

always require the imposition of certain conditions and terms upon it. The implementation of hospitality thus revolves around a “negotiation of the impossibility”, as O’Gorman (2006: 54) remarks. This, I would argue, is also mirrored in the differing views among those volunteering with refugees in the area of my field research. While the Solidarity City network and the moderator of the Welcome2Stay conference issued a universal call for equal rights – for unconditional hospitality – those who sought to help refugees in their local communities, and thus practically enacted hospitality, often tied the integration of asylum seekers as fellow citizens to certain conditions. Nonetheless, all of them sought to enact a different alternative ‘from below’ the nation-state.

4.4. Contestations around a Right to Stay

Along with equal rights, the moderator at the Welcome2Stay conference in Leipzig demanded “a right to stay” (Field notes: 12/06/2016). During my field research, however, I realized that many of my interlocutors had quite ambivalent, and at times conflicting perspectives towards this demand. This was particularly evident in the context of deportations: whether or not asylum seekers whose asylum case was rejected should be granted a right to stay proved a central issue that regularly provoked discussions among those supporting refugees. In the following two subsections, I scrutinize how people in the area of my field research positioned themselves in relation to a demand for a right to stay.

4.4.1. Taking, or not Taking a Stand against Deportations

For many of my interlocutors, the question of whether all asylum seekers should be granted a right to stay or not was not an easy one. This became most apparent when volunteers discussed the issue of deportations, i.e. the forced return of rejected asylum seekers to their countries of origin or, as in the case of Dublin III deportations, to the EU member state responsible for processing the asylum case. Deportations were a subject that regularly eschewed controversial discussions among the volunteers, for instance, at the conferences of the Refugee Council of Baden-Württemberg. In a nutshell, these debates revolved around the question of whether governmental decisions to reject and deport certain groups of migrants were acceptable or

whether volunteers should oppose such decisions and call for a right to stay for the affected.

For instance, in November 2014, I attended the workshop “Staying Here – Successful Protests and Concepts against Deportations” at a Refugee Council conference. This workshop aimed to discuss possible ways to contest deportations of rejected asylum seekers. To this end, the Refugee Council had invited two “experts” who had travelled all the way from Osnabrück, a city in northern Germany, to Stuttgart in order to recount their experiences in blocking deportations. One was a student in his early twenties called Michael, the other was Aman, a refugee from Eritrea, who was slightly older and spoke German with a heavy accent. Both introduced themselves as members of the group “No Lager Osnabrück”⁹, which had a long history of success in preventing deportations. Several years ago, the group had started blocking deportations of rejected asylum seekers to their countries of origin or, in the case of Dublin deportations, to other European member states. Michael and Aman introduced No Lager as an “anti-racist supporter group” (Field notes: 22/11/2014) that, at the time of the workshop, consisted of around 50 active members. In the course of their talk, the two shared their experiences and gave practical hints on how to (peacefully) block deportations on the ground. The audience seemed quite interested and was particularly attentive when it came to the practical details of these blockings. Many participants in the audience also voiced their respect and admiration for the successful actions of No Lager.

When the workshop leaders finally opened the floor for discussion, a lively and heated debate developed among workshop participants. This debate revolved mainly around two issues: Firstly, many voiced dissent towards the workings of governmental authorities in the context of deportations and accused them of the inhumane treatment of asylum seekers. For instance, they denounced the authorities for not informing asylum seekers before their deportation, but simply showing up with police presence in the middle of the night. Secondly, people discussed whether and how deportations could also be blocked successfully in the respective local context of their citizens’ initiatives across Baden-Württemberg. For instance, an elderly woman with a heavy Swabian dialect asserted that:

9 The group name “No Lager” literally translates as “No Camp”, mirroring how self-depicted political activists took a stand against the accommodation of asylum seekers in centralized and large-scale centres, which they called “camps” in order to highlight their problematic and discriminating consequences for their inhabitants.

“People’s behaviour in Upper Swabia is not the same as in Osnabrück. It is really difficult to do blocking in places such as Wurzach or other rural towns where we don’t have any students.”¹⁰ (Field notes: 22/11/2014)

Following the woman’s statement, various participants of the workshop shared their experiences of how they themselves had already successfully blocked deportations in their local communities. It turned out that many had opposed deportations through legal means, organized church asylum or even hidden asylum seekers in their houses.

These observations illustrate how people supporting refugees in the area of my field research often did not simply accept governmental deportation orders. Instead, they discussed deportations in critical terms and elaborated ways of opposing orders deemed unjust. By doing so, they demanded a right to stay for the affected. At this early stage of my fieldwork, it came as something of a surprise that the blocking of deportations was not only being conducted by those who openly identified themselves as political activists but also by those who sought to help refugees for ostensibly humanitarian reasons, such as retired pastors or the elderly Swabian woman from Wurzach. In the course of my field research, however, I discovered that many volunteers took a critical stance in relation to the topic of deportations and, in doing so, engaged in a *politics of presence*.

Scholars in the field of critical migration studies have outlined how deportations function as a key moment in which the state exercises and affirms sovereign power (see De Genova 2010). According to Peter Nyers (2010a), the issue of deportations is thus fundamentally a political one:

“In the case of asylum seekers, the decision about who will and who will not be provided with protection is not just a humanitarian determination but a moment when the sovereign state (re)founds its claim to monopolize the political. Anti-deportation activists can therefore be read in terms of contemporary disputes over who has the authority to protect, and under what terms and conditions. Such activism can reveal new problematizations as well as new ways of thinking and acting politically.” (Nyers 2010a: 415)

In line with Nyers, I would suggest that volunteers who actively take a stand against deportations directly challenge the authority of the nation-state in

10 Translation by LF. German original: “Das Verhalten in Osnabrück ist anders als in Oberschwaben. Es ist schwierig das Blocking in Orten wie Wurzach oder anderen ländlich geprägten Gegenden durchzuführen, da wir hier keine Studenten haben.”

the governance of migration. In doing so, they open up political possibilities that emphasize *presence* and enact alternative visions of society and belonging revolving around the rejected asylum seekers' rights to stay. Yet, Kalir and Wissink (2016) caution against distinguishing neatly between those who attempt to enforce deportations and those who contest them, a distinction that obscures how such positions are, in fact, much more debated and heterogeneous. They thus speak of a "deportation continuum" in order to make room for these differing views (*ibid.*). In line with their argument, I would suggest that the Refugee Council conferences served as an important "arena", to borrow a term from Hilhorst and Jansen (2010), in which those supporting refugees could articulate and negotiate positions in relation to a 'deportation continuum'.

This arena, which was opened up by the Refugee Council, brought together groups and individuals who embedded their practices of refugee support in quite diverse social imaginaries. Via my regular participation in these conferences, I soon learned that many participants neither took an explicitly left-wing political stance nor did they regard themselves as political activists. Instead, the conferences brought together a broad range of volunteers, including retired teachers, pastors, lawyers or stay-at-home mothers, who often embedded their actions in humanitarian or religious imaginaries. Aman and Michael, the two workshop leaders from the group "No Lager Osnabrück", however, probably did regard themselves as left-wing political activists, although they did not openly identify themselves as such during the workshop. When I studied the group's website in the wake of the workshop, I discovered that it formed part of a network of antifascist activists. Various links connected the website with other explicitly left-wing activist groups, such as "Rote Hilfe e.V." or a left-wing student association at the University of Osnabrück. Moreover, the information on the website revealed that the group had organized various public protests and demonstrations that made explicitly political demands while voicing dissent towards existing asylum and migration policies. Most strikingly, it had previously organized a demonstration demanding an "unconditional right to stay" for all asylum seekers.

Despite their differing self-understandings and motivations, however, the participants of the "Staying Here" workshop had a common denominator: they elaborated ways of blocking deportations and were thus determined to oppose governmental decisions. Yet, while the political activists of the "No Lager Osnabrück" group would probably reject *any* deportation in favour of an unconditional right to stay, this was not the case for many of those who

supported refugees for ostensibly humanitarian reasons. As I discovered in the course of my field research, the latter were often much more reluctant and ambivalent in this regards.

Such disputed standpoints became apparent in relation to the deportations of Sinti and Roma and those originating from Eastern European countries¹¹ such as Serbia, Kosovo and Albania. On the one hand, I came across numerous moments when volunteers openly denounced such asylum seekers for claiming asylum on false pretences and even called for their deportation. On the other hand, several initiatives organized campaigns or talks criticizing the problematic conditions in Eastern European countries, and raising awareness for the systematic discrimination against Sinti and Roma. For instance, the group “Freiburger Forum aktiv gegen Ausgrenzung” launched a campaign on behalf of a local Roma family demanding an “immediate right to return” (see Open Petition: 2015)¹². Its online petition received more than 8,000 signatures and widespread regional and national media attention (see Focus: 17/2/2015)¹³. In another town, a group supporting refugees handed over a petition entitled “No deportations of Roma!” to the local mayor (see Aktion Bleiberecht: 20/7/2014)¹⁴.

More widespread dissent formed around the deportations of asylum seekers from Gambia. Due to a national distribution formula, Baden-Württemberg accommodated a majority of the migrants originating from the small country in western Africa, and processed their asylum cases. During the time of my field research, however, most asylum claims by Gambians were rejected (cf. Flüchtlingsrat Niedersachsen: 2016)¹⁵. These decisions were denounced by many volunteers who criticized how Gambian asylum seekers were being sent back to a brutal dictatorship with an intolerable political

11 Throughout 2014 and in the first months of 2015, Serbia, Kosovo and Albania were among the top countries of origin among those who claimed asylum in Germany. However, recognition rates for asylum seekers from these countries were approximately zero. See: <https://www.proasyl.de/hintergrund/zahlen-und-fakten-2015> (last accessed 1/8/2020).

12 See: <https://www.openpetition.de/petition/online/sofortiges-wiedereinreise-und-rueckkehrrecht-von-frau-ametovic-und-ihren-kindern-nach-freiburg> (last accessed 1/8/2020).

13 See: http://www.focus.de/regional/freiburg/fluechtlinge-fall-ametovic-jugendhelfer-wollen-serbien-reise-mit-gall_id_4481827.html (last accessed 1/8/2020).

14 See: <https://www.aktionbleiberecht.de/?p=6271> (last accessed 1/8/2020).

15 See: <https://www.nds-fluerat.org/19551/aktuelles/bereinigte-schutzquoten-fuer-ausgewahlte-herkunfts-laender-von-fluechtlingen/> (last accessed 1/8/2020).

situation. Several citizens' initiatives thus organized campaigns demanding a right to stay for Gambians. For instance, in mid-2016, the group "Arbeitskreis Asyl Donaueschingen" ("Asylum Working Circle Donaueschingen") published an open letter to the German minister of the interior, calling for an end to all deportations to Gambia (Arbeitskreis Asyl DS: 2016)¹⁶. Another initiative, the "Helferkreis Breisach" (literally "Helping Circle Breisach"), launched an online petition against the deportation of Gambians that gained more than 5,000 signatures. In December 2016, when presidential elections in the African country were scheduled, the Refugee Council of Baden-Württemberg organized a "state-wide Gambia week" in order to call attention to the situation of asylum seekers originating from the country (see Flüchtlingsrat BW: 2016)¹⁷. According to the official website of the campaign, more than 50 volunteers' initiatives across Baden-Württemberg participated, organizing numerous local actions and events that received widespread media attention (see Abschiebestopp Gambia: 2016)¹⁸.

These instances, I would argue, clearly illustrate how some of the volunteers did not hesitate to systematically oppose deportation orders, demanding a right to stay for certain groups of asylum seekers. Although they did not directly demand an unconditional right to stay, their aim was nonetheless to change the status quo towards a more inclusive alternative. Rosenberger and Winkler (2014) argue that the opposition to deportations in local communities often depends on the individual case or on personal ties to the affected asylum seeker. Based on the observations of my field research, however, I would argue that it was often also the national and ethnic background of the affected asylum seekers that determined whether volunteers perceived deportations as unjust and took a stand against them.

Summing up, those who sought to help refugees for humanitarian reasons often elaborated where, when, for whom and under what circumstances a deportation was inappropriate and, in doing so, took up more conditional and ambivalent positions in relation to a right to stay. An issue, however,

16 See: <http://www.ak-asyl-ds.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Offener-Brief-Gambia.pdf> (last accessed 1/8/2020).

17 See: <http://fluechtlingsrat-bw.de/files/Dateien/Dokumente/INFOS%20-%20Fluechtlingsarbeit%20BW/2016%20landesweit/Aufruf%20Gambia-Woche%203-12.%20Dezember%202016.pdf> (last accessed 1/8/2020).

18 See: <https://abschiebestoppgambia.wordpress.com/tag/presse/> (last accessed 1/8/2020).

that triggered more unanimous views among the volunteers were so-called “Dublin cases”, as I will illustrate in more detail in the following subsection.

4.4.2. Counteracting the European Union

Volunteers in the area of my field research quite often demanded an unconditional, albeit temporary right to stay in the context of “Dublin cases”. These deportation orders fell under the Dublin III Regulation, an EU act stipulating that responsibility for processing an asylum case lies with the member state through which an asylum seeker first enters the European Union (for more information on the Dublin Regulation see Kasperek & Matheis 2016; Picozza 2017). Often this meant that countries at the margins of the European Union, such as Greece and Bulgaria, had to assume responsibility. If registered asylum seekers moved on to Central European countries, for instance to Germany, the authorities could then deport them to the first-entry state. Campaigning against the Dublin Regulation became one of the central aspects of the work of the Refugee Council of Baden-Württemberg in the first half of 2015. Around the same time, such tendencies also occurred on a national level: the Refugee Councils of different German states joint forces with the non-governmental organization “Pro Asyl” in order to implement campaigns with the aim to abolish this regulation.

Thus, the Dublin Regulation and related deportation orders became a major source of criticism among people supporting refugees even before the events of the long summer of migration. For instance, during an introductory speech to a Refugee Council conference in March 2015, the chairperson called the Dublin Regulation a “bureaucratic monstrosity” (Field notes: 7/3/2015). Later that day, I participated in a workshop entitled “Campaigns against the Dublin Regulation”, which was moderated by two employees of the Council. During their presentation, the two moderators asserted that “Fortress Europe had two components” (Field notes: 7/3/2015): first, the fortification of European borders and second, the Dublin Regulation. In the subsequent discussion, a heated debate developed in which audience members elaborated potential ways of protesting against and circumventing this EU regulation, for instance by blocking Dublin deportations. In this context, the moderators also recommended a brochure by the social welfare organization “Diakonisches Werk Kassel” to the workshop participants. Available online, this brochure provided a step-by-step guide on how to legally intervene against a Dublin deportation. The workshop moderators thus encouraged volunteers to

legally contest such deportation orders in their local communities, explaining that these interventions often proved successful if they were justified in terms of the “sovereignty clause” (literally “Selbsteintrittsrecht”): if the asylum seeker had faced human rights violations in the EU member state to which he or she was to be deported, then volunteers should call on the German state to apply this clause and not enforce the Dublin Regulation. Other volunteers in the audience recalled how they had successfully hidden an asylum seeker threatened with a Dublin deportation in their house for several days, so that the time limit for implementing the deportation expired and the German state became responsible for processing the relevant asylum case. Together with the participants, the moderators also discussed possibilities of “lobbying against” the Dublin Regulation at a local level (Field notes: 7/3/2015). For instance, several volunteers in the audience emphasized that it was important to “spread the word” in their local communities and to influence political representatives via conversations on the ground.

These observations resonate with something I encountered repeatedly in the course of my field research: committed volunteers considered the Dublin Regulation unjust and discriminatory and viewed it as a wider symbol of the ineffectiveness and inhumanity of the European Union. For instance, a volunteer strikingly remarked that the Dublin Regulation was responsible for “sending asylum seekers back and forth as if they were goods, not humans” (Field notes: 7/3/2015). My interlocutors also often condemned the terrible conditions asylum seekers faced in the member states to which they were returned – in Hungary and Greece for instance – and criticized those countries’ inhumane treatment of asylum seekers. Others considered the Dublin regulation to be a direct result of the lack of cohesion among European member states, who were denounced for washing their hands of the responsibility to receive asylum seekers. In this context, volunteers also often criticized the EU for being heartless, ineffective and over-bureaucratic.

These criticisms, I would argue, offer a striking example of the emotional disconnect many of my interlocutors felt in relation to the European Union, something that has been acknowledged in academic works on the European identity (see for instance Balibar 2004). This antipathy towards the European Union appeared to be a common denominator among many of the volunteers I encountered in the area of my field research. Some even told me that they were mobilized into refugee support in response to the European Union’s inhumane treatment of asylum seekers. For many of my interlocutors, especially those who became involved *before* the long summer of migration, their prac-

tices of refugee support also served as a means to enact an alternative to the heartless European asylum and border policies and thus to challenge the European Union ‘from below’. Quite connectedly, Monforte (2020) argues that pro-migrants’ protest movements mobilize alternative visions and counter-stories of Europe and its borders. I would argue that my field research clearly revealed how those who supported refugees for ostensibly ‘apolitical’ humanitarian reasons were often also driven by such an impulse to enact alternative visions of Europe and challenge dominant ones.

Summing up, many groups in the area of my field research did not hesitate to radically oppose the Dublin regulation and related deportation orders in their local communities. Kirchhoff (2020) observed a similar tendency in the northern German city of Osnabrück. These critical voices highlighted the deficiencies of the Dublin system months prior to what became known as the “refugee crisis”, when it eventually collapsed and asylum seekers could more or less travel freely to and claim asylum in Central European member states (cf. Kasperek 2016). Many volunteers also regarded their attempts to subvert Dublin deportations as a means to contest the EU asylum policies in general. They emphasized the *presence* of asylum seekers on the ground over the policies of the European Union and, by so doing, demanded a right to stay, at least for the duration of the asylum process.

4.5. Contestations around a Right to Migrate

The *politics of presence* that formed among those who supported refugees around the long summer of migration not only revolved around demands for equal rights and a right to stay, but also around a demand for a right to migrate. In the course of my field research, I came across numerous instances when my interlocutors discussed the possibility of global freedom of movement. By doing so, they elaborated alternatives that would enable the free global circulation of people, alternatives that often went hand in hand with criticisms of fortified borders. However, this demand for a right to migrate was met with diverse and, at times, ambivalent positions among those supporting refugees. They ranged from a call to abolish all territorial borders to more circumspect and sceptical views.

Those who openly identified themselves as “political activists” often called for a universal right to free global movement. This was particularly evident when I attended a conference in Berlin organized by the “International Coali-