

characterized the second half of 2015: While volunteers stepped in where local authorities were unable to provide for the basic needs of asylum seekers, volunteers had their efforts honoured and their individual interests rewarded by governmental actors. In the following sections, I scrutinize how the notion of a 'welcome culture' was translated into volunteering activities on the ground. I show how governmental actors and social welfare organizations appropriated a humanitarian imaginary in order to mobilize a *need to help* among local residents, making them part of a symbiotic relationship.

2.3.1. Mobilizing a Need to Help

Soon after its opening, hundreds of local residents became actively involved at the LEA through regular volunteering activities. These included, for instance, teaching German language classes at the facility, organizing social activities for the new arrivals, sorting and distributing tons of donations and assisting at the 'Baby Room', a childcare centre and nursery. Volunteering at the facility, however, was not possible on an independent or self-organized basis. Instead, the state government of Baden-Württemberg had commissioned the social welfare organization "Caritas", which is affiliated to the Catholic Church, to coordinate and manage the activities of volunteers at the facility. Caritas received funding in order to employ three "Volunteer Coordinators", who served as primary contact persons for all volunteers at the LEA.

One of these volunteers was Bernhard Thiele, a retired teacher in his late sixties who wore his age well. We met at the premises of the LEA in Ellwangen for an interview in March 2016. Finding my way through the confusing maze of buildings at the former military site, I eventually came to our arranged meeting point: the small building where volunteers had established a 'German school' for asylum seekers wanting to learn German. Bernhard Thiele was one of several volunteers who twice a week helped with the teaching of German language classes at the facility. He told me that he had always loved his job as a teacher at an Ellwangen high school, where he had worked for more than forty years. For decades, he had also been a member of the local SPD, the German Social Democratic Party and, ever since, had been active in contributing to the 'public good' in the town, for instance, through his position as a representative of a residential neighbourhood ("Ortsvorsteher"). When Bernhard Thiele went into retirement, he and his wife sought a way to spend their considerable free time "meaningfully" that would also enable them to participate in day-to-

day life. It was for this reason, my interlocutor recalled, that he first started working as a volunteer driver for the local food bank “Die Tafel”.

In mid-2015, however, Bernhard Thiele decided to give up his work at the food bank and volunteer at the new initial reception centre in Ellwangen instead. It was the notion of an urgent *need to help* that drove him to act. He put this as follows:

“Then, when the numbers exploded in July, August, September, with 3,000, 4,000 and almost 5,000 [asylum seekers]. Then it was clear to me that help was needed” (Interview with Bernhard Thiele: 15/3/2016)

To Thiele, the increased numbers of asylum seekers arriving in Ellwangen meant that “help” was urgently “needed”. This reasoning epitomizes a pattern I encountered repeatedly during my fieldwork: many volunteers in the area of my field research told me that, in light of the events in the second half of 2015, they felt “obligated” to step up and help. During this time, the image of a “European refugee crisis” was circulating widely across national and international media (cf. Collyer & King 2016; Holmes & Castañeda 2016; Kallius, Monterescu & Rajaram 2016). This acute emergency also became visible in the small Swabian town of Ellwangen, where rapidly growing numbers of asylum seekers had to be accommodated. Several of my interlocutors told me about the deteriorating conditions at the facility during this time. Bernhard Thiele recalled how all of the common rooms and various offices and corridors were filled with mattresses so that people did not have to sleep outside. Tents were set up in outdoor areas of the former barracks in order to accommodate additional new arrivals, among them children and elderly people. Another volunteer recalled how she was deeply affected by the shocking conditions at the facility. For instance, she told me, 300 people had to share one toilet and hundreds had no access to showering facilities. Only from December 2015 onwards, due to the rigorous closure of the European Union’s external borders, did the number decline again to below 1,000 asylum seekers (Südwest Presse: 12/1/2016).²⁴

The mobilizing effects of the ‘crisis’ in late summer 2015 were also stressed by Helga Maurer, one of the Volunteer Coordinators employed by the social welfare organization Caritas at the initial reception centre in Ellwangen. During our interview, she recalled that it was the desire to be part of this “historic

24 See: <http://www.swp.de/crailsheim/lokales/region/wie-sich-die-stadt-ellwangen-durch-die-lea-veraendert-11766590.html> (last accessed 1/8/2020).

moment" that provoked hundreds of citizens to engage in volunteering practices. She compared this to the situation after the "Hundred Year Flood" in central Europe in 2002, which saw an extraordinarily high willingness to assist the disaster victims through donations or practical action. Interestingly, she thus paralleled the man-made 'refugee crisis' to a natural catastrophe, thereby presenting it as a non-political phenomenon and furthering an 'apolitical' humanitarian imaginary. Moreover, Helga Maurer recalled how, during the time of the 'refugee crisis', she and her colleagues had been constantly overworked since they served as the primary contact point for the growing numbers of residents seeking to help at the facility.

Academic works across the social sciences have discussed the mobilizing qualities of situations deemed humanitarian emergencies. Calhoun (2010: 33) outlines how the "idea of emergency" is immanently connected to a moral incentive to act. At the same time, he criticizes how the use of crisis metaphors puts emphasis on the event itself while diverting attention away from its causes. Others have outlined how the topic of asylum is more generally framed through alarmist perceptions of emergency and risk (cf. Malkki 1995; Nyers 2006a). As Calhoun (2010: 44) puts it: "Refugees became the focus of a global emergency response in the 1930s, and indeed, it is from this point on that the association of refugees and emergencies became consistent". Authors often discuss this relationship between the reception of refugees and the image of crisis by drawing on the works of Giorgio Agamben (see for instance Agamben 1998, 2005). Seen from such a perspective, refugees are caught in a permanent "state of exception" that enables the sovereign state to insert biopolitical modes of governance in which asylum seekers are confined to a marginalized position (cf. Ophir 2010; Vandervoort 2020). To Fassin and Pandolfi (2010: 15f) such a "state of exception" forms "the basis for a government that is at once military and humanitarian, resting on a logic of security and a logic of protection, on a law external to and superior to law, rooted as it is in the legitimacy of actions aimed at protecting life". Scholars have also critically discussed this merging of humanitarian action and government (see for instance Bornstein & Redfield 2011b; Ticktin 2011; Fassin 2012). They problematize the effects of a humanitarianization of policy domains, such as the reception of asylum seekers (see Fassin 2009, 2010; Williams 2016; Cuttitta 2018). For instance, Nyers (2006a: 30) argues that humanitarian imaginaries "work to establish the refugee phenomenon as a nonpolitical occurrence". Fassin (2016) outlines how, in the course of 2015, the topic of asylum had become increasingly framed as a moral endeavour rather than as a political issue, an

imaginary that shifted the reception of asylum seekers “from right to favour”. Scholars have thus pointed to the intimate connection between the image of the ‘crisis’, the governance of asylum seekers and humanitarian action.

This also became visible in Ellwangen, where governmental actors framed the reception of asylum seekers not as a political question but as a humanitarian one. I would argue that this framing played a pivotal role in mobilizing a need to help among local residents. The following quote by the mayor of Ellwangen illustrates this strikingly:

“I am delighted that, by receiving refugees, Ellwangen has the opportunity to make a *humanitarian* contribution and to offer people *practical help*. The citizens of Ellwangen have shown a great willingness to volunteer in support of refugees. With the establishment of the initial reception centre, Ellwangen [...] is demonstrating its open-mindedness and desire to help.”²⁵ (Press release from the state government of Baden-Württemberg: 6/5/2015, emphasis added)

In this statement, the mayor not only framed the reception of asylum seekers in the town as a humanitarian matter but also as a way to provide “practical help”. At the same time, he praised the willingness of local residents to engage in volunteering practices. In doing so, he blurred the distinction between governmental responsibilities and humanitarian helping.

Governmental actors also engaged in direct efforts seeking to mobilize local residents for volunteering activities in Ellwangen. Through different incentives, they called on citizens to volunteer at the new reception facility. For instance, my interlocutor Bernhard Thiele recalled how he had started volunteering in response to an appeal from the local council in the official bulletin. In many localities in the area of my field research, local authorities or social welfare organizations published such appeals in newspapers or bulletins, asking residents to help and calling on them to volunteer. Often, such appeals invited citizens to participate in so-called “kick-off events” that were organized

25 Translation by LF. German original: “Ich freue mich, dass Ellwangen mit der Aufnahme von Flüchtlingen einen humanitären Beitrag leisten und Menschen konkret helfen kann. In der Ellwanger Bevölkerung gibt es eine große Bereitschaft, sich ehrenamtlich für die Flüchtlinge einzusetzen. Ellwangen [...] zeigt sich mit der Einrichtung der Landeserstaufnahmestelle weltoffen und hilfsbereit.” Available online at: <https://www.baden-wuerttemberg.de/de/service/presse/pressemeldung/pid/landeserstaufnahmeeinrichtung-fuer-fluechtlinge-in-ellwangen-vorgestellt/> (last accessed 1/8/2020).

by governmental actors. This was also the case in Ellwangen. In March 2015, shortly before the new initial reception centre was inaugurated, governmental actors organized a public “kick-off event for volunteers” that attracted more than 80 interested persons. At this occasion, governmental and political representatives held speeches talking about the possibility of and necessity for people to help out at the new reception facility (see *Schwäbische*: 19/3/2018)²⁶.

The government's efforts to mobilize citizens to get involved as volunteers proved quite successful. Like Bernhard Thiele, many volunteers in the area of my field research told me that they had decided to get involved in response to published appeals or kick-off events in their town. In many places, such instances brought together a group of newly recruited volunteers who, in the aftermath of the event, founded “circles of helpers” (“Helferkreise”), self-organized local initiatives supporting refugees. This, however, was not the case in Ellwangen, where citizens who volunteered at the LEA were coordinated through the Catholic social welfare organization Caritas.

To sum up, in parallel to the rising numbers of asylum seekers arriving in Ellwangen, governmental actors actively mobilized local residents into volunteering with refugees. As I will illustrate in the next section, this often resulted in the forging of a symbiotic relationship that offered mutual rewards to both the local government and the new-born volunteers.

2.3.2. Volunteering as a Symbiotic Relationship

Founded in 1542, the *Roter Ochsen*, a restaurant serving local Swabian specialties and house-brewed craft beer, is known as the oldest and most traditional establishment in Ellwangen. It is also one of the “most prestigious places” in town, where usually “the richest” and “most pre-eminent” come to dine on special occasions, as the volunteer Bernhard Thiele remarked during our interview. On an evening in late March 2016, the restaurant's rustic spaces were filled with more than 200 citizens who had been formally invited to dinner by the mayor of Ellwangen and by representatives of the state government of Baden-Württemberg. Almost one year after the new initial reception centre opened its doors to asylum seekers, it was time to “say thank you” and “to recognize” the extraordinary commitment of the citizens of Ellwangen, my interlocutor Peter Bauer, the local Refugee Commissioner, told me. For this

²⁶ See: http://www.schwaebische.de/region_artikel,-Freiwillige-koennen-sich-in-fuenf-Bereichen-der-LEA-engageieren-_arid,10198048_toid,290.html (last accessed 1/8/2020).

“humanitarian violence” that occur when humanitarian and governmental actors work in perfect synergy. In the following subsection, I scrutinize the role of social welfare organizations in governing volunteers and driving them into a symbiotic relationship with the state.

2.3.3. The Role of Social Welfare Organizations

An outgoing and self-confident woman in her early forties, Helga Maurer was a trained social worker and one of three Volunteer Coordinators working at the LEA in Ellwangen. Before the facility opened its doors to asylum seekers in March 2015, the state government of Baden-Württemberg, which was officially in charge of the facility, decided to commission Caritas with the management of local residents’ efforts to get involved; this the Catholic social welfare organization did by employing three Volunteer Coordinators. In the course of my field visits, I met Helga Maurer several times in order to speak to her about the volunteering activities at the reception facility. Each time, she seemed deeply stressed out by her work and emphasized how demanding it was to “look after” one hundred committed volunteers. In the course of our conversations, I realized that Helga Maurer and her colleagues played a central role in directing the volunteers and shaping their conduct according to governmental needs and objectives. They determined what was the ‘right’ conduct of support and vetoed those forms of volunteering deemed unbenevolent.

Helga Maurer and her fellow two Volunteer Coordinators were the first contact persons for all local residents seeking to help at the new initial reception centre. There was no way for prospective volunteers to circumvent these ‘gatekeepers’ if they wanted to access the highly securitized facility and engage in volunteering practices. During our first conversation, I asked Helga Maurer why such coordinators were needed at the LEA. She gave me a simple answer: “volunteers need supervision”, she replied (Interview with Helga Maurer: 16/4/2015). Such supervision was, to her, essential to the efficiency and success of volunteering activities. In one of our interviews, she described her role at the facility as follows:

“As social workers, we have the training for this, to say: let’s bring a little order to all of this and see who has what kind of resources. [...] Where are the resources, how can we deploy them, where can we mobilize further resources,

various ways. In a first step, all prospective volunteers had to schedule a personal appointment with one of the coordinators. Helga Maurer summarized this initiation process as follows:

“They get in touch either via mail or via our contact form or via telephone. Then we schedule an appointment and they come for an initial chat, then in the chat we ask them about their motivation and what moved them [to help], but that’s always a bit wishy-washy [...] Then we present the different work areas and, over time, you get a really good eye for it: ‘He’s one for the clothing store, he’s one for the Baby Room, language [teaching] [...]’”³⁰ (Interview with Helga Maurer: 15/3/2016)

This statement demonstrates how the coordinators were in full charge of the actual volunteering activities. Local residents willing to volunteer could not freely choose how to help and what to do but were assigned to set work areas, such as teaching German language classes, working in the clothing store, at which donated clothes were sorted and handed out, caring for children at the “Baby Room”, and working at the “cafeteria”, the facility’s volunteer-run common room.

Before prospective volunteers could start working at the LEA, the coordinators also briefed them on the guidelines and requirements for volunteering at the facility. For instance, prospective volunteers had to provide a police record attesting that they did not hold any previous criminal convictions. Then they had to sign a “Contract of Honour” (“Ehrenkontrakt”), a non-binding and symbolic contract with Caritas. Helga Maurer commented that its aim was to make sure that prospective volunteers respected the “principle of humanity” during their activities as well as the principles of the Catholic Church, and that they would not harm or sexually assault persons under their guidance. These requirements and the symbolic concluding of a contract, I would argue, are a clear indication of how Caritas sought to influence the ‘right’ conduct of volunteers and brought them under its control and supervision.

³⁰ Translation by LF. German original: “Ja und dann ist das so, dann melden die sich entweder über die Mail oder über unser Kontaktformular oder über’s Telefon, dann machen wir einen Termin aus und dann kommen die zum Infogespräch, dann fragen wir in dem Gespräch auch zur Motivation und was sie so bewegt, aber das ist immer sehr wischiwaschi [...] dann stellen wir die Bereiche vor und man hat dann mit der Zeit einen echt guten Blick: der ist eher was für die Kleiderkammer, der ist eher was für Babyzimmer, Sprache [...]”.

Moreover, the Volunteer Coordinators directly intervened when volunteers did not comply with the “rules”. Helga Maurer told me that she was also responsible for dealing with volunteers who showed “problematic” or “anomalous” behaviour. For instance, some would reject the tasks assigned to them, when it came to helping to sort and give out clothing donations to the asylum seekers. Others would get “too involved” and forge personal relationships with the asylum seekers, a tendency indicating that they suffered from “helper syndrome” (Interview with Helga Maurer: 15/3/2016). According to Helga Maurer, such volunteers did not know their “limits” and spent too much time at the LEA. If she noticed such symptoms, she would immediately schedule an appointment with the relevant volunteers and ask them to reduce their involvement. This would spare volunteers the “immense frustrations” that would occur without their interventions, Helga Maurer stressed. Through such interventions, I would suggest, the coordinators also sought to prevent practices of refugee support that were considered unbeneficial to the smooth management and governance of asylum seekers. For instance, the forming of close affective ties was considered a risk factor that might eventually lead volunteers to object deportations.

The long summer of migration thus illustrated the important role of social welfare organizations in the management of asylum seekers. At the new initial reception centre in Ellwangen, the state government of Baden-Württemberg commissioned Caritas, the German Red Cross and other organizations with the fulfilment of various tasks and responsibilities. This was also the case in many other places, where governmental actors increasingly outsourced responsibilities and tasks to such organizations. Besides the coordination of volunteers, this included the management of entire reception facilities and the social and legal counselling of asylum seekers. Officially, social welfare organizations work independently of governmental actors, concerning themselves with the ‘public good’ and the provision of care to those in need³¹. In German constitutional law, the outsourcing of tasks to ostensibly independent welfare organizations is inscribed as one of the key pillars of the German welfare state and dates back to the Weimar Republic. Nowadays, German wel-

³¹ See for instance the website of the “Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der freien Wohlfahrtspflege”, the umbrella association of German welfare organizations: <http://www.bagfw.de/ueber-uns/freie-wohlfahrtspflege-deutschland/selbstverstaendnis/> (last accessed 1/8/2020).

fare organisations are “large and highly professionalised social service organisations”, as Mayer (2017: 6) notes.

However, I also came across a couple of incidents when social welfare organizations took a critical stance towards governmental actors and their decisions. For instance, in September 2015, the heads of the social welfare organizations at the LEA in Ellwangen composed a “Warning letter” (“Brandbrief”). This letter was addressed to the state government of Baden-Württemberg and called for immediate solutions to the “crisis situation”, which had led to deteriorating conditions that were “no longer bearable” and “risked escalating at any minute” (Warning letter: 18/9/2015). In other places, employees of social welfare organizations circumvented or actively boycotted governmental decisions in the reception of asylum seekers. In spite of these cases, I would still argue that the organizations’ antipolitical effects dominated around the long summer of migration.

2.4. Concluding Remarks: Practices of Solidarity between Dissent and Co-Optation

This chapter scrutinized how the widely circulating image of a German ‘welcome culture’ played out on the ground; how it became appropriated by different local actors; and how it mobilized immediate practices of refugee support. Based on a case study in Ellwangen, I illustrated how the notion of a ‘welcome culture’ instilled *a moral imperative to act*, a feeling that action was morally mandated to alleviate human suffering, among residents in town. This moral imperative mobilized manifold practices of refugee support, including a public march and more long-term volunteering activities. Both examples revolved around a humanitarian imaginary that depicted the reception of asylum seekers in morally charged tones and generated feelings of compassion for those ‘in need’ – a framing that presented practices of refugee support as natural and ostensibly ‘apolitical’ ‘expressions of humanity’. In late summer 2015, this humanitarian imaginary was given further impetus by the notion of an extraordinary emergency situation and the widely circulating image of a ‘refugee crisis’. Such crisis metaphors had important mobilizing effects on local residents, many of whom sought to help and to be part of this ‘historic moment’.

The practices of solidarity that I investigated in the course of this chapter brought together a wide range of local actors and individuals with differ-