and events in Ellwangen, such as internal meetings of LEA staff, public information events organized by the local authority, and a seminar for prospective volunteers at the LEA.

The following investigation into the contested solidarities that emerged in Ellwangen around the long summer of migration is structured in two parts. First, I analyse the march 'Ellwangen Shows its Colours' that took place in January 2015, when hundreds of residents took on the streets in support of the soon to be inaugurated LEA. Second, I scrutinize how the notion of a 'welcome culture' became translated into more structured and ongoing practices of refugee support: governmental actors and social welfare organizations mobilized local residents 'to help' as volunteers at the new initial reception facility. Both cases illustrate how the notion of a 'welcome culture' instilled *a moral imperative to act*, a perception that mobilized immediate practices of refugee support revolving around a humanitarian imaginary. These practices and discourses depicted the reception of asylum seekers in morally charged tones and generated feelings of compassion for those 'in need'. And yet, they were not devoid of political and antipolitical meanings, something I will illustrate in the course of this chapter.

2.2. Humanitarian Dissent: The Solidarity March 'Ellwangen Shows its Colours'

When the state government announced its plan to establish a new initial reception centre at the abandoned military barracks in Ellwangen in late 2014, right-wing groups were quick to stir up hostile attitudes among local residents. By the end of 2014, the newly founded Facebook group "No Asylum Seeker Accommodation at Reinhardt Barracks" ("Kein Asylheim in der Reinhardtskaserne") boasted several thousand members. And even before the first asylum seeker had moved into the LEA, right-wing groups were organizing a demonstration that would signal their opposition to the decision to open a reception facility in the town.

In this tense atmosphere, two initiatives joined forces in order to counteract the rise of hostile attitudes in the town, arranging a "solidarity march" ("Solidaritätszug") under the banner "Ellwangen Shows Its Colours" ("Ellwangen zeigt Flagge"). On a cold winter's day in January 2015, more than 1,000 people marched through the streets of Ellwangen in order to signal their support for the reception of asylum seekers and the development of a local 'wel-

come culture'. This 'solidarity march' was jointly organized by the well-known local peace group "Mahnwache Ellwangen" ("Vigil Ellwangen") and the hitherto unknown "Aktionsgruppe Solidarität" ("Solidarity Action Group").

Father Feldmann[10], an 80-year-old Catholic priest, was one of the organizers of the event and a member of the Mahnwache group. During one of my field trips to the town, I interviewed him at the premises of the Comboni order of Catholic missionaries, where he lived and worked. He told me that he remembered no other instance in the past years, maybe even decades, when as many citizens were mobilized to march through the streets of Ellwangen for a common purpose. Indeed, the organizers succeeded not only in mobilizing a high number of participants but also in bringing a broad range of around fifty groups and well-known individuals from the region to lend their support to the event. The resulting alliance joined major political parties, the town's mayor, church communities, local schools and a wide range of civil society initiatives ranging from the football fan club "Sankt Pauli Province Fanatics" to the Turkish-Islamic cultural association. In addition, the event attracted a high level of attention from local and regional newspapers.

In the following sections, I investigate the discourses and practices surrounding this solidarity march in more detail. I illustrate how the two organizing groups appropriated the notion of a 'welcome culture' and translated it into concrete action on the ground. During campaigning, the organizing groups mobilized a *moral imperative to act* and strategically embedded the event in an ostensibly 'apolitical' humanitarian imaginary in order to attract 'ordinary citizens' and a broad range of supporters. Looking behind the scenes, however, we find this event was not as free from political reasoning as it appeared: it figured as a means for the organizers to promote their religious and political beliefs and to voice dissent towards governmental decisions.

2.2.1.   Mobilizing a Moral Imperative to Act

In order to mobilize participants for the solidarity march, the organizing groups designed and circulated "mobi material", as they called it short for "mobilization material", which included flyers, posters and the launch of a

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10   Throughout this chapter, I refer to my interlocutor Paul Feldmann as "Father Feldmann" as this reflects how he identified himself and how others in the town referred to him ("Pater Feldmann").

website. Taking a closer look at this material, I soon realized that the organizers remained vague and unspecific about the political objectives and demands of the event. Rather than voicing political dissent, it appeared, the solidarity march aimed at sending a general message in support of the reception of asylum seekers in the town.

It was thus not so much the concrete (political) objectives or claims with which the organizers set out to mobilize people to join the march, but rather their evocation of moral sentiments. For instance, the official flyer of the event appealed to the citizens of Ellwangen with the following words:

> "Ellwangen Shows its Colours – for a future for refugees based on solidarity and justice. We are calling on the citizens of Ellwangen to back this rallying cry and join us on a solidarity march through the centre of town. On 24th January 2015, we will take to the streets as a broad alliance of people in support of this cause. Together, we will send a clear message that those who have fled war, hunger, poverty and discrimination are welcome here!"[11] (Official flyer of the solidarity march, January 2015)

By presenting the solidarity march in such a way, I would argue, the organizers invoked a *moral imperative to act*, a feeling of being obligated to stand up for those who are worse off, in this case suffering asylum seekers arriving in Ellwangen. Observations on the mobilizing qualities of moral sentiments have been made in other academic works. Scholars writing on the practices of refugee support that emerged around the long summer of migration have repeatedly emphasized the role of emotions, such as compassion, for mobilizing and recruiting new volunteers (Karakayali 2017; Kleres 2018; Sirriyeh 2018; Armbruster 2019; Doidge & Sandri 2019; Gomez, Newell & Vannini 2020; Maestri & Monforte 2020). This emphasis on emotions and moral sentiments also connects strikingly to works on humanitarian action. Ticktin, in her book *Casualties of Care*, argues that an emphasis on human suffering triggers morally mandated humanitarian responses. She illustrates how, in

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11   Translation by LF. German original: "Ellwangen zeigt Flagge – Für eine Zukunft Geflüchteter Menschen in Solidarität und Gerechtigkeit. Mit dieser Zielsetzung rufen wir zu einem Solidaritätszug durch die Ellwanger Innenstadt auf. Am 24. Januar 2015 wollen wir mit einem breiten Bündnis für dieses Anliegen auf die Straße. gehen und gemeinsam mit der Ellwanger Bevölkerung ein Zeichen setzen, welches deutlich macht, dass Menschen, die vor Krieg, Hunger, Armut und Diskriminierung flüchten müssen, bei uns willkommen sind!".

the context of the reception of asylum seekers in France, "a moral imperative to relieve suffering" had emerged, a notion that inspired the formation of "regimes of care" spanning both governmental and civil society actors (Ticktin 2011: 2). Chouliaraki (2012: 11) argues that 'doing good' is quite often driven by a moral imperative to act for the vision of a "suffering-free humanity", while, in his monograph *Humanitarian Reason* (2012), Fassin outlines how "moral sentiments" generate compassion and prompt immediate actions for the sake of others.

In the case of the solidarity march in Ellwangen, the mobilization of a *moral imperative to act* was based on two specific framings. Firstly, the organizers portrayed the event as an "expression of humanity" and, secondly, they claimed that it would be "outside" or "above" politics. This particular social imaginary promoted by the organizers is encapsulated in an online news report on the press conference held by the organizers:

> "Chairman Paul Feldmann made clear that the various groups do *not aim to send a political message* but, as a broad alliance standing above party lines and rooted in the centre ground of society, want to offer an *expression of humanity*." (beobachternews.de: 21/1/2015, emphasis added)[12]

The local media echoed this imaginary in the run-up to the event. For instance, an article in a local newspaper quoted the town's mayor, who backed the solidarity march with the words: "It is never too early to speak up for an *act of humanity*" (Gmünder Tagespost: 7/1/2015, emphasis added)[13]. Another local newspaper article asserted that the march was about "underlining that [...] the establishment of a new initial reception centre at the former barracks of Ellwangen is a *natural act of humanity*" (Schwäbische Post: 22/1/2015, emphasis added)[14]. Thus, the act of marching through the streets of Ellwangen in support of asylum seekers was depicted not as a political message but as

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12   See: http://www.beobachternews.de/2015/01/21/nonnen-an-der-seite-der-antifa/ (last accessed 1/8/2020). Translation by LF. German original: "[...] machte der Versammlungsleiter Paul Feldmann deutlich, dass die verschiedenen Gruppen keine politische Aussage zum Ziel hätten, sondern als 'breites, überparteiliches Bündnis aus der Mitte der Gesellschaft' ein Zeichen der Menschlichkeit setzen wollten".

13   See: http://www.gmuender-tagespost.de/p/781918/ (last accessed 1/8/2020).

14   See: http://www.schwaebische-post.de/p/784179/ (last accessed 1/8/2020). Translation by LF. German original: „verdeutlichen dass [...] die Einrichtung einer Erstaufnahmestelle in der ehemaligen Kaserne in Ellwangen ein selbstverständlicher Akt der Menschlichkeit ist".

a "moral endeavour based on solidarity with other members of humanity" (Terry quoted in Scott-Smith 2016).

Works in the anthropology of humanitarianism and beyond have discussed how the notion of a shared identity of humanity figures, alongside the principles of neutrality and impartiality, as a key characteristic of humanitarian action (see Nyers 2006a: 27; Barnett 2011; Fassin 2012). Calhoun (2010: 31) describes this conception as the notion of "a mass of individuals equally entitled to care, and a sense of ethical obligation based on common humanity, rather than on citizenship or any specific loyalty". The mobilizing qualities of the idea of humanity are also stressed by Fassin (2012: 2) who argues that the impetus for humanitarian action stems from the "concept of humanity" since it comes with an "affective movement drawing humans toward their fellows". Similarly, I would suggest that the notion of the solidarity march as an 'act of humanity' generated compassion among the residents of Ellwangen and a feeling of being obligated to stand up for asylum seekers.

At the same time, the organizers framed the march as an 'apolitical' and 'impartial endeavour'. The article on beobachternews.de cited above quoted my interlocutor Father Feldmann, who emphasized that the event "did not aim to send a political message", but rather stood "above party lines" and was rooted in the "centre ground of society". In doing so, he presented the public demonstration of a supportive stance towards the reception of asylum seekers in Ellwangen as an apolitical practice that transcended political positions. This claim to stand 'outside' or 'above' politics, I would argue, was critical to the mobilization of a high number of participants: it assured them that they were not taking political sides or causing agitation. Through such means, the organizers depicted the demonstration of welcoming attitudes towards asylum seekers as 'natural' common sense.

Works in social anthropology and beyond have discussed how a claim of 'apolitical' action represents another key premise of a humanitarian imaginary (Feldman & Ticktin 2010; Bornstein & Redfield 2011a; Fassin 2012; Ticktin 2014). Ticktin (2011: 19) remarks that "those who act in the name of the moral imperative generally claim to be apolitical – beyond or outside politics". Nyers (2006a: 27) argues that politics and humanitarianism are generally thought of as occupying two opposing poles: "humanitarian action and political action are cast as two distinct and separate modes of acting and being-in-the-world". While the former carries negative connotations, such as being cynical, self-interested or amoral, the latter is framed as its positive counterpart – as compassionate, principled or impartial (ibid.). In practice, however, this

distinction is clearly not as straightforward as it might appear. Scholars have discussed public demonstrations – such as the 'solidarity march' in Ellwangen – as a 'classical' performative tool for voicing political dissent, and thus as a form of political action (see Butler 2011; Butler 2015). And yet, the organizers of the solidarity march in Ellwangen framed it as an 'apolitical' endeavour.

The idea of the solidarity march as a symbol of humanity that existed 'outside' or 'above' politics was underlined by the emphasis placed on the broad range of actors behind the march. The mobilization material repeatedly stressed that the event aimed to unite a 'broad coalition' that together would support the welcoming of asylum seekers to Ellwangen:

> "Let us, *as a broad alliance*, raise awareness of the present situation in Ellwangen, which does not signal the downfall of the Occident, but instead represents opportunity and enrichment. Let us […] show what Ellwangen is really about: open-mindedness, social commitment and solidarity!" (Official flyer of the solidarity march, emphasis added)[15]

This excerpt indicates how the organizers established an 'us', an inclusive subjectivity of which the reader is assumed to be part. The official list of supporters, which features at the bottom of the flyer, did indeed seem quite impressive. Around 50 groups and individuals were named, spanning remarkably diverse fields and interests, various civil society initiatives, religious groups and church parishes, left-wing activist groups, local high schools and other public institutions, trade unions, political parties and local government representatives. The organizers' ability to win such a broad alliance of supporters, I would argue, reassured potential participants that by getting involved they would not be taking political sides. In fact, they might even have feared that as non-participants they would risk being seen as outsiders. This significance of a 'broad alliance' points to what Agustín and Jørgensen (2019: 31) consider a key characteristic of solidarity: "alliance building is a crucial aspect of solidarity". In a similar vein, alliance building was central to the mobilization of solidarity with refugees in Ellwangen.

Several newspaper articles also took up this theme of a broad and unusual alliance when reporting on the upcoming event. For instance, the online news

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15   Translation by LF. German original: "Lasst uns deshalb als breites Bündnis ein Bewusstsein schaffen, dass unsere aktuelle Situation in Ellwangen nicht den Untergang des Abendlandes bedeutet, sondern eine Chance und Bereicherung darstellt. Lasst uns […] Ellwangen als das zeigen, was es ist: solidarisch, weltoffen und engagiert!".

platform beobachternews.de published an article with the eye-catching head-line "Nuns and Antifa activists side by side", highlighting the heterogeneity of the actors involved in an almost ironic way. Another article in a regional news-paper speaks of a "solidarity march of the centre of society" ("Ein Solidaritäts-zug der Mitte") (Schwäbische Post: 19/1/2015). This notion of a socio-political "centre ground of society" that backed the march was repeatedly evoked dur-ing campaigning since it reinforced the notion of 'apolitical' action. It reas-sured people that participation in the march would not be 'extremism', that it was simply a march of ordinary Ellwangen citizens in which their next door neighbours might also take part.

In his study on the 2006 mega-marches in the United States, Gonzales (2009) notes a similar pattern. These marches brought millions of people onto the streets of major American cities, people taking a stand for the rights of undocumented immigrants. They were among the biggest public demonstra-tions in the history of the U.S.. According to Gonzales, the unprecedented success of these mobilizations was founded on their ability to unite a broad alliance of actors in support of undocumented migrants, what he terms a "counter-hegemonic moment" in reference to the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971). According to Gramsci, the struggle for hegemony is ultimately a "strug-gle of objectivity" (Gramsci quoted in Riley 2011) through which views are pre-sented as objective truth. In a similar vein, the two organizing groups por-trayed supportive acts for the reception of asylum seekers in Ellwangen as an 'objective truth' that transcended political positions and interests. At closer examination, however, the march was clearly not as devoid of political mes-sages and interests as it first appeared. I will look at this in more detail in the following section.

2.2.2.   Behind the Scenes of 'Apolitical' Action

If we look behind the scenes, the political positionalities and interests of the two organizing groups turn out to be a key cornerstone of the solidar-ity march. By claiming to be apolitical, however, they intentionally concealed these positionalities in order to mobilize a larger number of participants and to generate a higher level of public attention. My insights into their behind-the-scenes negotiations, which I present in the course of this subsection, are based on my interview with Father Feldmann, who was a leading member of "Mahnwache Ellwangen". Since I was unable to detect the members of the

second initiative, "Aktionsgruppe Solidarität", and win them for an interview during my field research, these findings are however partial and tentative.

It was some days before Christmas 2014, Father Feldmann remembered, when he and the fellow members of the Mahnwache peace group received unusual visitors. A group of young "adolescents" – in the eyes of the 80-year-old priest and the other mostly retired members of the group – addressed them regarding an urgent matter. They were deeply worried about the rise of hostile attitudes in light of the decision to open a new initial reception centre in the town, as my interlocutor recalled. The group consisted of a handful of students who were born and raised in Ellwangen and had moved to cities in eastern Germany to study. They called on the peace initiative with the aim of working together in order to "do something" about these rising right-wing attitudes and raised their idea of organizing a public demonstration in Ellwangen. Since some of the members of the Mahnwache group, including Father Feldmann, had recently been very active in support of asylum seekers in the town, they shared the students' concerns about rising hostility and eventually agreed to "give their support" to these "dedicated young people" (Interview with Paul Feldmann: 15/3/2016). The main incentive in initiating what the organizers would later label a solidarity march was thus the desire to counteract hostile attitudes towards asylum seekers and agitation by right-wing groups in the town. The organizers may have presented the march as an 'apolitical' humanitarian endeavour, but they evidently did aim to send a message regarding political attitudes in Ellwangen.

To my surprise, Father Feldmann recalled during our interview that, at their first meeting, the students introduced themselves as members of the 'Antifa'. This short form of 'antifascist action' stands for a loosely connected network of anarchist and autonomous groups who clearly identify themselves as left-wing political activists (for more information see Schuhmacher 2015). These left-wing political positions, however, were not made public, with the activists campaigning under the name "Action Group Solidarity" in the run-up to the event and thus deliberately concealing their left-wing, activist identity.

The shared incentive to organize a solidarity march in Ellwangen thus brought together a rather unusual and contrasting pairing of initiatives. The young antifascist activists may have represented left-wing political positions but, as Father Feldmann stressed, the Mahnwache peace group was determined not to take political sides. Instead, my interlocutor told me, members of the initiative "advocated for peace" and maintained a "pacifistic" position. Each Saturday morning, when the town centre is packed with week-

end shoppers, members of the group gather at Fuchseck, the town's central square, my interlocutor explained. They discuss what was in the newspapers that week and raise awareness of various issues, including conflicts such as the war in Iraq or Syria, the arms trade, or the Charlie Hebdo terror attacks in Paris. Due to their regular public visibility, Father Feldman stressed, the Mahnwache group was well known and respected by many in the town. This esteem was enhanced by the fact that most of its members were part of the "intellectual bourgeoisie" ("Bildungsbürgertum") of Ellwangen, including re-tired physicians and priests as well as the chairperson of the local branch of the left-wing political party Die Linke. However, my interlocutor empha-sized, the Mahnwache initiative is neither religious nor political but rather "transcends these boundaries" (Interview with Paul Feldmann: 15/3/2016). Ap-parently, however, this intention did not always work out in practice, as was illustrated by Father Feldmann's remark that passers-by sometimes took the Mahnwache group for a religious cult: "Some maybe confuse us with Jehova's Witnesses or something like that" (ibid.). I would suggest that parallels could be drawn between the group and the German peace movement of the 1980s (see Schmitt-Beck 1990), while the term 'Mahnwache', which roughly trans-lates as 'vigil', dates back to at least the 1950s and signifies a peaceful public gathering intending to raise awareness of a social problem (Otto 1977). More recently, the term received renewed attention when several groups, primarily in eastern Germany, chose it as the label for their own activities, which they often claimed to be outside of politics (Daphi et al. 2014).

Despite their differences, the collaboration between the left-wing political activists and Mahnwache Ellwangen offered important synergistic effects. For instance, this is apparent from the following statement by Father Feldmann:

> "And they said: 'As Mahnwache, you have a certain pool of interest that you can motivate and we motivate via Facebook around 150. If you mobilize 100 more, so together we can attract 250 people, then we organize something in the town […] and then we said: if the youth are taking the initiative over

something like this themselves, then we want to give them our support."[16] (Interview with Paul Feldmann: 15/3/2016)

The collaboration was thus partly based on the perception that each of the groups was able to mobilize a distinct "pool" of participants and target groups for the event. While Mahnwache was more likely to recruit local actors and participants to the event, the antifascist activists were able to mobilize additional support from outside the town's boundaries via their activist networks on Facebook. During our interview, Father Feldmann put forward another reason why the young activists had sought support from the Mahnwache group: the high standing of its members in the town and the initiative's ostensibly politically neutral position would lend the solidarity march greater respectability. By contrast, if the activists had organized the march on their own and by openly identifying themselves as left-wing activists and members of the antifascist movement, "ordinary citizens" would have been "put off" from participating in the march. My interlocutor explained this as follows:

> LF: "Why do you think reading 'Antifa' would have put people off?"
> PF: That's just the way it is today. Left- and right-wing, both of them, they put ordinary citizens off [...] They associate them with stone-throwing or such like. So it is important to us, if I can put it like this [...] we are not against this, but, with our peace campaigning, we aim to speak to those in the centre ground"[17] (Interview with Paul Feldmann: 15/3/2016)

In Father Feldmann's eyes, an explicit political position would have been associated with deviant, dangerous or criminal behaviour such as the "throwing of stones" while "ordinary citizens" would not have wanted to associate themselves with such behaviour. During campaigning, the organizers thus strate-

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16   Translation by LF. German original: "Und die haben gesagt: 'Ihr habt von der Mahnwache, ihr habt einen gewissen Interessenpool, den ihr motivieren könnt und wir machen über Facebook, wir motivieren auch bis zu 150 und so weiter. Wenn ihr nochmal 100 zusammenkriegt, dann sind wir 250, da können wir schon was machen in der Stadt [...] da haben wir gesagt: ,Mensch, wenn Jugendliche für sowas selber die Initiative ergreifen, dann wollen wir ihnen auch ihre Unterstützung geben'.".

17   Translation by LF. German original: LF: "Warum meinen Sie, das hätte die Leute verschreckt, wenn sie 'Antifa' gelesen hätten? PF: "Das ist heute genauso. Sowohl das linke als auch das rechte Spektrum, egal ... schreckt den Normalbürger [...] Damit assoziiert man Steine werfen oder so etwas. Wir wollten also ... es ist uns schon wichtig, ich möchte das mal so sagen [...] wir haben da nichts dagegen und möchten mit unserer Friedensarbeit möchten schon die Mitte der Bevölkerung ansprechen.".

gically concealed the left-wing political leanings of the young antifascist activists in order not to put off 'ordinary citizens', Father Feldmann recalled. In her seminal work on *The Politics of Volunteering*, Eliasoph (2013: 43) observes a similar pattern: she argues that 'political activism' commonly evokes negative feelings and connotations, while 'volunteering', in contrast, is mostly treated in positive terms. She puts this as follows: "In our shared imagination, the volunteer feels comfortably warm, while the activist either feels too coolly intellectual or too hot-headed. In our collective imagination, the nice, agreeable volunteer reads to pre-schoolers, while the activist pickets and shouts" (ibid.). As she goes on to argue, this "makes activism look potentially too difficult and risky for ordinary people" (ibid.). In an attempt to avoid these negative preconceptions with 'ordinary people', the young activists thus strategically disclosed their political alignment to the public.

In the term "solidarity" they found a positive alternative; a common denominator that was deemed acceptable by both organizing groups. This crystallized in two behind-the-scenes negotiations that underpinned the collaboration between the organizing groups and aimed for a positive and less-biased public image. Firstly, the activists campaigned as "Aktionsgruppe Solidarität", which, according to Father Feldmann, was a new and therefore less partisan name. Secondly, the event was promoted not as a 'demonstration' or 'protest' but as a "solidarity march", an unusual term for a public demonstration. Father Feldmann explained the reasoning as follows:

> "Yes, this solidarity march, there was a discussion as to whether we should say a 'protest march'. So we said, we don't want to call it a demonstration, because then you think of being against something and, we said, we don't want to be against anything; we want take to the streets to show our support for a welcome culture for refugees. And so we tried to bring on board as many people as possible – churches, associations [...]"[18] (Interview with Paul Feldmann: 15/3/2016)

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18   Translation by LF. German original: „Ja dieser Solidaritätszug, es war eine Diskussion, ob wir es Protestmarsch nennen sollen. Also wir haben gesagt, wir wollen nicht ‚Demonstration' sagen, da assoziiert man ja irgendwas dagegen und da haben wir gesagt, wir wollen ja eigentlich nicht gegen, sondern wir wollen für eine Willkommenskultur für Flüchtlinge auf die Straße gehen. Und da haben wir halt versucht, alles so irgendwie möglich ins Boot zu holen, die Kirchen, die Vereine [...]".

Although the initial motivation for organizing the march was to act *against* right-wing tendencies, the organizers decided to present the event as a march *for* solidarity and a local "welcome culture" – and thus *for* a common purpose. This sending of a positive message, Father Feldmann remarked, enabled the organizers to attract a broader range of supporters and participants to the event. They avoided the words "protest march" and "demonstration" since these were more likely to be associated with a specific political position and, instead, decided to employ new and less partisan terms. In the eyes of the organizers, the chosen labels "Action Group Solidarity" and "solidarity march" were both free from political preconceptions. I would thus argue that such a framing was critical to the success and high public profile of the event.

These behind-the-scenes insights into the solidarity march in Ellwangen indicate that an 'apolitical' humanitarian imaginary may be strategically invoked by certain actors in order to promote their own interests and to open up political possibilities on the grassroots level. Existing works on humanitarianism, however, have often investigated how an 'apolitical' humanitarian imaginary becomes complicit in forms of domination and governing 'from above' (see for instance Bornstein & Redfield 2011b; Ticktin 2011). I would argue that such an emphasis on the adverse effects of humanitarian action risks neglecting the diverse and contested reasonings and interests behind an 'apolitical' framing. This resonates with the writings of Redfield (2011: 56) who points to these often overlooked dimensions of 'apolitical' action: "The refusal of political positioning not only has political effects, it is also a political strategy". He thus regards a claim of 'apolitical' action not as being devoid of politics but instead as a political tool. Similarly, Hilhorst and Bram (2010: 1118) highlight that an 'apolitical' positioning may be "strategically or tacitly used by different actors to advance or legitimize their respective interests, projects or beliefs". Vandevoordt and Verschraegen (2019: 124) thus speak of "subversive humanitarianism", which they conceive as "a form of direct action that gains political momentum precisely through its apolitical appearance". This becomes even clearer when we take a closer look at how the actual solidarity march served as a platform for promoting and performing the organizers' political and religious worldviews.

2.2.3.   The Political Messages of the Solidarity March

Although the organizers presented the solidarity march as an "apolitical expression of humanity" during campaigning, they did not shy away from send-

ing out their own particular messages on the day of the event. On the one hand, the young left-wing activists marched through the streets of Ellwangen bearing 'Antifa' flags, chanting political songs and proclaiming their political demands through a megaphone. On the other hand, Father Feldmann promoted his Christian beliefs and values among participants at the event. Both organizing groups thus used the actual solidarity march as a means to send out covert messages that responded to their own interests. This becomes strikingly illustrated, when we take a closer look at their speeches to the march's roughly 1,000 participants at the day of event.

The members of the 'Aktionsgruppe Solidarität' not only took a stand against right-wing attitudes and groups but also voiced dissent towards the government and its asylum laws. Repeatedly, the young activists criticized specific policies and laws that they deemed discriminating while advocating for the rights of asylum seekers. The following excerpt from their speech offers one example:

> "It is often forgotten that the Residence Obligation and work bans deny the refugees any possibility of work and self-fulfilment. These people want to participate in our society, but they are being hindered by the state."[19] (Speech by Aktionsgruppe Solidarität: 24/1/2015)

As this quote shows, these covert antifascist activists did not hesitate to take a stand *against* "the state" and openly voiced criticisms of existing laws and policies such as the "Residence Obligation", which declares that asylum seekers must remain within a defined geographical area and thus substantially restricts their movement (see also Chapter 6). The activists blamed the German state for directly "hindering" the inclusion of asylum seekers into German society. Later on, their speech also denounced both German and European asylum policies for being "racist" and for distinguishing between "useful" and "useless" refugees (Speech by Aktionsgruppe Solidarität: 24/1/2015).

Furthermore, the activists called attention to the wider capitalist context in which the reception of asylum seekers in Ellwangen unfolded. They claimed that "we live in a world of global violence and exploitation" and called for the breaking down of all boundaries and territorial borders (ibid.). Moreover,

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19   Translation by LF. German original: „Hier wird oftmals vergessen, dass Residenzpflicht und Arbeitsverbote den Flüchtlingen jegliche Form von Arbeit und freier Entfaltung nehmen. Gerade diese Menschen sind es, die an unserer Gesellschaft teilhaben wollen, aber von staatlicher Seite daran gehindert werden".

they directly blamed the German government for producing "causes of flight", claiming that the German arms trade and the uneven distribution of capital were forcing asylum seekers to leave their countries of origin. By doing so, they placed the solidarity march in a wider context of global inequalities and exploitation while voicing their dissent towards the status quo. The ostensibly 'apolitical' march in support of asylum seekers thus served as a means for the activists to promote their anti-capitalist world views.

The activists also voiced their dissent towards the local political context that surrounded the implementation of a new initial reception centre at the abandoned military barracks in Ellwangen:

> "For us, it goes without saying that we will follow decisions concerning the LEA and, if necessary, raise awareness of any irregularities. For instance, in connection with the commissioning of European Homecare. This company, which has been publicly criticized over the abuse of asylum seekers, should no longer be given responsibilities in refugee accommodation or initial reception centres."[20] (Speech by Aktionsgruppe Solidarität: 24/1/2015)

With this statement, the activists painted themselves as critical observers and declared that they would not hesitate to take a stand *against* governmental decisions concerning the LEA, even though the solidarity march had, during campaigning, been portrayed as a general expression of support *for* the establishment of the facility.

The solidarity march served as a political platform not only for the antifascist activists but also for Father Feldmann, whose speech contained various messages promoting his Christian beliefs and values. He linked these beliefs and values with criticisms of social and political developments surrounding the reception of asylum seekers. Interestingly, Father Feldmann did not speak on behalf of Mahnwache Ellwangen but instead addressed the audience in his own name. This might be explained by the fact that, in his speech, he clearly positioned himself as a Catholic priest and member of the Catholic congre-

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20   Translation by LF. German original: "Für uns ist klar, dass wir Entscheidungen, welche die LEA betreffen, begleiten und, wenn nötig, auf Missstände aufmerksam machen. Zum Beispiel bezüglich der Beauftragung von European Homecare. Dieses Unternehmen, welches öffentlich in der Kritik bezüglich der Misshandlung von Asylsuchenden steht, darf keine Aufgaben in Flüchtlingswohnheimen und Landeserstaufnahmestellen mehr bekommen.".

gation, a stance that would perhaps not have tallied with the peace group's 'apolitical' identity.

Father Feldmann's speech was filled with religious metaphors and anecdotes. In it, the 80-year-old priest and member of the Comboni order of missionaries repeatedly cited lines from the Bible and referred to "his Christian belief" and "his Christian values" (Speech by Paul Feldmann: 24/1/2015). A particularly clear example of this came when he referred to the Christian confirmations taking place at the Catholic church of Ellwangen at the same time:

> "By the way, a confirmation service is taking place right now at St Wolfgang's Church. In terms of meaning and substance, confirmation fits very well with the purpose of this rally. It is about responsibility in the world."[21] (Speech by Paul Feldmann: 24/1/2015)

This quote aptly illustrates how Father Feldmann linked his Christian beliefs with the purpose of the event. In other words, he used his speech at the solidarity march not only to foster a positive attitude towards the reception of asylum seekers but also to promote the values of confirmation, a key rite in most Christian denominations.

He also linked his religious beliefs directly with recent political and social developments surrounding the reception of asylum seekers in Germany, while taking a clear stance and voicing dissent. For instance, at the beginning of his speech, Father Feldmann referred to the nativity story and jokingly asserted that, if you were to take out all those figures who originated from the Orient rather than the Occident, there would be nobody left around the crib except the donkey (ibid.). Through this anecdote, he implicitly criticized the right-wing Pegida movement, which claims to represent the 'Occident', i.e. the Christian world. Pegida had been promoting hostile attitudes towards asylum seekers and Muslims since late 2014, attracting thousands of people to its weekly marches across the country. Later in his speech, Father Feldmann also blamed Pegida explicitly for misapplying Christian symbols. To the Catholic priest, a proper Christian belief should take its cue from Jesus Christ, who promoted compassion and hospitality towards strangers. In this context, he put forward his own interpretation of what a proper Christian position towards the reception of asylum seekers would be:

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21   Translation by LF. German original: "Übrigens ist gerade jetzt zu dieser Stunde Firmungsgottesdienst in der Wolfgangskirche. Vom Sinn und Gehalt her passt Firmung und diese Kundgebung sehr gut zusammen. Es geht ja um Verantwortung in der Welt.".

"I would take strangers to mean not only 'war refugees' in the narrow sense of the word but also those who want to leave a poor country that offers no prospects. These young people have their lives in front of them too. Who can blame them for this wish? Our society will change. The unknown is always alien to us. When we get to know it, it becomes familiar."[22] (Speech by Paul Feldmann: 24/1/2015)

Speaking from the position of a Catholic priest, he thus took a clear political stand on the reception of asylum seekers. This connects strikingly with what Wyller (2019) outlines: around the long summer of migration, some churches and religious organizations did not hesitate to resist and counteract governmental policies and actions they deemed unjust. The quote illustrates how Father Feldman also openly criticized the government's distinction between 'genuine' and 'bogus' asylum seekers, between refugees who fled war-torn countries and those deemed economic migrants (see also Ratfisch 2015). In doing so, he called on participants of the solidarity march to give asylum seekers in the town an unconditional welcome.

Furthermore, Father Feldmann voiced his dissent towards governmental decisions surrounding the implementation of the new initial reception centre in Ellwangen. In the final part of his speech, he directly addressed "those responsible in the state government and on the local council", asking them for direct changes in the plans for operating the soon to be inaugurated facility.

Taken together, the mobilization of a *moral imperative to act* served as a political tool for the organizers to promote their left-wing worldviews and religious messages. The case of the solidarity march thus clearly illustrates the powerful political potentials stemming from the notion of a 'welcome culture' and its humanitarian imaginary: it was appropriated by political groups and civil society initiatives with the aim of promoting social and political transformations on a grassroots level. There is, however, another side of the coin. In the following section, I take a closer look at how the notion of a 'welcome culture' became translated into more long-term volunteering practices at the new initial reception centre in Ellwangen. In this case, governmental actors

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22   Translation by LF. German original: "Ich möchte unter Fremden nicht nur Kriegs-flüchtlinge im engeren Sinn verstehen, sondern auch solche, die aus der Perspek-tivlosigkeit in einem verarmten Land herauskommen wollen. Auch diese jungen Leute haben ein Leben vor sich. Wer kann ihnen den Wunsch verdenken? Unsere Gesellschaft wird sich ändern. Alles, was wir nicht kennen, ist uns fremd. Wenn wir es kennen, wird es uns vertraut.".

appropriated a humanitarian imaginary in order to make committed citizens complicit in the local governance of asylum seekers.

2.3.   Humanitarian Governance: Volunteering with Refugees in Ellwangen

Soon after its inauguration in March 2015, the initial reception centre in Ellwangen was operating far beyond its limits. In the course of 2015, employees and officials in charge of the LEA were increasingly unable to provide for even the most basic needs of the new arrivals. This situation also presented an extraordinary challenge for Peter Bauer, the local authority's Refugee Commissioner. During our second interview in March 2016, he recalled how he had been increasingly under pressure to mediate between the actors involved and the local population in Ellwangen. He also recounted how the relationship between the local council and the state government of Baden-Württemberg, which was formally in charge of the reception centre, had become increasingly conflicted in the latter half of 2015: the mayor of Ellwangen had urged the state government to come up with solutions for relocating asylum seekers to other towns and districts.

This emergency situation, Peter Bauer emphasized repeatedly, could not have been managed without citizens' extraordinary willingness 'to help' as volunteers at the facility. The following statement is a case in point:

> "You can't say it often enough to people who volunteer what an important job they do. I always say, this is the *backbone of society*, if I can put it like that. If there wasn't such a willingness to volunteer, you wouldn't be able to run such a facility."[23] (Interview with Peter Bauer: 7/3/2016, emphasis added)

From the perspective of the local authority, thus, the volunteers at the LEA played an essential role in the reception of asylum seekers in town. Indeed, as I realized in the course of my field research, volunteers and governmental actors often formed a symbiosis in response to the emergency situation that

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23   Translation by LF. German original: "Das muss man aber immer wieder auch den Leuten sagen, die wo ehrenamtlich arbeiten, sagen, was für eine wichtige Arbeit die leisten. Ich sag immer, das ist ja eigentlich das Rückgrat einer Gesellschaft, wenn man das so ausdrücken darf. Wenn es so ein Ehrenamt nicht gäbe, dann könnte man eine solche LEA nicht betreiben.".