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Cultures of unwelcome: Understanding the everyday histories of exclusionary practices – A view from across the German border

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Abstract

This article sheds light on the socio-cultural dynamics Merkel's open-door policy set in motion in Austria. Based on the Anti-Merkel discourses that came to infiltrate Austrian mainstream politics, it will show how the summer of displacements 2015 led to a pronounced move to the right. While many commentators have tended to link the post-2015 triumph of reactionary parties to the sense of crisis caused by the few months the European Union opened its borders to asylum seekers, the article demonstrates that we need to be more careful in our analyses of the roots of exclusion. By zooming in on the everydayness of anti-cosmopolitan practices in an Austrian mountain community, it argues that if we are to understand the current backlash against liberal and cosmopolitan ideas we need to pay attention to genealogies of exclusionary practices, or 'cultures of unwelcome'.

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2015, as the public became aware of the dire situation of the hundreds of thousands of refugees trying to make their way to Europe, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel famously took the decision to embark on an open-door policy that would enable asylum seekers to enter the country safely. Effectively suspending the Dublin regulation according to which the first EU member state refugees entered would have been responsible for handling their asylum cases, migrants travelling along the Balkan route were permitted to cross borders to enter Germany without police checks. Propelled by a spirit of historical reparation and the mantra of *wir schaffen das* (we

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can do this), German civil society reacted to the unprecedented numbers of arrivals with a remarkable wave of solidarity. Much has been written about the German *Willkommenskultur* (culture of welcome) emerging from the 'long summer of migration' (Hess et al., 2017) and the opposite poles of vernacular humanitarianism (Dinkelaker et al., 2021; Sutter, 2020) and anxieties over loss of control (Zehfuss, 2020) it brought about. Yet, while debates about the *Willkommenskultur* have largely focussed on Germany, Merkel's decision to temporarily suspend the EU's long-established practices of deterrence and border control set in motion a chain of events that profoundly affected the political orientation of Europe as a whole. On the one hand it led neighbouring countries to also open their doors to large numbers of asylum seekers, leading to similar displays of solidarity and the emergence of new social spaces between refugees and citizens trying to help them (Persch & Strauss, 2020; Rozakou, 2016; Sandberg & Andersen, 2020). On the other hand, Germany's 'summer of welcome' (Karakayali & Kleist, 2016: 3) was the cause of far-reaching political antagonism across Europe – a fundamental dispute about the bloc's approach to migration and cultural diversity, which did not just work to dismantle the welcoming stance towards refugees but heralded a winning streak for racist and nationalist political parties. To understand the full reach of the *Willkommenskultur* and the subsequent backlash against it, it is therefore of crucial importance to look beyond the immediate effects it had on Germany. Bridget Anderson (2017: 8) suggests that what came to be labelled the 'European refugee crisis' should rather be understood as a 'multidimensional crisis of solidarity' within the European Union. Faced with years of austerity and diminishing sovereignty, the arrival of large numbers of refugees provoked these problems to surface (Ibid).

In this article I provide a perspective from across the German border to investigate the ambiguous and multi-tiered ways this crisis of solidarity manifested itself. I provide insights into the dynamics Merkel's decision to embark on an open-door policy set in motion in Austria, a country which, by virtue of this move, was turned into one of the key arrival- and transit hubs of the refugee movements in 2015 (Rosenberger & Müller, 2020). The steps taken by its closest political and economic ally forced the Austrian government into action. This became fortified in August 2015, when the Austrian police discovered a truck with the bodies of 71 refugees who had suffocated during their attempt to reach the European Union. The tragic event sent shockwaves throughout the country, adding pressure on Interior Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner to support Merkel's idea of creating safe migration routes.[1] Like in Germany, Austrian society was gripped by a wave of civic engagement throughout these summer months, and refugees arriving in the train stations were welcomed by a sea of support (Persch & Strauss, 2020). Politicians from across the political spectrum endorsed the open-door policy – a dramatic change for a country with an established history of politics based on anti-immigration sentiments (Wodak & Pelinka, 2002).

Some scholars interpret the implosion of Europe's border regime and the emergence of the *Willkommenskultur* as a political act of subversion (Monsutti, 2018), arguing that the mobilization of thousands of refugees making their way to the Austrian border by foot in September 2015 can be seen as the direct continuation of the revolutionary transformations set in motion by the Arab spring (Hess et al., 2017: 7). Yet, this sense of euphoria did not last long. By the end of 2015, Europe was gripped by a remarkable *Stimmungswechsel* (mood swing) that fundamentally tipped public sentiments from xenophilia to xenophobia (Borneman & Ghassem-Fachandi, 2017). The brief period of openness marking Europe's approach to asylum seekers was quickly corrected through the introduction of harsh, deeply exclusionary measures aimed at re-establishing the impenetrability of fortress Europe (De Genova, 2017). Austria played a crucial role in this backlash against the open-door policy and the establishment of a 'politics of fear' (Wodak, 2015) that fostered the normalization of nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments across Europe. The young Austrian conservative politician and state secretary Sebastian Kurz was the first European political actor to publicly oppose Merkel's suggestion that there was no alternative to the open-door policy. As early as October 2015, he called upon Germany to put an end to the *Einladungspolitik* (politics of invitation), suggesting that Europe's security was endangered by uncontrolled mass migration.[2] His interjections and subsequent attempts to close the Balkan route set the tone for the growing social and political discontent with the open-door policy. It turned Austria 'into a vanguard for a closed border approach' (Gruber, 2017: 39) in Europe, and Kurz – who liked to stylize himself as the 'Anti-Merkel' (Alexander, 2017) – into the pioneer of a

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culture of unwelcome. By propagating harsh measures to curtail migration pathways, Kurz became the spearhead of a shift towards the right that did not just transform the Austrian political landscape, but had ripple effects on conservative parties across Europe.[3]

The political triumph of right-wing parties in the years succeeding the long summer of migration, as well as the move of traditionally centrist conservative parties to the right, have left deep marks on Europe's socio-political landscape. Many scholars link the anxieties the open-door policy brought to the surface to the negative effects of decades of neoliberal policies that have created an ever-growing socio-economic divide (Koppetsch, 2019; Maskovsky & Bjork-James, 2020). According to this explanatory model the pressures emanating from aggressive forms of global capitalism make citizens of European societies that once were based on tolerance and social equality look for rescue in exclusionary political ideas that promise a 'my nation first' approach. Yet, while the politics of consensus marking liberal democratic societies since the 1990s has worked to cover up many discrepancies underlying the liberal paradigm (Mouffe, 2005), in this article I aim to demonstrate that analyses of the root causes of the post-2015 migrant backlash in Europe need to go deeper – empirically and historically. The presentism marking the frameworks of crisis often deployed to make sense of people's decision to vote for right-wing parties risks overlooking historically rooted patterns of xenophobia. The Black Lives Matters movement's repeated calls to acknowledge the presence of systemic racism – echoed by the recent turn towards decolonization across the social sciences – is a critical reminder that scholars attempting to make sense of the current reactionary backlash cannot ignore the historically engrained racial hierarchies and supremacist imaginaries underlying its success (Czajka & Suchland, 2018). In this vein, Pasieka (2019: 5) stresses that there is enough evidence from social science research to suggest that 'we have never been tolerant' and that hence we need more sophisticated analyses of the success of the right. She urges scholars to properly engage with the everyday lives of people forming the support base of exclusionary political movements. Building on the growing chorus of scholars who call for more research into the dynamics of right-wing micro-mobilization (Shoshan, 2016; Szombati, 2018; Thorleifsson, 2018), the aim of my contribution to this special issue was to inquire into the socio-cultural fabric of the post-2015 mood swing against refugees in Europe. By zooming in on the everydayness of anti-cosmopolitan practices in the rural state of Carinthia, I will show that the Anti-Merkel backlash stirred up by Austrian political actors and eagerly taken over by large proportions of the public did not appear out of the blue or as the consequence of a sense of crisis seizing the population. Rather, this mood swing needs to be anchored in historically engrained practices of unwelcome towards groups labelled as too 'other' to be included in the national community.

Given that 'we seem to know quite a lot about radical right-wing ideologies, but very little about the people holding them' (Pasieka, 2019: 6), nuanced ethnographic accounts about cultures of unwelcome are of crucial importance. For migration scholars this implicates widening the field's focus to also include the experiences and perspectives of non-migrants. As counter-intuitive as the idea of moving migration studies beyond the figure of the migrant might seem, I believe that such an empirical shift can add much-needed depth to the study of the socio-political landscapes migrants and refugees must navigate. By 'de-migranticising' (Dahinden, 2016) migration studies, we can come to a more nuanced understanding of the *intersubjective* dynamics marking migrants' reception in European societies (Lems, 2020a). It allows creating a more detailed picture of the cultures of welcome or unwelcome they encounter, and how inclusionary or exclusionary dynamics are made and unmade (Hoehne & Scharrer, 2022). Building on these epistemological points of departure, this article does not focus on the lifeworlds of refugees who arrived in Europe in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis – a perspective that remains central to the field and which I have taken up elsewhere (Lems, 2019, 2020b) – but on the experiences of people who perceive the presence of migrants as a threat to their values and ways of life. By digging deeper into the social dynamics driving the backlash against the open-door policy in Austria, I will show that the post-2015 mood swing and subsequent success of right-wing parties did not boil up overnight. Rather, they are rooted in genealogies of anti-cosmopolitan practices – or cultures of unwelcome – that fundamentally challenge the hegemony of the liberal paradigm.

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METHODOLOGICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

The case study I base my inquiry into the root causes of the post-summer-2015 mood swing on emerges from on-going ethnographic research in the *Nockberge* (Nock mountains) region in Austria's southernmost state of Carinthia. Having spent many years studying the experiences of refugees traversing integration and mobility regimes, the forcefulness of the backlash against the *Willkommenskultur* propelled me to return to the rural municipality I grew up in and conduct village ethnography at/of home. Given the long-lasting influence of right-wing political parties such as the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) on Carinthia's political make-up, the region formed an interesting point of departure for studying the social currents underlying exclusionary ideas and practices. For over a decade Carinthia was the ideological bastion of notorious populist right-wing politician Jörg Haider (Ottomeyer, 2010), and after a short break during which his party fell out of favour, the post-2015 anti-immigration backlash allowed the FPÖ to return reinvigorated, with 33% of the Carinthian population voting for it in the national elections in October 2017 (URL 1). These elections were entirely fought and won through the political mobilization of the anti-refugee sentiments that the open-door policy had brought to the fore (Plasser & Sommer, 2018), allowing the Christian Democrats (ÖVP) under Chancellor Kurz and the far-right FPÖ to gain a stable majority and form a coalition government.

The *Nockberge* region in Upper Carinthia where my research is based has been an epicentre of support for far-right and fascist parties for a long time (Thonhauser, 2020: 230), even though this support has not always been stable and was counterpoised by the success of the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ). The communities I study are located in the wider geographical area of the Alpe-Adria region, an Alpine border triangle between Austria, Slovenia and Italy. The region has thus always been linked into a world of movement and interconnection: The centuries-old trading routes between the Mediterranean and Central Europe criss-crossing this region are often described as symbolic of European integration (Valentin, 1998). At the same time, it has a long history of opposition against the political decisions taken in the urban centres. Throughout the centuries Carinthia has been depicted as the rural, backward periphery, leading to fractious relationships with the changing centres of power. The post-2015 backlash against Merkel's open-door policy thus links into historically engrained suspicion towards decisions being ordered from 'above'. Even though Carinthia took in a relatively small number of asylum seekers and most people living in villages in Upper Carinthia had never encountered a refugee, many were outraged by the open-doors policy.

In my research I try to come to a deeper understanding of the source of this outrage. Through participant observation in heritage clubs (*Traditionsvereine*) and everyday life in mountain villages in the Nockberge region, I aim to find out how it feeds into a longer history of anti-cosmopolitan ideas and practices. Starting with exploratory fieldwork in 2016, I have since conducted 12 months of ethnographic research, and while the outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic considerably slowed down my research pace, I have been able to build up relationships with a stable group of clubs and informants whom I collaborate with closely. There are about 50 clubs within the municipality. I regularly attend the events and gatherings of 10 clubs that have a distinct focus on the preservation of local cultural heritage. They include the *Perchtenverein*, a group of people who aim to preserve the tradition of the *Krampus*, the shooting association (*Schützenverein*), and clubs aiming to keep alive the treasury of Carinthian songs (*Heimatlieder*). The events they organize vary from religious or cultural festivities to spontaneously organized concerts, performances or social gatherings. I take fieldnotes of the social and cultural dynamics I observe during these events and of the conversations I have with people or that they have between each other. Besides these forms of participant observation, I cooperate more closely with the largest heritage club, the *Heimatverein* (homeland club). I participate in their weekly meetings, accompany the most active club members in their day-to-day activities and conduct life story interviews with them. Given that many of the club members are connected to other villagers through kinship ties, the interview sessions often lead to people outside the club who are also keen to share their life stories – sometimes in recorded settings and sometimes in face-to-face conversations of which I take written notes. Prior to taking up fieldwork, I informed the club members and village inhabitants about my

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research project, the methods I deploy and their right to decide autonomously whether they wanted to partake in it. Despite the sensitive political topics I touch upon in my research project, almost all of the clubs and individuals I contacted were open to it, and the vast majority was even quite keen to participate.

Inspired by phenomenological approaches to anthropological fieldwork (Jackson, 1996), my research is driven by an interest in studying phenomena as they are lived, experienced and made sense of by my research participants. This means that my focus lies on the micro-dimensions of political meaning-making. By accompanying village inhabitants in their everyday pathways, attending social gatherings, conducting recorded life storytelling sessions and participating in the activities of the local *Heimat* (homeland) movement, I zoom in on the rhythms and particularities marking everyday life in this rural region. Rather than asking my participants to respond to pre-formulated problems through questionnaires or interviews, I work with the ethnographic method of immersion, as it allows me to observe political meaning-making processes from up close (Schatz, 2003). While recorded life storytelling sessions play a role in my research (I have conducted about fifteen such interviews so far), interviews often only give a reductive sense of how people actually live their lives. Participant observation is therefore my main research instrument, as it allows me to zoom in on everyday actions and interactions and shed light on the contradictoriness and messiness of meaning-making processes.

The data this article is based on consists of about seventy ethnographic field protocols and interview transcripts. Like most anthropological work, the analysis of my research data is an interpretive undertaking (Geertz, 1973) that is characterized by continuous movements of zooming in and out of the micro and macro-dimensions of social life. The aim of this practice of ethnographic analysis is to interpret phenomena by understanding how the people anthropologists study themselves make sense of them. Rather than approaching my research data through pre-formulated analytical categorizations or patterns, I develop analytical categories from the ground up, by letting my ethnographic material speak. As Clifford Geertz, one of the founding figures of interpretive anthropology, poignantly put it in an interview, anthropological interpretation is 'fundamentally about getting some idea of how people conceptualize, understand their world, what they are doing, how they are going about doing it, to get an idea of their world' (Geertz quoted in Panourgiá & Kavouras, 2008).[4]

I believe that immersive ethnographic perspectives that aim to understand phenomena as they are lived and made sense of on the ground are particularly insightful in the post-2015 political climate in Europe. A growing number of people are turning their backs on liberal democratic values, such as inclusion, diversity and progress – often based on alternative, intensely exclusionary readings of the past and belonging to place. Commentators have been quick to point the finger at residents of periphery towns, whose nostalgic longings for a heroic past is seen to distort their ability to live in a modern, cosmopolitan and globalized here and now. Yet, while the question of what fuels the backlash against refugees is pressing, little credence is given to the people actually living in rural towns and villages and how they experience and make sense of global transformations. This lack of engagement with rural places in relation to the effects of globalization is also evident in migration studies, where research on migrant reception has only recently started to move beyond urban settings (Schech, 2014; Weidinger & Kordel, 2020; Wilding & Nunn, 2018). To gain a deeper understanding of the paradoxes of globalization that commentators have invariably written into the domain of the city, I explicitly work with a rural lens. This necessitates both, a sensitivity towards rural-urban divides that have relegated many places in the European countryside to the economic and cultural periphery of a globalized world, and the often deeply exclusionary place-making practices inhabitants of rural places have developed in response.

AGAINST MERKEL'S 'MULTIKULTI'

The remarkable display of solidarity by ordinary citizens marking the arrival of thousands of refugees in Austria in the summer of 2015 was not restricted to the cities. The wave of compassion also made its way to the countryside, where a flurry of activities sprung up from within civil society. This was also the case in my fieldsite in

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Carinthia. Many village inhabitants were touched by the media images of refugee children living under dismal conditions along the Balkan route and started to collect clothes, toys, and other items the migrants needed to start their new lives in Austria. The Catholic Church – an influential force in Carinthia – repeatedly called for *Nächstenliebe* (brotherly love) with the newly arrived (URL 2), and the local theatre club in the district capital of Spittal attempted to create bridges between refugees and the local population by inviting the Syrian and Afghan inhabitants of a nearby asylum seekers' home to attend their play (URL 3). With close to 90,000 asylum applications, Austria was amongst the European countries with the largest intake of asylum seekers per capita in 2015 (European Commission, 2016). This created a vast demand for reception facilities, and rural towns and villages were asked to help shouldering the situation. Between June and November 2015, the number of municipalities hosting asylum seekers doubled, with a considerable proportion of the homes located in rural areas (Rosenberger & Müller, 2020). Many mayors of the municipalities where my fieldwork is located also indicated their communities' willingness to host refugees. Yet, the big rush never materialized in this part of Austria. At the peak of the refugee crisis, 5900 asylum seekers lived in Carinthia (URL 4), that is a mere one per cent of the state's total population. Only three of the 33 municipalities in the borough of Spittal in the *Nockberge* region hosted refugees (URL 5), most of whom did not stay for long. Discontent with living in remote villages where they were isolated from their diasporic communities and work opportunities, some refugees even went on a strike by blocking the traffic on a local road (URL 6). By June 2018, the state had closed most of the asylum seekers facilities that had sprung up in 2015. By then only 2.527 refugees remained in the entire state of Carinthia (URL 4).

With under 8% of the population in their borough being foreign residents (URL 7) – most of whom are wealthy Dutch and German owners of holiday homes – statistically speaking people living in my fieldsite had little chance of ever encountering a refugee. Yet, by 2016 people's feelings were running high. The welcoming atmosphere had swung around, and a considerable proportion of the Carinthian population now questioned the validity of the open-door policy towards refugees. In the municipalities where my fieldwork is located this mood swing towards xenophobia showed in angry protests against the local government's plan to accommodate three refugee families (URL 8) and attacks against an asylum seekers' home (URL 9). But the general atmosphere of discontent also showed itself in more mundane, everyday settings. Ordinary conversations frequently veered into debates about the supposed danger emanating from the uncontrolled influx of refugees. While colloquial in nature, these conversations were more than random opinions. Taken together, they added up, thereby revealing the deep social and political fault lines of the refugee crisis. To detect shared patterns and ideas I started to listen more intently to the common-sense ideas about the open-door policy circulating in the village.

A conversation with 50-year-old carpenter Hubert is a case in point. It is representative of the exclusionary everyday acts of political meaning-making I came across during my fieldwork on a daily basis. The conversation occurred on a Monday morning in the summer of 2019. Hubert had come to my father's house to install fly screens. He had read about my research project in the community newspaper, where I had placed an announcement describing my fieldwork intentions. This made him curious to know more about my work. Chatting about my previous research with refugee communities, Hubert asked: 'What do you as an expert have to say about all these so-called 'cultures' coming over?' I did not get a chance to respond. 'They say that it is our destiny, that these people are coming and that we just have to live with Merkel's *Multikulti* from now on', he added. Like many other villagers, Hubert was deeply sceptical of the paradigm of multiculturalism he believed Angela Merkel to stand for. 'Ah well, soon enough we will see where this leads to'. I asked where he thought it would lead to. 'Well, nothing good', he responded. 'It won't end well. They bring all their problems from Africa and everywhere'. 'You think so?' I asked. 'Sure', he said. 'And this is all orchestrated from above, from the highest sources'. I asked what he believed the powerful sources he was referring to were trying to orchestrate by allowing refugees to enter Europe. 'Well, they are globalists, they want to extinguish us and create one single nation, the entire world', Hubert replied. 'They don't want any difference; they just want to govern us all as one'. He gave me one last piece of advice. If I wanted to study the local population, he said, I needed to be fast. Before long nothing might be left of them anymore.

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This deeply engrained suspicion of political and intellectual elites and the fear of being overrun by foreigners was a recurring sentiment. The thoughts of Hans, a waiter in the local village pub, are another case in point. He was a seasonal worker in his early forties. While in the summer months he worked in the village pub, in the winter he was employed as a ski instructor. Like on the many occasions when I attended the pub to talk to village inhabitants or members from a heritage club, on this particular summer evening Hans was keen to have a chat. The conversation started with the usual exchange of village gossip: X married Y, and Z built a new house. He mentioned that his oldest daughter now attended kindergarten. Suddenly his mood changed. Hans expressed anger and frustration about the fact that he had to pay 15 Euros per week for his child's kindergarten. This was a new rule, intended to cover children's meals. Hans was angered by this measure he believed to be ordered from 'above' – the political elite in Vienna. He argued that it was five times the prize it would cost to prepare a lunchbox at home for his daughter. When I suggested that it was perhaps not such a bad idea as it enabled the kindergarten teachers to ensure all children were well fed and received healthy food, Hans became even more agitated. He veered into a rant about the *kind of* children needing such a type of intervention, making explicit that the children he was aiming at were the kids of immoral and lazy refugees. Hans painted a dark picture of the future awaiting Austria if we were to allow small steps such as the introduction of kindergarten meals to go ahead. Similar to Hubert, the future he imagined was a future in which radical Muslim migrants had taken over the country and in which Austrians would be forbidden to eat their beloved pork meat sausages or drink beer. Hans was convinced that it was up to 'us' Europeans to prevent this terrible future from becoming a reality. When I asked how he intended to get to this future emptied of migrants, given that so many of them had the right to live in Austria, Hans did not have to think long. 'All we have to do is learn from the past', he said. Contrary to my expectation that he was hinting at the prevention of the terrible atrocities committed by the Nazis in this region prior to and during the second world war, his look into the past revealed a different lesson. 'Not everything Hitler did was bad. He actually had some good ideas'. Hans was convinced that if we were to prevent a future in which people like 'us' are going to be extinguished, we needed to re-read history and make some drastic decisions.

The conversations with Hans and Hubert capture brief, rather disjointed moments – common-sense exchanges about politics as they occur in the realm of the everyday. Yet, the exclusionary narratives they reveal should not be written off as isolated, extremist derailments of frustrated individuals. Throughout my fieldwork the idea of the 'globalist', 'Multikulti', paradigm attempting to destroy local traditions and lifestyles appeared again and again. Imaginaries of the European Union as representative of this paradigm go hand in hand with stories about Vienna as the bulwark of liberal elites enforcing their agendas on the lives of 'everyday men and women'. Critiques of global capitalism mingle with neo-fascist fears of a *Bevölkerungsaustausch* – the planned replacement of the local population with migrants. Hans and Hubert's ideas thus link into wider meaning-making practices in this rural area, which are driven by an overriding fear of cultural extinction. Questioning the validity of ideas that are foundational to modern democratic societies, these everyday politics of belonging are by no means banal. They actively challenge and undermine the liberal cosmopolitan paradigm.

Many scholars have ascribed the post-2015 mood swing to the events surrounding New Year's Eve 2015/16, when the media reported about hundreds of cases of sexual assault in the German city of Cologne, allegedly carried out by young men of African and Middle Eastern refugee background (Borneman & Ghassem-Fachandi, 2017; Scheibelhofer, 2017). The events in Cologne fundamentally changed the public view on the welcoming stance towards refugees. Increasingly, the open-door policy was made responsible for importing a range of problems that were threatening to derail Europe. Yet, while New Year's Eve 2015/16 clearly formed a political turning point, I believe that the roots of the anti-refugee mood swing lie deeper than this one moment of crisis. Scheibelhofer (2017: 106) aptly points out that the move from an empathetic attitude towards an exclusionary one 'was accomplished by drawing on an already existing archive of knowledge about dangerous foreign masculinity'. The post-2015 mood swing thus did not appear from a temporal void. Rather, the exclusionary sentiments that Merkel's open-door policy swept to the surface are inextricably linked to historically engrained patterns of anti-cosmopolitan thought and practice.

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ANALYSIS: ANTI-COSMOPOLITAN ARCHIVES OF KNOWLEDGE

In the final part of the article, I have a closer look at the archives of knowledge feeding into the backlash against the *Willkommenskultur* and highlight the complex yet fundamental ways local, national and transnational dynamics complemented each other in the race to the bottom of European refugee reception. In using the term 'archive of knowledge' I do not refer to institutionalized forms of storing, ordering and disseminating knowledge about the past. I use it as a heuristic that allows me to trace the socio-cultural genealogy of collectively shared truths and shed light on how they are woven into the texture of the everyday. I deploy a 'multiscalar' (Cağlar & Glick-Schiller, 2018) lens to take into account the various spatial and temporal layers playing into the post-2015 mood swing. Importantly, such a conjunctural perspective allows me to interpret 'sociospatial spheres of practice that are constituted in relationship to each other and within various hierarchies of networks of power' (Cağlar & Glick-Schiller, 2018: 8). My analysis will thus be threefold: First, I shed light on the *local* archives of knowledge people living in the *Nockberge* region reverted to in their turn towards anti-immigrant sentiments. Such an emplaced view is of crucial importance given that much of the affective shift succeeding the summer of 2015 was propelled by fears of locals becoming 'strangers in their own land' (Hochschild, 2016). On a second level, I provide insights into the *national* archives of knowledge feeding into these collective anxieties. It allows me to show how the Carinthian case study is knit together with historical processes in Austria, that have nurtured the creation of migration-related mood swings. Thirdly, I will look at the ways these dynamics are woven into *transnational* archives of knowledge that have shaped a Europe-wide approach towards refugees that is characterized by a distinct sense of 'moodiness'.

Local archives of knowledge

The two everyday conversations about migration with Hubert and Hans introduced above form helpful entry points into an analysis of the locally shaped historical repositories towards refugee newcomers in the *Nockberge* region. The conversations snippets show a common trope through which many of my research participants expressed their discontent with 'Merkel's *Multikulti*' approach. Tapping into 'great replacement' conspiracy theories brought into life by far-right networks and spread on social media, Hans and Hubert both articulated the fear of ordinary white, Christian Austrians being replaced by migrants. These ideas circulate widely across the communities I work with, encapsulated in a commonly shared sense that the political and cultural elites in Vienna, Brussels or Strasbourg are not to be trusted. Rather than representing the interests of ordinary men and women, they are believed to follow their sinister own motives, attempting to impose a new world order that will see cosmopolitan ideologies displace local values and customs. In 2016, Merkel and the *Willkommenskultur* turned into key representatives of these fears. While the open-door policy towards refugees was a catalyst for the emergence of a collective sense of anxiety, the narratives about cultural demise underlying the mood swing against refugees were not new. They link into local repositories of knowledge that continuously reproduce the fear that Carinthian values and traditions are facing extinction.

The historical embeddedness of this fear can be seen in the local population's treatment of the Slovenian-speaking minority that has been living side-by-side with German-speakers in the Carinthian border region for many centuries (Minnich, 1998). Mirroring the fear of extinction propelling the post-2015 mood swing, Slovenians have long been treated as less 'modern' or 'civilized' and as threats to the local and national order of things. Studies have shown these dynamics to be historically constituted in centuries of othering non-German groups within the Habsburg Empire. Through processes of 'internal colonization' (Feichtinger, 2003) or 'frontier orientalism' (Gingrich, 1996), Slavic, Muslim and other non-German speaking groups came to be treated as less civilized, backward and non-European. Excluding members of the Slovenian minority from social and political life, they were pushed to the margins of society. The explosive potential of these dynamics became tragically apparent during the 1930s and 1940s, when the state of Carinthia formed a stronghold of Nazi support (Pirker & Profunser, 2012).

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During these years, members of the Slovenian minority living in the border region were subject to dispossession, expulsion, torture and murder. Although the armed resistance movement led by Slovenian partisans was crucial to the victory of the allied troops in Austria (Pirker, 2017), in Carinthia they continue to be described as traitors and deserters who planned the state's annexation by Slovenia. Indeed, the fear that if given more rights, the Slovenian minority will take the chance to take over Carinthia and displace the German-speaking population, is so engrained that they have not only been denied a space within official narratives of the past (Pirker & Profunser, 2012), but even the basic right of bilingual street signs (Gully, 2011). Members of heritage clubs and German-speaking inhabitants of bilingual villages participated in a vicious, three-decade long stand-off with politicians in Vienna who insisted that it was the constitutional right of Slovenian speakers to have street signs written in their own language. Fuelled by the idea that Carinthians had a right to defend 'their own' land against intruders, they organized local vigilante groups who dismantled bilingual street signs every time the authorities attempted to erect them. These fears of foreign subversion are actively kept alive in influential heritage clubs such as the *Kärntner Abwehrkämpferbund* (Carinthian League of Defence Fighters) or traditional shooting associations (*Bürgergarden*). Tracing back their origins to historical moments when locals united to defend 'their' homeland from the intrusion of foreign forces, club members gather on important public holidays to re-enact their victory over unwanted intruders or perform their readiness to protect their 'own' traditions and people.

These historically engrained anxieties of extinction feed off distinct anti-liberal and anti-cosmopolitan archives of knowledge which are cultivated and maintained in key social institutions of Carinthian society (such as the heritage clubs) and demarcate important everyday sites for shared political meaning-making. The German-speaking Alpine region formed one of the key imaginaries for a school of thought emerging in the early nineteenth century that stood in opposition to the liberal ideals promoted by Enlightenment thinkers (Berlin, 2000). In this tradition the notion of alienation (*Entfremdung*) plays a crucial role, as it emphasizes the deep sense of uprooting that is believed to be the effect of the 'emptiness of cosmopolitanism' characterizing liberal ideals (Holmes, 2000). The German-speaking Alpine region, and particularly the figure of the rural mountain peasant who is forced to break with his traditions played a crucial role in these anti-liberal narratives. Importantly, the sense of being displaced from one's 'natural territory' or *Heimat* does not necessarily entail any form of physical dislocation. It is often purely figurative – a sense that liberal, cosmopolitan agendas force people to break with their enduring traditions and attachments to place in exchange for 'rootless' lifestyles. The anti-refugee narratives I encountered in my fieldsite were driven by similar ideas. Merkel's open-door policy turned into the epitome of the social and cultural degradation caused by the cosmopolitan paradigm, and village inhabitants once again emphasized the need to protect what was dear to them from intruders.

I encountered traces of these local anti-cosmopolitan archives of knowledge everywhere I went. I encountered them in people's oppositional stance towards Vienna and the villagers' self-depiction as proud and independent mountain people and fierce opponents to the changes imposed upon them by liberal city elites. I found them in the heritage clubs I worked with who saw the preservation of the populations' 'natural' cultural ties to the land as their core task. And I encountered them in the care people invested in keeping alive the memories of people who lost their lives fighting for their Carinthian *Heimat* – even if most of them died in the cause of Nazism. The anti-refugee mood swing was therefore not an exceptional sentiment. While the open-door policy set in motion a wave of new anxieties, these anxieties were linked to established ways of meaning-making in this rural region that are driven by ideas of extinction and demise.

National archives of knowledge

While these local historical processes play a crucial role in the formation of the mood swing against the *Willkommenskultur*, it was also enabled through sedimented national affective practices. A look into Austria's more recent history reveals that public mood swings in relation to migrants and refugees are nothing new. Rather,

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national outbursts of empathy with refugees followed by equally as passionate outbursts of anger and anxiety have marked much of the national debate on refugees in the last three decades. Until the 1990s, refugees were not a topic of public debate in Austria. While the country had faced several large migration waves since the postwar era – some of which brought double the amount of asylum seekers to Austria than the 2015 refugee crisis[5] – representatives from different parties long abided to an unspoken agreement not to use anti-migrant sentiments for political gains (Zuser, 1996: 4). While these sentiments were clearly simmering within parts of the population, expressing them openly was a taboo. This changed with the end of the Cold War when asylum seekers increasingly became a politicized question. Christmas 1989, the Austrian population enthusiastically welcomed thousands of Rumanian refugees who had escaped the bloody 'Palace Revolution' ending the Ceausescu regime. Like in the summer of 2015, countless activities sprung up from within civil society with the aim of helping the newly arrived, and media reports about the refugees were consistently positive. Yet, mirroring the post-2015 mood swing, this empathetic atmosphere did not last long. By March 1990, the media started to problematize the asylum seekers who had come to Austria, describing them as burdens to the welfare system and as threats to the social equilibrium of the towns and villages where the reception centres were located. Unlike in the previous decades, politicians did not ignore these exclusionary sentiments. Arguing that they needed to react to the bad mood that had taken hold of the population, migration turned into one of the key topics of political mobilization (Zuser, 1996: 17). Since then, the country has experienced a number of refugee-related mood swings, leading to ever-tougher measures that curtail asylum seekers' rights and possibilities. The nationalities of the migrants who are turned into the object of these anxieties are interchangeable. While in recent years the public has been particularly preoccupied with Afghan young men, similar sentiments have been expressed in relation to Nigerian, Chechen, or Albanian refugees.

The post-2015 mood swing I encountered in Carinthia thus did not come as a surprise. The anger, frustration and anxieties expressed by people like Hubert, Hans and other villagers link into a national archive of sentiments, which once opened, have led to the increased normalization of discriminatory ideas and practices. Throughout my fieldwork, people often talked about a nationally shared 'bad mood' (*schlechte Stimmung*) that was poisoning everyday life. They ascribed this mood to the uncritical acceptance of Merkel's open-door principles by politicians in Vienna. My informants interpreted this as an act of disloyalty of the Austrian government towards its own citizens. Rather than caring for the needs of its 'own' people, it prioritized the needs of strangers.

Ahmed (2015: 23) urges social scientists to take seriously the role of 'national moods'. Governments often defend strict measures on immigration policies based on the idea that they are responsive to such a national mood. They particularly like to do so by referring to the figure of the ordinary citizen who feels threatened by incoming migrants. Ahmed (2015: 23–24) stresses that we should not assume that this figure is based purely on the fabrication of feeling, as there are many layers of mediation between the government and the public mood. This includes the mainstream media, the blogosphere and everyday life, spaces where narratives are created about who counts as the public and who does not, and the 'form of feeling' this public relates to (Ibid: 24). Ahmed speaks of a national 'attunement', which she likens to the participation 'in a shared body without even being proximate to other bodies' (Ibid).

It is precisely this convoluted set of ideas and sentiments that marked the mood swing against refugees in Austria. Based on ideas of a historically constituted sense of national 'we-ness', my research participants could simultaneously call for deeply discriminatory measures against newcomers, and continue to see themselves as tolerant, open-minded citizens who were simply protecting the shared national body. Rather than interpreting the quick shift from a welcoming to an exclusionary atmosphere as a contradiction, a look into Austria's more recent past shows that such 'ugly feelings' (Ngai, 2007) have come to form a dominant pattern for dealing with questions of race and diversity. Importantly, however, these developments are not restricted to the Austrian case. They link into Europe-wide archives of knowledge regarding the treatment of refugees that have fostered the creation of such mood swings.

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Transnational archives of knowledge

The move from empathy to rejection marking the everyday engagement with refugees in the rural communities where my research is located are not purely local. Nor are they exclusively restricted to Austria. While embedded in specific local and national histories, the ideas and practices I encountered in the *Nockberge* region echo affectively charged politics of non/belonging brought to life in a European discursive space. In his ground-breaking analysis of the moral economy of the European asylum landscape, Fassin (2005) has identified a fundamental shift that has come to characterize the reception of refugees from the 1990s onwards. The political right for asylum was gradually replaced by moral sentiments, fuelling continuous public mood swings between sympathy and concern for order, or between 'compassion' and 'repression' (Fassin, 2005: 376). Within an increasingly restrictive asylum landscape, acts of compassion towards refugees only appear as 'privileged moments of collective redemption' directed at individual cases labelled humanitarian exceptions (Fassin, 2005: 375).

The flipside of these moments of compassion are the repressive backlashes that inevitably follow suite, accompanied by moralized ideas and expectations about refugees' un/deservingness – imaginaries that also crucially shaped the mood swing in Carinthia (and Austria) after the summer of welcome 2015. The refugee-related mood swings between compassion and repression are nourished by a prevailing sense of crisis. This 'crisis' is not related to the people forced to leave behind their countries due to violence, war or chronic uncertainty. Rather, the 'crisis' is seen to be constituted by Europe's inability to keep the movements of displaced people at bay (Carasthathis et al., 2018). The protected polis of Europe is considered to be threatened by an erosion of its welfare systems through immigration. Increasingly, this polis is also considered in need of protection from Muslim or black migrant populations who are believed to threaten Christian, white European values (Fassin, 2005: 381). The 2015 backlash against refugees was based on similar narratives about a perceived threat to the imagined European community.

Throughout my research in Carinthia, I have repeatedly been confronted by calls for action by village inhabitants who do not just see their particular local traditions threatened by refugees, but an imaginary space of Europeanness. Interestingly, these fears of European decline also had a unifying function in village life. This became visible in the conversations the open-door policy set in motion between two social groups in the villages that otherwise had little overlaps, namely between locals and the steady stream of retirees who have moved into the region over the past years. Many of the German and Dutch pensioners I talked to as part of my research, explained their decision to move to Carinthia as motivated by the idea of living in an area that was still untouched by migrants. They referred to the open-door policy as a critical event, a turning point that had changed their hometowns into places where they could no longer feel at home. These stories were often based on purely imaginary threats believed to emanate from the refugee newcomers – stories about criminal migrant hordes and their supposed uncontrollable behaviour that people had not experienced themselves but learned about from hearsay. The low percentage of migrants in Carinthia and the local population's care for traditions motivated these elderly German and Dutch men and women to give up their homes and family bonds in exchange for rural life in the *Nockberge* region. These narratives about the decline of European values reinforced local anti-cosmopolitan and exclusionary ideas and practices. It strengthened the local populations' resolve as it made them feel that their anti-refugee and anti-Merkel stance tied into wider networks of meaning-making. It demonstrates that the archives of knowledge propelling the resistance against the open-door policy cannot be treated as isolated, enclosed spaces of knowledge-production. These everyday archives of knowledge are highly dynamic. While taking shape locally, the post-2015 mood swing links into transnational archives of knowledge about the moral ambivalence of incoming refugees and dystopian fantasies about the imminent breakdown of the European project.

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INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IOM UN MIGRATION

CONCLUSION

In this article I have offered a perspective from beyond the German border to demonstrate the far-reaching effects of the *Willkommenskultur* and subsequent backlash against it. By providing insights from ethnographic research in a rural area of Austria, I have tried to shed light on the everyday ideas, practices and sentiments playing into the mood swing against the refugee newcomers. By moving between various spatial and temporal scales, I have argued for a more nuanced understanding of the root causes of the anti-migrant backlash. Rather than ascribing this collective mood swing solely to people's discontent with aggressive forms of global capitalism or the neoliberalization of welfare states, I have stressed that social scientists need to dig deeper. Zooming in and out of a local case study has revealed the temporal embeddedness of exclusionary sentiments. The Carinthian example has also highlighted that policies never occur in a generic political discursive space. They are anchored in a historically constituted social landscape that propels or squashes them. This socio-political landscape feeds off local, national and transnational archives of knowledge as well as particular histories of sentiments regarding questions of non/belonging.

If the Black Lives Matter Movement has been a wake-up call to societies across the world to acknowledge the existence of historically engrained practices of racialization and othering, this should equally shake up social scientists to critically examine the analytical frameworks they deploy to understand exclusionary sentiments. Rather than explaining away uncomfortable truths, in this article I have argued that we need to confront them head-on by dissecting the complex and multi-layered ways racist and xenophobic ideas are woven into the texture of the everyday. A multi-scalar approach that moves between different temporal and spatial levels allows putting the spotlight on the continued importance of place and place attachment in a hypermobile globalized world. This is what became abundantly clear in the aftermath of the summer of 2015, when people expressed great anxieties of literally being replaced by others. However, these placemaking efforts should not be romanticized. The post-2015 backlash against the open-door policy revealed the contours of historically engrained cultures of unwelcome. I have argued that social scientists should take such exclusionary ideas of belonging seriously, because they form key drivers of political micro-mobilization. Scholars therefore need to pay serious ethnographic attention to the anti-cosmopolitan and anti-liberal sentiments that form key corner stones of the wall of indifference refugees see themselves up against in contemporary European societies.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Due to the researchers' duty of care regarding the protection of informants' privacy rights, research data are not shared.

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ENDNOTES

1. Mikl-Leitner's approach to the open-door policy has been marked by deep ambiguities. Her stance went from a heart-warming welcoming scene at an Austrian train station to the threat to use violence to defend the borders, to the denial of having ever been in support of Merkel's policy. A good summary of her shifting positions can be found in the following commentary from the newspaper *Der Standard* from 5 September 2020 (last access date: 8 November 2021): https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000119651803/als-johanna-mikl-leitner-fluechtlinge-am-westbahnhof-empfing.
2. On 31 October 2015 Kurz said in an interview with the newspaper *Die Kleine Zeitung*: 'Ich wünsche mir in ganz Europa eine ehrlichere Politik. Ich wünsche mir definitiv, dass wir in Europa, vor allem auch Deutschland die Dinge endlich beim Namen nennen und klipp und klar sagen: Es braucht ein Ende der Einladungspolitik. Wir sind überfordert. Es kommen einfach zu viele Menschen'. The full interview can be accessed online (last access date: 11 May 2021): https://www.kleinezeitung.at/politik/aussenpolitik/4856227/Kurz_Wir-sind-bereits-heute-massiv-ueberfordert.
3. Many political commentators have picked up on Kurz's influence on German politics and Merkel's own party (Alexander, 2017). The friendship between Kurz and the German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer has even been described as a conservative axis against Merkel: "Eine 'Achse der Willigen' gegen Merkel", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 June 2018 (last access date: 8 November 2021): https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/seehofer-und-kurz-eine-achse-der-willigen-gegen-merkel-15637682.html.
4. The analytical categories emerging from my empirical material concern questions of belonging and non-belonging, place-attachment, alienation, social inclusion and exclusion, local identification, everyday rural politics, the politics of *Heimat* and the city-country divide.
5. In 1956, approximately 180,000 refugees from Hungary applied for asylum in Austria, in 1968/69 160,000 people from Czechoslovakia came to Austria, and in 1982 around 150.000 Polish refugees stayed in the country (Zuser, 1996: 15). Even though many of them moved on to different countries, they still left important imprints on the social fabric of the country.

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