

3. GOVERNING SOLIDARITY: Volunteering with Refugees as a Field of Governmental Intervention

3.1. Governmental Interventions in the Conduct of Volunteering with Refugees

At the height of the ‘refugee crisis’ in October 2015, I attended the third “Forum for Refugee Help” (“Forum Flüchtlingshilfe”), one of a series of conferences organized by the state government of Baden-Württemberg. Gisela Erler, a Green party member and the state’s first “Counsellor for Civil Society and Civic Participation” gave the introductory address to the event. In her speech, she lauded the outcomes of her efforts to enhance and support the growth in volunteering with refugees. “You won’t find another product anywhere in the world as participatory as this one in this field!”, she remarked enthusiastically (Field notes: 16/10/2015). The State Counsellor waved a small, yellowish booklet in the air so that everyone in the room could catch a glimpse of it. “It has been extremely successful!” she announced. Developed under her auspices and in the name of the state government, it was designed as a “practical guidebook” for citizens seeking to help refugees across the state. According to Gisela Erler, the government had given out more than 30,000 free copies within the few weeks since its publication date.

During my field research among volunteers in Baden-Württemberg, I came across this booklet on numerous occasions. It appeared to be an important source of information for many of my interlocutors. As stated on its title page, it aims to “give answers to key questions at a glance”, features “good examples” and practical advice for volunteers, for instance on how to found a citizens’ initiative in support of refugees, and contains information on the legal situation of asylum seekers and refugees. The booklet begins with

a short commentary by Gisela Erler, who introduces the handbook entitled *Welcome! A Handbook for Voluntary Help for Refugees in Baden-Württemberg*¹ with the following words:

“Volunteering is of the highest importance when it comes to our humanitarian obligations. For this reason, we took a decision together with the volunteer helpers on the ground to provide a compass. A compass with which you and the refugees entrusted to you can navigate the confusing landscape of federal, state and communal laws, decrees, and responsibilities.”² (Handbook: 2015, p. 3)³

Around the long summer of migration, governmental actors assigned committed citizens an important role in the ‘humanitarian reception’ of asylum seekers. They fuelled the notion that help was urgently needed and actively mobilized practices of refugee support among local residents. By doing so, they sought to integrate committed citizens into a symbiotic relationship that offered mutual rewards (see Chapter 2). At the same time, governmental actors felt a growing need to influence, support, motivate, enhance and coordinate citizens seeking to help refugees. The handbook for committed citizens is a striking case in point. It illustrates how the state government of Baden-Württemberg felt a need to provide a ‘compass’ that, metaphorically speaking, pointed volunteers in the right direction and ensured they would remain on the desired path.

In the course of 2014 and 2015, governmental actors introduced numerous other programmes and instruments that aimed to shape the conduct of newly committed citizens. Their efforts were underpinned by the notion that volunteers needed governmental guidance, coordination and support in order to work effectively – a notion that I repeatedly encountered in the course of my field research. The state government of Baden-Württemberg,

1 German original: “Willkommen! Ein Handbuch für die ehrenamtliche Flüchtlingshilfe in Baden-Württemberg”.

2 Translation by LF. German original: “Das Ehrenamt hat bei unseren humanitären Verpflichtungen höchsten Stellenwert. Deshalb haben wir gemeinsam mit vielen ehrenamtlich Helfenden vor Ort beschlossen, einen Kompass bereitzustellen. Einen Kompass, mit dem Sie sich und die Ihnen anvertrauten Flüchtlinge durch eine zuweilen unübersichtliche Landschaft von Bundes-, Landes- und Kommunalgesetzen, Verordnungen und Zuständigkeiten lotsen können.”.

3 See: https://www.fluechtlingshilfe-bw.de/fileadmin/_flh/Praxistipps/Handbuch-Fluechtlingshilfe-3.Aufl-WEB-DB.pdf (last accessed 1/8/2020).

for instance, provided special training schemes, introduced financial support programmes, published a regular newsletter and launched a website (www.fluechtlingshilfe-bw.de) featuring practical information for volunteers. It also held regular “Forum for Refugee Help” conferences that aimed to facilitate networking and dialogue among volunteers and other actors in the field. Furthermore, so-called “Volunteer Coordinator” positions were introduced in almost all municipalities and district councils across the area of my field research. A similar tendency unfolded at social welfare organizations, who were given responsibility for implementing additional efforts to coordinate and support citizen engagement around refugees – a responsibility for which they received increased funding from the state government.

This chapter investigates the rationalities behind governmental efforts to intervene in volunteering with refugees. I also provide insights into the mechanisms and techniques with which actors set out to shape the ‘proper’ conduct of refugee support. The manifold programmes that were introduced around the long summer of migration, I will argue, not only extended governmental control over committed citizens but also aimed to shape their practices of refugee support in a way that served the state’s interests in the governance of migration. They shifted governmental responsibilities to the individual and placed an emphasis on self-government, a development that Lessenich (2011: 316) calls “governing the self in the name of society”. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that certain volunteers also constantly exceeded and defied governmental attempts to shape their ‘proper’ conduct. By doing so, they remained to a certain extent ungovernable.

The following analysis is deeply influenced by a Foucauldian perspective on government and governmentality (Foucault 1982, 1991). Following Foucault, I understand government as the “conduct of conduct” that is “constituted by all those ways of reflecting and acting that have aimed to shape, guide, manage or regulate the conduct of persons [...] in the light of certain principles or goals” (Rose 1996: 41). My analysis also draws on works that outline how ostensibly ‘apolitical’ humanitarian interventions have become increasingly entangled with and complicit in the governance of marginalized groups of society, such as irregular migrants and asylum seekers (Ticktin 2006; Fassin 2007; Bornstein & Redfield 2011a; Ticktin 2011). For instance, Fassin (2007: 509) scrutinizes the development of a new mode of governing based on humanitarian premises, arguing that “humanitarianism and politics are tending to merge – in governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental spheres”. This chapter contributes to these works by investigating how state actors set out

to shape the conduct of grassroots humanitarian action in order to increase their influence in domains commonly considered non-governmental. By doing so, I will argue, they seek to govern migration societies through extended state-citizen networks veiled in a cloak of humanitarianism.

I draw on field research conducted between late 2014 and mid-2016 in various localities across the southern German state of Baden-Württemberg. During this period, I spoke to numerous governmental representatives from the level of the state to the level of municipalities. Moreover, I participated in conferences, training schemes and other events that governmental actors organized for volunteers supporting refugees across Baden-Württemberg.

This chapter consists of five parts. In the following section two, I scrutinize how the programmes launched by governmental actors shifted, challenged and (re)produced the contested boundary between ‘state’ and ‘civil society’, while (re)ordering responsibilities in the reception of asylum seekers. Section three explores the discourses and practices with which governmental actors intervened in the self-conduct of volunteers in order to shape ‘socialized selves’. In section four, I illustrate how governmental actors positioned themselves in relation to what one of my interlocutors called kinds of ‘uncomfortable engagement’ through which volunteers expressed their dissent towards governmental decisions and policies. I conclude with reflections on the role of governmental actors in the contested solidarities that emerged around the long summer of migration.

3.2. (Re)Ordering Responsibilities in the Reception of Asylum Seekers

In his seminal essay on the limits of the state, Mitchell (1991) argues that what we think of as “the state” only gains meaning in relation to what is defined and understood as “(civil) society”. He thus calls on scholars to reflect on the processes of boundary-making between what appear to be two distinct entities: “Rather than searching for a definition that will fix the boundary, we need to examine the detailed political processes through which the uncertain yet powerful distinction between state and civil society is produced” (ibid.: 78). In this section, I investigate how the long summer of migration brought about important – but necessarily contested – (re)negotiations of the role and responsibilities of “active citizens” vis-à-vis “the state” in migration societies. I scrutinize how the programmes launched by governmental actors shifted,