1. INTRODUCTION: The Contested Solidarities of the German 'Welcome Culture'

1.1. The Spirit of Summer 2015: "We Want to Help Refugees!"

In the summer of 2015, an extraordinary number of German residents felt an urge to provide "help" to refugees. This unprecedented outburst of compassion for newly arrived migrants made history as a German "welcome culture" or a "summer of welcome" (cf. Hamann & Karakayali 2016; Karakayali 2017, 2019; Sutter 2019). My interlocutor Maria Papadopoulos[1], a volunteer supporting refugees, described in vivid terms the spirit of this exceptional moment:

> "Oh, you should have seen it! Yes, it was September last summer. I had just got back from my holidays and I came here and was confronted by loads of enquiries and I didn't know why. I'd been abroad for one and a half months and, when I returned, suddenly the whole of Germany was all stirred up, with people saying 'We want to help refugees!' And in the meantime, via Facebook [...] groups like 'We help refugees in Ludwigsburg' were set up. And then it all started happening – because most people think that if they clear out their closets and clear out their apartments and then dump their rubbish here, they're helping. And so that's what started happening here ... oh my God, I can still remember it so well – we had ten to twelve cars per day, people driving up to the accommodation centre and unloading bags. We needed one huge container per week to get rid of all the rubbish. [...] And then I thought, 'My God, we need to do something' and, of course, I didn't have a clue how to use Facebook [...] Out of desperation, because it was so bad, I published my contact details in the group ... and from that point on, my

1 In order to preserve the anonymity of my interlocutors, their names have been changed throughout this book.

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> phone didn't stop ringing and I was getting phone calls like: 'I'm here with a three-and-a-half-tonne truck full of stuff, I'll bring it round now' and I'm thinking 'Nooooo!'. The scale of it, it was beyond normal. And then, one day, refugees started fighting over stuff and people were just throwing stuff out of their cars … It was insane, just insane!"[2] (Interview with Maria Papadopoulos, 18/2/2016)

In our conversation, Maria Papadopoulos recalled the extraordinary scale of donations to the refugee accommodation centre in her neighbourhood. Her telling account, though, indicates that practices of refugee support are situated, relative and contested. Different individuals judge and evaluate such practices based on their conceptions of the 'right' way to support refugees. Whether something is considered help or not is thus contingent on interpretation and classification. In Maria Papadopoulos's neighbourhood, some sought to help through dispensing with a share of their belongings for the benefit of 'needy' others. However, my interlocutor did not consider these donations to be a help at all. Quite the opposite, in fact she was deeply stressed by the arrival of what she perceived to be piles of old "rubbish" that was no longer of use to anybody. As a volunteer supporting refugees[3] in the neighbourhood, her idea of the 'right' way to help consisted of a willingness to build personal relationships with refugees and to give large amounts of spare time for their benefit. My interlocutor's account also illustrates that refugee support has unintended consequences and adverse effects. She remarked that she had "to get rid of all the rubbish" dumped at the refugee accommodation centre, while refugees started fighting each other over their share of the donations.

This insight into the spirit of summer 2015 sheds light on the contested nature of refugee support that lies at the heart of this book. 'Doing good' for refugees, in other words, is not as simple and straightforward as it might appear. Practices of support and help are embedded in differing and at times contrasting interpretations, with various actors[4] and individuals competing

2 Translation from German by LF.

3 In this book, I use the terms 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers' interchangeably. This mirrors how people throughout my field of investigation used the terms. Most of the time, they did not distinguish between those whose asylum case was pending and those who represented legally recognized refugees.

4 In this book, I employ the term 'actors' in order to distinguish analytically between different groups of people who intervened in practices of refugee support from a partic-

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over the 'proper' conduct of support. There are diverse interests and motivations at stake, which might not primarily be those of their ostensible beneficiaries. Refugee support is thus deeply intertwined with questions of power and comes with ambivalent political meanings. What are the visions, motivations and imaginaries that guide such differing practices for the benefit of newly arrived migrants? How do actors and individuals with various positionalities and interests influence, appropriate and shape the 'proper' conduct of refugee support? When and how do such practices and discourses turn political? This book sheds light on these questions. It investigates the contested practices of refugee support that emerged around the German 'summer of welcome' in 2015, while providing empirical insights into the imaginaries, interests, politics and conflicts at stake.

Unlike those who supported refugees through a single act of donating second-hand items, my interlocutor Maria Papadopoulos spent most of her spare time volunteering with asylum seekers in her neighbourhood. She was the head of a local citizens' initiative supporting refugees in a medium-sized town in southern Germany, the area where most of the research for this book took place. The initiative consisted of around thirty volunteers who together aimed to support refugees in the neighbourhood, for instance by organizing joint leisure activities such as a weekly handicraft group for women, providing German language classes or advising asylum seekers on administrative matters. Such loosely constituted citizens' initiatives in support of refugees formed in almost every corner of Germany in the course of 2014 and 2015, when the number of people willing to volunteer rose sharply (cf. Turinsky & Nowicka 2019). Similar tendencies occurred in other European countries, such as in Italy (Sinatti 2019), Sweden (Kleres 2018; Povrzanović Frykman & Mäkelä 2020), Belgium (Vandevoordt 2019), France (Sandri 2018; Doidge & Sandri 2019) and Greece (Parsanoglou 2020). Around this time, there was extraordinary coverage in the national and international media of the growing numbers of migrants heading to Europe, migrants who were crossing the

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ular subjective and situated point of view. These include governmental actors, volunteers, church representatives, self-declared political activists and others. As such classifications might give the false impression that those in question constitute seemingly homogenous types of actors, I should emphasize that an actor itself is always marked by internal differences, conflicts or heterogeneities and comprised of further actors nested within. When speaking about 'actors', it is thus important to keep in mind that the term always entails a certain necessary simplification of a more complex reality.

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external borders of the European Union irregularly in their search for asylum. Numerous media accounts presented this situation as an unprecedented and historical moment of intensified global migration (cf. Pries 2019). For instance, the *New York Times* wrote of a "mass migration crisis" and proclaimed that "there are more displaced people and refugees now than at any other time in recorded history – 60 million in all – and they are on the march in numbers not seen since World War II" (New York Times: 31/10/2015)[5]. The article also depicted the migrants heading to Europe as "heralds of a new age" and claimed that they were arriving in an "unceasing stream, 10,000 a day at the height, as many as a million migrants heading for Europe this year" (ibid.).

From at least 2014 on, the number of asylum seekers arriving in Germany also began to rise sharply, reaching its climax in late summer 2015. When existing schemes of accommodation eventually proved to be insufficient and overcrowded, local authorities established new makeshift accommodation centres in residential neighbourhoods or rural villages that had never previously hosted asylum seekers (cf. Hinger 2016; Hinger, Schäfer & Pott 2016). In consequence, the local reception of asylum seekers moved to the centre stage of public and media debate in many places across Germany. This notion of an extraordinary emergency situation mobilized many established residents 'to help' by volunteering in their neighbourhood, village or town – among them was my interlocutor Maria Papadopoulos.

Not only did the immediate practices of Maria Papadopoulos differ from those of residents donating belongings to asylum seekers, her intentions and interpretations of supporting refugees did too. For her, volunteering with refugees served as a means to take a stand *against* nationalistic and xenophobic attitudes and to signal support *for* a multicultural society, as she told me during my interview. She decided to get involved as a volunteer in response to the hostile attitudes that emerged among established residents in her neighbourhood when local authorities announced the decision to accommodate 200 asylum seekers in an untenanted building in the area. In many places across Germany, reactions towards the arrival of asylum seekers were equally divided, entailing both hostile and migrant-friendly attitudes and actions (cf. Fontanari & Borri 2018; Hinger, Daphi & Stern 2019). Through her volunteering activities, my interlocutor sought to enact an alternative to the

5 See: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/world/europe/a-mass-migration-crisis-and-it-may-yet-get-worse.html (last accessed 1/8/2020).

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hostile and right-wing attitudes that were on the rise around that time[6] – an alternative based on togetherness and mutual support despite cultural differences. For many of my interlocutors, volunteering with refugees represented a similar means to bring about positive transformations and to enact a vision of what society should look like in an age of migration.

What follows from these insights is that practices of refugee support are embedded in social imaginaries that quite often go far beyond an urge for altruistic giving to those 'in need'. As Maria Papadopoulos' intention to counteract hostile right-wing attitudes in her neighbourhood illustrates, volunteering with refugees can also come with *political* meanings and effects. Interestingly, though, my interlocutor did not consider her practices to be political at all. Instead, she framed her commitment as an "apolitical sign of humanity", as many of my interlocutors did. Let me be clear here, I believe that the idea of 'apolitical' and 'neutral' forms of refugee support is a powerful and persistent myth (cf. Fleischmann & Steinhilper 2017). 'Doing good' for refugees does not take place in an 'apolitical' vacuum. Those who set out 'to help' are entangled with governmental actors in different and ambivalent ways and embedded in a context marked by discriminating migration and border policies. Unknowingly or unwillingly, even those who describe their actions as purely 'apolitical' might end up reproducing structural exclusions and discriminations, or, to the contrary, might challenge and alter them. The contested imaginaries at play thus elaborate on current parameters of living-together and speak out on contemporary voids, deficiencies and challenges in migration societies. Like Maria Papadopoulos, volunteers might aim to bring about changes for a 'better society' and create new ways of relating among different groups and individuals who might formerly have been isolated from one another. Practices of refugee support can therefore offer revealing insights into how an individual imagines and makes sense of the world around her or him. At the

6 From late 2014 on, a new movement going by the acronym "Pegida" (its full name translates as 'Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident') brought thousands of German citizens out onto the streets of Dresden as well as of other major cities across Germany. Through its weekly Monday demonstrations, the alarming extent of xenophobic, nationalistic and Islamophobic attitudes within German society became increasingly visible. At around the same time, the newly founded right-wing populist party, the AfD (short for "Alternative für Deutschland") was gaining in support and attracting a growing number of voters. After its success at the 2017 federal elections, it became the first right-wing party to enter the German parliament in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany.

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same time, these practices can also be world-building in that they enact alternative ways of living-together – an aspect of refugee support that I consider to be deeply political.

Thus, practices of refugee support do not fit neatly into such clear-cut boxes as 'humanitarian volunteering' and 'political activism', which are quite often thought of as contrasting types of action. Instead, the uncertain, oscillating and ambivalent entanglements with questions of power constituted a defining feature of the practices and discourses that I observed around the summer of 2015. Rather than distinguishing between 'apolitical' and 'political' forms of acting from the outset, I therefore suggest to focus on the notion of *contested solidarity*. Throughout this book, I employ the term *solidarity* as an analytical bracket for exploring the diverse practices of refugee support as well as their ambivalent political meanings and effects. This perspective interrogates the social imaginaries of those who offered help and support and argues that they are central to understanding the manifold practices of refugee support and their diverse effects. I regard *solidarity* as a transformative relationship that is forged between established residents and newcomers in migration societies, one that creates collectivity across or in spite of differences. Such relationships of solidarity hold the potential to invent new ways of relating that challenge the divide between citizens and non-citizens, a divide scholars have identified as a central source of sovereign power and a locus of the modern nation-state (Agamben 1998; Minca 2017).

In social anthropology, a long line of thought has investigated acts of gift-giving. Dating back to Marcel Mauss (1990 [1925]), these investigations highlight how acts of giving foster social bonds and mutual obligations and thus produce sociality (see for instance Mallard 2011; Komter & Leer 2012; Paragi 2017; Heins & Unrau 2018). In her foreword to a reissue of Mauss's famous *The Gift*, Mary Douglas suggests that "the theory of the gift is a theory of human solidarity" (Douglas 2002: xiii) but, while 'the gift' became the focus of numerous empirical studies and conceptualizations, 'solidarity' received considerable less attention from anthropologists. With this book, I aim to contribute to the empirically grounded understanding of solidarity and its practices in migration societies.

The book at hand also sheds light on current conceptions of, hopes and challenges for the way people live together in an increasingly diverse society. Perhaps better than any moment before, the developments in the summer of 2015 illustrated that the idea of culturally homogenous and sealed-off nation-states is a persistent yet ever more untenable illusion. The increasing numbers

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of asylum seekers entering the country provided a striking demonstration of how intensified global migration flows are profoundly altering and redefining existing ways of living-together in society. In western European countries, societies are becoming ever more heterogeneous and diverse in response to growing influxes of migrants, turning into what I refer to as 'migration societies' throughout this book (cf. Matejskova & Antonsich 2015; Hamann & Yurdakul 2018). The extraordinary willingness to support refugees in the German 'summer of welcome' thus revealed a desire to build new forms of collectivity and togetherness amidst intensified migration flows. These solidarities put forward social and political alternatives that included whoever was present on the ground, whatever their national origin or cultural belonging.

This book is therefore very much in the spirit of what Cresswell (2006: 53) calls "nomadic metaphysics", in that it regards human mobility and flux as a defining criterion of our times. We live in an age of intensified migration, in times when the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) of the modern nation-state is undergoing significant changes (cf. Castles & Miller 1994). Based on such a perspective, this study sheds light on how social orders and social identities are constituted through movement. It focuses on mobility and becoming rather than on embeddedness and stasis (see also Malkki 1992; Castles & Miller 1994; Urry 2007; Feldman 2015).

Throughout the book, I refer to the developments in the second half of 2015 as the "long summer of migration", a term frequently used in academic accounts (Kasparek & Speer 2015; Mezzadra 2018; Yurdakul et al. 2018). This expression was coined by Hess et al. (2017) in order to describe the increased numbers of asylum seekers crossing the European Union's external borders around this time. These movements, they argue, constituted a destabilizing force that brought the fault lines of the European migration and border regime to the fore – a migration regime that had been increasingly built on control, exclusion and selectivity (see also Kasparek 2016). The phrase 'the long summer of migration' is, to my mind, preferable to the term 'refugee crisis' since the latter expresses a problematic and alarmist take on the developments in the second half of 2015 (cf. Collyer & King 2016; De Genova & Tazzioli 2016; Agustín & Jørgensen 2019).

While this book is published, the spirit of summer 2015 has long since faded. European migration and border policies have become ever more draconian and restrictive, as other commentators have previously outlined (cf. Heller & Pezzani 2017; Hess & Kasparek 2017a; Kasparek & Schmidt-Sembdner 2019). Right-wing attitudes in Germany and other European

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countries are enjoying new levels of popularity (cf. Jäckle & König 2017; Castelli Gattinara 2018). Nonetheless, this book is based on the premise that the spirit of summer 2015 produced lasting effects. My empirical investigation in the five subsequent chapters explores how the long summer of migration served as a laboratory of alternative socialities, how it shaped visions of a more egalitarian and inclusive social order, and how it created new ways of relating among different actors in migration societies.

1.2. The Political Ambivalences of Refugee Support

Building on the premise that refugee support can never be located 'outside' or 'above' politics, this book traces solidarity's complex and ambivalent entanglements with questions of power. Practices and discourses of refugee support are always embedded in a wider social and political context. Even if they are framed as purely 'apolitical' humanitarian or altruistic helping, they nonetheless come with ambivalent and contested *political* meanings and effects. This book investigates how the contested solidarities of the migration summer constantly *oscillated* between political possibilities to bring about alternative ways of living-together in an age of intensified migration, the fulfilment of personal needs and a complicity in the governance of migration. Before we look in more detail at these political ambivalences of refugee support, however, it is important to come to terms with what I understand as the 'political' and respectively, its antidote, the 'antipolitical'.

1.2.1. Refugee Support as Political Action

My reading of 'the political' throughout this book is inspired by the works of French philosopher Jacques Rancière (1998, 2001, 2009). For Rancière, political change occurs when the established order is interrupted and those who are not represented make claims to be counted. In his reading, "dissensus" or "disagreement" forms the essence of the political (Battista 2017). "Dis-agreement" goes beyond the mere confrontation between opinions and occurs whenever a "wrong" is voiced that challenges the partitioning of the dominant order. Rancière (1998: 11) puts this as follows: "Politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part". In critical migration studies, asylum seekers or irregular migrants are often thought of as 'a part of those who have no part', since they

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