

the status quo in favour of a different alternative. In his essay on urban possibilities, Bauder (2016) argues that ‘utopia’ always contains a certain impossibility of practical implementation. However, he suggests that a key function of utopian imaginaries is their criticisms of existing social relations and orders. This chimes with how my interlocutor Markus Bayer expressed support for the utopian ideal of free movement, knowing full well that it might not be practicable yet still seeing it as a means to achieve a ‘better’ alternative.

#### 4.6. Concluding Remarks: Emerging Meanings of Political Action in Migration Societies

In the course of this chapter, I analysed the political meanings and effects emanating from the practices of refugee support that emerged around the German ‘summer of welcome’. Scrutinizing my concept of a *politics of presence*, I argued that many of those supporting refugees were striving for social and political transformation within their local communities, while they did not necessarily describe their actions as ‘political’. Even though many were mobilized by an ostensibly ‘apolitical’ humanitarian imperative, they did often not hesitate to contest exclusions and inequalities on the ground, denounce governmental deportation orders and take a critical stance towards the fortification of borders. Volunteers also *enacted* alternatives that challenged the nation-state ‘from below’ or counteracted the inhumane policies of the EU. In consequence, their practices of refugee support became *political*.

The alternatives that were formulated and enacted around the long summer of migration revolved around the criterion of *co-presence*. They often emphasized the material act of being there, of an imagined personal immediacy, over national origin or cultural belonging. ‘The local’, in this context, played an important role for the volunteers; it was *their* neighbourhood, town or village that appeared most likely to be shaped or transformed through their immediate practices of refugee support. I would thus argue that ‘the local’ became an important means of political claims-making around the long summer of migration.

The question of how these envisaged alternatives should look like in practice, however, triggered differing understandings among those acting in support of refugees. On the one hand, I encountered individuals and groups demanding the unconditional and universal implementation of a right to equal rights, a right to stay and a right to migrate and thus calling for a radically

egalitarian society. They included, for instance, the moderator at the Welcome2Stay conference, the Solidarity City network in Freiburg, the members of No Lager Osnabrück and the activists at the “Stop War on Migrants!” conference in Berlin. On the other hand, many of the volunteers in the area of my field research were much more hesitant and ambivalent in relation to such demands. They placed limitations, restrictions and conditions on their strive towards a more egalitarian society and adapted them to local practicalities.

Taken together, these insights illustrate how those who support refugees for ostensibly ‘apolitical’ humanitarian reasons cannot be reduced to mere accomplices in the governance of migration. Nevertheless, I would caution against an overly optimistic and romanticized perspective on the practices of refugee support that emerged around the long summer of migration. As outlined elsewhere, there is also a dark side to practices of refugee support (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3). Despite these caveats, however, the contested solidarities that emerged around the long summer of migration introduced new visions of society and enacted alternatives that might be better equipped to cope with intensified global mobilities and an increasingly heterogeneous migration society.

