

The Styrian *Megaphon*: Bridging representations and uneasy “conviviality” in a regional counter-public

Ich bin krank. Stela ... setzt die Worte in den Raum, als wären sie schwere Steine. Dann lenkt sie unsere Blicke dorthin, wo auch sie ihren Fokus hat – nach vorne. Stela gibt nicht auf. Auch wenn das heißt, dass sie als 65-jährige Rumänien verlassen und in ein fremdes Land gehen musste. “Ich hatte gehört, in Österreich kann ich eine Beschäftigung finden... Ich bin sehr froh, dass ich *Megaphon* verkaufen kann.” ... Stela hat Freunde und Freundinnen gefunden, Menschen, die ihr helfen. Ohne Versicherung, ohne Ersparnis tat sie ein Abgrund vor ihr auf. “Aber die Menschen haben mir geholfen. Ich konnte in Rumänien operiert werden”, erzählt sie. (Pichler 2016a)

The last two decades have seen the rise of a newly dominant paradigm pertaining to the governance of Europe’s ethnically diverse societies. Sceptical of previous nationally specific models of multiculturalism (e.g. Baumann 1999), the new discourse unfolds around *integration* and *social-capital-building*, whilst opposing the spectre of allegedly religiously or culturally underpinned “parallel lives.” This currently dominant paradigm revolves around the notion of “community cohesion,” defined as entailing a shared sense of belonging and the development of “strong and positive relationships ... between people from different backgrounds” (Cantle 2008: 62; also see Bundesministerium für Inneres 2008).

Critics of the community cohesion agenda have accused it of being assimilationist (e.g. Alexander 2007) by leaving structural-material inequalities unscrutinized (e.g. Phillips 2006), or of “criminalizing” young male Muslims (e.g. Burnett 2004). In addition, there are two wider, inter-related issues pertaining to this new pan-European integrationism that demand systematic attention: first, its implicit reliance on particular (stereotypical) depictions of ethnic “others” prominent amongst national majorities; second, the actual self-understandings and lived identifications articulated by members of ethnic minority groups themselves are generally assumed rather than investigated.

A deeper understanding of these issues is urgently needed for diversity to be experienced as enriching and to allow for more inclusive societies and thereby also – especially in a global knowledge- and information age – for the European Union’s long-term economic competitiveness. Being about inter-ethnic relationships, community cohesion crucially implicates the (re-)construction, (re-)negotiation and potential contestation of boundaries, of belonging and exclusion. Representations of “self” and “other,” in the media and across a wide range of forms of cultural production, are at the heart of these processes.

This article makes a modest, empirically delineated contribution to such deeper understanding of some of the lived, “meaningful relationships ... across cultural boundaries” (Cantle 2008: 172) emerging in parts of our much-debated, in some political quarters much maligned, pluralistic life-worlds. The particular instances of lived community cohesions, to which I turn here, are captured through a careful and longitudinal reading of the monthly street-magazine *Megaphon*, from which a particular discursive “snapshot” was provided in the scene-setting quotation above. Published in Austria’s second largest city, Graz, since 1995, *Megaphon*’s regular features include a long-standing series that has been sharing individual migrants’ life-histories, initially in conversation with local writers and more recently with the magazine’s editor. The above-quoted extract, and the series more generally, are paradigmatic of how such regular, co-produced “travelling memories” (Erlil 2011) and often multi-dimensional and complex identifications (i.e. with both a now distant “homeland” and with new surroundings in Austria) are articulated across ethno-national boundaries and address a local, cosmopolitan audience.¹ Put differently, as co-produced representations of migrants’ biographies and partly by migrants themselves, these life-stories provide important insights into some of the dynamics of local *conviviality*, defined by Paul Gilroy (2004: xi) as “processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multi-culture an ordinary feature of social life” and that is often lived in wider contexts and in spite of enduring exclusions and nationalist politics.

This discussion proceeds by outlining the relevant contexts (i.e. historical/ empirical, methodological and theoretical) to the analysis being developed. This is followed by a discussion of three recurring features of the migrant biographies shared on *Megaphon*’s pages every month. The concluding discussion revisits prominent conceptual and thematic strands in the relevant literature and on the basis of the dialogical representations crossing ethno-national boundaries that are encountered in this Styrian street-magazine.

Multiple contexts

Austria’s complex post-1945 histories of inward migration have revolved around a number of central developments. Andreas Weigl (2009: 33; 47; 71) has summarized these as including the following: first, the oft-repeated statistical claim that, proportional to population size, Austria has been Europe’s “number one refugee destination” since 1945; second, a steep increase in migration flows since the late 1980s has translated into a proportion of foreign-born residents that is considerably above the Western European average; and third, along with Germany, Austria ranks amongst those European countries where the educational disadvantages experienced by second- and, by now, third-generation migrants are particularly pronounced. In short, these are some of the very historical and structural conditions, in which questions about social cohesion – and hence of

shared values and meaningful relationships cutting across ethno-national boundaries and structural (dis)advantages – present themselves with particular urgency. Also worth noting here is that between 1991 and 2001 non-EU migrants’ residential segregation decreased in Vienna but it had slightly increased in Graz; at the 2001 census, 16 percent of Vienna’s residents held non-Austrian passports and 9,5 percent of the population of Graz (Kohlbacher and Reeger 2007: 307). These percentages have increased significantly since then, with 11 percent of the Styrian population being classed as “foreign” by 2019 (Statistik Austria 2019), and some 29 percent of the population of Graz by the end of 2016 (Graz Statistik 2016: 10). Questions of integration and exclusion have thus acquired an undeniable prominence in a region, and particularly in a medium-sized city, which have experienced significant migration-related demographic changes over recent decades.

By the time Austria’s second *Migrations- und Integrationsbericht* was published in 2007, it had become commonplace to point out that whilst Austria had manifestly become a country of immigration, much public discourse was yet to acknowledge, let alone embrace, this. At the time, 16,3 percent of Austria’s population had a “migratory background” (Lebhart and Marik-Lebeck 2007: 168-170), one of the highest percentages of first- or second-generation migrants in the EU (Fassmann 2007: 394). Migrants’ continuing structural disadvantages have included higher unemployment rates (Biffi 2007: 265), persisting educational disadvantages (Weiss and Unterwurzacher 2007), proportions of people living in poverty or at risk of poverty (Heitzmann and Förster 2007: 291-293). Importantly, the political terrain had also shifted significantly since the 1990s, with the rise of right-wing populism, also interpreted as a “politics of emotion” (Haslinger 1995) and as paradigmatic of the “Haiderization” and “politics of fear” (Wodak 2016) witnessed across large parts of Europe, reflecting disillusionment with entrenched political structures and anxieties about immigration, globalization, and European integration. In line with such wider European trends, the new millennium has also seen evidence of growing Islamophobia in parts of Austrian society (Bunzl and Hafez 2009) and new legislation making stronger integrationist demands on migrants.

In such changing and politically charged contexts, the importance and role of various media, and their different political trajectories, have often been pointed out. In the Austrian context, relevant work has included the following: a survey of media by and for Austria’s autochthonous (i.e. Slovenian, Croatian, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, Roma and Sinti) minorities – i.e. weekly journals and periodicals, radio and televised programs, regional publishing houses – and resulting criticism of the relevant budget (Purkarthofer et al. 2005: 1); a survey of media “by and for” migrants and reflections on migrants’ participation in the mainstream media (Bratic and Inou 2008); and analyses of the growing significance of religious organizations and assumed religious solidarities in the newly dominant integrationist discourse (Permoser et al. 2010). More generally relevant has been a formidable body of discourse analytical literature, which has examined the

“construction of national identity” (Wodak et al. 1999), anti-Semitic and other discriminatory discourses (e.g. Reisigl and Wodak 2001), and which includes discussions of migrants’ “inside perspective” (e.g. Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2009). In the wider European context, mention should be made of a European Commission funded project (“Changing city spaces”), whose findings included insights into “new cultural flows and connections” (through music, media and other forms of cultural production) in three distinctly transnational “nexi” – Turkish, Balkan and African respectively – that connect various European capital cities (Meinhof et al. 2007: 14-16). Finally, other pertinent work has included analyses of the exclusionary discourses and structural discriminations that define Europe’s “new racism” (e.g. Delanty, Wodak and Jones 2011); examinations of migrants’ portrayals in the media and migrants’ cultural self-expression through literature and film (e.g. Jacobs 2011); and reception studies of particular television- or literary genres (e.g. Keightley 2011; Niyogi 2011).

Most pertinent of all, however, was a contribution in the Austrian Ministry of Interior’s 2008 report *Gemeinsam kommen wir zusammen*, which emphasized the role the media can play for what was depicted as successful integration. More particularly, the contribution in question emphasized the importance both of the dominant majority’s media depictions of migrants and of media specifically produced “by and for” migrants; what is more, a relative lack of existing studies of media portrayals of migrants and (successful) integration was criticized at the time. (Sandrisser and Winkler 2008: 196) The particular representational domain and genre to be examined below cuts across distinctions of mainstream- versus “ethnic minority-media.” Yet more specifically, it also cuts across the distinction between media representations produced “by” or “for” migrants respectively. For the particular type of medium in question, other similar examples of which would include Vienna’s “community TV channel” *Okto*, contains what emerge below as syncretistic *co-representations* (also see Karner 2011: 207; 218), or convivial *bridging representations* that self-consciously engage in dialogue across ethnic and structural divides.

As already mentioned, *Megaphon* has been published in Graz since 1995. It is affiliated to the international network of street-magazines and gets sold – to a print-run of some 15,000 sold copies a month – predominantly by (sub-Saharan) asylum-seekers and migrants from South-Eastern Europe on prominent street corners in Graz and in other Styrian cities. Its coverage can be described as countering nationalist exclusion through a strong local cosmopolitanism (Karner 2007). Organizationally tied to the Caritas, *Megaphon* has also created a free educational initiative – called MegaphonUni (see <https://megaphonuni.uni-graz.at/>) – that creates knowledge exchange between local academics and socio-economically disadvantaged and politically marginalized groups. Particularly relevant for our purposes is *Megaphon*’s earlier-mentioned, regular feature of migrants in Graz, very often *Megaphon*-vendors themselves, telling their life-stories in and through a conversation with the magazine or, previously, with a local author. The results often capture

difficult biographical journeys from “elsewhere” to “here,” offering its audience insights into some of the transnational stories, “routes” and “flows” (Appadurai 1990) that intersect with its local lifeworld.

In the discussion to follow, my focus lies on some of these (co-produced) migrants’ stories as published between June 2013 and December 2016, which are here approached as qualitative data and analyzed thematically. The period thus sampled spans the much-discussed, so-called “refugee-crisis” (see Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou and Wodak 2018) of 2015/2016. Like many European countries, Austria found herself then also affected by mass migratory flows from Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere across the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans and on to central and northern Europe. Between January and November 2015 Austria’s Ministry of Interior received some 80,500 asylum applications, which constituted a 237 percent increase when compared to the previous year (Bundesministerium für Inneres 2016). Widely perceived as a major social caesura, and in dominant political discourses seen as a major threat (also see Karner forthcoming), the crisis of 2015-16 is generally considered to have played a significant role in triggering Austria’s subsequent electoral shift(s) to the political right. Against this backdrop, the migrant biographies, many of them asylum-seekers’ stories, published every month in *Megaphon* acquired a particular and further heightened significance. Their analysis, as the following discussion shows, is helped by core-contributions to relevant cultural theory to do with the bridging of cultural boundaries, with political resistance, and with internally highly heterogeneous (counter-)public spheres.

From “bridging capital” to *bridging representations*

Previous research (Karner 2007) on *Megaphon* has shown it to act as a local site of counter-hegemonic resistance, which is equally opposed to ethno-nationalist exclusion as it is critical of the perceived consequences of neoliberal capitalism. *Megaphon*’s self-understanding, and its self-defined goals, emerge most concisely from its imprint and inside cover page:

Megaphon ... ist Ausdruck eines Lebensgefühls: sozial engagiert, mit klarem Blick für die Anliegen der Menschen, die gesellschaftlich benachteiligt sind; umweltbewusst und politisch interessiert. Das Megaphon ist offen gegenüber dem Fremden und versteht die kulturelle Vielfalt als Chance und Bereicherung der Gesellschaft. (Megaphon Imprint)

The magazine’s monthly *migrant- and/or vendor portraits* are part and parcel of the latter dimension. Among *Megaphon*’s regular and long-established features, each issue contains and retells one the magazine’s vendors’ biography. Initially, their life-stories were captured in

conversation with a local writer; in recent years the interviewer's role has come to be performed mainly by the editor-in-chief Annelies Pichler. These are frequently, though not exclusively, life histories of long-established asylum-seekers awaiting decisions on their asylum-claims. For such vendors, *Megaphon* provides one of but a few opportunities for legal employment (i.e. the magazine currently sells for € 2.50 a copy, half of which goes to the person selling it).

Not all portraits are those of non-European asylum-seekers. Another Romanian *Megaphon* vendor has shared with the street-magazine that her work in Graz enables her to provide her two children in Romania with the essentials; she recalls having to “grow up” at a very early age, but she is, at the same time, given strength by nostalgic recollections of her childhood (Pichler 2016b). If this particular example focuses largely on an individual's private domain, other accounts begin to pose more public questions.

For instance, in October 2016 the series (Pichler 2016c) told the story of a Cameroonian vendor, who had spent her childhood working on the family farm, until she had to flee in 2004. Now in Austria, she expresses hope for work, ideally with “plants,” whilst fearing that she sees “no future for herself” in Austria's industrialized agriculture. Tragically, the vendor in question also remembers being hospitalized for three months, when she “lost her mind” following her mother's and sister's death two years ago. Characteristically, memories of personal tragedy, of forced migration and comments on Austrian institutions all intermingle in this account.

Transnational dimensions and routes behind a life history being shared were even more apparent in the following account:

Ich habe einen kleinen Sohn! Er heißt Wisdom ... Ich wünsche mir, dass Wisdom eines Tages ein Star wird. Fußballstar vielleicht ... im österreichischen Nationalteam ... Ich hoffe jetzt noch stärker als zuvor, dass der Weg zu meinem Aufenthaltstitel in Österreich nur noch ein kurzer ist und ein gerader. Ohne Umwege. Davon hatte ich schon zu viele. 2009 war ich zum ersten Mal nach Österreich gekommen ... nach der Dublin-Verordnung musste mein Asylverfahren in dem Land durchgeführt werden, in dem ich in Europa angekommen war ... Das war Griechenland ... Es ist mir gelungen, mich als Strandverkäufer auf der griechischen Insel Eos zu verdingen ... Bis ich hörte, dass Österreich Flüchtlinge nicht mehr wegen “Dublin” nach Griechenland zurückschickt ... Ich versuchte es 2013 also wieder mit Österreich – und tatsächlich! Ich konnte hierbleiben ... Seit 2013 verkaufe ich *Megaphon*. (Pichler 2016d)

More will be said below about the arduous journeys, experiences of exclusion and the protracted bureaucratic processes many of the vendors interviewed by *Megaphon* have shared. In a first analytical step, the dynamics and process of production underpinning these accounts is worth

paying closer attention to. What *Megaphon* offers, then, is strictly speaking neither a representation of a member of an ethnic minority group, nor simply a representation *by* themselves of themselves. Instead, we here encounter a genre, or at least a register, of “co-representation” (also see Karner 2011: 208-229), through which members of structurally very differently positioned groups, i.e. the ethnic majority and the local asylum-seeker “community” respectively, dialogically shape a biographical account.

The workings of another such “co-representation” become yet clearer in the following example of a local writer meeting a former *Megaphon* vendor. In this particular instance, the resulting account very directly addresses its local audience(s):

Vielleicht sind Sie John ja schon mal begegnet. Vor dem Steirerhof in Graz zum Beispiel, oder am Kaiser-Franz-Josef-Platz. Dort verkaufte er nämlich lange Zeit das Megaphon. Stets freundlich und offensichtlich immer gut gelaunt. Viele kennen John nur als Superjohn ... Mittlerweile [ist] John nicht mehr vorm Steirerhof anzutreffen. Voriges Jahr hatte er einen Schlaganfall und ist seither halbseitig gelähmt ... John ... lebt seit 2004 in Österreich. In seinem Geburtsland Nigeria war er einer jener Bauern, die durchs Land geschickt werden mit der Aufgabe, den Menschen beizubringen, wie sie ihre Nahrung selbst anbauen können. John ist Diabetiker und hatte schon damals Probleme mit den Augen. In Österreich verschlechterte sich sein Zustand ... John kann ohne fremde Hilfe die Wohnung nicht mehr verlassen ... [Er] bedankt sich herzlich für die Möglichkeit, hier auf sein Schicksal hinweisen zu können. Und mir ist es eine Ehre, dass ich darüber schreiben darf.
(Lederwasch 2014)

Accounts such as these show the establishment of relationships across boundaries, and hence – in the policy-terms mentioned earlier – an emerging *community cohesion* in action. Beyond that, such co-representations raise the important question as to what else they reveal about the politics of lived, “convivial” multi-culture (Gilroy 2004). Most importantly, such representations facilitate a particular politics of representation and solidarity that warrants further commentary.

In the terms of wider cultural theory, this returns us to Edward Said and the impact his work has had on the *subaltern* “revolution in historiography” aiming to “rescue the writing of ... history from the domination of the nationalist elite and restore to it the ... role of the ... poor and the ... masses” (Said 1995: 335; 352). This also resonates with Homi Bhabha’s insistence that “national culture is neither unified nor unitary” but defined by “process[es] of hybridity, [of] incorporating new ‘people’ ... generating other sites of meaning and ... producing ... political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation” (1990: 4). Translated back to the context in

question, *Megaphon*'s portraits provide regular examples of an ongoing hybridizing and re-writing of local identifications and relationships. As importantly, these are representations with the potential to politicize by drawing attention to otherwise unacknowledged or previously unknown histories of hardship and suffering.

Similarly relevant here is Charles Husband's notion of a "multi-ethnic public sphere," which displays two inter-related characteristics: first, it "facilitate[s] the autonomous expression of ... identity of both minority and majority ethnic groups"; second, it "must provide for the exchange of information and cultural products *across* these communities of identity" (Husband 2000: 209). *Megaphon*'s migrants'/ vendors' portraits raises yet more fundamental questions as to the kinds of communities and boundaries constructed, reproduced, negotiated, as well as potentially transformed in such multi-ethnic public spheres. Building on Robert Putnam's (2000) distinction between "bonding" social capital (i.e. intra-group networks of trust, support and reciprocity) and "bridging capital" (i.e. inter-group networks), these portraits are arguably best described as *bridging representations*: not content with the circulation of histories within national/ ethnic groups, they enable cross-boundary interactions and dialogical sharing.

If *bridging representations* are seen as self-conscious contributions to a multi-ethnic public sphere aimed at inter-group dialogue, this raises further questions about the political positions variously articulated and countered in and through them. This, in turn, promises to further refine our understanding of actually lived community cohesion.

(En)countering nationalism

Typically, *Megaphon* portraits condense an individual's life-story, their backward-facing recollections of multiple hardships and their forward-looking hopes for the future. This often also entails reflections on the bureaucratic hurdles faced by asylum-seekers more generally, not only in Austria but as part of the European Union's wider legal frameworks and policies pertaining to asylum. This also surfaces in the following recollections, by another *Megaphon* vendor, of his successive, arduous attempts to make it to Europe and the continuing frustrations and exclusions he endures:

Ich bin 35 ... 1200 Dollar zahle ich für die Überfahrt von Tripolis nach Lampedusa ... Und du hast Durst ... statt 18 Stunden dauert [die Überfahrt] zwei Wochen ... Und sie bringen uns nach Lampedusa in ein Spital und ich bekomme Essen. Früchte. Und Kleider zum Anziehen ... Und zwei Wochen bleibe ich ... mit 17 anderen schicken sie mich wieder nach Nigeria zurück ... in Ravenna sind Freunde und in Ravenna ist Arbeit für mich und meine Familie gibt mir Geld und ich mache mich wieder auf den Weg. Ich fliege ... ich habe ein

italienisches Visum bis 2014 ... in Italien gibt es keine Arbeit und ich bin seit November immer wieder in Graz und darf nur für drei Monate bleiben ... Ich will arbeiten. Ich mache alles. Ganz egal. Ich brauche die österreichische Arbeitsbewilligung. (Grossegger 2013: 20)

The hardships recalled are not restricted to bureaucratic obstacles, nor do they stop with a person's partial integration into a new, local lifeworld. Not surprisingly, some vendors recall their experiences of coming face to face with various forms of "everyday racism" (Essed 1991). An account (Pichler 2015a), by a female *Megaphon* vendor from Nigeria of how she was told by "an elderly, elegantly dressed lady" to "go back to your country" is a case in point. The following vendor reflects yet further on this:

Beim Straßenverkauf kann ich meine Kunden und Kundinnen in zwei große Gruppen teilen. Die eine hat fertige Bilder im Kopf und lässt sich sehr schwer davon überzeugen, dass die Welt vielleicht doch anders ist, die anderen sind gereist, offen und neugierig ... Erstere sind verschlossen, mit den anderen kommt es oft zu sehr schönen Begegnungen. Darum wünsch ich mir: Stopp mit Vorurteilen! ... Geh nicht davon aus, dass du von der Hautfarbe oder weil jemand "Ausländer" ist, darauf schließen kannst, wer vor dir steht. Aber auch für die *Megaphon*-Verkäufer/innen habe ich einen Rat... Sie denken, beim Verkaufen geht es nur um den unmittelbaren Erlös. Stopp damit! Beim Verkaufen geht es nicht nur ums Geld – durch das Projekt *Megaphon* wird uns eine Plattform gegeben. Chancen tun sich auf, wirklich in die Gesellschaft aufgenommen zu werden. (Pichler 2015b)

Repeatedly, *Megaphon* readers learn about the uncertainty endured, the resilience shown, and the hopes expressed by the street magazine's vendors:

Sicher gibt es Gemeinheiten. Kleine böartige Sticheleien im Alltag. Zu klein, um viel Tamtam darum zu machen, aber groß genug, um dich zu zermürben ... Ich bin gerne mit Menschen zusammen, mache leicht neue Bekanntschaften ... Ich bin sehr dankbar dafür, was mir meine [österreichischen] Freunde und Freundinnen hier schon gezeigt und ermöglicht haben ... Ich gehe in Schulen und erzähle den Kindern vom Leben in Afrika ... Jetzt bin ich 22 Jahre alt und meine Hoffnung ist, dass ich in Österreich weiterkommen kann ... Dass ich das *Megaphon* verkaufe, ist so ein Schritt ... Denn seit ich in Österreich lebe, habe ich keine andere Möglichkeit, mir etwas zu erarbeiten. Ich arbeite jeden Tag von 8:30 bis 19:30 ... Diese Arbeit bewirkt, dass ich mich als Teil der Gesellschaft fühlen kann ... Aber ich muss immer noch zittern, dass ich hierbleiben kann. Drei Jahre schon lebe ich in Österreich und immer noch ist der Ausgang meines Asylverfahrens offen. (Pichler 2015c)

Megaphon portraits also show great potential to counter stereotypical depictions, all too common in today's Europe of "re-nationalization" (Hartleb 2012), of asylum-seekers, refugees and other migrants, their backgrounds and journeys. One relevant case in point was the story of a Nigerian medical student and *Megaphon* vendor:

[E]r aber schaut in die Zukunft. Er will Chirurg werden, plastischer Chirurg. Die ersten Schritte sind getan: Vier Jahre Medizinstudium in Nigeria finden ihre Fortsetzung in Österreich ... Sein Deutsch ist überraschend gut. "Schon bevor ich nach Österreich gekommen bin, habe ich es über Internet-Kurse geübt", erklärt er ... er arbeitet intensiv daran, es weiter zu verbessern. "Ich mag Sprachen! Wenn ich so richtig gut Deutsch kann, werde ich noch andere Sprachen lernen. Italienisch vielleicht oder Französisch. Griechisch, Englisch und Yoruba spreche ich schon jetzt", überrascht er. Das habe mit seiner Biographie zu tun ... [Er] wurde in Belgrad geboren ... "Mein Vater hat dort Medizin und Psychologie studiert. Als ich zwei Jahre alt war, sind wir mit unserer Familie nach Griechenland übersiedelt ... Nach sieben Jahren haben wir wieder die Koffer gepackt und sind nach Nigeria gezogen", erzählt der Kosmopolit, der jetzt wieder zurück nach Europa gekommen ist, um sein Medizinstudium zu beenden. (Pichler 2016e)

Alongside all frustrations and exclusions, along with the patience and stamina they demand, there is, as we have also seen in these accounts, evidence of the kinds of meaningful, bridging capital that the community cohesion discourse demands.

Nationalism today has different facets: a largely symbolic, barely noticed, and hence "banal" form; as well as considerably "hotter," institutionalized manifestations that draw not only discursive boundaries but effect enduring exclusions (see Billig 1995). Asylum-seekers across Europe, and hence also of course in Austria, know and experience both. *Megaphon*, symbolically as well as institutionally, provides some of them with a safety-net of sorts. This is an example of bridging capital (Putnam 2000) – or a network of mutual support, reciprocity and trust that cuts across ethno-national boundaries – in action in Graz and other parts of Styria today. As such, *Megaphon* raises further important questions about the interactions and politics it enables.

A "sub-altern" counter-public

Megaphon and its portraits depict the potential for emerging, inclusive "communities," where "belonging" may be re-defined in non-ethno-national terms. In a next analytical step, we need to probe further and enquire deeper into the kinds of experiences, frustrations and hopes articulated through these co-produced *bridging* representations. This poses additional questions about the

grievances and concerns articulated through the convivial spaces created by *Megaphon* and how to read them through pertinent strands of cultural theory.

Time and again, the biographical journeys shared on *Megaphon* pages by asylum-seekers who sell the street-magazine reveal a recurring pattern: early plans and dreams were shattered by a life-defining caesura, this is followed by their experience of forced migration and the difficulties of attempting a new start on arrival in Austria; notwithstanding those, these are biographical reflections accompanied by hopes for the future. The following accounts also reveal some of the many locations, around which some of the transnational journeys recorded revolve:

Gerade holen mich die Erinnerungen an meine Mutter ein, denn sie ist genau vor einem Jahr um diese Zeit gestorben ... In Nigeria war ich schon auf einem guten Weg. Zwölf Jahre lang habe ich die Schulbank gedrückt ... später habe ich geheiratet, mein Sohn ist heute fünf Jahre, meine Tochter zwei Jahre alt. Schon hatte ich mich darauf vorbereitet, mir über Kurse Hochschulwissen zu erarbeiten, doch dann hat ein hässliches Ereignis all meine Ambitionen in Nigeria zunichte gemacht. Im Jahr 2014 fand ich mich als Asylsuchender in Traiskirchen² wieder, von dort zog ich nach Gaisbühel in Vorarlberg ... Im März 2015 kam ich nach Graz ... Wenn ich endlich wieder besser verankert bin, möchte ich endlich auch wieder kreativ arbeiten. Ich werde Geschichten schreiben und das am liebsten in perfektem Deutsch.

(Pichler 2016f)

Geboren wurde ich in Nigeria, dort ging ich zur Schule, später auf die Hochschule und dort hatte ich mir meine Zukunft ausgemalt. Gekommen ist es anders. Auf einmal fand ich mich in Österreich wieder. Völlig alleine. Ohne Familie, ohne österreichische Freunde ... Keine Papiere, kein Geld, noch nicht einmal ein Platz zum Schlafen ... Ich hatte Glück. Ich fand eine Kirche, in der ich mich bald gut aufgehoben fühlte ... Als ich voriges Jahr zum ersten Mal ins Megaphon-Büro kam ... änderte [das] alles ... mit jedem Monat wird es besser... Gerade mache ich einen Deutschkurs – gesponsort von einem meiner Kunden, der mir längst ein Freund ist! Ich bin so dankbar dafür ... Nimm ein Ziel in den Fokus. Verliere es nie aus den Augen. Meines ist gerade: ich möchte in Österreich arbeiten. Ich bin hoffnungsvoll.

Auch wenn der Weg voller großer Hürden ist. (Pichler 2016g)

The following account, published at the height of the 2015 “refugee crisis”, revealed a similar pattern traceable through this person’s experiences of persecution in Pakistan, his arduous route from there to Europe, and his attempt to rebuild his life in Austria:

[Die] Ahmadiyya-Bewegung des Islam ... [wird] im heutigen Pakistan mitleidlos verfolgt ... Ich wurde gefangen genommen, misshandelt, geschlagen ... Im April 2013 ergriff ich die

Chance zur Flucht. Ich musste meine Frau und unser Kind verlassen. Mein Sohn war damals noch keine acht Monate alt. Mit der Hilfe eines “Agenten”, hier würde man Schlepper sagen, erreichte ich die Türkei. Dort musste ich sechs Monate ausharren, bevor ich ... nach Griechenland gebracht wurde... Endlich erreichten wir die serbische Grenze. Zu Fuß überquerten wir sie. Alles war tief verschneit ... schließlich waren wir in Ungarn ... Auch hier wurden wir nicht wie Menschen behandelt. Die Schlepper sperrten uns in einen Raum ... Wir wurden in Autos gepfercht und nach Österreich gebracht. Zehn Monate waren vergangen seit dem Zeitpunkt, zu dem ich Pakistan verlassen hatte ... Inzwischen habe ich ein österreichisches Visum ... Ich hoffe, dass meine kleine Familie bald vollzählig hier sein wird. Den Antrag auf Familienzusammenführung habe ich gestellt ... Ich möchte gerne in einem helfenden Beruf arbeiten ... Den ersten Deutschkurs habe ich erfolgreich hinter mir. (Pichler 2015d)

In some cases, the period spent in Austria has been long enough for the person in question to also acquire distinctly localized memories and considerable *bridging capital* in the region:

Um die Weihnachtszeit denke ich auch oft an Mariazell.³ Immerhin hab ich dort jahrelang das Megaphon verkauft. Das bleibt in Erinnerung und immer noch fühle ich mich den Mariazellerinnen und Mariazellern verbunden ... Mein großer Wunsch für das Jahr 2017 ist: endlich eine Anstellung! Egal, welche Arbeit ... Wenn ein Traum in Erfüllung gehen sollte, dann würde ich im kommenden Jahr Gärtner sein. Ich kenne die Arbeit, denn als ich noch um meinen Aufenthaltstitel zittern musste, hatte ich in Parks ... der Stadt Graz gearbeitet ... Auch als Straßenarbeiter war ich einige Zeit im Einsatz ... Jetzt ist mein Asylverfahren positiv abgeschlossen und ich habe eine umfassende Arbeitserlaubnis, aber trotzdem ist es sehr schwer, wirklich Arbeit zu finden. (Pichler 2016h)

Megaphon thus offers glimpses of complex and difficult migrants' life-histories, of set-backs and of often enduring exclusions. At the same time, however, such (auto-)biographical accounts also articulate hopes for a local future and reveal individual migrants' new orientation towards a life-world they now partly share with the street-magazine's readers. In the following case, a former asylum-seeker who has since been granted refugee status attributes considerable importance to *Megaphon* in helping him through a particularly challenging part of his biographical journey:

Ich fand mich in einem kleinen Dorf wieder, Bad Goisern. Um Unterkunft und Verpflegung musste ich mir keine Sorgen machen ... Doch ich durfte nicht arbeiten ... [w]ar isoliert ... Ich habe dann auch vom Megaphon gehört und davon, wie sehr es Flüchtlingen wie mir geholfen hat ... Bin von Bad Goisern nach Graz, wo ich zuerst nicht einmal ein Bett hatte.

Drei Jahre hatte ich nur einen Sessel, in dem ich schlafen konnte. Der aber stand in einem Raum, in dem ich mich gut aufgehoben fühlte, weil ich inmitten einer Gemeinschaft lebte. Das Leben war hart. Ich hatte nur wenig Geld, keine Versicherung ... meine Situation verbesserte sich ... Ich konnte auch etwas Geld nach Nigeria schicken, an meine Familie. Meine Frau, meine kleine Tochter ... und an meinen Sohn, den ich noch nie gesehen hatte, er war noch nicht geboren, als ich Nigeria verlassen musste ... Schließlich habe ich auch meine lang ersehnte Aufenthaltsgenehmigung, mein Visum für Österreich bekommen. Und seit September ist meine Familie bei mir. (Pichler 2016i)

If we define “conviviality”, building on Paul Gilroy (2004), as an increasingly taken-for-granted living with difference and a quotidian sociability defined by boundary-crossings and negotiations, then *Megaphon*’s portraits also provide evidence of this. Local conviviality is reflected in the story of a Nigerian *Megaphon* vendor aspiring to represent Austria at future Special Olympics:

[Ich sitze] im Rollstuhl und verkaufe Megaphon ... Als ich vier oder fünf Jahre alt war, ... war ich an Kinderlähmung erkrankt. Damals schämten sich Eltern in Afrika für ihre behinderten Kinder ... Meine Mutter stand helfend und stark hinter mir ... Mein Traum ist es, Österreich im Gewichtheben bei den Special Olympics zu vertreten ... Heute bin ich in den Grazer Straßen aktiv. So viele freundliche Männer, Frauen, Mädchen und Burschen ... Diese Begegnungen stärken mich so, dass ich jetzt auch anderen Leuten helfen kann. (Pichler 2014)

These accounts, and many similar ones published monthly in *Megaphon*, bear some of the hallmarks of Nancy Fraser’s notion of “subaltern counter-publics,” defined as “parallel discursive arenas,” in which subordinated social groups “circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities ... and needs” (1992: 123). Importantly, and adding a dimension not explicitly anticipated in Fraser’s formulation, *Megaphon* offers a very particular counter-public: regional; geared towards the bridging of social divides and of cultural boundaries; shared – and indeed co-produced – by individuals speaking from very different structural positions. *Megaphon*, as a manifestation of and outlet for a regional counter-public, creates dialogical encounters and involves very different social actors and audiences: those include, but are not limited to, asylum-seekers-cum-vendors; local journalists and writers; ethnic minority communities; local NGOs; and audiences of local cosmopolitans.

Concluding reflections

Continuing structural disadvantages notwithstanding, ethnic minority groups have been central to enormously significant shifts in the politics of (cultural) representation recorded in Europe’s

multicultural cities over recent decades. Philip Cohen (1992: 85) was among the first to record “autonomous space[s] of representation,” in which otherwise “silenced or marginalized” ethnic minorities “find their own political voice”. Stuart Hall (1997: 183) even spoke of “the most profound cultural revolution” as having come about “as a consequence of the margins coming into representation – in art, in painting, in film, in music, in literature, in the modern arts everywhere”. This paper has provided empirical insights into an Austrian, Styrian, example of such spaces and processes.

Megaphon, as has been shown, is a regional street-magazine that has successfully created discursive spaces for *bridging representations*. It is part of a local, multi-ethnic public sphere defined by dialogue across boundaries, and in which differently positioned social actors, as members of dominant majorities and ethnic minority groups respectively, engage in forms of *co-representation*. By way of a conclusion, it is worth reflecting further on the wider cultural significance of media outlets and initiatives like *Megaphon*. At a first reading, *Megaphon*’s portraits of its vendors may seem to offer an empirical extension to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s attempts to “make visible the unseen,” for which she invokes Foucault’s concept of the *insurrection* of “subjugated knowledges,” or those “knowledges that have been disqualified as ... naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (Foucault qtd. by Spivak 1987: 281). Put more simply, *Megaphon*’s portraits offer glimpses of histories, lives and experiences that are rarely taken note of or given space. Here, some among the structurally most marginalized acquire a voice.

Megaphon’s significance goes further than this. Capturing some aspects of our era’s many transnational “flows” and “scapes” (Appadurai 1990), cultural representations and biographical portraits such as those contained in this Styrian street-magazine also resonate with Levitt and Glick Schiller’s (2004) conceptualization of contemporary, transnational “ways of being,” which refer to social relationships crossing national boundaries, and “ways of belonging” that capture transnational self-understandings and forms of consciousness. At the same time, *Megaphon* – through the people who sell the paper and through some of the life stories told on its pages – issues powerful monthly reminders of the steep asymmetries of power, inequality and exclusion that structure our transnational “social fields.”

Continuing along the lines sketched in the analysis above, *Megaphon* reveals two dimensions particularly important to the protracted discussions about the past, present and future of multiculturalism that have reshaped European societies in the new millennium. On a first level, this particular street magazine is but one local and regional example of how spaces and genres of “conviviality” (Gilroy 2004) are being created today; in this particular case, conviviality involves members of the dominant majority and of different ethnic minority groups developing forms of (syncretistic) *co-representation* (Karner 2011), through which boundaries are debated, crossed in

dialogue and interaction, and re-negotiated. Second, and going beyond such *bridging* representations, the genre facilitated by *Megaphon* also displays characteristics of a “subaltern counter-public” (Fraser 1992), in which the structurally marginalized and excluded articulate some of their histories and formulate some of their hopes. Yet, here again, the bridging component is significant, for these formulations implicate both local co-producers and local audiences of different ethno-national backgrounds and who occupy very different structural positions.

Taken together, this discussion has built upon previous research on representations “‘about’, ‘for’ and ‘produced by’” ethnic minorities (Cottle 2000: 17). However, the examples examined here add a vital component, by drawing attention to local representations that are co-produced by citizens of an EU member state and members of structurally disadvantaged ethnic minorities respectively. Future work should take its cue from here and focus on how such life-stories, and their partial re-negotiation of strongly politicized ethno-national boundaries, are locally received. Such potential future reception studies would promise to shed important new light on the ongoing re-articulation of both national and European boundaries, and hence identities, in dialogical encounters with various “others.”

In the face of heightened neo-nationalisms, institutional obstacles and discursive exclusions on all sides of the boundaries that bridging capital seeks to cut across, conviviality can – at least at present – only be partial and uneasy. This discussion of *Megaphon* adds to an observation made elsewhere (Karner and Parker 2011): namely that “community cohesion” and “integration” are wrongly thought of as straightforwardly measurable properties or permanent states of cohabitation; instead, they constitute vectors, or trajectories, of political and cultural activity. As such, community cohesion, in seeking to cut across the ethno-national- and other boundaries fortified by many, constitutes, at most, one among several competing political forces in the contested fields of our cities, media and pluralistic lives.

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Notes:

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² Traiskirchen is a town in Lower Austria and site of Austria’s largest asylum-seeker reception center.

³ Mariazell is a famous Catholic pilgrimage site in northern Styria.