The whole Balkan route from Greece up to Austria.

**How often did you talk to migrants?**

It was part of our everyday work to talk to the migrants.

**Which language did you talk to the migrants?**

Mostly I spoke English with them. But if there was a possibility to have a translate we would try to speak their mother tongue. A lot of people were even able to speak German. There was a number of people especially from Syria nd Irak that were able
to speak German., that was our preferred language.

Was there a sort of natural filter that arose out of the linguistic barriers?
Certainly yes. Sometimes I thought ‘oh I want to talk to this family with a lot of children, even very young children but I noticed that they didn’t understand a single word – or to put it the other way, I didn’t understand them’ and there was no one who could help me with translations, which I think was a pitty that I couldn’t frame this situation which is happening right in front of my eyes, how the people feel and that happened quite often that I just couldn’t communicate with the people.

Under which aspects did you chose the migrants?
The most important factor was always if they want to talk to me. But usually if you hold consistently the microphone in front of the person or if you make it visible that you are a reporter I could see with their body language if they are open for an interview, but If you notice that the turn their back on you then I wouldn’t even try to talk to them.
Because of that I think that there were certain groups of migrants that have been totally left out in my reporting. A lot of people were a bit afraid and just not used to talking to the press, especially women don’t want to talk. But if you would talk to the husband and ask for his agreement the women would start to speak, that’s the trick. It often seemed for me that the women are more educated because they spoke English, but I needed to get the support of the husband. But it general women were quite tight-lipped, because they didn’t want to but also because they weren’t allowed to. It was much more easy to talk to men because of their hierarchy and their standing in society – they were more brave talking to journalists.

What did you ask the migrants?
How are you, how do you feel in this situation, where are you from, why did you flee, where do you want to go? Sometimes even current affairs regarding European refugee policies. Surprisingly a lot of people were up to date on latest news developments.

How much do you feel do you represented the average migrant?
I think that you rather chose the people who are easily accessible and with whom you can talk English and you choose the people who want to talk to you, especially because I am often stressed and I know that I don’t need 4 people but 2 interviews are sufficient, a man and a woman. Sometimes I wasn’t looking for detailed interviews but I rather tried to capture emotions, and I noticed that I actually don’t need someone who speaks English, desperation can be expressed with body language.
When an Afghani women shows her kids, is close to crying, when people stand in the rain and out in the cold, when they get stuck, stand in the mud, when their kids get sick then you don’t need to translate literally, the situation of the people can be transported with pictures without a need for them to reflect in proper English.

How do you think did media shape the creation of refugee identities?
That’s difficult to answer, because it is a question that I posed to myself too. Who do I choose? I tried to control it and asked myself: do I transport the message appropriately, or is it my own opinion, or am I influenced by the whole situation? I have asked myself: do I just confirm with my interviews and stories what I read in the newspapers and the news agencies, or do I need to be more critical? I thought that I
really need to be careful in order that the audience doesn’t think that all of these migrants who come to Europe are very kind and educated people who perfectly speak English. My experience showed that most people actually don’t speak English and it seemed that they are quite uneducated, that they didn’t understand at all what we were doing there. I still believe that 90-95% don’t speak a single word of English and that was the moment when I told myself I really have to be careful what to show – it’s not just the noble, educated refugee but there is quite a different mean of people that came over the borders.

**For which shows did you report?**
Mainly for the RTL Group, RTL, NTV, VOX, RTL2. We reported about it because the audience was very interested in this topic, which was confirmed by the good viewer rating. The editors told me: stay there, it’s most discussed topic, every headline was about the refugee crisis, the radio stations always placed the refugee stories in front, 2015 was the year of the refugees, of the migration flows. Of course we reached millions of people. We knew that we create and transport opinions and it was important to reflect on my own work if everything goes in line with media ethics. Kids for example are always catching attention and my colleagues would even say ‘look at these poor kids’ and then I noticed that I can’t always show children because I created the picture that there is only children on the way which all need help. That appealed to the emotions of people that wanted to help. It was basically pretty easy to make a successful report because you only had to show people in need, the youngest, the smallest, the ill, people in wheelchairs and old grandmas. That’s what’s caught the people’s attention but I noted that that wasn’t reality because there were other sorts of people too and those needed to be shown as well. It just wasn’t right to look out for children on the days when there were 90% men of all migrants on the way. We saw that it was tempting to fall into this trap because we wanted to show ‘the best images’ which have not necessarily reflected the whole spectrum of people.

**In retrospective: did you in your own reporting make any mistakes?**
Therefore I changed the way I approached the refugee crisis as a journalist along the way because I reflected and noted that what I did in the beginning simply wasn’t showing the truth and I couldn’t continue like that. There wasn’t only small children that slept in the arms of their parents, it wasn’t only nice people and not so nice people. Of course you always watch when there is someone sitting in a wheelchair and you feel sympathy but is just not reality if there is 90 % men passing than I have to show that as well. I am sure that I went through a development as a reporter. It is worth to mention that the refugees came in different flows. Right in the beginning it was especially educated and outspoken people with a good level in English but later on I couldn’t talk to a single person in English, it was total different people and I have to admit that I was quite surprised that the refugees are not a homogenous crowd, it was not only different Nationalities like Afghans and Pakistanis but also from a different educational background, sometimes only people that travelled alone and next day it was mostly families.

8.4 Transcription of Recorded Interview with Asylum Seekers Yara and Alaa
What was your route, where did you stay and how long?
Bus from Damascus to Beirut Airport (only allowed to stay 24hs), Turkey (visa freedom) stayed 5 days, in a motel in Izmir, thousands of refugees were sleeping on the streets, wait in Lesbos 5 days for ferry registration, slept on the street, first time in their lives, each cue was more than 400 long, Athens, 2 days in a decent hotel, because we were exhausted of sleeping on the streets, bus to Macedonian border, a lot of buses, 1 day waiting, from the Greek-Macedonian border to Serbian border, 5hs not leaving the bus, another paper to leave the country, without paper couldn’t leave the country, 1 night Belgrade, then set of to Hungarian border, then Budapest, 2hs Hotel, then Austrian border, Nürnberg, Stuttgart asylum, Karlsruhe, 1 night, Hardheim, Buchen

How much did your escape cost?
1.200 Dollars each person

Who did interview you? Radio, TV, Newspaper, Photos? Which media outlets can you recall?
ABC from Athens to Austria, BBC Presevo, ZDF Austria, SWR (three), RTL and ZDF once (all in Hardheim)

How often were you interviewed?
8 times in total.

Which language did you talk to the journalists? But did translations?
English, all the times. Translation done once for SWR.
Alaa: I used to work as a translator and interpreter you should always be honest about what is being said. I should not interfere with the translations but I expressed my opinion separately, I commented of what the people said. I like to affect the meaning of the speaker.

What sort of reactions did you experience when you told your story?
They didn’t really ask us for our full story but rather for opinions. They were literally surprised that some people speak English fluently like this and that they had more liberal views. We have experienced sympathy from journalists, but it wasn’t that deep. The ABC was so concerned about our safety – in that time there was a cameraman in Hungary that tripped a father and his son at the border – they prayed for us to pass safely Hungary, they lived with us literally. There was a journalist from the SWR, she was so moved by our story, she even wrote down her email address and her phone number to give her an update what’s going on with us.

Why do you think were you chosen for the interviews out of some 10.000 people that crossed borders each day?
For the ABC we were chosen by chance because the group with whom we were contacted the journalists beforehand and we met them on the way. But for the BBC it was interesting.
Yara: We were just waiting in the camp in Presevo and I was holding a book from British novelist D.H. Lawrence in my hands, he found it very funny that I read this ancient author on the road. I had nothing to do, just waiting, it was the only book we had.
I don’t think that we were chosen by our look.
Alaa: That encouraged him to talk to us, it was quite different in a context that is all the same. You can say that everything is grey but there you had a thing that popped out as strange. He focused so much on the book.
Actually we were doing our best to help the management of the refugee camp in Hardheim doing translations at the clothes second hand shop. When ever a journalist came to the camp the administration would ask us to give an interview. All the interviews that were held in Hardheim, we were suggested to do the interview there. There were a lot of migrants complaining, but we didn’t, we had a different point of view then the others.
Yara: In the camp we had the feeling that we were saying something the journalists liked Alaa: or which was in accordance to what they wanted to hear.
Yara: On the other hand I had the feeling that they were focusing of the other kind of refugees that are different to the Germans.
Alaa: I think the media tried to show the whole picture.

How much do you feel do you represent the average refugee?
I would define and describe it that might be totally different for many other people, it depends on the perspective here. I would say that we represent a minority of educated liberal refugees. Actually if you go deeper to the issues that there are many educated people among the refugees, you can not generalize that these refugees are so and so. To get to the point, we only represent ourselves. There is a huge diversity in the community and I would like to note her that a whole population was displaced in Syria, so you can imagine people from different levels of education, from different social status and different sets of mind. You shouldn’t think about one mass of people. They represent a larger population, a whole Syria that was displaced. You have doctors, translators, engineers, people who were not educated, you have among the refugees a lot of university students – so almost everyone. So I would like to go to the save area to say that I represent myself.

Do you think it was a balanced way of reporting by choosing you 8 times?
Yara: I would say no but seeing our share of the representation it is not that essential, not that very important. During this period hundreds of reports have been made, so 8 interviews are nothing. When it comes to the Hardheim camp, you can watch the reports and you will find that the reporters didn’t focus only on us.
Yara: Even in Hardheim there was more than three American channels doing reports. Every time there were newspapers, TV channels. We did four reports but I stopped going downstairs because I was tired of giving interviews.
You can say that the journalists selected us initially but what facilitated all of this were our linguistic skills. So it wasn’t a matter of ‘let’s show the educated people and we only have this couple’ and it comes to the others we have millions of them. I think it was not the case, our linguistic skills were one of the most important things that facilitated all of this, that made us more accessible to the media, more than us.

Do you think your fellow refugees had an agenda when they gave interviews?
Yara: Yes, that’s right! Especially when it comes to conservative people I think so. I think that many people were trying to say that they expected something and they found something completely different in many interviews, that was happening many
many times on the way and especially in Hardheim, I don’t know why but it happened.

**What were you asked? And what were the most asked questions?**

Yara: Where are you from, how did you come here, how much did you pay? In Germany they were especially interested in how and which way we accept the German rules, integration, how we feel in Germany, is it a strange place? Our host took us to a church and showed us Virgin Mary, she asked us ‘do you know who that is’ and we had to laugh. Then I lifted a candle at the church and she was completely shocked that we know about these rituals. Still people believe we come from a completely different world.

**Why did you do the interviews?**

Yara: There was the image that immigrants are not good people, or not educated and I liked to give another idea or another image, especially at the camp. When it came to the rules, I always said that we had the same rules in our country and we lived the same way the German live. People were focusing on the bad things that the immigrants did.

Alaa: As far as we were watching the media reports that time, we were seeing a sweeping image that refugees are bad, so we just felt that we have to make some kind of balance. We felt like we have to say something about this, to show the people that we are not different from you, we are human beings like you, we are not coming from primitive societies, we used to have something similar to your lives in your countries. We needed to comment, especially when there was the Hardheim scandal, it’s not like some people tried to present it. You have the whole spectrum of colours, almost everyone amongst the refugees.

**8.5 Pictures from the Reporting at the Borders**

(1) Country road at the Hungarian-Austrian border where I first Alaa and Yara
(2) A migrant and his large family helping me with translations
(3) Large crowds of people arriving from Slovenia to the Austrian border at Spielfeld

Photo-Copyright Nikolai Atefie.
8.6 Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my extraordinary Grandparents Christine, Irene, Khosrow and Tivadar. Thank you for your great support and inspiration.