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European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation

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„As long as we are visible“

Refugees, Rights and Political Community

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Abstract

In the year of 2015, due mainly to unrest in the Middle East, more refugees arrived in Europe than ever before. They have been met with national and EU policies that emphasise border control and deterrence rather than human rights and dignity. I argue here that the human rights regime has proven to be insufficient to ensure refugees' rights are protected, owing to the inherent contradictions of sovereignty, citizenship, and universal rights by referring in particular to Arendt's description of the complete rightlessness of refugees. However, drawing on field research and interviews in Athens and Hamburg, this thesis counters the description of refugees as passive and essentially non-political, showing that refugees in fact constitute themselves as political subjects. They do this in small ways through place-making and inserting themselves into the social fabric of everyday life, as well as more through more overtly political acts. By insisting on being seen and heard, they disrupt the mainstream discourse and framing of social reality. This is done with the help of "communities of justice" such as the solidarity movement in Greece. Finally the thesis suggests a new form of disaggregated citizenship that can make a new guarantee of rights by involving refugees in political participation.

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