5. Negotiating Solidarities: Empirical findings

In this chapter, I give a detailed summary of my empirical findings, so that the reader can gain insight into my analysis of the data. The subchapters present an in-depth discussion of each of the six analytical categories and the codes that most essentially sustain them in the overall storyline. I use direct quotes from interviews and fieldnotes as well as further references to the empirical material. The conceptual storyline emerged from and was developed based on the empirical material from my fieldwork. Throughout the later analytical techniques, this also involved engaging with existing literature. However, I do not systematically engage with it in this chapter yet. Especially in constructivist GTM, it is key to give data space and depth, accounting for emerging theoretical development. But certainly, I do not pretend that these observations have never been discussed. The previous chapter underlined the relevance of existing research and how it frames my data. Furthermore, in order to make relevant links to extant research visible in this chapter already, I include what Dunne and Üstűndağ refer to as *flags*:

> "[T]he reader [...] may be frustrated with an apparent lack of theoretical discussion as they progress through the contextualization and findings chapters, [so] this technique of flagging connections between your own emerging themes and extant theoretical concepts can be very useful" (Dunne & Üstűndağ, 2020).

These flags are hints to but not in-depth elaborations of existing literature. A more thorough integration follows in Chapter 6 where I link the condensed contributions of this chapter to existing literature and theory, focused by the contribution to social movement studies.[1] The following graph represents a vi-

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1   Therefore, I flag the references relevant for this integration within the text, while only including other necessary references, which will not be explored further, in footnotes.

sualization of the overall storyline: Negotiating Solidarities. The gerund form underlines its processual character as neither its components nor their interaction are totally clear-cut or rigid. They partly move at different levels (more focused on the individual or the groups), but are linked to each other in the development of answers to the research question. In the visualization, the research question is at the center and around it there are the six main analytical categories that emerged from the multi-step data analysis. Next to their name, I note a more conceptual dimension each category takes within the storyline and toward the research question. Altogether, the storyline offers an abstracted summary of the data that anyways stays close to them.

Figure 2: Visualization Storyline, by the author.
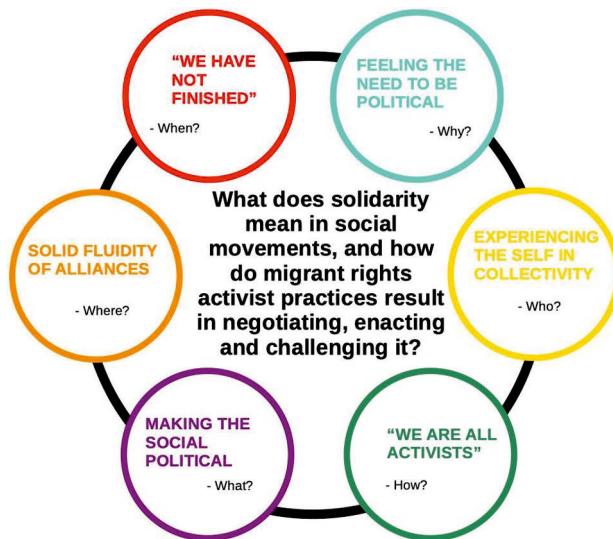
Feeling the Need to Be Political basically discusses *why* and *how* people are involved, so rather the individual dimension of lived everyday activism. Experiencing the Self in Collectivity still explores the individual dimension but by taking it as accessing the experience of the collective: *who* builds solidarities? "We Are All Activists" discusses *how* the very notions of solidarities and joint action are constantly being challenged within activist groups themselves. Making the Social Political looks at *what* kind of activities are taking

place, distinguishing them from others and thereby framing how political action is referred to. Solid Fluidity of Alliances focuses on *where* these solidary actions take place, meaning moving beyond single activist groups, negotiating solidarities at different levels simultaneously. Finally, "We Have Not Finished" is the category that contains the *when*, as in a time dimension of how groups sustain their activities through the constant practicing of solidarity. While there is a sequence in how these categories are presented through the storyline, this does not mean that this should be taken as a clear sequential logic or a life cycle—either of activists or activist groups. There might be occasions where a certain sequence applies, but generally the various components can also happen simultaneously or some parts may take place while others do not.

5.1   Feeling the Need to Be Political

This category captures the individual level of how activists experience being and becoming political in the context of migrant rights activism in Hamburg. It emerges from the interviews with individual activists but also regularly comes up as a topic in group activities.[2] The category entails motivations and backgrounds of being politically active as well as reasons for not being active (anymore). It captures structural and seemingly more individual reasons, which are collected in some patterns. Some activists suffer themselves from the circumstances they are fighting, while others are not as directly affected by current migration policies. Nevertheless, many patterns emerge with people in very diverse living situations. Feeling the Need to Be Political is a complex category that might seem contradictory in capturing plural and shifting perspectives. It is the first category presented because without politically active individuals, there are no groups and there is no claiming, feeling or practicing solidarities.

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2   Many activists are involved in multiple groups or have been political for a long time, so their experiences are not necessarily confined to migrant rights activism or the groups I have been involved with. Additionally, all the activists I conducted interviews with or met in groups were, at that moment, actively involved in some way. More than the other categories, this one is centrally based on how participants interpret others' experiences, especially in terms of stopping political involvement. Nevertheless, also active people face the factors that lead to people not being active.

Being and becoming political

"I'm just a person who is into politics" (IDI_P04, l. 912f. [Translated])

Similar to this statement, many activists regularly reflect about their be(com)ing political. Being political is framed as a personal characteristic, a natural part of one's life (IDI_P01, l. 524–528; IDI_P07, l. 231–234; IDI_P16, l. 1415–1422). One activist refers to her*his "cause" (IDI_P15, l. 138f. [Translated]), another one even states: "I think I couldn't live without political work." (IDI_P03, l. 1136f. [Translated]) These examples show that activists reflect on their own being political. They often emphasize the importance they attribute to it, even defining themselves through it. Some refer to how they have always been political, many delineate how they *became* political (IDI_P01, l. 689–695; IDI_P08, l. 7–13; IDI_P11, l. 474–481; IDI_P14, l. 410–420). These political biographies are often building around decisive events, youth and family (IDI_P03, l. 128–131; IDI_P04, l. 81–84; IDI_P06, l. 35–43; IDI_P15, l. 117–127).

While there are overarching patterns that can be identified, there is also a wide variety of backgrounds, understandings and forms of being political. Activists differ in ways and intensities of involvement (IDI_P08, l. 639–648; IDI_P11, l. 554–565). Not everyone sees it as the center of their lives or discusses a linear development of *politicizing*. This chapter captures some such patterns without aiming at exhaustively representing how activists experience their being political. The focus is less on reasons for *becoming* political[3]. It is more about how people experience their be(com)ing political—including reasons but not as causal links.

Feeling the need to be political

"I always felt like… 'Oh, I need to do something'. I always knew a sense of guilt. Now I feel like- I'm trying to do something. It's not to- only for the sake of appeasing me but I think because it's right and also enjoying it and I think that people around me appreciate… what I do." (IDI_P05, l. 616–621)

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3   However, it is interesting to note that a topic that social movement studies seemingly have always been focused on is exactly this dimension of *why* people become political (see e.g. Buechler, 2000; Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 5f.; Kreisler, 2010; Norris, 2002, p. 201; Raschke, 1988, p. 124).

One defining pattern of this category is that activists feel the need to be political. This urge is differently composed and contextualized but frequently expressed—both by activists who are fighting for their *own* rights very directly and by activists who have the privilege of choosing this political fight over others because they are not directly affected (anymore) by German and European migration policies.

Many activists express that they feel like they have to engage because the overall situation is so unbearable, for others or themselves to live or witness. Often this involves a clear reference to the current political situation or the importance of standing up against racism, discrimination, borders or the rising Right (IDI_P06, l. 50–58; IDI_P14, l. 341–346; IDI_P16, l. 221–230). One activist says, "[it is] necessary to do anti-racist work." (IDI_P05, l. 471–473). Another one stresses that "[i]t is unacceptable that people are systematically deprived of their rights." (IDI_P06, l. 309–310 [Translated]) Often these notions are also related to activists' own privileges or capacities that they feel a responsibility to use. In a meeting someone says that "s*he wants to do something against this situation where s*he can move more freely than others in this society." (PO_G01_24, l. 7–10) Sometimes, such responsibility is also ascribed to privileged groups, for instance, a refugee activist appealing to Germans' obligation "to counter the current situation and developments." (PO_G01_10, p. 27; PO_G09_1, p. 54) Even when not expressed so explicitly, such a feeling seems to emerge in the following quote too:

> "And being politically active for me means that I can simply... that I know, I have the possibility to change things or... like, shift things- I can contribute to a specific topic moving in one direction rather than another. ... This gives me the feeling of not being powerless." (IDI_P11, l. 483–489 [Translated])

Another person describes how s*he does not want difficult living conditions let immobilize her*him: "[W]e have to get out, we still have to walk, we have to learn many things in life. We can do many things." (IDI_P17_1, l. 675–688 [Translated]) Indeed, these two quotes stress the linkage between the sense of *having to* act and the possibilities that come with it. The felt need to act positively emerges as building a society or future "that I want to live in," (IDI_P06, l. 19–28 [Translated]) overcoming borders, including the ones in one's own mind (PO_G01_24, l. 10–14). Some scholars similarly observe activists' "felt necessity," (Bang & Sørensen, 1999, p. 331) "responsibility," (Day, 2005, p. 200;

Young, 2006) their feeling "drawn in," "compelled" or even "morally obligated" to act (Scholz, 2008, p. 52).[4]

"We were forced to be political"

> "It came up that it was important to make clear: The people are made into refugees. We have to be political as a logical consequence from this." (PO_G02_12, p. 43)

This quote captures the specific situation of people who are personally and directly affected by the circumstances this movement is fighting against. In this context, these are most of the time migrants that aim at or apply for asylum or a residence status in Hamburg and live or have lived in camps. Many people do not get or fight long years for a legal status, they are threatened by deportation, they live isolated in camps, do not get access to education, health services, work or normal housing. Of course, these life circumstances give a specific texture to the necessity to act (IDI_P05, l. 933–942).

The notion of "we were forced to be political" is voiced by several activist (IDI_P03, l. 430–434; IDI_P08, l. 599–606; PO_G02_06, p. 68). While responsibility can play a role in this as well, indignation and anger seem central in its context, as shown when one activist talks about the situation in a camp, explicitly expressing her*his anger: "[U]p to now [specific camp] is... full of people. Up to now... people arrive and are there. They are not... transferred because they [do] not have asylum." (IDI_P01, l. 418–422) Activists underline that they are denied basic rights and live in unbearable situations and, therefore, have to stand up and organize themselves (IDI_P17_1, l. 604–611). They did not choose this struggle, but they try to own it, as shown in this note from a meeting: "[N]o one [came] here with the plan of making a political group. Instead they had used certain conditions and an opportunity." (PO_G02_14, p. 90) Migrants with a (by now) secure status, who have (partly) experienced the oppression of migration policies and discrimination, or BPoC, who daily

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4   Flacks even addresses that activists cannot be interpreted just by their situation, calling for a more differentiated exploration (2004, p. 146). But he, as others, focuses on those acting in solidarity. Maybe because the activity of those affected are, indeed, interpreted mainly through their positioning. Nevertheless, they all call for these more complex motivations to be further explored.

experience racism, have direct links to these struggles (IDI_P11, l. 20–47). One activist describes such an experience:

> "And [there] suddenly I'm not a teacher anymore, I'm a [...] worker. And how they treat you badly... how they belittle you, how they devalue you... just for how you look... or, well, they treat you as inferior to them, you know. [...] Then I come here to Hamburg and the situation in this sense doesn't change much." (IDI_P17_1, l. 728–740 [Translated])

Such situations force people to become active, as is raised when a person, discussing her*his living situation shaped by institutional barriers, is told that nobody was going to become political for her*him: "'I know you don't want to do it and I understand it but you have to connect, unite and mobilize.'" (PO_G05_11, l. 23–28) Facets of this notion are reflected in some research on migrant rights activism (see e.g. Ataç et al., 2015, p. 8; Bayat, 2010, p. 15; Kanalan, 2015, p. 1f.).[5]

Nicht-Ankommen-Können[6]

> "[Y]ou know, you can feel the segregation that you are immigrant, you are refugee. Even though you hold a passport... you hold a German passport [...]. [B]ut you could still know that it's just a ceremonial and bureaucratic right that you could get but in the reality you cannot connect to the reality. [...] Because I think [...] it's also connected to the fact of if you really belong... to this city, to this system, to the culture and also... to how the system works. But when you already feel like... the system excludes you [...]. If you could miss this, the reality part, you could really feel like the future does not sound really good in the context of how you feel, you know." (IDI_P08, l. 812–827)

This description of experiencing a discriminatory, racist society and state shows how hard it is made for people to actually arrive. This is true for the most immediate experiences of arrival but expands to when people, as depicted in this quote, already have legal documents. Understandably, this can

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5   It also links to perspectives focusing on identity politics or grievances (see e.g. Barker & Cox, 2014, p. 20; Crossley, 2002, p. 14; Rosenau, 2008, p. 64). However, it is too easy to ascribe becoming political mainly to activists' positionings, as is often done in such perspectives.

6   Not being able to actually arrive or settle.

cause a sense of hopelessness, which can lead to people not becoming active or stopping their engagement (IDI_P04, l. 405–408; IDI_P05, l. 806–813; IDI_P15, l. 592–602). It also raises an ambivalence present in this whole analytical category. Factors that for some people, or at a certain point in time, are central reasons why they are or become politically active, for others, or at a different point in time, can be the very cause for not doing so. The very conditions—the isolation in the camps, criminalization, discrimination, living conditions, lack of perspectives and, not least, the immense effort it takes to move through the asylum procedures—are structural causes why people do not have time or energy for rising against these very circumstances (anymore). Far-off camps, daily struggles or deportations very directly prevent people from building a life (IDI_P06, l. 745–749; PO_G01_18, p. 19).[7]

Giving reasons for not acting

> "One refugee said that s*he had been in Germany for a year only and felt like s*he had to gain more experience before s*he could actually do something. Then some others said that it was only through doing things that you could actually gain experience." (PO_G06_06, l. 82–86)

The whole setting described above also results in many migrants living in the camps lacking knowledge and confidence to become active—yet, while it clearly does not apply to all since there are many who become active despite this. Nevertheless, not knowing about one's rights, concrete possibilities of acting, or the people to address, but also just feeling like not having much to contribute, are mentioned as factors (IDI_P05, l. 1087–1103; IDI_P07, l. 6–13). The very real and partly externally produced fear of negative consequences for one's life, especially for people's asylum procedures, is even more fundamental (IDI_P01, l. 673–684; PO_G08_01, p. 97).[8] Additionally, of course, there are also activities or contexts that indeed can involve risks for people without (clear) status (IDI_P03, l. 531–535). This can also be grounded in intersectional

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7   Steinhilper refers to "demobilizing circumstances" (Steinhilper, 2017, p. 78 [Translated]).

8   Multiple people report that camp employees discourage people to leave the camp when there are activities outside, telling them it will be bad for their asylum procedure or giving wrong information about activists.

forms of discrimination, affecting how free or comfortable people feel to be politically active.[9]

Not being political

> "Someone said this explicitly: 'I don't have any problem because- it's not nice where I live. It is a camp. I didn't say it's nice. But it's... still part of the right time. It is a phase that I have to stay in this camp, then come the Folge-unterkunft[10] and after Folgeunterkunft comes the apartment.' And this is what they all experience: Why should I rush and demonstrate?" (IDI_P07, l. 257–266 [Translated])

Especially concerning people in such living situations, it is important to point out that not all people living in and being affected by European migration policies are, see the need, or want to be political about it. This is particularly important to take into account when it comes to some people in vulnerable situations getting in touch with activist groups, at least partly often seeking individual support:

> Because the people don't go there to suddenly become politically active. No. They talk about their own problems [...] not with the background of wanting to problematize something: 'For this I will get more rights or less rights or...' No. These consequences are not always there or not... intended." (IDI_P07, l. 312–317 [Translated])

This quote points to the fact that there are different perceptions of which situations really require becoming active in the first place. Such perspectives, for example, can build on seeing the situation as a temporary part of the normal procedures, as described above, or on not having any political experiences, having lived through worse situations or being better off than others (IDI_P01, l. 556–560; IDI_P07, l. 169–173; IDI_P15, l. 209–220). All these observations do

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9   Examples (lack of childcare or the choice of meeting places) are raised in Subchapter 5.3. Some political participation research explores why certain groups of people are not getting involved in different forms of participation—more or less conventional, for instance (see e.g. Edwards, 2004, p. 97; Rosanvallon, 2008, p. 253; Streeck & Schäfer, 2013, p. 13).

10 These are the camps which mostly people are transferred to from "first reception centers".

not mean that people are necessarily not political at all or that they cannot eventually become it. But it indicates diverse positions within groups. These can include dependencies, making people do something for groups because they need support. Such aspects are raised by fewer activists and are often hard to recognize, as one activist describes: "that... people just accepted and endured their living conditions, no matter how difficult they were... eh, yes, I found this really hard" (IDI_P14, l. 126–129 [Translated]). Nevertheless, some activists very clearly call for being aware of and acknowledging this (IDI_P08, l. 251–266). One activist highlights that people should accept that, just like medicine, politics is not the right thing for everyone: "Not all people can do politics. Alright? ... And this is very ok." (IDI_P15, l. 353–357 [Translated]) These notions around respecting not being political and awareness of certain emerging power imbalances seem rather marginally voiced and discussed. However, I think that it is a potentially important dynamic that should be given its place.[11]

"Doing something for oneself"

> "[S]o, you know, this is also part of my daily life so but at a certain point it changed because I was less involved in all those activities and things changed. And I tried to get some black job, then stopped because the situation is very precarious and... at a point also I get in process of also getting legal status which also... was a very turning point in my life, also trying to do some other thing." (IDI_P08, l. 61–66)

This quote raises another reason that comes up concerning activists stopping to be involved—for a certain time or altogether. Firstly, it contains the notion of migrants beginning to "[start] a life" (PO_G02_07, p. 80): through school, Ausbildung[12] or work (IDI_P01, l. 412–418; IDI_P04, l. 737–742; IDI_P06, l. 189–203; PO_G02_22, l. 85–90). One activist describes how being transferred to another camp but also getting her*his papers, enabling her*him to start a German class, led to not being actively involved anymore: "When I want to do... Politik[13], I cannot focus at the same time for learning." (IDI_P01, l. 947–952)

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11   Various positionings and resulting power relations are discussed in Subchapters 5.3 and 5.4.

12   Apprenticeship.

13   Politics.

"Doing something for oneself" means shifting one's focus and energies—circumstances (positively) changing can keep people from (further) organizing politically (IDI_P01, l. 588ff.). That is not always a conscious choice but can be induced, for instance by getting a job taking more time or not being flexible, or starting a family[14] (IDI_P06, l. 911–920; PO_G02_32, l. 38–55). From different positionalities and life situations, this dimension also resonates with activists in legally secure circumstances. So secondly, doing something for oneself can refer to conscious choices to put oneself before the political struggle, at least at a certain point (IDI_P11, l. 146–162; IDI_P16, l. 345–352).

Being tired/fed up/exhausted...

> "Then I thought: 'Well,... [laughs] the laws worsened and no one listens to us'. ... And... there is no danger, or the politicians simply... don't take us seriously and they think that we don't put pressure. So they will never do anything for us...." (IDI_P15, l. 572–579 [Translated])

I already raised hopelessness before. A related pattern is that people describe having "no energy," (IDI_P04, l. 1182f.) feeling "fed up," (IDI_P07, l. 486f.) "exhausted," (IDI_P06, l. 423f.) "tired" (IDI_P08, l. 771f.) or "frustrated" (IDI_P14, l. 123–126). Sometimes this is due to the general political situation or lack of positive developments or changes. Other times, it can relate to internal dynamics, disagreements or personal issues (IDI_P03, l. 256–261; IDI_P08, l. 210–227; IDI_P11, l. 146–162; PO_G02_22, l. 90–96).[15] People do not necessarily always stop but even when they are still or eventually remain active, these notions emerge frequently.[16] One activist intervenes in a meeting claiming that "the way we are doing this is not working," referring to energy being lost in arguments: "Try to be positive. If you're not positive, you're not helping us. [...] We have a lot of things to do, we need energy." (PO_G02_15, p. 10) An aspect receiving less attention but linked to this is how activists deal with this.

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14   Interestingly, in my experience, it was rather new fathers who would be less involved. Many mothers who were active before giving birth would still come with their babies afterwards as well. Of course, this also relates to the forms that groups take and to structural factors, such as childcare discussed in Subchapter 5.3.

15   Lack of change is explored in Subchapter 5.6, internal dynamics in Subchapter 5.2.

16   If anything, exhaustion comes up in publications as a general collective phase in protest cycles (see e.g. Ataç, 2016, p. 636; Kreisler, 2010, p. 98; May, 2010, p. 149; Tarrow, 2011, p. 206).

Balancing things

> "No, but I really think this is also a topic how people who are doing a lot
> politically actually have a balance, you know. I often ask myself- well, I think
> some people... are more like, doing sports or... I don't know go out dancing or
> things like that. But I believe that you need some kind of a balance." (IDI_P03,
> l. 1193–1200 [Translated])

This indicates how activists continue to stay involved when many of them ex-
perience a strong sense of tiredness and exhaustion. Balancing emerges as a
strategy of "[engaging in a way] so that I'm fine" (IDI_P11, l. 177–179 [Trans-
lated])—which, however, of course, not everyone has the full choice of using.
This can mean limiting engagement time-wise, but sometimes also just in-
volves awareness of its intensity. It can mean taking time for holidays, seeing
friends or having other hobbies (IDI_P03, l. 1182–1189; IDI_P15, l. 176–185). Ac-
tivists also focus on building a life by finding a job or doing a German course
(IDI_P01, l. 950–953; IDI_P08, l. 606–619). Many activists consciously reflect
about how many capacities they have. Some claim that when being convinced
of what one is doing, it is possible to make time for it, even though in prin-
ciple there is little time and energy (IDI_P07, l. 62–67; IDI_P11, l. 412–426).
One activist in a group meeting stresses how the living conditions of refugee
activists leave more responsibility to act with Germans (PO_G05_05, p. 51).
So balancing can go in a direction of individually limiting political activity or
collectively distributing responsibilities very consciously (IDI_P16, l. 221–230;
IDI_P17_1, l. 669–676; PO_G01_33, l. 12–21). What is usually referred to as a
work-life-balance, in this context might become an activism-life(-work) bal-
ance (IDI_P01, l. 950–953; IDI_P03, l. 157–161; IDI_P08, l. 61–69; IDI_P16, l.
461–470). Part of this balance is that activists also address how they gain
through their political involvement.

Gaining (energy) from politics

> "I thought that I could never do it, you know? Unfortunately, in the society
> we're living in they keep telling us that we cannot do it [...]: 'It's complicated,
> you won't be able, it will not work'. But when you enter a group, as I entered
> [group's name], I suddenly see that they are doing workshops. And, addi-
> tionally, that they offer me to do it as well. At first, I refused, I thought 'No,

no'. But then I said 'Why not? I won't die if I try'. So from then on I could do it and, of course, I can still improve but I made the first step […] and this also fills me with personal satisfaction." (IDI_P17_2, l. 50–61 [Translated])

Many activists describe feeling happy, satisfied, proud at times, getting energy and hope from their political activities (IDI_P03, l. 177–185; IDI_P04, l. 853ff.; IDI_P08, l. 141–150; IDI_P14, l. 635–644). Personal relationships and sharing joint experiences are an important part of this (IDI_P03, l. 1199–1209; IDI_P16, l. 564–571). One activist calls the emotional support among activists "enriching," (IDI_P14, l. 342, l. 549–559 [Translated]) another summarizes: "[I]t's making friends in the end, of course." (IDI_P05, l. 517f.) Gaining energy can involve not feeling alone, experiencing positive collective moments and also just having fun (IDI_P11, l. 195–198; IDI_P15, l. 198–205; PO_G01_27, l. 120–129): "And actually for me it's very important that […] political work is fun. Of course, it doesn't always have to be fun. But it's an important part." (IDI_P11, l. 389–393) It can mean receiving emotional or material support (IDI_P08, l. 676–688). Examples can be forgetting one's daily problems or possibilities of improving life through activism (IDI_P17_1, l. 638–644; IDI_P07, l. 96–104).[17] That can also cause challenges in terms of relationships of power and dependency as well as of potentially unequally distributed benefits (IDI_P07, l. 522–533; IDI_P08, l. 241–251). Yet, it also puts the positive side of feeling this need to be political into perspective:

"I would always continue because in my daily life it gives me good experiences and good feelings. So I would say without it, it would be, on the one hand, stupid not to do it anymore cause… I would- could only sit at home and look outside and see that nothing is changing but everything is worse. So it would make me really sad I guess. And, on the other hand, it's also something with- for my personal life… where I just gain more positive attitude from." (IDI_P16, l. 1415–1422)

Gaining recognition sometimes comes up and expresses a wish to contribute something (IDI_P03, l. 1291–1295; IDI_P04, l. 885–897; IDI_P05, l. 142–149; IDI_P07, l. 722–733). Networking, energy and political agency sometimes appear in existing literature about migrant rights activism focused on politi-

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17   It should not be ignored that next to people living in camps this can also apply to privileged people (materially) benefitting from activism, even when this is not often explicitly addressed.

cal practices (see e.g. Johnson, 2014, p. 29; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2017, p. 16; Steinhilper, 2017, p. 81). This last aspect of *contributing* links to where this category started, exploring that many activists see being political as a natural, necessary, central part of their lives.

Summary

> "I would say that… in the beginning I had […] the idea […] that politics is something which is done by politicians […]. I'm basically there to elect them and that's all. And step by step you get to know or you, well, you realize that there are many problems where the politicians are not giving you any solution […] And… so I developed the idea that it might be pretty smart to do something on my own." (IDI_P16, l. 205–216)

This quote shows how such an understanding of one's own be(com)ing political can develop over time.[18] This category captures the complexity of people's involvement in political groups fighting for migrant rights in Hamburg. People come from different backgrounds and are in various life situations, but share notions of strong commitment, at times experienced as inescapable. The category shows that this can result in positive and negative experiences. Activists think about ways of balancing. I would argue that the category interestingly shows that positionings are not necessarily the main or only factor for political involvement. This makes reasons that make people stop an essential part. Individual positions and situations are reflected and shifting, also because necessities and priorities change. Identities might sometimes be as much a result of as a reason for political activism. In a way, this category is the basis of the storyline Negotiating Solidarities. What solidarities can and should be is such a personal figuring-out process. In addition, for collective negotiations to take place, joint capacities need to be explored and reflected. The next analytical category takes off at the linkage of these individual and collective positionings.

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18   Yet, there is no linearity from not being politically conscious to being politically active.

5.2   Experiencing the Self Through Collectivity

This category captures the role relations, emotions and the multiplicity and fluidity of identities play in how activists experience political activity. The category explores how activists reflect on their own involvement and how groups are in a continual process of self-defining.[19] Individual and collective identities are often addressed as something surprisingly rigid when it comes to social movements because as participants' identities (most often seen as equal to positionings) are often assumed as the core reason for movements' existence. The previous subchapter raised that identities might partly be a product of political involvement because people change through it. This category explores this a little further in terms of individual and collective identities emerging as fluid, overlapping and controversial parts of activism. Neither on the individual nor on the collective level is this a simple or purely positive process but one of constant negotiation. That stresses the meeting of self and collective as the interesting focal point, rather than either the one or the other. This is the reason why I describe the notions in this category as Experiencing the Self Through Collectivity, underlining the centrality of experience and relations.[20]

Perceiving oneself (within a group)

> "At the moment it's less- well, I also don't really know what my place is, maybe, but… something always comes up then where I can contribute."
> (IDI_P04, l. 955–958 [Translated])

Many activists reflect very (self-)consciously about their involvement in groups and how they are experiencing it. That can involve insecurities and doubts, as in the previous statements (see also IDI_P05, l. 1087–1103;

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19   Groups consist of individuals and can only be approached through their perspectives. This includes my participants and myself. This category strongly builds on observations from group activities I have been part of, which means that these collective instances are captured through my own experience. My participants vary in experience and involvement in political groups. Some are involved in many groups, some mainly in one. Some have been active for a long time (in Hamburg), some just started (here). Some have doubts about their place within activism.

20   The category is an example of how my empirical data developed in dialogue with existing theory, as its name was inspired by McDonald's concept of a "public experience of self" (2002, p. 125).

IDI_P17_1, l. 742–756; PO_G06_06, l. 82–86). But other feelings are also raised, such as happiness, frustration, support, love, anger and many more (IDI_P01, l. 281–284; IDI_P03, l. 177–185; IDI_P11, l. 114–117; IDI_P15, l. 268–272). The wide range of emotions suggests that these experiences are promising to look at. One activist states: "I'm here because I care…" (IDI_P05, l. 111–113). While not being specified further, this is a strong entangling of personal feelings and relationalities, both to other individuals and to a collective. Someone highlights that even though sometimes it is really hard, s*he takes time for the group because it is important to her*him: "[W]hen you're convinced by the contents then… eh… you take the time and make it possible." (IDI_P07, l. 65–67 [Translated]).

Interestingly, the process of finding one's place seems to be experienced both when starting to get involved and in contexts where people have been active for some time (IDI_P14, l. 560–566). Some scholars explore the role of emotions in movements particularly (see e.g. Flam & King, 2005; Goodwin et al., 2001; Goodwin & Jasper, 2004; Polletta, 2006). Barker and Cox discuss how activists are often presented as very strong and clear about their position and goals, while, according to them, they "do not always *know* what needs are driving them, but […] are engaged in finding out, through struggle and through solidarity." (Barker & Cox, 2014, p. 22 [Emphasis in original])

"I try to do my small parts"

> "In the beginning I was very, very insecure what my role in the group is but at some point I realized, well, that this feeling I have… really works a bit. … So that sometimes you feel ready to do more, like in this [activity] we did I managed to speak a little bit and I also felt like a legitimate speaker." (IDI_P14, l. 560–566 [Translated])

This quote interestingly shows a core of experiencing the self in collectivity because it is a personal reflection about one's own involvement that is not only concerned with the individual but that also aims at strengthening the collective through whatever might be needed (IDI_P05, l. 550–554; IDI_P06, l. 595–604). Nevertheless, it is very closely linked to what feels right, comfortable or desirable to an individual (IDI_P08, l. 639–648; IDI_P14, l. 1016–1026;

PO_G02_32, l. 16–26).[21] This expression, "I try to do my small parts," at once raises a sense of wanting to contribute and taking responsibility (IDI_P05, l. 613–618). It also points to the processual and fluid nature of this category because what the small parts are depends on oneself, on the point in time and on the group. For instance, one activist claims: "I just do whatever is needed" (IDI_P05, l. 445). Another activist positions her*himself as a "Klein-Aktivist*in"[22]: S*he describes that with a child and exams s*he didn't manage to participate at times and how it was a good feeling that this was accepted by the group (IDI_P07, l. 24–28).

Feeling part of the group is a very personal process that takes time and figuring out. Sometimes people might explicitly look for identification and belonging in specific groups—and, clearly, there can be direct links between categorized positionings and certain political fights (IDI_P16, l. 588–592). But other times, someone's personal characteristics or previous priorities might actually be put aside (IDI_P05, l. 160ff.). People are strongly shaped by being part of a group, by interacting with others and by finding a place for themselves. There is not necessarily a direct causal link between individual positionings and involvements. Identities are not mainly understood in terms of mutually exclusive identity categorizations here, but. they are constantly being figured out.[23] All this underlines that it is about processes of collective involvement and negotiation, which also includes that difficulties can emerge in various forms.

Lacking joint decision-making and a sense of collectivity

> "Because I still feel there is… two, three people that have their own friends, they know that… they still control anything. It's not still… democratized to a certain extent." (IDI_P05, l. 1225–1228)

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21 This is where this category closely relates to the one discussed in the previous Sub-chapter 5.1. That such processes can be affected by structural inequalities is explored in Subchapter 5.3.

22 Small-activist.

23 There is research acknowledging such processes, discussing identities as multiple, fluid, context-dependent and criticizing dominant approaches (see e.g. Farro & Lustiger-Thaler, 2014, p. 3; Flesher Fominaya, 2010, p. 395; McDonald, 2002, p. 125; Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 294f.). Yuval-Davis' distinction between positionings, identities and values (2011) is helpful and introduced in Chapter 6.

This impression of individuals dominating processes arises, for instance, when decision-making is not perceived as a collective process but as non-transparently dominated by few people (IDI_P07, l. 250–270; IDI_P16, l. 740–756; PO_G01_32, l. 57–63). Often a lack of joint decision-making does not only go back to individual activists taking the lead on something. It also seems to emerge in settings with time pressure—which in one way or the other is most of the times. An example can be a young activist who is too nervous to speak in front of many people on the first attempt and later on is refused to try again by organizers (PO_G01_27, l. 111–118). Such situations show a lack of taking care of an individual activist's needs. It might also contain a lack of joint decision-making and sense of collectivity that often happens when there is time pressure (which might explain but not excuse dynamics). Of course, it also links to existing power relations, gender in this case.[24] In some cases, this can result in situations where people feel pressured or even used (IDI_P07, l. 273–285; IDI_P15, l. 225–242).

Specifying the atmosphere

> "There was a lot of small discussions among one or two people so that it got quite chaotic. Some people got a bit annoyed and pushed for moving on." (PO_G02_17, l. 63–65)

In activist groups, just as in any other social setting, interpersonal issues exist, at times erupt and often consume time and energy. This has a lot to do with relationships between individual people but also with a general atmosphere that can be shaped by interruptions, fights, power plays, tensions, rushing or impatience (IDI_P06, l. 761–765; PO_G01_31, l. 59–69; PO_G01_32, l. 111–116; PO_G02_21, l. 26–30; PO_G05_06, p. 2; PO_G06_06, l. 86–92). This is captured in a fieldnote from a meeting: "The tone, the dynamic, the discussions were quite exhausting." (PO_G02_31, l. 29–30) This can link to groups often acting on urgencies and being under time pressure, moving from one action to the next (IDI_P04, l. 1002–1018; PO_G02_22, l. 117–123). This can impact individual experiences of a certain setting, which can of course lead to people being frustrated or even leaving groups (IDI_P04, l. 1128–1132; IDI_P08, l. 251–266; PO_G06_07, l. 10–15). It can also result in instances where nobody

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24   Structural exclusions play an important role and are explored further in Subchapter 5.3.

feels responsible, individuals withdraw or stay passive (IDI_P05, l. 1167–1170; PO_G01_30, l. 35–42; PO_G06_02, p. 14). So far, I mostly explored how groups impact individuals. However, there are also occasions when it rather seems to be the individual level impacting the collective one.

Taking the lead

> "I would describe myself also as a quieter person. And these people are the ones who are making it really difficult for new people and not that self-confident people to do something in a group... because they have a really clear idea and they are verbalizing this clear idea of what is right and what is wrong and therefore a sort of feeling can occur within the group that you're afraid of saying something wrong. And when this situation exists and in my experience it's existing in many groups [...] yes, it can... it can destroy a lot, I would say, or make... make the whole group relation more difficult, even more complex than it's already." (IDI_P16, l. 510–524)

As described here, individual activists can dominate group contexts. It can be rooted in individuals having been involved for a long time and therefore having set priorities that they share during meetings. An activist points out how, especially for new people, this can be intimidating (IDI_P06, l. 796–812). This can be continually reproduced when others keep seeing the same people taking over certain tasks, addressing them as the relevant (spokes)person of a group (IDI_P04, l. 799–802; IDI_P05, l. 1225–1230; PO_G01_27, l. 107–111). Actually, such a focus on individuals can be experienced as too much of a responsibility by these people themselves (PO_G02_06, p. 66).[25] But there can be little space left for the collective. This can be caused by the differing possibilities and positions in groups or it might depend on personalities and people placing themselves at the center of attention (in)advertently (IDI_P06, l. 734–744; IDI_P08, l. 279–287; IDI_P16, l. 524–541; IDI_P16, l. 972–980).

Especially processes concerning finances, which require specific knowledge and often language skills, are often discussed as non-transparent (IDI_P06, l. 990–1001; PO_G01_32, l. 57–63). "Information is crucial, and it is what we are often missing" is how one activist describes this problem of

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25   Additionally, this does not have to be only negative. Of course, there is a need for people to speak for groups, take care of things or potentially even take quick decisions (IDI_P16, l. 489-510).

centralizing knowledge in individual people (PO_G06_02, p. 16). This links to lacking joint decision-making. What I want to point out here is that, as destructive or unnecessary as many of these dynamics are, they are also a normal part of groups *figuring out* who they are or want to be and might even lead to necessary internal change.[26]

Self-defining as a group

> "And then [...] I asked the question: 'Who is the group?' [...] And everyone said 'We'. Ok but if it is us then we have to look at the context. I don't want to be called a refugee. [...] And then we thought of migrants. [...] And now it is about women*." (IDI_P07, l. 653–662 [Translated])

Given that all of these dynamics exist, groups are in a constant process of negotiating, agreeing or disagreeing on their self-defining as a group, which most of the time is never completely finished. This quote recounts a situation where this was addressed very directly. Many activists describe how the goals and directions of their groups are a process that is negotiated among those involved at different points in time (IDI_P04, l. 1128–1132; IDI_P06, l. 796–812; IDI_P08, l. 90–99; IDI_P16, l. 524–541). Groups continuously do this along with other activities they realize: "I have the feeling that we... well, for a long time didn't really know: Who are we? What do we want to do? What is our work? Where should we start? This... somehow wasn't quite clear." (IDI_P11, l. 356–360 [Translated]) In fact, just as individuals, activist groups are defining and developing themselves, their identities.

The question "Who are we?" is not always addressed this explicitly. Sometimes it emerges through more specific topics: Discussions dealing with how open a group is, should be and to whom, or just about who is present, about who decides things or represents the group, sometimes even through what other actors ascribe to a group (IDI_P03, l. 1377–1381; IDI_P05, l. 150–159; PO_G01_28, l. 25–30; PO_G02_19, l. 71ff.; PO_G02_36, l. 25–43). All this makes

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26   There is social movement research dealing with the (lack of) leading figures in movements (see e.g. Castells, 2015, p. 132; Flesher Fominaya, 2010, p. 395; Schaumberg, 2013, p. 279; Young, 2010, p. 19). It might be interesting to link the difficult nature of these processes to critical perspectives on deliberative democracies in terms of equal access (see e.g. Medearis, 2005; Young, 2001).

it evident that these processes involve having and dealing with disagreements. With as many positions, experiences and interests coming together, things can be controversial at times (IDI_P14, l. 495–510; PO_G01_32, l. 80–96; PO_G02_33, l. 7–17; PO_G02_31, l. 7–12; PO_G06_02, p. 15). The importance of acknowledging and capturing such discussions and diverging opinions is sometimes stressed, for instance, in Black feminism (hooks, 2000a, p. 58; Lorde, 1982). Nevertheless, *together* is a key word here because to engage in such processes, there is the need for a level of trust and familiarity that allows for certain issues to be raised.

Getting to know each other

> "So but in general that, for example, in group meetings or something you have the possibility to eat together and so on is a really important part of groups and the activism itself because otherwise you don't get to know people personally, you don't develop any, or not as much, sympathy. And if you want to work together on a long-term I would say it's only healthy to work on your relationship to the different people and that's only possible if you get closer together. But it doesn't mean that you need to be like- act like best friends or something. That could happen and it's fine but I would not say that it's in any way necessary." (IDI_P16, l. 470–480)

Of course, this does not always happen as consciously, but quite some activists underline the importance of building relationships in political contexts. For many, this involves meeting personally as opposed to mainly communicating digitally (IDI_P03, l. 711–717; PO_G06_02, p. 12f.).[27] Taking the time for getting to know each other and spending time together beyond the *business* of political activism shows the importance of relationalities for these very political activities (IDI_P16, l. 524–541; IDI_P17_1, l. 879–887; PO_G06_02, p. 12f.): "And this eating together I really liked. Even though often we have to try really hard and don't really have time for it." (IDI_P15, l. 202–204 [Translated]) Some groups try to create such spaces within meetings, others create further opportunities to sit, talk, eat and get to know each other: "[I]t's supposed to be an occasion for people to come together without a working agenda and just spend time together, get to know each other and talk." (PO_G02_27, l. 12–22)

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27   This stresses just one level where the pandemic certainly impacts activist groups and it is important to remember that my empirical data stem from before the pandemic.

Yet others underline the importance of sharing political and private activities with people, which eventually can add a dimension of friendship or even family to group contexts (IDI_P14, l. 682–695; IDI_P17_1, l. 638–644; PO_G01_14, p. 74):[28] "[I]t [activism] is a very nice way to, to make friends, and to know people and actually learn a lot of new things." (IDI_P05, l. 514f.) Even when differentiating it from friendship, another activist stresses the relational dimension of activism: "They are not my friends, they are not my colleagues but they are my comrades. It's nice to have comrades." (IDI_P11, l. 434–437 [Translated]) Learning from each other points to a certain degree of curiosity, trust and reflexivity that individuals and groups build (IDI_P04, l. 318–321; IDI_P06, l. 927–941; IDI_P14, l. 658–665; IDI_P16, l. 329–335). Political practices and intersectional feminist theories discuss the importance of building personal relations for movements (see e.g. Hill Collins, 2010, p. 24; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016, p. 422; Lin et al., 2016, p. 308; Martin et al., 2007, p. 79; McDonald, 2002, p. 116f.).

Experiencing collectivity

> "This was once… shortly after I came to Hamburg. There was a big demonstration… for refugees I think and with a lot of support. And I gave a speech. And… somehow I really had the feeling, well, like they hear me and… something will happen." (IDI_P15, l. 585–590 [Translated])

This is a powerful quote which points out how collectivity can be experienced. Other instances highlight that organizing can create something that goes beyond a group as just the sum of its parts. For instance, through going beyond the people who take part or are present (IDI_P01, l. 239f.; IDI_P03, l. 430–434; PO_G02_28, l. 53–58)—"it's about us together, not someone individually, that we try together and mutually" (IDI_P07, l. 525–527 [Translated]). Such feelings of collectivity emerge in groups when there is a joint sense of experience, highlighting relations and emotions again. Even when there are disagreements or tensions, the aspect of working on them together seems to be central in all these debates is (IDI_P06, l. 289–299; IDI_P08, l. 251–266; IDI_P11, l. 342–348; PO_G05_11, l. 5–8). *Together* as in reflecting oneself, one's position-

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28   Yet, I also want to point out that one activist explicitly raises that s*he also sees risks in this.

ing, one's behaviors within groups settings, "considering other people's ideas and [not] hav[ing] a ready-made concept" (IDI_P06, l. 691–696 [Translated]).

These are examples of positive emotional experiences of the collective.[29] Such emotions often appear when groups organize events or demonstrations, preparing them sometimes for months, and then experience the realization of their plans together (IDI_P16, l. 618–623; PO_G01_21, l. 36–41; PO_G01_24, l. 17–21).[30] But on a smaller scale, it also comes up when activists just feel comfortable together, can empower each other or found new ways and solutions through jointly reflecting and acting (IDI_P14, l. 712–723; IDI_P17_1, l. 902–911; PO_G06_06, l. 70–79; PO_G01_33, l. 78–85). This brings us back to taking time on individual and collective levels equally.[31] Such contexts can constitute situations when collectivities develop a certain drive, carrying joint actions and individual involvement (IDI_P08, l. 141–150; IDI_P16, l. 638–643; IDI_P17_1, l. 695–700). Lister's exploration of the "relational self" is an interesting reference here as well as, for instance McDonald and others, differentiating between personalization and individualization (Carrillo Rowe, 2005, p. 18; Lister, 1997, p. 37; McDonald, 2002, p. 118). Yuval-Davis discusses constructing identities not as individual or collective processes but as an "in-between perpetual state of 'becoming'" (2011, p. 22).

Summary

"Even though, they never get involved again in political struggle. And I think there are also some people that they never show the interest in political struggle but because they were forced… and they [explored], you know, the movement, lot of them also changed in their mind. They meet lot of people, they experience a lot of thing and, before you know, I think their mind exploded and … they developed totally different kind of life and they now see that it's important for them to be maybe somehow political active or to be… very much aware about what's going on." (IDI_P08, l. 619–636)

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29   This nicely links to the previous Subchapter 5.1 because such experiences of collectivity are what is often referred to in terms of gaining energy from political activism.
30   Certainly, it is also linked to experiencing success which is explored in Subchapter 5.6.
31   Nevertheless, as mentioned before, it undoubtedly needs to be acknowledged that in these settings and living conditions often there is no time.

Experiencing the Self Through Collectivity captures the complex relational and emotional interaction of individual and collective. Individuals form collectives, shape them and are themselves shaped by being part of them. This takes place through various positive and negative dynamics. The category calls attention to the fact that the activist groups are in on-going processes of figuring out their multiple identities and places, individually and collectively. These experiences can only be captured through individuals' reflecting them, which makes the category's title even more fitting. Self-defining as groups is an on-going process of figuring out who they are, what they do and how they work together. Relations are important in terms of affective bonds and a general sense of collectivity, but they also involve emotions, such as caring, trusting and feeling in place. Individual experiences in collective settings are a central part of how and by whom solidarities might be negotiated in migrant rights activism. Exploring social movements in-between individual and collective is addressed by some scholars, researching political practices or diverse contexts (see e.g. Bhabha, 1994, p. 1f.; J. Clarke et al., 2014, p. 54; Scholz, 2008, p. 41; Schwenken, 2006, p. 143). The next subchapter dives deeper into collective dealing with difference and inequality.

5.3   "We Are All Activists"

This category is concerned with how inequalities manifest in activist groups and how groups deal with them. It addresses the aim of many groups to fight united and on equal terms and how this very goal can lead to reproducing power dynamics. But the category also includes that most groups somehow reflect on and try to improve acting together. When starting such a reflection, inequalities, differences and categorizations have to be named—already this is delicate as especially regarding grids of power, people are put into categories they do not choose (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 22f.). This idea, "we are all activists," is invoked regularly by multiple activists, even though not always in this very expressive wording by one activist (IDI_P05, l. 150–159). The categorization especially central in migrant rights activism most frequently referred to distinguishes between "refugees" and "supporters".[32] Legal status differs

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32 The activist groups explored here differ in constellation: one is self-organized but also has a mixed group form which is, of course, the part I have been involved with, one group is mixed, another one is mainly white-German. However, it is central that mi-

from other social categories, such as race, gender or class in its potentially more temporary dimension, but it intersects with them and sometimes they are mixed up (IDI_P05, l. 262–283).[33]

In my data, gender mainly emerges concerning men and women facing different kinds of discriminations and exclusions.[34] Religion does not come up very often, which could be interesting to look into elsewhere. Of course, lists of such structural inequalities could go on forever as once starting to look and reflect about these, ever finer ones emerge.[35] Addressing more than one of the mentioned inequalities makes their practical and conceptual handling more complex. This empirically emerges in parts through the notion of acknowledging while challenging differences. Similarly, this tension applies for the analytical capturing of dynamics and discussions in activist groups. Thereby, it is at the heart of what negotiating solidarities is about: what can solidarities even look like when inequalities are so overly present and how are they being negotiated?

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gration policies diversify legal statuses: asylum seekers, illegalized people as well as a number of in-betweens, all present in groups. These are often subsumed as refugees or on the contrary referred to as migrants, actually disregarding human rights (Münch, 2018, p. 318f.). Some very practical consequences of these differentiations were addressed in Subchapter 5.1.

33 Central social categories are race, class and gender. There are more that intersect with these three: sexual orientation, ableism, age, education, religiosity, etc. Finally, there are elements which result from these grids of power, like living situations, types of knowledge or language skills. I follow Yuval-Davis' distinction between social categories and identities: While the former are the social positionings of people along intersecting "grids of power relations operating in society", the latter are narratives, retaining some more self-defining (Yuval-Davis, 2011, pp. 20–22).

34 Trans, Inter, queer and non-binary gender identities, but also sexual orientation have come up little in these groups, which surely does not mean that they do not exist and organize themselves.

35 A number of scholars raise the issue that movements are more heterogeneous than often discussed (see e.g. Andersen & Hill Collins, 2013; Barker & Cox, 2014; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016; Lorde, 2007; Weldon, 2011). With regards to migrant rights activism, some address internal heterogeneity (see e.g. Benhabib, 2004; Dauvergne, 2008; Kwesi Aikins & Bendix, 2015; Menjívar & Kanstroom, 2014; Pehe & Misetics, 2015; Schulze Wessel, 2016). Few scholars engage with internal consequences (see e.g. Ataç et al., 2015; Fadaee, 2015; Johnson, 2015; Nicholls, 2013b; Ünsal, 2015). Critically-engaged perspectives in various movements seem to offer more accurate views, especially BPoC feminist theories (Fadaee, 2015; hooks, 2000b; Barker & Cox, 2014).

Overcoming categories and working on equal terms

> "At the same time, s*he explained very impressively that and why s*he doesn't want to be called a 'refugee' because such a categorization is a downgrading […]. S*he especially criticized the reduction to this one aspect, as if a taxi driver would forever only be 'the taxi driver' or a cardiac patient who might at some point not be cardiac anymore would always be 'the cardiac patient'." (PO_G01_4, p. 36)

As raised in this group setting, activists aim at overcoming differences for various reasons.[36] This comprises working together on equal terms and moving beyond differences, at least in the context of the groups, as a common and central goal. Many groups want to be inclusive to everyone and diverse (IDI_P06, l. 897–911; IDI_P08, l. 439–443; IDI_P16, l. 815–824). One activist stresses how important it is to "concretely work together with people, […] see them as equals, [not] work *for* but *with* them." (IDI_P06, l. 182f. [Translated]; see also IDI_P05, l. 896–899) As mentioned above, the distinction refugee/supporter is the one most often referred to both in groups and academia. Of course, this is rooted in the defining aim of the movement, setting out to fight inequalities rooted in migration policies. It is a recurring notion in these activist groups that they want to overcome categorizations and inequalities. Some researchers reflect the scholarly use of categorizations (see e.g. Bakewell, 2008; Brubaker, 2015; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Rostock, 2014).

Reproducing categories

> "[I]n my opinion most of the supporters don't even get what they are doing or from which… point in the society they are arguing. So I don't think they want to harm anyone or do something bad, but by acting how they are acting, they are supporting the racist… system itself, like the society, the rules which are there and who are putting other people under pressure. So it's sort of a paradox […] that these people go into groups, I mean now the white supporters

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36   German or non-refugee activists often challenge their being labeled as "supporters" with the reasoning that they do not want to just support but *work together*. Another example are some groups that consciously re-appropriate the categorization refugee for themselves.

go into groups... try to... fight against racism, but reproduce the racism at the same way." (IDI_P16, l. 719–728)

As this quote shows, despite all efforts to make inequalities not matter within activist groups, differences do exist, of course. And it is not just that these, often structurally imposed, inequalities are present and visible within groups but they are also—inadvertently—reproduced. Reproduction can take place by emphasizing differences as well as by not naming inequalities as structural patterns. But even more critically, they can also be reproduced by dynamics that are shaping how accessible and safe group contexts are for various people. Reproducing racist dynamics is one example, mentioned in the quote above. Other dynamics that have to do with privileges and power include not properly involving the people who are actually affected when doing political work supposedly *for* them (IDI_P06, l. 725–734). One activist stresses that "already when the people that, ehm, want to see themselves as active for migrants, I would like them to look into what they [migrants] actually need" (IDI_P07, l. 186–190 [Translated]). According to her*him, this could be figured out by speaking to them about their general exigencies and political actions.

Another way that inequalities are being reproduced is language, for instance by not providing interpretation or having certain parts of a discussion in German (IDI_P08, l. 279–287; IDI_P17_1, l. 742–756; PO_G01_31, l. 59–69; PO_G02_09, p. 108). Even when interpreting is organized, it can for example result in "a symbolic mechanism of exclusion" when people are put in a corner not to "disturb" the group as a whole (PO_G02_09, p. 110). It might be hard for people to follow certain discussions for reasons at the intersection of language, interpretation and knowledge:

"And sometimes they don't understand. Well and, eh, when I was in the group translating each time I... thought 'Why do I even have to translate? They don't get me, even in [language]... when I translate in [their language] they also don't understand because they simply... don't have any political experience." (IDI_P15, l. 209–220 [Translated])

These examples show how easily people are left behind or excluded: "[I]f you don't... understand or get a chance to speak and be understood then you don't exist at all." (IDI_P14, l. 860–862 [Translated]) Another example of how certain people are basically excluded from activities is the lack of childcare or the choice of meeting places and times. Especially female refugee activists with children are prevented from participating in many activities in the first place

(IDI_P05, l. 818–825; PO_G06_02, p. 14). Further exclusions mainly become palpable through absence.

(Not) depending on others

> "[U]sually these meetings are pretty much… 'Oh, we have these problems.' And then how can we fix it, and usually- are the Kartoffel or the… so-called supporters, activists that have their contacts. And it's really important that they do… but I would like to get to a point where as [Name 9] said […] there's a finance- I don't need to ask [Name 7] to write the application for me." (IDI_P05, l. 867–874)

Dependency is a very strong dynamic, which exists in activist groups and which particularly reproduces the inequalities between activists of different legal statuses. Yet, how much somebody depends on others can centrally concern more differentiated inequalities. One activist describes how official and free German classes are only provided to some groups, establishing a hierarchy of "first refugee, second refugee, third refugee," which according to her*him also leads to some being less dependent on alternative activities (IDI_P01, l. 511–520). Indeed, the opening quote raises dependencies that have to do with knowledge and experience but also language. Activists note that often people have to ask for interpretation themselves or they might attend whole meetings without understanding:

> "This is super stark! It just leaves you aside. And if nobody notices it there is always someone who is out. … And it is not self-evident that everyone says 'Hey, I don't understand. Please translate,' you know. It is not self-evident at all." (IDI_P14, l. 871–883 [Translated])

This vividly shows that, if in need of interpretation, either way people are very dependent on others.[37] That can be the dependence on an interpreter or on someone explaining certain terms or knowledge taken for granted (IDI_P03,

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37   It might seem like such dependencies work centrally along power structures of legal status, but it is significant to emphasize that especially interpretation or specific knowledge are in fact frequently provided by migrant and refugee activists. Similarly, migrant activists are very often multi-lingual and still it is usually them that interpretation is organized for, as opposed to Germans not speaking English, which often impacts the language choice for a whole meeting.

l. 892–905; PO_G02_09, p. 109). It means that "those who don't know are si-
lenced," which "shows dominating dynamics" (PO_G02_09, p. 109). Similarly,
both through factual knowledge—for instance, about legal regulations—and
more experience-based activist knowledge, dependencies are often solidified
(IDI_P05, l. 1215–1219; IDI_P08, l. 180–190). One activist says that refugees
are systematically made "non-independent" by the political system (IDI_P03,
l. 576–586 [Translated]) and questions her*his role in it: "I do see the danger
also in the support of refugees that you... do the things that they would have
to learn." (IDI_P03, l. 602–604) This visibly emerges because many groups
are also concerned with supporting individual activists (IDI_P01, l. 673–684;
IDI_P03, l. 892–905; IDI_P06, l. 841–858; IDI_P15, l. 76–79).[38]

Activist experience is based on more localized knowledge but can similarly
reproduce inequalities. Examples are: Having networks, providing money to
groups by writing applications or simply knowing where to go for specific
information or things, such as loudspeakers or a truck for demonstrations
(IDI_P03, l. 892–905; IDI_P05, l. 860–886). Of course, this kind of experience
and knowledge can be acquired and passed on (IDI_P01, l. 205–208; IDI_P05,
l. 1215–1219; IDI_P17_1, l. 949–963). But activists critically remark that through
them some people have more power than others, which can result in further
dependencies when not reflected (IDI_P06, l. 765–772; IDI_P15, l. 209–220).
Dependence between refugee and supporter activists is addressed by some
scholars concerning migrant rights activism (see e.g. Cappiali, 2016, p. 1f.;
Della Porta, 2018b, p. 14; Steinhilper, 2017, p. 81).

Revealing power dynamics

"[T]hey [supporters] want to contribute and their contribution in some ways
might not be in the interest of the self-organized group, of the refugees
group. [...] I think it's not bad that they also give their own ideas, their own
opinion, you know, on how to... motivate self-organized groups. But in most
of the time what I discover is like their idea, their opinion, their Politik- is
more stronger than the idea and the opinion and what the refugees them-
selves really [need]." (IDI_P08, l. 355–369)

Dependencies are certainly based on existing structural inequalities. But the
ways they are being internally reproduced need further exploration. Because,

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38   This is explored further in Subchapter 5.4.

as this quote shows, however well-intentioned or however inadvertent of their power positions (often as German, white, academic activists), these create an imbalance that can lead to not even seeing what needs and goals are. Such dynamics can result in interests and exigencies of white European activists having more weight because they have the experience and capacities to realize things that are more recognized (IDI_P07, l. 186–191; IDI_P08, l. 355–369). One activist recalls a situation when German activists used their experience and authority concerning German food and health regulations to make an argument against refugee activists' wishes: "I could really say that in some situation it's totally difficult to really change this narrative of the influence... their own idea on refugees." (IDI_P08, l. 395–402) Another activist recalls how s*he questioned her*his own judgment in a situation because others would insist on their preference from a similar power position:

> "I thought maybe they just know more than I do because they are here for a long time, because they grew up here and... they know... the situation better than I do. But later I found out: well, it's not about where you're from, it just has to do with... the people, you know." (IDI_P15, l. 547–553 [Translated])

The resulting feeling of not knowing enough or not seeming to have a kind of knowledge that counts, as well as actual lack of knowledge, can cause feelings of intimidation, desperation and fear (IDI_P01, l. 136–139; IDI_P15, l. 229–241). Some activists point out that it is really certain marginalized kinds of knowledge and experience, linked to having lived experience, that are often—sometimes very subtly—ignored, not considered or not understood as equally valuable: "I think, there's a lot of knowledge there that... we don't... pay enough attention or maybe we don't have the situation to make it come up." (IDI_P05, l. 880–882; IDI_P07, l. 250–270; IDI_P08, l. 462–473)

All these examples underline a tension: People with resources and capacities to take care of certain tasks potentially make people depend on them and in addition, certain knowledge counting more (IDI_P15, l. 225–242; PO_G02_09, p. 109). So while groups might try to overcome inequalities, they might simultaneously reproduce power dynamics in various different ways. Inequalities and dominating dynamics in migrant rights activism are addressed by some scholars (see e.g. Ataç, 2016, p. 642; Fadaee, 2015, p. 734; Glöde & Böhlo, 2015, p. 79; Kewes, 2016a, p. 264; Nicholls, 2013b, p. 615). Especially Black feminist theories offer critical insights into internal power dynamics in general (see e.g. Hill Collins, 2015; hooks, 2000b; Lorde, 1982).

Self-organizing and/or taking responsibility using privileges

> "It was also discussed about self-organization. On the one hand, people emphasized how important it is. On the other hand, [Name 24] also said that s*he simply notices how done and exhausted people are and that we [Germans] simply are the ones who have more capacities and because of that also a responsibility to create the structures and possibilities and not to shift everything onto self-organization." (PO_G05_05, p. 51 [Translated])

Self-organizing is mostly referred to as refugee and migrant activists, those with the lived experiences of the issues addressed in this movement, building their own structures and activities. These are partly exclusive spaces to protect people from the reproduced power relations just discussed.[39] One activist raises this as opportunities for refugees to "create their own platform of knowledge, their own platform of education," to address "what they really think are the topics, what are the issues that they really think is really important for them to talk about." (IDI_P08, l. 565–573) However, as shown in the quote, pure self-organizing alone is often hard to realize.[40] Nevertheless, it is important to give credit and do justice to the many forms in which especially marginalized groups and communities actively organize by themselves. Potentially complementing this, what also arises is the responsibility of privileged activists to not just acknowledge their power positions but to use them to back up independent, self-organized action (IDI_P05, l. 860–886; IDI_P08, l. 351–355; IDI_P16, l. 845–857; PO_G01_32, l. 42–50; PO_G02_31, l. 18–22). Self-organizing is explored by involved activists themselves (see e.g. Cissé, 1996; Emejulu & Sobande, 2019; Kanalan, 2015; Langa, 2015; Odugbesan & Schwiertz, 2018; Transact, 2014). References to using privileges can be found in intersectional feminist, post-colonial and critical theories (see e.g. Day, 2005; Dhawan, 2007; Johnson, 2014, p. 192; Spivak, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 130).

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39   Self-organizing is also discussed concerning alliances in Subchapter 5.5.
40   Since legal status is not the only structural inequality, it should also not be assumed that in such groups there will be no power relations. However, this is not for me to explore here.

Enabling access and participation

> "[Many are] afraid to come in the street and say 'Oh, it's little bit difficult, we are refugees' and this. And I 'Yes, ok, refugee, refugee'. Then I have to explain too much. But yeah, I cannot say that people not have this kind of knowledge, yeah, lot of people have… and some, most of people not but I have to explain to, yeah, this is our right to go to the street." (IDI_P01, l. 678–684)

This quote raises that a basic level of enabling access can be explaining to people what rights they have. Thus, very basically it requires the involvement of or at least exchange with those who are facing all kinds of various inequalities—as one activist puts it addressing white European activists: "[G]et to know people! Talk to people! Get out!" (IDI_P05, l. 996–999) With this can come awareness in groups about needs and exigencies. Examples are the choice of meeting places and times that do not just fit the average white, German, Left activist.[41] Hence, through joint reflection and discussion and changing ways of doing things, many activist groups aim at improving access and participation in their meetings. Indeed, concerning some of the dynamics discussed above, I could observe constant learning and developing processes. One activist recommends offering childcare for meetings in general, saying that "often to find someone for taking care of the children and pay for it, you find that… for us… from our background it is difficult." (IDI_P07, l. 49–55 [Translated]) In some groups, it goes further in considering *who* is doing the childcare, involving men or solidary groups (IDI_P16, l. 957–962; PO_G01_33, l. 12–25).

A similar evolving can be observed concerning language. Of course, the first step to open up mainly German-speaking spaces is to provide interpretation.[42] At a bigger event, this was taken further by using technology for interpreting in a way that made everyone equally dependent on it: "[Name 9] said afterwards that it had been the first time s*he participated in a workshop

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41   Emerging examples are: choosing cleaner or more neutral places than many Left-organized spaces; evenings might fit working people but not necessarily parents; there are neighborhoods where Black people are especially targeted by racist police controls; it can be helpful to be able to pay the tickets for people to get to meetings.

42   Switching to English might be an option, however, is not always fitting as some new-comer activists might learn German but not speak (much) English (IDI_P11, l. 180–185). Conducting bilingual meetings is possible, but still requires activists to speak either of these two languages.

from the start on a completely equal footing." (PO_G06_04, p. 17) However, this is also a strategy that needs resources, not too easy to provide. Sometimes it can be the easier option to split up in language groups for certain discussions to enable everyone to participate (PO_G01_31, l. 47–52). These examples highlight that it is not about pretending that any group could be able to eliminate all inequalities, but about capturing that groups are figuring out ways to deal with them.

Reflecting and enacting procedures and empowerment

> "I think for me it's again to being very… aware of the different… contexts and backgrounds of the people, which is difficult. But I think after you meet for [many] years, you tend to know the people and maybe work on improving things to a certain extent." (IDI_P05, l. 944–950)

The examples discussed so far have addressed how groups are challenging inequalities in terms of *infrastructural* measures, aiming at making groups more accessible for people. The quote underlines the processual character and raises that there are also strategies to enable more equal participation within meetings and group contexts. First of all, this requires questioning procedures and making collective choices in terms of working mechanisms. As many activists describe, this takes being or becoming aware, both as an individual and a collective process (IDI_P04, l. 476–479; IDI_P11, l. 500–509; IDI_P14, l. 552–557; IDI_P16, l. 845–857). It takes time and needs a certain level of trust that is often based on knowing each other (IDI_P03, l. 302–308; PO_G06_02, p. 16).[43]

A first step on the collective level can be becoming aware of a group's composition. In mixed or predominantly white German contexts, this often concerns whether migrant activists are involved but can also refer to any of the other categorizations, such as: engaging different political positions, people of different ages, gender identities or in general not having always the same people involved (IDI_P01, l. 602–606; IDI_P03, l. 1289ff.; IDI_P05, l. 574ff.; IDI_P08, l. 547–559). Explicitly procedural examples can include mediating group discussions more clearly, reflecting how groups communicate between meetings or distributing tasks in more deliberate ways, for instance on a rotating basis, to prevent the same people always taking care of things (IDI_P05, l. 860–886; IDI_P16, l. 541–550; IDI_P17_1, l. 1043–1051; PO_G02_03, p. 27f.;

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43   These relational and emotional dimensions were explored in Subchapter 5.2.

PO_G06_02, p. 15f.). One group tries to give space to hearing all perspectives on a specific topic by making a whole round where each person speaks for a certain question, such that "we had a whole range of opinions, which would probably not have come up the same way otherwise." (PO_G01_32, l. 92–96)

In fact, what emerges as a concrete step is to improve things by finding procedures for taking decisions jointly, more transparently, more "democratic" (IDI_P05, l. 1231–1234; IDI_P06, l. 691–696; IDI_P08, l. 547–559; PO_G02_23, l. 58–64). Oftentimes, decisions are taken in smaller sub-groups or not properly discussed. Such dynamics reproduce the power imbalances that exist within a group. One group decides to establish a decision group, which decides urgent matters in-between meetings and includes a majority rule for migrant and refugee activists (PO_G01_32, l. 15–23). While reflection is a key part of these processes, it is not enough. Additionally, enacting and trying measures as well as taking time to jointly work on this are notions at the heart of this category that in a way indicate starting points toward lived solidarities. Research on internal democratic procedures and prefigurative politics could be interesting to explore further with regards (see e.g. Juris, 2008, p. 6; Lin et al., 2016, p. 312; Weldon, 2011, p. 5; Yates, 2015, p. 12).

Taking time to share experiences and knowledge

> "There were very deep discussions and especially exchanges of experience that I think were extremely valuable and empowering for a lot of people. I remember one scene in particular in our […] workshop where we eventually spent a lot of time talking about experiences concerning speaking in public more in general. Two very young people shared bad experiences they had made at school and got a lot of encouragement and support from the older activists in the group. They also shared bad experiences they had made and talked about how they moved beyond them." (PO_G01_33, l. 57–66)

Taking time for sharing experiences in shifting constellations centrally emerges in this category. Activists claim that distributing roles or ascribing clear responsibilities can be important to involve everyone but also have more transparency and stability (IDI_P07, l. 722–733; IDI_P15, l. 505–509; IDI_P16, l. 541–550; IDI_P17_1, l. 1067–1075). Working groups are discussed as a means to share responsibility, involve people more equally and enable exchange (IDI_P05, l. 1225–1230; PO_G01_18, p. 21; PO_G02_09, p. 109). Another group tried to share experiences and knowledge by giving speeches

together, empowering inexperienced people facing this potentially upsetting situation (PO_G01_31, l. 10–24).

Taking time is an important element here because these attempts to balance inequalities often involve whole groups and mean explicitly enabling spaces where mutual learning and sharing of perspectives is encouraged (IDI_P17_1, l. 1101–1103; PO_G01_33, l. 57–66; PO_G02_08, p. 89). It is an ongoing learning process for both individual activists and groups, which takes time and taking the time to move on. Simultaneously, as mentioned before, time is controversial to call for in a setting where many people face existential and urgent living situations that do not allow taking time. Indeed, as the opening quote has shown, especially with the urgency and pressure defining many group contexts, this is easily left aside (IDI_P06, l. 454–469; IDI_P08, l. 676–688; IDI_P11, l. 412–426; IDI_P14, l. 712–728).

Sharing experiences does not necessarily have to be about solving certain situations or problems but can centrally be about *sharing* itself (IDI_P07, l. 273–285).[44] It can be incredibly powerful to talk about lived experiences, discovering shared elements or learning about others' perspectives (PO_G01_33, l. 57–66). In fact, it also contains a notion of taking care of each other and building trust (IDI_P01, l. 142–149; IDI_P08, l. 287–295; IDI_P17_1, l. 848–856). It can involve having the possibility to give feedback, talking about what is normally not visible or "speakable" (IDI_P04, l. 115–122; IDI_P16, l. 857–862). It is essential to underline that this is not understood as one-way from German to refugee activists (IDI_P07, l. 209–212; PO_G06_02, p. 12). Migrant knowledge and peer-to-peer learning are particularly valuable and empowering (IDI_P01, l. 163–168; IDI_P14, l. 635–644; PO_G02_35, l. 21–25).[45] Feminist practices and theories offer insights into such practices of mutual learning and empowering (see e.g. Combahee River Collective, 1977; Hanisch, 2006; hooks, 2000b, p. 57; Schwenken, 2006, p. 146).

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44 A lot of the knowledge transfer concerns, of course, topics of learning how things work in Germany, where to get information or how to find ways of getting through in asylum and migration bureaucratic processes (IDI_P01, l. 787–790; IDI_P03, l. 658–666; IDI_P14, l. 652–658; IDI_P15, l. 290–303; IDI_P17_1, l. 924–944; PO_G06_06, l. 38–42).

45 In this context, it can also be important to create exclusive or safer spaces (IDI_P08, l. 731–735).

Summary

Acknowledging the existing inequalities and how they are simultaneously being reproduced and challenged in activist groups is the principal notion of this analytical category. It contains acknowledging power and knowledge differentials, avoiding domination and paternalism. Mutual learning, sharing experiences, taking time, making space and taking care of each other all need to be constantly and consciously promoted and claimed. The existing inequalities need acknowledgment. At the same time, they should not be regarded as too rigid or be reduced to legal status alone. Such learning processes are not automatic or linear. Groups all engage in this in some ways, but there is no *ideal* model. A continuous balancing seems to be key to negotiating solidarities and how they might be enacted through reflections, discussions and actions—sometimes succeeding, often failing. Theories embedded in movement experiences most promisingly reflect on how categorizations and inequalities are concretely dealt with (see e.g. Barker & Cox, 2014; Hill Collins, 2010, p. 25; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016, p. 418). The next analytical category explores what kind of activities groups are involved in and how they frame them.

5.4   Making the Social Political

The groups I have been involved with consider themselves *activist* and *political* in one way or the other. They can mostly be distinguished from, on the one hand, formalized political parties or institutionalized organizations (e.g., of social work or political education) and voluntary or cultural associations, on the other (see also Della Porta & Diani, 2006, pp. 22–27). Still, there are ongoing negotiations within the groups about what political action and organizing is in their own understanding.[46] These negotiations take place implicitly and explicitly, in a way moving between the two poles mentioned above. Groups use them to define themselves as distinct from those, while, simultaneously, negotiating elements that overlap.[47] This analytical category explores the dif-

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46   Groups vary in the activities they mostly engage with—meaning for example that some very explicitly engage in internal dynamics, while others are more focused on public activities.

47   Groups' interaction with other actors is further addressed in Subchapter 5.5.

ferent dimensions that negotiating (self-)definitions of the political has in activist groups for migrant rights.

Being addressed by/addressing institutional politics

> "I think what motivated the struggle is because the people want to live a respected life. And if the [national or local] authority, eh, have given us… the right to stay or allow a document to work, you can imagine that there won't be such a movement… maybe, you know. So and I think that… it's also interesting how […] this bad situation […] [motivated] political movement." (IDI_P08, l. 599–606)

In whatever concrete way the groups define themselves, all of them are directly addressed by the state in one way or the other—through individuals or specific groups of people being treated in a certain way or through the constituted groups being addressed directly.[48] The quote emphasizes the basic wish to live a normal life, which can result in political action when experiencing inequalities and injustices and people start to organize to *simply* live. In fact, state institutions are perceived to address groups of people or political activists in ways that impact their addressing of authorities but also their capacities to organize. In a meeting, it is discussed that "the development of the struggle was totally determined by the attacks of the state in various forms." (PO_G02_06, p. 67)

One dominant identified state strategy is the division of people by creating differences among them through granting some more rights than others (IDI_P01, l. 511–520; IDI_P03, l. 1334–1343; IDI_P05, l. 1356–1362; IDI_P08, l. 195–204).[49] Part of this racialized addressing of migrants are deportations—even *only* the threat—and the tightening of migration laws (IDI_P03, l. 892–905; IDI_P06, l. 745–749). Another strategy is the isolation of refugees and asylum-seekers, in a very direct spatial sense through the imposed accommodation in camps (IDI_P15, l. 453–462; PO_G05_05, p. 51). Finally, this contains being criminalized, delegitimized or pressured more in

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48   Subchapter 5.1 showed that many people struggle daily to survive and obtain legal perspectives.

49   The most recent example for this would be different treatment of refugees from Ukraine (even among them, depending on their documents, nationality or race).

general (IDI_P03, l. 1244ff.).[50] Because of this opposition to institutionalized politics, but also because structural changes are linked to it, the interactions with authorities play a role in the process of negotiating political action in activist groups.[51]

Sozialarbeit[52]

> "[It is] more this idea of which projects do I want to do, this total humanitarian aspect in order to just make sure not to encounter resistance, to not make, somehow, well, yes, political… statements and trying to push for them. It's more on this nice and friendly level." (IDI_P06, l. 649–656 [Translated])

This other defining feature that continues to come up in negotiations over political action is that activists often distinguish it from Sozialarbeit. Some activists have very urgent necessities due to their acute and desperate living conditions. This results in a setting where Sozialarbeit arises in various forms in order to alleviate such necessities. Coming together in political groups fighting these very conditions, it often is part of them to address specific individual situations. This is one dimension of what is often referred to as Sozialarbeit. Such individual support can take many forms: providing legal support, organizing accommodation, accompanying to authorities, translating or interpreting, writing job applications (IDI_P01, l. 312–316; IDI_P03, l. 594–598; IDI_P04, l. 299–302).

People and groups who do *just that* supposedly lack political positioning and are what many activist groups distinguish themselves from. According

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50   These mechanisms are well researched and analyzed in works on migration and border regimes. Such research reveals how migration policies are permeating daily life realities, both at state borders and way beyond borders. The way in which borders take immaterial forms that shape everyday reality everywhere, creates a setting that treats migrants as "disposable" subjects to be managed (Oliveri, 2012, p. 794; see also Carmel & Paul, 2013; Hess & Lebuhn, 2014; Täubig, 2009).

51   This is opposed to classical social movement theories where the addressing of institutional actors is often seen as the only way activist groups act politically (see e.g. Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 42; Hellmann, 1998, p. 23), whereas my data show it as merely one part of negotiating the political.

52   "Sozialarbeit" is the German word for social work. It is used in varied meanings even by individual people, explored in this subchapter.

to them, pure "humanitarian" work is mostly uncritical of structural problems (IDI_P06, l. 136–144; IDI_P08, l. 689–697). One activist claims that it "moves 'within the limits of the laws,'" while seeing political work as going "way beyond" because it "also questions these laws and structures." (IDI_P03, l. 999–1002 [Translated]) Sozialarbeit in this second dimension is seen as *wanting to help* as opposed to "doing politics together" (IDI_P11, l. 331–334 [Translated]; see also IDI_P14, l. 778–784).[53] One example mentioned by some activists is the role more institutionalized actors and volunteers play.[54] Nevertheless, activists also recognize that this is not fixed and that both individual and collective actors shift their positions in general or with regards to specific questions (IDI_P06, l. 561–573). Despite the fact that many activists and groups clearly use both Sozialarbeit and institutional politics as distinguishing poles when discussing and negotiating their own activities, there are clear linkages of both to their meaning-making.[55]

Defining political action

> "[Sozialarbeit] I see as accompanying people to the authorities or… helping them to find a flat or things like that. … So less these political… explicitly political things." (IDI_P04, l. 299–302 [Translated])

One way that activists negotiate definitions of political action is through *negatively* distinguishing whatever takes place in their contexts from other activities. Because at first sight, as this quote shows, there is the same distinction

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53 This seems to be reciprocated to some extent from "support" initiatives through explicit reluctance to take political positions (IDI_P06, l. 483–505; PO_G05_04, p. 33f.; PO_G06_02, p. 15). Some publications reflect problematic consequences of supposedly unpolitical initiatives (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Hamann & Karakayali, 2016; Pehe & Misetics, 2015).

54 Churches are sometimes referred to as very active in humanitarian support of refugees but also as supposedly hesitant to more political claims—according to one activist because they could lose the political system's tolerance of church asylum (IDI_P03, l. 483–491). Someone else raises bigger NGOs' fear to lose donations when taking more radical positions (IDI_P06, l. 649–656).

55 This polarization arose early on in my data. Yet, at closer exploration, it is not consistent or shared by all. To some extent this moves into the analytical dimension, while not implying that it cannot also be analytically criticized. and is not necessarily how I would conceptually frame it. This tension certainly illustrates a challenge of constructivist grounded theory's abductive practice.

between Sozialarbeit and political work *within* the activist groups themselves. In fact, as discussed, some part of groups' activities involves the support of individuals. In *what* is done, it might not differ that much from what is otherwise referred to as humanitarian. Also within activist groups, these activities are often discussed somewhat dismissive as Sozialarbeit but also as *support* or "Kleinkramarbeit"[56] (IDI_P03, l. 515–522). Thus, political activities are often framed or understood as more central. Nevertheless, these activities are also underlined as absolutely necessary—for example, "to sustain our fight" (IDI_P08, l. 676–688) and to "[help] people get on firm ground" (IDI_P04, l. 1013–1018 [Translated]). It is also presented as the "concrete," "practical" and "effective" part of groups' work (IDI_P07, l. 508–518; IDI_P03, l. 1047–1066), which shows "humanity" (IDI_P15, l. 402–411).

And despite this differentiation, they are even often explicitly seen as political. Activists sometimes refer to this as "micro politics" (IDI_P14, l. 475-484 [Translated]) or "small-scale activism" (IDI_P07, l. 580–585 [Translated]). These remarks show that, next to more negatively approached definitions of the political distinguishing it from pure Sozialarbeit or institutional politics, there are also more positively constructed definitions of the political, in and beyond social activities. Political practices and post-colonial perspectives on social movements, as well as some research on migrant rights struggles, address such broader understandings of the political (see e.g. Ataç et al., 2015; Bayat, 2010; Goldfarb, 2006; Marciniak & Tyler, 2014; Piacentini, 2014; Wagenaar, 2014; Wilcke, 2018b).

Practicing small-scale solidarity

> "[S*he said:] 'We need to be patient' but [we] also have to figure out: 'How do we fit together? [...] I want to find ways to work together'. For her*him, solidarity is bridging differences and working with differences." (PO_G02_22, l. 117–123)

The quote links the earlier developed distinction of Sozialarbeit inside and outside of activist groups. This is also captured in the notion and aim of working *with* as opposed to *for* refugees (IDI_P11, l. 342–348). Individual support or care work are then understood as political because while individual issues are addressed, they also involve questioning and taking into account

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56   Expression similar to "penny-ante stuff" work.

the structural level (IDI_P03, l. 999–1002). One activist says: "Well, because [...] if you don't get food, [you can't do anything].". S*he goes on explaining that when groups start providing such basic things, "*then* one starts and says: But I have rights. My rights are not being respected." (IDI_P17_1, l. 911–924 [Translated]) This also makes childcare, translation or cooking together further activities that are explicitly framed as political actions (IDI_P05, l. 1115–1120; PO_G01_03, p. 18; PO_G06_04, p. 17).

Social and interpersonal dimensions are part of many groups' political activities (IDI_P16, l. 1014–1029). Small-scale solidarity practices can mean individual support but they happen in specific collective settings. So organizing politically involves acting in solidarity, which has to bridge but also acknowledge differences. Indeed, phrasing certain activities as *solidarity* instead of Sozialarbeit might be the connecting link in that "solidarity is daily life." (PO_G02_35, l. 37; see also hooks, 2000b, p. 65) The whole notion of making the social political or, more classically, making the personal political, is a central step that feminist theories have contributed to, developing a broader understanding of the political (see e.g. Brisolara et al., 2014; Dean, 1996; Emejulu & Sobande, 2019; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2004).

Saying that something is not right

> "And [Name 76] also said this, s*he said [...] that cooking also is politics. Right? S*he said then, now I remember: The human being eats... the human being needs friendships, build relationships... and the human being needs to realize itself, right? So all of this is in it. And all of this is politics. All that you do in life is politics" (IDI_P17_1, l. 880–887 [Translated])

The main point to be taken from this is not to conflate anything into politics but to understand the underlying realization that individual issues and needs have structural roots. It is mainly their contextualization that makes such activities political within activist groups. It can mean "not accepting the way that the system is working and treating people." (PO_G02_06, p. 68; see also IDI_P05, l. 536–544) Similarly, another activist claims that it should not matter "what the institutions say what a status you have, what a paper, what rights." (IDI_P14, l. 129–136 [Translated]). At the center of this understanding of the political is not to take a situation as given. It contains notions of self-organization, resistance and empowerment, for instance, when people stand up and act against their living situation or problems in camps (IDI_P01, l.

329–344; PO_G01_05, p. 49). It underlines the relevance that is attributed to revealing structural issues, which often comes up as a core feature of the political. It is about pointing out that a matter might appear individual but is actually caused by a structural situation (IDI_P11, l. 500–509). The following quote links different of these dimensions, talking about a personal experience while stressing the structural roots:

> "I have [...] learnt during these years that in Germany you have to put so much effort into everything, that you [...] have to work and do so much until you really get a perspective. And sometimes you will not get this perspective. When, for instance,... you don't have light skin or, I don't know, blond hair or whatever, if you have a weird accent. Yes, [...] whenever I meet migrants or so... they complain that... they are always underestimated. And for long time already. Not today. It has been long, it has been years, long years. ... Yes." (IDI_P15, l. 592–598 [Translated])

Therefore, already realizing and not accepting this can be a significant part of political action. Trying to support a family to move out of a camp becomes political as it can contain figuring out the systematic context and revealing who benefits from it. In this sense, political action can take place at small-scale, even individual levels. It means speaking up and being aware of the bigger picture but does not necessarily contain a public dimension yet.

Making the struggle visible

> "[I]t's the situation also that motivated why the people became politically active. Because when the people discovered that with [these] documents they cannot... find a work here, then they have to think about how to make the situation more public, how to give an awareness about the situation. ... And I think that is how... the issue [...] became public and with the support of [a group]... and some other local... German political groups, anti-racist groups then... the group started to get more attention and lot of people started to give a donation, giving more humanitarian support." (IDI_P08, l. 113–123)

Surely, an important element of political action is to make the own issues, claims or visions visible. So *going outside* and formulating demands (IDI_P08, l. 141–150; PO_G01_27, l. 38–45) are concerns classically aimed for through demonstrations, events or conferences. This dimension is centrally about societal attention and public discourse (PO_G01_05, p. 49; PO_G02_06, p.

66). For the groups this entails wanting to "[hold] up a mirror to society" (IDI_P04, l. 596–604 [Translated]) and "[transport] things publicly," (IDI_P06, l. 496–508 [Translated]) but also mobilize people and raise political pressure. Groups make direct demands to politicians, work with or against certain parties and take issues out into the streets demonstrating (IDI_P01, l. 858–865; PO_G01_06, p. 76; PO_G01_17, p. 99; PO_G05_05, p. 50f.): "'We need to give a sign. Many people think they are alone and don't know what to do. [...] And we also need to do something about the political development.'" (PO_G06_05, l. 25–32) This contains a more traditional understanding of political action. In some sense also in groups such actions are often seen as the *real* political work (IDI_P04, l. 299–302; IDI_P15, l. 389–401).[57]

Acting and developing together

> "[W]e should bring people from different category, like new refugee, old refugee, migrant, all people, together, to share together our idea to make together something." (IDI_P01, l. 888–893)

This quote emphasizes another essential meaning that many activists associate with the political—acting together and exchanging with one another. This partly encompasses *social* activities, such as listening to each other, getting to know each other, eating or spending time together (IDI_P07, l. 574–579; IDI_P17_2, l. 15–18). It also endorses having political discussions with each other, organizing together and sharing experiences (IDI_P03, l. 525–530; IDI_P14, l. 682–695).[58] One activist summarizes the value of this dimension for building trust and working politically by emphasizing that "you need to think collectively" (IDI_P16, l. 1240–1244). Activists focus on sharing skills or doing tasks together and thus try to enable ongoing learning processes of individual activists but also collectively develop as a group (PO_G01_32, l. 42–50). Such aspects show political action as centrally concerned with itself, aiming at realizing internal democratic procedures as a goal in itself, which is sometimes picked up in theories of radical democracy or prefigurative politics (see e.g. Heil & Hetzel, 2006; Lin et al., 2016; Yates, 2015) While so far it might have seemed as if there was relative consensus

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57   This is mirrored in much traditional research on social movements as discussed in Chapter 4.

58   Subchapter 5.3 showed functions of such activities in these diverse activist groups.

about these understandings, it does not mean that all activists share these perspectives.

Speaking about problems is not political

> "Right:... these people have to become stronger, they have to, eh, be active, they have to find their own way and so on. But:... well, they need support. They don't need pressure. And that's what we have been doing with them. And... they are simply overwhelmed and some didn't come to the meetings anymore [...]. Maybe... right now I need support... nice people, maybe knowledge. And then I can really become active. But like this, without knowledge, without support, without an apartment—some of them don't have an apartment! What is this about?" (IDI_P15, l. 225–241 [Translated])

This activist strongly raises that involving individual support in political activities too unreflectively can create dependencies and pressure. A person in need of support might feel like she has to give something back in return. This is especially critical when she might not be convinced of or fully understand a political action she is involved in (IDI_P07, l. 904–916; IDI_P15, l. 384–389).[59] Another activist raises that when someone speaks about a specific personal problem in the group, it might mainly be about sharing her situation with others, maybe hoping to address it together with the group. But it does not necessarily mean that this person sees the need or wants to politically, collectively organize against this issue in general (IDI_P07, l. 273–285). I have encountered such perspectives mostly from migrant and refugee activists. These opinions might be marginalized, maybe even silenced, within activist contexts. For instance, this can happen to people who are involved in groups and yet express gratitude to the German state for having received them (PO_G01_13, p. 60):

> "Really, one of them told me: 'Well, actually I don't want to do an action against the German government.' I asked why and s*he answered: 'Well, they are the only government that accepted us [...].' And I responded: 'You know, all these governments, also the German government, they brought war to our countries. They caused the poverty in our countries. And so on and so

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59   This is equally true for activism and academia.

on. Why are you grateful? Come on.' S*he couldn't understand it. S*he said: 'At least we have a room.'" (IDI_P15, l. 324–339 [Translated])

This activist criticizes this, according to her, uncritical perspective, while also criticizing how groups deal with it, mainly by ignoring it or pressuring people into anyways participating in actions. This topic shows that there are differing perspectives on which situations require political action in the first place. An activist recalls a politically active refugee who stressed that the mere fact of living in bad conditions in a camp does not require political action because it is an acceptable, since provisional, situation (IDI_P07, l. 487–501). In the end, these perspectives do not necessarily contradict a political reading of social practices. Groups can and are doing political and social work simultaneously. Rather, it is about becoming aware of the mentioned risks and about explicitly framing social action *also* as political—for instance, by indicating that it would be a state task to provide language classes, but since it does not: groups take care of it (PO_G05_04, p. 33).[60]

Summary

> "And I do think […] that as a political group… you always have to move on both, or on three, four different levels. On the one hand, the concrete practical daily issues. On the other hand, also… perspectives of what we are actually claiming." (IDI_P03, l. 1053–1059 [Translated])

This category captures activists' understanding of their activities and notions of *the political*. It clarifies that understanding socially labeled activities also as political eases the apparent contradiction introduced in the beginning of this chapter. Besides, it raises a tension that groups juggle, which also concerns allocating limited resources, setting priorities and dealing with power relations (PO_G01_22, l. 50–58). I argue that the emerging ambiguities emphasize processes of negotiating solidarities within activist groups and might capture the complexities of co-existing, contradictory or overlapping definitions of political action and how it is framed. Feminist theories have shown that such a broader view on political activities is valuable, but it anyways needs further

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60   This is not to downplay the power dynamics at play. That such perspectives are mostly dismissed as not seeing the structural level of things highlights the many positions within groups but also the power dynamics that impact on negotiating processes, as discussed in Subchapter 5.3.

integration with other research traditions (see e.g. Dean, 1996; Hill Collins, 2010; hooks, 2000b; Martin et al., 2007). The following analytical category moves one level up in focusing on where interactions beyond the internal processes of groups take place.

5.5   Solid Fluidity of Alliances

While the activist groups I have been working with are clearly collective actors, they are mostly involved at a relatively small scale of action. I mean this in the sense that they have limited numbers of actively involved people and mainly work rather locally in the city of Hamburg. Nevertheless, all of them are continuously interacting and working with other actors. The everyday reality of migrant rights activism in Hamburg emerges as a broad composition of more or less fluid alliances that involve all kinds of actors, relations and durabilities. Thus, this analytical category captures *where*—in the sense of in which constellations rather than physical places— solidarities are negotiated, enacted and challenged.[61] While the previous subchapter focused on the kind of activities groups engage in, internal and external, here I concentrate on groups' interaction with the *outside* in its various shapes.

Nach außen gehen[62]

> "[Name 28] got a letter with a Anzeige[63] because s*he had filmed the police when they were controlling [...]. Apparently, s*he had mainly filmed one police man's face who then said s*he should stop filming. The group agreed that politically it was their right to film the police when they did controls. [Name 9] said that these things were their 'only arm' to show people what they had to face every day." (PO_G02_03, p. 26f.)

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61   When talking about alliances, it is important to underline that it is not the working together of differently categorized groups of people mainly focused in this category. Instead, I am looking at how all of these differently composed groups build alliances among each other and beyond.

62   Literally, going outside, but also in terms of speaking up about something publicly.

63   A filed complaint.

This situation from a group meeting shows how speaking up in public is often an important way to act about an issue. Indeed, one thing that groups are centrally concerned with is getting in touch with the *outside*, the rest of society. Especially in terms of migrant rights activism, this can also be about becoming *part of* society (IDI_P03, l. 658–664; IDI_P06, l. 276–284; IDI_P07, l. 834–841). Simultaneously, it is very centrally about challenging a society that continuously excludes and discriminates people (IDI_P08, l. 812–829; IDI_P15, l. 592–602). In both of these ways, "the public" is an important addressee of groups' claims (IDI_P04, l. 115-122; PO_G02_12, p. 42f.). While openly fighting injustices, often, this is also aligned with an eye on how to transmit them or on who will be "taken serious" when talking about something (IDI_P15, l. 456–462).[64] The relation to the media can exemplify this further. Groups need their attention and try to position themselves through interviews, press conferences and public actions (IDI_P01, l. 802–807; PO_G01_06, p. 76f.; PO_G05_07, l. 78–81). However, placing topics and keeping media attention is a big challenge, especially for smaller groups (IDI_P14, l. 539–546; PO_G01_05, p. 49; PO_G05_08, l. 49–59). Especially concerning self-organized groups, public reach is a key part of making struggles visible.

Self-organizing

> "So, I think… phh… this is also something that is a little bit complex in the sense like … I have discovered so far like it's difficult for most of the self-organized groups to survive without the existing local groups or without the… supporting structure of… people in the city, like German supporters." (IDI_P08, l. 351–355)

Self-organization commonly comes up as a term, a distinction and a priority. In the context of migrant rights activism, self-organization refers to refugees or migrants organizing themselves, potentially exclusively (IDI_P01, l. 334–345; IDI_P03, l. 317–325; IDI_P08, l. 141–150).[65] The quote raises that

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64   As referenced in Subchapter 4.2.2, Odugbesan and Schwiertz contextualize this (2018, p. 198).

65   More broadly, it can be about people organizing against structural inequalities directly affecting them and creating safer spaces for their exchange, strengthening and organizing.

particularly for self-organized groups collaborating with other actors can be crucial. Concerning alliances, especially the further networking *between* self-organized groups is regularly raised as important (IDI_P03, l. 336–347; IDI_P04, l. 779–784; IDI_P05, l. 1322–1327). Self-organizing can emerge from specific situations and places of oppression—for example, the people who are living in a certain camp organize against the circumstances they face there (PO_G01_05, p. 49). Or concerning a specific group of people, sometimes ethnic or national—such as, Roma or Afghan people fighting that they are constantly threatened by deportations (IDI_P01, l. 193–198; IDI_P06, l. 745–749).

The notion is significant because it involves a notion of ownership, putting an emphasis on who speaks for whom or becomes visible (PO_G01_36, l. 49–60). Self-organizing emphasizes the strength and agency of refugee and migrant activists (PO_G02_11, p. 25). As mentioned above, these groups often need the joint forces with others, for example because of local knowledge, language and financial resources (PO_G02_36, l. 70–79; PO_G05_11, l. 35–49).[66] This links to acting together with other actors as the core of this category. It's important to give credit here to existing scholarship by self-organized activists (see e.g. Kanalan, 2015; Langa, 2015; Odugbesan & Schwiertz, 2018).

Building from scratch and/or using existing structures

> "What also came up, especially underlined by [Name 9], was that the [event] should be used to share and exchange experiences with other refugees. S*he said: 'We keep our experience, we didn't share it' and that instead it was crucial. It would be about sharing their own experience as a group and learning from others. [Name 9] underlined that s*he wanted 'not to do something and then it's finished' but to do something that works together with the [event] and other groups." (PO_G02_10, p. 6f.)

As shown above, groups form in specific places, for specific reasons, in specific constellations. This does not mean that there are no other groups working on something similar(ly). Not even in a local context groups are necessarily all aware of one another. The important aspect of this notion of getting started,

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66   Difficulties and risks of domination and dependencies are discussed in Subchapter 5.3.

building something from scratch, is that it does not have to stand in contradiction with using existing structures. Groups need one another, for the overall struggle, for their own fights, for exchanging experiences and learning from each other (IDI_P05, l. 1180–1188; IDI_P08, l. 329–336). This can be particularly important for newly formed groups. Additionally, networking is generally raised as important not to waste resources by doing the same things (IDI_P11, l. 604–608; PO_G02_23, l. 35ff.; PO_G05_03, p. 104). This emerges as a problem most visibly when groups compete for attention or resources. In one group setting this came up when discussing several demonstrations planned in a short time period and which, according to some, concerned similar topics or addressed the same people, raising doubts if mobilization would work well for all those demonstrations (PO_G05_07, l. 69–83).[67]

Joining forces

> "Well, like, exchange of positions. Also discussing hard, yeah, but on a level where one is not getting hurt, that I find important, where you still take the other serious. […] And you might say at some point 'Ok, we go separate paths, we don't get together on this. But we're not enemies because of this.' It is about certain points and concerning others maybe eventually we work together again, you know. […] And this is so much … where I think it's so important to stand for differing positions and to see where the commonalities are." (IDI_P06, l. 712–725 [Translated])

This quote raises the balance that defines this category in terms of the need to work together and the difficulties it can bring. Groups are in constant interaction with others—it makes them stronger, louder or simply quantitatively more (IDI_P08, l. 251–266; PO_G02_10, p. 6f.). It can also internally strengthen groups. As mentioned above, they can benefit from each other's expertise and resources, for instance when bigger groups take over specific fundraising tasks or because they do not have to do everything by themselves (PO_G01_03, p. 20; PO_G02_36, l. 70–79; PO_G06_01, p. 71). It can also be useful for exchanging experiences, knowledge and perspectives (IDI_P11, l. 611–619; IDI_P16, l. 1255–1264; PO_G01_20, l. 70–79). An activist states:

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67   Differentiating group and movement level is referred to in terms of urban contexts and emerges for collective identities (see e.g. Flesher Fominaya, 2010, p. 400; Scholz, 2008, p. 69).

"Dream—If you have, you know, the people... in the camps and they work together." (IDI_P05, l. 1360–1366) This stresses the importance of joining forces. In a group's meeting, it comes up that at a certain point networking seemed to start happening to some extent "automatically" through becoming more known and being approached by others (PO_G01_18, p. 21). As another activist puts it, working together is "the only answer to a system which is based on individualism and which brought us where we are." However, s*he also cautions that "you should [not]... step back from your basic ideas and aims... or principles" (IDI_P16, l. 1228–1246)—which links back to the initial quote.[68]

Multiple levels of joining forces

"And there is a lot in this. There is Libya in it, there is Dublin in it. There is... borders. There is, well, asylum laws and so on. So there is a lot of national and transnational politics combined." (IDI_P03, l. 334–342 [Translated])

This activist is talking about a particular group here, making a point that concerning migrant rights activism might seem obvious: Even when looking at locally engaged groups, they are active in a transnational setting. Not just because individual activists migrated themselves. The issues and structures these activists are facing are intertwining transnational, national and local policy levels, and, additionally, activists are transnationally networked (IDI_P03, l. 44–50; IDI_P06, l. 1068–1074; PO_G05_07, l. 45–51). Thus, working together with others takes place at multiple levels simultaneously. While this research is mostly concerned with the local level, other levels do emerge. Next to local interaction, there is quite a lot of regional working together, which in the case of Hamburg means collaborating with groups from the neighboring regions (IDI_P15, l. 205–209; PO_G05_10, l. 67–79). But there is also national networking—be it in explicitly formed alliances or more loosely in terms of regularly meeting somewhere (PO_G01_33, l. 3–8). In this particular movement, the transnational dimension is relevant in personal, topical and networking terms, yet in my data arises less centrally. One activist talks about transnationality as "a central part of today's local activism." (FN_P03_01, p. 8) The awareness of the importance of such networking, not just in terms of

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68   Gaining visibility through alliances is raised in some research (see e.g. Barker & Cox, 2014, p. 22; Oliveri, 2012, p. 801).

building something bigger but in linking various local struggles, seems particularly intriguing (PO_G02_09, p. 110).[69]

Interacting

> "[E]ither you fight... or, well, call for each other's actions—which is important but you don't need to be [group name] for this. If we do something that, on the one hand, is [group name]'s issue but, on the other hand, also involves others. That is good I think." (IDI_P03, l. 463–468 [Translated])

This quote touches upon that groups broadly speaking interact and cooperate with many institutions and professional actors. Classically, this can be organized civil society actors, such as churches or unions.[70] These actors are or can also be part of movements in the broader sense. Although, as potentially bigger institutions, they often have a broader range of societal issues they are involved in. This can make such interactions challenging because it also becomes a balancing between political positionings and power rather than merely differing foci (IDI_P06, l. 523–539; IDI_P08, l. 245–251). One activist expresses this doubt about *trading* cooperation, based on the chance of being supported with resources or gaining visibility, with a group's own focus: "We are losing... the real roots of the problems and the real causes why these problems are there, if we are going into too many alliances." (IDI_P16, l. 1209–1226) Nevertheless, activists underline how important such contacts are to explain

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69   The interaction between local and transnational levels of political organizing is famous through the slogan "think globally, act locally" (see e.g. Juris, 2008, p. 11; Keck & Sikkink, 1998, p. 8; Tazreiter, 2010, p. 211). Generally, there is quite some research focusing on the international comparison of local migrant rights struggles or sometimes also their transnational nature and networking (see e.g. Ataç et al., 2016; Della Porta, 2018b; Erensu, 2016; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2017; Rother & Piper, 2015; Schwenken, 2006; Steinhilper, 2017).

70   Other actors that have come up in my data are parties or individual politicians, schools, sports clubs, theaters, NGOs or universities. I summarize another part of groups' interactions as cooperations with professionals. This includes lawyers in particular, which makes sense given the centrality of legal status, but also involves doctors, social workers, graphic designers, researchers, sometimes even camp employees. These are individuals who might also be involved activists, but they are also addressed in their professional capacity.

and transport positions "not just to radical left people" (IDI_P11, l. 316f. [Translated])—in building visions of society or becoming "the answer" to societal challenges (PO_G06_05, l. 9–14).

Bringing struggles together

> "[I]n front of this, we have same problem that- about the learning for all. We make together and say, ok, this student say 'Lernen für Alle'[71], we also say 'Deutschkurs für Alle'[72] and we make Demo together. Yeah, when... in some place... my problem is the same, I come there and... we make together." (IDI_P01, l. 822–827)

The notion that is raised here could involve any of the above-mentioned actors or another activist group. I think that part of joining forces is about bringing struggles together—be it between places, specific communities or in yet other forms. In fact, many of activist groups' cooperations aim at a temporal collaboration of two or more groups concerning a certain issue, moment or goal. In this notion, it is less about *whom* it is with but about its intensity.[73] So seemingly different struggles can (occasionally) be brought together. In a way, this also occurred on a demonstration for March 8, when feminist, migrant feminist and care workers' actions were brought together (PO_G01_31, l. 35–38). Yet, this seems to be occasional, as an activist observes that the feminist scene in the city is "pretty... white" and that "it would be very enriching for all" to have more migrant perspectives (IDI_P14, l. 972–976 [Translated]).[74] Nevertheless, despite many instances when struggles are brought

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71   Learning for all.

72   German course for all.

73   Intensity not meaning that they merge or that such cooperations necessarily last over time. It is more about the intentionality and awareness of intrinsically intersecting social and political issues.

74   Similarly, Black rights groups have very direct intersections with migrant rights struggles. There are also attempts to link environmental with migrant struggles (IDI_P06, l. 369–374; IDI_P16, l. 765–790). Sometimes this takes the form of solidary supporting as well, which a group offers to another. This can be less content-based but aimed at, for instance, collecting donations or supporting with a certain activity (PO_G01_33, l. 12–21; PO_G01_30, l. 26–29). Some scholars raise that overlaps of and interactions between movements should receive more attention (see e.g. Kenshiro & Lawrence, 2010, p. 26; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2017, p. 230; Reitan, 2012, p. 2).

together, activists also very clearly point out difficulties that emerge, for instance, when the various experiences, interests or goals are not given enough space and disagreements appear (IDI_P03, l. 458–468; IDI_P05, l. 1274–1283; IDI_P16, l. 1264–1273; IDI_P17_1, l. 770–784; PO_G02_33, l. 19–27).

Building alliances

> "We are all somehow involved in some projects and do things together as some kind of bigger compound, you know. [...] But you don't have to necessarily be together under a certain umbrella, [...] but everyone does their own thing and sees where to temporarily work together. You choose the things, join, realize projects together and, well, then it also falls apart and something emerges at another level. I think this is how refugee work functions here in Hamburg, very flexible and not so stuck I think. [...] I find it quite dynamic I have to say." (IDI_P06, l. 776–791 [Translated])

As shown throughout this subchapter, groups are continuously building alliances—on multiple levels, with various actors and about numerous topics. More activists echo the Hamburg setting as described in the quote. One says that at some point s*he saw that "the meetings are all connected and at the end you realize […] that the scene is quite small" (IDI_P05, l. 406–411). Sometimes it just comes up as knowing that people will join anyways because everyone knows what is going on and will show up (IDI_P01, l. 600–606; PO_G02_31, l. 22–27). One activist describes how it might be difficult for groups to come together, even if working in the same field. At the same time, due to the specific mobilization and fight of a group, "they have to come together, because they see... the situation." (IDI_P08, l. 148–161) This loose nature of many alliances is not always perceived positively because it can also be a sign that the scene is quite limited.[75]

Of course, there are also alliances that are much more explicitly and intentionally concerned with networking, bringing experiences and resources together to join forces and make a more powerful point (IDI_P01, l. 888–893; IDI_P05, l. 1336–1338; PO_G05_02, p. 58). An activist refers to the "unity in diversity" image (IDI_P03, l. 1334–1349 [Translated]), claiming that it does

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75   Although Nicholls and Uitermark discuss that in cities movements interact much more naturally than is often depicted (2017, p. 232).

not necessarily mean "everyone has to go under three slogans" but "everyone can have different slogans but under a common denominator" (IDI_P03, l. 1351–1354 [Translated]). Similarly, another activist underlines that there might be various ideas and positions among groups, but "on a political level I think we agree, with the demonstrations we go together to the street." (IDI_P08, l. 190–195) Yet, especially these more consolidated alliances also take a lot of resources. People need capacities for participating in multiple settings, explicitly linking them, thus engaging in potentially effortful transfer activities (IDI_P11, l. 611–619; IDI_P17_1, l. 742–756; PO_G01_18, p. 20; PO_G02_06, p. 66; PO_G05_03, p. 105).

Summary

"[T]his is a pretty good example where you see actually really politics happening in social movements. Because different groups are dealing with each other. Each of them, they have their own goals, their own ideas- hopefully at least the groups have a strict idea or direction where they want to go, but I mean that's not really that common but... some have that. ... So they are dealing with each other and talking to each other and sort of finding compromises in the end." (IDI_P16, l. 1187–1194)

I think this quote points to the heart of the ambivalent status of solid fluidity described here. It seems to apply to groups, to their interactions and might just be the defining nature of what migrant rights activism is altogether as a movement. Negotiating solidarities on this collective scale is the delicate process of positioning, coming together, arguing, re-aligning, splitting and powerfully moving together. I would argue that this is one of the reasons why, even when networking has a defined form, it is characterized by what I call solid fluidity. The ways in which these activist groups join forces are stable and fluid at the same time. Fluidity means that cooperations take various forms, endure for differently long periods of time, can and do fall apart. Stability refers to the fact that there still seems to be a certain basis which, broadly speaking, is present when needed. This base does not really have a fixed place or shape: in some sense it is the local, potentially urban character of loose knowing each other. In other ways, it can be topic-specific or group-

specific networking beyond locality.[76] All these interactions bring insecurities and challenges because in order to know how to interact with each other, groups often have to figure out what they want. This is explored further in the final analytical category, looking at how groups negotiate goals and success.

5.6   "We Have Not Finished"

Groups aim for change. This might seem obvious but is actually already more complex at a second sight—which change exactly? And how does the way, leading to this change, look like? Like other aspects, activist groups are continuously figuring this out. Additionally, a recurring challenge is that it does not seem like anything is changing at all. What particularly emerged in my data and is explored in this category is how activist groups deal with this situation. They are constantly juggling ups and downs, groups falling apart, others starting anew. My impression is that the fact that they anyways *move on* is promising to look at more closely. This also involves a time dimension. What success is or should be, how short-term and long-term goals are addressed and the lack of change all shape groups' negotiating solidarities. In these included elements, these negotiations link past, present and future activities.

Defining aims

> "And I would say this is the really crucial thing of each group but also a really difficult one… to say, ehm, where… … where do we want to go, what do we want to reach and, therefore, how many compromises are we willing to do and where is maybe- […] which line do we don't want to cross?" (IDI_P16, l. 1194–1199)

This quote nicely links this category to the internal negotiating processes in groups that were highlighted in the previous subchapters. Groups are con-

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76   There is increasing attention on the role of the urban space for social movements (see e.g. Hess & Lebuhn, 2014; Kewes, 2016a; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2017; Steinhilper, 2017). And of course, I want to give credit to a whole section of social movement studies specifically focusing on transnational networks of movements (see e.g. Castells, 2015; Juris, 2008; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Kenshiro & Lawrence, 2010; Khagram, 2002).

stantly figuring out who they are and what they want. In fact, they try to find and develop "the same sense of direction" (IDI_P08, l. 287–295). So goals or aims do not appear pre-established or always stable over time (IDI_P11, l. 356–360). Big-scale goals aiming for societal and political change are very clearly at the core of most social movements. Activists organize for a society clearly positioned against the far-Right, one with more equal opportunities where human rights are respected (IDI_P05, l. 536–544; IDI_P06, l. 19–28; PO_G01_24, l. 6–10). They want to reach a situation where migration is not the main societal issue linked to every problem anymore—a state of "post-integration," as one calls it (IDI_P07, l. 794–804 [Translated]).

Among others, formulated goals are about stopping all deportations, ending the accommodation of migrants in camps, freedom of movement, equal rights for all (IDI_P01, l. 250–254; IDI_P06, l. 539–550; PO_G01_27, l. 38–45). Yet, what my data reveal is that there are many more goals that groups are working toward. They might be part of the previously mentioned ones but are less slogan-like and in some ways evolve on different levels. Notably, even one group's goals can contradict each other, for instance resulting from differing positionalities of various activists (PO_G02_31, l. 7–12; Odugbesan & Schwiertz, 2018, p. 198). Some scholars raise such internal debates and the complex nature of aims concerning migrant rights activism (see e.g. Cook, 2010, p. 147f.; Fadaee, 2015, p. 734; Klotz, 2016, p. 63; McNevin, 2006, p. 146; Monforte & Dufour, 2013, p. 83f.).

Living a normal life

> "I need to have a… to calmly live here in Hamburg, I need to have a legality, you know. Because it is also my right to live where I want to live […] You have the right to be here, right?" (IDI_P17_1, l. 924–947 [Translated])

Very concretely, this quote shows that migrant rights activists are constantly working toward enabling "normal" lives for people, enable them(selves) to "work… and live a decent life" (IDI_P08, l. 90–99; IDI_P04, l. 378ff.; PO_G05_10, l. 55–66). *Calm* or *normal* often means to find some way of obtaining a legal status, even if that might (first) be a precarious one (IDI_P06, l. 911–920). While these might seem individual problems and even self-centered goals, this is where the linkage of the categories Feeling the Need to

Be Political and Making the Social Political[77] builds the bridge to the essence of this category. Migrant rights groups want to better lives for everyone. In order to even be able to work toward this, they first need to find ways for themselves and each other. Even more basic than obtaining a legal status, it is often about being "treated as humans" (IDI_P15, l. 618–622 [Translated]):

> "There were four new people at the meeting. They live in an accommodation in [street name] and the situation is very bad. It is cold and rain enters the rooms. To go to the toilet, they have to leave the building and the kids are sick very often. They have been working together with [group name] in order to get a transfer but so far only the 'real' refugees got that. They have certificates from a doctor and so on but nothing helps." (PO_G01_30, l. 8–17 [Translated])

Even though working on such individual situations is not a fully agreed upon part of the political organizing and goals of groups, aiming for living normal lives certainly is. In fact, changing life realities as a goal of migrant rights activism is sometimes specifically addressed in existing research (see e.g. Johnson, 2012, p. 125; Josten, 2012, p. 169; Klotz, 2016, p. 63; Marciniak & Tyler, 2014, p. 170; McGuaran & Hudig, 2014). There is another more implicit goal emerging from my data.

"Wir machen zusammen Politik"[78]

> "Somebody once told me: 'It actually doesn't make sense what you do. You would have to address one person directly that can decide things and not just be in the streets... eh. But for me this person didn't actually get what it's all about. And that's this strengthening ourselves. And, of course, the other... you can also do. But [...] it is really important to know that there are others that think the same and... with whom we can take these steps." (IDI_P14, l. 732–742 [Translated])

This code is centrally about organizing in the first place and finding ways of doing it well (IDI_P01, l. 854–860; IDI_P03, l. 523–530; IDI_P06, l. 236–243). The quote stresses the tension between supposedly *real* political work, aiming at politicians and institutions, and other activities. Yet, what this activist as well as the invivo code emphasize is the centrality that working *together* has for

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77   See Subchapters 5.1 and 5.4.
78   We do politics together.

her*him (IDI_P11, l. 342-346). This raises the continuity that is involved when groups consciously reflect it as an explicit aim they set for themselves: bringing people together (IDI_P04, l. 792–799; IDI_P05, l. 1010–1017; PO_G01_03, p. 18; PO_G06_02, p. 12f.). Moreover, it is not only aimed at in the sense of doing things together. Sometimes it very explicitly means *developing* together, for example by addressing issues raised in Subchapter 5.3:

> "I think, against this backdrop [some people felt unsatisfied with an event], but also in general, we discussed more about a separate 'structural meeting'. This should be about how the group should develop in the future: Who is the group? Who takes decisions? How do we organize things? Who takes over tasks? And so on." (PO_G01_28, l. 25–30)

Some groups try to build spaces where there is time to work on themselves, to talk and exchange about the basics that often come up short in the everyday pressure of various urgencies and priorities (IDI_P11, l. 342–348; IDI_P16, l. 243–252; PO_G06_02, p. 12). Nevertheless, there certainly is the need to work toward the overall aims and goals in more visible and traditional forms as well.

Reaching public attention

> "[T]o have this political discussion, you know, that we try to talk to people from our position and try to work politically but also keep an eye on: 'How can I transport this to society?'" (IDI_P06, l. 496–500 [Translated])

This quote links internal topics to the need to externally positioning as well. Creating visibility by taking to the streets, raising awareness about issues, trying to capture media attention or directly addressing politicians bring in classical forms through which social movements aim for change. As one activist puts it, when there is "a big problem," there needs to be "big action" (IDI_P01, l. 606ff.). Especially since many of the situations migrant rights activists face are marginalized and pushed out of public attention—even though migration certainly is a constant topic—, it becomes ever more central to find ways of making them more present:

"In the end they talked about the demonstration against the Abschiebek-nast[79] in Glückstadt. Those who were there said that it wasn't very big but quite good. The prison will get started soon and mainly concerns people from 'safe countries of origin'. These people should be brought there early on and live 'a normal life' there over weeks which apparently was already referred to by operators and politicians as 'life minus freedom'. [Name 35] said that detention pending deportation has always been and continues to be a legal borderline, which is why they [politicians] try to get it through 'under the radar', so in a small town like Glückstadt. Altogether it was established that it is obviously quite a sensitive topic for the institutions and that [the group] should do more to make this [situation public]." (PO_G05_10, l. 67–79)

Of course, to work against these institutionalized and structural problems is difficult and often activist groups do not manage to obtain success.[80] It seems easy to look at this quote and state: If they did not manage to mobilize enough opposition to the deportation prison to make politicians shut it down or not open it in the first place, they have not been successful. However, considering the remarks concerning multiple scales of goals and the role time frames play, with success it might not be that easy either.

Negotiating success

"What was mentioned as most important to communicate is that this was Black people who organized without the help of anyone, decided to fight, decided to go [outside], not knowing yet whether they would be supported or not." (PO_G02_11, p. 25)

This quote underlines that already the step of organizing and in this case going public can be considered a success, which underscores that there are multiple ways of looking at success. One activist asks "What is the actual success? Is there a success? How do I measure it?" to then answer her*himself: "it's something personal." (IDI_P16, l. 1343–1349) Actually changing life realities of people or individuals is, understandably, considered a success, some-

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79   Detention center pending deportation.

80   While this is a goal and level of success which social movements are most of the time being evaluated on (see e.g. Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008, p. 77f.; Buechler, 2000, p. 163; Crossley, 2002, p. 139; Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 232; Weldon, 2011, p. 3).

times but not necessarily directly linked to activist groups' involvement—concerning getting a residence status, obtaining an apprenticeship position or a job, finding an apartment or similar successes (IDI_P01, l. 338–346; IDI_P07, l. 508–518; IDI_P08, l. 241–251). Another type of repeatedly mentioned success is individual and collective development and empowerment (IDI_P08, l. 606–619):

> "According to what s*he told, s*he has passed very adverse, difficult situations, but her*his strength made that s*he could move ahead and, additionally, that s*he obtained what s*he believed to be entitled to. [...] Therefore, this strength of achieving this, despite everyone telling her*him that it was not possible. S*he fought for obtaining this and s*he did. And it's not only her*him, but s*he also passes it on to everyone else. S*he also passed it on to me. Then this makes you fill with strength. I don't want to say power, but strength and knowing that you can [...] obtained what we are entitled to. Actually, it's fighting for our rights. So this is what they remind us and it's important: knowing and remembering it." (IDI_P17_2, l. 31–46 [Translated])

This quote discusses individual experiences of empowerment but also relates them to collective development. Notably, it raises a time dimension by stressing that past experiences are shared in the present, generating hope. Seeing that one is able to realize or contribute something, taking responsibility and developing agency can be empowering experiences (IDI_P11, l. 483–489; IDI_P14, l. 1016–1026). Giving hope and keeping up the mood is a relevant success of joint action and so is seeing results from taking the time to exchange views and find ways of concretely developing together or successfully having organized with others (IDI_P01, l. 491–499; IDI_P11, l. 666–673; PO_G01_32, l. 4–8; PO_G02_32, l. 8–14). The multiplicity in goals and success in migrant rights activism on multiple levels is raised by some scholars (see e.g. Glöde & Böhlo, 2015, p. 85; McNevin, 2006, p. 147; Odugbesan & Schwiertz, 2018, p. 198; Oliveri, 2012, p. 803; Schwenken, 2006, p. 323f.; Tazreiter, 2010, p. 212; Ünsal, 2015, p. 4).

Reflecting on the lack of (political) change

> "[Apparently in the meeting] some refugees remarked that 'It didn't change anything' [referring to a big jointly organized demonstration]. [Name 5] commented that this is always a difficulty and is linked to the question what

success is in the first place. [...] Many ask 'What use does it have for me?' and, indeed, in their specific life situations often these actions don't change anything. At the same time, s*he said that for [group name], it did release some energy. For instance, to organize the open meeting and exchanging a lot about [the current legal changes] and its consequences." (PO_G05_10, l. 55–66 [Translated])

This quote picks up the ambivalence of realized activities and how they might be perceived. Significantly, it also raises a recurring notion, namely that "nothing changed" (IDI_P01, l. 445). Or as one activist puts it: "[T]he laws worsened and no one listens to us." (IDI_P15, l. 572–579 [Translated]) Someone else says: "[M]aybe we won't reach anything." (IDI_P14, l. 415–420 [Translated]) Activists underline how they do not even expect to realize big changes by saying that one has to be "realistic" (PO_G05_05, p. 50f. [Translated]) or that "it is gigantic problems [we are facing] that are out of our hands." (IDI_P07, l. 569–575 [Translated]) These statements refer to the general political situation and personal life situations that do not seem to be changing no matter what activists do. Such lack of political change is often referred to and together with resulting disappointments are issues that the groups constantly have to deal with: "I'm losing more hope that [...] refugees and immigrants will get [...] better future here." (IDI_P08, l. 789–803) A recurring perception is also that "many fights [have been] lost" (PO_G05_07, l. 39–45 [Translated]). These expressions reveal that despite the previously cited "realistic" attitudes to change, its lack needs coping.[81]

The ambivalence of activities and successes at various levels also shows in demonstrations, which are likely the most frequent public activity groups organize. What activists perceive as satisfying numbers of people differs between rather low numbers, such as fifty, and much higher ones, such as 35,000 or more. That underlines the importance of context. On the one hand, it is often mentioned that the only thing that is being done are demonstrations but that they do not lead anywhere (IDI_P01, l. 606–610; IDI_P03, l. 950–963). On the other hand, demonstrations emerge as occasions that bring people together, keep up the mood and create empowering situations (IDI_P14, l. 712–728; IDI_P15, l. 205–209; PO_G01_17, p. 99). One activist interestingly

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81   While failures of movements are sometimes addressed in terms of the cycle of protest, to my understanding, they are mostly not explored more (see e.g. Cook, 2010, p. 156; Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 233; Glöde & Böhlo, 2015, p. 84; Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 134; Tarrow, 2011, p. 206).

raises that "if you're only focused on a goal that is that far away, it... makes things more complicated," pointing out that it can be good to have short-term goals, which are more "practically related" (IDI_P16, l. 1333–1339). Essentially, s*he points out that it is a balancing between hope and disappointment that activists are dealing with, individually as well as in their groups.

"Connecting [ideas] to something practical"

> "For [Name 6], the workshop was a way of bringing the social and the political struggle together in that sense. It is good and important, others agreed, to capture the interests of refugees. [Name 50] remarked that we have to talk about things that can be realized and that we can do something. Something [Name 8] said, at some point, was: 'Solidarity is daily life.'" (PO_G02_35, l. 31–37)

This group situation on reflecting a previously organized event in a way counters the issue of nothing changing. Groups discuss organizing events that are directly relevant to those people living in specific precarious situations, as a significant approach in its linkage to the political and structural context (IDI_P03, l. 1004–1010). This adds the notion that to keep going, despite all disappointments, practical or concrete steps are needed. Often, this can be linked to or even enforced by existing urgencies—due to institutional political dynamics, a specific occasion that a group can work toward or individual situations (IDI_P03, l. 458–468; IDI_P05, l. 933–942; IDI_P08, l. 141–150; PO_G05_05, p. 50f.). This is repeatedly referred to as the concrete "actually doing something" (PO_G05_01, p. 45 [Translated]; IDI_P14, l. 440–458; PO_G02_32, l. 12–16). Such concrete aims and practical activities are easier to realize and facilitate getting and keeping people on board in the very real urgency of everyday struggles. Barker and Cox seemingly make a similar point when discussing how activists always have to combine general and practical issues, (2014, p. 12).

"We have not finished"

> "And I had hope that we as a group could... eh- I know that we cannot change the system but I thought we might be able to do something good for these people." (IDI_P15, l. 148–151 [Translated])

Maybe through working on multiple types and levels of goals simultaneously and thereby experiencing various kinds of disappointments *and* successes at the same time, migrant rights activists find ways to not just individually balance but also collectively keep moving against all odds. As this activist points out, s*he is not convinced structural change will happen. But if there is the possibility of improving things for some people, it is significant to do it. The notion of not having finished is recurring and stands for continuation but certainly also persistence (IDI_P01, l. 521ff.): "We have to try again, again, again, again, again." (IDI_P01, l. 291f.) As in the opening quote, such persistence is often linked to various kinds of changes that occur: impacting people, giving hope, gaining courage, "strengthening ourselves" (IDI_P03, l. 374–381 [Translated]; IDI_P01, l. 279–284; IDI_P08, l. 619–636). Such a continuity can also persist through times more dominated by "low level" activity—fewer people and actions (IDI_P08, l. 251–266; PO_G02_30, l. 44–51). It means holding up the fight and keeping things moving. All this depends on an equally ambivalent expression that characterizes this category altogether. People are not really feeling hopeful, *but*...:

> "I don't really have a positive view into the future. I don't see that anything is changing in a good way. So, you could say 'Oh, you're really negative, [Name].' And I would say 'Yes, definitely.' But... well, it doesn't... mean that I need to [...] stop doing something cause, on the one hand, I gain power out of political, practical action [...], or strength. [...] And the other thing is that there is the foolish hope that... yeah, many small drops... ... will in the end, will create something bigger... somehow. But I don't know, if I still live then or whatever. But as long as I'm thinking that I'm working sort of on the right side and fighting... with people I like or [...] I just respect them, I would say I would always continue [...]." (IDI_P16, l. 1399–1415)

The same activist also talks about how learning about people's experiences and the realities they are facing is sad and frustrating, but that it can also be inspiring and empowering to see *that* and *what* they are doing to fight these (IDI_P16, l. 285–294). Other activists make similar points when saying: "I believe that... with a lot of work [...] we can affect society" (IDI_P05, l. 630f.) or "I'm very convinced that [...] when I work politically there is a chance I can change things." (IDI_P06, l. 216–226 [Translated]; see also IDI_P11, l. 483–489) In fact, part of this is also reminding each other "not to underestimate everyone's power" (PO_G01_10, p. 27). Ultimately, there seems to be some belief in

the own collective potential (IDI_P17_1, l. 1234–1243). This persistence to continue despite everything is a powerful notion.

Summary

"But they are 'not moving' is what s*he said. 'A demo is not a success. A success is when you're creating something, when you're knowing where to go.' Later s*he said that the strength of them experienced and organized people is that they think about the future and understand that it's not about themselves: one day one won't be there anymore, but it won't matter because it's about what's created. Instead, it's about creating space and possibilities for others for the future." (PO_G02_28, l. 51–58)

This quote underlines the linkage of present and future in activism. Moreover, it indicates how groups might manage to handle the existing complexity through balancing. For instance, this can occur by building places and spaces where there is time to focus on each other, on oneself, to listen and aim at improving situations and how they work together (IDI_P16, l. 857–862; IDI_P17_1, l. 1216–1220; PO_G01_33, l. 78–85). In this sense, the claim "we have not finished" seems to be a self-assurance, a strategy and a challenge at the same time. This category highlights that negotiating and building solidarities takes time. It builds on past fights, seeks practical, concrete aims in people's present life situations while always aiming at big-scale societal and political change. It offers no recipe and is, surely, no endpoint—as might be suggested if these six analytical categories were presented as a linear sequence. This category works as the closing empirical-analytical subchapter because it nicely weaves them all together, as various references throughout the subchapter illustrate. Many of the ongoing negotiations discussed in this entire chapter show that groups are continually working on building lasting structures to continue fighting for their goals. The destructive consequences of the lack of political change cannot and shall not be denied—individual fates, groups falling apart, people quitting, losing hope or seeing no perspectives anymore. Yet, activist groups often manage to keep going anyways. In its inescapability, the collective claim discussed in this subchapter clearly relates to the individually felt need to be political: "We have to struggle." (IDI_P01, l. 524–527)

5.7   Summary of the storyline

This chapter offers an insight into lived realities of migrant rights activism in Hamburg. The analytical categories are very grounded in the empirical material of my interviews and fieldnotes and emphasize those patterns that seemed most promising to explore further. The overarching storyline Negotiating Solidarities only developed at the later stages of the research process. My impression was that processes of negotiating meaning and practices emerged in all the analytical categories as very central internal dynamics. This is not surprising since these are contexts defined by social interactions and political positionings. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 4, these are dynamics that are not conceptually developed very far in the Northern mainstream of social movement studies.

I already pointed out that solidarity is a very present buzzword in current times. I do not merely criticize this but decided to use it myself because it is a powerful idea. While it does not emerge very centrally in an explicit sense throughout my data, it seemed an intriguing way of capturing groups' various internal processes of figuring themselves out. The plural underlines that the claim here is not to develop *the* definition of solidarity. Instead, it is about rendering the many implicit understandings and practices of solidarities present in migrant rights activism in Hamburg. Notably, it also expresses that this is not a plainly pleasant and harmonious process. It involves negotiating, discussing, disagreeing as well as things going wrong and power relations playing out. Yet, these processes also highlight much practical engaging with each other and aiming at developing together. The next chapter consolidates the main insights I see in this storyline and puts them in dialogue with existing research to contribute to developing a conceptual angle that captures these activist groups and their activities for migrant rights from a social movement perspective.