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Representing the "European refugee crisis" in Germany and beyond: Deservingness and difference, life and death

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ABSTRACT
The European refugee crisis has gained worldwide attention with daily media coverage both in and outside Germany. Representations of refugees in media and political discourse in relation to Germany participate in a Gramscian "war of position" over symbols, policies, and, ultimately, social and material resources, with potentially fatal consequences. These representations shift blame from historical, political-economic structures to the displaced people themselves. They demarcate the "deserving" refugee from the "undeserving" migrant and play into fear of cultural, religious, and ethnic difference in the midst of increasing anxiety and precarity for many in Europe. Comparative perspectives suggest that anthropology can play an important role in analyzing these phenomena, highlighting sites of contestation, imagining alternatives, and working toward them. [*refugee, media, immigration, crisis, Germany, Europe*]

In the first nine months of 2015, more than 487,000 people arrived on Europe's Mediterranean shores, twice the number for all of 2014 (Banulescu-Bogdan and Fratzke 2015). Many of them were Syrians fleeing their country's civil war, which began in 2011; since then, almost 429,000 Syrians have applied for asylum in Europe (UNHCR 2015). The "crisis," as it came to be represented and experienced, was not a new phenomenon in the summer of 2015. In addition, large numbers of refugees from across the world have entered western Europe at various times in its history (Baldwin-Edwards 2006, 2008; *Fortune*, October 15, 2015). According to some estimates, however, there are 1 million more refugees yet to come, leading the European Commission to call this the "largest global humanitarian crisis" of our time (ECHO 2015, 1). And German chancellor Angela Merkel has asserted that the contemporary crisis will define this decade (UK *Guardian*, August 15, 2015).

Thoroughly examining the current crisis, together with its historical and ongoing violent production, is beyond the scope of any single article. And while the specifics of the multisided war in and outside Syria are centrally important, we focus here on the simultaneous and related struggle over meaning, legitimization, and power in representations of the refugee crisis, specifically through the lens of Germany. In doing so, we employ concepts developed by Antonio Gramsci (1971) in the *Prison Notebooks*, where he defines a "war of position"—on a continuum and in contrast with an all-out military "war of maneuver"—as the ongoing struggle over symbols that legitimize and transform political-economic structures. According to Gramsci, then, hegemony is always incomplete, contested, and agonistic. Media reports, political statements, and popular discourse on the refugee crisis engaged in such a war of position over symbols, legitimizing and—at times—resisting the political-economic dynamics that inflected the many ways people in Europe responded to the people arriving at their borders. Far from

reducing the crisis to mere text or discourse, we seek to understand how representations engage with the violent political, economic, and material realities of primary importance in the production of and response to this crisis. In this instance, we analyze representations as simultaneous symbolic, social, political, and legal categories of inclusion and exclusion with potentially fatal consequences. These categories, at times, form a "lexicon of terror" (Feitlowitz 1998) as boats of refugees are turned back to sea (Klepp 2013), refugee centers are set on fire (Agence France-Presse, August 26, 2015), politicians are violently attacked for supporting refugees (Agence France-Presse, October 19, 2015), and Syrian refugees are imagined as connected to the violent November 2015 attacks in Paris (Reuters, November 16, 2015).

These current events are framed and experienced as a crisis (Kehr 2015), entering the daily media, capturing worldwide political attention, and producing diverse and contradictory discourses and responses.[1] While the construction of events as a crisis can lead to repression and intensification of vertical politics (Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016), we focus on these phenomena as crisis in the sense conceptualized by Gramsci—that is, as a moment in the war of position and war of maneuver when hegemony and the architecture of a social world are at stake, with future structural and symbolic realities unknown. He writes of crisis as a moment of openness in which "the old is dying and the new cannot be born" (1971, 276). By analyzing representations of the European refugee crisis through the particular lens of Germany, in the midst of shifting material, social, political, and symbolic ground, we aim to inspire further work on how displaced people are framed and how various actors respond to them. The discursive frames used in the media and in political and popular narratives can help us learn a great deal about how the responsibility for suffering is shifted; how fears of cultural, ethnic, and religious difference are mobilized; and how boundaries of social categories are made and unmade (Latour 2007), sorting people into undeserving trespassers versus those who deserve rights and care from the state. This crisis highlights an unknown future for Germany, with its tendencies toward both xenophobia and *Willkommenskultur* (culture of welcome), as well as for Europe more generally, in terms of internal relations and contradictory orientations toward the outside world.

How displaced people are framed reveals a great deal about anxieties in Europe regarding diversity and change within a paradigm of limited good (Foster 1965) informed by debt, austerity, and neoliberal disassembling of social systems. Media reports and political statements project these anxieties onto displaced people by morally delineating the deserving refugee from the undeserving migrant while casting both groups as outsiders threatening the well-being of an imagined homogenous Europe. While many of

the tragedies in this crisis directly result from policies that have sought to selectively control and restrict migration to Europe for the past quarter century (Hess et al. 2015), the discourse of deservingness displaces responsibility from historical political and economic policies supported by powerful actors in Europe and the United States and instead locates it in displaced people themselves. Yet such discourses are also sites of contestation, with numerous actors and grassroots organizations resisting these dichotomies. As Jacques Derrida (2001) notes, state interests and local ethics of hospitality are always in tension. On the one hand, states limit the right to residence; on the other hand, local communities may respond with hospitality to newcomers and offer refuge. Derrida points to this contradictory logic not to suggest that political action is impossible, but instead to foster it: in such a crisis, we may simply not yet recognize the possibilities for new forms of inclusion as well as novel horizontal solidarities (see also Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016).

We conclude this article by asking the following: What can anthropology contribute regarding the European refugee crisis? What particular perspective on these events can comparative perspective, social theory, and ethnographic methods provide that media representations cannot, and how can they help us understand the media representation themselves? In a moment of crisis that brings into relief unknown futures, how can we, as anthropologists, participate in imagining alternatives to contemporary sociopolitical structures and values as well as to the dominant "communicable cartographies" (Briggs 2005; 2007) in which we are also imbricated? Charles L. Briggs has developed this concept to indicate how narratives project certain subject positions that have differential access to the production of those narratives themselves. We use this concept to analyze current media and political discourse in the refugee crisis as well as to consider the political implications of ethnography.

Anthropology can establish important links between human experience and macro–political-economic structures, contextualizing both in historical perspective and challenging the marking of people through tropes of deservingness and difference. In addition, ethnographic work can highlight limits to abstract tropes of "the refugee" and "the migrant," suggesting that more carefully contextualized work is required to trace the political subjectivities of diverse displaced communities—and the social groups responding to them—through time and space. At the same time, anthropologists may challenge power hierarchies in the production and circulation of representations, including within our own writing. Analyzing the current crisis requires us simultaneously to consider the subject positions afforded displaced people, the audience, and the anthropologist as author within the communicable models not only of media representations but also of ethnography

itself (Briggs 2005, 2007). In a sense, the current crisis highlights openness and unknown futures not only for Germany and Europe but also, on a different level, for anthropology, its identities, and its future modes of engagement with the world. Here, we hope to explore how simultaneous reflexive engagement with current events and social theory might allow anthropology to reimagine its own contributions to political possibilities, emboldening and perhaps even moving beyond our tried and true specialties of contextualization and complexification.

Europe, Germany, Syria, and media representations of the crisis

While there is clearly no unified "Europe" in relation to the refugee crisis, some important patterns emerge. Media reports on the response to the crisis touch on many aspects, including the fairness of the quota system for distributing refugees among various countries and the question of which countries should take more or fewer refugees and which should or should not propose quotas for others. Reflected in all this are struggles in the war of position to define "Europe" as well as to establish who will have access to the various forms of capital associated with this definition. Here, we focus particularly on representations of the crisis in relation to Germany. Exercising often controversial leadership as Europe's largest economy, Germany played an especially important role in responding to the crisis in the summer and fall of 2015, occupying an important political and rhetorical position within media narratives. While countries such as Israel and most of the Gulf states have uniformly turned away refugees, and others such as Hungary have answered with direct violence, Germany has responded with an ambivalent hospitality that is uniquely nuanced and conditioned by memories (and some present-day realities) of xenophobia and fascism.

As would be suggested by Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony and the war of position, there is also no unified Germany in response to the crisis. Some within Merkel's own political party have criticized her response as "too generous" and warned that the crisis is turning into a "national catastrophe" (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, October 15, 2015). In response, she famously stated, "We will make it!" (*Wir schaffen das!*) and "If we now have to start apologizing for showing a friendly face to emergency situations, then this is not my country" (*Wenn wir jetzt anfangen müssen, uns zu entschuldigen dafür, dass wir in Notsituationen ein freundliches Gesicht zeigen, dann ist das nicht mein Land*; *Spiegel Online*, September 16, 2015). On the subway in the nation's capital, one can hear people discussing whether Germany has done enough in response to the crisis through the course of a regular day. Simultaneously, as officials debate and enact policies to receive some people and turn away others, xenophobic groups stage

demonstrations calling for refugees to be kept out (Agence France-Presse, October 19, 2015), while throughout the country there are many offers of hospitality to those arriving from local organizations and neighborhood associations (e.g., www.moabit-hilft.de). We consider these realities as anthropologists variously involved in participant observation and observant participation (Sufrin 2015) in the refugee crisis in Germany. Our analysis of the sorting and othering of people occurs in comparative perspective with our ongoing work with migrants in Germany (Castañeda) as well as with undocumented Latin American im/migrants and refugees in the United States (Castañeda and Holmes).[2]

During the spring and early summer of 2015, German officials repeatedly emphasized the EU policy that refugees must claim asylum in the first country of entry—in this case, most often, Greece and Italy. Various German civic groups responded with calls for more compassion, drawing attention to the deaths of those trying to enter the European Union and to the fact that the points of entry are some of the poorest EU member states. For example, one group called the Center for Political Beauty held a large-scale "burial of refugee bodies" on the lawn of the Reichstag in Berlin, complete with shovels, dirt mounds, and small, white crosses (see Figures 1 and 2). This group produces its own accounts of the crisis in its actions and on its website (PoliticalBeauty.de), challenging dominant communicable models in which state officials and journalists are the primary subjects who can speak the truth.

On July 16, 2015, Merkel addressed a group of teenagers in the northern city of Rostock in a talk titled "Good Life in Germany." One of the teenagers, a Palestinian girl named Reem, explained in fluent German that she and her family were threatened with deportation. She said, "I have goals like everyone else. I want to go to university like them." She added, "It's very unpleasant to see how others can enjoy life, and I can't myself." Merkel responded that there were "thousands and thousands" of refugees like her and that Germany "just can't manage" to help them all. According to reports, Merkel stopped midsentence and whispered, "Oh Gott," as Reem began to cry. The chancellor walked over to the girl and tried to console her, stroking her shoulder and telling her she had "done a good job" (*Das has du doch prima gemacht*; Connolly 2015). The incident caught international attention, trending on Twitter with the hashtag #MerkelStreichelt (Merkel Strokes) as many people mocked her awkward response.

In August, Merkel announced that Germany would admit Syrian refugees even if they did not claim asylum in the first EU country they entered, thereby changing direction and suspending the key EU procedure known as the Dublin Regulation (*Vox*, August 28, 2015). The interaction between Merkel and Reem and the social media responses to it further challenged state-authority communicable models and

Figure 1. The Center for Political Beauty, an artistic and activist group in Berlin, stages a mock burial of refugees in front of the Reichstag, June 2015. (Jennifer Burrell)

seem to have, thus, contributed to this significant change in discourse and policy (*Die Tageszeitung*, October 18, 2015).[3] Reports of a surge of refugees to Germany followed this announcement, further influencing public opinion and overwhelming local sites of reception, as witnessed by Castañeda in the state of Hessen in early August. By October, Germany had admitted more refugees in the 2015 crisis than any other country in Europe—though Sweden and Turkey showed comparable hospitality. Some see Germany as having significant responsibility within the European Union, given its relative wealth and its recent, widely publicized leadership role supporting austerity measures in the Greek debt crisis. In 2015, Germany celebrated World Refugee Day for this first time, and German president Joachim Gauck argued that Germany had a "moral duty" to provide safe refuge because Germans were refugees themselves after World War II.

These events are in line with the complex conversation about immigration and multiculturalism in contemporary German society produced within the historical legacy of the 20th century. While restrictive immigration policies are generally well received, there has been occasional public resistance to their implementation, especially in the case of individuals and families framed as "deserving" (Castañeda 2010). In general, Syrian families are seen as deserving because they are understood to have been forced to flee by the ongoing civil war and the involvement in this war

of its international protagonists, especially the United States and Russia. In some ways, then, the realities clash with ongoing anti-immigrant rhetoric, which penetrates German society and is strongly reflected in the country's contemporary policies on immigration and "integration." Especially important here are contemporary anti-Muslim movements such as Patriotic Europeans against the Islamicization of the Occident (PEGIDA), founded in Dresden in 2014, and how people, including major political parties, have taken up and acted on such rhetoric (Deutsche Welle 2015). Anti-immigrant sentiment has coalesced with neoliberal policies ever since the mid-1990s, leading Germany to dismantle and defund many of its refugee reception centers, thus contributing to the experience of crisis (Fullerton 2001; *International Business Times*, April 9, 2014). More common is the rhetoric of integration, which positions immigrants as having the responsibility to adapt to German society, both culturally and bureaucratically, though in ways that can never be complete (cf. Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Castañeda 2012). These dynamics reflect Germany's historical struggle between xenophobic tendencies and liberal aspirations (Lehr 2015). Previously, Germany had a strong, constitutionally embedded right to asylum—it was the only nation to formalize it in such a way—and this right held an important place in political life and in the consciousness of postwar society. But amid growing anti-immigrant sentiment, the German

Figure 2. Participants in the mock burial of refugees staged by the Center for Political Beauty hold tombstone signs in front of the Reichstag, Berlin, June 2015. (Jennifer Burrell)

legislature amended Article 16 of the Constitution in December 1992, severely restricting this previously unqualified right.

While Germany occupies an important position in the European response to the refugee crisis, many other countries have contributed to the massive displacement, including the United States, Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and Iran. Media reports indicate that the United States has supported Syrian rebels through CIA and Pentagon trainings and launched airstrikes against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, while Russia has provided arms to the regime and directly attacked rebels (Al Jazeera America, October 14, 2015; BBC News, October 9, 2015). At the same time, other groups in the area—ISIS, Hezbollah, and Kurdish alliances—have both received support and been directly attacked from multiple sources. Meanwhile, the European Union has imposed economic and diplomatic sanctions on Syria in response to violence in recent years, increasing the vulnerability of many in the country.[4] Clearly, this displacement is complicated by the roles played by multiple powerful actors within and far beyond the country's borders. Moreover, Syrians are not the only ones displaced; people from many other countries are arriving in Europe for diverse reasons as witnessed by both authors in different areas of Germany. Below, we briefly consider how and why these different groups receive different amounts and types of political and media attention.

Parsing moral deservingness: "Migrant" versus "refugee"

The words "migrant" and "refugee" are intermittently distinguished and conflated in political, popular, and media discourse. At times, the phrase "migrant crisis" subtly delegitimizes calls for protection (BBC News 2015), whereas the phrase "refugee crisis" reinforces them (Deutsche Welle 2015). Simultaneously, political and media statements may alternate in the same account between these two phrases when describing the same people (as the news reports cited here do). Though these categories are distinguished by different symbolic and legal framings, they are often blurred, adding to the confusion regarding what is actually possible legally and practically.

Across many historical and geographic contexts, the discursive framings of the causes of displacement—particularly those involving the overlapping dichotomies of "voluntary"/"forced," "(im)migrant"/"refugee," and "economic"/"political"—have shaped how states and other actors have responded to displaced people (Gonzales 2013; Holmes 2013; Yarris and Castañeda 2015). International conventions establish refugees as *involuntarily* displaced by political circumstances, including war and violence (as well as natural and anthropogenic disasters); they are thus framed as deserving. In this case, deservingness participates in the war of position as a conditional attribution

enabling a moral demarcation (as opposed to a strictly legal one) between people who are understood as worthy of the international community's physical, economic, social, and health aid and those who are not (Huschke 2014; Willen 2012; Willen and Cook, forthcoming). Immigrants or migrants, as opposed to refugees, tend to be portrayed in popular, political, and academic discourse as economic opportunists, *voluntarily* leaving their home communities in search of a better life. Because they are viewed as having made a free and autonomous *choice* to cross borders, they are often positioned as unworthy of social, economic, and political rights.

The discursive category "refugee" confers legitimacy on subjects who make claims on host states for social rights and services and responsibility on host states to protect those who fall in this category (Yarris and Castañeda 2015). The definition of *refugee*, along with the responsibilities of second- and third-party governments to provide protection and resettlement assistance, is codified in the 1951 United Nations Convention of the Status of Refugees. Yet how states respond to asylum seekers always reflects geopolitical interests that reinscribe ideas about which groups deserve support and at which historical moments (Coutin 2011). Miriam Ticktin (2011) and Didier Fassin (2005) show that, at times, immigration and refugee policies prioritize morally legitimate biological or health differences in delineating deservingness. Although it is one of the oldest social institutions, asylum remains a precarious construct in which questions of legitimacy—and of "truth"—continually shift (Fassin 2013).

However, the distinctions between *political* and *economic* as well as *involuntary* and *voluntary* deserve to be questioned. Individuals, families, and communities have been driven out of their homes by economic desperation that is politically produced—that is, they have been forcibly displaced by material factors other than war and temporally limited natural disasters, but nevertheless produced by political forces. Indeed, the idea of the "voluntary" economic migrant elides the realities of structural violence and postcolonial economic inequalities that push people to migrate in order to survive (e.g., Holmes 2011, 2013). In media and political discourse about the crisis, relatively little attention was paid to the historical, social, economic, or even political determinants of immigration and refugeeism, including the Syrian civil war itself. A violence continuum frame (Bourdieu 2000; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2003), however, reminds us that the political-economic realities of structural violence can produce and exacerbate political violence or resistance, while various discursive frames may engage in the symbolic violence of legitimization and thereby help perpetuate these phenomena. One man in his early 30s living in one of the Berlin refugee camps who had previously been a dentist in Syria explained to a group including Holmes that he fled because of the war, the

interruptions of electricity and other services to his family's household, and the threat of conscription. These reasons, including the shutting off of vital services in the midst of war and EU economic sanctions, demonstrate how difficult it is to separate the political from the economic. The two are interproductive and interpenetrating, with economic policies (such as sanctions) occurring in response to and exacerbating political changes and political violence. Simultaneously, political changes produce and occur in response to economic phenomena (for example, EU anti-immigrant policies in the context of EU-imposed austerity).

The parsing of deservingness operates on many levels and in many forms. In September, images of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi's lifeless body on a Turkish beach reverberated across the globe, stirring public outrage and affecting politics as far away as Canada during its federal election (CNN.com, October 10, 2015). While much of the media coverage of this and other images indicated that refugees needed more support from Europe and beyond, some deliberated over whether the boy and his family were really deserving refugees (Lee 2015). Images of suffering, like those of Kurdi, engage in emotional and political work, producing sympathy and empathy, as well as fear and othering, here as in other contexts (Comaroff and Comaroff 2007; Kleinman and Kleinman 1996).[5] Subsequently, the parsing of deservingness colors other realms, including commercial transactions. For example, a German company that produces razor wire—which is significantly more dangerous than barbed wire—refused to send an order to Hungary in September, where it would be used to deter refugees from crossing the border. "The refugees are anything but criminals," the company's owners argued. "They're harmless people who are running for their lives" (Asche 2015).

Simultaneously, displaced people are far from homogenous. Syrian asylum applicants range from illiterate working-class people to English-speaking professionals. In October 2015, the central receiving area for refugees in Berlin was processing hundreds of people a day from many countries, including Syria, Iran, Iraq, Albania, Eritrea, Somalia, and others. During a recent visit by Holmes, a young volunteer stated under her breath that "they aren't really refugees," motioning toward an Albanian family. She then explained that they "do not really need help" because they are not from Syria. This reflected the rhetoric of the Kretschmer Deal made in October, in which Germany declared that asylum would not be granted to people from countries it had declared safe. The delineation of deserving versus undeserving also came out in a recent conversation between anthropologists and Syrian refugees in Berlin. A young Syrian asylum applicant living in one of the refugee camps on the outskirts of Berlin said in fluent English that "Germany must differentiate between humanitarian and economic refugees," explaining that he and his friends were highly educated engineers and health care

professionals who fled the civil war and that "refugees who are professionals or students deserve extra support and permission to work and study in these hard times." The parsing of moral deservingness occurs on many levels and interrelates with class, race, and nationality, here seen active within the diversity of refugees themselves.[6]

Demarcating the population: Hospitality versus xenophobia

In the midst of the refugee crisis, much of Europe has been caught between two responses: compassionate pragmatism versus fear of cultural, ethnic, and religious difference. The othering of those considered different applies to both immigrants and refugees and has increasingly manifested in securitization responses.

Biopower, Michel Foucault's (1977, 1985) conception of a particular form of security that is meant to ensure life at the level of the body and the population, forms a central axis in this war of position. Protecting life, in Foucault's formulation, necessitates a sorting of those who deserve to be "let to die," so that those understood to make up "the population" can be "made to live" (1977, 1985). He specifies that "race" as a sociocultural and economic formation comes into existence to mark those whose bodies represent a sort of threat, such that their death is understood to enhance the life of the population (1977, 1985). More recently, Fassin (2007) argues that the "politics of life" composes a means by which radical inequality underlies a transaction in human lives, with certain lives marked to be saved and others not. This aspect of the war of position has potentially fatal consequences as ships belonging to Frontex, the EU border patrol, turn away boats of people from Africa and the Middle East arriving near Europe's Mediterranean shores to unknown and precarious fates (Klepp 2013). On the flip side are the refugees themselves, some of whose goals may be simply to live, participating very differently in this politics of life.

The fear of being overwhelmed by difference runs through much of the discourse surrounding the current crisis. Metaphors invoking invasion include those of "open doors" or "open windows" that need to be secured or closed (Reuters 2015). Reflecting this projected threat, authorities restricted the German-Austrian border for the first time since Austria joined the "border-free" Schengen Area in the mid-1990s following reports of up to 1,800 refugees entering Germany daily from this point (BBC News 2015). These actions throw into question the political and material architecture of a border-free Europe—specifically the 26 countries making up the Schengen Area. Metaphors of water—such as "flood," "tide," and "flow"—frequently emerge in descriptions of the arrival of displaced people and connote a fear that the unspecified European mainstream could be "overwhelmed" or "inundated," and "drown" as a consequence (Hage 2016). Media (and UN)

depictions of Syrian refugees explained that the arrivals in 2015 were just the "tip of the iceberg" and that the "largest tide" was yet to come (Kirka 2015). Those who are different are overtly and subtly portrayed as a threat to the life of "Europeans" and "Europe." These metaphors are common in relation to transnational displacement in other contexts. For example, scholars have shown how metaphors of water have been used in the United States to "produce fears about the population growth of Latinos in American society, which in turn positions them as a possible threat to the 'nation' . . . as conceived in demographic and racial terms" (Chavez 2001, 173; see also Santa Ana 2002).

As securitization paradigms increase, the "criminal"/ "terrorist" has emerged as another figure along the refugee–migrant spectrum. European and US politicians have described Syrian refugees as "infiltrated with Muslim extremists" and as a potential "ISIS Trojan horse" (UK *Daily Mail*, October 11, 2015; *US News and World Report*, October 2, 2015; *Politics.co.uk*, September 4, 2015). These fears seemed realized as news reports indicated—but were later refuted—that the passport of a Syrian refugee was found on or near the body of a dead suicide bomber in the November 13, 2015, attacks in Paris. Markus Söder, finance minister for the German state of Bavaria, consequently stated that "Paris changes everything" (UK *Guardian*, November 16, 2015). The trope of the criminal or terrorist has been seen in other contexts of displacement, with Latin Americans entering the United States painted not only as migrants seeking opportunity and refugees fleeing gang and military violence, but also as criminals (Stephen, forthcoming) and potential terrorists carrying weapons of mass destruction (*Sianews.com*, October 31, 2004).

Difference along cultural, ethnic, and religious lines is the primary means for marking those who are deemed a threat in current media and political representations. Recent statements by the prime minister of Hungary indicate that he must protect Europe (implied to be homogenously Christian) from the influx of Muslim refugees (UK *Guardian*, September 3, 2015). Indeed, several European leaders have indicated that Christian refugees are more welcome than their Muslim counterparts (*Ynetnews*, September 7, 2015), and this rhetoric only increased after the attacks in Paris. On a related note, the UK Independence Party leader recently stated that the refugee crisis is a "conspiracy to make Europe more multicultural," with "multicultural" framed as a threat (Ross 2015). These statements imply that Europe is homogenously white and Christian, erasing long-existing ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). Perhaps not surprisingly, the refugee crisis, reflected through anxieties about austerity and limited good, has also played into the recent moves to the political Right across Europe (UK *Independent*, September 25, 2015). Inflammatory narratives portraying refugees as a threat have been instrumental in

pitching the working class against the middle class in several countries and have been spread especially powerfully in the tabloid media (Crone 2015). At the same time, Merkel, acting with Germany's complicated 20th-century history in the background, has challenged other European leaders to receive refugees (UK *Express*, September 21, 2015). And some commentators frame this moment as an opportunity for the European Union to "evolve" beyond a constrained definition of cultural and religious identity that leads to border control and fighting over quotas (Nougayrède 2015).

Until late 2015, much of the discussion of refugees and irregular immigrants in Europe had focused on people from various parts of Africa, and developed within an even more explicit securitization paradigm (Baldwin-Edwards 2006, 2008). The recurring catastrophes in the Mediterranean involving the deaths of people on boats from Africa attempting to reach Italian islands made headlines earlier in the summer (UK *Guardian*, June 2, 2015). Though many African refugees continue to arrive in Europe, as witnessed in Berlin by Holmes, this ongoing phenomenon is no longer represented in popular accounts of the crisis. Syrians and other Middle Eastern refugees affected by ISIS's recent advances, as well as by US, Russian, and other foreign violent interventions, have displaced the discussion of African refugees. On the scale of deserving immigrants, Syrians appear to trump Africans, even though many of the latter are coming from areas similarly affected by conflict and economic precarity. This hierarchy of deservingness reflects arrangements of race that are interpenetrated by US and European political-economic interests.

Within these political and media engagements with a fear of difference, there is a wealth of suspicion of deceit. To use Lynn Stephen's (forthcoming) term, refugees and migrants are marked as "pre-emptive suspects," always already untrustworthy. For instance, a spokesman from the German Ministry of the Interior stated that "practically a third of asylum seekers coming to Europe have forged Syrian passports and IDs to make naturalization easier" (RT.com 2015). Comparative anthropological perspective shows similar suspicions of displaced people in other contexts. Roma across Europe, for example, have been viewed as "bogus" refugees and faced accusations of posing as other groups to gain legitimacy and receive resources (Castañeda 2014; Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016). These characterizations echo media and political representations of Latin American migrants in the United States, often portraying them as "cheating the system" (Chavez 2001; Holmes 2013; Quesada 2011; Stephen, forthcoming).

Discourses of suspicion highlight the tensions, inconsistencies, and ironies inherent in how these frames are defined, categorized, and managed. Ethnographic linkages between human experience and macro–political-economic phenomena might turn these suspicions on their heads. Anthropological research in other contexts has suggested that many of the neoliberal economic and military policies provoking displacement itself are suspect and deceptive, while migrants and refugees are doing their best within the social, economic, and political systems within which they are positioned (Cartwright and Manderson 2011; Castañeda 2014; Holmes 2013; Quesada 2011).

At the same time, "solidarity," "responsibility," and "Willkommenskultur" (culture of welcome) are central themes in the German response to the crisis, especially in the German-language press. There has been no shortage of cases of compassionate pragmatism, with newly formed neighborhood organizations or existing groups shifting their missions to provide support, regardless of official government aid or recognition. This points to ongoing struggles over representations of refugees and actions to be taken; here, the delineations at work in the politics of life are contested. Refugees have been cheered on as they arrive at train stations in Germany after being rejected and violently attacked in other countries, for example Hungary (CNN.com, September 16, 2015). This warm welcome—with bottles of water, fresh clothing, and chocolates for the children—has been broadcast widely in the international press (UK *Guardian*, July 16, 2015). Other state and grassroots efforts have followed, with myriad volunteers providing aid in various forms, including health care, translation services, bureaucratic registration, and housing (Bochow, forthcoming), and bars throwing "solidarity parties" to raise funds for refugee services in the capital and elsewhere (see Figure 3). The German constitution has been translated into Arabic to "aid integration" (RT.com, September 30, 2015), German newspapers have issued special supplements in Arabic to welcome refugees to the country (*International Business Times*, September 9, 2015), and small towns have put on welcome celebrations (UK *Mirror*, September 1, 2015). News stories have shown Syrians passing out roses to their German hosts as tokens of appreciation (*Huffpost Video*, September 10, 2015). Nonetheless, the moral economy of gratitude (Rivkin-Fish 2011) is complex and contradictory. For instance, some volunteers in the central receiving area of Berlin explained to a group including Holmes that the refugees arriving now are not thankful enough and are too demanding compared to those who arrived one year ago.

As in many other contexts, such forms of human mobility are almost always understood as a "problem" that needs to be solved. On the one hand, the subject positions that are offered to displaced people in these narratives are those of the deserving refugee and the undeserving immigrant, both always being other, potentially threatening, and suspicious. On the other hand, the subject position of hero is open only to those positioned as European or North American, primarily leaders in the state or civil society.

Figure 3. Jacky Oh Weinhaus (right), a drag performer, deejays during a solidarity party for refugees at SchwuZ, a gay bar in Berlin, August 2015. (Seth Holmes)

Interestingly, one aspect of the media coverage of the 2015 crisis that differs from past media work on immigrants and refugees is the focus on technology and business entrepreneurs as the solution. For example, in August 2015, with the support of venture capitalists, a company called Startupboat brought together leaders from technology, health care, and business intelligence in what they called a "Startupboat Adventure" to address the problem of immigrants on the Greek island of Samos. The solution they developed and want to "roll out" and "scale up" is a website, First-Contact.org, which provides information for refugees to aid in their integration. Their efforts have been lauded for helping to "solve" the problem (*Forbes*, September 9, 2015), while others have criticized such a technological response through satire.[7] This kind of techno-optimism and technological solutionism (Morozov 2014) frames entrepreneurs, business leaders, and corporations as the heroes who arrive on the scene to solve the problem that pre-existed them. This heroic subject position obscures the imbrication of such powerful actors in international capitalism in many of the political-economic asymmetries that produce displacement in the first place.

Conclusion: Displacement, ethnography, and engagement

Ethnography's potential to link individual human experience with macrolevel social, political, and economic structures can challenge both abstract theoretical and common media and political frameworks within which refugees are understood (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992; King and Wood 2001).

Much recent anthropological scholarship on refugees has drawn on Giorgio Agamben's (1998) conception of "bare life." For Agamben, the refugee is removed from the political realm and exists in opposition to those persons within "a particular mode of life" or "qualified life." The refugee is the figure within a regime simplified to biopolitics who is deprived of social, political, and economic rights.[8] But as the comparative ethnographic work we have examined clarifies, refugees are multiple and diverse, differentially involved in making political and symbolic claims. Refugees, then, are not simply "bare life" removed from the realm of the political, but rather political actors whose subjectivities are shaped by the uneven social and symbolic environments in which they simultaneously are positioned and position themselves (Williams 2014). They actively engage in a politics of life (Fassin 2007). The responses to them are similarly diverse and, at times, contradictory. Ongoing ethnographic engagement with displaced persons and their sites of reception confronts theory that works with the abstracted figure of "the refugee" and instead suggests that more responsible scholarly interventions can be made through carefully contextualized work alongside and by the diverse people who have been displaced.

As anthropologists with research, personal, and activist experience in Europe, the United States, and Latin America, we have attempted to draw attention to how the discursive framings of this crisis reflect regimes of power as well as fears and imaginations regarding the unknown future of Europe. These frames often elide the responsibility of structures, institutions, and individuals—many of which are located in "receiving" areas such as the United States and Europe—within unequal and violent political and economic regimes. Meanwhile, these narratives reframe responsibility and choice at the level of the individual, dichotomously sorting deserving refugees from undeserving migrants. To return to Foucault, we understand media and political frames as demarcating "the population," whose life must be protected from the Other, who is portrayed as a threat to be turned away. Alongside Gramsci, however, we analyze these frames as neither all-powerful nor unquestioned but rather resisted and contested in official and grassroots discourse and practice, playing a role in the shifting war of position over symbols and their meanings.

An ethnographic, comparative perspective encourages us to question the discursive framing of such crises, from

how this metaphor can be mobilized to further repression and exclusion (Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016) to how the crisis as experience can highlight political and symbolic stakes with unknown futures. If displacement operates on a continuum between "force" and "will," one role of ethnography is to probe this range in particular social, historical, and cultural locations (Yarris and Castañeda 2015). This linkage, then, reframes the question of responsibility and leads us to confront in our work (and beyond) the actors and systems responsible for inequality, displacement, and suffering. For example, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, a proposed "free" trade agreement between the United States and the Europe Union being discussed among political and corporate leaders at the time of this writing, promises to produce further precarity for many.[9] Proposals such as these, which advance neoliberal, corporate power and decrease political, social, and economic protections, must be challenged. The prominent role of US political and business interests in displacing precarious people through such trade agreements, as well as through military involvement in the Syrian civil war, suggest that the United States should engage more responsibly in an ethic of hospitality. But as of the fall of 2015, it has taken in only 1,800 Syrian refugees (New York *Daily News*, September 5, 2015).

These events, framed and experienced as crisis, bring into relief the unknown future of Germany in relation to displaced persons and ethnic and religious diversity itself. This is underscored by contradictory announcements from the Interior Ministry suggesting that Syrians would enjoy only limited "subsidiary protection" in Germany and by the issuance of semi-denials of asylum status (UK *Guardian*, November 6, 2015). The events discussed here spotlight the relations between European countries and their border-free agreements as well as relations between the European Union and the neoliberal policies that create and exacerbate inequality and displacement in the first place. On another level, crises like this call for anthropologists to take an open stance on the future, imaginatively engaging social theory, ethnographic methods, and current events to understand what is happening and to figure out how to respond.

In this article, we have begun analyzing the war of position in Germany in relation to the European refugee crisis, with a special focus on deservingness, difference, biopolitics, and their routinely fatal consequences. As the structural and symbolic ground of the Middle East and Europe shifts, it will be necessary to further analyze discourse, its communicable cartographies, and resultant political action. At the same time, we must question and seek to disrupt dominant communicable models and power hierarchies within our own work.

One example of the myriad potential responses of anthropologists could be seen during the crisis in Berlin. Here,

a group of anthropology faculty and students are engaging in an ongoing, open conversation with displaced Syrians in a nearby refugee camp. Anthropologists and Syrian refugees have begun ethnographic experiments of verbal and musical dialogue, weekly socializing in a neighborhood café, dialogical courses in the department of anthropology involving Syrian refugees and university students, activism to push the university to admit Syrian refugees, and collaborative writing and publishing to participate in the war of position more actively together. In addition, many of the faculty and students volunteer regularly in housing, health care, registration, and other services for refugees. These efforts have complemented other forms of horizontal political solidarity that have emerged (Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016). In these ways, anthropologists are involved as scholars, writers, speakers, listeners, friends, colleagues, teachers, students, activists, translators, and volunteers.

An awareness of the political-economic and symbolic contexts that produce the experiences of refugees and migrants may offer alternative possibilities for meaning making and, subsequently, for response. While this possibility for engaging in social and political change through our work may be minimal at times and fraught with possibilities for misperception, self-interest, and symbolic violence (Fassin 2015; Hankins 2015; Trouillot 2004), the theoretical and ethnographic tools of anthropology allow us to critique received understandings and engage in current events (Hansen, Holmes, and Lindemann 2013a, 2013b; Kehr 2015; Martin et al. 2013). Our analysis paves the way for research that further explores and pushes against the line dividing "the population" and the deserving on the one hand from, on the other, the different and underserving in the current crisis. Yet even if the demarcating line is successfully moved, the social, political, and economic system will inevitably allow some to die so that others may live. It is necessary, then, for us as anthropologists to engage with displaced and other structurally vulnerable people in critical, dialogical, bold, reflexive, and humble solidarity in order to imagine and work toward less violent futures for being alive.

Notes

Hoeckley, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, and Lynn Stephen. We are inspired by the ongoing theoretical, activist, and practical labor of the Engaged Anthropology Network in Berlin working in dialogue with refugees in the area. Any mistakes are our own.

1. Recognizing the importance of ethnographically tracing how events are framed, encapsulated, and produced for the media, we acknowledge that such "mediatization" (Briggs 2011) fieldwork is beyond the scope of this paper.

2. On another level, our understanding of (b)ordering practices is informed by our own experiences at the time of this writing, as Castañeda is conducting fieldwork with Mexican migration agents concerned with the movement of Central Americans—many of whom have legitimate asylum claims—en route to the United States, and Holmes is being deported from Germany due to technicalities of the Schengen Area policies within the discretionary power of immigration authorities.

3. See also Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa's (2015) work on how people use social media to contest dominant paradigms in other contexts.

4. European Union External Action, "The EU's Relations with Syria," http://eeas.europa.eu/syria/, accessed October 20, 2015.

5. Indeed, images of suffering, security, and difference proliferated during the current crisis (e.g., David Maurice Smith/Oculi and Bryan Schatz, "21 Photos That Capture the Heartbreak of Europe's Refugee Crisis," *Mother Jones*, September 25, 2015, http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/09/photoessay-european-refugee-crisis-serbia-hungary-syria, accessed October 21, 2015). These images are part of the war of position.

6. In German-language media and popular representations, distinct semantics are at play that, at times, differentiate deservingness. For example, the official and most commonly used word for refugee is "Flüchtling," which means "one who is fleeing," with a diminutive suffix often used in the names of plants or animals but sometimes also for people, especially children. More recently, some are using the construction "Geflüchtete," meaning "one who has fled," to emphasize the active, completed event of fleeing and to avoid any subtle pejorative connotations of the diminutive suffix (e.g., *Gala* 2015 and Stefanowitsch 2012).

7. See the Startupboat project at https://www.hawk-e.com, accessed November 1, 2015. For an example of satire, see the Center for Political Beauty's website, http://www.politicalbeauty.com, accessed November 10, 2015.

8. Nonetheless, as Agamben emphasizes, these forms of exclusion are always also fundamentally inclusive.

9. For example, a UK trade minister recently acknowledged that the government would consider dismantling and privatizing the National Health Service, because the TTIP requires opening public services to US companies (UK *Independent*, October 12, 2015).

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