

Maria Ullrich

Media Use During Escape. A Contribution to Refugees' Collective Agency

2017

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/3854>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Ullrich, Maria: Media Use During Escape. A Contribution to Refugees' Collective Agency. In: *spheres: Journal for Digital Cultures*, Jg. 4 (2017), S. 1–11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/3854>.

Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here:

https://spheres-journal.org/wp-content/uploads/3Ullrich_MediaUseDuringEscape.pdf

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Creative Commons - Namensnennung - Nicht kommerziell - Keine Bearbeitungen 4.0/ Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a creative commons - Attribution - Non Commercial - No Derivatives 4.0/ License. For more information see:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

MARIA ULLRICH

MEDIA USE DURING ESCAPE – A CONTRIBUTION TO REFUGEES’ COLLECTIVE AGENCY¹

1 INTRODUCTION

According to the popular² German boulevard newspaper *The BILD*, it was a historical tweet of 140 characters from August 2015 that resulted in Germany becoming the primary country to receive Syrian refugees via the Balkan route.³ The tweet by the German National Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) stated that from that moment, the Dublin Regulation should not apply to Syrian refugees, meaning they would not be sent back to the country they first entered in the Schengen Area.

The BILD blamed Merkel for the tweet in their article. There was a widely shared belief that the spread of ‘welcoming’ information through social media was one of the main reasons why many Syrian refugees considered Germany as their preferred country of arrival.⁴ The access to social media and the welcoming messages spread using these platforms, were cited as significant pull factors for Syrian refugees to continue walking towards Western Europe from Hungary at the beginning of

1 Warm thanks to Magdalena Freudschuss, Franziska Mönnich and Javier Contesse for their constructive feedback and support.

2 BILD is the German newspaper with the highest circulation.

3 Cp. n.n., “Historische 140 Zeichen. Der Tweet, der Deutschland zum Zufluchtsort machte”, *Bild Online*, September 19, 2015. Available at: <http://www.bild.de/politik/inland/twitter/kurznachricht-die-deutschland-zum-zufluchtsort-machte-42642974.bild.html> [accessed November 4, 2016].

4 Although research results suggest that a lot of the welcoming information might not even have been received by refugees before their arrival. Cp. Martin Emmer, Carola Richter, Marlene Kunst, *Flucht 2.0. Mediennutzung durch Flüchtlinge vor, während und nach der Flucht*, Research Report, Freie Universität Berlin, 2016. Available at: http://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/kommwiss/arbeitsstellen/internationale_kommunikation/Media/Flucht-2_0.pdf [accessed February 5, 2017].

September 2015.⁵

According to the assumption that communication through social media directly leads to action, the refugees' behaviour is described as deterministic.

“[...] as if the new technologies themselves with no human agency, no sociality and no social struggles are automatically revolutionizing the world”⁶.

On the contrary, the idea of this paper is to take a closer look at the nexus of media usage and refugee movements with an actor-centred perspective following the thesis that it is the refugees that do move and make use of media for their own sake. Following this perspective the refugees do not follow social media information blindly, but rather use different forms of media actively and in a self-determined manner to organize their escape. How do the refugees use media during their flight and how does that contribute to their agency?

To answer these questions, this paper analyses and summarises data collected through fieldwork in Italy in 2015, volunteering experience in Athens in 2016, as well as information from newspapers, relevant grey literature and specialist publications. The significant use of media by refugees along the Balkan route is presented as it raised more awareness for the migration-media nexus. While this is not a completely new issue, it made media scholars and migration researchers especially interested in the phenomenon of digital media use.⁷ However, different routes of escape and the media used by refugees will be analysed to compare media usage of refugees and to gain a broader view of the issue.

I argue that media use supports different forms of refugees' agency, because it helps to build up and maintain strong networks. That refugees organise themselves through networking is not a new phenomenon. As the Autonomy of Migration argued in the 1990s, migrants and refugees are highly self-determined actors, mainly due to a collective agency.

5 This idea was later shared by other leading newspapers see for example Nicola Abé et al., “Herzdame”, *Spiegel Online*, September 19, 2015. Available at: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-138749214.html> [accessed November 1, 2016].

6 Dimitris Parsanoglou, Nicos Trimikliniotis, and Vassilis S. Tsianos, *Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*, Basingstoke/Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 9.

7 See several field studies that were undertaken since the expansion of the Balkan route, for example Marie Gillespie et al., *Mapping Refugee Media Journeys. Smartphones and Social Media Networks*, Research Report, The Open University/France Médias Monde, 2016. Available at: http://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/sites/www.open.ac.uk/ccig/files/Mapping%20Refugee%20Media%20Journeys%2016%20May%20FIN%20MG_0.pdf [accessed May 2, 2017; Emmer et al. 2016; Media in Cooperation and Transition – MiCT, “Information to go”, *Migration Media Usage Survey*, June 1, 2016. Available at: http://www.mict-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/mictbrief_en_20160623.pdf [accessed November 9, 2016].

2 THE AUTONOMY OF MIGRATION: IT IS ALL ABOUT NETWORKING!

The Autonomy of Migration introduced an agency-centred view of migration.⁸ Moulier Boutang regarded refugees and migrants as subjects that reveal the limited capacity of political measures to control migration routes or to seal off borders.⁹ His interpretation encourages us to understand migration as a political practice,¹⁰ to interpret it as a process of deep creative power.¹¹ The Autonomy of Migration can be seen as a perspective on migration focusing on the process itself and not on the border control mechanisms that are merely considered a reaction to these processes. The Autonomy of Migration underlines the collective character of migrant and refugees' agency, when Moulier Boutang describes migration as a movement that possesses its own knowledge, follows its own rules and organises its practice collectively.¹²

The refugees' movements can be assigned to different types of collective agency.¹³ I distinguish between an invisible and a visible type of refugees' agency.¹⁴ Both forms can be observed during escape depending on the respective strategy refugees draw on, as well as on the challenges they are confronted with. The visible type presents the kind of agency refugees possess when they use public space to raise awareness of their situation and to demand freedom of movement. The invisible

8 Including processes of escape.

9 Cp. Yann Moulier Boutang, "Interview", in: Materialien für einen neuen Antimperialismus (ed.), *Strategien der Unterwerfung, Strategien der Befreiung – Thesen zur Rassismusdebatte*, Berlin/Göttingen: Schwarze Risse, pp. 29–56.

10 Cp. Stephan Scheel, "Das Konzept der Autonomie der Migration überdenken", in *Movements. Journal für kritische Migrations- und Grenzregimeforschung*, 1(2), 2015. Available at: <http://movements-journal.org/issues/02.kaempfe/14.scheel--autonomie-der-migration.html> [accessed January 25, 2016].

11 Cp. Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos, *Escape Routes. Control and Subversion in the Twenty-first Century*, London/Ann Arbor, Pluto Press, 2008, p. 202.

12 Cp. Yann Moulier Boutang, "Thesen zur Autonomie der Migration und zum notwendigen Ende des Regimes der Arbeitsmigration", *Jungle World*, 15, April 3, 2002. Available at: <http://jungle-world.com/artikel/2002/14/24171.html> [accessed January 24, 2016].

13 I prefer the term "agency" instead of "autonomy" because it does not suggest an independence towards structures as "autonomy" does and leaves room for how this agency can be explained. However I speak about the "Autonomy of Migration" when I refer to the approach going back to Moulier Boutang.

14 This distinction derives from research by Wilcke and Lambert who in turn derived the invisible character of agency from Rancière's notion of politics (u.a.: 2002) conception of politics and the visible one from reflections on Imperceptible Politics by Papadopoulos et al. Cp. Holger Wilcke, and Laura Lambert, "Die Politik des O-Platzes. (Un-)Sichtbare Kämpfe einer Geflüchtetenbewegung", in *Movements. Journal für kritische Migrations- und Grenzregimeforschung*, 1(2), 2015. Available at: <http://movements-journal.org/issues/02.kaempfe/06.wilcke,lambert--oplatz-k%C3%A4mpfe-gefl%C3%BChtete-bewegung.html> [accessed January 25, 2016]; Jacques Rancière, *Das Unternehmen. Politik und Philosophie*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 2002; Papadopoulos et al. 2008.

type, by contrast, manages his route very effectively so that she/he will not be detected by powers that could hinder him.

Visible	Invisible
The Politicals: “We have rights”	The Tacticals: “The collective makes us invisible”

Table 1: Types of collective refugees’ agency

Communication processes between the refugees are central. That networks are the key for understanding processes of migration and escape, is a commonly shared view within new theories of migration research.^{15, 16} The movements appear as social processes that are made possible through exchange and networking between groups. The decisions on the followed route depend on the networks a person belongs to. From this perspective, refugees’ behaviour can only be understood by considering them as members of groups with shared interests going beyond personal connections. It is not primarily an individual process.¹⁷ Consequently, Papadopoulos and Tsianos describe migration as

“a constitutive moment of the current social transformation; a moment which is primarily sustained by cooperation, solidarity, the use of broad networks and resources, shared knowledge, collective anticipation”¹⁸.

Using this theoretical background as well as the distinction between invisible and visible forms of refugees’ agency, I will analyse empirical data on media usage of refugees and show how media contributes to collective refugees’ agency.

3 MEDIA (USE) FOR REFUGEES’ NETWORKS

Refugees use a variety of media for networking, ranging from traditional ones to digital technologies. These are also used in different ways. People might, for example, use social media or online platforms, although not

15 Cp. Sonja Haug, *Klassische und neuere Theorien der Migration*, Working Paper 30, Mannheim, Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung, 2000.

16 This includes research on forced migration or refugee studies.

17 There is an individual type of refugees’ agency based on pragmatism, self-esteem and purposefulness I explored during field research in Italy about movements of refugees, illegals and asylum seekers within Schengen. But considering media which are basically used for networking the individual type is not relevant here.

18 Dimitris Papadopoulos, and Vassilis Tsianos, “The Autonomy of Migration. The Animals of Undocumented Mobility”, in: Anna Hickey-Moody, and Peta Malins (eds.), *Deleuzian Encounters. Studies in Contemporary Social Issues*, Basingstoke/Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 223–235, here: 230f.

via mobile internet. At the same time, physical technologies like mobile phones are not only used for communication, but might also serve as investment-instruments during migration processes. They could be exchanged for money or they could function as a pledge for part of their journey. Different forms of media can also be combined. Tsianos cites the case of Syrian refugees who researched their route on Google Maps and printed it before starting their journey.¹⁹ Accordingly, the general term ‘media’ also refers to printing, text-messaging and phone calls, which are important instruments for refugees to organise their route.

Recent research has focused on how refugees have used digital media. Dekker and Engbersen, who were already highly aware about refugees using new technologies well before the expansion of the Balkan route in 2015, conducted interviews with migrants about their reasons for migration to the Netherlands.²⁰ According to their results, digital technology facilitates migration. It helps to be in contact with friends and family, to mobilise weak ties, but also to create latent ties.²¹ However, it has to be taken into account that – because of the easy access to social media – platforms and forums can be exploited by other interest groups, like traffickers or the police. For instance, Frontex operated on social media with fake profiles.²²

For Tsianos, it is not a surprise that refugees are familiar with new technologies and – despite certain risks – use them during their escape. According to him, one needs to recognise that it is not the poorest people who move. As such, these people have the economic background to afford technical devices. Additionally, refugees – like many people on the move – are adapters of new technologies. Of course digital technologies which facilitate communication in a globalized world are especially useful for those acting transnationally.²³

Nevertheless, different preferences and migration routes lead to varied outcomes. Due to inherently irregular processes, escape is often accompanied by great adversity. This also implies to the Balkan route where refugees’ “digital nativity” was restricted when the police confiscated mobile phones from refugees crossing the Greek and

19 Cp. Vassilis Tsianos, “Smartphones sind für Flüchtlinge überlebenswichtig”, *Wired Deutschland*, August 23, 2015. Available at: <https://www.wired.de/collection/life/ohne-smartphones-hatten-fluchtlinge-kaum-eine-chance-sagt-der-migrationsforscher> [accessed November 9, 2016].

20 Cp. Rianne Dekker, and Godfried Engbersen, *How social media transform migrant networks and facilitate migration*, Working Paper 64, Oxford, University of Oxford, 2012.

21 Cp. Dekker and Engbersen, *How social media transform migrant networks and facilitate migration*, p. 1.

22 Cp. Tsianos, “Smartphone sind für Flüchtlinge überlebenswichtig”.

23 Cp. Tsianos, “Smartphone sind für Flüchtlinge überlebenswichtig”.

Bulgarian borders.²⁴ Still, the Balkan route is hardly comparable to the Mediterranean route and the Sub-Saharan sub-routes connected to it, for example, where people pass politically fragile states, where they confront adverse environmental conditions, where they are at the mercy of traffickers, and where the infrastructure is lacking for uninterrupted use of mobile internet. Of course this varies across the route, but considering the crossing of the Sahara and in many cases, the detention of refugees in Libya, the circumstances of escape can be much harder than those that shape the Balkan route. Furthermore, the background of the refugees plays a role in how they utilise media during escape. An interview participant from the Ivory Coast who made his way to Europe via the Mediterranean route, assigned little meaning to social media during transit because in his opinion many refugees from Sub Sahara could not afford new communication technologies:

“The refugees come from different countries and two thirds from developing countries and countries where politics control the media. Communication technologies are not reachable for them, especially for those from the countryside. Poverty also plays a role. Electricity is luxury.”

Consequently, refugees’ economic background has an influence on which media they use as Tsianos also suggests above. But any media basically helps to communicate with others. Though, different forms of media usage suggest that they also contribute differently to refugees’ agency. They might contribute to invisible collective agency as well as to visible collective agency. On the one hand information is spread via media that gives refugees the opportunity to bypass border controls.

3.1 Media Usage and Invisible Migrant Agency

Utilising media can help refugees to remain invisible under the radar of the bureaucratic state, for instance because they organise themselves independently during the movement without the support of public services. As a survey of Media in Cooperation and Transition – MiCT based on interviews with Syrian and Iraqi²⁵ refugees showed, firstly route relevant information and secondly information to satisfy basic needs such as food, security or housing was considered as most crucial during escape by the interviewees.²⁶ Both kinds of data were preferably gathered from social networks, WhatsApp, Viber, Skype and/or other VoIP

24 Cp. Tsianos, “Smartphone sind für Flüchtlinge überlebenswichtig”.

25 Most likely those must have fled along the Balkan region.

26 Cp. Media in Cooperation and Transition – MiCT, “Information to go”. Interviews were conducted in Germany with refugees that at the most had been living two years there.

services; especially Facebook was named during the interviews.²⁷ To have access to this information was the most important need during escape.

“The survival of individuals and families was dependent upon their access to, and membership of, the aforementioned cycle of relevant information. This is why the provision of communications equipment and ongoing access to information during transit was described as a ‘meta-need’ and one that was prioritised above other needs.”²⁸

The refugees mainly learned about data to satisfy basic needs from other refugees whom they trusted more than European official media. They shared their experience during transit and after arriving to some country of arrival.²⁹ When I was in Pireus, Athens a Syrian refugee for instance invited me to get to know his family living in Germany via a Whatsapp call with his phone. This cheap and practical way of communication was for him crucial to be in contact with those that had already arrived in Western Europe and to organise his escape by communicating with them. The circumstances of escape are changed profoundly through these permanent communication processes. In the presented examples the refugees in transit gave and took information on their own initiative without any form of superior management and organised themselves independently. In other words:

“Digitality and the new knowledge forms contained and transmitted are a vital organizing force. This force generates and shapes various mobile commons which are an essential acquisition resulting from the collective power to reshape the world of people on the move.”³⁰

The information spread along the routes contained for example the price of taxis, recommendable hotels, where to charge phones, where to buy equipment to sleep outdoors, what traffickers to trust and how to avoid the police.³¹ Through a permanent sharing of information refugees on the Balkans were able to organise themselves in solidarity between the continents, as the results from the MiCT survey show.³²

Refugees also share almost real-time information about the border situations. Individuals document their routes for example through video sharing in social media. Due to the real-time exchange refugee

27 Cp. Media in Cooperation and Transition – MiCT, “Information to go”, p. 5.

28 Cp. Media in Cooperation and Transition – MiCT, “Information to go”, p. 7.

29 Cp. Morten Freidel, “Schlag nach bei Facebook”, in *FAZ Online*, September 20, 2015. Available at: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/auf-dem-fluechtlingsstreck-schlag-nach-bei-Facebook-13812602.html> [accessed November 10, 2016], p. 2.

30 Trimikliniotis et al., *Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*, p. 8.

31 Cp. Trimikliniotis et al., *Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*, p. 1.

32 Cp. Media in Cooperation and Transition – MiCT, “Information to go”, p. 7.

movements are able to react flexibly to new challenges during escape. Their digital mobility through smartphones contributes to their geographical mobility. This became obvious when the border to Hungary was closed at the end of September 2015 and new routes via Croatia were rapidly spread on the internet, many on social media.³³ Accordingly the refugee movements changed immediately and could continue their movement towards Central and Western Europe. The real-time data also contributes to refugees avoiding border controlling like the registration through fingerprints because they have the latest information about uncontrolled routes. Interview partner Luigi from an international aid organisation working in a refugee camp in Rome that was mainly occupied by Eritreans on transit described these refugees as very effective in avoiding controls. Following him they were networking a lot through phones and internet and could plan their route through Europe avoiding Dublin law because they had the actual information about the border situations. Consequently they could take routes where they stayed invisible and avoid to be stopped, sent back or controlled.

To draw attention to the various forms of media usage by refugees and how it relates to their invisible agency I would like to reflect furthermore upon a case from the border between Mexico and the United States. Newell and Gomey conducted interviews on information seeking and technology use with recently deported or other migrants³⁴ in the border region of Mexico.³⁵ Within their investigation they found out that the migrants primarily gathered information through word of mouth. They exchanged information within intricate networks that have little representation in traditional or digital media.³⁶ Certainly, the interviewees used mobile phones, but mainly for calls with their families. This is because the phones pose a danger to them and their friends and families in the border region:

“At the border the use of phones, and especially the disclosure of one’s contacts’ phone numbers, are a window to extortion and abuse. At the border, the cell phone that was a lifeline and a useful tool becomes a liability, and the comfort of having a

33 Cp. Stephan Dörner et al. “WhatsApp und Facebook machen Flucht erst möglich”, in *Die Welt Online*, September 23, 2015. Available at: <https://www.welt.de/wirtschaft/article146756198/WhatsApp-und-Facebook-machen-Flucht-erst-moeglich.html> [accessed November 10, 2016].

34 Newell and Gomey used the term “migrants” which I adopt here. Cp. Bryce C. Newell, and Ricardo Gomez, “Informal Networks, Phones and Facebook. Information Seeking and Technology Use by Undocumented Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border”, *iConference Proceedings*, 2015.

35 Cp. Newell and Gomey, “Informal Networks, Phones and Facebook. Information Seeking and Technology Use by Undocumented Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border”.

36 Cp. Newell and Gomey, “Informal Networks, Phones and Facebook. Information Seeking and Technology Use by Undocumented Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border”, p. 6.

list of phone numbers of friends or family to call becomes a risk.”³⁷

This draws attention to the adversities this particular migration route is accompanied by. At the Mexican-U.S. border it is common for migrants to be robbed by gangs, mafia, or crooked police officers. And the phones pose a special danger to them and their families as it is increasingly common for their abusers to call the migrants’ relatives to coerce or extort payments for the release of their relative.³⁸ However, the research found out that the non-mobile use of social media presents a mean of contact for the migrants during border crossing. Half of the interviewees had a Facebook account and drew on it during transit. Following them the use of Facebook is less risky than that of mobile phones and protects not only them but also their families from abuse and crime.³⁹ This example shows that refugees select between certain media and forms of media usage with the objective of staying invisible. Carrying a mobile phone with them during border crossing could have made them visible because somebody could abuse the information about her/him on the phone. They, by contrast, wanted to stay invisible, not only for state actors but also for human traffickers, and consequently selected the appropriate media.

3.2 Media Usage and Visible Migrant Agency

Several examples also suggest that the utilisation of media contributes to a visible migrant agency. Accordingly gaining visibility is a strategy to get access to rights. Social media like Facebook and Twitter for instance are suitable media because information spread through the networks can have a huge range of coverage. Trimikliniotis et al. mention Guantanamo Italia, a protest of Tunisian refugees that were detained in Lampedusa and later sent back to their country of origin. There, they organised a six-months hunger strike to protest against their deportation. Videos and information about their situation were then uploaded on a Facebook page specifically established by a friend. That is how their demand for rights in the end even reached Al Jazeera and France 24 and was consequently spread globally.⁴⁰

Social media use also contributed to the visible agency of refugees

37 Newell and Gomey, “Informal Networks, Phones and Facebook. Information Seeking and Technology Use by Undocumented Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border”.

38 Cp. Newell and Gomey, “Informal Networks, Phones and Facebook. Information Seeking and Technology Use by Undocumented Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border”, pp. 7–8.

39 Cp. Newell and Gomey 2015, “Informal Networks, Phones and Facebook. Information Seeking and Technology Use by Undocumented Migrants at the U.S.-Mexico Border”, p. 8.

40 Cp. Trimikliniotis et al., *Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*, p. 13.

fleeing through the Balkan region when at the beginning of September the hashtag #marchofhope was spread all over the world. The photos of their collective movement marching with banners from Budapest via the motorways towards Western Europe recall a demonstration, a political act, refugees standing up for mobility. The term “March of Hope” expresses this political character of the migrant collective that had a certain impact on some destination countries. Germany’s and Austria’s decision to receive refugees was at least influenced by visual impressions of the March of Hope.

“The march toward the West, which quickly became known under the hashtag #marchofhope, progressed relatively fast and soon reached a two-lane motorway. The images of this march will surely find their place in the iconography of this long summer of migration: a line of people formed who, after a week of waiting, reappropriated their own mobility to collectively and defiantly leave Budapest. [...] Under the pressure of these images and with the knowledge that a repressive strategy had failed, Germany and Austria announced that they would open their borders and admit the migrants.”⁴¹

Following this quotation the use of social media and their contribution to the visibility of the refugees was highly successful. Nevertheless also other media than social networks can help to make migrant agency visible. Phones, for example. Boat refugees crossing the Mediterranean set up alarms with their mobile phones when they have naval accidents. Accordingly, the *WatchTheMed-Alarmphone*, an independent hotline for boat people in distress, had been contacted several hundred times since its launch in autumn 2014.⁴² This shows that refugees use mobile phones for their rescue. They might organise themselves in groups and share mobile phones⁴³ – especially when they have little money – or they act within an exchange system. Using a phone in this case and setting an emergency makes the refugees visible for the rescue services and allows them to be brought safely to the European borders where they can demand asylum.

41 Bernd Kasperek, “Routes, Corridors, and Spaces of Exception. Governing Migration and Europe”, *Near Futures Online*, 1: Europe at a Crossroads, March 2016. Available at: <http://nearfuturesonline.org/routes-corridors-and-spaces-of-exception-governing-migration-and-europe> [accessed February 5, 2017], p. 5.

42 Cp. Maruice Stierl, “The WatchTheMed alarm phone. A disobedient border intervention”, in *Movements. Journal für kritische Migrations- und Grenzregimeforschung*, 1(2), 2015. Available at: <http://movements-journal.org/issues/02.kaempfe/13.stierl-watchthemed-alarmphone.html> [accessed November 13, 2016].

43 Cp. Tsianos, “Smartphone sind für Flüchtlinge überlebenswichtig”.

CONCLUSION

The examples presented highlight the types of media used by refugees, how they use them and how networking through them contributes to their collective agency. Social media provide easy access to various information and can contribute to spreading information to the public, to raise awareness for the situation of refugees and therefore to support or rescue them or to put pressure to politics. The above described case of media usage on the Balkan route presents convincing arguments in favour of considering social media as significantly important for visible collective migrant agency. However, also traditional media, like phones can contribute to refugees' visibility as the case from the Mediterranean Sea and *WatchTheMed-Alarmphone* showed.

The Mexican border with the U.S. gives more insights into the relationship between migrant media usage and route circumstances as well as consequent invisible agency strategies of refugees. Mobile media is exactly not used to stay invisible. Smartphones are desired objects for robbers or traffickers because of their value and their personal-contacts information. On the other hand examples from the Balkan route draws attention to the use of mobile media with the same intention: to stay invisible because real-time information allows to have knowledge about the actual border situation and consequently to bypass controls.

The different forms of media usage and the respective migrant strategy shows the variety of refugee movements. Refugees have different backgrounds and ideas, they take different routes and they have access to different communication tools which they use for different strategies. However, all forms of media use can contribute to their collective agency. That refugees organise themselves on the move through networks is certainly not a new phenomenon, but it is clear that these social processes are facilitated through the use of media. The examples from the Balkan route make explicit that new media are important for refugees. Their use helps them to organise themselves as highly independent subjects. But also the other examples made one thing clear: the migration-media nexus draws attention to the collective power refugees can develop.