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The Provocations of Contact Zones - Spaces for Negotiating  
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## **Abstract**

Post-migrant societies in Europe are characterized by political, cultural, religious, and social changes. Where people meet under the conditions of migration and globalization, new places and spaces of negotiating are arising. They are formed by provocative questions, dynamic reorientation, and social transformation, in particular regarding religious affiliations, contexts and experiences. This article will consider challenges and resources of religion in terms of coping with ambiguity and building up post-migrant community relations. In this context, the concept of the 'contact zone' as a post-migrant place or space provides an insight to social spaces where cultures and religions meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in emotionally charged contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, like displacement and their aftermaths. These contact zones offer a place of discussing power, oppression, and religious diversities, but also find innovative perspectives for post-migrant identities. With reference to this, three case studies based on experiences of refugees in Europa with contact zones in refugee centers, schools and educational institutions allow an understanding of the significance of places, the feeling of rootlessness and the findings of new places of religious identity, of 'embodied' habitation and participation. Finally this article emphasize the meaning of public speech in post-migrant societies from a Christian perspective.

Keywords: contact zones, post-migrant identities, social capital, othering, postcolonial perspectives, public theology

## **The Provocations of Contact Zones - Spaces for Negotiating Post-Migrant Identities**

In fall 2019, I was quite affected by the reality of the refugee flows from Turkey to Greece. Syrian families and their children in simple tent lodgings at the Greek island Lesbos, confined living spaces without future or educational prospects. In the news and in social media I saw pictures from children with open and interested eyes, printed shirts with animals or slogans, their hair tied back with a ribbon and, in spite of all of their trying experiences, full of hope and future. But they are stranded in completely overcrowded places, which will be not the last place of arrival, which will not offer a safe place or home. Even if they and their families manage to reach Germany or other European countries in the first instance, they will have to live again in reception camps or collective housing for asylum seekers until finding new living spaces. Places such as those described are a provocation, a call, a request to deal with different, migration-related forms of social and physical exclusion and marginalization.

### **Theological Speech in the Public Sphere**

In view of these depressing pictures and impressions there is a strong need to address the question: Which answers can we draw from Christian positions that are presented to the public? Christian communities as well as other religious communities can be understood as important actors in civil society because of their public mission. They contribute to the task of reminding the state again and again of its responsibility for social justice and of being advocates for the people who have no voice.<sup>1</sup> In migration societies, as educational scientist Paul Mecheril describes contemporary European societies, special challenges arise. By replacing the ideologically filled term 'immigration society', Mecheril wants to counter the notion of the entity of nation states as externally closed reference points and draws attention to a broad spectrum of historical and contemporary migration phenomena. He also uses the term migration society to capture phenomena that are characteristic of its members, such as the emergence of transnational social spaces and affiliations, hybridity, the production of othering, everyday racism, the negotiation of ideas of borders and orders of belonging.<sup>2</sup> Against this background, the question arises how Christian communities and other religious

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<sup>1</sup> Bedford-Strohm, Heinrich (2008): Öffentliche Theologie in der Zivilgesellschaft, in: Gabriel, Ingeborg (Hg.): Politik und Theologie in Europa. Perspektiven ökumenischer Sozialethik, Grünewald Verlag, p. 344.

<sup>2</sup> Mecheril, Paul (Ed.) (2016): Handbuch Migrationspädagogik, Beltz Verlag Weinheim/Basel.

communities can profile their participation in civil society. First of all, theological speech in the public sphere needs a kind of bilingualism and a special openness for interdisciplinary dialogue and its insights. On the one hand theological speech in the public sphere implies first and foremost, to bear in mind contextual circumstances and conditions for public engagement arising from that. Respecting the specific political situation with its specific concerns and challenges plays an important role. On the other hand, Christian communities and other religious communities, as social actors in religiously diverse societies, have the task of contributing their social-ethical relevance as orientation for the common good. In summary, it can be said: public theology is intended to change thinking, feeling, acting and structures. This means not only participating in society but taking an active part in developing the conditions of living together. To say it in the words of philosopher Hannah Arendt: It is about creating a meaningful public sphere. In this public space, the plurality of those who appear in it becomes visible and constitutes the basis for political action. For Arendt, this public sphere is the place where people can meet, exchange ideas and change society. "We start something new. We tie our thread into a network of relationships. We do not know what will happen. (...) That's the risk. This adventure will only be possible with confidence in humanity. This means in a - difficult to define exactly, but fundamental - trust in the humanity of all people. There's no other way."<sup>3</sup>

To take this step, the concept of contact zones in post-migrant societies will first be highlighted. With this concept in mind, in the second part, different case studies will illustrate conflicts in these contact zones. Finally, inspired and motivated by Hannah Arendt, there will be a call to focus on and make use of the potential of theological speech in the public sphere of immigrant societies.

## **Contact Zones in Post-migrant Societies**

Places and spaces which arise through processes of migration can be understood as so-called 'contact zones'. From a postcolonial perspective, linguist Mary Louise Pratt put forth contact zones as social spaces, where cultures and religions meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in emotionally charged contexts of highly unequal relations of power, like displacement, and their aftermaths. Pratt uses this term to refer to social places of cultural, linguistic, and

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<sup>3</sup> Arendt, Hannah (1964): Interview mit Günter Gaus am 28.10.1964: [https://www.rbb-online.de/zurperson/interview\\_archiv/arendt\\_hannah.html](https://www.rbb-online.de/zurperson/interview_archiv/arendt_hannah.html)

religious encounters, wherein power is negotiated, and struggle occurs. Contact zones can be seen as a trope or metaphor for visualizing conflicts and possible solutions. It is a kind of spotlight that makes power and oppression, recognition, and discrimination in immigrant societies visible. In times of migration, globalization, and hybridization of identity, she considers that it can no longer be assumed that 'imagined communities' are homogeneous in nature. The idea of "imagined entities" which creates a type of problematic nationalism does not correspond to the reality of immigration societies. Rather, they make contact zones visible and perceptible, in which social affiliations, power relations and recognition must be renegotiated. Pratt in particular uses the contact zone to discuss educational spaces. She writes: "All the students in the class had the experience of having their cultures discussed and objectified in ways that horrified them; all the students experienced face-to-face the ignorance and incomprehension, and occasionally the hostility of others. Along with rage, incomprehension, and pain, there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom—the joys of the contact zone"<sup>4</sup>. These contact zones provide a place to discuss power, oppression and (religious) diversities, but also to find innovative perspectives for post-migrant identities.

On the basis of these understandings of contact zones, I am interested in the relations and structures, which occur from migration processes, that become apparent and change social spaces in the host country. For this situation analysis sociologist Naika Foroutan coined the term 'post-migrant society'. With this term she refers to the political, cultural, and social changes in society that result from immigration. 'Postmigrant' refers to an analytical perspective in which the social transformations and the associated identity processes after immigration to a host country are examined. For Foroutan, post-migrant societies have five characteristics:

1. Postmigrant societies deal with the political recognition of being an immigration society.
2. They are places where social, cultural, structural, and emotional negotiation processes on the rights, affiliations and participation of migrants and non-migrants take place. This also results in laws and amendments to laws.
3. At the same time, ambivalent evaluations of immigration arise in post-migrant societies. They are manifested in the whole range from approval to rejection.

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<sup>4</sup> Pratt, Marie Louis(1991): Arts of the Contact Zones, Profession, pp. 33-40.

4. This also includes questions of belonging and national identity, which can by all means have a polarizing effect.

5. Increasingly, an interweaving of persons and organizations with and without migration experience is becoming apparent.

With this analytical perspective, Foroutan wants to point towards processes of exclusion and inclusion in German society as a consequence of migration flows. She specifies: "Post-migrant doesn't mean the end of a migration process. It stands for an analytical perspective which deals with conflicts, identity-building processes and social and political transformation after migration already has taken place and after accepting being an immigration country."<sup>5</sup>

### Provocations of contact zones

As an illustration of the previous classifications, I would like to highlight some provocations from contact zones in post-migrant European societies:



1. Here one can see three women. Only at second glance do you realize that it is the same woman three times. In a field study a researcher from the Institute for the Study of Labor sent 1500 fictitious applications to companies in Germany and analyzed

the feedback of the personnel departments. The result was that even if an applicant had grown up in Germany, speaking German fluently and having a German educational biography, they will be considerably disadvantaged, if they have a Turkish or Arabic-sounding name or, in addition, wear a headscarf in the application photo. The probability of getting an interview is 80 % lower in comparison to women with German names.<sup>6</sup> "This result implies, that the candidate with the headscarf had to send 4.5 times as many applications as an identical applicant with a German name and no headscarf to receive the same number of callbacks for interview. This suggests that there is discrimination against female migrants – particularly if they wear a headscarf."<sup>7</sup>

This example shows how ethnic, but above all religious, affiliation is becoming a flashpoint for social exclusion. Even with the same qualifications, structural exclusion happens because of

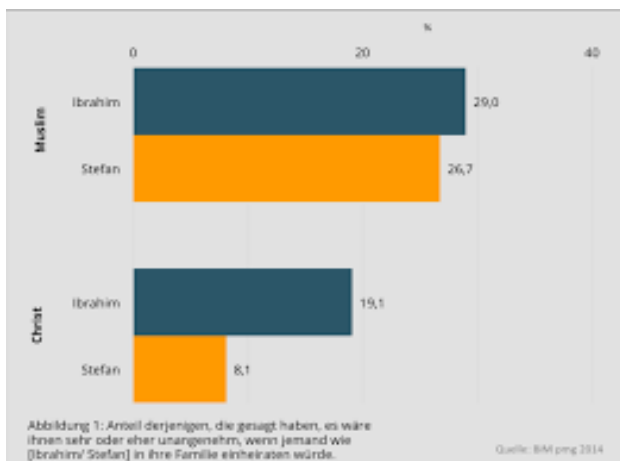
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<sup>5</sup> Foroutan, Naika (2016): Postmigrantische Gesellschaft. In: Heinz-Ulrich Brinkmann / Martina Sauer (Hg.): Einwanderungsgesellschaft Deutschland. Wiesbaden: Springer, p. 232.

<sup>6</sup> Weichselbaumer, Doris (2016): Discrimination against Female Migrants Wearing Headscarves, in: IZA Discussion Paper No. 10217.

<sup>7</sup> Weichselbaumer (2016), p. 12-13.

ethnic and/or religious characteristics. Equality and integration to the German society is called into question. What is the reason for that? The Berlin Institute for Empirical Integration and Migration Studies reported the following basic facts and figures, which delineate criteria for being German. Over 40 % of the population has the opinion that speaking German without any accent is an important criterion for being German. This narrow understanding of a correct language as a national criterion manifests a lack of recognition of realities of immigrant societies in which dynamics of change also affect the diversity of languages. Another criterion is the human appearance: over 38 % of the population has the opinion that people who are of color or wear a headscarf could not be German. The narrative of being German continues to be exclusive in central external aspects.



2. The next diagram of the Berlin Institute for Empirical Integration and Migration Studies shows how the information of simply being 'Muslim' is enough to create negative attitudes and social exclusion.<sup>8</sup> Respondents were asked how they would feel if a male person with varying characteristics were to marry into their

family. The survey results indicated:

- a.) 30% of the respondents said it would be unpleasant if this person would marry into their family. It was subordinate whether the name of the person was 'Ibrahim' or 'Stefan'.
- b.) From the perspective of Christian men, the name 'Ibrahim' caused a negative effect – even if the person had the same characteristics as 'Stefan'.
- c.) The negative view of 'Stefan' tripled when he was described as 'Muslim'.

This example also illustrates how ethnic and religious affiliation function as a provocation for social exclusion in the form of stereotypes and prejudices against Muslims, the largest religious minority in Germany. The empirical study 'Deutschland postmigrantisch I' refers to the following results: Muslims often are conceived of as a counter-image and as a counterpart. 40 % of the respondents identified themselves as German people, as part of the German population and the German society. Predominantly Muslim and German are

<sup>8</sup> Canan, Coskun/ Foroutan, Naika (2016): Changing perceptions? Effects of multiple social categorization on German population's perception of Muslims. In: Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 42 (12), pp. 1905-1924.



perceived as counter categories and excluded from the German “we”.<sup>9</sup> The postcolonial approaches of the French-Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad suggest this: The combination of immigration and Islam is defined in Western societies as being inferior - devalued as undemocratic, regressive and unenlightened.<sup>10</sup>

3. The graphics illustrate the presence of opposing attitudes in post-migrant societies. On the one hand it shows a high abstract recognition of participation rights. 70% of the German population believe that if immigrants, or specifically Muslims, make standard-of-living demands in and of the host country, it is their right to do so. But when it comes to concrete implementation, 50% of the population would prohibit religious circumcision, 50% would forbid female teachers to wear a headscarf and 40% would restrict the building of mosques.<sup>11</sup> In summary, it can be said that there is a greater disposition to refuse Muslims cultural-religious, socio-spatial or symbolic rights where national identity is of high importance. In addition to that, there is an abstract openness to the recognition of rights while at the same time activating stereotypes as soon as associated demands become concrete (e.g. building mosques in public space). Last but not least, prejudices against Muslims in form of a closed world view are not only present in a small part of the population. A large part of the population shares at least some of the stereotypes. For Foroutan, the subtext of German society is about the question of the cultural compatibility of Muslim traditions with Western culture.<sup>12</sup>

These results present huge challenges to address conflicts in contact zones. They shape public spaces of the post-migrant society in Germany, generate narrations about social and civic participation, and produce barriers to developing new post-migrant national identities.

## **Social and Physical Places and Spaces – Exclusion in Post-migrant Societies**

Against this background I want to ask how and in which social and physical places and spaces these exclusions and negotiating processes take place. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has intensively dealt with questions about migration and inequality in society, but also addressed conditions in educational systems. For him social spaces can be understood as the living conditions and the related values which every human being experience in its living space.

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<sup>9</sup> Foroutan, Naika / Canan, Coşkun et al.(2014): Deutschland postmigrantisch I. Gesellschaft, Religion, Identität – Erste Ergebnisse, Berliner Institut für empirische Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (BIM).

<sup>10</sup> Sayad, Abdelmalek (2004): *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, Translated by David Macey, Polity Press Oxford/UK.

<sup>11</sup> <https://junitied.hu-berlin.de/deutschland-postmigrantisch-1/>

<sup>12</sup> Foroutan, Naika / Canan, Coşkun et al.(2014), p. 40-42.

For Bourdieu, the social space presents a mesh of relations, a space of relationship that is just as real as geographical places. You can change your position only at the cost of effort, work, and time. Depending on your social and economic resources, you have a specific habitus according to which you can take a seat in the social space.<sup>13</sup>

“Social space tends to be more or less strictly reflected in physical space in form of a certain distributional arrangement of actors and characteristics. Consequently, all distinctions with respect to physical space are reflected in the reified social space (or, which amounts to the same,) in the appropriated physical space.”<sup>14</sup>

For Bourdieu, the term ‘capital’ is decisive in this context. He distinguishes three types of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. The essential aspect here is the aspect of accumulation. Thus social capital can also be accumulated through time. Individuals and social classes fight for their position in society within the framework of their habitus and capital resources. In Bourdieu's view, social capital means the power that arises from belonging to a group, for example the elite of a country, and from supporting the members of this group for their own purposes. Like the other two, social capital is used to consolidate or enhance one's status within social classes and groups. Bourdieu's social capital comprises the "entirety of current and potential resources associated with participation in the network of social relations of mutual knowledge and recognition". According to Bourdieu, social capital arises from the "network of relationships that help to ensure that careers, power and wealth are based not only on individual performance, but also on group affiliations and other beneficial connections in the sense of 'vitamin B'".<sup>15</sup>

Migrant families and their children do not possess or have limited possession of so-called ‘social capital’ to use as a resource or a benefit. As displaced people, completely on their own they do not have a long-term network of personal and/or institutionalized relationships with mutual acceptance and confidence at their disposal. For Bourdieu, this social space is mirrored in physical places like reception camps, collective housing for asylum seekers, poor residential surroundings, bad jobs and so forth. Bourdieu points out: it is the habitus, which generates the habitat. And vice versa, going beyond Bourdieu: it is also the habitat, which creates the

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<sup>13</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre (1985) : The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups, Theory and Society, Vol. 14, No. 6. (Nov 1985), pp. 723-744.

<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre (1991) : Physischer, sozialer und angeeigneter Raum, in: Wentz, Martin (Hg.): Stadt-Räume, Campus Verlag Frankfurt/New York, p 26.

<sup>15</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre (1983): Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital, in: Kreckel, Reinhard. (Hg.): Soziale Ungleichheit. Soziale Welt, Sonderheft 2, Göttingen, p.183-198

habitus. Where we live, where we go to school, where we work, where we shop, all of these factors influence our social status.<sup>16</sup> Following Bourdieu this means in the end that the social space is more or less stringently reflected in the distribution and the arrangement of people in physical places.<sup>17</sup> This means, with the examples above, that women wearing a Muslim headscarf have less attributed social capital and they get less access to the physical places of schools or job market; that people with strange sounding names will possibly not find their place in social relationships in the host country; that mosque associations are often located in backyards or industrial parks; that immigrant children and youth often go to schools in underprivileged areas and educational success can be reached only with major efforts. In the end this implies that persons without social capital have physically or symbolically less access to important goods and are forced to deal with less valuable properties.<sup>18</sup> With three case studies of my own I will link and deepen these insights.

## **Voices from Young Refugees**

Three young immigrants report their impressions of being a migrant in Germany. To which physical places and social spaces do they have access? What kind of place or space for social development and developing their own post-migrant identity are available in the host country? The experiences of these young refugees in social refugee centers, schools and educational institutions in Germany give an insight into the contradictions of places, the feeling of rootlessness and the struggles of finding new places of participation, of habitation and of (religious) identity.

### *1. Place: Collective housing of asylum seekers in Ingolstadt-Manching: No participation!*

Amaru is 15 years old and is originally from Nigeria. He, his parents and his four siblings fled from their home country because of the terror of Boko Haram. At the collective housing for asylum seekers the 15-year-old Amaru is forced to inactivity. Even though, from a legal point of view, he and his family should not live in this collective housing for more than six months, they have been living there for more than 12 months. Frustrated he said: "We are doing nothing! For 12 months we are only waiting." Together with 1500 other asylum seekers he

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<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre (1983)

<sup>17</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre (1991), p 25-34.

<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre (1991), p.30.

lives cramped together in this collective housing waiting for a decision taken on his application for asylum. Sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad examined the difficult situation of migrants arriving in a new country: forgotten in both, their origin and their host countries, forced into silence.<sup>19</sup> In Sayad's analysis: Amaru has no access to education or training placements, no age-specific environment, no opportunity for building up social contacts. As Amaru said himself "I don't want your money, I only want a future!"

## *2. Place: Secondary school in Aschaffenburg: Othering in the classrooms*

Anahit is a 13-year-old girl and was born in Armenia. When she asked with her parents for asylum, Anahit was one year old. She does not remember the home country of her parents. Her mother reports about Anahit's stressful experiences belonging to an undesired minority and being 'out of place' as an immigrant: "Two days ago Anahit was deeply saddened. I asked her, 'What's the matter?' And she asked me, 'What is an immigrant?' I answered, 'We are immigrants!' Anahit said, 'I really don't like this word 'immigrant'! Why are we immigrants?' I answered, 'This is the more beautiful word for foreigner.' Inside, I knew that the teacher probably said something to the class about migrants." Anahit experienced the clear distinction between her and her classmates because of her ethnic and religious affiliation. Following literary scholar Gayatri C. Spivak, the teacher defined herself and the rest of the class through a clear dissociation from immigrant students. In this context, the term "othering", coined by Spivak, becomes concrete. It indicates the process of first comparing oneself with others, standing out from them and making the others become others. Linked to this is the idea that people and societies differ considerably from their own social group through their way of life, culture, experiences, or other characteristics. Othering can therefore be understood as a social psychological mechanism for discrimination and exclusion of minorities. As a consequence, this can lead to images of the enemy, especially xenophobia, if members of a cultural group fear that so-called foreign influences could spread to their own culture and threaten it.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Sayad, Abdelmalek (1999): *La double absence. Des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré*, Éditions du Seuil

<sup>20</sup> Spivak, Gayatri C. (1985): *The Rani of Simur*. In: Francis Barker et al (eds.): *Europe and its Others*. Vol. 1. Colchester: University of Sussex.

### *3. Place: High school in Augsburg: Identity*

Tamineh is 14 years old and comes from Iraq. Together with her parents she fled from there to Germany. With major efforts all of the family members are trying to integrate themselves into German society. Tamineh's mother tells about the difficulties her daughter has in developing her own identity in a post-migrant society: "I want to tell you an example from my daughter Tamineh. Last year she attended the 7th year at school. One day she came home and said, 'Mam, I want to learn everything about the Koran.' And I said, Wow! This is fine! To have interest in religion is always very good and positive. Therefore, my husband and I sat together with Tamineh and we taught her some verses. Enthusiastically she tried to repeat and to learn the words. I said to my husband, 'Wow! Something special is going on! She is very interested you can see it runs in her blood.' My husband and I were very proud of her! Two or three weeks she learned and one day she came to me and said, 'Mam, you have to know: My teacher expects that I know that. The Koran and so on. 'Cause I'm Muslim.' And I answered, 'Oh my God! All the time I was so happy that you have great interest! And now this...'"

Regardless of Tamineh's real biographical experiences and ethnic and religious affiliation, Tamineh felt that her teacher attributed a religious identity to her, which fits to the teacher's image of Islam and of immigrant students as religious Muslims. With a view to sociologist Levent Tezcan's work, it is clear that being Muslim is one of the fundamental differentiation categories for immigrant families.<sup>21</sup> On the basis of cultural fictions and narrations attribution mechanism are activated throughout a culturalization of religion. It enables host countries to describe characteristics and standardize attitudes of immigrant people.

### **Public Speech in post-migrant Societies from a Christian Perspective**

As a consequence of these case studies from contact zones, I want to emphasize the meaning of public speech in post-migrant societies from a Christian perspective.

In her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Hannah Arendt analyzed the importance of the public sphere and public action.<sup>22</sup> The public sphere is the most important space for human beings to meet, to exchange views, to think, to act and to become active. In this space people can negotiate common interests and can show individual attitudes and spontaneously behave.

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<sup>21</sup> Tezcan, Levent (2012): *Das muslimische Subjekt. Verfangen im Dialog der Deutschen Islam Konferenz*, Konstanz University Press.

<sup>22</sup> Arendt, Hannah (1951): *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Schocken New York

In connection with her experiences during National Socialism, Arendt points out: in totalitarian systems this public sphere is precluded. It caused what Arendt calls the 'abandonment of humanity'. Everybody is left on their own and cannot rely on anyone. One result is the unwillingness to ever imagine what happens to others. It is shown as complete indifference to what happens to people around us. Another result is the ignorance, the lack of interest towards political developments.

The conciseness of Arendt's analysis has not lost any of its timeliness to this day. Looking at the emergence of right-wing movements in Germany in connection with migration flows her insights are more relevant than ever. With frightening clarity one can understand the current strategies of the right-wing parties, which Arendt analyzed in the Eichmann trial as the banality of evil<sup>23</sup>: trivializing racism and discrimination, down-playing breaking taboos and human rights abuses, minimizing injustice, disregarding democratic rights and giving the impression that they speak with the people's voice. Therefore, from a Christian viewpoint it is crucial to develop and shape public places and spaces and to represent counter-opinions in public discussions. On the basis of the case studies this means:

### *1. To face structural refusal of meeting places*

The situation in collective housing for asylum seekers is an example of the denial of encounter. In particular, right-wing parties are creating a climate of fear of meeting migrants. In their speeches migrants are objectified and their individuality is denied. You can seal off from them, you can displace them, you can dehumanize them. In contrast to this, in meeting places understanding and familiarity that arises out of narrated stories and common experiences can be found. Such interactions are the basis of feeling responsible for others and one cannot avoid responsibility for people around us. From a Jewish perspective Martin Buber points out, "All real life is meeting. A person only becomes a self through encountering the other. The extended lines of these relationships intersect in the eternal Thou."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the encounter with God in real meetings with human beings becomes a benchmark and a corrective for responsible care of an interaction with migrants and refugees today.

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<sup>23</sup> Arendt, Hannah (1963): *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of the Evil*, Penguin Books New York.

<sup>24</sup> Buber, Martin (1970): *I and Thou*, Published by T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1970, p. 123.

## *2. To address refusal of social participation*

Exclusion and othering because of ethnic and religious affiliation, as shown in the case studies, are a challenging task for Christian communities. As biblical stories show, foreignness and social exclusion, migration and reorientation are deeply human experiences which are mirrored in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In these narrations we face displacement, loss, discrimination, the question about God and longing for new life opportunities. As mentioned at the beginning, it needs a kind of bilingualism to relate and present these religious experiences and ethics in the public sphere of post-migrant societies. In short it means, to raise awareness of exclusive mechanisms, make marginalization immediately apparent and make clear what is meant by believing that every human being is an image of God.

## *3. To counter refusal of education*

In the face of displacement, flight and migration in a globalized world, Art.1 "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and Art. 26 "Everyone has the right to education" of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are gaining importance for educational practice. To recognize that refugees only have limited access to education is a human and social catastrophe. The right to education and training is firmly established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, by the UN Convention on Children's Rights and also by the Geneva Convention of Refugees. In the Christian tradition, education is an important point of reference. Education opens up living worlds, allows participation in society, provides the opportunity to find one's own religious identity and the perspective to consider world-view positions. If refugee children and youth don't get access to education for months or years, this will cause not only a lack of knowledge and know-how, which they need to have a future, but also a lack of intercultural competence and interfaith understanding that they need to contribute to plural and democratic societies. Therefore, it is a public task for Christian communities as social actors to make every endeavor to improve educational opportunities for displaced children and youth in reception camps and schools.

It is uncertain where public engagement is leading. For Hannah Arendt it is clear: We are thrown into the world, but at the same time we shape the world through our actions. "To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin, to set something into motion."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Arendt, Hannah (1958): *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp 176-178.

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