Milan, Artero (2019: 158) also suggests that volunteering with refugees can become a "micropolitical practice". Stock (2019: 136) points to the transformative potentials of relationships forged through refugee support, relationships that enable both volunteers and refugees "to engage in acts of citizenship through care practices that are conducive to more inclusive migration politics". Bosi and Zamponi (2015) also stress the political significance of actions that seek to transform certain aspects of society without making direct claims towards governmental actors (see also Zamponi 2017).

Such conceptions of political action chime strikingly with what I witnessed around the long summer of migration. Many of those who engaged in practices of refugee support aimed to change the status quo through 'hands-on' interventions in their local communities. In order to take into account such more hidden, subtle or indirect forms of political action, I approach solidarity as a transformative relationship that inspires actions with contested political meanings and effects. In this way, this book aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of political action in migration societies by stressing its *relationality*, a relationality that unfolds in relationships of solidarity between established residents and newcomers.

1.6. Researching Solidarity in the German 'Summer of Welcome': Field, Access, Methods, Ethics

This book is underpinned by qualitative and ethnographic field research conducted between late 2014 and mid-2016 in various localities across Germany, particularly across the southern state of Baden-Württemberg. In the course of my 20 months of fieldwork, I held more than 30 semi-structured interviews ranging in duration from half an hour to four hours. The majority of these interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed. They allowed me to gain insights into the motivations, interests and social imaginaries of a diverse range of actors involved in the contestation of solidarities. This spanned volunteers who sought to help refugees; self-declared political activists; governmental representatives at municipal and federal state level; people professionally employed in the field of the reception of asylum seekers, for instance in social welfare organizations; and, last but not least, asylum seekers themselves. In order to gain insights into the discussions that evolved among and between these different actors, I conducted participant observation in numerous meetings, conferences, trainings and other events related

to practices of refugee support. For instance, I regularly attended conferences organized by the Refugee Council of Baden-Württemberg, which brought together volunteers from across different localities in the state. Moreover, I participated in several conferences organized by the state government of Baden-Württemberg, such as the regular "Forum for Refugee Help" events, which aimed to facilitate volunteering for refugees. I also participated in workshops that brought together self-declared 'political activists' acting in support of refugees across the country, for instance in cities such as Berlin and Hannover. This empirical fieldwork was backed up by an analysis of relevant written materials, such as newspaper articles, online sources and position papers.

Over the course of those 20 months of empirical research, I was confronted with a highly dynamic, fluctuating and constantly changing field of investigation. In November 2014, at the start of my fieldwork, nobody would have predicted the extraordinary explosion of refugee support that took place some months later. My impulse to start investigating practices of refugee support stemmed, however, from a sense that a profound change had already begun to take shape that year. At this early stage of my field research, the reception of refugees began to attract growing public attention, while the numbers of citizens seeking to support refugees was also on the rise. In addition, more and more actors began intervening in the conduct of committed citizens. For instance, governmental actors implemented programmes that targeted the increasing citizen engagement around refugees. By the summer months of 2015, the reception of asylum seekers and the notion of a German 'welcome culture' had taken centre stage both in the media and in public debate. The extraordinary spirit of that long summer of migration mobilized an unprecedented number of established residents to engage in practices of refugee support. Only in 2016 did the public focus on the reception of asylum seekers slowly begin to diminish. Despite the decreasing media attention in the first half of 2016, however, various actors intensified their efforts to influence and gain authority over the contested solidarities that had developed over the previous months. What I witnessed over the course of my field research was thus a gradually growing diversification of actors and an expanding and increasingly complex field of investigation.

This growing complexity in my field of investigation also led me to narrow the spatial focus of my fieldwork. As I was based in Konstanz, a town on the southernmost edge of Germany, I conducted the majority of my field research across the southern state of Baden-Württemberg. I complemented my data collection with occasional field trips to relevant events in other parts of Ger-

many, such as Berlin, Leipzig and Hannover. This enabled me to consider how events in the area of my field research did not occur in a vacuum and to take into account the area's spatial connections to and relationships with other regions in Germany and beyond (Allen, Massey & Cochrane 1998). I should, however, acknowledge that this narrowing of the spatial focus of my field research necessarily involved selection processes that limit my findings. With the state having the only Green-Social Democrats (SPD) led government[10] in Germany, my field research in Baden-Württemberg took place within a specific political climate (see Chapter 3). It was contingent on the particular historical, regional and socioeconomic context of this part of Germany. In the following empirical chapters, I provide information on the local and regional context of my investigation where it appears pertinent to an understanding of my findings, although I am unable to provide a complete picture of all the relevant contextual factors.

Since I moved back and forth between various localities across the area of my field research, my investigation might be labelled a "multi-sited ethnography" (Marcus 1998; Falzon 2009). However, as Hannerz (2003) remarks, this terminology is misleading in several regards as it might suggest a comparative study of different and isolated 'cases'. It is therefore important to stress that the purpose of my investigation was not simply to study practices of refugee support in different localities and compare my findings afterwards, but rather to analyse relationships and connections across and between these sites. Moreover, I should mention that my multi-sited ethnography necessarily entailed selecting certain locations from the many potential candidates (ibid.: 207). Some localities were chosen because they became the site of specific problems or events of interest, such as protests by asylum seekers (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6); other choices were shaped by governmental decision-making processes and policies, such as the decision to inaugurate a new initial reception centre in Ellwangen (Chapter 2); while some also responded to particularities of my field or may have been guided by mere coincidence.

Starting ethnographic research on one's own doorstep might appear to be a rather unusual approach for an anthropological study. Historically, studies in social anthropology were almost exclusively based overseas, in regions

10 At the time of my field research, the Greens and the Social Democrats (SPD) were in a coalition that had governed the state of Baden-Württemberg since 2011. See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion on the implications of this specific political context for the findings of my field research.

that appeared different and unfamiliar to the ethnographers themselves (see for instance Mauss 1990 [1925]; Douglas 1991 [1966]; Malinowski 2014 [1922]). In contrast, Baden-Württemberg is the region that I am most familiar with, having been born and raised in a town close to Stuttgart, the state's capital. While research in regions further away from the ethnographer's 'home' continues to be a major focus of research in social anthropology, more and more scholars are conducting research in regions familiar to the anthropologist, Europe for instance (cf. Koutsouba 1999; Alvesson 2009). In his monograph *Reversed Gaze*, Ntarangwi (2010: 78) highlights the value of "using anthropology not only to study others but also to reflect upon one's own culture". Indeed, doing fieldwork on 'home turf' offered several advantages for the purpose of this investigation. For instance, it allowed a greater degree of flexibility in that it substantially shortened the distances to travel and thus enabled me to react spontaneously to developments over a relatively long period of time. This proved particularly useful since, as I outlined above, my field of investigation was highly dynamic and constantly changing. My tacit knowledge of the region and light Swabian accent often made it easy to gain access to those supporting refugees on the ground and to build trustful relationships with them. However, the spatial overlap of research area and 'home', coupled with the high visibility of my research topic in public debate, led to a situation where it became increasingly challenging to 'step back' and retain a critical distance to my topic of investigation. Scholars, however, have outlined the importance of both 'immersion' *and* 'distance' for the research process (see Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 115; Ybema & Kamsteeg 2009). Distancing became easier for me when the visibility of and euphoria around refugee support begun to fade in early 2016.

Gaining access to those who engaged in volunteering with refugees generally proved to be a smooth endeavour. Most of the volunteers or citizens' initiatives I contacted in the course of my field research were available for interviews and conversations; many willingly opened their doors to me or invited me to take part in their sessions and activities. Such interviews frequently lasted several hours or spanned multiple sessions. Volunteers – especially those who were retired – often enjoyed talking about their personal histories and motivations, and expounding on the achievements or challenges of volunteering with refugees. All in all, volunteers often seemed quite enthusiastic about my research project and asked me for findings and insights into the research process. Participating in my research seemed to present a welcome opportunity to share experiences and thereby to contribute to the

greater public good. Thus, the participation in my field research, at times, appeared to form part of their very commitment to refugees. Many times, people also felt 'honoured' to be included in a scientific research project since it appeared to give them a feeling of doing the 'right' thing. This easy access to volunteers contrasted sharply with my experiences with deliberate "political activists" supporting refugees. Such groups and individuals often appeared to be largely unavailable for interviews and generally suspicious of my research project; at one time, an activist even suspected me of being a government spy. This might in part be explained by the fact that left-wing activism in Germany has long been subject to severe government crackdowns and infiltrations, as typified by the harsh treatment of anti-G20 protesters in Hamburg in 2017 (see Haunss et al. 2017). Governmental actors and those professionally employed in the field of the reception of asylum seekers also proved open towards my research and were happy to talk about the extraordinary scope of refugee support in their sphere of influence. Nonetheless, I often had the impression that what I was being offered by such actors was an incomplete or sugar-coated account of reality. With a few exceptions, it was often quite difficult to talk about problems, disagreements or other controversial topics with these professionals or governmental representatives. A prime example came when I investigated asylum seeker protests at emergency reception centres and had numerous interview requests bluntly rejected, with the explanation that this was a 'confidential area' or a 'sensitive topic'.

The familiarity with my field of investigation also meant that I struggled less with the unequal power relations that affect research encounters in the Global South (see for instance Sidaway 1992; Scheper-Hughes 1995; Comaroff & Comaroff 2003; Monteith 2017). Nader (1972), for instance, problematizes how most anthropologists have "studied down", investigating people less prosperous and powerful than themselves. Ethnographic research focussing on marginalized 'others' has therefore often been accompanied by issues of paternalism, exploitation or postcolonial continuities (see also Madison 2008). My field research, in contrast, mostly centred on German citizens with a broadly similar social, political and economic status to myself. Added to this, in early 2015, I myself got involved with supporting refugees in a small initiative committed to building bridges between asylum seekers and local residents in Konstanz. In consequence, the boundary between my research subjects and myself often appeared rather blurred. Ethnographic research concerned with peers or groups of people who cannot be treated as 'others' and themselves participate in othering has been discussed as "studying side-

ways" (Hannerz 1998: 11). However, having talked to a variety of different actors in the course of my field research, including not only volunteers but also governmental actors and asylum seekers, I would suggest that my approach might be better described as *"studying through"* (Wright & Reinhold 2011). Such an approach seeks to trace "ways in which power creates webs and relations between actors, institutions and discourses across time and space" (Shore & Wright 1997: 14). In the case of my own field research, this translated to a close examination of the webs and relations that emerged among different actors in the area of investigation and a multi-perspective approach to the practices of refugee support.

That said, the process of data collection and analysis was clearly neither entirely objective nor free from power dynamics. While it was difficult to remain in a critical distance to some of the opinions and positions I encountered, I also came across others with which I did not personally agree. As a result, I may myself have unintentionally participated in the contestation of the solidarities I was investigating. Various scholars have pointed out that the researcher is a socially embodied and far from value-free human being who substantially shapes the research and writing process (see Rose 1997; Nencel 2014). England (1994: 82) thus argues that "reflexivity is critical to the conduct of fieldwork; it induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions". In order to avoid the "God-trick" (Haraway 1988) and its "view from nowhere", I will, in the course of the following empirical chapters, reflect on my own positionality and on personal challenges faced at specific moments in my field research.

Before turning to my empirical investigation, I should also acknowledge that this book is written from a politically and morally engaged perspective. Starting from a point of view that is sympathetic to those who support refugees, this investigation is informed by a desire to uncover contemporary forms of exclusion and oppression; by a critical stance towards the idea of culturally homogenous national identities; and by a sensitivity towards postcolonial continuities (see also Thobani 2015). It is a search for more egalitarian alternatives of togetherness in an age of migration. I therefore also consider it the researcher's obligation to name and speak out against injustices witnessed during the research process (cf. Scheper-Hughes 1995). Nevertheless, I want to stress that I view my study as being separate from works focussing on what has been described as *action research* (Reason & Bradbury 2008), *participatory research* (Pain & Francis 2003) or *activist ethnography* (Juris & Khasnabish 2013; Montesinos Coleman 2015). Despite writing from a polit-

ically and morally informed perspective, I take a critical view of the deliberate blurring of the distinction between scientific research and political activism, something evident, for example, in works by scholars associated with *Kritnet*, the German network of critical migration and border research (see for instance Kasparek & Speer 2013). Publications in this research network often speak from explicitly left political perspectives, calling for the unrestricted free global movement of people. Moreover, the network tends to regard itself as a mouthpiece for refugee activists and, in turn, contributes ideologically to activist networks (see Carstensen et al. 2014). This book, by contrast, is guided by the notion that it is a key responsibility of social researchers to consider the multiple perspectives pertaining to a field of investigation; to remain as independent as possible from the subjects of investigation; and to keep a certain critical distance to the topic of investigation. As Czarniawska (1992: 73) aptly puts it: an empathetic stance towards the research subjects should go hand in hand with "a constant urge to problematize, to turn what seems familiar and understandable upside down and inside out".

1.7. An Outline of *Contested Solidarity*

The following empirical investigation into the contested solidarities that developed around the German 'summer of welcome' consists of five chapters. These distinct but interrelated parts analyse differing forms of *contesting*, that is, of making claims and intervening in the conduct of refugee support. The outline of this book thus attests to the elusive character of solidarity. Practices and discourse of migrant solidarity continually adapt to new circumstances; are subject to constant intervention and manifold negotiation processes; and respond to the needs of various actors involved in their contestation. Each of the five subsequent chapters deals with another form of intervention that I encountered in the course of my field research: the *mobilizing, governing, politicizing, recasting* and *breaking of* solidarity with refugees. In the first of these chapters, I start with an analysis of how solidarity was mobilized and how the notion of a 'welcome culture' translated into concrete practices of refugee support on the ground (Chapter 2). In the third, fourth and fifth chapter, I investigate how solidarities and related practices then became subject to the (de)politicizing interventions of different actors, including the state government of Baden-Württemberg, political activists and the asylum seekers themselves. In the sixth chapter, I investigate how solidarities might eventually dis-