1. Introduction

> "We have made ourselves visible to say that we are here, to say that we are not in hiding but we're just human beings. We are here and we have been here a long time. We have been living and working in this country for many years and we pay our taxes." (Cissé, 1996)

Who is taken into consideration when we talk about *the* citizens, about *the* people or *the* activists? Often it is a rather unquestioned privileged positionality, which is taken to be the standard that most of the time it is actually not. In this quote, the activist Madjiguène Cissé, from the transnational *Sans-Papiers* movement, raises that just because someone or something is not visible—to the broader public or a particular public—it does not mean that they have not been there for a long time. Migrant rights activism is not a new phenomenon but has intensified and become more networked and visible over the past years (Eggert & Giugni, 2015). This study explores group contexts of activism by, with and for refugees and migrants in Hamburg, the claims, interactions, challenges and processes that activists experience, discuss and deal with. I have approached activists experiencing political organizing in this context from a constructivist grounded theory perspective. This allowed me to develop conceptual perspectives grounded in activist groups' realities and was advanced through existing literature on this social movement but also theories from other research fields. *Solidarities* emerged throughout the research process as a more concrete focus. This research sets out to answer the questions: *What does solidarity mean in social movements, and how do migrant rights activist practices result in negotiating, enacting and challenging it?*

This publication is a revised version of my dissertation thesis. Although I only began my PhD research in 2016, the relevant time frame, shaping my research, starts at least in 2015. Similarly, while particularly my data generation only

took place until 2019, the writing process still included all of 2020—which certainly shaped it. Finally, the publication is happening in 2022, adding a yet altered context. This overall period covers many societal events and tensions that centrally concern and impact migrant rights activism today but that are not all explicitly part of my data generation and analysis. Since 2015, the so-called "refugee crisis" has been yet another way of framing migration as a threat, especially to Northern, in this case, European countries. However, this does not mean that migration or the often racist and xenophobic motives for problematizing it are new phenomena. To acknowledge this means accepting that the circumstances that make people leave their homes, that solidify borders, that turn landscapes into graveyards and that categorize people into more or less deserving, more or less citizenship-worthy, more or less fitting, are not a temporary crisis, which politicians try to handle. Instead, they are a historically built condition. This condition has been shaped by European imperialism and colonialism, intensified by capitalism and globalization and decided upon by politicians and societies over many years. Just as long as these dynamics exist, there have certainly also been people organizing and struggling against them. This book wants to explore a glimpse of such activities and how activists experience them.

All of this general societal atmosphere has intensified since 2015. The year 2020 is not formally included in my data generation anymore but has undoubtedly brought up further significant circumstances that I want to mention as they have importantly shaped my writing process. Among the globally most significant ones is that we have been facing a global pandemic, which shook up everyone's lived realities and is on-going. I will not address it further, but it is essential to point out that it has certainly intensified all existing structural inequalities people experience (Hermisson, 2020; Kohlrausch et al., 2020; UNHCR, 2021). In 2020, we also witnessed another chapter in the long line of racist and xenophobic violence in Germany through the murder of nine people in Hanau on February 19: Ferhat Unvar, Gökhan Gültekin, Hamza Kurtović, Said Nesar Hashemi, Mercedes Kierpacz, Sedat Gürbüz, Kaloyan Velkov, Vili-Viorel Păun, Fatih Saraçoğlu are remembered, and a growing movement is calling for justice. We also witnessed fierce *Black Lives Matter* movements that powerfully spread from the United States all over the world by calling out one more time, ever-so-loudly, the historical deathly racism and inequalities that Black people and People of Color (BPoC) are facing on a daily basis. In the first few weeks that the war in Ukraine is lasting while I am preparing this manuscript for publication in March and April 2022, this clearly constitutes

a further relevant circumstance. The war has already forced above 4.5 million people to flee their homes and the country (thus not considering internally displaced people) (UNHCR, 2022). The geographic proximity, a supposed cultural similarity and, quite bluntly, the fact that most of these refugees are white seem to already result in a different involvement for them on the part of European politicians, border regimes and societies than before. Infrastructures are quickly built, legal regulations enable easier procedures, while BPoC refugees, even from Ukraine, are kept from passing the EU's borders.[1]

Both in 2015, throughout 2020 and in 2022, there seemed to be a resurgence of the concept of solidarity. However, it also applies to all of these periods that, especially in government-proclaimed crises, the understanding of solidarity is a limited and contradictory one. The *Long Summer of Migration* in 2015 re-intensified and broadened the fight for the equal rights of migrants, which is facing the societal and political dynamics mentioned above. 2020 also exemplifies how, while calling for solidarity, it was just after exhausting mobilizations of many societal actors that the implicit "Who is involved in it?" was sometimes being questioned. Similarly, 2022 raises critical questions about the importance of solidarity at the face of its clearly selective practices along racist structures. This research explores migrant rights activism in Hamburg in a more limited temporal window. Nevertheless, all these circumstances underscore the ongoing relevance of conceptualizing solidarities. This study aims to offer a reflective, challenging insight into a lived movement reality that is bound up with the historical and contemporary dynamics we continue to face.

The focus is explicitly on mixed group contexts where activists with various legal statuses organize together.[2] Therefore, it is also referred to as activism by, with and for migrants and refugees. I do not claim to have researched *the* migrant rights movements, especially not self-organized and exclusive group structures that undoubtedly are their heart. Of course, my own positionality—including my white, German, cis-gendered, able-bodied, academic and other privileges—shapes all my exploration and analysis. Many knowledge forms that this thesis is centrally based on, to a large extent, come from activists and scholars with lived experiences that I do not share. That

1 Various news articles discuss such dynamics (see e.g. Ferris-Rotman, 2022; Howard et al., 2022; ProAsyl, 2022; Schleiermacher, 2022).

2 Yet, it will become clear throughout this book that the complexity of identities in these groups certainly goes well beyond that of legal status.

can create a gap or tension between recognizing and amplifying while not appropriating or using such knowledge forms and fights. It is an act of balancing that I have experienced and been learning from throughout this research project. I try to address this by including self-reflection, giving credit and focalizing how I have conducted and am presenting my research. Surely, this cannot solve such tensions altogether, and all this is far from flawless, but it represents an immense learning process, which I hope can offer valuable insights.

In this introduction, I briefly delineate the context of this research and the general approach I have been taking to it. I also shortly make two terminological remarks and introduce the structure of the thesis.

Situating this doctoral thesis

> "With collective public actions that take on a variety of forms (including marches, hunger strikes, occupations of public sites, and protest camps), refugees, migrants, and those working in solidarity with them, demand advocacy for human rights, freedom of movement, a fair asylum process, and access to labor markets." (Ataç et al., 2016, p. 527)

Migration certainly represents an increasingly crucial topic in many societies worldwide (Eggert & Giugni, 2015; Rother, 2016). The intensification of globalization and growing numbers of people migrating is often discussed as a challenge both for the countries receiving migrants and those losing more or less significant numbers of their population (Cole, 2016; Mikuszies et al., 2010; Solimano, 2010). Over the last years, European and Northern countries have increased their practices of deterrence and tightening border and migration policies, which also applies to people fleeing war zones and people who risk their lives when moving (Friedrich, 2008; Johnson, 2014; Oberndörfer, 2016). The initial quote by Ataç and colleagues shows that borders are present everywhere and shape people's lives. Migrants and refugees, being the most affected by these border practices, stand up for their rights, often together with their allies (Fadaee, 2015; Grove-White, 2012; Nicholls, 2013a). And they do not only meet civic response, for example in terms of so-called "welcoming culture", but also face increasing Right-wing and racist rhetoric, politics and violence referring to migration as a threat (Daphi, 2016; Hann, 2015; Häusler & Schedler, 2016).

Migrant rights activism has existed for a long time. Still, scholars observe that over the past couple of years it has solidified in terms of active groups all over the world becoming more visible, coordinating themselves and organizing on a new scale (Ataç, 2013; McGuaran & Hudig, 2014; Tyler & Marciniak, 2013). While political rights are still dominantly framed as intrinsically linked to citizenship, thus, membership in a nation-state, the institution of the nation-state is increasingly being challenged (Schütze, 2016; Young, 2010). Nevertheless, political scientists have mainly paid attention to migrants' institutional integration (see e.g. Bertelsmann-Stiftung, 2009; Mikuszies et al., 2010; Schulte, 2015), and especially Northern social movement scholars still seem to predominantly take the supposedly homogeneous citizen for granted as *the* activist (Stierl, 2016; Zajak & Steinhilper, 2019).

Refugee and migrant activists challenge this. In the dominant view of more traditional perspectives, this results in a conceptual puzzle: People who are not conferred any political rights by the state and are therefore institutionally unexpected as political actors still start constituting themselves as such, enacting political agency (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2017). Critical border, migration and citizenship studies have, over the last years, built an academic perspective on migrant rights activism that, conceptually and normatively, underlines this agency of migrants: their active positioning and interacting, as opposed to an often-depicted passive being affected by actions of others (see e.g. Borri & Fontanari, 2015; Hess et al., 2017; Isin, 2012; McNevin, 2006; Nyers, 2015). These research fields constitute the main approaches to academic studies of migrant rights activism so far.

This study builds on this emerging body of literature but aims at developing a conceptual take explicitly focused on social movement studies as a field and at contributing to address some identified gaps. Although there is some engagement with migrant rights activism from this field, it lacks consolidated perspectives (Bloemraad et al., 2016, p. 1648; Eggert & Giugni, 2015, p. 167; Steinhilper, 2017, p. 76f.). Eggert and Giugni observe that while academia is starting to bridge migration and social movement research, "much more work is required in order to better understand under which conditions social movements by, for, and against migrants mobilize and through which processes and mechanisms." (2015, p. 168) Furthermore, Southern, post-colonial or indigenous theories, as well as those coming from disciplines that emerged from movements themselves, seem little regarded in mainstream social movement studies. Feminist and BPoC perspectives, post- and de-colonial theories are generally too little considered (Bayat, 2010; Fadaee, 2015; Nicholls

& Uitermark, 2017). Finally, this research contributes to perspectives on local, contextualized, internal dynamics and dimensions of movements that, according to some scholars, need further development (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008; Farro, 2014; McDonald, 2002). While scholars have distinguished studies on "pro-migrant solidarity groups" and "the subject of migrant and refugee struggles" (Ataç et al., 2016, p. 530), these groups often still seem to be implicitly assumed as relatively homogeneous. Rather few studies engage with the internal dynamics and categorizations more in detail (Ataç et al., 2015; Fadaee, 2015; Ünsal, 2015).

Focusing this research project

> "The solidarity called for is a solidarity that recognizes and respects their action as political participation, and as a radical demand for change. It enables a relationship of mutual support and protection that uses the security of the citizen, but does not reduce or subordinate the power of the migrant. Such solidarity is not easy; it requires a rethinking of protection, equality, and of protest itself." (Johnson, 2015, p. 16f.)

My research aims to offer new perspectives by exploring migrant rights activism in Hamburg, focusing on developing a conceptual take from a social movement perspective. It was shaped and guided by constructivist grounded theory approaches. This philosophical and methodological perspective allowed me to move into the research process with an open view on what might emerge and to do this while also acknowledging the expectations, perspectives and experiences I brought with me. Interpretive philosophical groundings and practical methodological approaches to self-reflective, iterative, activist scholarship have guided me through this enormous learning process and thereby focused my research. That also means that the concrete focus on filling the concept of solidarities with meaning based on activists' lived experiences only emerged throughout the research process itself.

This book explores migrant rights activism in Hamburg as experienced by diversely positioned activists. In this endeavor, I accompanied several activist groups and conducted twelve in-depth interviews throughout a time frame of roughly two years. The research develops a conceptual take on this activism through the generated data presented in six analytical categories. These and the codes composing them do not always explicitly raise solidarity. However, *Negotiating Solidarities* is developed as the overarching storyline,

capturing what emerged from them. The activist groups fighting for migrant rights in Hamburg engage in continuous processes, discussions and interactions around what solidarities might be, how they are being challenged and aimed for. This empirical-analytical storyline is informed by existing approaches to this movement, mostly from critical research fields, and developed through the scholarship of intersectional feminists, BPoC and power-sensitive activists themselves.

While I do not pretend to produce any generalizable explanations, I believe that many of the contextualized insights have relevance for a broader range of social movements. I claim that solidarities are constantly being negotiated, challenged and enacted in implicit and explicit, individual and collective processes. Many of the dynamics that become visible through this exploration of local activist groups might thus have value for broader social movement studies. They might potentially be more visible in this particularly diverse context, but they most probably emerge in other social movements as well. Finally, I want to acknowledge that what informed and shaped this research goes way beyond the *formal* data generation and therefore makes this described setting and time frame confined and endless simultaneously. All of my own experiences—beyond the time frame and local field of my data generation—find their way into this research. I try to make it explicit and give credit while also acknowledging that it is impossible to keep track of all the interactions, experiences and learnings that shape my analysis.

Terminology

> "[T]erms such as activism, creative space, cultural activism, critical consciousness and others are not subject to one objective standard. Readers are advised not to see the use of these terms in a strict context, rather they are more flexibly put forth as commonly used within the local communities explored." (Graham, 2019, p. 285)

This quote aptly points out a challenge of research that is not just claiming to be *about* social movements or activism but that also engages *with* these movements. Even though Graham's examples might not completely apply to my research context, I want to similarly emphasize that, due to my methodological approach and my research setting, my goal is not to develop clear-cut, mutually exclusive and objective terminology. Parts of this are explored more in-depth in Chapters 3 and 4. Nevertheless, throughout this publication, I try

to indicate and substantiate my terminological choices, some of which I want to raise here already.

As mentioned, I explicitly focus my research on activist groups with people of various legal statuses. This potentially distinguishes it from research focused on different constellations, such as self-organization, refugee movements or non-citizen struggles (see e.g. Bhimji, 2016; Johnson, 2014; Klotz, 2016; Moulin & Nyers, 2007; Odugbesan & Schwiertz, 2018) but also pro-migrant mobilizations, solidarity movements or "refugees welcome" initiatives (see e.g. Ataç et al., 2016; Every & Augoustinos, 2013; Hamann & Karakayali, 2016; Koca, 2016; Kwesi Aikins & Bendix, 2015; Siapera, 2019).[3] Some groups are mainly and sometimes exclusively organized and led by refugees and asylum seekers themselves. Simultaneously, many (activist) groups, especially in the most immediate context of the Long Summer of Migration, are often dominantly constituted by Germans trying to support newly arriving people. Yet, often they are also merely framed as such while actually collecting a variety of people. Of course, these kinds of groups regularly overlap and cannot always be distinguished. However, I think this makes it even more important to explicitly delineate my research focus.

My focus on *migrant rights activism* is also grounded in that such a broader term as *migrant* is more embracing. It does not imply the absence of asylum seekers and refugees or a normative judgment of who is or should be a refugee or a migrant.[4] Increasing attention is being paid to the pitfalls of using terms, such as "economic" vs. "political migrants", "refugees", "asylum-seekers", "illegals", "undocumented", "regular" vs. "irregular migrants", "aliens" or "non-citizens" (James, 2014; Menjívar & Kanstroom, 2014; Schulze Wessel, 2016). Most of these designations share that—intently or not—they involve a negative connotation or devaluation of the persons they are ascribed to and often reduce people to this *one* identity (Fleischmann, 2015; Kewes,

3 Some of these publications do not specify the constellations in the context they study.

4 This is not to say that a distinction between various forms of migration cannot be significant on a human rights basis. But it raises that the distinction is often arbitrary. Some activists deliberately use the term refugee to emphasize their disagreement with existing asylum laws, thereby re-appropriating the term. Some reject such terms of assigned legal categorizations because they are too often used to essentializing or creating differences among them. Importantly, legal status is not a never-changing characteristic and it is not neutrally assigned. It is not on me to judge so I use the broader term, include controversies on various terms and try to be open to debate.

2016b; Schwenken, 2006). Based on such reflections, I early-on decided to approach my participants as *activists* to do justice to their mixed constellations and each person's complex personal history and identities. However, because dominant societal structures categorize people in the ways mentioned above, these are obviously shaping people's realities. How these societal inequalities operate within activist groups is an essential part of what I explore. Using such broader terminologies in general does not mean that, where necessary, insightful or meaningful, I do not distinguish between migrant or refugee or German activists, among others. Nonetheless, staying vigilant concerning these categories and ascriptions is a task that has been running through my whole research process (Bakewell, 2008, p. 445; Brubaker, 2013, p. 11; Spivak et al., 2011, p. 11).

Moreover, I mostly refer to *activism* when discussing the local forms of political organizing that I researched. However, as further discussed in Chapter 4, I consider the overall activities, including all the above, as part of a social movement. Another terminological remark concerns gender. I use the female form as the generic one when there is not a specified gender. That means that, for example, I refer to *the* researcher justifying *her* methodological choices. For my research participants and activists referred to in field notes or by interviewees, I use "s*he" and "her*him/ her*his" to further anonymize their identities. As apparent, "I" explicitly appears as a situated researcher throughout the whole thesis. This mirrors my philosophical belief that, even when made invisible in the written presentation, a researcher is never neutral or objective and can, therefore, appear explicitly in the text.

Furthermore, I try to avoid using the denomination "Western," for example concerning research fields. What is usually referred to as "Western" results from a historical polarization that is not necessary here and gives the illusion of a geographic clarity. Nevertheless, it is generally, at least roughly, understood which countries tend to be referred to as "Western"—most often these are European (at least EU) countries, the United States, Canada and Australia. Especially when criticizing the dominance of these perspectives in academia, it can be important to be able to label them explicitly. The most apt description of such dominance might be to state that they are strongly shaped and thus dominated by the white supremacist structures in society and academia.[5] While I will name this where fitting, I finally chose to use the

5 Openjuru et al. detect "an international academic publishing universe dominated by scholars from the global North." (2015, p. 226) Similarly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains

terms "Northern"/"Southern," in reference to Global South and North. While it continues to be an inappropriate seemingly geographic description, it enables a finer differentiation. A research field can be dominated by Northern perspectives and it does not have to mean that Southern perspectives in the Global North are not still marginalized (Openjuru et al., 2015).

Structure

> "Required formats often presuppose a traditional logico-deductive organization. Thus, we need to rethink the format and adapt it to our needs and goals rather than pour our work into standard categories. Rethink and adapt a prescribed format in ways that work for your ideas rather than compromise your analysis." (Charmaz, 2014, p. 290)

As may have become apparent through this introduction and is nicely captured by this quote, I approached my research context through some not so traditional ways. That also shapes its form and presentation and is very centrally so because of its constructivist grounded theory perspective and its aspiration of exploring meeting grounds of activism and scholarship. After this introducing chapter, the thesis therefore partly continues rather unusually.

Chapter 2 further accompanies the reader into the research setting. Firstly, this consists of a thick description of an activist scene. Secondly, it contains a self-reflection and positioning of myself as a researcher. Chapter 3 follows up on this by explaining the methodological background of this study more in-depth. This is because the philosophical and methodological choices shape all other parts of the research design so explicitly that it is reasonable to introduce this to the reader early on. In turn, this means that the literature review only follows in Chapter 4. Constructivist grounded theory's take on the engagement with existing literature brings some specificities that result in a lack of what is usually referred to as a conceptual framework. Thus, the chapter, firstly, contains a literature review organized by relevant research fields concerning the study of migrant rights activism. Secondly, it identifies

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how already the term *research* is bound up with European imperialism and colonialism and states: "It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing […], and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations." (L. T. Smith, 2012, p. 1)

gaps in the existing literature, introduces the sensitizing concepts (developed at the beginning to orient the further research process) and focuses my own conceptual approach by introducing solidarity.

It might also seem untypical for a qualitative research presentation that I present my empirical findings in Chapter 5 without explicitly relating it to extant theory and literature yet. The chapter is structured based on the six analytical categories. This does neither mean that I only descriptively present my empirical data nor that I pretend to introduce entirely new insights never reflected in any publication. Due to constructivist grounded theory's iterative logic, the form in which I present my empirical findings was developed through multiple stages of data analysis and confrontation with existing theory and literature. Therefore, the categories are already a central part of the analysis. Yet, to give the empirical data and the emergent nature of the analysis the space they deserve, I decided to follow Birks and Mills' recommendation to first isolate and only later link my findings to the literature (2011, p. 134). The latter then takes place in Chapter 6 in the form of three contributions my research makes. This chapter develops the main insights from my empirical findings together with existing literature to more explicitly engage with and answer the research questions. In Chapter 7, I attempt to summarize the results of my research in a more practical way, acknowledging they should not be limited to academic audiences. The conclusion summarizes my findings, addresses limitations and points to recommendations for further research.