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## **TRANSGRESSIVE PERFORMANCES: REFUGEES DEMANDING THE RIGHT TO HAVE RIGHTS**

Despite the UN Declaration on Human Rights that “everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum”, Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière have commented on the lack of human rights of the refugee. They argue that, while the nation-state privileges the rights of its citizens, it arbitrarily undermines the status of the refugee. According to Arendt, “The great danger arising from the existence of people forced to live outside the common world is that... they begin to belong to the human race in much the same world as animals belong to a specific animal species ... forcing millions of people into ... the conditions of savages.” (*Origin of Totalitarianism*, p. 30). In this article I explore not only the mechanisms by which the nation-state transgresses the rights of the non-citizen and the philosophical commentary on this by Arendt, Agamben and Rancière, but also the ways in which theatre performances can transgress the disenfranchising actions of the nation-state. Such performances as *Letters Home* by the Refugee Club Impulse in Berlin and their street campaign “My Right is Your Right” have challenged the disempowering practices of the nation-state, and reaffirmed, as in the UN Declaration, “the right [of refugees] to have rights” (*Origin of Totalitarianism*, p. 296).

### **Biography**

S.E. Wilmer is Professor Emeritus at Trinity College Dublin, where he was Head of the School of Drama, Film and Music. He has served on the executive committees of the American Society for Theatre Research and the International Federation for Theatre Studies and on the board of *Nordic Theatre Studies* and was Editor in Chief of *Nordic Theatre Studies* from 2018 to 2020. He has been a Visiting Professor at Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley, and as a Research Fellow at the Interweaving Performance Cultures at the Freie Universität Berlin. He has written and edited twenty books and co-edited a special topic on “Theatre and Statelessness in Europe” for *Critical Stages* in

2016. His latest books are *Performing Statelessness in Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) and *Deleuze, Guattari and the Art of Multiplicity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020). He is currently co-editing *Life in the Posthuman Condition* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming in 2022) and the *Palgrave Handbook on Theatre and Migration* (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming in 2023).