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Once a refugee: Selfie activism, visualized citizenship and the space of appearance

A man in his late 20s with dark brown hair and a white cap looks directly at the camera and holds a placard in front of him. It says, 'Once, I was a refugee. Now, I am a DJ.' On the right side of the picture, he tells how his family travelled from Kurdistan to Finland as refugees over 15 years ago. He recounts how he started school in Finland, became interested in playing music, began working as a professional DJ, and slowly gained fame. The reason he wrote this piece on Facebook was his frustration over the heated debate on the refugee crisis in Europe. His image is among hundreds of other similar images and stories that are gathered together on Facebook and around the hashtag #ennenolinpakolainen (Once, I was a refugee) on Twitter. Men and women of various ages hold placards with messages beginning with these same words, 'Once, I was a refugee,' and continuing with their current professions or positions: 'Now, I am a nurse, doctor, student, fireman, electrician, consultant, politician, etc.' These stories are part of a 2015 campaign conducted in response to stereotypical media coverage and an increasingly hostile political climate in Finland and Europe with regard to asylum seekers and migrants. During the year 2015, over 1,2 million people entered Europe, escaping the war in Syria and a hopeless future in Middle East (Eurostat 2016). In Europe, the arrival of asylum seekers and migrants has been regarded as an unexpected and exceptional emergency. The media coverage focused on borders, maps, charts and numbers, portraying people, who were seeking asylum often as a natural force or a disaster (Berry et al., 2016; Chouliaraki et al., 2017). This has coincided with the growing popularity of anti-immigrant movements in European politics, which are organized through social media and further polarized opinions regarding refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Refugee policy has become a

central (and politically torn) issue in the EU and seems to threaten core EU values and principles, including the Schengen Agreement, the Dublin Treaty, and the free movement of people. Instead of generating new alternatives to refugee politics, the main focus has been on managing the people on move through increased surveillance and closed borders, mechanisms that seem to intensify the ruthless treatment of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and further the conception of them as inhuman (Rheindorf & Wodak, 2013).

This article examines the politics of the 'Once I was a refugee' (OIWR) social media campaign to show how people with refugee backgrounds responded to the political and media debate in Finland. The study examines how, with particular visual and discursive modes of expression, the campaign exemplifies the emergence of political action in the digital era that can challenge the dominant discourses of fear and the position of migrants and refugees as 'voiceless'. It is argued that by using a form of selfie-activism, the campaign expanded and challenged the expected 'space of appearance' (Arendt, 1998[1958]; Butler, 2011; 2015) by introducing new voices, sensibilities, and perspectives to the public debate. As such, the campaign exemplifies a type of solidarity that arises from dissonance and connects with emerging social movements and their digital practices. The campaign succeeded in creating a counter-narrative that was able to question the uselessness of refugees in society. However, there were limitations to it that reflect the difficulty of the subaltern to speak (Spivak, 1988) even given the promise of the digital media environment. In other words, this article examines how these images speak, who they speak to, and how the context of digital media shapes listening.

This article contributes to the research of voice and citizenship by introducing popular, visual, collective digital performance as a way to speak beyond expected voicelessness. The starting point of the article is the understanding of voice as a performative act that constitutes connection to the

community with other human beings. Following Agamben (2000: 28,33), I consider the ability to take part in political debates fundamental to justice. When these possibilities are taken away, people have no access to membership of society and they can be treated as non-people, as 'surplus humanity' (Ticktin, 2010; Stevenson 2014; Fraser, 2013: 193-208).

The article argues that, first of all, to have a voice, a space is needed, that enables and allows for recognition of that voice. In this case, it means a multimodal address: a space of appearance and mode of expression (Butler, 2015) that departs from traditional political and media contexts that tend to repeat stereotypical images of the Other and to be confined to the visuality and vocabulary of singular citizenship. Voice here is understood as a complex process of 'capability of people to speak for themselves and to be heard in a society' shaped by social and collective practices, materialities and structures of mediated world (Couldry 2010). Selfie activism can be understood as such process that is connected and shaped by social practices and mediated materialities. It operates on discursive but importantly also on visual level to challenge the understanding of citizenship and to challenge the mechanisms of symbolic bordering (Georgiou, 2018; Chouliaraki et al. 2017) that systematically exclude asylum seekers, refugees and migrants 'outside Europe's' (and Finland's) symbolic space of representation and deliberation' (Chouliaraki et al., 2017).

The empirical material of the article is based on a digital and visual analysis of this Facebook and Twitter campaign (#ennenolinpakolainen), and the book that was made on basis of the campaign, however, the focus of the analysis is on the social media campaign. It also includes interviews with eight participants and the founder of the campaign.¹ The study adopts a multi-sited approach to

¹ The interviews with the participants were conducted face-to-face or by phone depending on what suited best the participants. Initially the participants were contacted by an email or through Facebook messenger. The interviews

investigate both the patterns and meanings of the campaign: the forms and modes of social media engagement, which are shaped by both individual choices and social media affordances, as well as being guided by the mainstream media and the political debate in Finland. The visual analysis consists of 175 images published in the campaign on both Facebook and Twitter. These images are analyzed with semiotic representational analysis (Hall, 1997)². The data also includes 11 news stories published on the campaign. This investigation is juxtaposed with the meanings that the participants attach to the campaign and its relevance to political engagement and public debate. The campaign exemplifies social media activity that is embedded in the real-life contexts that shape how politics is done in the digital era (Hine, 2017). Therefore, the analysis is informed by a contextual understanding of the campaign as a part of a particular historical moment, one shaped by the political, cultural, and media contexts. I begin by outlining the main events in the campaign, followed by theoretical discussions of the political space of appearance and the rise of new social movements. I then move on to explore how the selfie provides for such a space of appearance in the refugee debate. The article shows that the selfie campaign may expand the political debate and provide a particular space for voice and visibility, however, both the national frame of citizenship and social media affordances create limitations in terms of how people in marginal positions can speak and be heard in public.

The campaign

The structure of the campaign is simple: people post their picture with a short text in which they narrate their story (either written on a placard or on the side of the picture) on Facebook and

lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. The interviews have been anonymized and the participants are referred to in terms of gender and age.

² Images included single pictures but also compilations of multiple images posted as one image and images with additional texts and graphics. The figure of 175 images includes compilations counted as one image. Images posted by the moderators concerning news and events around the campaign were not included in the analysis.

Twitter. The stories always start with the same phrase: 'Once, I was a refugee. Now, I am...' This is the key repertoire of the campaign that can be modified and adapted (Tilly, 1993): each participant fills in the rest of the sentence to the extent that he or she wants to. Some of them may write only one or two words to define their place in society: a doctor, student, a worker for the city, or a mechanic. Others write longer stories depicting their experiences arriving in Finland, completing school, finding a job, being united with their families, and having children. Just as the narratives can make use of different tones, voices, and lengths, the images include a wide range of poses.

The campaign makes use of coordinated, modular repertoires of collective action (Tilly, 1993; Tilly & Tarrow, 2007; Khazraee & Novak, 2018) in ways that is familiar from other digital or social media campaigns and protests. These are performances that can be adapted to a wide range of contexts and function effectively as claim-making performances by conveying the main idea of the protest. Such modular performances in digital media include, for example, use of a placard, a certain type of image or a meme to communicate the core idea of the campaign (Brager, 2015; Maxfield, 2016; Khaerzee & Novak, 2018).

The campaign, initiated by Markku Kähkönen and inspired by a similar campaign in Norway, officially began in June of 2015 but remained quiet until September, when the public debate on refugee issues became particularly hostile and concerned with the economic cost of the people arriving and seeking asylum in Finland.³ The rise of populist party, The Finns, with openly anti-immigrant agenda had been fortifying in Finland during the recent years, however, in 2015 with the arrival of exceptionally many asylum seekers, various new anti-immigrant and street patrol

³ In September 2015, over 10,000 people arrived in Finland seeking asylum. In the context of Finland, it was exceptional as the average amount of asylum seekers in Finland had been around 3,000–5,000 in a year (<http://migri.fi/arkisto>).

groups (such as Soldiers of Odin) were formed to resist the arrival of asylum seekers. The public debate on refugees was exceptionally heated in the mainstream and on social media in the summer and fall of 2015. The OIWR campaign responded to this situation and also got push from a massive demonstration in support of multicultural Finland from July 2015: the Meillä on Unelma/We have a Dream demonstration gathered together over 100,000 people to voice support for multiculturalism and opposition to anti-immigrant sentiments and racism. Many participants of OIWR took part in this demonstration. After September 6th, when a prominent public figure, member of parliament, and refugee from Afghanistan named Nasima Razmyar posted her image on the campaign, new stories began to appear on the site. Within the next five days, over 150 images and stories were posted with the hashtag. At this point, the mainstream media discovered the campaign. Several newspapers, magazines and TV programmes contacted the participants and created news stories about the campaign⁴. The site was discussed on the national news and on a current affairs programme early September and thus it became familiar to the general public and to other potential participants. As such, the accumulative power of media attention enhanced what might be called affective publics: mediated emergence of publics with immediacy, intensity, and expressed solidarity on social media as a response to particular news events (Papacharissi, 2015). In the 'Once, I was a refugee' campaign, many participants knew one another from various activities and networks. However, many had only a few acquaintances in the group. During the campaign, they became temporarily visible together but dispersed again to their own circles and everyday lives. The affective intensity of this social media campaign stands in contrast to the more lasting temporality of the book that was made out of the campaign in 2016.

⁴ The campaign was covered in several newspapers, magazines and television programmes during September and October 2015: *Nyt-liite HS* 7.9. *Ilta- Sanomat* 7.9., *Huvudstadsbladet* 7.9., *MTV* 7.9. *Finland Today* 8.9., *Radio Nova* 9.9., *YLE.fi* 11.9., *Me Naiset* 11.9., *YLE* 13.9., *Sveriges Radio* 15.9., *Lääkärilehti* 16.10.

The plans for the book, which was named after the campaign 'Ennen olin pakolainen' (Once, I was a refugee), began after the first months of the campaign and were initiated by a small independent publisher, S&S. Consisting of 50 stories, it both enlarges and narrows the affordances of this hashtag campaign. In the book each participant is introduced by a portrait, a medium close-up, in which he or she is posed in diagonal position, gazing directly into the camera. Each image is followed by a biographic story of 2–5 pages, written by the participants. While the social media campaign expands to various sites and contexts through participants' profiles and commentaries, the book offers more fixed view of the same theme. The concurrent publicity of the campaign on various platforms and media outlets provided the campaign with a polymedia (Madianou, 2013) dimension: the stories are discussed and debated on various platforms, with transnational and decentralized dimensions, and expand beyond bounded publics.

Expanding the space of politics

While digital media have provided visibility for politics that depart from the traditional institutional politics, they also provide space for unconventional modes of action that combine everyday practices, humor, and performance. Digital participations can take the form of 'culture jamming', carnivalisue revelry, ethical spectacle, or creative insurgency (Routledge, 2012; Kraidy, 2017; Rovisco, 2016; Khazraee & Novak, 2018): self-organised, open-ended, participatory action that involves transformative play. Such performative modes of action may expand our understanding of the political. As argued by Judith Butler (2011) in reference to Arendt (1958/1998), the space of appearance (polis, the square), to be truly political, must include and signify engagements other than those specifically directed toward political action (speeches on public squares, for example). Butler argues that expanding what is constituted as political is essential for doing politics in the contemporary context: it opens up the space of appearance to

the people who otherwise might not participate in politics. In times of digital media, these participations happen increasingly in 'the conjuncture of media and the street' (Butler, 2015: 94). Butler argues that this conjuncture constitutes a contemporary version of the public sphere that is both virtual and material, there and here, preceding, expanding, and continuing the event or protest online (Butler, 2015).

The idea of expanding the space of appearance is also present in Nancy Fraser's (1992) famous notion of subaltern counter-publics, where she describes how these groups can create own arenas where they can define their interests, needs and identities in their own term with 'journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places' (Fraser, 1992: 67). In the digital era such arenas of debating, publishing and campaigning are increasingly found in the realm of social media.

It can be argued that OIWR campaign makes use of these digital realms of action to expand the visual and discursive modes of expressing politics. From these mediated performances, new forms, interactions and sensibilities of political action emerge. This is where hashtag campaigns become connected with the so-called new social movements: issue-based, flexible, many-voiced movements emerging and operating through social media with sensibilities of affect and intimacy. By organizing across and beyond traditional alliances (such as right and left), these new social movements can address and identify issues that cross party lines (feminist and environmental issues being typical examples). They are connected with ideas of horizontal participation and direct action, rather than politics through delegations and representatives (Della Porta, 2005; Fenton, 2016: 35). Typical new social movements include the anti-capitalist, environmental, anti-racist, and feminist movements, in which many participants in this campaign are also involved. Participants in OIWR include a mixture of outspoken feminist, left wing, and human rights activists,

as well as more centre- and conservative-oriented participants, entrepreneurs and businessmen, urban youth, mothers and fathers, and people without any strong political orientation. They are united by the desire to make an intervention from the premises of their own experience.

Expanding the space of appearance from the traditional media and political contexts to spaces that may provide alternative voices in public is crucial for attracting multiple and different voices and for allowing movements to grow beyond existing political groups and organizations. In what follows, I explore more in detail how a selfie works as such a space. In other words how selfies may expand the space of political engagement, the speech and visibility, in the context of refugee debate.

Selfie: Becoming an individual

Selfies have been explored in relation to technologies of the self, surveillance and visibility, killable bodies (Mbembe, 2003), grievable lives (Butler, 2004), and as the burden of evidence. Lillie Chouliaraki (2017) has explored the remediation of refugee-related selfies in the western news as a form of symbolic bordering: 'the systematic elision of the other's face as an authentic and agentive presence in Western spaces of publicity' (Chouliaraki, 2017: 91).

In this campaign, selfies re-claim this presence and operate on multiple levels as technologies of self, identity, and citizenship. They re-narrate identities through a predefined structure, one connected to social connectivity and exchange, as mundane expressions of multi-layered citizenship, as well as through core values of national belonging. Selfies are often critiqued as self-centered, individualistic, and commercialized media engagements (Barnard, 2016; Giroux, 2015). However, as Senft and Baym (2015) point out, a selfie is a practice — a gesture that can evoke

different messages for different audiences and address contested political issues. 'This gesture may be dampened, amplified, or modified by social media censorship, social censure, the misreading of the sender's original intent, or the adding of additional gestures to the mix, such as likes, comments, and remixes' (Senft & Baym, 2015). The campaign images can also be considered as part of a larger self-representation genre, including the idea of a personal 'journey' (actual or metaphorical) (Thumim, 2012). Nemer and Freeman (2015), who have researched the use of selfies among urban youth in Brazilian favelas, argue that instead of considering selfies as narcissistic self-promotion, we should understand how they are also used by the marginalised and those living in poverty for the sake of empowerment and assuming a voice in a context in which there are limited ways of gaining access to public debates.

In the context of the 'refugee crisis', the selfie is particularly interesting because it extends the discursive and visual space of the refugee debate to personal and popular forms of social media expression. Jenna Brager (2015) argues that the practice of selfie-taking makes the marginalised or third-world selfie taker legible as a grievable subject among Western social media users.

As noted earlier, media coverage of the so-called refugee crisis in Europe has fed stereotypical images of refugee crisis in the form of maps, charts and numbers depicting the dehumanised figures on European borders as floods of non-moderns (Fotopoulos & Kaimaklioti, 2016; Zhang & Hellmüller, 2017; Khiabany, 2016; Holmes & Castaneda, 2016; Chouliaraki et al., 2017). In this tragedy, 'refugees lack names, voice and agency'; their voices are either ignored or used against them (Khiabany, 2016; Philo et al., 2013). The news images of groups of refugees waiting outside a fence, in a railway station, or queueing in a hotspot emphasize views of refugees and asylum seekers as silenced subjects. Dehumanized and dehistoricized representations produce silence that hides roots and practices of marginalization (Malkki, 1996; Georgiou, 2018).

The stereotypical images also redefine those who have already become 'former' refugees and lived ordinary lives in Finland for several years. Participants in the OIWR campaign describe the discrepancy and gap in their daily lives in moments when people fail to make connection between their background and the media images of refugees:

'I am so inside of this society, and therefore, people, like the ones at work, don't even realize that I have another background, saying "I didn't know you were a refugee." The image [of a refugee] is so different from [my image in] everyday life.' (Woman, 35 years)

'There was so much talk everywhere about refugees and when people say that they should go to hell, I remind them that I am also a refugee and that I go to work and pay taxes. And then they say, yeah, but you are different. I hear that a lot.' (Woman, 32 years)

The participants describe incongruence between how they are being perceived and the ways in which refugees are expected to look like and carry vulnerability in their bodily appearance.

In this context then, a selfie provides a stark contrast to the media images of silent masses behind a fence or in a camp. The popular, mundane selfie operates as a means of becoming an individual in this public debate. The selfie pulls 'individuals from the anonymous crowd of victims' and allows them to have a place, name, and identity (Brager, 2015). As such selfie challenges the typical visual features of refugee representation which depicts them as 'a multitude of indistinguishable individuals'(Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2018: 1164)

The selfie produces a counter-gaze on the part of those being gazed at in ways that also challenge the anxieties regarding difference that people who are non-white experience on a daily basis.

Using a selfie in such a way is by no means new. Selfie campaigns have become particularly familiar as means of feminist body politics: feminist selfies, #metoo, and other # campaigns. Here, as in many other digital campaigns and protests, 'the body in its different significations becomes

the cultural locus of resistance' (Melucci, 1980: 221). Just as in feminist campaigns, in refugee campaigns, the struggle over recognition and relevance of voice becomes culminated in the body: the visible difference that carries markers of inequalities. Reclaiming the body and showing the body are important repertoire of these collective movements. In these campaigns, selfies embody difference that needs to be acknowledged, accepted and to be seen.

In this way the selfies in the OIWR campaign enable becoming of an individual, a visible human being, in the eyes of a mainstream, national audience. They open a space for voice but require a bodily presence to do that, to make bodies matter. Sonya Lindfors, a dancer and choreographer, describes the sense of being different and having brown skin in Finland. She has explored this in her art as 'something you are always conscious of. If you forget it, the world around you will remind you about it' (HS 9.5., 2018). The voice and visibility through a selfie thus opens up a space for what I term solidarity of dissonance (Author, 2018; Dean, 1996). This refers to the identified discrepancy, or gap, between the embodied sense of self and the perceived, expected self in the eyes of others. It arises from a disagreement about what is being represented and produced by the mainstream media and the political culture – depicting a sense of misrecognition (Hemmings 2015; Mohanty 2003). This was one of participants' main incentives in joining the campaign. Participants' feelings of necessity to act and break the silence, having the sense of being compelled to voice their views became through in these accounts below:

'I usually don't talk about this topic, but lately, there had been so much talk about the refugees that I felt compelled to do something.' (Man, 27 years)

'When the refugees started to arrive and there were lots of hate speech, when the other, Meillä on unelma/We have a Dream, counter-demonstration was organised, I wrote a blog on

multiculturalism from my own perspective. I wanted to tell the truth instead of feeding all those lies by being silent.' (Woman, 35 years)

'The other stories were really touching and full of hope. People have such a negative image of immigrants and refugees. I thought that this was a great way to change this image in a positive way.' (Woman, 29 years)

This feeling of dissonance, experienced affectively, be it rage, anger, or passion, is described by Clare Hemmings (2012) as a seed of knowledge: it generates critiques and alternative ways of seeing the world and drives many solidarity campaigns. The participants describe this feeling of dissonance as a push that made them take the first step to express their views in public.

It is noteworthy that the selfies are not angry or hostile. They are casual and cheerful, carrying a sense of ease: building on such imagery the political campaign appears accessible and conciliatory. As such, the campaign also follows the everyday sociability of Finnish culture that often seeks for consensus and avoids open confrontations (Rainio-Niemi, 2008). In a political climate that has become increasingly tense and polarized in Finland in recent years, a campaign with strong positive undertone was welcomed widely among the public and the press. Some stories highlight the struggle of growing up as the only refugee in a small town in Finland, being bullied at school, and then overcoming these difficulties. Not all stories are about great successes. Rather, many concern achievements on the scale of everyday life: finding a job, finishing high school, going into the army or completing vocational training. In other words, the narratives describe ordinary life, yet, dark stories of disappointment, bitterness, and a sense of rejection are not heard in the repertoire of the campaign.

Multi-layered citizenship

The OIWR stories were shared by friends, family members, and activists across Facebook and Twitter, so most individual stories received comments and likes beyond participants' immediate friendship circles. It now includes 175 stories by refugees from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, and Kosovo, among others, and over 27,000 likes.

The stories create what Jerslev and Mortensen (2016) refer to as simultaneous spatial and temporal presentness, here and now. The feeling of the present tense is produced through the intensity of these new stories emerging one after another. Together, they produce assemblage of powerful testimony, felt in the moment (Sandbye, 2012: 2; Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016).

Scrolling through the stream on Facebook and Twitter provides a variety of images in which people pose alone or together with their loved ones. Many include children and friends situated in domestic environments, in the countryside, in a party, at school, or at work. Stories range from a few sentences to long narratives of family histories and childhood experiences. Some images are decorated with graphic hearts or colorful frames, while others convey more formal pose behind an office desk or in a workplace.

Images range from mundane, transient situations (typical of selfies) such as having lunch or standing by a car in a parking lot, to festive posing on at a graduation party with a fancy dress or a suit, showing a diploma or a flower bouquet in hand. They embrace the valued achievements of a good citizen and also the everyday sensibility of daily lives, such as going to work, school, or daycare. The mundane images speak of doing citizenship within shared experiences and spaces:

the convivial aspects of citizenship that are not highlighted or exceptional but rooted in their repetitiveness and ordinariness (Gilroy, 2004).

Images of everyday life exemplify conviviality or seek to do so. They question the divisions between 'us' and 'them' and between the 'nation' and 'foreignness' that are implicit in public debates and institutional arrangements. By publicly performing citizenship in the form of different identities and cultures, the campaign points out the variety of layers citizenship entails. As argued by Nira Yuval-Davis (2013) people's lives are simultaneously shaped by different local, ethnic, religious, national, regional, transnational, and international political communities. Multi-layered citizenship applies to all, 'although the lives of migrants, refugees and people of ethnic minority origins are probably affected by this multiplicity of citizenships even more than those of people who belong to hegemonic majorities' (Yuval-Davis, 2013: 562).

Departing from the liberal definition of citizenship seen in legal terms as a set of rights and responsibilities between the individual and the state (Marshall 1992[1950]), Yuval-Davis' notion of multi-layered citizenship includes understanding of multiplicity of these rights and responsibilities that operate on different levels across different communities. In other words, multi-layered citizenship is embodied, connected to various communities and shaped by social forces. It is a perspective to citizenship that emphasizes sense of belonging through multiple relations and practices in the everyday life. However, even if people's citizenships maybe embodied through different layers, the national institutions and the media often only recognize certain layers of citizenship with similar expectations to all. This shapes the experience of and accessibility to the full membership in the community – the sense of belonging.

Experiences of everyday life, importantly connected to the sense of belonging, are rarely present in coverage of refugees and migrants in the media. Instead they are expected to perform the wounded victims or exceptional heroes, as one of the participants explained:

' The journalists always want to write these hero stories. I'm tired of that. I would rather speak of my everyday life and actually the only time this happened, when on a radio programme we talked about my work and family, just ordinary things, without mystifying, was when the journalist himself had an immigrant background'. (Man, 48 years)

Therefore, Yuval-Davis (2013) argues that 'we need to situate citizenship in the wider context of contemporary politics of belonging which encompass citizenships, identities and the emotions attached to them.' She also points out, that the role of the nation-state is not withering away. The framework of inclusive national identity and citizenship is often organized around a set of core or irreducible values in ways that hamper its inclusiveness, even if legal citizenship was fulfilled.

Therefore, reclaiming citizenship through these mundane selfie images expands the understanding of citizenship by mundane representations of multiple identities and cultures as part of the nation. However, it simultaneously embraces the core values of the nation and their fixity. This becomes particularly evident in images representing good citizenship in uniforms, as will be discussed next.

Speaking to the nation

In her famous discussion of whether the subaltern can speak, Spivak (1988) raises the question of how the expressions of the subaltern are shaped and dominated by those in power and by the discourses of power. In a similar way, political campaigns strive to speak to this power. To be

identified means to be in the register of the right discourse. In this case, the campaign speaks to the nation with the language of dutiful citizenship in order to be seen and recognized.

One of the recurring representations of refugees and migrants in the media is connected with the sense of threat. Threat becomes underlined in narratives that connect them as suspect others and potential terrorist; in the narratives that reflect concerns over 'our' social order to be disturbed by racial 'others', young men with dark skin who 'appear to trespass 'our' own space'. (Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017: 1169).

In the campaign this imagery of threat is challenged by images that express and embody good citizenship. This happens by wearing uniforms. In these images, people wear their work uniforms (doctors, nurses, mechanics, construction workers, and military personnel), which signal the respectable regime of citizenship. The sense of being part of society is aesthetically aligned with bodily images of respectability. The uniform symbolizes order, structure, obedience, and efficiency, as opposed to the vague, floating, borderless, unreliable, and potentially dangerous bodies of the unknown refugees that appear in the news media. Doctors, nurses, construction workers, and firefighters are all uniformed, signaling not only loyalty to the nation but also productivity, usefulness and success. They visualize effective bodies of taxpayers that are far from waste. Here, the campaign most clearly speaks to the nation: it assumes neoliberal trope by addressing the economic value of citizenship, and in this way responds to the call of populist discourses.

Specifically, images with army uniforms indicate the values of the nation and particular loyalty to the nation. This has special currency in Finland where the history of war (against Soviet Union in 1939-40, and 1941-44) assumes significant role in the narrative of the nation, connected with loss,

sacrifice and national pride. With the weight of this history, independence and citizenship are treated with seriousness and gravity, that are also captured in the uniformed selfies.

In one of the many uniform selfies, a young man with brown skin, poses solemnly in front of the camera with his hands behind his back, calm expression on his face. He is wearing the camouflage army uniform, with a small Finnish flag on the sleeve and a green beret on his head, slightly tilted to the right. On the background we can see the army barracks and the symbol of the unit. His posting reads: 'I did my service[...] as a second lieutenant. In the future I am going to apply for the UN peacekeeping forces'. The posting has 1200 likes and 15 praising and cheering comments. It provides a visible symbol of the common identity and serves to 'establish membership and rank within a group, display loyalty, and demonstrate status' (Ugolini, 2010). This combination makes the image widely circulated, shared and commented, in other words it becomes sticky with affective value, to use Sara Ahmed's (2004) terminology. The nature of affect becomes clear when we look at the comments more closely. Some of the comments are posted by people who work in the army, but one them saying 'that's the spirit', is from a profile that openly supports far-right nationalistic movement. Similar comments from anti-immigrant activists are posted under other selfies with uniforms, with similar supportive, yet patronizing praise. In some of the comments, the uniformed refugees are referred to as exceptions, or as the kind of refugee that 'we need'. The comments adhere to discourses of dividing, categorizing, and defining refugees in terms of those who are deserving and useful for the nation and those who are undeserving and useless. Inadvertantly then these images open up the discourse of deservingness, which also haunts the media coverage and general political debate on refugee policy. This happened unintentionally and was not the aim of the campaign organizer or participants:

'I wouldn't want to think that this campaign has only emphasized the successful refugees. It was never the goal, but we should have had more resources to create news on events and make sure there were many different kinds of stories – like the campaign in Norway did.'

'When I looked at others stories if felt a bit like, well, people come from so many backgrounds that it is a bit funny how one has to prove that one has a university degree. It feels that one needs to prove oneself more than others that one has succeeded. It is great that our family has had the chance to come here, but it seems strange that I would have to be extra active and pay more taxes because I had to flee from our home country.' (Woman, 35 years)

This account illustrates the fragility and conditionality of citizenship and structure of exception (Agamben 1998). Even after years as a formal citizen, belonging must be earned. This is explicitly expressed in some of the stories as a sense of frustration regarding the continuous demand to prove one's citizenship and usefulness to the nation.

As argued by Holmes and Castaneda (2016), the discourse on deservingness displaces the question of refuge from the history of global political and economic inequality and places it on the refugees themselves, who become evaluated as genuine, good, or deserving refugees. This illustrates what Miriam Ticktin (2010) has identified in humanitarian discourse: it limits the political subjectivity of refugees by requiring victimhood, innocence, and gratefulness. Indeed, many postings end with expressions of gratitude towards Finland. While the intention of the campaign was not to emphasize too much of personal success and citizenship as earned, this seemed to be hard to avoid. However, representations of good citizenship appear to be also a conscious, strategic political move to use the affective power of the uniform selfies, that could not be denied even by the far-right anti-immigrant activists. This is how, in complex ways voice is shaped and defined by the national hegemonic discourse as well as by the reflexive counter-performance of that

discourse. Further complexities rise with the social media context, algorithmic power and oppositional audiences.

Political contestation

What is particular about the social media technologies is the way they collapse multiple contexts and audiences, in ways that complicates possibilities to manage separate profiles or create the self through the recognition by particular restricted audience (Marwick & boyd, 2010). Each story on Facebook is followed by comments from the group, family, friends, and strangers, mostly cheering, congratulating, and celebrating the post. According to the moderator of the site, most of the comments were positive, and there were only a few aggressive or hostile comments. An attempt was made to hijack the hashtag to create a counter-campaign that would connect refugees with crime; however, this never fully succeeded⁵. These attempts strive to make use of the technological affordances provided by platforms. As Tarleton Gillespie (2015) points out, platforms not only facilitate and host but also 'intervene' and shape the public culture of digital media. In other words, the algorithmic power of platforms can also be a target of manipulation. The amount of hate speech had been escalating in Finland in past years, at the same time as support for the populist party The Finns and their anti-immigrant agenda had grown. Furthermore, the distribution of fake news, rumors, hate speech, propaganda, and vague policies on commercial social media platforms speaks of the contested, challenging space of social media. Platforms are even seen to benefit economically from racism and provide a space for anti-immigrant politics (cf. Nagle, 2017; Farkas et al., 2017; Matamoros-Fernandez, 2017). Posting an image to a public site

⁵ In these plans, voiced in anti-immigrant forum, Hommaforum, one member suggests that they could create memes with images of refugees who have committed crimes and then attach their crimes and sentences to the images, along with the hashtag #Once I was a refugee. <https://reijaharkonen.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/ennenolinpakolainen.jpg>

such as Facebook or Twitter may then open up a range of vulnerabilities in the everyday lives of the participants, of whom only a small number are politically active and used to public attention. Many participants explain being cautious about participating in the campaign, partly due to the way it exposes their 'refugee' background but also because it opens up the possibility of attacks. On digital media, politics is done through personal profiles in ways that both emphasize the (achievements of) individual and create new vulnerabilities and emotional labor (Hochschild 2003[1983]) with regard to political participation.

However, counter to expectations, the experiences from the campaign were predominantly positive among the participants. As argued earlier, the comments directly under profile pictures were mostly positive and rarely included open hostility towards the participants, even if they were sent by anti-immigrant activists. However, the critique for the campaign was most explicitly expressed on other discussion forums and not directly under the comment threads of the campaign images. In these discussions, largely conducted in the main anti-immigrant forums⁶, the authenticity and representativeness of the refugee stories were questioned:

'How come so many "ähläm"[mock word referring to Muslims] have gotten in the medical school when their Finnish language skills don't seem to be enough for assistant nurse? Who funded those years' long studies?' (Guest/ Vauva.fi)

'Great stories and images, but where are Somalian men?' (Guest/Vauva.fi)

⁶ These discussions appear in forums that host anti-immigrant debates, such as politically oriented Hommaforum and originally the forum of a magazine for parents of newborn babies called Vauva.fi, which has become famous for racist and sexist debates. https://www.vauva.fi/keskustelu/4577958/ketju/ennen_olin_pakolainen

'In the middle east as Isis fighters or in basements preparing for action in the West?' (Guest / Vauva.fi)

'I would like to know the success percentage of these immigrants. I've been in contact with many immigrant families, and unfortunately, many of the boys have become criminals.' (Guest/ Vauva.fi)

These comments undermine the individual achievements of refugees as exceptions to the rule. They particularly argue against the possibility of refugees reaching higher education and valued positions in the society. At the same time they disregard, and argue against the fact that most postings in the campaign concern ordinary jobs: nurses, electricians, construction workers, receptionists, sales personnel and social workers. Many are also posted by men who have arrived from Somalia, representing one of the most marginalized group in Finland. The refusal to accept these images and their message speaks of the political determination of not-listening and therefore also underlines the importance of the campaign. Instead the stories are interpreted according to own political stance and shared among the group of like-minded (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), exemplifying the new dynamics of digital political participation. However, instead of being upset by these comments, the participants saw value in the attention that the campaign reached across different political groups and discussion forums: 'The problem of many campaigns is that they remain inside a particular bubble, and I also wondered how much this campaign actually reached those who didn't already support these views. I hope it did.' (Woman, 29 years)

While the public attention towards the campaign was significant, and as a polymedia event it reached different kinds of audiences, the most oppositional audiences, such as the ones in anti-

immigrant sites, remained more modest in terms of the amount of discussion and mentions of the campaign on their sites.

Conclusions

As argued by Gholam Khiabany (2016), the refugee 'crisis' is not happening in a vacuum. It has 'everything to do with place, history, capitalism and imperialism' (Khiabany, 2016: 756). The circumstances and policies in the new home countries shape and define the experiences of refugees and immigrants in significant ways. In this respect, the ways in which people are being invited to become part of the public and voice their views in public help create sense of belonging, whether this takes place in the realm of popular culture or politics proper. Taking part in political debates is the key to membership in society. Agamben (2000: 28, 33) discusses the relevance of the ability to take part in political debates and discussions of justice – a capacity the most vulnerable are often deprived of. Nick Stevenson (2014) and Rheindorf and Wodak (2017) have pointed out how in contemporary Europe, the rights of refugees are increasingly weakened. If we agree that the ability to take part in political debate is fundamental to justice, then when these possibilities are taken away, people have no access to membership in society and can thus be treated as non-people, as 'surplus humanity' (Ticktin, 2010). The securitization and surveillance of borders, the growing difficulty of gaining refugee status, and the questioning of refugee rights point to increased difficulties to take part in such debates (Yuval-Davis, 2013). These signs are also present in the ways in which media symbolically challenge and reaffirm European borders and systematically exclude refugees from the space of representation (Georgiou, 2018; Chouliaraki et al., 2017). In this sense, the OIWR campaign speaks of a larger struggle for recognition and 'grievability over killability' (Brager, 2015), 'to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not' (Mbembe, 2003: 17, 27; Brager, 2015).

This takes us back to the question asked by Spivak (1988): can the subaltern speak, or rather, how can the subaltern speak? In this case, the selfie provided a means of becoming an individual in the context of this debate and of claiming identity and place within the nation as mundane expressions of multi-layered citizenship. Selfies operate on multiple levels, re-narrating identities through a predefined structure and connectivity, providing both possibilities and limitations.

Campaigns' political power lies in the collective force that the images, posted one after another, create together: the emergence of a political movement and visibility of what the future of an arriving refugee can look like – and what citizenship can look like.

The OIWR campaign has increased the visibility of many refugee activists in the public sphere. As such, the campaign operates as a seed for new identifications, mobilizations and movements stretching across many forms of political engagement. With a multitude of stories, they achieve a collective dimension of action and gain political force (see also Khazraee & Novak, 2018).

More than anything, the case reveals how difficult it is to speak from a refugee position without being drawn into a discourse of deservingness. This difficulty also reveals the conditionality of citizenship. The uniformed images visualize good citizenship in ways that speak of the fragility of belonging: through the uniforms, the 'former' refugees need to prove their value and loyalty to the nation, year after year. The fact that the campaign must remind the public and the media that asylum seekers and refugees are humans who can have a future shows that the refugee crisis is more than a crisis of management. It reveals the harsh values of contemporary Europe, where it seems that refugee rights and humanity itself is being redefined.

At the same time this campaign has made an effort to break the silence. To do that, it has expanded the space of appearance, to produce visual and discursive counter-narratives for reclaiming citizenship. The selfie campaign represents a collective political struggle with its inevitable contradictions. It expanded the imagination of political protest and produced

momentarily disruptions within the hegemonic power, although it was not able to completely escape it.

In the midst of media representations that focus on victimization and affective circulation of fear, breaking silence matters. Therefore representations voicing joy and pride in the everyday life and celebration of achievements, deserve to be seen and heard. In the book 'Ennen olin pakolainen' Javiera Marchant Aedo ends her story with these words:

'We are survivors. I am a survivor, but I continue to hope that there will be more days in my life when I don't just survive being a refugee but live. I live a life worth living.'

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