

# MEDIÁLNÍ STUDIA

---

## MEDIA STUDIES

JOURNAL FOR CRITICAL MEDIA INQUIRY

Special Issue: Fresh Voices in European Media and Communication Scholarship

### Hopeful and Obligatory Remembering: Mediated Memory in Refugee Camps in Post-War Germany

Philipp Seufferling

To cite this article:

Seufferling, P. (2020). Hopeful and Obligatory Remembering: Mediated Memory in Refugee Camps in Post-War Germany. *Mediální studia*, 14(1), 13–33.

ISSN 2464-4846

Journal website: <https://www.medialnistudia.fsv.cuni.cz/>

1/2020

# HOPEFUL AND OBLIGATORY REMEMBERING: MEDIATED MEMORY IN REFUGEE CAMPS IN POST-WAR GERMANY

PHILIPP SEUFFERLING

Södertörn University

## ABSTRACT

*This article explores mediated memory practices in refugee camps in post-war Germany. In response to refugees experiencing a disjuncture of temporality materialized in the liminal space of the refugee camp, the article argues that media practices of camp residents include practices of remembering and witnessing. Drawing on memory studies, media practices are understood as forms of “management of change” and “mediated witnessing”, enacting cultural and diasporic memory, as well as providing opportunities to remember, store the present and give witness to one’s plight. Based on an analysis of archival records from camp structures in Germany (1945–1955), examples of mnemonic media practices are analyzed. Concludingly, the article argues that mediated memory in refugee camps is characterized by an ambiguity of “hopeful” and “obligatory” memory, affected by structures and control of media and mnemonic activities, as well as agency and initiatives to remember and create memories from below.*

Keywords: media practices ▪ refugee camps ▪ memory studies ▪ mediated witnessing ▪ media history

## 1. INTRODUCTION: REFUGEE TEMPORALITIES AND MEDIA

The refugee experience is not only characterized by spatial displacement, but is also intertwined with a fundamental disruption of temporality: “here and now” clashes with “back there and then” – “before” and “after”. Anthropology and migration studies have pointed out the relevance of suspended, discontinued, or “paused” temporalities<sup>1</sup> for forced migrants, which underlie experiences of uncertainty and instability

---

<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘forced migrant’ and ‘refugee’ are used interchangeably in this article, acknowledging their various complex political connotations as constructed political labels (see Zetter, 1991). For readability’s sake, I use these

in exile and diaspora (Brun & Fábos, 2015; El-Sharaawi, 2015; Griffiths, 2014; Lacroix & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013). What is described as “in-between”, in a “liminal space”, in “protracted displacement”, “stuck”, in a “limbo” or “living in transit” not only captures the spatial dimension of forced migration as a mechanism where one falls out of the national, citizenship-based order – but also the altered experience of time a refugee encounters. The modern refugee regime, in turn, is characterized by contradicting refugee temporalities where processes of exception from certain human rights, of being cast into an indefinite limbo (cf. Agamben, 1998; Arendt, 1951/2017), intersect with humanitarian ideals of creating “durable solutions” (UNHCR’s<sup>2</sup> lingo for resettlement, repatriation or naturalization) – based on a legal refugee status, which is by definition temporary (e.g. Article 1C of the 1951 “Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees” defines, when the regulations cease to apply). These disjunctural structures of temporality form experiential frames for refugees’ imaginaries of past, present, and future. They affect hopes and expectations as well as relations to one’s past, and ultimately shape the temporal dimension of “ontological security” (Giddens, 1991). While the significance of such temporalities has gained some anthropological and ethnographical attention, it remains to be explored, how refugee temporalities are dealt with and experienced through media and communication. Some researchers have put digital media uses among forced migrants in conversation with experiences of “waiting” and discourses of “memorializing” (Greene, 2019; Horsti, 2019; Twigt, 2018). However, historic roots and contexts of media-related practices of memory and witnessing in pre-digital media environments are uncharted. This article, therefore, seeks to rephrase these observations from a media and communication historical perspective, asking: How did historic refugees draw on media as technologies and practices in response to disrupted temporalities?

For approaching this broad question, two specific contexts are chosen: the refugee camp as a material and constructed space of temporal and spatial limbo, and the historical context of post-war Germany. These contexts thereby form a historicizing approach to both media and communication as well as migration, zooming in on the roots of the contemporary, modern Western refugee regime. Contemporary legal structures historically emerged out of the forced displacements in the aftermath of World War II in Central Europe. In Germany of the 1940s and 1950s, millions of refugees, expellees, and displaced persons lived in camp structures, administrated by various state actors, like government, Allied Forces, Red Cross, UNRRA, IRO, and UNHCR<sup>3</sup>. At that time, the refugee camp<sup>4</sup> had become a humanitarian management tool, a means of “solving” the “crisis” of displacement. Thereby, the camp is

---

terms for all forms of forced migrants throughout the text, regardless of the exact status of the specific group mentioned.

2 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

3 United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration; International Refugee Organization

4 By this term, I mean all forms of institutionalized accommodations for forced migrants in the empirical context of Germany. Exact terminology was very bureaucratic, frequently changing, and vast, therefore I use one term.

characterized by its definite temporariness: residents – then, often called “inmates” (also a term that implies eventual release) – enter a transient “time pocket” (Turner, 2016, p. 142), where a different temporal regime is in place, “an enduring moment of rupture from the space and time” (Ramadan, 2013, p. 73) of home.

While ample research has shown how vital media are for forced migrants (Gillespie et al., 2018; Leurs & Smets, 2018), we know less about how ruptures of time are mirrored and acted upon in uses of media technologies. Especially there is a gap of knowledge about historic practices around media technologies. In this article, I draw on notions of media practices around “remembering/mediated memory” and “media witnessing” to analyze archival material from refugee camps in Germany roughly between 1945 and 1955. The notion of media practices provides a holistic analytical entry point to explore how disrupted temporalities are dealt and coped with through uses of media technologies. It decenters the attention of previous research from memory discourses and textualities towards practices of diasporic and exilic remembering. Methodologically, the archival records can be analyzed as traces of camp residents’ media practices and show media’s roles for cultural and diasporic memory, documenting one’s past and present, and giving witness to one’s plight.

Arjun Appadurai (2019) recently re-emphasized how for migrants, “memory becomes hyper-valued” (p. 561). He argues: “memory of the journey to a new place, the memory of one’s own life and family world in the old place, and official memory about the nation one has left have to be recombined in a new location” (p. 562). Being fundamentally mediated, these memories then take multiple forms, like archives or other media representations, privately or in (diasporic) public spheres. These are expressions of agency, Appadurai continues, in contrast to the frequent reduction of migrants to people with “only one story to tell – the story of abject loss and need” (ibid.). Koen Leurs (2017) confirms the relevance of media technologies for memory, calling refugees’ smartphones “pocket archives”, which store memories and identities. Yet, also historically, media technologies were an element of memory and witnessing practices of forced migration.

Against this backdrop, the goal of this article is to map out and analyze how refugees’ experiences of disrupted temporalities were dealt and coped with through media practices of memory and witnessing. First, a theoretical section draws on the field of memory studies and media witnessing to build a conceptual framework to analyze media practices in refugee temporalities. Next, a methods section describes how the archival material was collected and analyzed. The analysis section draws on several examples from the archival records to demonstrate how media and communication were relevant for practices of (1) cultural and diasporic memory – giving the camp a past, and (2) giving witness to one’s “refugee story” and documenting the present – giving oneself a past. The analysis leads to a discussion of how mediated memory incorporates forms of coping with and managing disrupted refugee temporalities through oscillating between two modes – “hopeful” and “obligatory” – of remembering practices.

## 2. MNEMONIC MEDIA PRACTICES: REMEMBERING AND WITNESSING

In her seminal essay on “travelling memory”, Astrid Erll (2011) revisits the field of memory studies and argues for a renewed focus on mediation and border-crossing processes that shape cultural memory. The study of cultural and social memory as a construction has long shown how groups, like nations or religions, get stabilized through common references to a constructed and stored past (most famously Nora, 1984-1992/1996; Assmann, 1995). Later, a “media turn”, has emphasized the impact of changing media technologies and mediation on collective memory (van Dijck, 2007; Erll & Rigney, 2009). Still, only recently we see more attention to the boundary-crossing, fluid nature of cultural memory: especially in the field of migration, memory is in constant movement, facilitated through media and communication, through an “incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms, and practices of memory, their continual ‘travels’ and ongoing transformations” (Erll, 2011, p. 11). Having traditionally emphasized the place-making feature of collective memory, memory studies has often also implied a rather stable, constant temporality and a place-bound, settled imaginary of history. We should, however, refocus away from national “container-cultures” and their “roots”, towards the “routes” which practices and meanings take (ibid.). This article is interested in camp-based mnemonic practices – which are inherently immobile, i.e. non-travelling. Yet, I suggest seeing memory in refugee camps as affected by “travellings”, where forced migrants negotiate mobile pasts and futures, travelling in time and space. We can therefore ask: Which memory practices travelled in and out of refugee camps, in response to the experience of disrupted temporalities?

Studies at the intersection of media, memory, and migration have underlined the relevance of memory work and practices of memorialization within diasporic communities across media environments, journalistic cultures, and self-productions among families and individuals (Appadurai, 2019; Keightley & Pickering, 2018; Horsti & Neumann, 2019). Christine Lohmeier and Christian Pentzold (2014), for example, show how among the exiled Cuban community in Miami “mediated memory work” is a salient way of becoming a member of the diaspora through a mediated “experien[ing of] attachment to places, people, objects and actions defined as Cuban-American” (p. 787). Disruptions of temporality are worked upon through memory and lost homeland (both in time and space) is passed on and reshaped through mediations across generations in exile. Moreover, Lynda Mannik’s (2011) study of a photo collection of the Estonian refugee ship SS Walnut, which crossed to Canada in 1948, also emphasizes the role of mediated memory, especially through photography. These photos, as real-time documentations of the refugee hardship, are active productions of memory and identity, in a web of representations between public and private realms. A specific “refugee gaze”, as “a way of looking at the ordering of knowledge about refugee movement by those experiencing this type of movement” (p. 26) emerges in Mannik’s visual analysis,

showing the travelling practices and meanings of refugee memory in conjuncture with media technologies.

## 2.1. Media practices

Building on this notion of active working on social memory through media technologies, I further suggest understanding the phenomenology of disrupted temporality among forced migrants as being coped with through “media practices” (Couldry, 2004) of remembering and witnessing. Seeing memory as forms of media practice allows for a holistic, situated and contextualized analysis of open-ended practices “oriented towards media and the role of media in ordering other practices in the social world” (p. 115). The concept draws on practice theory to rephrase media not as texts and responses to them but rather as actions, rituals and habits oriented to media, thereby also interrelated to other social practices, such as remembering. Understanding memory as a media practice, hence, enables us to account for the varieties, hierarchies and orders of social practices that refugees engage in in relation to imaginaries of past, present and future.

Subscribing to a practice-take on media, further allows for focusing on agency within memory and its mediation, putting center stage what people actually do with media to remember. Of course, media practices in refugee camps are dependent on and limited by structural conditions of material and social kind. However, media practices can also be spaces for performances of agency (Wall et al., 2017; Seufferling, 2019), arguably also through memory. Ramadan’s (2013) anthropological study of Palestinian camps in Lebanon states: “[T]raditions helped keep alive memories of Palestine as time passed, maintaining a connection with a place and time that are increasingly distant” (p. 73). Filling the open concept of “media practices” with memory as a specific analytical lens – mnemonic media practices – opens a space for looking at mediated ways of dealing with temporal ruptures. Starting the analysis from archival traces of media practices (more on methodology below) frames camp media practices from an agency-focused perspective of the camp residents as communicative actors. While we cannot gain direct access to lived experiences through archival material, widening the concept of media practices through memory locates the social practices not only in media technologies and their uses, yet also in their content: mediated narratives, stored experiences and reports of one’s past. Practices of remembering are hence mediated in various ways, manifesting in uses of technologies but also in the very content, i.e. in genres or types of texts and visuals produced: practices of narrativization and storing experiences in photographs, diaries, or newspapers.

## 2.2. Media technologies: managing change

Media technologies, their affordances and environments are crucial for memory practices: be it traditional photography, as in Mannik’s (2011) study, becoming



“vehicles of memory” (Keightley & Pickering, 2014), or mobile phones becoming wearable, prosthetic memory devices, which Anna Reading (2009) calls “memobilia”, allowing for mobilization and shareability of mnemonic content. Photography, but also other media, like newspapers or cinema, as the examples will show, are technologies which mediate memory, or perform what José van Dijck (2007) calls “personal cultural memory” at the intersection of individual and cultural/collective forms of remembering. Here, Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering offer two interrelated concepts for capturing mnemonic practices of working through past, present, and future: “management of change” (2017) and “mnemonic imagination” (2012). They argue that in experiences of temporal disruption, “[w]hen continuity is broken and ripped apart, e.g. through a tragic event such as forced migration, the role of memory, mnemonic imagination, and coherent narrativity, becomes even more prevalent and is realized at large” (Keightley & Pickering, 2017, p. 11). Media technologies and practices obtain multiple functions for managing change, in “[d]eveloping new narratives and re-plotting what has happened to us” (p. 12), in order to gain reconciliation, especially with painful pasts. “In doing so we draw on the mnemonic imagination to help us transform the pain, confusion and hurt we have endured and eventually turn the past towards other possibilities of being” (ibid.). Mnemonic imagination delineates how single experiences become worked into cohesive narratives through active labor processes of imagination. A sense of temporality and identity is constructed in “acting upon” (p. 5) memories in imaginative ways: “The remembering subject engages imaginatively with what is retained from the past and, moving across time, continuously rearranges the hotchpotch of experience into relatively coherent structures” (p. 43), thus re-negotiating the past self as linked to the now and the possible future. Past, present and future are (re) connected through the management of memory in imagination. These processes, I argue, take place and become observable in media practices. Media technologies are used and employed for actively managing, coping with and experiencing disrupted temporalities of forced migration.

The flipside of remembering and managing memories is of course forgetting. Paul Ricœur (2004, pp. 412–456) distinguishes between forgetting in a cognitive sense as the “erasure of traces”, and in a pragmatic and social sense as forgetting “in reserve” as something able to be remembered again. The latter dimension ties into practices of use and abuse of forgetting, through manipulating and selecting memory. Here, forgetting can be understood as the active dis-remembering, a practice of non-mediating (a non-media practice) – which, however, is almost impossible to get hold of through archival methodologies. After all, Ricœur further notes that forgetting, unlike remembering, is not an “event” tied to actions or practices – and therefore not readable from archival sources. However, forgetting is of course necessary, remembering everything is impossible, and in the case of forced migration forgetting also opens up spaces of reconciliation and hope for the future – what Ricœur calls “forgiveness” (p.457). I see remembering and forgetting as intertwined forms

of “management of change” through media practices, being aware that my data is strongly biased towards what is remembered.

### 2.3. Mediated witnessing

As a last concept to understand media practices of remembering as managing temporal and spatial change, I refer to “mediated witnessing”. Thereby, I do not mean “media witnessing” as a modality of audiences’ relation to media texts, e.g. of distant suffering, but the active practice of giving witness to one’s own experiences through forms of mediation. Mediated witnessing means moving experience into discourse, seeing into saying – thus, the “witness is the paradigm case of a medium: the means by which experience is supplied to others who lack the original” (Peters, 2009, p. 25). Mediated witnessing as media practice is intrinsically based on memory, on a re-presentation of past events, experienced and embodied by the individual and mediated within social frameworks into the present. Hence, collective memory, as a social construction of history, is essentially an accumulation of witnessing practices – which are media practices. When experiencing spatial and temporal disruptions and managing them through reworkings of the past, the act of giving testimony, is a mediated way of coping with change, as mediated witnessing means becoming narratable, and having voice. Mediated witnessing, in this sense, includes practices of documenting one’s present, and giving testimony to immediate past and present, either for oneself, one’s community (diaspora or just the camp), or wider audiences and publics beyond. Thus, mediated witnessing is a media practice of remembering in the present moment, in an attempt to mediate and store experiences of oneself and one’s environment. In relation to refugee memories, Karina Horsti (2019) recently applied the concept to an Italian migrant archive, showing how mediated witnessing is tied to communicating injustices and giving them a temporal dimension, by storing and mediating experiences across time and making them available in the future – thereby, managing change also for the future.

## 3. METHODOLOGY: ARCHIVING POST-WAR GERMANY’S REFUGEE CAMPS

In what follows, I will explore the outlined conceptual pathways with analyses of archival records from refugee camps in post-war Germany. The method is based both on an inductive approach of source-critical close-readings of archival material and a parallel developing of theoretical entrance points for analysis. The records analyzed for this article have been collected from the following archives: Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Landesarchiv Niedersachsen (Hanover), United Nations Archives (New York City), Bundesarchiv (Koblenz), Staatsarchiv Bayern (Nuremberg). These are state or organizational archives, archiving documents on activities of governments, public authorities or NGOs. While the main perspective documented there is of



course the administrative one, various source collections reveal voices and activities from the refugees themselves. The documents thus give insight into administration procedures of the camps, and document events and the general camp life. They are photographs, letters/correspondences, forms, tables, reports, newspapers, leaflets, or just random sheets of papers with notes. I selected the file collections in the archives through key words, identifying relevant files which relate to specific camps and media in the widest sense<sup>5</sup>. Given this eclectic array of source material, I see the files as traces of media practices. They are either physical remains of media themselves or can be read as reports or reconstructions of media practices. The material was scanned for media practices related to memory, in reciprocal reference to the theoretical reflections outlined above. I am aware that archiving as a method is, of course, a media practice of memory in itself. Archives, in a Foucauldian sense places of power and construction of history, are media collections, giving access to interpretations of the past in the present (Sterne, 2011). Therefore, this approach is highly inductive; the examples can be seen as small case studies, analyzed in their situated historical context, in order to historicize phenomena of mediated memory practices in refugee camps. The ensuing analytical chapter will introduce examples and discuss them according to the previously outlined analytical framework.

#### 4. ARCHIVAL STORIES

At the end of World War II, Central Europe experienced major population displacements. 14 million Germans left Central and Eastern Europe as refugees or expellees, 11 million “Displaced Persons” (DPs), which had been deported by the Nazis, and liberated from concentration or labor camps, as well as general war-related upheaval characterized the forced movements of the mid-late 1940s and early 1950s: 60 million in continental Europe in total (Gatrell, 2013, p. 3). Camp accommodation was the most common way of “managing” migrations within the re-ordering of post-war Europe as a whole (Beer, 2014). The Allied military governments, together with welfare organizations and local municipalities were central actors in designing and deploying this regime: UNRRA, which became IRO, which again became UNHCR in 1950; as well as the Red Cross, or local authorities within occupied Germany, and from 1949 the newly founded German states. These actors’ imaginaries and practices informed the modern Western humanitarian and refugee regime, still in place today, cemented within the 1951 Refugee Convention. This ranged from concrete definitions

---

<sup>5</sup> In searching the archive catalogues with keywords (word clusters denoting “refugee camps” and “media” in the widest sense (like “newspaper”, “radio”, “communication” etc.), I focused on files which indicate any relation to media (with a very wide notion). Then, snowballing from one file to the next got me an overview of the collections. Usually, I went through collections tied to specific camps. In the case of the UN Archives, I went through the “Germany” file (UNRRA’s operations in the late 1940s), focusing on media-related files. Through inductive close-reading and immersion in the files and their contexts, mediated memory emerged as a productive lens to capture identified media practices. This material stands in a larger context of my ongoing PhD dissertation on historic media practices in refugee camps, where “memory” forms one conceptual result.

of who is legally a “refugee” to discourses of humanitarianism, that sees migration as something to be governed and solved through the goodwill of institutions and helpers, where migrants are mute victims to be “saved” (Gatrell, 2013, p. 8; Hyndman, 2000). Thousands of camp structures existed during this time period, ranging from improvised barracks, to repurposed buildings of any kind, both in urban and rural areas. Usually, the camp populations were separated according to refugee status and nationality. Some were transit camps, registering and redistributing forced migrants, others were more permanent until further housing was available (mostly German refugees and expellees), again others were meant as temporary preparation for resettlement or repatriation (mostly DP-camps). Living conditions in camps were generally dire, often tedious and highly controlled, as contemporary reports by governments (e.g. the very critical 1945 “Harrison report” about DP-camps), as well as voices from camp residents and historical research show (Gatrell, 2013, pp. 94–103): camp administrations had built spaces of what a contemporary Canadian psychologist for UNESCO in 1955 called a necessary “autocratic paternalism” (Murphy, 1955, p. 58), keeping the refugees on their toes, in preparation of “durable solutions”, such as repatriation, naturalization or resettlement. As examples from archival collections show, mediated memory was deeply entangled with these experiences and imaginaries.

#### 4.1. Cultural memory: giving the camp a past

Keightley and Pickering (2017, p. 115) note that “[s]pace and place are part of the stuff of memory; at the same time, they provide the topographical arrangement of remembering practices and processes in the present”. For camp residents, the immediate camp structure is the material space and place, where management of spatial and temporal change takes place. Various forms of media can be encountered in the archival material, that shows how the at first meaningless, time-and-history-free camp space was made into a space with a past, through the memory of its inhabitants. Figure 1 shows a picture from a photo collection from DP-camps, meant for public relations of UNRRA. It comes with the description: “Here the camp barber shaves one of the men of the center. With the mirror framed by pictures of his native town, the barber thinks of the time when he will be home again.” Photos as a small, mobile media technology were suitable carriers of memory, of references to the lost home or family and friends, always in one’s possession, often pinned to the wall. Memory of the homeland is a classical trope in migrant memory (Lacroix & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013). Appadurai (2019) foregrounds the role of the “migrant archive” as a crucial media project dealing with the confusion of dislocation, “ranging from the most intimate and personal (such as the memory of one’s earlier bodily self) to the most public and collective, which usually take the form of shared narratives and practices” (p. 562). Photos are very well-preserved in the archives, giving insight into the camps’ migrant archives of the residents’ cultural memory. Often, mnemonic references

depicted and enacted focused on culturally specific, national, ethnic, or local points of identity: hometowns, landscapes, religion, handicraft, music, or literature. Such specific cultural references among the groups dwelling in the camps are omnipresent in archived photos, but also in other files, like documentations of arts and handicraft exhibitions (Figure 2), religious practices, or an invitations to events, such as a ballet show. Such cultural camp life was mediated across various technologies, like in photos and reports on “camp history” in this example. In the corresponding report to Figure 2, it is even mentioned how the camp residents, through practices, “have been able to retain their individuality, develop new traditional skills and contribute toward the educational, cultural, and economic life of the camp community.”



Figure 1: Photo of camp barbers' mirror with photos attached around. Hersfeld, Germany, undated (1943–1948). [UN Archives, Germany Mission-Photographs #001-120, S-1058-0001-01]

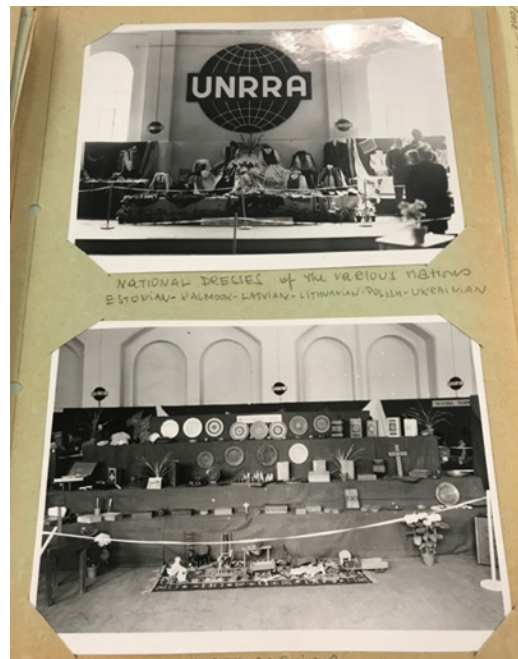


Figure 2: Photos in report on DP-camp life in Ingolstadt, 1947. Captions: “National dresses of the various nations. Estonian, Kalmook, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Ukrainian” and “Wood carvings”. [UN Archives, Illustrated Histories, Daily Logs, etc. of Various Camps, S-0436-0016-01]

Y. M. C. A. - C I N E M A				
=====				
D A T E		T I M E	C A M P	T I T L E
MONDAY	3 June	7,45 pm	Pol. Mil. Centre	New Film
TUESDAY	4 "	7,45 ""	Jew. Camp (Ohestr)	" "
WEDNESDAY	5 "	7,45 ""	Wingate	" "
THURSDAY	6 "	7,45 ""	Anita's Club	" "
FRIDAY	7 "	5,15 "" + 7,45 ""	Lyssenko	" "
SATURDAY	8 "	7,45 ""	Springe	" "
<u>N.B.</u> Transport to be arranged by Camp				

ESTONIAN MOBILE CINEMA				
=====				
D A T E		T I M E	C A M P	T I T L E
MONDAY	3 June	2.30 pm	Koskusko	"Karneval der Liebe "
"	3 "	7,30 ""	Student's Hostel	" " "
TUESDAY	4 "	7.30 ""	Wingate	" " "
WEDNESDAY	5 "	2.30 ""	Hamelin	" " "
THURSDAY	6 "	2.30 ""	Pishuand	" " "
"	6 "	5.30 "" +7.45 ""	Lyssenko	" " "
FRIDAY	7 "	2.30 ""	Letter.	" " "
"	7 "	7.30 ""	Accu	" " "

Figure 3: Film screening schedule "YMCA - Cinema". 1946. [UN Archives, BZ/REG:WEL/Welfare-VS/Voluntary Societies-537-Camp Newspapers, S-0431-0007-07]

Not only photography and handicraft, but also films screened in camp cinemas were a platform for cultural memory. Theatre barracks with regular film screenings, often almost daily, were very usual in camps of that period. Schedules (Figure 3) show that newsreels, educational and blockbuster entertainment films were on offer.<sup>6</sup> These were highly popular, as a YMCA report from 1946 states: "Entertainment: 425,468 people have attended 1,221 cinema shows, theatre performances, concerts and sports competitions, which have been organized by the teams."<sup>7</sup> While the film program was of course supervised by the camp administration, it also left room for cinematic expressions of cultural memory or films with historical references. In the DP-camps of the late 1940s, in general a very active cultural life took place: organized "welfare programs" included films, theatre, music, handicraft classes, or sports tournaments. These activities reflect wider imaginaries of humanitarianism, emerging at the time, of managing the "needy" camp population (they hardly had any say in the general management of operations), and using cultural activities as part of a physical and

6 Staatsarchiv Nürnberg, "Gewerbebetriebe im Sammellager für Ausländer und Kantinen Allgemein" (Reg. v. Mfr. Abg. 1978, Nr.19856)

7 UN Archives, Z-181-Story Material Used, S-0405-0019-04



mental preparation for repatriation. This included cultural memory of all kinds, so that a connection to the “homeland” would not be lost and repatriation in a re-ordered Europe made easier for the Allies. A similar strategy was also applied in camps for German refugees and expellees living in West Germany, which long believed in a return to the ceded areas. The newly founded “Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and War Victims” (1949–1969) even developed a stock of “Heimatfilme”, which could be ordered for screenings.<sup>8</sup> Almost like an on-demand service, these 16-mm-films were made available as “historical documents from almost all expulsion areas in Central Germany”, as an attached leaflet advertises. Keeping cultural memory alive was thus also politically motivated, enabling further migration. Media here became a mnemonic tool for managing past, present and future, highly controlled by camp administration and in line with the development of the refugee regime at large (preparing repatriation or resettlement), upkeeping coherence, where memory as practices of managing change takes place within the media.



Figure 4: Yiddish camp newspaper “A Heim”, 1946, page “camp chronicle”. Headlines: “elections of new camp administration”, “announcements”

Figure 5: Yiddish camp newspaper “A Heim”, 1946, page “Our life in pictures”, photos from camp life. [both: UN Archives, Area Team 1062-Augsburg-Copies of Newspaper A Heim Published in Leipheim Camps, S-0436-0009-01]

8 Bundesarchiv (Koblenz), B150/3377

9 With “Central Germany” areas of the GDR and West Poland were referred to at that time.

A more self-organized form of mediating cultural memory was the production of camp newspapers. From DP-camps, these are well-preserved.<sup>10</sup> After a license had been granted by the camp administration, residents could start publishing newspapers from and for the camps. Depending on the material conditions, the papers ranged from typewritten sheets stapled together, to properly printed newspapers, if also usually rather short. The content of these papers usually included general news, which were relevant for the community, but also creation and documentation of a camp public, embedded in the specific refugee community: “our life in pictures” (Figure 5), a “camp chronicle” (Figure 4). The last part of the papers was usually a list of lost people and search ads. Again, cultural memory was performed in this camp media platform: commemoration of important events or religious holidays (especially in Yiddish papers, e.g. commemorating the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), publication of photos with mnemonic meanings of any kind for the specific community, and sometimes even literature.

These examples showcase various media practices, actualizing and performing cultural memory. Cinemas, newspaper, photos, and other mediated cultural activities act as “vehicles of memory” (Keightley & Pickering, 2014, p. 589), as mediations where identificatory references to cultural memory manifest and materialize. In the diasporic and exilic context of refugee camps, such mnemonic media practices are enactments of “the migrant archive” (Appadurai, 2019, p. 561), reassuring identities and belongings during spatial and temporal upheaval. The examples show how this was practiced by forced migrants themselves, through photos, exhibitions or the production of newspapers, giving the timeless space of the camp a past. The migrants bring their pasts and roots into the space, travelling memories are transferred, thus giving the camp however not only a past, but also a present: a temporality for the space in in-between-ness.

Yet, the examples also point at the structural dependency and control of memory: film screenings were organized by administrative staff, not only as forms of entertainment to prevent camp fever, or as forms of democratic education. Correspondences between camp administration and operators of mobile cinemas reveal the purposes behind the selection of films that were screened: “soothing”, as well as offering “cultural values” or a “moral upgrading” to the camp residents.<sup>11</sup> Control and active management of what content was allowed to be screened can be seen as a practice of mnemonic management: upkeeping cultural belonging, which was deemed important in the post-war re-ordering of Europe. Similarly, camp newspapers had to be licensed and were dependent on access to printers and other materials. In the direct post-war years newspapers in general had to be licensed in occupied Germany. Correspondences between camp administration and local authorities reveal, how

---

10 With “Central Germany” areas of the GDR and West Poland were referred to at that time.

11 Staatsarchiv Nürnberg: “Gewerbebetriebe im Sammellager für Ausländer und Kantinen Allgemein” (Reg. v. Mfr. Abg. 1978, Nr.19856)



the content of the papers was surveilled: fears of “anti-repatriation-propaganda” or even “anti-American sentiments” were voiced and affected licensing<sup>12</sup>.

#### 4.2. The refugee story: giving oneself a past, present and future

While the camp’s media landscape incorporated mediated remembering on the collective level, it also provided spaces for mediations of individual pasts. Forced displacement always produces the loss and dispersion of families and loved ones. Staying in touch, finding, and identifying people is a relatively simple undertaking in digital environments; online platforms like “Refunite” even offer such reunification services for forced migrants today. After World War II, finding missing people relied on other technologies. Under Allied leadership, an international infrastructure was erected for this purpose: the “International Tracing Service”, centered in the small town of Bad Arolsen in central Germany. It collected millions of documents on missing persons, with the purpose of enabling identification and reunification. A fundamental part of this operation was to create an archive: filing individual stories and contact details. Information could then be exchanged across Europe through a communication system of mail and telegraphy, in order to reunite people.



Figure 6: [UN Archives, Germany Mission - Photographs #001-120, undated (1943-1948) S-1058-0001-01]

Figure 6 shows a photo depicting “Sofia and Janusz Karpuk, sister and brother aged 10 and 6, two of ‘unaccompanied children’ who are being cared for in the UNRRA assembly centre at Kloster Indersdorf. Picture shows children being interviewed by officer of UNRRA’s Tracing Bureau, whose job it is to establish the children’s identity

12 UN Archives, Displaced Persons-Newspapers, S-0402-0001-12, 1946-1947

if possible. The Karpuk family came from Pensk, Poland. The parents died in exile in Germany”<sup>13</sup>. The practice of collecting and documenting stories (photo and interview) can be understood as a structural form of mediated witnessing, of documenting and storing refugee stories. It is these stories, and more exactly, these mediated witness accounts and memories, which make Sofia and Janusz “refugees” (or legally: “displaced persons”). They give account of histories, which qualify for the “making of the modern refugee” (Gatrell, 2013), and insert them into a media infrastructure, which archives their histories. Tracing missing people was a very common post-war media practice, discernable also in the previously mentioned camp newspapers, but also as paper notes posted on the walls of buildings, both in camps and in public places, e.g. on the walls of the German Museum in Munich<sup>14</sup>.

The repetitive re-telling and performance of the “refugee story” as a media practice of witnessing is a constant trajectory of the modern refugee regime. Apart from this example of the International Tracing Service, the credible remembering of a refugee past happens in asylum hearings, as well as in magazines, protest leaflets or mass media. Looking through the lens of mediated memory and witnessing at such archival materials (as well as of course at contemporary manifestations of the same phenomenon) demonstrates how media practices construct the “refugee story” as an almost obligatory form of remembrance. Historical and contemporary legislations around asylum hearings manifest compulsory accounts of one’s past as the basis for refugee status, e.g. in German law: “The foreigner must himself present the facts, which give rise to his fear of persecution or the threat of serious harm, and provide the necessary information” (§25 Abs. 1 Satz 1 AsylG, 2013, author’s translation). Interestingly enough, this was formulated the other way around in the law’s predecessor from 1953: “The recognition committee has to clarify the facts and collect the respective evidence” (§13, Ausländergesetz, 1953). Either way, mediated witnessing stands central to this legal regime. The cruel centrality of media technologies becoming tools for obligatory witnessing forms a historical trajectory directly into today’s datafied asylum systems, where smartphone data, such as social media profiles – which are themselves performances and mediations of memory – are seized as evidence (Metcalf & Dencik, 2019).

This history shows trajectories of structural factors shaping refugees’ media practices of witnessing and remembering, forming almost a performative genre of “refugee story”. Myria Georgiou has pointed out the performativity of refugees’ voices, of how their stories get mediated in today’s public spheres, arguing that their recognition is conditioned to specific frames of “the refugee story” in a “digital order of appearance” (2018, p. 55). Apart from the context of the hearing, such individual witness accounts of “what happened to me” have of course also historically been abundant in mass media stories, zines or leaflets. In the post-war material, such

---

13 UN Archives, Germany Mission-Photographs #001-120, S-1058-0001-01

14 UN Archives, Z-181 - Story Material Used, S-0405-0019-04

stories were often driven by the respective humanitarian or state organizations, trying to create solidarity, secure support for their operations and raise money. In his historicization of media witnessing, Günther Thomas (2009, p. 97) argues that “[p]hysical co-presence is central to witnessing, and the possibility of substituting such bodily presence with media is crucial for the development of the cultural form”. In this sense, forced migrants transfer bodily experiences of forced migration processes into discursive, mediated structures, making their experiences available “second-hand” to others.

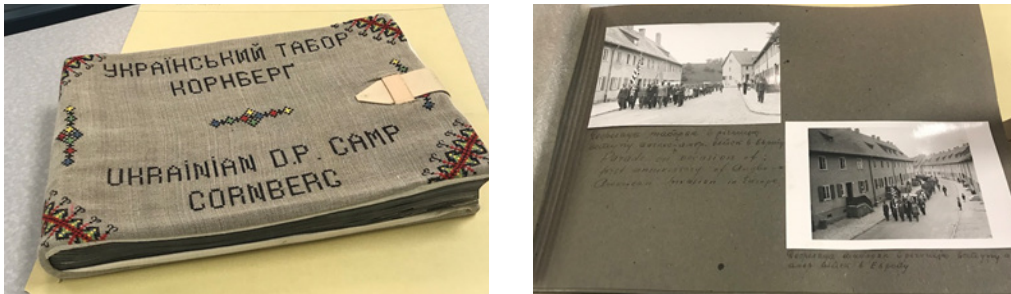


Figure 7: Photo album “Ukrainian D.P. Camp Cornberg”, 1946 [UN Archives, Area Team 1023-DP Camp 566-Cornburg-Photographs and Copy of Newspaper-“For Liberty”-Ukrainian Camp Weekly, S-0436-0004-07]

While the examples so far emphasized the structural conditions of witnessing and remembering as a partly obligatory mediated relation to one’s past, I want to lastly draw attention to more agency-focused media practices of giving oneself a past, present, and future: namely practices of documenting the present, and giving witness to the current situation in the camp, creating memories. This photo album (Figure 7) was created in 1946 in the Ukrainian DP-camp of Cornberg in Central Germany. The residents meticulously documented their life, including sports events, exhibitions, new buildings, festivities, but also protests. Each photo is accompanied by a Ukrainian and English description, and the album is wrapped in cloth with Ukrainian embroidery. This album, a media product of various practices (photography, writing, the documented events themselves, embroidery), can be understood as a way of acting upon the camp temporality: managing the disrupted life, creating coherence through sorting and ordering experiences. All of which becomes mediated and stored in the cultural form of the album, and through the technology of photography.

This practice of documenting the present, through forms of media memory and witnessing, can also be observed in other examples, like photo collections, the already mentioned camp newspapers, or the documentation of cultural activities in the camps. Experiences are stored and communicated in these media, be it the everyday, cultural life, or making public mistreatments and injustices. They create a present to be remembered in the future. We can interpret a similar intention – storing a memorable present – into this last example. This photo in Figure 8, of which similar ones were plenty in the archive, shows a group of DPs on the day of their departure

from the camp, moving towards a new place of settlement. They decorated the train, wrote messages of thanks and names and places with chalk onto the carriage and posed with flags for the photo. This was presumably a very important day, a caesura in the camp temporality, namely its end. A day to be remembered.



Figure 8: Photo of DPs departure on train, undated (1945-1948) [UN Archive, Germany-Children and refugees, S-0800-0034-0001]

## 5. CONCLUSION: HOPEFUL AND OBLIGATORY REMEMBERING

The archival records demonstrate how mediated memory and witnessing are fundamental components of refugees' media practices. Media technologies in post-war Germany's refugee camps were, similarly to today, used for managing the experience of spatial and temporal change. Media offered ways, and were drawn upon for re-imaginings of dissembled pasts, presents, and futures. The historical perspective on mediated memory practices among forced migrants shows how entangled diasporic identity negotiations are with media practices – and with changing media technologies. The mnemonic media repertoire in these examples included cinemas, newspapers, photography, documentations of refugee stories and cultural activities like art exhibitions. While we see continuities and ruptures of these technologies in the digital environment today, underlying practices remain constant: using media to remember, witness and manage change. Such mediated forms of “management of change” are positioned along a spectrum of group-individual, ranging from communal, diasporic memory practices, to individual practices of witnessing, storing one's own memory. From memory studies, we know that these levels are highly entangled, as cultural forms referring to each other in “personal cultural memories” (van Dijck, 2007).



Yet, what the historical context of the studied camps also shows, is how mediated memory practices can range along a spectrum of structure-agency in their socio-technological set-up: forms of remembering offered and controlled by camp administrations, like cinemas, dependent on material possibilities and permissions – and forms of active remembering as initiatives “from below”, like newspapers or photography. Management of change, hence, also involves mnemonic practices that are “being managed” through certain power dynamics of the camp, where the refugee regime employs and steers cultural and individual memory, e.g. in film screenings or in asylum hearings. Access to technologies, permission, but also control of content, characterize structural dimensions, while urges to and execution of creative memory practices, as well as the popularity of many activities, demonstrates camp residents’ agency.

Taking this interpretation of structure and agency one step further, the material points at how “management of change” in forced migration, as media practices of re-imagining past, present, and future, is characterized by an ambiguity of hope and obligation. Firstly, the examples show how memory was a way of reassuring one’s identity and belonging in cultural, diasporic pasts, through media facilitating belonging and identity in the timeless space of the camp. Also, the present was documented: practices of creating and storing new memories along the way, remembering for the future. As practices of looking back as well as ahead, these memory practices can be interpreted as representing hope. Mirjam Twigt (2018) has shown how for Iraqi refugees in Jordan media technologies are providing “spaces of hope” during long times of waiting in exile. I argue that mnemonic practices of remembering past and present are part of hopeful refugee media practices: memory work that reassures past, present and future in coherent structures. They can be seen as an attempt to stabilize identity again, enacting a certain optimism towards something better *after* the camp, while stuck in dire conditions.

Yet, simultaneously, the outlined structural conditions show how media practices of remembering in forced migration can be obligatory at the same time. In exploring the pragmatic uses and abuses of memory, Paul Ricœur (2004, pp. 86-92) suggests the dimension of “obligated memory” to describe duties to remember. Obligations can come from outside, as something superimposed, as well as inside, something experienced subjectively. The field where memory work becomes a project with an imperative to remember, Ricœur continues, is justice. Obligation, here, is characterized by three dimensions: striving towards justice through memory is directed towards someone else, the other; it is derived from a debt, or heritage to previous generations; and the moral direction is towards victims. What my analysis suggests is that an obligated memory can also be directed towards oneself. In the current refugee regime, especially within the asylum hearing, giving witness to and credibly remembering one’s own past, is what makes a refugee a refugee. Communicating one’s “refugee story” is a mediated performance of memory, be it for the “International Tracing Service” in the 1940s, in the asylum interview, for a mass media interview, a self-produced newspaper, or in the seized smartphone and on social media.

The archival records offer us access to historical continuities that underlie experiences of obligated mnemonic practices. Becoming a refugee is a memory project carried out through media practices, in the respective media technological environment. The obligatory dimension becomes visible through control of media practices in the camp, such as film screenings or organized activities, which deliberately offer and steer cultural memory to prepare repatriation. Ultimately, Ricœur claims that justice combines internal and external obligated memory. And this is, what ties the ambiguity of hopeful and obligatory (or free and controlled) memory together: an obligation to remember and to give witness in order to achieve justice is intrinsically hopeful. The various mediated memory practices, therefore, are characterized ambiguities of hope and duty, agency and structure, that are grounded in the temporalities and spatialities that the contemporary refugee and humanitarian refugee produce in the liminal spaces of camps.

**Philipp Seufferling** is a PhD student in Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University, Stockholm. In his PhD project, he researches media practices in German refugee camps and asylum-seeker shelters between 1945 and 2000. Philipp has studied Media and Communication Studies as well as Finno-Ugric Studies at the universities of Hamburg, Helsinki and Lund. His general research interests lie in the intersections of media and migration studies, historical approaches to media, communication and technology, as well as memory studies.

## REFERENCES

- Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Appadurai, A. (2019). Traumatic Exit, Identity Narratives, and the Ethics of Hospitality. *Television and New Media*, 20(6), 558–565.
- Arendt, H. (2017). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. London: Penguin.
- Assmann, J. (1995). Collective Memory and Cultural Identity. *New German Critique*, (65), 125–133.
- Beer, M. (2014). Die deutsche Nachkriegszeit als Lagergeschichte. In H. Bispinck & K. Hochmuth (Eds.), *Flüchtlingslager im Nachkriegsdeutschland. Migration, Politik, Erinnerung* (pp. 47–72). Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag GmbH.
- Brun, C., & Fábos, A. (2015). Making homes in limbo? A conceptual framework. *Refuge*, 31(1), 5–17.
- Couldry, N. (2004). Theorising media as practice. *Social Semiotics*, 14(2), 115–132.
- Dijck, J. v. (2007). *Mediated memories in the digital age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- El-Shaarawi, N. (2015). Living an uncertain future temporality, uncertainty, and well-being among Iraqi refugees in Egypt. *Social Analysis*, 59(1), 38–56.
- Erl, A. (2011). Travelling memory. *Parallax*, 17(4), 4–18.



- Erll, A. & Rigney, A. (eds.). (2009) *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Frosh, P., & Pinchevski, A. (eds.). (2009). *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gatrell, P. (2013). *The Making of the Modern Refugee*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Georgiou, M. (2018). Does the subaltern speak? Migrant voices in digital Europe. *Popular Communication*, 16(1), 45–57.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gillespie, M., Osseiran, S., & Cheesman, M. (2018). Syrian Refugees and the Digital Passage to Europe: Smartphone Infrastructures and Affordances. *Social Media and Society*, 4(1).
- Greene, A. (2019). Mobiles and ‘making do’: Exploring the affective, digital practices of refugee women waiting in Greece. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 1–18.
- Griffiths, M. B. E. (2014). Out of Time: The Temporal Uncertainties of Refused Asylum Seekers and Immigration Detainees. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40(12), 1991–2009.
- Horsti, K. (2019). Temporality in cosmopolitan solidarity: Archival activism and participatory documentary film as mediated witnessing of suffering at Europe’s borders. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22(2), 231–244.
- Horsti, K., & Neumann, K. (2019). Memorializing mass deaths at the border: two cases from Canberra (Australia) and Lampedusa (Italy). *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42(2), 141–158.
- Hyndman, J. (2000). *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Keightley, E., & Pickering, M. (2018). The Mnemonic Imagination and Second-Generation Migrant Experience. In T. Zittoun & V. P. Glaveanu (Eds.), *Handbook of Imagination and Culture* (pp. 167–186). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Keightley, E., & Pickering, M. (2017). *Memory and the Management of Change. Repossessing the Past*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Keightley, E., & Pickering, M. (2014). Technologies of memory: Practices of remembering in analogue and digital photography. *New Media and Society*, 16(4), 576–593.
- Keightley, E., & Pickering, M. (2012). *The mnemonic imagination: remembering as creative practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lacroix, T., & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2013). Refugee and Diaspora Memories: The Politics of Remembering and Forgetting. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 34(6), 684–696.
- Leurs, K. (2017). Communication rights from the margins: politicising young refugees’ smartphone pocket archives. *International Communication Gazette*, 79(6–7), 674–698.

- Leurs, K., & Smets, K. (2018). Five Questions for Digital Migration Studies: Learning From Digital Connectivity and Forced Migration In(to) Europe. *Social Media + Society*, 4(1), 1–16.
- Lohmeier, C., & Pentzold, C. (2014). Making mediated memory work: Cuban-Americans, Miami media and the doings of diaspora memories. *Media, Culture and Society*, 36(6), 776–789.
- Mannik, L. (2011). *Photography, Memory, and Refugee Identity: The Voyage of the SS Walnut, 1948*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Metcalfe, P., & Dencik, L. (2019). The politics of big borders: Data (in)justice and the governance of refugees. *First Monday*, 24(4), 1–15.
- Murphy, H.B.M. (1955). *Flight and Resettlement*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Nora, P., & Kritzman, Lawrence D. (1996). *Realms of memory: Rethinking the French past. Vol. 1, Conflicts and divisions*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Peters, J. D. (2009). Witnessing. In Frosh, P., & Pinchevski, A. (eds.). *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 23–48.
- Ramadan, A. (2013). Spatialising the refugee camp. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38(1), 65–77.
- Reading, A. (2009). Memobilia: The mobile phone and the emergence of wearable memories. In J. Garde-Hansen, A. Hoskins, & A. Reading (Eds.), *Save As...Digital Memories*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 81–95.
- Ricoeur, P. (2004). *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Seufferling, P. (2019). “We Demand Better Ways to Communicate”: Pre-Digital Media Practices in Refugee Camps. *Media and Communication*, 7(2), 207–217.
- Sterne, J. (2011). Rearranging the Files: On Interpretation in Media History. In: Robertson, C. (ed). *Media History and the Archive*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 78–90.
- Thomas, G. (2009). Witness as a Cultural Form of Communication: Historical Roots, Structural Dynamics, and Current Appearances. In: Frosh, P., & Pinchevski, A. (Eds.). (2009). *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 89–111.
- Turner, S. (2016). What is a refugee camp? Explorations of the limits and effects of the camp. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29(2), 139–148.
- Twigt, M. A. (2018). The Mediation of Hope: Digital Technologies and Affective Affordances Within Iraqi Refugee Households in Jordan. *Social Media + Society*, 4(1), 1–14.
- Wall, M., Otis Campbell, M., & Janbek, D. (2017). Syrian refugees and information precarity. *New Media & Society*, 19(2), 240–254.
- Zetter, R. (1991). Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 4(1), pp.39–62.