Border Regimes, Racialisation Processes and Resistance in Germany

An Ethnographic Study of Protest and Solidarity

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In Memory of My Parents

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Contents

1 Introduction 1
Aims of the Book 3
Contentious Politics, Solidarity, and Humanitarianism 4
Refugee Activism 5
Solidarity Work 6
Volunteer Work in Germany 8
Humanitarian Work 11
Coming to Berlin and Doing Ethnography 14
Organisation of the Book 18
References 19

2 The Everyday Racialisation of Refugees in German State and Society 23
Introduction 23
Institutional and Everyday Racism at Refugee Camps and Reception Centres in Germany 26
Camps, State Power, and Institutional Racism 28
Racialisation and Racist Violence 32
Migration and Populist Racist Mobilisation 36
Living with Deportability and Detainability 37
Anti-Immigrant Anxieties in the Political Arena and German Society 41
Concluding Comments 43
References 44

3 Heterogeneity and the Dynamics of Tent Protests and Squatting: The Refugee Movement at Oranienplatz 49
The Refugee Movement 2012–2014 49
Oranienplatz as a Site of Anti-Racist Protests 51
Heterogeneous Struggles at Oranienplatz 55
Diversity of Demands by Refugee Groups 56
The Formation of Media Activists, Solidarity, and Cultural Groups 57
References 63

4 Practical Solidarity, Encounters, and Transformative Possibilities: A Case Study 65
Introduction 65
SPO: Anti-racist Politics Versus Charity 69
Political Networking 73
Working Structure of Schlafplatzorga 76
Networking with Solidarians 84
Hospitality and Hosting Refugees 92
Contact Persons and Refugees 100
Solidarity Events and Sociality 103
Solidarity Parties 106
The Techno Festival 110
Solidarity at Demonstrations 114
The Küfas 117
Concluding Comments 126
References 127

5 Intersectional Feminist Solidarity and Activism amongst Refugees and Migrants at International Women's Space in Berlin 131
Introduction 131
The Political Culture of IWS 136
Funding Matters and IWS 138
IWS and Meeting Spaces 140
The Women at IWS 142
Meetings at IWS 145
Lawyer's Workshops at IWS 147
'Giving Voice' and Narratives of Intersectional Experiences 150
Book Launches and Networking 159

The Conference as a Collective Gathering 161
IWS and Advocacy for a Roma Woman 169
Roma Woman Is Suing Racist Attacker 170
Street Protests, Speeches, and Alliances 171
Concluding Comments 176
References 179

6 There Is Empowerment in the Air: Media Activists Decolonise the Radio 181
Introduction 181
Participating on the Radio 182
The Beginning of Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio Project 183
Emancipation, Decoloniality, and Humanity on the Radio 187
Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio and Sovereignty 191
We!R Radio's Shows 194
The Format, Content, and Scheduling 194
The Radio's Intended Audience 196
Greetings from the Radio 197
Music on Wearebornfree Radio 197
Mediating Rastafari Culture and Resisting the Babylon System on the Radio 199
The Polizei, Deportations, and Anti-Racist Activism 206
Africa and Transnational Solidarity 218
Expressions of Solidarity on International Women's Day 224
Encounters with Artists, Alliance Building, and Working with the 'Left' 226
Concluding Comments 234
References 237

7 Conclusion: Reconsidering Refugee Activism and Solidarity 239
Political Ideologies and Activism and Solidarity 241
Solidarity and Activism as Extensions of Refugee Protests 244
Political Activism, Practical Solidarity, and Humanity 245
Impact of Refugee Mobilisation and Solidarity Work 246
References 248

Index 249

List of Figures

Fig. 2.1	Women in exile call for justice for Rita	34
Fig. 3.1	The refugee tent protests at Oranienplatz	51
Fig. 3.2	Mimi's vigil in Berlin	54
Fig. 3.3	Protests in Gürtelstraße against the eviction of people in hostels	58
Fig. 3.4	African Refugees Union and International Women Space Protest for LGBTQI Rights	61
Fig. 5.1	The Women at International Women's Space	144
Fig. 6.1	The author at Wearebornfree empowerment radio	183
Fig. 6.2	Mohammed playing music at Wearebornfree Radio	200
Fig. 6.3	Wearebornfree Radio at the Women in Exile workshop at Oranienplatz, Kreuzberg, Berlin	230

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I first visited Oranienplatz on a cold wintry night, at the end of November 2013, and saw several people bring blankets and clothes to a table. Although there were slogans written around the information table, such as 'Break Isolation', 'Refugee Strike Berlin', and 'Kein Mensch ist Illegal' (No Human is Illegal), I was particularly drawn to the slogan 'We are here because you destroyed our countries.' This was the very first time that I had observed a connection made in explicit ways between colonialism, neo-colonialism, and migration outside of left-wing academic circles. I immediately sensed that these protests were influenced by leftist politics and extended well beyond providing humanitarian support to refugees. After getting acquainted with some of the people involved in the resistance at Oranienplatz, I acquired knowledge of the EU and German asylum policies and decided to focus my research in this direction. Furthermore, I had met a number of people with whom I felt at ease and developed friendships, which was another reason I continued to return to Berlin.

At that time, there was not much discussion of refugee activism in Germany in the mainstream media or scholarship. However, in 2015 and 2016, a wealth of scholarship emerged and refugees became the focus of much media attention during the so-called refugee crisis. Since the euphoria of the short-lived 'Welcome Culture' in 2015 in the German state, the attitude towards refugees has altered considerably (see Jäckle and König 2017; Bhimji 2019). Similarly, scholarly and media attention have dimmed.

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Yet, the need for a focus on the ontologies of refugees is paramount. In recent times, there has been a rise in the far-right populist movements, anti-immigrant sentiments, and the normalisation of white nationalism, with far right-wing political parties in Europe making substantial gains. Since then there has been a contagion effect, which has resulted in a xenophobic and racist attitude towards refugees and migrants as well as physical attacks in the areas in which they reside. More significantly, current migration policy in the EU has resulted in the externalisation of the EU borders, and contributed to deaths in the Mediterranean. Even if they are fortunate enough to reach their country of destination, refugees are excluded from participation in the civic and social life in Europe since they are often isolated in sub-standard and far-flung accommodation. Despite this negative climate, cities such as Berlin, Hamburg, and London have also witnessed an increase in solidarity efforts, protests, and media and theatre activism, which call for and demand an open border policy. This book examines the refugee protests which began in Berlin in 2012 and continued as several solidarity and media groups emerged during the mobilisation.

The refugee movement which began in 2012 in Germany received limited scholarly attention, and the solidarity and self-organised refugee resistance groups which emerged from this mobilisation and continue to function warrant scholarly attention because of their employment of different and creative strategies, political and humanitarian ideals, and their long-term sustainment. The groups which I discuss in this book began during the protests of 2012 or shortly after and have continued to mobilise, protest, and sustain themselves to this date, that is, for a period of five to seven years, despite the increasingly hostile feelings towards refugees.

This study stems from the resistance that has been occurring in Germany since 2012 at a square called Oranienplatz in the district of Kreuzberg in Berlin, and from thereon I discuss the workings of three different grassroots initiatives which emerged from this movement. The book focuses on the ways in which the groups continue to fight against border regimes and the racial exclusion of refugees. In doing so, the book's aim is to examine how solidarity movements and refugee self-organised resistance work within Germany challenge the culture of border regimes, employing different strategies in an environment of hate, racism, and perpetual fear of detention and deportation. In this respect, I examine how refugees' self-mobilisation through tent protests and subsequently via the media, and challenge some of the demonising discourses which perpetually criminalise

them. The study also examines some of the solidarity groups which emerged from the refugee movement and the relational dynamics which operate when solidarity workers and citizens support and 'help' refugees, and the power relations which tend to persist in such situations.

Aims of the Book

This book has several aims. Based on empirical data and ethnographic methodology, I first demonstrate the ways in which refugee activism and solidarity efforts go beyond citizenship such that their activism includes fights against racialisation of refugees, and state power. The book discusses the asylum policies and the German state's practices which exclude, ostracise and limit membership of refugees in the nation-state. In this respect, the policies which racialise refugees and the related institutional violence which refugees are compelled to live with are discussed in detail and the subsequent chapters demonstrate how refugee initiatives fight such forms of state power and racial ostracisms.

The book's second aim is to demonstrate that activism and solidarity work can take on many forms. The book demonstrates the diverse politics and strategies which different activist groups employ in order to expose and overcome asylum policies which serve to govern the racialised Other through migration controls (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018). To this end, following a brief discussion of the refugee tent protests in Berlin, this study provides an analysis of three forms of activism (which continued following the mobilisation): solidarity activism, intersectional feminist activism, in which women advocate for women refugees suffering from multiple forms of marginalisation, and refugee self-organised media activism. In particular, the book examines the different strategies employed by three different initiatives, Schlafplatzorga, International Women's Space, and Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio, and describes and critiques the differing strategies they employ to challenge asylum policies and racist ideologies. The book shows that political activism does not cease with street protests, as has been demonstrated in the case of social media in recent times. It thus demonstrates how fights against border regimes, racialisation of refugees, colonialism, capitalism, and neocolonialism can occur in diverse ways, such as through the media, through organising conferences, cooking and eating together, seeking refuge in Berlin, and leaving the 'Lager' (segregated mass refugee accommodations) when in dire

circumstances, offering one's room to homeless refugees threatened by deportation, and by finding funds to carry the activism efforts forward.

The third aim of this book goes beyond a description of unequal structure and agency and examines the interplay of the humanitarian and the political, questions of reciprocity, and representational tropes of refugees within these initiatives. Even though the groups which I discuss in this book were born out of radical left politics in Berlin and were engaged in anti-racist struggles, humanitarian values and politics came to interact in the initiatives such that they posed ethical dilemmas even for the participants. This study shows how some of these solidarity actions affected slippages between humanitarian and political action. Thus, this empirical research shows how, because of humanitarian interventions, solidarity activism and feminist and intersectional activisms did not always lead to equality, between refugees and solidarity works; and for the members of the groups it became challenging to participate in solidarity work in prefigurative ways. The study demonstrates the differences between larger humanitarian systems (Fassin 2012; Ticktin 2011; Agier 2011), which tend to become part of border regimes, and smaller initiatives that remain local and independent (Fekete 2016).

Finally, the book aims to draw attention to refugee activism and refugees from countries other than Syria. Since the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, there has been much scholarly and media attention focused on refugees arriving from Syria. This book demonstrates some of the experiences, struggles, and activism of the 'less deserving refugees' and perpetually racialised people who came from Sub-Saharan Africa, Pakistan, and Afghanistan to Germany prior to 2015, and who continue to arrive to this date, assuming they survive their treacherous journey.

Contentious Politics, Solidarity, and Humanitarianism

Border regimes and exclusionary asylum policies which gave rise to internal and external borders and fortresses, the threat and the actual drowning of bodies in the Mediterranean, and the presence of refugee camps and accommodations have led in recent years to the formation of an industry of humanitarian aid and government, volunteerism, solidarity, activism and protests, as well as refugee self-organised and self-led activism. To this

end, scholars have provided an analysis of refugee activism, solidarity, and volunteerisms and humanitarian aid in much depth.

Refugee Activism

There has been much focus in scholarship on refugee activism, citizenship, and migration. Refugee mobilisations have been understood to take on a variety of forms, such as marches, rallies, protests, hunger strikes, occupations of space, squatting, anti-deportation and detention actions, solidarity acts with refugees, and demands for a just and fair asylum policy (e.g. Ataç et al. 2016; Rygiel 2011; Bhimji 2016; Chimienti and Solomos 2011). These actions are generally targeted against the state, and refugee activism has been understood as a political force in its own right (Tyler and Marciniak 2013; Rosenberger et al. 2018).

Through a focus on refugee mobilisation, these studies demonstrate the political agency, citizenship, and membership of refugees within a polity. They further contend that refugees and their support networks participate in contentious politics, which constitute 'concerted, counter-hegemonic social and political action, in which differently positioned participants come together to challenge dominant systems of authority, in order to promote and enact alternative imaginaries' (Leitner et al. [2008] p. 157, cited in Ataç et al. 2016).

There has also been an increasing focus on mobilisation self-organised by refugees, particularly in Germany, leading to their visibility and awareness of their rights and political subjectivation (e.g. Bhimji 2016; Meret et al. 2019). Squatting practices and 'We are here' movements within Europe have additionally been the focus of scholarship. Squatting practices have been understood to constitute a strategy of fighting border regimes, isolation, and increasing levels of securitisation with the creation of common spaces and solidarities (Dadusc 2019).

European activists who aim to subvert regimes, and advocate for no-borders and/or open border policies, have been understood as political actors engaged in contentious politics and struggles for citizenship. Scholarship has regarded refugees involved in self-organised activism as political actors rather than as passive victims of asylum policies, detentions, and deportations. To this end, a large body of scholarship has challenged Giorgio Agamben's argument that refugees can be seen as the ultimate 'biopolitical' subjects, those who can be regulated and governed at the level of population in a permanent 'state of exception', and who are

reduced to 'bare life', humans as animals in nature without political freedom (Owens 2009).

The focus of the abovementioned studies remains on refugee activism connected to citizenship, agency, and visibilities rather than resistance efforts countering racialised exclusion of refugees from the state and the effects of colonialism. These studies do not include a discussion of the ways in which grassroots resistance groups adopt anti-racist, feminist, intersectional, and decolonial vision which enables them to support and self-organise in complex ways. Citizenship alone cannot encapsulate the racialisation, exclusion, and ostracism that refugees experience because of the state's border and migration regimes. This study examines the ways in which, refugee activists recognise and comprehend racialisation by the nation-state and the legacies of colonial domination within their countries of origins, and thus fight for the inclusion of people who have been excluded and ostracised in the German state.

This study also shows how refugees seek self-determination while criticising solidarity work. The focus of their activism rests on decolonial approaches intertwined with an emphasis on the importance and significance of humanity. Thus in this respect refugee activists foreground political ideals and values over struggles for formal status and documentation within the state.

Marina Gržinić (2018) recognises the importance of positioning racism as a central category within the parameters of the abstract state. She stresses that we recognise that 'we're a fully constructed racial state in the form of European and global capitalism' (p. 19). Thus, it is important to comprehend the state's power of classifying, ostracising, and excluding refugees. It is the state which ultimately decides who is allowed a liveable life and whose lives should be governed, technologically and digitally controlled, and regulated (see Butler 2004; Mbembe 2003). Thus, it becomes imperative to examine the decolonial process and anti-racist struggles organised by refugees and their support networks. In this regard, the study discusses the refugee mobilisation and tent protests and the work of three initiatives including a self-organised refugee media activism which subsequently emerged.

Solidarity Work

In addition to protests, scholars have also focused on solidarity work with refugees, primarily within Greece. More significantly, there has been a grammatical and ontological shift such that the word in the Greek

context, *alliléggios* (solidarian), has changed 'from an adjective to a noun', meaning a *person* (not just the action), which in turn demonstrates the radicalisation of solidarity in the social spaces in which it is being practised (Rozakou 2016). Solidarity initiatives substantively differ from the activities of NGOs and non-profits, which provide extra-state services and are explicitly professionalised, paying staff and employing volunteers through formal internships and practicums (Cabot 2014). Solidarity has been further understood in terms of representation as a relational practice, and in opposition to reductionisms or strategic emptiness. Thus solidarity is contentious; it emerges strongly in moments or conjunctures; is generative of political subjectivities and collective identities; entails alliance building among diverse actors; is inventive of new imaginaries; is situated in space and time and organised in multi-scalar relations; and is linked in different ways to institutions (Augistin and Jorgensen 2019). Expressions of solidarity with migrants are often conceptualised as contentious politics (Ataç et al. 2016). These scholars argue that solidarity struggles traverse the local and constitute trans-border, trans-categorical, and social movements and bring about transformative possibilities. Because solidarity networks are perceived as transnational in nature, developed both through the physical crossing of territorial borders and connecting of people, but also in the ways they challenge the very logic of borders and border control, scholars understand solidarity groups, as well as migrant/refugee groups, not as distinct categories, but rather as interwoven and as transformative collectivities (Ataç et al. 2016).

Scholarship related to solidarity and volunteer work has focused mainly on the political stance and transnational activism of migration policies. There has been less scholarship which comprehends solidarity activism in terms of social encounters and sociality, which this study emphasises. It is important to understand the relational dynamic between refugees and migrants and solidarity workers, as well as the political alliances and networks forged by grassroots solidarity groups. A focus on sociality, social encounters, and solidarity workers' anti-racist efforts allows further insights into understanding how groups may evoke transformative outcomes, or fail to do so and thus maintain the status quo. For example, an understanding of relational dynamics within solidarity work in the migration context can demonstrate how initiatives can create new forms of safe spaces and help contest the notion of closed borders, as well as the racialised images of refugees, and yet in other instances could reproduce

racial hierarchies and inequalities, and may do little to instrumentalise shifts in migration policies.

The solidarity groups which I discuss in this book engaged in anti-racist, feminist, intersectional, and decolonial activism; they simultaneously 'helped' refugees and engaged in 'altruistic' behaviour which led to unequal dynamics between refugees and solidarity groups. Several of the people I met, worked with, and socialised with, and with whom I held in-depth interviews and conversations, were of the view that they did engage in practical solidarity efforts in a way that could not always be understood as doing politics. Some refugee activists criticised solidarity activism since they believed that such forms of work did not always lead to equality.

The book demonstrates that as asylum policies became tighter in Germany, the rate of deportation increased, and xenophobia and racism rose by an alarming rate, it would have been virtually impossible to not provide individual 'care' and to focus solely on making political demands, especially since it would have meant allowing the state to deport refugees or to leave them homeless and illegalised. Thus, several conditions necessitated 'care work' in conjunction with doing politics. However, unlike humanitarian workers, who were part of large-scale NGO organisations, people who worked in these smaller initiatives aimed to maintain an anti-racist and anti-capitalist vision. Thus this book shows that radical left politics, decolonial efforts, hierarchical relations, gratitude, and the humanitarian realm cannot be divorced from one another. To this end, refugee grassroots politics need to be understood as inclusive of their humanitarian elements in conjunction with their anti-racist and anti-colonial ideologies, as well as their subversive elements such as squatting and anti-deportation actions.

Volunteer Work in Germany

Apart from solidarity actions in Greece, scholars have explored the volunteering actions by members of civil society, particularly in Germany during the so-called refugee crisis or the long summer of migration. In 2015, Germany witnessed a rise in humanitarian interventions in the form of *Willkommenskultur*. This term was used to reflect the welcoming of refugees and migrants in the German state by civil society when Angela Merkel's regime implemented a relatively more liberal immigrant policy, primarily towards Syrian refugees, with the announcement *Wir schaffen das* (We can do this) and stated that Germany could manage to absorb one

million refugees. The German state was supposedly not prepared for these large numbers, and bureaucracies failed to register, house, and feed the new arrivals (Karakayali and Kleist 2016). It was documented that during this period established organisations working with refugees in Germany estimated an average increase of 70% of interest in volunteering to help refugees over a period of three years, and more than a third of volunteers were active in self-organised groups and initiatives, rather than in established NGOs. For them, their engagement was not about volunteering itself, but specifically about 'helping' refugees and establishing a mainstream movement of volunteering for refugees across society (Karakayali and Kleist 2016).

The German people intervened and helped with the everyday needs of the newcomers: they provided refugees with food and clothes at the camps, took refugees to meetings with the authorities in their own cars, paid their fares, footed their medical bills, taught German, translated forms, shared couches and bikes, acted as nannies, opened up soccer clubs, schools, and kindergartens for refugee children, and demonstrated against right-wing attacks across the country (Akrap 2015).

In the context of volunteering, members of civil society made no demands on politicians with respect to improvement of asylum seekers' conditions, nor did they express any political stance, but rather came to support the state's endeavours to accommodate refugees in Germany. Nor did scholarship discuss whether these volunteer groups engaged in anti-racist and anti-colonial actions. The focus continued to remain on supporting the refugees with citizenship-related issues. The radical left in Germany understood civil society's interventions as apolitical, but some scholars argued against these views. Fleischmann and Steinhilper (2017) argue that this possibility for political transformation emerged when volunteers became aware of the powerful myth of 'apolitical' help, and began to embed their volunteering activities in a wider context instead of turning a blind eye to it, which involved the contextualisation of volunteering for refugees in the spatial, social, institutional, and legal conditions of forced migration (p. 24). For example, they asserted that extended interactions between volunteers and refugees led to awareness amongst the volunteers about systemic inequalities, such as deportation procedures and closed-door immigration policies. The scholars also contended that initiatives which emerged during the so-called refugee crisis also included experienced activists from anti-racist and immigrant-rights movements. Another study demonstrated that these volunteers advocated for open borders and

tried to curtail some of the racist response towards refugees and migration which prevailed in some regions of Germany at the time (Hamann and Karakayalli 2016). However, some scholarship understood these volunteering efforts, which were mainly undertaken by white German women, as continuities of historical and colonial notions of feminine charity, observing parallels between 'third world aid' and current Welcome Culture, and contended that both rely on hierarchical and inegalitarian structures of 'help' and are connected to particular ways of seeing and understanding both 'self' and 'other' (Braun 2017).

These volunteering endeavours did not explicitly support anti-racist activism and protest on the streets against asylum policies to the same extent that the radical left had in Germany during the years prior to the *Willkommenskultur*. They did not experience any conflicts with the German police, and they expressed solidarity primarily with refugees who had the right to stay in Germany. In other words, these middle-class volunteers conformed largely to liberal values and, despite their open-ended views and desire to help, they did not explicitly confront the state and the asylum laws. Moreover, expressions of the initial euphoria dimmed when there was a *Stimmungswechsel*, a mood shift towards refugees, as extreme right-wing political parties began to make refugees into scapegoats in the subsequent years. Doris Akrap, a German whose father had migrated from the former Yugoslavia to Germany in the 1990s wrote an opinion piece in the *Guardian* entitled 'Germany's response to the refugee crisis is admirable. But I fear it cannot last.' She predicted correctly that *Willkommenskultur* would most likely end when segments of Germany society were called upon to fight their own government with respect to border regimes. In the past two years, far-right ideologies of nationalism, xenophobia, and anti-Islamism have come to prominence in the German nation-state, and mainstream politics has shifted to the centre. Thus, the interventions and initiatives which express humanitarian ideals instead of a commitment to explicitly engage in anti-racist politics did not endure and were short-lived.

This study delineates these particular volunteer actions during the period of 2015–2016 and examines the refugee activism which confronted the powers of the state with respect to asylum policies and which had started in 2012, three years before the furore of the *Willkommenskultur*, and continues into the present in different forms while adopting an explicit anti-racist ideology.

Humanitarian Work

On a larger and international scale, scholars have analysed the interventions of humanitarian aid provided to refugees by organisations such as Doctors Without Borders. Critics of humanitarianism have argued that humanitarian aid work leads to humanitarianism anti-politics or minimalist biopolitics (Pandolfi 2003). Several scholars have criticised humanitarian aid work amongst refugees.

Didier Fassin (2012), who worked with Doctors Without Borders for several years, contends that 'humanitarian reason governs precarious lives'. In his book entitled *The Humanitarian Reason*, he has probed and criticised the moral sentiments behind humanitarian endeavours, asserting that people often prefer to speak about interests or justice, legitimising actions by declaring them to be humanitarian. In his book he writes about the paradox of solidarity:

> The tension between inequality and solidarity, between a relation of domination and a relation of assistance, is constitutive of all humanitarian government. It explains the frequently observed ambivalence of authorities, of donors, and of agents working for the good of others, and accounts for what has been called compassion fatigue. But it also explains the shame felt by the poor all those who receive these gifts that call for no counter gift, and accounts for the resentment and even hostility sometimes expressed by the disadvantaged and the dominated toward those who think of themselves as their benefactors…. The asymmetry is political rather than psychological: a critique of compassion is necessary not because of the attitude of superiority it implies but because it always presupposes a relation of inequality. (pp. 3–4)

Similarly, Miriam Ticktin (2011), in her work on professional humanitarian NGOs, including Doctors Without Borders, has argued that, in the context of restrictive immigration policies, these exceptional 'apolitical' humanitarian clauses—and the transnational institutions, discourses, and practices that give them shape—play a critical role in the governing of immigrants. She states further that even activists who fight for immigrant women's rights are compelled to search for evidence of gendered forms of violence, such as rape or forced marriage, as these became the most significant factors by which refugees could prove their humanity, and thereby these regimes of care ultimately work to displace possibilities for larger forms of collective change, particularly for those most disenfranchised (p. 3). Thus, for these scholars the divisions between the politics of change

and equality and the humanitarian ideal have been of the utmost concern. Immigration is one of the most politically charged issues in current times, but humanitarian aid organisations and NGOs tend to dismiss the politics of immigration, claiming neutrality and failing to comprehend the unjust and unequal politics of closed-door immigration policies and the effects of colonialism, and instead claim to demonstrate compassion, affect, and sympathy in 'neutral' ways. However, the question of politics remains one of the most endemic challenges of humanitarian relief and law (Feldman 2007). Feldman, in her work on the history of aid work in Gaza by Quakers, contends that:

> Its **nonpolitical stance** is often what makes humanitarianism possible—permitting access to populations in need of aid, convincing countries to sign on to refugee conventions—but it also gives humanitarianism a sometimes cruelly narrow focus, able to keep people alive but entirely incapable of changing the conditions that have put them at such great risk. (p. 129)

Humanitarian interventions have also been likened to policing and biopolitical governance, especially in camps in which the local and international NGOs control the police and manage displaced persons' lives (Agier 2011). The rhetoric of 'humanitarianism' and 'political realm' was understood in such a way that the former was seen to entail positive aspects, given its core principles of humanity, impartiality, and neutrality, and the latter was viewed negatively as 'the domain of cynical, self-interested, "devilish" behaviour with the incursions of politics into the ethical sphere posing the greatest threat to humanitarian action' (Nyers 2006, p.32).

Thus, despite the emphasis on neutrality and non-political positions, scholarship on large-scale NGOs' participation in the humanitarian realm has demonstrated that the ethical humanitarian sphere cannot be disentangled from the political sphere, especially in the realm of refugee politics, when humanitarian actors, despite their apolitical position, become complicit in the management and biopolitical governance of refugees. Nyers (2006) asserts that these very actors ultimately come to work in conjunction with the state, and it is for this reason that humanitarianism cannot be understood as a neutral, impartial, and non-political concept but rather one that is implicated in a fundamentally political and (when pushed to the limit) violent relationship (p. 41).

The empirical and ethnographic work which forms the basis of this study traces the ways in which smaller-scale refugee support networks and

refugee activists have engaged in anti-racist and anti-colonial activism in differing ways while employing different strategies. Unlike larger NGOs, which the scholarship describes as being focused solely on humanitarian work while claiming to be neutral, this study describes the ways in which small-scale grassroots groups based in Berlin engaged in refugee support work while adopting an explicit political stance and anti-racist ideologies. To this end, the study demonstrates that refugee activism and support work were not understood in apolitical and neutral ways. The refugee tent protests and the three types of activist groups, solidarity activism, intersectional activism, and decolonial and media activism, which I discuss in this book describe themselves on their websites in ways that make apparent that they are influenced by anti-racist, feminist, and LGBTQI-friendly ideologies and decolonial approaches.

Nevertheless, these groups, including self-organised refugee initiatives that formed during and shortly after the refugee protests, maintained their political stance, but also adhered to humanitarian values and at times an insistence on ideas related to humanity, love, and kindness. However, the solidarity workers and refugee activists positioned themselves differently with respect to political goals, and humanitarian values and understandings about humanity. Several of the activists distanced themselves from the notion of 'charity work', even though they participated in care work and understood their work as an extension of their political endeavours, while others tried to negotiate with such tensions. Thus, this study demonstrates how anti-racist and anti-capitalist political endeavours and care work came to intertwine and overlap. The book shows that political acts which contest the state narrative about immigration and humanitarian work cannot be understood in isolation from one another, and that non-reciprocal and unequal relations develop between individuals with resources and those who are made vulnerable by the state.

The abovementioned scholarship has mainly focused on countries such as France, Greece, and Italy within Europe. There has been relatively less work conducted in the German state on solidarity efforts and refugee self-organised groups which resist internal border regimes, racial exclusions, and state power. Germany is one of the EU countries which receives a significant share of refugees and rejects a large number of refugees arriving from the Global South, the details of which I describe in Chap. 2. Thus, it becomes important to examine the resistance strategies in Germany with all their complexities.

In sum, scholarship has discussed in depth the various ways in which refugees came to be supported by NGOs, volunteers, and activist groups, and have simultaneously fought for their own rights with the nation-state. However, much of this scholarship has not attended to the ways in which small-scale solidarity and self-organised refugee groups mobilise against state power, border regimes, and racialisation processes with which refugees are forced to contend during their asylum process. Given the increasing levels of anti-immigrant sentiment and attitudes at state and societal level, it is important to examine how organisations and groups with limited resources at their disposal endeavour to disassemble particular discourses and state-level policies.

Coming to Berlin and Doing Ethnography

On October 3, 2013, I saw news reports on television of a fishing boat catching fire, which was carrying refugees mainly from Ghana, Eritrea, and Somalia. This boat had drifted and sunk less than half a mile from the Italian coastal island of Lampedusa, and of the 518 people on the boat, 366 died. The news coverage furthered my interest in discussions related to EU border regimes. Up to this juncture, my research focus with respect to migration had been primarily on California. A few weeks after the drowning of refugees in the Mediterranean, I chanced upon an event for artists working with refugees at the University of Manchester. At this event, I met Michael Ruf, the director of a German theatre company, *BuhnefürMenschenrechte* (Stage for Human Rights) and the author of the play 'Asyl-Monologe'. Following a brief conversation with him, I decided to visit Berlin in order to better understand the complexities of migration policies, as well as to examine the collaborations between artists and migrants. I decided to write an article on the topic, and during this process I met with actors from the play who directed me to the ongoing tent protest at Oranienplatz.

I subsequently decided to trace this activism from the perspective of the refugees and their understandings of the protest, and continued to visit Berlin over several years since I found the political activism and solidarity work of much interest and to a large extent it also aligned with my own political views. I appreciated the fact that people did not simply participate in care and 'volunteer' work, but that the refugee activists and the support network made specific demands for the rights of asylum seekers and tried to fight inequalities and the racist and unjust asylum system.

After the Green Party and the police evicted the tent protesters at Oranienplatz, I participated in several groups which had been formed during the resistance as well as subsequent to the evictions. Some of these initiatives included 'Schlafplatzorga', 'The Media Group', 'Daily Resistance Newspaper', 'The School Group', 'Wearebornfree Radio Humanity Matters', and 'International Women's Space.' In this book, I outline and examine the workings of three of these initiatives, since it is beyond the scope of the book to include an analysis of all the different initiatives that emerged during the refugee mobilisation.

In order to demonstrate and analyse the workings of the groups, I employed 'intimate ethnography', a term coined by Waterston and Rylko-Bauer (2006), and multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995). Waterston and Rylko-Bauer assert that intimate ethnography allows for a foregrounding of epistemological, methodological, emotional, and ethical issues. Because I directly participated in two of the three groups on a regular basis over a period of five to six years, I came to know several of the people quite closely, and supported the groups' political endeavours in various respects. This level of intimacy allowed me to critically analyse the groups' functioning, the participants' political perspectives, their emotional and affective ties to the groups, and the ethical dilemmas with which they dealt. Intimate ethnography also allowed me to describe my own positioning in relation to the groups, as I did not engage in participant observation but rather participated in these groups on a consistent basis. Although I lived in Manchester, I was able to go to Berlin relatively easily on a regular basis, and when I was in Manchester I diligently listened to the radio programmes streamed by Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio and participated in the shows virtually on some occasions. More significantly, intimate ethnography allowed me to understand the complexities, frictions, and dilemmas underpinning political actions and solidarity work, as well as the sociality and co-operative aspects of refugee activism. This method also allowed me to understand the shifting nature of political activism and solidarity practices and the reasons for such shifts.

This study simultaneously employed multi-sited ethnography, a practice which was made popular by George Marcus (1995), who contended that 'the object of study is ultimately mobile and multiply situated so any ethnography of such an object will have a comparative dimension that is integral to it, in the form of juxtapositions of phenomena that conventionally have appeared to be 'worlds apart' (p. 102). The sites for this study are situated in different spaces: I first discuss the broader political context for

refugees in Germany, and subsequently examine the refugee resistance and three different grassroots organisations, which met in three different spaces in Berlin. Thus the study does not focus on any single site of struggle, but rather describes and analyses how various initiatives worked in shifting spaces in the same city, using different strategies.

My repeated visits to Berlin from Manchester aroused much curiosity amongst refugees, and members of the European support network. Several of them asked me about my origins, my reasons for being in Berlin, and my interest in the refugee resistance. Some members of the refugee and support network assumed that I was a journalist visiting from Manchester to cover the refugee mobilisation in Germany. Some members of the radical left activists distanced themselves from me, as I did not fit neatly into any particular category. Several of them understood that I was an academic doing research, which was also problematic for them, since in their perspective I represented a mainstream institution, and was focused on furthering my individual career, although many of the activists themselves were studying at some of Germany's leading universities. Furthermore, I was of a different generation from the majority of the activists and refugees, who were between the ages of 17 and 30 years. However, during my initial years, I became friends with an activist of Italian-Croatian origin, Tanya, who was closer to my age. She also shared my political views and became a key source of support.

During my initial time in Berlin, I forged connections more comfortably with refugees in comparison to the European activists, as I felt closer to them than to the latter. I met several English- and French-speaking refugees from different African countries and shared their experience of being born and having resided in a country which bore the brunt of a colonial legacy and which continued to experience neo-colonialism in different ways. I also met several refugees of Pakistani origin and was happy to converse with them in Urdu. I believe that my personal experience of continued displacement and emplacements helped me connect with the people I met. There were some refugees who I admired for their delivery of articulate speeches during rallies, their social grace, their sense of humour, and their perseverance in dire situations, whereas there were others who I met who seemed to have assumed a relatively passive role. I came to know some refugees quite well and became friends with them over the years, whereas there were others I met with only a few times and experienced language and communication barriers.

I was always conscious of my privileges, given that I had EU and British citizenship and relatively stable employment at the time of my fieldwork. The fact that I was from Britain furthered my connections with some of the people, who idealised Britain and continued to consider it their 'mother country.' However, the myth of Britain as a cosmopolitan nation-state where it is relatively easy to find work also led to some tensions between some of the newly arrived people in Germany and myself in Berlin. I discovered that refugees from countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Gambia, former colonies of Britain, wanted me to help them find a way to come and reside in Britain.

I find it problematic to use the racialised terms 'refugees', 'migrants', and 'asylum seekers'. These categories have been imposed by the 'international state- system in turmoil' (see Benhabib https://www.eurozine.com/critique-of-humanitarian-reason/) upon individuals who have been widely regarded to be leading vulnerable lives, with political implications and understood as *Homo Sacers* (Agamben 1998) or systematically Othered, alienated, and racialised. Refugees traverse nation-states for multiple and complex reasons, and several scholars have contended that they are actors in their own right. However, it is difficult to describe and analyse the politics of their situation and their resistance and representations without referring to these imposed categories.

In this book, I aim to provide a realistic and complex view of some of the actions undertaken by refugees and solidarity workers. I try my best not to overly idealise their actions. Yet in the current political climate, when there is a rise in xenophobia, Islamophobia, and immigration controls, it is a challenge not to fall into the trap of advocacy. Heath Cabot (2016) reminds us that ethnographers tend to silence and truncate the voices of refugees when they amplify their voices or show them as vulnerable. To this end, the refugees I speak about in this book are the ones who I came to know closely, and thus I was in a position to provide a more complex view of how they understood themselves and their actions. There were people I met who had less of a visible presence, and there were many who I didn't come to know because of language barriers and other reasons, so their voices could not be included. Nevertheless, this study aims to provide a complex overview of people's activisms in interview formats, their self-representation in the media, and their representation by advocacy groups.

I became acquainted with the European activists during the summer of 2015, when I became relatively more active with the group Schlafplatzorga,

and in the following years with some of the other initiatives. However, because of the dynamic nature of solidarity activism I did not come to know some of the newer participants as closely as I did some of the older members who were active from the very start of these groups. Nevertheless, I interviewed some of the newer members and became close to a few of them who stayed with the groups. I went to their parties, dinners, and Küfas (cooking for all actions), attended concerts with them, participated in their plenaries, and joined them during Berlin's several demonstrations. In 2017, when I decided to write a monograph on this topic, many of the solidarity workers readily agreed to give interviews and encouraged me in this endeavour, and I conducted 20 interviews with European activists. Throughout this book I also offer reflections on my experiences, as I was an active participant and involved in doing solidarity work.

Organisation of the Book

This book is based on an ethnography of the refugee tent protests and case studies of three initiatives in Berlin, the members of which resisted the asylum system and the racialisation of refugees in the German state. In this vein, each chapter illustrates the activism and the workings and strategies of three initiatives and depicts how the members fight against the unjust system in various ways. Chapter 2 provides an overview of recent immigration policies in the German state and the everyday forms of racism that refugees experience as a consequence of restrictive laws and deportation policies, and the difficult living conditions to which they are subjected. This chapter also focuses on the rise of xenophobia and nationalism and the increasing popularity of far-right anti-immigrant parties in Germany. Chapter 3 provides an introduction to the refugee tent protests that occurred in Berlin starting in 2012. This chapter also demonstrates how the different groups were formed and the need for their existence. Chapter 4 discusses in depth how an initiative, Schlafplatzorga, which emerged out of the refugee protests, supported finding temporary and long-term accommodation for refugees, who, in defiance of the state's asylum laws, were seeking to reside in Berlin rather than residing in their mass accommodation. This chapter in particular focuses on some of the frictions that arise when a group is engaged in doing practical solidarity work and politics simultaneously. Chapter 5 examines the workings of an advocacy group, International Women's Space, for refugee women, which was also formed during the refugee protests in Berlin. This chapter

demonstrates how the group supported asylum seekers with lawyer's workshops, and depicts the ways in which they advocated for them through publication of their testimonies and narratives in books. This chapter also examines the interplay of engaging in care and support work and doing politics. While Chaps. 4 and 5 focus on practical solidarity and feminist and intersectional activism, Chap. 6 shows how a group of refugees found their own platform, the radio and social media, to air their own views. This chapter demonstrates how the refugee activists aim to decolonise the media, critique solidarity, and advocate for emancipation. The final chapter, Chap. 7, discusses the workings of the different initiatives (described in the earlier chapters) in a comparative framework, the advantages and disadvantages of engaging in diverse forms of activism, and the dilemmas of melding care work and anti-racist politics within refugee and solidarity activism.

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CHAPTER 2

The Everyday Racialisation of Refugees in German State and Society

Introduction

The German Basic Law article 16a grants asylum for those who are politically persecuted in their home country. Until June 30, 1993, anyone had the right to ask for political asylum in Germany under the Basic Law. This meant that asylum seekers could not be turned away at the German border. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, the constitutional right to asylum was significantly revised and restricted (Achakzai 2018).

It was in the 1990s that the German state began to introduce restrictive asylum policies, which coincided with a shift in the migration pattern to Germany when migrants from the former Yugoslavia (the majority of them from Bosnia) began to arrive. It was at this point in time that the asylum and temporary protection regulations became extremely restrictive, pushing the vast majority of civil war refugees from the Balkan into a 'voluntary' return (Bosswick 2000: 50). In 1993 there were almost 100,000 deportations from Germany (Kirchoff and Lorenz 2018). People who came increasingly from the Global South were considered potentially problematic migrants and consequently the discourse on 'bogus asylum seekers' who 'abused' the 'generosity' of the German asylum system grew in the early 1990s, with increasing discussions on limited capacities and the costs of reception such that 'Overforeignization' (Überfremdung) became a dominant trope (Müller 2010; Kirchoff and Lorenz 2018).

This chapter examines and describes the differing forms of exclusion which refugees were subjected to in Germany from 2012 to 2019, when

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the German state witnessed another peak in immigration. I understand such exertions of state power in terms of colonial domination over people from the Global South by the German state and mainstream society. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the German migration political context and state power within which the refugee mobilisations and solidarity work occurred. Drawing on reputable and long-standing websites such as Pro Asyl, Infomigrants.net, and the German newspaper Taz.de and the broadcaster Deutsch Welle, this section of the book foregrounds the institutional racism and systematic Othering of refugees with respect to refugee camps, detentions, and deportations. I will additionally discuss how the growing popularity of the extreme right-wing parties contributed to the formation of restrictive asylum policies, which further led to the *Ausgrenzung* (exclusions) of asylum seekers from German society and evoked anxieties about immigrants amongst segments of the German population. Thus, on one level refugees experienced institutional racism and colonial domination from above by the German state, but on another level refugees came to be racialised by German society, fuelled by the right-wing ideologies of populist parties.

In 2018, 185,853 people applied for asylum in Germany, of which 27.3% received refugee status, 16.6% received subsidiary protection, 6.3% received humanitarian protection, and 49.8% were rejected outright (Source: the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, BAMF, Asylgeschäftsbericht, December 2018: https://bit.ly/2T3P04). According to the same source, the majority of people who were recognised as 'refugees' in 2018 were from Syria and their rejection rate was only 0.2% in comparison with countries such as Afghanistan and Nigeria for which the rejection rate was as high as 47.8% and 76.2% respectively. Thus the German state favoured highly skilled white refugees over black and 'economic migrants' from countries which continued to experience ongoing conflicts. In this way, Germany's asylum policy distinguished the 'deserving' refugees from the undeserving 'economic migrants.' The 'undeserving economic migrants' encountered refusals and came to be racialised and denigrated by society and the state at large, whereas the highly skilled migrants who arrived from Syria to Germany received global attention and much sympathy during 2015—2016 (however, in the subsequent years the 'welcoming' mood changed to an unwelcoming one amongst certain segments of German society). Although many Africans and people from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Albania, and Pakistan had arrived in Germany prior to 2015 and continued to arrive in the

subsequent years, the acceptance rate for Syrians remained high while many refugees from these latter regions were subject to deportations and consequently experienced precarity. Such levels of inequality with respect to acceptance and refusal rates reflect 'arrangements of race that are interpenetrated by US and European political-economic interests' (Holmes and Castañeda 2016, p. 18). And as Gutiérrez notes:

> While current EU migration and asylum policies do not operate *explicitly* within a framework of racial or ethnic difference, by coupling nationality and the right to asylum, they construct hierarchies in the recognition or rejection of asylum in terms of nationalities. This places people in zones of recognition or rejection of the human right to liveability. This coupling follows from the foundation of racialised notions of the Other. (Gutiérrez-Rodriguez, p. 24)

In Germany, even recognised refugees and asylum seekers remain segregated from the local population. While the notion of borders and fortresses has been discussed extensively in scholarship, what also needs to be acknowledged is that the nation-state—and this is particularly true for Germany since it is divided into 16 states with considerable autonomy and sovereignty— can erect further borders by policing its own districts even after the refugee manages to traverse various border regimes and becomes a 'legal' resident as an asylum seeker. In this way, the state has the power to create a two-tiered apartheid system between those with formal citizenship and those without. Thus the State controls, dominates, exploits, and exerts colonial power over people arriving from the Global South and has considerable leeway to include its white citizens and male migrants with high skill levels and social capital, while those arriving from the 'underdeveloped and economically poor' Global South, women, and people from poorer countries with a colonial past and present are excluded, controlled, and racialised. Bhambara (2017) contends that rights attributed to European national citizens that are not extended to others are privileges and in this way imperial inclusion based on hierarchical and racialised domination is reproduced as national—joint European—exclusion, reflecting earlier forms of domination and similarly racialised. The refugee in the German state came to be understood as the racialised Other through imposition of laws, segregationist housing, and most significantly through hypernationalistic rhetoric and membership in the nation-state. In doing so, some lives gain prevalence over others. Sylvia Wynter has noted:

> the correlated hypothesis here is that all our present struggles with respect to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, struggles over the environment, global warming, severe climate change, the sharply unequal distribution of the earth resources… are all differing facets of the central ethnoclass Man vs. Human struggle. Central to this struggle also is the usually excluded and invisibilised situation of the category at the global level by refugee/economic migrants stranded outside the gates of the rich countries, as the postcolonial variant of Fanon's category of les damnés. (Wynter 2003, p. 261)

The following sections illustrate the emergence of a segregationist system and racial domination between refugees and German society.

Institutional and Everyday Racism at Refugee Camps and Reception Centres in Germany

One of the major ways that asylum seekers came to be immediately ostracised in the German state was through the manner in which they received accommodation. In Germany, it is the Residence Act (14) that dictates the living arrangements provided to asylum seekers. When asylum seekers first arrive in Germany, they are housed in central reception centres where they have very limited rights. They are subject to heavy surveillance and constant monitoring through ID checks, do not have the right to work, and their movements are curtailed. In this manner refugees' quotidian experiences tend to be set apart from that of German society. For example, they are subject to *Residenzpflicht*, which means that they are not allowed to leave the federal district to which they have been assigned. Asylum seekers cannot even visit a lawyer or a counselling centre without a special permit. People from countries that have been labelled 'safe countries of origin' even have a *Wohnverpflichtung* (obligation to reside) in the *Erstaufnahmeeinrichtungen* (EAE; 'initial accommodation facilities') throughout the full duration of their asylum proceedings and are thus subject to the residency requirement during the entire process (§47 Ia AsylG) (El-Kayed and Haman 2018, p. 139).

Several of these centres are located in smaller towns and others in cities. The conditions in these reception centres tend to be extremely difficult as they are heavily securitised and refugees have to share their space with a number of other people, while they are banned from working; many end up working in 'black jobs' where they are exploited and paid wages below the minimum standard. It is in these reception centres that refugees

encounter much inequality since individuals who are understood to be from 'countries in conflict' are fairly rapidly assigned to a collective refugee accommodation in a specific federal state, while others arriving from countries which are deemed safer have a longer period of waiting or await deportation (Bhimji 2019). Thus it is in these initial centres that refugees experience violation of basic human rights and dignity. Such border regime enforcements within the German state should be understood in terms of structural and institutional racism, since during this period refugees are forced to live their lives segregated from the rest of German society and have limited access to the basic services which are readily available to European and German citizens. It is at these camps that rejected asylum seekers also encounter the threat of deportation since parts of the initial reception centre could be a detention centre, where rejected asylum seekers are imprisoned so that they can be deported directly to their home countries (Ott and Wiebke 2019).

Under the management of privatised security companies, situations in reception centres can be extremely restrictive. For example, the reception centre at Eisenhüttenstadt was known to be overcrowded, and the toilet and shower rooms were extremely small and lacked basic hygienic conditions. The refugees were deprived of accessing necessary information and there was heavy securitisation everywhere and food was inadequate. It was in Eisenhüttenstadt that a racist incident received some attention in 2013 when a nurse insisted that an ill person speak in German. In response, the activist group Corasol, which advocated for refugees, called for a protest demonstration (http://corasol.blogsport.de/2013/05/29/3-6-refugee-protest-demo-in-eisenhuettenstadt/).

In 2018, the German state introduced Ankunft-Reception, Entscheidung-Decision, and Rückführung-Reptraiation camps (AnKEr). In these camps, refugees are compelled to stay for the first 18 months upon their arrival. BAMF, youth welfare offices, the department of justice, immigration authorities, and other state institutions are all located in a single area. Such concentration of all offices in one location led to further restrictions in the movement of refugees and increased segregation from German society.

The notion of AnKER centres rests on a racist ideology and colonial mind-set. With all the services located in one site, AnKER centres serve to further segregate immigration population from civil society and exert state power. The length of stay in the AnKER centre can be 18 months–longer than what it is in reception centres, and additionally 'bescheunigte

Verfahren' (accelerated procedures) are served in particular to reject and deport people excluded according to an unequal and discriminatory territorial logic of 'safe countries of origin' and 'safe third countries' more quickly (Lagermobi. Network 2018). AnKER centres further blur the functions of refugee accommodation such as initial reception, collective accommodation, and detention.

Following their stay at reception centres, refugees are subsequently transferred and housed in shared or mass accommodations in *Gemeinschaftsunterkünften*, GU (collective accommodation centres), within a municipality in Germany. Refugees are subsequently 'distributed' around the German territory via the *Erstverteilung von Asylbewerbern* (EASY), the 'Initial Distribution of Asylum-seekers' system. According to section 45 of the Asylum Act, the distribution of asylum seekers within Germany is based on quotas (the so-called 'Koenigsteiner Schluessel' which is based on the tax revenue and population of the German regional states. Thus, refugee accommodations fall under the jurisdictions of the various federal states and local authorities.

In many cases, refugees are sent to remote locations and the local authorities dictate policies regarding their movement in these areas. It is in this manner that refugees are systematically segregated and isolated from German society and subsequently come to be racialised in the public's imagination when they become either invisible or hypervisible. However, racialisation of refugees must be understood to form part of Europe's colonial legacy. Gutierrez has noted that racism is not an exception to European modernity but is at its very foundation. It is in this entanglement that migration emerges in the nineteenth century as a modern nation-state colonial tool of governing the population in racial, ethnic, national, religious, and cultural terms (p. 21).

Camps, State Power, and Institutional Racism

Through the creation of refugee camps, the states exercise their sovereign power in order to 'delineate membership and cast non-members out of the political community and eventually beyond the physical borders of the country, often at the expense of their human rights' (Bosworth et al. 2016). The remoteness and derelict appearance of the refugee camps (which are usually converted DDR-era hotels, schools, or government administrative buildings) often insight comparisons to prisons or detention centres (Chemin 2019).

The state is able to exercise its power through a network of mechanisms. Thus, the asylum system should be understood as a manifestation of biopower and governmentality such that some lives become disposable while others hold more value. As Foucault has noted.

> A power whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms…such a power has to quantify, measure appraise and hierarchize. (Foucault 1978, p. 144)

In the case of refugee accommodation centres, the state delegates its power to the Federal State, the *Auslanderbehorde* (the foreigner's office), the security guards at the refugee camps, and the local police, who then have the power to govern immigrants' lives. Invoking several scholars, Kreichauf describes the exclusionary nature of refugee camps:

> First, the nature of a camp is to separate populations and to create a distinction between those inside (immigrants as camp residents) and those outside (the local population). Its objective is to contain a specific category of the population. The extent of this containment varies, but segregation is a result of it. Second, camps are demarcated and have boundaries; there is a clear spatial distinction between the space inside and the space outside, physical barriers and other material and social forms of containment (Agier, 2014; McConnachie, 2016). Third, camps are exceptional in legal terms, since they are usually governed by different legal instruments and frameworks than those in the surrounding areas and that apply to citizens of a state (Agamben, 1998). Turner (2016, p. 141) argues that, 'they are legally under the jurisdiction of the host society but also exempted from it' due to regulations and laws of asylum and alien acts. Lastly, a refugee camp is a space of permanent temporality. On the one hand, it is not meant to remain; it is not intended to be a durable solution, but is applied as a device to temporarily react to forced migration. On the other hand, the length of the stay in camps and the existence of camps are unknown; they 'exist between the temporary and the permanent' (Hailey, 2009, p. 4). (Kreichauf 2018, p.)

Thus the German refugee accommodation system operates in a manner such that it should be understood as a product of the German state's racist laws and thus an element of 'institutional racism' (Pieper 2008). More significantly, the camp system is also an entity where imperialism is reproduced such that refugees from the Global South are de-humanised, deprived of any autonomy, not allowed to provide any input in the

running and operation of the camps, and where their movements are constantly monitored. If the refugees manage to find work, they are forced to apply for work permits through the *Auslanderbehorde* in the specific federal state, such that the state has power to grant or reject their permits. If work permits are denied, refugees are subsequently forced to work in the informal sector where they become vulnerable to exploitation.

Refugee camps in Germany can be thus understood to be the starting point for processes of racialisation and 'territorial stigmatization'; since refugees are dispersed to a stigmatised space, they also become visible (Wacquant 2007). Consequently, the racial domination of people who arrive in the German state starts at reception centres and collective accommodations. Thus asylum seekers are subject to colonial and racial domination, at the very outset, which they struggle to contest and defy, fighting for their freedom and autonomy while they negotiate the German bureaucratic systems (Bhimji 2016a, b).

At these camps there are no national regulations regarding size, equipment, or facility standards, and while some of the federal states have implemented binding rules on minimum standards, others have not (Wendel 2014). Moreover, it is for state and local authorities to decide whether to place people primarily in collective accommodation centres on the municipal level or to support decentralised living arrangements such as private apartments. The length of time that refugees are kept waiting (Oldfield and Greyling 2015) in regard to housing thus depends, among other things, on the state and municipality to which they are allocated (El-Kayed and Hamann 2018).

The conditions and size of these mass accommodations tend to vary considerably. Some of the accommodation centres host only half a dozen people, or two or three families, while others accommodate several hundred. Due to this large variance in accommodation situations, it is not always possible to speak of 'the' German refugee centre per se (Hartmann 2017). The regulation of refugees in the Federal Republic of Germany is embedded in a multilevel system that includes laws and regulations at the EU level, the federal level, the federal state level, and the municipal level (Aumüller et al. 2015; Schammann and Kühn 2017; Wendel 2014). The laws and regulations from these various levels combine to affect the way refugees are housed in the asylum-seeking process and when and how refugees can enter the housing market (El-Kayed and Hamann 2018). Nevertheless, for many refugees, particularly those who the German state considers to be from so-called safe countries of origin, the period of

waiting could be much longer and filled with uncertainty. It is during such periods that refugees are forced to confront social isolation, institutional violence, and everyday forms of racism, as well as ambiguity and insecurity. Thus the racialisation process, which starts at the reception centre, exacerbates and becomes part of refugees' quotidian reality upon their allocation to collective accommodation centres located in various federal states in the German state.

In an interview in 2014, activist Napuli Lang offered the following account to me, which reflects her everyday experiences of racism in the refugee camps:

> The experience you can see is as if you are a prison. We were just kind of like machines, you know. We have nothing to think and we just sleeping. We just ate and sleep. This is my experience because the first thing when I went there, I was thinking that they will ask me or I will ask them for example, go to the office and introduce myself. And also present my case. It was different. They were just like, "Okay. This is newcomer." The newcomer come here and go to this corner. They took the names and from there they just give you the names and divide us into groups of 12 to 6 people and from there they said, "Okay. Come tomorrow and make the interview." We are shifting from place to place and we don't know anything. And then they ask you, "Who are you? How do you come here? What is your case?" And you know they divide the interview. Then they ask, how do they come here. And then after that they give you the house. And then they give you the camp. And this is the camp where they say that you don't have the right to move anywhere. And then at the same time we are from different countries. Different languages, Imagine then we are in one room. All of us with different languages. So then we would have misunderstandings. We don't know what she said. And then when you start laughing or smiling and then something make her to be ruder. "Hey, I'm telling you this and you are laughing." Then people are fighting because of this misunderstanding. Also the woman then they have a different problem than the men. For example, children taking showers in the same place as where the men are taking showers. And then the shower is just open and the men can just come like this. In the Lager, there are people who were not drinking before they of course start to drink to forget about what they were passing through. And with this drinking it causes a lot of problems to the women. They just come there and you are threatened by them or sexual harassment. And we cannot live like this fighting all the time. And some people just have problems-they are sometimes talking alone by themselves. And you know just saying, "Deutschland Deutschland." By this time I don't know what is Deutschland.

> So it was very strange. And then I started to think, "What is this? People are coming from trauma. And they traumatize them even more. They have problems. And what is the idea behind this way? And why are they transferring the people from the centre to small centres?" We are transferred to other Lagers. We are there for five years, ten years, and 15 years. So that make me more, like, "I cannot be like this anymore."

These views were echoed by almost everyone I met who had resided in the refugee camps in Berlin. Men and women complained about feeling isolated from German society, about the quality of the food, about the excessive securitisation of the camp, and about the sheer monotony of constantly waiting for their respective asylum process to move forward. Thus refugees experienced institutional violence and racisms in the everyday at these camps and it is in this manner that race became analytically central and even more visible and brought racialisation of migrants into the everyday domain (Erel et al. 2016).

Racialisation and Racist Violence

The stark racialisation of individuals at camps became apparent when the police neglected to find the missing dead body of a female refugee in a timely manner. Rita, of East African origin, had been missing since April 7, 2019. It was two months later, in the middle of June, that the police found the remains of her body in a forest near the accommodation in Hohenleipisch, in the state of Brandenburg, where she lived with her family. Several leftist solidarity groups, including Women in Exile and International Women's Space, queried the very upsetting fact that her body was only found after two months—in the immediate vicinity of her place of residence—even though the police claimed to have launched extensive investigations and searches since April 25. They asked questions such as 'Why was it that the news of her murder became known only in the social media and in the local press?' and 'Why was it that there was no reporting in the public media about her death?' Why the silence (Bierbach 2019)?

Anti-racist, feminist, and migrant groups in Berlin and Brandenburg, such as Women in Exile and International Women's Space, contended that because of the racist German asylum laws, Rita was forced to live in isolation in the refugee accommodation Hohenleipisch, Brandenburg, where she waited for years for a decision in her asylum procedure. They were of

the view that the neglect, isolation, and racism that refugees experienced at the camps, which had been denounced by refugees and activists, had not been given attention, and that this woman's murder clearly demonstrated how unsafe and dangerous the so-called dormitory of 'Human Care' actually was for people who sought asylum.

Rita's disappearance and murder and the delayed response of the police must be recognised as evidence of the structural violence that refugees are subjected to because of inequalities in the asylum laws, which give more protection to refugees fleeing countries in conflict as opposed to 'safe countries'. Rita, who was of Kenyan origin, did not receive the protection of the state which would have given her access to a private apartment in a city in the German state; rather she was housed in a far-flung refugee accommodation centre in the middle of a forest. Hartmann notes:

> the most striking logic of inequality concerning refugee centres is the exclusion logic that differentiates between those inside these spaces and those outside, between the ones who were forced to flee, the uprooted, the ones then labelled 'irregular migrants' on the one hand, and the regular citizens on the other. The implicit and explicit justification of this order as the natural order of things, with all the implications of global and local inequalities, is an example par excellence for the above-introduced understandings of structural as well as cultural violence (Hartmann 2017).

However, in this context the impact of structural violence and physical violence and attacks, police negligence, and state sovereignty must be comprehended. The refugees are not simply ostracised in the camps but are vulnerable to physical violence. Rita's murder occurred in Brandenburg, a German federal state with considerable autonomy. To this end, state sovereignty should be understood 'to mean to have the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not' (Mbembé 2003) (Fig. 2.1).

The refugee camps cannot be regarded as a home or a safe space for the people who resided there. In some instances, the police attacked the refugee camps themselves. A case of police attacks in 2018 (Donauwörth, and many more similar raids and attacks in Bavaria) came to be publicised through the efforts of activists and independent media and blogs. A Gambian activist, David, created and wrote a blog, excerpted as follows:

Fig. 2.1 Women in exile call for justice for Rita

The police attack in Donauwörth and the deportation orders left the Gambian community in fear and terror. Deportations became more frequent and aggressive since the incident, people being picked up for deportation almost every night at two or three o'clock in the morning. Many left Germany by themselves, simply because they were afraid. In the beginning of the year around 360 people from the Gambia lived in the first reception camp in Donauwörth. Meanwhile there are maybe 50 people left. Donauwörth has become a terrifying place.

We refer to this police action as police violence because there was absolutely no need for their harsh and dangerous actions. I would like to underline that it is rare that protection seekers will seek to challenge the laws and conventions of the society. With this in mind, statements that refugees are 'aggressive' or 'dangerous' are unfounded and rather operate as political

> arguments to justify the isolation of refugees. The local community is thus split and the freedom of movement of certain people is denied.
>
> We wrote letters to give members of the Integration Committee the opportunity to visit our colleagues in prison. All applications were rejected. In mid-May, the police gradually released our colleagues from pre-trial detention. Some were deported directly from the prison to Italy, others were transferred to *Heims*. Each of the freed received a penalty order (*Strafbefehl*) for breach of civil order (*Landsfriedensbruch*), some additionally for resisting execution officers. Only those under 21 years old were not charged. Seven persons objected to the penalty orders, ready to go to court to fight their case. By mid-August, three of them had already been deported to Italy. The remaining four are seriously threatened by the Dublin procedure. (Jassey 2018)

Such incidents demonstrate the prevalence of structural racism within the German asylum system. Police attacks, raids, and deportations occur in camps when the refugees are known to originate from so-called safe countries of origin and seen as 'economic refugees', or even when there are agreements made between the German state and the government of the countries of origin, as was understood in the case of Afghanistan. Afghanistan was not categorised as a 'safe country of origin' and yet Afghans were frequently deported. State protection for refugees in this context operated at a minimum level and they became easy targets for deportation or were illegalised. Protests and retaliations against police raids, increased securitisation, and other repressive measures ended up in arrests, conflicts, and stigmatisation of refugees. Thus, the assisted refugee should be passive in order to be a true victim, genuinely traumatised and needy (Fassin and Rechtman 2009, p.252), but when involved in struggles and mobilisation for their own rights and emancipation they arouse suspicion and further racialisation at the level of institution, as was observed in the case of the Donauwörth raids where their voices were ignored. Subsequent to the arrests and raids, there were court hearings against two of the Gambian refugees who contested their penalty orders. Since the prosecution's main witnesses did not appear and did not inform authorities of their absence the trial was suspended. Despite the visibility and display of solidarity regarding this particular case, the refugees were silenced and translations were also not facilitated in an adequate manner during the hearings.

Migration and Populist Racist Mobilisation

The racialisation of asylum seekers received some media and mainstream attention when in 2015 and 2016 there were a series of racially motivated attacks on them, which was understood in the mainstream as a form of 'backlash' when the state registered more than 900,000 new refugees in the first 11 months of 2015. This figure was less than 1% of Germany's population. *The Independent* reported that attackers targeted homes at night–often throwing Molotov cocktails from moving cars or heavy stones at windows–but a 'shortage' of police in the eastern parts of the German state was also blamed. In the same year, where many of the camps were located, the right-wing anti-Islam group PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident) held a number of demonstrations in Germany.

One particular incident received international attention when early on a Saturday morning people broke into an apartment building and set it on fire in the town of Tröglitz in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt. This particular building was being re-modelled to accommodate 40 refugees. The arson attack left the building badly damaged and uninhabitable. However, this attack on the refugee camps was not limited to camps situated in Eastern Germany. The previous year, arsonists attacked and set fire to three buildings which were to be used by refugees in the town of Vorra, in the economically affluent southern German state of Bavaria. Similarly, there were arson attacks on camps in Germering, a town west of Munich known for its multicultural population where people from more than 120 countries lived. It was in the summer of 2012 that the city council unanimously adopted a plan to help integrate foreigners and refugees into the community, with the town's mayor, from the conservative Christian Social Union—the Bavarian sister party of Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats—writing in the preamble that Germering was diverse and had to remain open 'for a tolerant and a positive mutual future.' However, in 2014 an arsonist set fire to an asylum-seeker hostel in a town where ten refugees were residing in that part of the refugee camp. More recently, police recorded 609 attacks on refugees in the first half of 2019. According to the left-wing faction in the Bundestag, 'Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung' (NOZ), the politically motivated offences were instigated by far-right parties and they carried out 60 attacks on refugee accommodations as well as 42 against refugee support networks and organisations. The offences, the majority of which occurred in eastern Germany, ranged from insulting and

incitement to arson and dangerous assault, and 102 people were injured, including seven children.

The everyday life of European society and the lives that refugees and migrants led in isolated camps were significantly apart. Upon rejection of their asylum applications refugees are further forced into situations where they are compelled to lead invisible lives by going 'underground', securing low-paid 'black jobs' and seeking temporary support from the radical left within European society. During such periods, they are most likely afraid to contest overt forms of racism and police harassment in case they are arrested, detained, and deported.

Living with Deportability and Detainability

Since 2019, refugees whose asylum applications have been rejected have been further criminalised since there has been a shift in the law with respect to detaining migrants. The federal government has introduced policy measures which have made it even easier to send 'rejected' refugees to their countries of origin. One of the measures was the lifting of a rule that mandated that those in deportation detention must not be accommodated with regular prisoners. This rule, known as *Trennungsgebot*, or separation precept, came into effect in 2019, and federal states could accommodate those in deportation detention in the same facilities as regular prisoners. Furthermore, the German government in 2019 made the decision to apply deportation detention and departure custody more often, and the *Geordnete-Rückkehr-Gesetz* (Orderly Return Law) contained measures to lower the respective administrative hurdles. The law also provided for the introduction of an up to 14-day *Mitwirkungschaft* (assistance detention) (Bathke 2019). According to EU law, shared housing of those in deportation detention together with regular prisoners was not allowed. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) affirmed this in a ruling from 2014, which mandated that those in deportation detention must be accommodated in special facilities, separate from other prisoners. Before the ruling, the majority of German states did not have such special facilities.

Furthermore, the law which was proposed by Germany's Interior Minister Horst Seehofer lowered the threshold for the use of detention, making it easier for the government to detain people before deportation. While previously the law required the government to provide the reasons why it considered a person at risk of absconding, the new law shifted the burden of proof from the government to the person affected. The person

presumed at risk of absconding had to prove the non-existence of this risk while they were held in detention and without being provided with a legal representative. In addition, the everyday circumstances would further serve as an indicator of a risk of absconding, such as the fact that a person had paid a certain amount of money to come to Germany or that they had made false statements at some point, even if these had later been corrected.

The exclusionary practices and inequalities of the state's asylum system were further manifested in the process of actual deportations. Deportations within the EU were mainly carried out via commercial flights, and pilots had the right to refuse to fly if he or she deemed the deportee a safety threat. However, to prevent this, police officers started to accompany the deportee on the flights and increasingly authorities began to charter entire planes to carry out collective deportations. Chartered flights in the past few years were known to deport migrants to the Gambia, Pakistan, the Balkans, and Afghanistan. Thus deportations to certain countries were prioritised over other countries. As Nicholas De Genova asserts:

> Because the European asylum system maps roughly onto a divide between Europe and its exterior, illegalized migrants and rejected asylum seekers must frequently wear the border on their bodies: their racialization as anything deemed not white automatically signals their non-European (hence suspect) status. This racialized susceptibility to suspicion is also the foundation for the migrant's apprehension and susceptibility to detention—their detainability. (2016, p. 88)

In order to avoid deportations, many refugees were known to leave their reception centres and refugee accommodations and were forced to seek support of civil society and go 'underground.' In some cases, people left their reception centres upon receipt of negative notices following their interview and found refuge in Berlin. Nevertheless, they had to return to their reception centres every other day to clock in and out and show their presence and to keep their *Ausweiss* (identification card) valid, which would be liable to be blocked if they failed to clock in on a regular basis. Their precarious situation was further exacerbated if it was known that charter flights and collective deportations to a specific country were to take place on a given date.

The deportation process varied across federal states in Germany. For example, in the context of Afghanistan, even though the federal government had formally repealed all restrictions on deportations to Afghanistan,

there were several federal states in Germany which continued to deport Afghans who were categorised as Gefährder (endangered), Identitätsverweigerer (identity deniers), or Straftäter (offenders). These federal states, while pushing single men to Afghanistan without restrictions, repeatedly emphasised publicly that the deportations in one of the three categories should be a priority and often these categories were interpreted very differently by the federal states and clear criteria were often missing (Pro Asyl 2018). In this way, the federal state's exclusionary and subjective practices led to Afghans becoming deportable subjects. Thus it was the federal state which ultimately ended up with the leeway and power to decide who had the right to stay in Germany. In this regard the categorisation, racialisation, and ostracism of asylum seekers varied across federal states. For example, in July 2018, Interior Minister Seehofer boasted on his 69th birthday about the 69 men deported to Kabul. Of these deported subjects, 51 alone had lived in Bavaria, the federal state that makes significant deportation decisions (Pro-Asyl 30/7/2018). One such deportee died by suicide in Afghanistan, which led to further criticisms of Germany's deportation policies (Gebauer et al. 2018). Thus it was in this manner that the deportation process became gendered, racialised, and unequal. According to newer laws, even 'well-integrated' refugees with *Ausbildung* (apprenticeships) were subject to deportation. Asylum seekers with *Duldung* (temporary suspension of deportation) status were allowed to work after three months of their stay, but the local *Auslanderbehorde* of the federal state also had the power to issue or not renew the work permit. It was not unheard of for the *Auslanderbehorde* to refuse to renew a work permit even after an individual had worked for three years consistently at one job. Since employers were well aware of these facts, refugees who applied for work with a *Duldung* status were automatically discriminated against when applying for jobs in the German state.

Thus refugees were forced to reside with the idea of deportability and consequently as racialised subjects in the everyday. Federal states were equipped with much power and autonomy, and those states with populations and politicians which represented anxieties around immigrant populations could very well deport more individuals than others and certain asylum seekers in such states became relatively more 'deportable', as was the case for Afghans living in Bavaria.

Related to the deportation was also the social welfare of refugees. One of the changes made to the Asylum Seeker's Benefit Act which was passed in 2019, migrants was who were affected by the Dublin Regulation and

who generally arrived to German via Italy from Sub-Saharan African countries or from Greece from Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan were subject to further hardships since their social benefits were to be completely cancelled after two weeks of their arrival (Ott and Wiebke 2019). Thus refugees not only had to live under the constant threat of deportation because of the Dublin law but they also had to live without basic means. According to the Pro Asyl report, the exclusion of benefits thus violated the Basic Law, which protected a life in dignity for all people in Germany (Article 1 paragraph 1 of the Basic Law). It was in this way that the law functioned to further force people into working in the informal economy with little pay, and thus furthered the precarious conditions of people arriving from the Global South. The system thus marginalised, illegalised, and excluded refugees from mainstream German society as many made the decision not to apply for asylum because they were well aware of the fact that the outcome of their asylum process would not be positive and that they would simply wind up in detention centres or be subject to deportation to southern European countries or to their countries of origin. Thus many refugees simply arrived in major cities such as Berlin in the hope of finding work and restoring their personhood rather than working through the bureaucracies of the asylum system and becoming vulnerable to detention and deportation (Bhimji 2016a). It is in this way that colonial and imperial domination should be understood to be reproduced in the German state such that black and brown people from the developing world are forced to live lives which are set apart from white Europeans' lives while their bodies and intellect are exploited to the fullest.

Thus when the state ceased to distinguish between criminals and rejected asylum seekers, producing deportable and stigmatised subjects with the majority being from countries such as the Gambia, Senegal, Kenya, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Nigeria, Niger, and Mali, the consequences are such that these subjects not only live with the fear of deportation, they ultimately end up being fully exploited by the state when their labour is squeezed from them at minimum compensation.

Anti-Immigrant Anxieties in the Political Arena and German Society

The asylum system and laws were not produced in a vacuum in the German state. Two major right-wing groups, the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA) and Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), introduced a populist tone, which was quickly adopted by more moderate political actors, which in turn facilitated the normalisation of extremist statements and prepared the ground for action and restrictive laws and exclusionary practices towards refugees in the German state. A Dresden businessman, Lutz Bachmann, formed PEGIDA in October 2014 and sought support for its weekly rallies, urging tough immigration curbs. This right-wing group gained further momentum and popularity and the group expanded its ideology into various cities in the German state when thousands of people joined their marches. PEGIDA's own movement diminished over the years, but its extreme right-wing ideology became normalised and part of Germany's immigration politics. For example, PEGIDA's extremist views also gave rise to Germany's far-right party AfD, which also espoused anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic rhetoric, as well as Euro-sceptic ideologies. The AfD became the largest opposition party in Germany's lower house of parliament, the Bundestag. In the year 2017 German federal elections, the AfD won 12.6% of the vote and received 94 seats. In 2019, despite several demonstrations and protests against them, the AfD made significant gains in the September elections in the two eastern German states such that this anti-immigrant party won by 27.8% in Saxony, one of its best results in a German election, and 23.5% in Brandenburg, the state closest to Berlin.

PEGIDA and AfD in particular gained popularity in the eastern parts of the German state. These political parties were among the far-right groups which joined the violent protests in the eastern German city of Chemnitz that followed the stabbing of a 35-year-old German-Cuban. The German newspaper *Deutsche Welle* (DW) reported that many of the marchers were so sceptical of mainstream media and politics that it was difficult to imagine them engaging in a dialogue with people of different views. According to DW, the 'Lying press!' was the second-most frequent slogan chanted, second only to 'Merkel must go!' with journalists being attacked not far from the oversized bust of Marx.

Thus it was in eastern German cities such as Chemnitz that people's anxieties over a 'flood' of 'foreigners' had surfaced to an extent that they

even started to understand their own government and society as deeply alien. The AfD had become known to incite anger at Germany's position towards refugees, even though there were fewer refugees allocated to the federal states with less income, such as the eastern states of Germany. According to a survey, 63% were found to demonstrate such attitudes in eastern Germany, while 51% did so in western Germany. The survey also showed that the level of prejudice had grown even as fewer people applied for asylum in Germany ('Germans increasingly hostile towards asylum-seekers' 2019).

It was in 2015 that Angela Merkel declared, 'Wir schaffen das!'(We can do it!). She claimed to voluntarily accept one million refugees, mainly Syrians, even though this was required as a consequence of Hungary having closed its borders with Serbia, leading to a potential humanitarian disaster in the border region (Bhambara 2017; Hess and Kasparek 2017), but by 2019, it was evident that with the passage of laws which made it difficult for refugees to attain recognised status, and increased deportation and detention, the euphoria and burst of 'Willkommenkultur' towards refugees in the German state which had made international headlines had dimmed and dissipated.

The weakening of the 'Welcoming Culture' became evident in 2015, when on New Year's Eve a group of mostly non-European men sexually attacked women at the Cologne train station and the incident was blew up, thus inciting a racist hate campaign towards refugees and Muslims that had far-reaching consequences. The attacks gave rise to the popularity of far-right political parties, even though it was found that incidents such as these were frequent because of consumption of large amounts of alcohol. Proceedings were initiated against 330 accused, but only 30 cases made it to sentencing and only three involved a finding connected with a sexual crime. However, in 2017 the number of state police was increased tenfold to 1500. An additional 300 federal police and 600 crowd control police patrolled Cologne with the result that there was a significant increase in racial profiling (Sokoll 2017).

As a consequence of the media attention on this incident, the public outcry, combined with other racist articulations and attacks against refugees in Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Sweden and the EU refusal to offer asylum, drove politicians in Germany to pass a second asylum law packet, which restricted family reunification for two years for subsidiary refugees (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 2018). In the same week, Angela Merkel's party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), declared that Morocco,

Algeria, and Tunisia should be designated 'safe countries' (Mortimer 2016). This was no coincidence as the 'perpetrators' were believed to be of North African and Middle Eastern origin.

Fearful of the extreme right parties' gains and popularity, Germany's centrist parties thus started to formulate restrictive policies on immigration, particularly Merkel's CDU and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), which was under Seehofer's leadership. The interior minister thus introduced a host of deterring asylum laws, which further constrained the basic rights of refugees and pushed them into vulnerability. During this period, the far left political parties and citizens (who were also criminalised for their acts) bore the responsibility to struggle with activists among refugees for their 'right to have rights', in Hannah Arendt's terms. In this connection, several far left political parties and immigrant advocacy groups came together and organised a demonstration, *Unteilbar* (Indivisible), which contested the ideologies of the extreme right. The demonstration was held in 2018 in Berlin and in the following year in Dresden, the state capitol of Saxony in Eastern Germany, where the AfD had amassed much popularity and made several gains. Two-hundred and fifty thousand people attended the demonstration in Berlin and 40,000 people participated in Dresden. The need for these high-powered demonstrations and the strong presence of a number of migrant self-organised and solidarity initiatives further showed the levels of racism directed against migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in these years.

Concluding Comments

The above discussion demonstrates that refugees were not treated at par with German citizens and were forced to contend with laws and policies which enforced segregation and exclusionary practices at the institutional and societal level. Thus imperialism and colonial domination of people from developing countries was reproduced when white Europeans enjoyed certain privileges which were not shared by refugees of African and Middle Eastern origin as they struggled for their basic rights and worked in 'black jobs' with virtually no pay.

The relationship and links between Germany's colonial past and the current refugees were not recognised by lawmakers when they implemented restrictive asylum policies. It was in 1884 in Berlin that the German Chancellor Otto von Bismark called a conference with the aim to negotiate questions over the control of Africa and for Germany to gain

further control over the African content. Ambassadors from 14 European countries were present at this conference, including France, Germany, Great Britain, and Portugal, which at the time controlled most of colonial Africa. Prior to the conference, 80% of Africa had been under local control. Following the conference, the European nations gained control over the interior of the continent.

In the German state, the recognition of the fact that refugees come from countries with colonial relationships with Europe is entirely absent in the mainstream media and discourse and among politicians. The fact that many refugees idealise and mythologise Europe because of the propaganda of empire and call it their 'mother country' remains to be acknowledged by politicians who formulate exclusionary asylum policies. Thus refugees are understood vis-à-vis a racialised logic. While the mainstream failed to recognise the relationship and links between colonialism and the people who came to Germany via various difficult and treacherous routes, the refugee activists and some of the EU citizens who participated in activism and solidarity work recognised these colonial histories and thus understood that their solidarity work needed to be conducted in ways that were anti-colonial and anti-racist. The following chapters will examine some of the workings of self-organised and solidarity practices which drew their inspirations from decolonial and anti-racist ideals.

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CHAPTER 3

Heterogeneity and the Dynamics of Tent Protests and Squatting: The Refugee Movement at Oranienplatz

The Refugee Movement 2012–2014

In 2012, a 29-year-old Iranian asylum seeker died by suicide in a refugee shelter in Würzburg, Germany. Several refugees went on protests across Bavaria and in German cities demanding the end of *Residenzpflicht* (restriction of movement within the German state), the 'Lager', long asylum trials, deportations, rights to work and study, free German-language instruction, medical care, and the termination of the Dublin Regulation. Refugees undertook a bus tour, stopping at various towns and cities to inform, to campaign, and to bring refugees to Berlin from their Lager to campaign for their demands. This bus tour arrived in Berlin, where refugee activists who called themselves 'Refugee Strike Berlin' set up protest tents in Oranienplatz, a square in Kreuzberg, Berlin. Their protests came to be known as 'Refugee Tent Action' and they aimed to make demands, show resistance, and gain visibility. Over time, the activists understood their action to form part of a 'refugee movement' rather than a protest, because of its duration, the visibility their actions received by the media and German citizens, the frequent discussions with politicians, the numerous demonstrations, and the run-ins with the local police. In its initial months, the spirit of the entire action was indefatigable; it consisted of residing together in tents and discovering ways to negotiate together, despite the numerous languages spoken at the occupied square. On May 14, 2014, when the renowned African American political activist Angela Davis visited Berlin subsequent to the eviction of the tents at Oranienplatz,

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she declared the refugee movement as the 'movement of the 21st century'. She further stated, 'It's the movement that is challenging the effects of global capitalism, it's the movement that is calling for civil rights for all human beings.'

Over time, the 550 refugees and their support network occupied several places including an abandoned nearby school, Gerhart-Hauptmann Schule (GHS), following an agreement with the local Green Party-governed district as the winter in 2013 turned extremely cold and many people needed shelter from the tents set up in Oranienplatz. However, Oranienplatz continued to remain the main site of political resistance, with continued events, weekly meetings, demonstrations, and an information table for over two years, and even subsequent to the eviction of tents at 'O-Platz' many rallies and demonstrations still begin and end at this square.

The key demands of refugee protests in Berlin were for the German state to end the 'Lager' and the deportations of refugees, to provide them with access to work and education, and to end *Residenzpflicht*. In order to directly contest these spatial restrictions, the refugees defied this law, and left their accommodation or 'Lager', as they themselves understood and named the accommodation spaces and began a radical spatial movement in Berlin.

Asylum seekers from differing 'Lager' across the country arrived in Berlin and set up protest tents (in which many refugees resided for 18 months) with the help of supporters in Oranienplatz in Kreuzberg, a Green Party-governed district. These activists subsequently helped transform Oranienplatz into a site of political activity with an information tent and a circle tent, in which weekly meetings were held in multiple languages with translations, whose attendees included European activists and refugees. Several demonstrations took place as the space attracted much local and national support, and consequently this square was transformed into a space of residence and a protest camp.

Oranienplatz included formal and informal structures, including a kitchen in which refugees of differing nationalities cooked and ate together. The activists created their own online media presence, the O-Platz Media Group (https://oplatz.net/), which served as a platform to report related political events and news during the occupation of Oranienplatz and subsequent to the eviction thereof. The media group continues to operate with the headline runners at the top of its page reading 'Stop Deportation',

Fig. 3.1 The refugee tent protests at Oranienplatz

'Abolish Lagers', 'Abolish Residenzpflicht', 'Right to Work and Study', which were also the key demands of the refugee mobilisation (Fig. 3.1).

Oranienplatz as a Site of Anti-Racist Protests

For the refugees and their support network, the tent protests at Oranienplatz ceased to be a separate place of residence away from their 'Lager'. The refugees did not simply physically occupy the space, as is the case in many spatial movements, but rather they developed strong ties with the square and the neighbourhood and formed structures. Furthermore, the square became a meeting point for demonstrations and conflicts with the police, local politicians, and state order. Since it allowed for inclusion, equality, and contestations of power through different tactics, Oranienplatz became associated with refugee politics and adopted a radical and anti-racist tone. Furthermore, Oranienplatz became a representational space which stood in direct opposition to state-administered

'Lager', which were situated in far-flung areas so that refugees remained isolated from the wider German society. Thus the protests at Oranienplatz need to be understood as a site of anti-racist struggle which received considerable visibility on a national and international scale (see Bhimji 2016). It is this visibility which transformed it into discourse.

When I first went to the information table at Oranienplatz, a refugee activist immediately told me, 'We are here because you [Europeans] destroy our countries', thus making the argument that the 'refugee problem' needed to be linked with European colonialism and European sponsored dictatorships and wars. Napuli Langa, of Sudanese origin, who was one of the key activists, signalled in an article that many of the problems which the Global South encountered had to do with colonial legacies, racism, and imperialism, including the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 which formalised Europe's claim of African territories. She wrote:

> Seventy years later they bequeathed to native African countries that looked remarkably different from how they looked in the 1880s. These countries are the poorest in the world today. To judge the impact of colonialism on development in Africa simply by looking at outcomes during the colonial period is a conceptual mistake. Post-independence Africa looks nothing like it would have done in the absence of colonialism. Indeed in most cases post-independence economic decline in Africa can be explicitly attributed to colonialism because the types of mechanisms that led to this decline were creations of colonial society. (Langa, 2015: 5)

In this way, refugee activists such as Napuli used various spaces to repeatedly convey their anti-racist and anti-colonial ideologies. Nadiye Ünsal, an activist who wrote about the movement in a scholarly journal, asserted that one of the ideals of the 'refugee' movement at O-platz was to fight racism. She recounted, 'We discussed (during the mobilization) how capitalism produces racism and how we can reflect and emancipate ourselves from it, hoping we can realize a community without borders' (Ünsal, 2015).

On April 8, 2014 the local politicians and police evicted the tent protesters, who had become a symbol of refugee resistance. The police actions further helped them acquire visibility in the media, including the mainstream media. As Jacques Ranciere notes:

> Whatever breaks with the tangible configuration … political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise. (1999, p. 30)

Subsequently, the Kreuzberg district formed an agreement with one group of refugee activists and collaborated with them in the physical eviction of the tent protests. Scenes of struggle between activists and the police were televised and broadcast via the national and international media. Mainstream civil society witnessed these scenes online and on television, and believed that the protests had ended. However, at the same moment, there were several hundred refugees residing in an occupied school in the same district of Kreuzberg. Three months after the eviction of the protests, the politicians within the district also tried to evict the people from this school, GHS. Several thousand police, many of whom were called in from other cities in Germany, were involved in the eviction process.

When the police came to evict the refugees from the school, the majority agreed to move to the accommodation organised by the district and the Senate in Berlin. Thus there were further divisions and tensions between the people who decided to stay and protest and those who left. There were also divisions within the support network regarding strategies. However, 40 refugees and some supporters stayed and went on the school's roof with a banner reading, 'You Can't Evict A Movement.' Thus, the school's rooftop came to symbolise a site of radical anti-racist politics against the police force. For nine days, 1700 policemen cordoned off sections of streets around the school. This police presence drew resentment amongst residents in Berlin. Thousands of Berlin/Kreuzberg residents rallied against these police actions. There were also refugees who joined the protests. As I have pointed out elsewhere:

> The spatial resistance at the school differed from the protests at Oranienplatz since the people in the school engaged in a local long-running legal battle. Unlike at Oranienplatz, not all of the people in the school were forced out. About 40 refugees remained in the school and they signed an agreement with the district, which allowed them to remain in the school. Although the people who remained in the school won their spatial rights, the occupation of this space did not serve to help influence asylum policy at a broader level. Local politicians and the refugee activists in the school remained embroiled in these very local contestations and negotiations. (Bhimji 2016, p. 11)

The refugee resistance remained successful for a few years, and the people who had refused to be evicted were allowed to stay in the school. However, one key activist, Sista Mimi, a resident of GHS who fought against racism, neocolinalism, and gentrification of Berlin and came to support the refugee movement in an active way, fell seriously ill following the protests and shortly died. The support network raised funds and managed to organise a vigil for her in Berlin and played her recorded speeches (Fig. 3.2). Thus the refugee mobilisation in Berlin was instrumental in shifting the meaning of the square such that it came to represent refugees' anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles, including institutional racial violence which came to be intertwined with claims to local space in order to express these positions.

Fig. 3.2 Mimi's vigil in Berlin

Heterogeneous Struggles at Oranienplatz

The protest square was known as a heterogeneous and dynamic space. Differing groups of refugee activists, from different countries and with differing legal status, lived in Oranienplatz in order to voice their struggles in all respects.

In the foreground were male refugees from various African countries, such as Sudan, Uganda, Mali, the Gambia, Senegal, Togo, and Cameroon, as well from Asian and Middle Eastern countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Thus, multiple languages were spoken during the movement, and translation and accessibility to languages spoken during plenary meetings was one of the defining features of the movement. Female refugees were in the minority, since it was not always possible for women with children to be at the forefront of the refugee movement. LGBTQI refugees simultaneously struggled to make their voices heard since not everyone in the refugee struggle was open to their participation.

Several support networks, including those made up of white Germans, European men, and women and people of colour and various refugee support groups, which were active prior to the tent protests at Oranienplatz joined the self-organised refugee movement as well. The white supporters, as well as many people of colour, were university educated and from a middle-class background. They questioned and interrogated their 'privilege', since they were free to travel with their EU passports, and benefited not only from freedom of movement, but from access to health services, education, employment, and housing, in ways in which the refugees they supported lacked. People of colour and LGBTQI activists occupied a complex position in the movement since they had also had the benefit of freedom of movement and access to all of what the welfare state offered, but at the same time were vulnerable to racialisation, patriarchy, and prejudice within European society. Amongst the refugees, there were also people who were equipped with greater social capital, academic education, and organising capabilities than others.

Some of the refugee activist groups which supported the movement included Corasol, Karawane for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants, Pro-Asyl, Women in Exile, The Voice Refugee Forum, and Refugee Black Box. These refugee groups had been active in Germany for several years prior to the beginning of the refugee protests in Berlin.

There were activists who aligned with some groups more than others, but despite these alliances the movement needs to be recognised in its own

right since the it evoked a level of visibility in refugee politics and resistance at a scale which had not occurred in Germany's recent history (Bhimji, 2016). Because the refugee movement included diverse groups of people, it needed to be understood in complex ways. As Üsal (2014) demonstrated, the simplistic categories 'refugees' and 'supporters' did not reflect the intersectional power relations that affected the people interacting within the movement.

Diversity of Demands by Refugee Groups

The refugee groups within the movement also differed with respect to their demands. In the course of the 18-month period of the occupation of Oranienplatz in Kreuzberg, refugees who had been fingerprinted in Italy, Greece, and Spain and who were not permitted to claim asylum in Germany because of the Dublin law gradually connected with refugee activists from Refugee Strike Berlin. According to the Dublin Regulation, if a refugee had their fingerprints taken in the first EU country they arrived at, for example, Italy, prior to their arrival in another EU country, for example, Germany, then it was that first EU country which was responsible for their asylum application, and consequently they were not eligible to apply for asylum in the second country. They demanded their rights to work and move freely within Europe. This group, known as 'Lampedusa in Berlin', explicitly contested the Dublin Regulation, because the refugees that comprised this group had first arrived in European border countries and did not have the right to seek asylum in Germany. They spoke of wanting to have more power, of leaving their vulnerable family members, of their dire economic conditions in Italy, and of seeking the right to live and work in Germany.

For this group of refugees, coming to Oranienplatz was also a political transformation, since they did not allow their lives to be suspended in the economically depressed southern European states. Even though some of their demands differed, this group subsequently decided to form an alliance with the group Refugee Strike Berlin, which had arrived from Würzburg (Bavaria). But the Lampedusa in Berlin group differed in terms of their connections with Oranienplatz. For them, it was clearly a space in which to articulate their political demands and to find shelter, since they did not have any other accommodation in Berlin. The Lampedusa group did not necessarily demonstrate the same level of political and affective

commitment as the refugees from Refugee Strike Berlin, as they entered into political negotiations with the Green Party district.

This protest ground needs to be further understood as a site of political tension; for example, relations between supporters and refugee protesters did not always remain amicable. Tensions over tactics, strategies, and the use of funds arose frequently. Questions of power and privilege were repeatedly discussed. There was evidence of unequal positions of power amongst the refugees, as well as between supporters and refugees and amongst supporters. There were concerns about sexism, since the refugee activists mainly included men.

Thus, the public square took on different meanings for different activist groups. But the significance of resistance needs recognition. As Olivia Landry (2015) observed:

> For asylum seekers in Germany-with no home, no resources, and sometimes even no documents – the collective power of bodies and voices in a public space became their only means of redress against what is for many an unjust and debilitating asylum system. (Landry 2015, p. 399)

The Green Party district subsequently signed an agreement with the people directly affected by the Dublin Regulation who were then provided accommodation in hostels on a temporary basis. However, within three months, the refugees were given eviction notices, which led to three weeks of protests with people climbing on top of the hostels to dissent. During these protests, the various groups which had been divided started to come together in solidarity during the protests, which once again served to demonstrate the collective power of the movement (Fig. 3.3).

The Formation of Media Activists, Solidarity, and Cultural Groups

The different tensions generated because of differing ideologies between various initiatives which surfaced during the protests led to some divisions between the activist groups, but these frictions also led to the formation of various groups and initiatives during and subsequent to the tent protests. These grassroots initiatives continued to be active in Berlin and persisted in their struggle and in their campaign for the rights of migrants in the German state. More importantly, despite some of their divergences, the groups participated in anti-racist, intersectional, and anti-colonial

Fig. 3.3 Protests in Gürtelstraße against the eviction of people in hostels

activism, foregrounding the links between colonial legacies and the current immigration situation.

The refugee movement at Oranienplatz was very active, as discussed above. There were demonstrations, protests, panel discussions, and events. During the evictions, there was much resistance, with activists climbing on roofs and trees and participating in hunger strikes. Since the mainstream media did not always represent these protests, the Media Group was formed, consisting mainly of white Germans and European support networks, and they frequently reported online the various actions and events related to the refugee movement. Subsequently, in 2015, the newspaper *Daily Resistance* came into existence, which included opinion pieces and narratives written by refugees and members of solidarity groups. These testimonies were published in several languages.

Following the eviction of the people at the GHS School, some of those who remained there drew up a plan for the school. The purpose of the school was to serve as a social centre and a political centre for migrants.

The activists had put forward a motion to the district in which they described in detail their plans to start five different projects, which included a social centre and an open café where people would be invited to cook and provide food on a regular basis, a theatre project, a music-meeting point, a serigraphy workshop, and the continuation of the women's group International Women's Space, which met there regularly. The motion described the aims of these groups as follows:

> For the implementation of these projects, we will form several groups made up by all residents of the school according to their interests. We want people from outside the school to support us and join the projects and groups. The projects we create are an open access for the people from the neighbourhood. We will not ask for permission. Too many promises have not been kept by politicians and authorities. Since the attempted eviction of the school almost nothing has been done by them. That we prevent construction workers in their work is a Lie. We will implement our project ourselves. Therefore we expect that we will not be stopped in our work. As it happened on the 15th of September 2014, when we wanted to open the Social Centre and the police was called. Now we are told that a 'Lager' (camps) will be built in the school. More people shall live in the school. Why were they then kicked out violently before? We could not stand it anymore in the "Lagers" (camps). In the school, we want to build a Refugee Center by Refugees for Refugees. With the security the school begins already to be like a "Lager". But we will not accept a new "Lager" here. About the school it is often reported that it is a place of criminal and drug dealers. That's not true. We want to show everyone what the school really is and who we are. Don't stop us.
>
> The people from the school.
>
> Do not fool the people from the school!
>
> November 1, 2014/ the people from the school (Ohlauer)

Thus the motion clearly indicated the need for differing initiatives organised along cultural, social, political, and feminist lines. At the same time, the motion also shows how the ideologies of these groups converged as they aimed to refute the racist asylum policies and laws which had resulted in the creation of border regimes and segregated and ostracised asylum seekers from EU citizens, even when they were present in the German state. However, some of the abovementioned groups could not be formed because of several obstacles and ongoing conflicts with the district, but the initiative International Women Space (IWS) continued their

activism and solidarity work. The founding members of IWS believed that there was a strong need for a space for refugee women where they could organise 'actions against sexism and the corrupt structures within a patriarchal and male dominated world.' IWS participants included German, European, and migrant and refugee women equipped with multiple resources and skills. Their aim primarily remained to advocate for newcomers who they believed needed support.

Members of IWS were collectively inspired by the squatters' movement in the early 1980s in Berlin when they came across the journal at the feminist archive FFBIZ, Frauenforschungs- Bildungs- und Informationszentrum (Women's Research, Education and Information Centre). Denise, one of the members, described it as 'an oasis for all, especially for women who are searching for documents written by women, about women'. The group discovered that in 1981 when West Berlin celebrated its 100th occupation, one of these occupations was made by a group of seven Kurdish-Turkish women, five children, and one German woman. They were supported by the association TIO, Treff- und Informationsort für türkische Frauen e.V. (Meeting and Information Centre for Turkish Women), and occupied a house at Kottbusserstraße 8, Berlin-Kreuzberg. After the eviction of the school, IWS came to be supported by the very same association where they met for several months in their room.

Similar to IWS, a group of refugee activists at Oranienplatz also believed that there needed to be a platform to be used as a space for expressions of tolerance, especially for LGBTQI people, women, Africans, and people of colour. Many of these activists collectively organised protests for the rights of LGBTQI refugees. This group of individuals, which comprised mainly African male refugees, focused on the idea of empowerment and humanity, and subsequently the idea of decolonisation (Fig. 3.4). The group of refugees decided to find support for a radio platform for their ideas and struggles. In 2015, some of the members of the group, with the support of German activists, were able to attain some initial funding and find a space for their radio studio, and thus Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio platform (We!R) emerged, from which they continue to broadcast their views and perspectives to this date.

While the abovementioned groups were formed primarily along ideological lines, many activists were of the view that there was also a need for practical intervention. Following the eviction of refugees from the school and from the hostel in which several hundred refugees were offered accommodation by the Kreuzberg district and later evicted, an

Fig. 3.4 African Refugees Union and International Women Space Protest for LGBTQI Rights

organisation called Schlafplatzorga (SPO) was formed in October 2014 with the aim to find temporary housing for refugees. Although there were several divisions during the resistance at Oranienplatz, the refugee groups were divided in terms of political ideologies, demands, and needs. Local politicians who governed Kreuzberg exploited these divisions. Initially, it was the refugees dissatisfied with their current conditions at their mass accommodations and the asylum policies in the German state who had occupied the square. However, in the subsequent months, there were refugees directly affected by the Dublin Regulation who also came to occupy the square. When local politicians realised that there were divisions amongst activist groups, they became instrumental in dividing the groups further by offering the refugees who were affected by the Dublin Regulation places to stay in hostels in the city, and offering to examine their cases on an individual basis in exchange for support in removing the tents. However, the district did not abide by its promise and within three

months it had ordered mass evictions of the individuals residing in the hostel. Thus, many people were left homeless and on the streets. At this juncture, German and EU activists formed a group to support these individuals by helping them find temporary accommodation in people's homes in Berlin. The people who formed the group had been active in refugee mobilisation and had access to contacts with European and German individuals who could possibly house the refugees so that they would not be homeless on the streets of Berlin.

These grassroots groups used different strategies in resisting border closures, racisms, and colonialism. The initiatives worked around ideological lines such that anti-racist and anti-colonial actions became an integral part of refugee resistance. However, the groups were not free of tension with respect to politics and humanitarian values. Politics, humanitarian work, and notions of humanity came to merge with the formation of groups such as Schlafplatzorga, International Women's Space, and Wearebornfree Humanity Matters. While the protests were firmly rooted in politics, such that the refugees and activists interrogated and challenged the asylum structures which racialised refugees, these groups more visibly offered practical help and spoke of the importance of humanity. But because these activist and solidarity groups emerged from a political context, the political aspects and goals of these groups also need recognition, since the activists themselves were of the view that they were involved in anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles.

The members of IWS, We!R and SPO also participated in protests, marches, rallies, and other political events in Germany against racism, colonialism, neoliberal politics, and transnational politics. Over the years, as this book will demonstrate, these initiatives developed in dynamic ways, but they also came to support each other, for example, in their respective solidarity (fund-raising) events, and more significantly they socialised with each other as some of them had known each other since the inception of the refugee mobilisation at Oranienplatz in 2012. This is not to say that there are no differences or tensions between some of the groups, but amidst the frictions, the members of the groups were also conscious of the bigger battles which needed to be fought and thus were aware of the importance of collective struggles and worked to find common ground in order to adhere to their ideals.

Angela Davis, during her visit to Berlin, in her filmed conversation with Bino, who was a prominent activist during the refugee mobilisation and later one the founders of the radio platform, told him that there were

bound to be differences in a given movement, and that it was important to recognise and work with these differences and contradictions and to make them productive. She emphasised that it wasn't necessary for everyone to be the same and to think in the same ways, and she hoped, for example, that the differences between male and female activists would be overcome, and that the male refugees would be active in the face of violence against women as well.

Thus, it was these very differences, contradictions, and frictions which Angela Davis recognised on her visit to Berlin that led to the formation of various initiatives during and subsequent to the refugee mobilisation. Some of the initiatives which emerged from the refugee movement continue to be productive, while others struggle. The following chapters demonstrate how these activist groups continued to survive and function while employing different strategies and platforms, despite various obstacles in terms of support, spaces, and financing. At the same time, the study does not idealise these networks, and I demonstrate some of their shortcomings as well as their strengths.

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CHAPTER 4

Practical Solidarity, Encounters, and Transformative Possibilities: A Case Study

Introduction

On a hot summer evening at the office space for the Contact and Advice Centre for Refugees and Migrants (KUB) in Berlin there were about 10 homeless refugees looking for a place to stay. There were two German citizens present who searched through a list and made phone calls hoping that someone amongst their contacts would offer the 'searchers', as they were known to the members of the organisation, a temporary place to stay. Meanwhile, I served tea to the various searchers. Later on, another solidarity worker, an undocumented migrant himself from Algeria, came to support the shift with translation and communication since he spoke French, Arabic, and English fluently. The refugees were not very communicative. They sat around tables, hoping that they would find a place to stay. Ali was intently following Japan and Belgium play football on his smartphone. Meanwhile, Anand was sleeping until someone woke him up. Amongst the refugees, there were two women and two men who were from Kenya whose asylum applications had already been rejected. The refugees seemed visibly inactive, passive, and beneficiaries of help from privileged individuals, while the solidarity workers and activists were seemingly active whilst carrying an air of compassion.

Ostensibly, this scenario fits in with Didier Fassin's discussion of compassion within humanitarian organisations. He notes that when compassion is exercised in the public space, it is always directed from above to below, from the more powerful to the weaker, the more fragile, the more

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vulnerable—those who can generally be constituted as victims of an overwhelming fate. Fassin (2012) notes that precarious lives cannot be understood in the absolute of a condition, but in the relation of those who have power over them and humanitarian actions needs understanding as a politics of precarious lives. Similarly, Michel Agier (2011) contends that humanitarian interventions act against politics by producing exceptionality and presenting figures that are victims and guilty, vulnerable and undesirable—all incompatible with those of the subject and the citizen. For Ticktin (2011), compassion amounts to circulating particular narratives, images, and histories of those in need of 'help', which then serve to maintain unequal power relations between citizen and 'foreigner', and she thus suggests that such politics of care is a form of *antipolitics*.

However, rather than formalised NGOs, it was a small-scale solidarity group based in Berlin that supported homeless refugees such as those described in the above vignette. In contrast to large-scale and formalised humanitarian organisations and NGO groups, solidarity groups aim to be less hierarchical and try to develop horizontal relations with the people they support. Solidarity groups contrast both hospitality and bureaucratic frameworks and need to be understood as distinctive of the humanitarian realm (Rozakou 2016). Rozakou comprehends solidarity in terms of sociality such that solidarity resonates with potent moral ideals of how society should be, and how people should relate to one another.'

This chapter thus demonstrates how a solidarity activist group which was connected to the refugee movement in Berlin, which lasted from 2012 to 2014, worked towards creating the idea of freedom of movement, open borders, and anti-racist actions while engaging in practical work. I illustrate the relational dynamics amongst solidarity workers and refugees, the complexities and the role of citizens within solidarity activism, which focus on meeting practical needs of refugees, while conscious and aware their own privileges and political views. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the power dynamics and power structures which may continue to operate between citizens and refugees even in the context of anti-racist practical solidarity actions. This chapter illustrates that over time these hierarchies may dissolve when solidarity workers and refugees work together towards common aims, such as when refugees and EU citizens come together to search for temporary accommodation in Berlin. Finally, the chapter interrogates if equality can be achieved between refugees and solidarity workers or whether solidarity activism also reproduces racial hierarchies. More specifically, the chapter provides an analysis of the

workings of solidarity initiatives such as Schlafplatzorga, whose main practical objectives were to find temporary and longer-term accommodations for homeless refugees and to allow them to network amongst Berlin residents, so that they could settle in Berlin. In doing so, the chapter aims to provide insights into the relational dynamics between 'solidarians' and refugees and how these relations could facilitate in providing housing for all regardless of formal and legal status or even past criminal records in a city such as Berlin. Thus, the chapter demonstrates the transformative potentialities of a leftist solidarity group which aims to share their privileges and work together with refugees. Finally, this chapter also provides a critique of solidarity work, and recognises the fact that in some situations hierarchies between citizens and refugees continue to prevail and solidarity activism may not always result in transformative outcomes such as bringing about systemic shifts.

Schlafplatzorga (SPO) helped make available to refugees temporary accommodations amongst private residents in different situations and time periods. The group held shifts three times a week for two hours in the evenings where solidarity workers who called themselves 'members' would meet with refugees who were known as 'searchers' and mediated them with Berlin residents (offerers) in their private accommodations. In some instances, the members adopted the dual role of mediating as well as offering their private spaces. The group also gave out public transportation return tickets to the 'searchers' who came to the shifts. Normally, the number of people who would arrive to the shift would vary from two to twelve individuals. SPO maintained a digitised Trello Card, where information about 'searchers', 'offerers', 'members', shelters in Berlin, and other resources in the city for newcomers was stored. A 'responsibility' card was also maintained where information about arising matters was recorded. Members of SPO communicated electronically and a WhatsApp group was created for refugees and members such that they could write their opinions and maintain an open communication system with the members and network with each other.

The group members held weekly meetings as well as monthly 'meta-meetings' to discuss the day-to-day as well as major issues such as searchers' and offerers' concerns and issues, finances, and the availability of spaces for refugees to sleep. It was in this manner that the organisation facilitated and promoted the notion of freedom of movement and open borders for all in Berlin, when in many parts of the country, with the

growing popularity of the extreme right, there was an increase in hostility towards refugees.

Some of the activists had been participating in the work of SPO since its inception in 2014, but many left the group because of different commitments and changes in their life-course. The members of the initiative supported refugees in their search for temporary accommodation, the duration of which could last from one night to two to three weeks. The group also tried to find longer-term accommodations for refugees who wanted to work and live in Berlin. SPO mainly supported refugees affected by the Dublin law, who in many instances were seeking protection from deportation threats, but the initiative aimed to find accommodation for any refugee who ended up on the streets of Berlin.

Several of the members of the group at the time of its inception had participated in the Oranienplatz refugee protests between 2012 and 2014, and had expressed solidarity with refugees who had decided to leave the assigned state shelters located outside Berlin. SPO was formed in October 2014 specifically to house refugees who became homeless as a consequence of the Green Party's decision in Berlin to oust refugees from their temporary assigned housing and from the occupied school during the refugee movement in Berlin. Upon eviction, there were several hundred people on the street with nowhere to go and, consequently, they were left without much information and further help. In response to these events, about 10 activists gathered and made use of the phone lists which were collected during the eviction of the people in the Gerhart Hauptmann-Schule and during the eviction of the hostel in Gürtel Straße in Berlin. Thus, a temporary phone list for sleeping places already existed and the activists phoned as many people as possible and talked to them about the critical situation, asking them if they could possibly host people. At that time, the group didn't consider forming an initiative and they simply responded to the situation such that the main goal was to provide sleeping places for people. Over time, the members of the group recognised that a number of refugees were being pushed out of their homes and continued to encounter deportation threats. Subsequently, the activists felt under pressure to be on the spot at Oranienplatz every day. In addition, at the time there was an infrastructure which was in place. For example, an art installation, in the form of a large tent, entitled 'The House of 28 Doors' was present at the former protest square, Oranienplatz, and there was also

a container house, with some space to store materials for initiatives. The group distributed the shifts amongst its members and were always available seven days a week initially and in subsequent years three days a week. According to one member, SPO came to be understood as the only initiative in Berlin offering 'non-bureaucratic immediate' help for homeless migrants.

SPO: Anti-racist Politics Versus Charity

Despite the fact that initiatives emerged in the context of political protests, the group always struggled around the question of humanitarianism and its political stance. From its inception in 2014, emails and discussions arose amongst activists about the political nature of SPO. The following are excerpts from two email exchanges:

> they put the people on the street with the purpose that they leave Berlin. They wanted to get rid of Oranienplatz and thought that would be the case if people become suddenly homeless in winter. In this perspective, organizing once and again becomes political, because it disturbs the plan of the Senate and stops the eviction. A.
>
> I think we should not forget that the centres of the refugee protest are its political demands, which are concerning accommodation: abolishing all lagers and giving refugees the right and practical possibility to live in normal private flats. as far as i understood it is about putting pressure on the government/state to give refugees these rights, so the responsibility about it is actually with the state. Also different politicians already expressed in public that they expect the supporters to organize accommodation for homeless refugees (even though it is clear that the governments on different levels and laws are responsible for the homelessness of refugees).
>
> Of course, i also understand that surviving has to have priority and that everyone needs a place to stay and take a rest to be able to fight politically.
>
> I think it is necessary to broaden the sleeping-place-organization, but think it is problematic if it is seen as part of the political protest, because by this we are also making it more easy for the government to continue their inhumane policy and misuse us also. thus, i would suggest to try to kind of separate it from the refugee protest as such. to rather form an autonomous group with the aim to organize sleeping places, which is connected to the refugee protest. T.

Other people thought that SPO could be understood as a political group if the initiative supported refugees who were politicised and had been active within the refugee movement.

Elias, who had been a member of SPO from its inception, explained to me in an interview I conducted with him in 2018:

> I always wanted to maintain ties to the refugee movement and the O-Platz movement. Yes, especially because the initiative was founded by O-Platz supporters, usually privileged people who made use of their passports and language skills and knowledge about the system. We opposed the division of people that oppresses them. So usually we were confronted by non-citizens- often people without papers. Myself, I regard this as a political act- to kind of advance and progress to his or her case in Germany. Usually we dealt with people who were affected by Dublin. We also tried to help them get in touch with legal services, language courses and food banks etc. We conceived ourselves as part of a network system and not working on our own but also in opposition to the current state asylum system. Making use of it if it helps but certainly not as an institutional civil society- as good neighbourhood. We didn't want to cover any catastrophes that were being imposed by the state on the people but rather unveil them. And also reflect upon our own position within the hierarchical system. So the goal is not only to find accommodation, but actually to help people settle down and this requires a lot of networking and communication. Of course we had to stretch our understanding of political but to me also this networking was part of it. And to not to exclude anyone. To talk about refugees vs migrant vs newcomer. We actually had an internal debate about who our target group is. It's also important to amplify voices of people and to influence the agenda in the public discourse by showing that I am helping people but this is not because the people went to the situation deliberately but because it's like a political situation because people are being made refugees. And this is happening everyday where people have to endure constraining structures. In their home country and Libya and also here. So of course it's very difficult to talk about these structures. I think this is needed otherwise we just end up being burned out because we couldn't help people with food and accommodation because we want to end the state that people are living in and not just write on Facebook, 'hey now we have achieved our thousand mediation target'. This is not the goal.. From the very beginning it was obvious that this was a means to a political end. But of course we didn't think that the initiative would exist for such a long time.

The ideology of the group was also expressed on their website:

> The courage of activists in self-organization shows that they are not simply defenceless in the face of ongoing racist policies. They develop alternative solutions together with people who act in solidarity, with people who resist the system; they keep on creating their own political structures. However, in order to be able to tackle racist policies, to organize everyday life better, and to build a self-determined life, people need places where they rest, their own accommodation and private sphere! They need space for their own personal development—spaces that offer some protection against everyday racism, sexism and homophobia! To be able to establish a continuous supporting structure, it is our goal to be part of a solidarity network of political initiatives striving for a systematic change in society and politics regarding asylum, migration and social policies, among others.

Thus, the work of SPO needs to be understood in political, anti-racist, and humanitarian ways since the group defined itself as being part of a larger network which sought to shift asylum politics, but at the same time supported refugees with their immediate housing needs.

The group's political ideology associated with anti-racist actions, freedom of movement, and open borders was manifested in its actions in varying ways. The solidarity workers understood that the group helped support illegalised and racialised refugees who had received negative notices in their areas and were subject to deportation on account of the Dublin Regulation, even though it was never explicitly mentioned. Many of the members as well as refugees and migrants participated in anti-racist demonstrations and actions in Berlin and the surrounding area. When the demonstrations were formally registered and a relatively low police presence was expected, several of the refugees also engaged in these actions, demonstrations, and marches. Potential members were also recruited at such demonstrations since members distributed flyers describing the purpose of the group.

Included amongst the people who were searching for places to stay were also individuals who were working but could not afford Berlin's rapidly increasing rents. Thus, the idea behind such work was that rents in Berlin should remain affordable to all. SPO thus participated in and organised actions around anti-gentrification efforts in Berlin and were loosely connected to the politics of homelessness in the city. In this sense, the work of SPO needs to be understood as anti-racist, since racialised and illegalised refugees came to share spaces with white German citizens even though sometimes the power dynamics and privileges continued to lead to

a reproduction of racial inequalities. However, most significantly the members believed that borders needed to be open, opposed the German state's stance with respect to border controls, recognised inequalities in the formal view of the 'integration' process, and were well aware that refugees were racialised. The members of SPO therefore believed that there was a need to provide preferential treatment to refugees and some EU citizens such as Roma with respect to support for accommodation. In this regard, solidarity acts with refugees need to be understood as *persistent and conscious anti-racist collective efforts* to change conditions in the context of limited possibilities and prevailing racist policies towards refugees and limited solutions. On a macro-level, SPO's work should be understood as acts against the state since solidarians worked to preserve the dignity and personhood of refugees as well as to engage joint actions which worked towards making systemic changes in refugee policies at the level of the state and the EU. For example, SPO and several other solidarity groups I encountered in Berlin opposed the Dublin Regulation, deportations, criminalisation of private rescue boat operations on the Mediterranean Sea, and centralised Lagers in German, while they simultaneously focused on the day-to-day aspects of meeting the needs of refugees. When refugees are subject to everyday racisms, when they are denied by the state even, as in Hannah Arendt's terms, 'the right to have rights', and are subject to the strictest of all asylum regimes, actions which voice opposition to such injustices should count as politics. For Rancière, *politics* is an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: 'whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration-that of the part that has no part' (Rancière, 1999, p. 30). To this end, the act of hosting people in one's house who were subject to Germany's and the EU's asylum regimentation and governance needs to be understood as a configuration and contestation of existing politics.

On a collective level, the group opposed the state's asylum and migration politics and worked together to transform them and to also simultaneously resolve the immediate needs of refugees. On an individual level, several members of the group recognised their own positionality, power, and privileges since many of them were white, university educated, and from middle-income backgrounds. Members and supporters who were refugees, people of colour, or from working-class backgrounds were generally in the minority. The activists thus aimed to share some of their

privileges as well as work towards opposing the laws. For white members, as well as for middle-class, university educated people of colour, the question of privileges and power became the focus of many meetings, plenaries, and recruitment workshops since everyone was of the view that compared with deportable asylum seekers their situation was somewhat better. In this sense, the solidarity group differed from humanitarian organisations as the members' politics guided their actions as opposed to moral imperatives.

Many members also became acutely conscious of their privileges, power, and the politics of the city during shifts while they worked with refugees in order to find them accommodation from a given list. It was not always possible to find places for them to sleep in private accommodations, and members were often compelled to send them to a homeless shelter or in the summer period even to sleep on the streets as during the summer only one or two homeless shelters remained in operation.

Political Networking

Schlafplatzorga did not work in a vacuum, but rather made alliances with different initiatives in order to strengthen their work and attain further visibility. In this way, the group further aligned itself with leftist initiatives in Berlin which were working on related issues such as the idea of accommodation for everyone and political positions. For example, SPO received invitations to meetings by initiatives such as *Aufstehen gegen Rassismus* (Stand up against racism) and were frequently invited to the meetings of the group *Gemeinwesennetzwerk Kotti* (Kotti Community Network). SPO also aligned with groups such as *Seebrücke Aktion* (Sea Bridges Action) and *Bürger*innenasyl* (Citizens' Asylum Activists) and were represented in a visible manner within the prominent initiative Solidarity City Berlin. Such links further enforced the idea that SPO was not a charitable group for migrants, but rather a group which, while providing practical support for refugees, also aimed to shift migration politics in Germany.

On the practical level, Schlafplatzorga forged alliances with other groups responsible for finding accommodation for refugees, such as *Solizimmer*, and maintained regular communication about the availability of sleeping places for homeless refugees. Similarly, Schlafplatzorga formed an alliance with the initiative KommrRin, a non-profit association that used donations to finance housing for refugees, and other networks, housing initiatives, and private individuals. The donations that KommrRin and

Schlafplatzorga received were sometimes pooled together in order to help pay the rent for a short period for a searcher.

An important alliance was formed between SPO and the initiative Kontakt- und Beratungsstelle für Flüchtlinge und Migrant_innen e.V. (KuB e.V.), a contact point and advice centre for refugees and migrants. Initially, SPO members held the shifts in the evening at Oranienplatz. During the winter they met in various cafés. Upon three years of its inception, members of the group networked with KuB e.V. and the initiative agreed that SPO could use their office space to meet with the refugees in search of accommodation and to hold their weekly meetings. Furthermore, the political ideology of KuB e.V. and that of Schlafplatzorga were similar since both these initiatives demonstrated solidarity and worked with refugees and migrants who were racialised by society and the state and had limited chances of receiving refugee status since the German state understood them to be from 'safer' countries. For some members of Schlafplatzorga, it was important for the political ideology of the group to be in concurrence with the groups with which they formed alliances. As Elias told me:

> We conceive ourselves as part of a network system and not working on our own but also in opposition to the current state asylum system. Making use of it, if it helps but certainly not as an institutional civil society- as good neighbourhood. We didn't want to cover any catastrophes that were being imposed by the state on the people but rather unveil them. And also to reflect our own position within the hierarchical system. I really felt a bit detached from these Welcome Initiatives. I think they were engaged in doing good campaigns and imposing pressure on the state representatives. And the furore dissolved once the 'influx' of refugees in Berlin were over.

Thus, in this way, the solidarity groups found common ground with groups which opposed the migration regime, deportations by the state, and racialisation of refugees, and supported open borders and no-borders and rights for everyone. The solidarity groups tended to align with each other and work less closely with formal organisations which supported integration and social cohesion of selected refugee groups within the state.

The solidarity group also made efforts to forge connections and make their own actions visible when other initiatives held events, actions, and demonstrations. For example, members of Schlafplatzorga supported the Seebrücke movement, an international movement which was supported

by various alliances and civil society actors. The Seebrücke movement was founded at the end of June 2018, when a 'Lifeline', a private rescue vessel with 234 people on board, had to endure for days on the Mediterranean Sea and was not permitted to dock at any European port. Members of Schlafplatzorga as well as some of the refugees participated in a major demonstration organised by the alliance and passed out leaflets during the rally. Similarly, members participated at one of their vigils, which was held at the prominent Neptune Fountain in the centre of Berlin for the people who had drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. The news of this event was quickly communicated via the electronic communication channel 'Telegram' and thus several people decided virtually on the time of the meeting point. During the event, which occurred at noon on a Monday, the activists made paper boats and coloured them orange and wrote along the sides. One member, Tony, passed out flyers to a number of participants and passers-by. However, it was an area largely frequented by tourists and it was a challenge for her to meet German citizens interested in the topic of homeless refugees. The members also placed a stack of SPO flyers on top of their banner which read 'feel mehr seenotrettung' (feel for sea rescues). The activists stayed for two to three hours and the action culminated with a line of paper boats which were strung together and hung from one end of a tree branch to another. In this manner, an alliance between some members of Schlafplatzorga and a prominent and visible movement was in the making.

Schlafplatzorga also forged links with smaller and less visible local initiatives such as the residents of an occupied house in Berlin. During one of the group's events entitled 'Zusammen gegen Mietenwahn im Großbeeren-Kiez!' (Together against rent delusion in Grossbeeren Neighbourhood!) SPO was invited to present a report on the topic of racism and the illegalisation and displacement of migrants in the housing market and to discuss possible solutions. Similarly, another smaller and locally based initiative supported the work of SPO. In other instances, the SPO initiative posted events organised by various related groups and initiatives on their Facebook page. On one occasion, a left-wing initiative, Kaltehilfe Monster (Cold help Monster), which aimed to support homeless people during the winter, contacted them and additionally organised a solidarity party for them in a leftist space in Friedrichshain, LAngriffe. Their plan was to hold a series of parties the first Thursday of each month to support various initiatives, and at their first party SOLIKLUB #1 invited SPO. The event was held at a small but comfortable venue with four rooms, which included a

bar, a dance floor, and a hand-football table with graffiti. The initiative charged 3 euros at the entrance, which they promised to give to SPO. On one wall, a Schlafplatzorga sticker was posted and an information table was organised with several people taking turns to sit and provide information. A long-term 'searcher', Mohammed, was also present, but none of the other searchers were there. Like many of the parties, the vast majority of people who attended the party were young and were comfortably dressed in jeans rather than in strict party-ware. The party also allowed members of the groups to meet and socialise with each other in a less formal context and to form new networks. We also posted some SPO stickers on the walls of the venue for further publicity. Such events also offered further opportunities for the group members to network with people who could potentially offer places to sleep for refugees and migrants and also socialise with each other. For example, it was at this particular event that I became aware that a refugee and long-term friend of the group had been deported just four days before he would have been 'out' of the Dublin Regulation.

Participation in the events of various leftist solidarity groups allowed for forging of alliances, helped build collectivity, and further demonstrated the significance of the idea of freedom of movement within and outside the solidarity group. However, there were some drawbacks since such affiliations did not always visibly further any specific campaigns or bring about new political actions and collectivities. Even though such alliance-building facilitated the creation of more offers in the city, but the radical leftist political views of the group members tended to be obscured by the efforts expended upon meeting the immediate needs of the refugees in Berlin. As Miriam Ticktin (2011) has pointed out, 'radical change is the result of *political action*, not politics' (p. 19). Consequently, solidarity groups such as Schlafplatzorga served to provide practical support and did not help shift politics even though all of the members supported the idea of open borders and housing rights for all and opposed the idea of 'integration' and access to educational resources for selected refugees.

Working Structure of Schlafplatzorga

SPO was organised along horizontal lines and generally adopted and enacted principles such that all of its members could participate along prefigurative lines and in a democratic fashion so that everyone could have an equal say in the decision-making process. Prefiguration is regularly described as a 'new' form of doing political action and is increasingly used

for analysing contemporary movements. The term has been in use for several decades and it was first defined in a formal article by Boggs (1977) as 'the embodiment, within the on-going political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal' (p. 100). Two key practices define the current historical moment

> 1. the refusal of singular demands, ideologies, or programmes for social change (linked to the movement terms "diversity" and "horizontality"), and
> 2. the idea that the political practices, the movement itself develops, are part and parcel of the movement's aims (prefiguration) (Maeckelbergh 2009).

These two political assumptions became prevalent during the 1960s and have been growing more central to social movement praxis ever since, such that the New Left is characterised by a rejection of unitary programmes for revolutionary change and instead pursued notions of participatory democracy as a way to embody multiple movement goals (Gassert 2008; Horn 2007; Maeckelbergh 2009, 2011; Miller 1994; Polletta 2002; Klimke and Scharloth 2008). Thus Schlafplatzorga aimed to adhere to and enact these principles amongst the members and in its everyday workings and organisation. The group also tried to include refugees in the decision-making and its workings. For example, people from Libya, Cameroon, and Algeria have been involved in doing mediation and support work. One such individual had the dual role of being a mediator as well as a 'searcher' and contributed to the activities and the decision-making processes of SPO. However, when he was in search of a place to stay, he withdrew from his mediator role.

The group met each week and major items such as the number and types of offers, the 'searchers', finances, solidarity events, public relations, and recruitment activities were discussed in sufficient depth. All efforts were made to arrive at a consensus, and meetings could potentially last for over two hours in the absence of a consensus. A member of the group took *protocol* (minutes) that was diligently sent out to all members, so that members absent from the meeting could have access to the contents of the meeting. In addition to the weekly meetings, a meta-meeting was organised each month where topics which needed in-depth discussion such as finances, deportation awareness, decisions related to spaces to hold shifts, and involvement in the decision-making process of the group were discussed in detail. The meetings were generally conducted in English since

at least three members, including myself, did not speak fluent German, and hand signals were used which within horizontal social movement praxis are generally understood as a signifier for agreement.

However, it was not always easy to obtain consensus on some topics. For example, the topic of involvement of refugees in the decision-making process caused much debate and disagreement. It was mutually agreed that refugees should be involved in the decision-making related to how accommodation should be allocated. Spaces were generally allocated on a first-come-first-served basis, but this method privileged some people who could manage to arrive on time. It was proposed that the 'searchers' should have a meeting and some members were of the view that the members should participate and reach a joint consensus, while others felt that the members needed to keep in view their privileges and power and let the 'searchers' meet by themselves and arrive at decisions which needed to be completely independent of any influence from the members. This matter was deliberated carefully but finally a consensus could not be reached and a decision had to be made through a majority vote. Another point of contention was whether the decision reached by the searchers should be accepted or the final decision should be 'informed by the 'searchers' comments.' There was much debate and discussion on this topic in the working group as well as in the regular plenary and via email. Finally, it was decided that it would be disappointing to the searchers if they were to make a decision that the members failed to accept. In this way, SPO members tried to make decisions in horizontal and democratic ways. But, because of lengthy deliberations and a lack of consensus, some actions such as the 'searchers' meeting' failed to be implemented. However, even within this framework, some voices tended to dominate over others, but members generally felt free to participate and engage in discussions and decisions. Furthermore, sub-groups were formed such as the Searchers' Meeting Group, Tombola group, Party group, and Küfa group, and members were free to join and leave these groups at will. These smaller groups, in which I also participated, allowed for more equal and democratic participation since each member had the opportunity to participate in a relatively equal manner and was able to voice their opinions.

The members communicated with each other outside the meetings regularly and electronically through encrypted electronic channels. These forms of communication became particularly useful when matters needed to be communicated quickly and urgently, as well as to allow people to gain further access to make their voices and opinions heard. Thus, the

group made efforts to function in a democratic manner, using a variety of strategies. As Horst told me:

> I think we have principles that we try to avoid hierarchy. What I perceive sometimes is that we do these Küfas and try to involve searchers we try to live this open borders.

However, Nina, who had been with the group for four years since its inception, was of the view that:

> There are hierarchies because there are strong differences between how long we are in the group. And also high differences between our output in the group. And I see myself in the position of setting a lot of agendas and putting a lot of input always. And I think there are other people who have more agenda setting power. And I am not so sure how problematic I find that. I think also that within the group there are possibilities to say that I don't agree with this and I wouldn't like us to do that. I have the feeling people can do this. There are decisions are more or less in consensus. At the same time I think these hierarchies have to do with people doing stuff and not doing stuff. But people are free to veto decisions. If there are people in the group who are not doing stuff and then to keep in mind that we cannot do stuff if there is nobody to do it. And so the people who are wanting to do something for the group, they should do it and make it happen rather than to set agendas.

Similarly, Hilda was of the opinion that the group was not free of hierarchies and that people with certain privileges had more power within the group:

Hilda: Sure there are hierarchies in the group. To me there is always hierarchy.
Fazila: it also comes with if you have been in the group for a long time.
Hilda: It also comes with personality. It also comes with privilege. Some kind of social status, I don't know. Even though there are hierarchies, it doesn't mean that people don't have the option to counter argue someone who might be more dominant in the group. I think sometimes I feel that it's not a common decision but that someone made a proposition and people go with it. And that many times it's okay for me.

Thus the group's organisational structure was not free of hierarchies but the majority of people believed that they did have the leeway to veto the decisions they didn't agree with. This idea was also put into effect through email communication. In certain cases, a summary of the decision was sent by email and members were notified that they had the right to veto these decisions. For example, it was unanimously decided in a meeting that in the case of decisions related to the 'searchers' meeting', an email would be sent out and any member who was not in agreement could veto the decision taken by the group. In one exceptional case, rather than vetoing the decision, a member of the sub-committee of the 'searchers' meeting' did withdraw from the group since he opposed the decision made by the majority of the members of Schlafplatzorga. Initially, I was of the opinion that members and 'searchers' should have the opportunity to meet together and arrive at a consensus in a democratic manner, which in turn could possibly lead to future joint meetings and potentially to horizontal methods of decision-making by both members and searchers. I personally felt that by 'allowing' the members to make autonomous decisions, the members, including myself, were falsely adhering to democratic principles which were very difficult to implement given the impermanent nature of the 'searchers' group' in relation to the members who had been there for a longer time. I also felt that such a strategy allowed for a burgeoning of the false notion of sharing of power. I believed that it was only by being present in the meeting that power relations could be further recognised and made visible and then the members could make efforts to listen carefully to the viewpoints of the searchers and subsequently counter their viewpoints as equal participants during the meeting. Since the group members and the refugees, other than in social situations, almost always met in a hierarchical context, I felt that this was an opportunity for the boundaries between group members and refugees to possibly blur, and the 'problem' of allocation of limited sleeping places could be resolved together. However, I reflected on the opposing arguments made by the majority of the people in the group. The members believed that their presence in the meeting would influence the meeting and would not allow members the safe space to bring up issues while people who were responsible for allocation of their 'sleeping places' were present in the room. I decided it was idealistic on my part to assume that a meeting along equal and horizontal lines could occur between people who were privileged, on the one hand, and refugees who were racialised, lived with the threat of deportation, homeless, and illegalised in Berlin, on the other. Ultimately,

I thought it was a good idea for the refugees to meet by themselves and then accept their autonomous decisions such that it would be binding. More significantly, these plenum discussions and e-mail communication demonstrated that it was possible within the initiative to express diverging points of view and that conflicts were inevitable. As Maeckelbergh has noted:

> A truly inclusive democratic process therefore is one that remains open to new people, new ideas, and new aims. This inclusion of diversity and opposing beliefs leads to conflict, but this conflict is not viewed negatively, instead it is considered to be one of the ways in which creative new solutions to problems and better political analyses (better in the sense that it better represents the diverse needs of the people) are developed (Maeckelbergh 2012, p. 225).

While there were obvious advantages to horizontal decision-making, there were also some limitations since it often took several months before a mutual decision could be agreed upon. For example, a consensus amongst the members which finally led to the possibility of a searchers' meeting took almost six months, and thereafter there were further delays since it became a challenge for the group members to find an appropriate space for the searchers to meet in Berlin so that they didn't necessarily have to be present.

Horizontality and equal participation within the group was also achieved through regular informal meetings amongst group members. Members of the group often socialised amongst themselves, which I firmly believed added to better organising and collectivity. There were always get-togethers where members of the group invited each other, as well as the refugees with whom they had developed friendships, to their parties and dinners. In addition, members organised outings and events. Consequently, the group members came to know each other closely and intimately. As Beatte told me:

> With some people I can relate to nicely and intimately and I develop a deep relationship with them. With some members, I also have a more honest relationship but I don't see them more often. And it's related to where I am living and where I am working to who I see then more often and who I share more hobbies with. Listen to this music and going dancing. Having this concert and having this food together. In a way we are all connected through 'chats'. And there are in this group, which are now like this…I

think there are some people who are more into the group in terms of reliability everyone is equal. There are some people who are better networked. But we know each other and I know that I can ask this person for this and that person for that but I will make it transparent.

Nina: To the other members I have quite strong friendships. At least at the moment, there is nobody I would not like. It's like being more happy and in solidarity with each other.

Fazila: Do you think it is a conscious effort on your part?

Nina: I think it is a conscious effort on my part as well. I think it is important for me that who is coming to the group gets a welcoming which is nice. For me it is also important this idea of doing 'Emo' (Emoji) rounds for beginning of each plenary, which we are not always doing. But I think it is important to ask everybody how everyone is and how they feel and so on. And sometimes doing this that you go out with people and so on. And do stuff together which is also nice. For example, we did this year going to this conference together or to visit a former member of the group who could not live in Berlin anymore and he has to live at his '*Heim*' for his *Auslanderbehorde* and we just did a camping trip with him. That's kind of why I enjoyed it but we made a conscious effort. Maybe not because it is good for the group work and efficiency, but as a group for the people who are involved in it.

Fazila: How do you relate to the members in the group?

Fernando: There are some people I have a connection with because we are both members of the group and we won't see each other outside of that context. There are others I meet now who have nothing to do with it. Some people I see almost daily. Alif I see almost daily. We see each other for Schlafplatzorga. But we see each other for other things. Martin also who is not part of Schlafplatzorga but we see each other for other things. Beatte, Elias, Nina –these are the people I go camping with and go to a festival with.

Fazila: Is there a conscious effort to build collectivity within the group?

Fernando: No. On my part it just happens. I spend a lot of time with these people and with some people-I think I get along with most people basically-but with some people I also enjoy spending time with on friendly level. No I don't think it is a deliberate attempt but on the other hand it is true also that the organisa-

tion we do try to create these spaces-I think there is an attempt to create that kind of sociability but then it works because it works on a personal level I think.

Fazila: Do you think it's important to have this connectivity amongst the supporters?

John: Yes, because it is this connectivity that makes the group stronger. It permits the group to grow large. And attain much more objectives.

On the surface, these social interactions and encounters cannot be understood as political acts. However, such interactions did help make the group members develop stronger ties, and thus led to possibilities of participating in equal ways. In many ways, these social exchanges and gatherings also came to challenge and contest individualistic, isolated, and fragmented ways of living since all efforts were made by people of colour, LGBTQI individuals, refugees, and older members in the group to participate in parties, concerts, and festivals. These were spaces where normally young white leftist Europeans would participate, but because of the particular ideology of the SPO initiative with respect to openness, there were efforts by everyone to make everyone feel comfortable on all occasions. As Silvia Federici reminds us:

> Isolation, loneliness, segregation by age, as well as by race and class, are today poisoning our lives and adding to the misery caused by economic insecurity, the ecological degradation of our environment and the anguish of living in a society that is on a constant war path and undergoing a process of militarization that affects every aspect of our lives. Focusing in particular on the misery that results from the privatization of our lives, we can see that this too has many aspects, but certainly the organization of the space/s in which we live contributes greatly to it. Everything has been done to ensure that our reproduction occurs in ways that discourages collective relations and cooperation (Carlin and Federici 2014, p. 7).

Thus, the members of the group fought against the social norms of privatisation and tried to engage in inclusive and collective behaviour. By including refugees in social activities, the group's particular actions can also be understood as anti-racist actions which opposed the German state's policy, which tended to isolate refugees in camps, often located in smaller towns and villages. In these villages, as discussed in detail in Chap. 2, there was growing racism and hostility towards refugees by the local residents,

who found Angela Merkel's policies towards refugees far too radical. Such collective actions and behaviours of Schlafplatzorga should be understood to be transformative and radical even if the group did not make specific demands for changes in policies which directly affected refugees' lives.

However, this is not to say that there were no tensions within the group. For example, the group members challenged and confronted instances of sexism and patriarchy amongst themselves, as well as any sexism they experienced from refugees. In order to resolve and alleviate such situations, members held 'awareness' meetings with the refugees and co-members and provided them with several opportunities to alter their sexist behaviours. Similarly, when group members experienced sexism amongst themselves, they held awareness meetings and tried to alleviate conflicts and uncomfortable experiences and exchanges. The female members were generally vocal about these experiences and did not let instances of sexism slide, but rather almost always foregrounded such concerns during meetings and informal exchanges.

Thus, the working structure of the group was organised in a manner which reflected the group's particular position with respect to their anti-racist ideology, open borders, and freedom of movement. It was primarily organised along horizontal lines in alignment with how many anti-racist and anti-fascist leftist groups operate within Europe, but despite such a working structure, hierarchies, tensions, and instances of sexism, dominance, and patriarchy continued to prevail and needed to be challenged.

Networking with Solidarians

Refugees, the majority of whom were men from countries such as the Gambia, Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Libya, and Cameroon, and in some instances Afghanistan and Iran, heard about Schlafplatzorga and the shifts through word of mouth upon arrival in Berlin and in some instances even prior to their arrival at their camps. Their asylum status tended to vary: some were in the process of seeking asylum but were threatened by deportation; many encountered the Dublin Regulation and were also under threat of deportation; others were illegalised since they had never applied for asylum; and yet others were EU citizens of countries other than Germany. These individuals had limited access, financial resources, and know-how on searching for rooms to rent in Berlin, which was a cumbersome and bureaucratic process. Furthermore, the people, particularly those from African nations, were racialised within German society since

they were largely understood as 'economic migrants', and their chances of acquiring a flat by themselves were limited even when they had the funds to do so since landlords were not willing to rent to refugees from particular countries.

The work of Schlafplatzorga activists differed from volunteer groups who worked at camps. In such situations, it was generally the host society which approached the refugees in 'need' and helped the refugees residing there with language courses, which should have been provided by the state in the first place. In this case, it was the refugees who for various reasons made the decision to come to Berlin and subsequently sought out the support of SPO. These decisions demonstrated refugees' agency since they were the ones who had decided to leave their difficult circumstances in their camps in Germany. Despite the presence of many volunteers, they experienced isolation, regimentation, racism, and in several instances the ever-increasing threat of deportation. As Lamine told me:

> I had this Dublin procedure. I thought that they would deport me back to Italy. So during that time I decided to find a steady place where I could live and to move out from the "Heim". Because I am an activist doing a lot of activity. So for during those six months, I thought Berlin could be the best place for me and from there I tried to contact this association Schlafplatzorga. I was motivated to be in Berlin, Berlin is big. Berlin is multicultural. You are really isolated in the camp. So this is what inspired me to leave the "Lager" and I say that okay, "I cannot leave the 'Lager' legally because I was not allowed to leave then- but then I broke those so called rules, because Residenzpflicht, you have to stay." I say, "no" I must move out. I must have my freedom. Like to go to a place where I would feel like being human, like to be part of a society where I feel like myself. In a Lager I was isolated. Totally living in a place, like even animals are not living in such a situation. So you feel you are isolated from the society and not integrated into society. I feel that I have to get into the society. People like myself I feel that I am integrated.

Similarly, Angela told me how she came across SPO:

> So I am affected by the Dublin Regulation. We were at a workshop at the University and saw that they had a table with flyers up showing that had accommodation for refugees. We reached out to Beatte and her colleague. They told us that they could help us with temporary accommodation for a day or two or a few days in Berlin. We were with the "Stop Deportation

> Group" and then we had a table where we were selling cocktails and so they had a table right opposite us and this is how we came to know SPO.

And according to Mohammed and Omar:

> Until I was in Berlin I was in a small town. I heard SPO about through a friend. It was boring in the camp. You have nothing to do only eating and sleeping. I wanted to change that life and so I came to Berlin.

> So the situation in the Lager is a bit complicated while we are living with lots of people. There is no respecting of boundaries and drinking. Lots of alcohol. Smoking in the room. There is no kind of respect. There is also nothing there in Frankfurt Oder that people can do. So everybody who is registered there is coming here to find a job and to live here. And I personally also came here to look for a job. And trying to live here. There is also much racism there. So the people in Frankfurter Oder, they are in a box that they judge people. They don't feel comfortable with migrants. Especially when you have a black skin. They behave in a real bad way. It's not like the people in Berlin. They are more cultivated and open-minded. They know migrants from different time. They know people of different colours.

Thus, many refugees came to a city where they could potentially network, possibly avoid deportation, and seek support from various groups. These actions show refugees' autonomy and resistance since many of them aimed to confront the Dublin Regulation by staying in the city for 18 months, the time period required in the second EU country if they wanted to avoid deportation to the first EU country they had set foot in. Over time, even families who feared deportation to their home countries such as Pakistan and Iran also heard about SPO and came to the shifts in order to find a safe space to reside in Berlin.

When asylum seekers and migrants arrived at the SPO shifts they did, however, come to depend upon the group to find housing. If the solidarity initiative was unable to successfully find housing for them, they then were forced to return to their original circumstances or to sleep on the street. During shifts, members were left with the difficult task of being forced to turn refugees away and they ended up sleeping on the streets or at emergency shelters. When members were unable to find private accommodations, they were often referred to an emergency shelter where conditions were difficult for homeless refugees, since in certain shelters they were only allowed an overnight stay and were forced to leave early in the morning. They thus needed to put in a fresh request for accommodation the

following day, travel back to the shelter, and pay an extra day of public transport fares. The refugees reported that they were forced to contend with much racism from the authorities at these shelters, where managers had an unfriendly demeanour, and often directed the people to apply for asylum, thus treating them with little dignity and respect. For example, each time I phoned a particular shelter to mediate for some of the refugees, I always encountered an unfriendly voice at the other end of the line: 'Why are you calling here, this is not a hotel' was the standard reply I often received. The refugees resided in these shelters because they had no other option. As many of them stated, 'Well, we have to sleep somewhere…we cannot sleep on the streets.' In this regard, the refugees were continually burdened with the struggle to find and create homes for themselves in civil society, since the city shelters failed to provide them with a sense of home. Such events tended to cause frustration amongst the refugees when on any given day there could be a very limited number of or no offers in private accommodations. Subsequently, many refugees ended up at the only city shelter in operation during the summer in the city. During the winter period, several emergency homeless shelters opened up in Berlin, but there were also more people trying to reside in such shelters. In some instances, these shelters also asked homeless refugees for ID.

During shifts the inequalities become most visible between mediators and those who searched, that is, when offers in private accommodations became scarce and the mediators made the decisions (usually on a first-come-first-served basis) regarding who could sleep in a 'nice private room', a public shelter, or on the street. However, the refugees' agency needs recognition even within such uneven dynamics since in the case of non-availability of private accommodations they independently decided what was the most practical and best option for them. For example, during summers, they made autonomous decisions as to they would rather sleep on the street, go to an emergency shelter, return temporarily to their camps, or stay with friends.

In some respects, the work of SPO and refugees needs to be understood as a common struggle against the German state's segregationist and racist asylum and housing policies. The group would then try to find rooms in Berlin with low rents and collaborated with another registered non-profit group, KommrRin, which collected donations so that refugees in search of accommodations could pay rent to reside in private accommodations rather than in state-run shelters. The perseverance of both

refugees and the support network to find safe spaces for refugees to live needs to be understood as a joint political struggle.

The refugees actively tried to find living spaces for themselves. For example, when I met James at Daniela's party, he told me that he had been searching for rooms in Berlin for several months. James was Italian by nationality and was of Gambian origin and had the right to work and live in Germany. But because he could not afford the rents in Berlin, he had stayed at Daniela's place for a few weeks. At the party, he chatted with the guests who were of various nationalities, ethnicities, and sexual orientations and seemed completely at ease. I asked him how he knew Daniela and he told me that he had met her through Schlafplatzorga and had stayed with her for a few months. He pointed to the couch he had slept on. He eventually found a job doing repair work and said that he had also found a flat near Schönefeld Airport which was about 10 stops from Neukölln, where he worked and where many of the SPO members resided. However, he told me that he could not afford the full rent, which was already quite low by Berlin's standards. He also told me that he had had to leave Italy because there weren't any jobs there and he thus made the decision to come to Berlin to work.

Similarly, Angela told me of her situation:

> Even though I keep moving from one place to another and it is not permanent, I feel as I found friends. I am happy because it is a good thing to have friends as well. I met Beatte, yourself, John, and Julian. I wasn't believing that it was possible and now it's been two weeks that I am not sleeping at the camp and I am happy. So I feel home away from home. Now, I am trying to find a more permanent place to stay, which we are working on.

Incidentally, SPO did find a place where Angela could stay for five months, but she needed to pay rent for a room, which was in part to be paid by her and in part by the group through events. The group as well as her flatmates collaborated with Angela to raise funds through Küfas, Tombola events, a lecture on 'Migration and Beauty' and 'Nail Art' events (where Angela painted nails all day long).

Furthermore, the refugees who SPO had supported over the years also actively networked with hosts and mediators such that several of them were able to acquire long-term places to reside. For example, Mohammed, who always seemed to have a place to stay, told me that the people who he stayed with were very friendly and came to resemble a family. He said to me with

confidence, 'they cannot tell me to leave and I can always stay there'. Similarly, Abdul Rehman managed to find a permanent place through his networking efforts and had been staying at the same place for the past two years.

Networking with solidarians involved joining them in their social events, Küfas, solidarity events, in some instances even accompanying them to demonstrations, and supporting the group with shifts, and being present at the shifts even when they had places to stay. It was in such social contexts and social political encounters that many of the refugees managed to network with the people they stayed with. As Lamine and some of the other refugees explained to me:

> It was nice because it was kind of community to me. Because earlier I was in the Lager and it was a different experience. Because in the Lager I am living with my fellow refugees. So I have the same problems with them. So in terms of some problems they could help me. But in case of other problems such as finances, I am on the same level as them. They cannot help me. In physical problems they could help me. Since I came here, they could form a kind of community for me. A solidarity community for me. They asked me my problems and helped me with a lawyer. They organised everything for me and even the cost of the lawyer was managed. They organised Soli-Küfa for me. It was a kind of community and collaborating together. I could move freely. Being a black moving with white people, they see you on a different level then being a black moving with blacks. They give you a little bit of honour. The relationship was good. The social life was also good. And I got to know a lot of public places. Like I remember the first public place, Tempelhofer Feld that I came to know. It was just a second day after my arrival. So I went with them and I saw this place. This was the former Airport and the city centre I moved with them. Then there was a lot of cops as well then. After hanging out with them, then I could go out by myself to go and build my own community and relations.

Fazila: How was your experience living there?

> When I was living there, there were four people living there including myself. Now there are two men and two women living people. Now I am living in Wedding with Germans, one guy and one girl. I know them already. The owner of the house is a friend of my colleague and she is in Dakar now where she is studying now for ten months. She gave me the room. She asked me if she could pay the rent. So that I could stay there. She was part of our movement here and she contributed a lot here.

Fazila: So you are doing shifts here? Why did you decide to give your time to SPO?

Sharif: I don't work. I don't study. I have plenty of time. So why don't I volunteer for something to help the others?

Fazila: How has your experience been volunteering?

Sharif: So far it's been good. But sometimes I feel that I disagree with someone at SPO. But the rest of the group agree with that point. For example reducing the shifts. From 5 shifts to 3 shifts a week. I don't agree with this. But the whole group agrees that we should reduce the shifts. I understand that they are working. And I am not. I have plenty of time and they don't. So we must reduce the shifts. At the same time I feel like it's really hard for the searchers. There are high chances of sleeping in the streets. Because of missing like two days of working.

Alif: When I went to the workshop to the bike I found Jon and Henri. I also lived with them. I lived with Jon at the Wagonplatz. It is an interesting place with several anarchists living there. Because when I came here I didn't have a stable place. Just living with friends from one place to another. I really loved to live in a Wagon. It was a spontaneous way of living I would say so. So the group that are living there are 12. The main group of the society they are having. And now I am in Neukölln with Hannes.

Fazila: How do you like staying there?

Alif: I really feel like its home. I really like it. There are two other people living there.

Abdul Rehman: Now I am staying in Neukölln in a long-term situation. I have been staying there for two years. I met the host through Beatte. I have my own room. And there are two cats. I feel very comfortable there.

Tamara Wilson (2009) in her seminal work on networking principles among Mexican migrants discusses the notion of weak and strong ties and the ways in which these ties become instrumental in migrants' decisions about travel to particular geographical destinations. Although the refugees in Berlin networked amongst each other in their attempts to find work and places to live, they also developed strong and weak ties with the host community who supported them. Furthermore, the refugees' social capital

also played a role in their respective ability to form social ties with solidarians. For example, refugees with particular 'social skills', level of education, and interest in sports, politics, or music were able to form relations with the solidarity workers and thus gain relatively more support from them than others. Wilson recognises the dynamic aspect of social ties such that weak ties may develop into strong ones. The refugees who participated in the SPO group also developed, which changed over time such that in some cases strong ties weakened when refugees relied less on their support network or strengthened over time because of mutual interests or even increased reliance.

The extent of the social ties between particular refugees and SPO members was especially manifested when some of the individuals who the members had come to know closely were suddenly deported from Germany. The impact of these deportations was felt at a personal level and extraordinary meetings were called to seek possible options. Communication with the person who was deported continued via social media and in one instance a chat group titled A's Fan Club was created where supportive messages were posted.

When another refugee was deported to her home country, she continued to write to me while she was being deported and sent me photos of the plane in the early morning. Upon receiving these messages, I felt dismayed and spent much time planning a solidarity anti-deportation awareness event with her former host to raise some funds which we hoped would help her during her initial months. Following her deportation, SPO members also organised an extraordinary meeting. The people who she had been living with for a few months and who were not part of the SPO group also attended the meeting and offered support in the short and long term. In the previous weeks they had also supported her and let her use their space for nail art events which had helped generate funds for her room rent in Berlin.

Following Angela's deportation, members of the group were clearly upset and thus were committed to supporting her so that she could survive economically during the first month in her home country. Thus, her former host and myself organised a solidarity event entitled 'Deportation awareness event'. A small group of people from various countries attended the event. We ate dinner and watched a film screening about refugees' experiences in Germany, and discussed the issue of deportations and social movements and refugee politics in countries such as Italy, Czech Republic, the US, and Brazil. These actions not only demonstrate the level of

support which solidarians provide, but also indicate the extent of the refugees' efforts to continue to maintain ties and contact with the solidarians and develop relations with them in ways that even subsequent to their absence promote willingness on the part of some solidarity workers to continue to support them in the short and long run.

Refugees managed to develop friendships with the group members, but at the same time felt obliged towards them when the members helped organise for payment of their rents or continued to find them either accommodations with affordable rents or solidarity spaces where they didn't have to pay any rent. As Mohammed told me:

> I would prefer not to receive 'help' and be in this situation for ever and I would rather have my own flat and pay rent- but the law did not allow me to work and even if I find paid work, it would be a challenge for me to pay the rents in Berlin.

Thus, the power dynamic between searchers (refugees) and the members was always present, and despite the solidarity efforts, the privileges of the members were always visible, which was evidenced by the fact that all of the refugees I spoke with understood the group as a humanitarian organisation rather than a political group. In many respects, they felt deeply indebted to SPO's work and did not always recognise their own agency and networking abilities. However, the refugees' participation in the group in a manner whereby many of them networked actively with the members does illustrate that these relational dynamics facilitated in breaking some of the state-imposed migration regimes since they actively chose not to reside in their state-assigned accommodations. Although these encounters between the solidarity group and refugees did not help shift refugee policy per se, refugees' agential capabilities need recognition even within such unequal encounters.

Hospitality and Hosting Refugees

As discussed above, an important and significant aspect of Schlafplatzorga's work included providing temporary accommodation to refugees who were in Berlin for multiple reasons. Several of the group members who actively participated in the initiatives also hosted many of the refugees. In addition, Berlin's residents who came to know about this initiative also

offered their spare rooms and couches in their homes to the refugees. Accommodating refugees in personal and private homes should be understood as an act of hospitality. As Derrida notes:

> Absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights. (p. 27).

However, this idea was difficult to implement even though, in principle, members of the group stood for 'open borders' and/or 'no-borders', 'freedom of movement', and 'safe passage'. Many of the people who offered their places requested that the mediator should send a refugee to their homes who was at the very least 'known' to them and who they felt comfortable with. In some cases, people who shared flats preferred to host women, or refugees who defined themselves as LGBTQI. For instance, one individual had clearly defined the profile of the person she wanted to offer her space to: a black woman who was preferably disabled and who identified herself as transgender or a lesbian. Subsequent to a match made between a potential offerer and a 'searcher', there were rules and conditions that the searchers needed to adhere to. For example, refugees' arrival and departure time, the number of days she or he could stay, as well as sleeping and eating arrangements needed clarification. In some cases, the hosts wished to be formally introduced to the refugees before they could stay with them. Thus, in many respects, the power dynamics continued to persist between the refugees and people who hosted them. Despite these levels of inequality, it should be recognised that hosts and refugees did make active efforts to socialise on equal levels. For instance, on one occasion, when I went with Ang to meet some people who had offered to host him for a month, they did express a genuine desire to get to know him on a personal level. On that summer evening, I met Ang outside the 'offerer's' apartment, which was located in the district of Wedding. Ang was from South Korea, and had been residing in Berlin for 12 years. He had arrived in Berlin on a tourist visa and had refused to join the army. Hence,

his passport had expired and he could not renew it. Ang had met two of the members of SPO at its inception, and he started coming to the shifts with the hope of finding temporary accommodation. He was noted amongst the members for always finding places to stay since he always managed to arrive first to the shift. He told me that unlike some of the refugees from various African countries who managed to network amongst themselves, he had no such networks, as he was the only South Korean migrant in this particular position. When I met him in front of Marie's apartment, he arrived on time and later over dinner chatted about his interest in music and the possibility of playing the piano in the flat with his hosts. Marie and Leo were delighted to hear this and even considered borrowing a piano for him from a friend who was leaving Berlin. They also offered him the possibility of playing at a bar, where Marie worked. They spoke of opportunities for him to possibly offer piano lessons. Ang immediately liked the flat, noting its thick walls and the fact that it was on the ground floor, conditions which he believed would enable him to pursue his interest in music. Thus, the hosts and the guest did try to diffuse the apparent inequalities by engaging in conversations which helped to obscure the power relations at least temporarily, while they focused on Ang's interests and hobbies. In this respect, Ang's agency also needs to be recognised since he did not focus on his difficult situation, but rather spoke about his interest in classical music, a less discomforting topic for everyone present.

Horst and some of the other members expressed to me their experiences of hosting people. Horst described his experience and relations with a refugee in the following manner:

> The most important I would say about a man from Chad who lived at my place for a long time and with whom I was in constantly in contact trying to support him to find a living in Germany. After it didn't work out, I helped him return to Chad under good conditions. And I am still in contact with him. This was the deepest connection and I would still say. For example with one guy who I meet every Tuesday and we meet play to basketball. There are several people I am in contact with and I would say that real friendships with I would say with Ki and Lamine.

Fazila: How do you think those real friendships happened with the three people?

Horst: I think with Ki, it's somehow because we have the same spirit. And I think it's also because he is from Chad and as I lived there for a

> year and a half and Lamine was like you know Lamine. He is very open and wants to move things. And Sharif I like his humour and I like his ways. I think it's just personal affiliation.

Thus, the power dynamics and racial hierarchies between a refugee with minimum resources and a white German man gave way to some levels of equality through social exchange, participation in sports, and other commonalities. Borders and rifts created by the state between refugees and hosts could be understood to be somewhat dismantled. However, it is only in this context of solidarity that long-term friendships can occur because solidarians do not always perceive the people they support as suffering victims similar to how humanitarian organisations see them, but rather as individuals who are in particular positions because of specific migration policies and legacies of colonialism and neocolonialism. But as Horst explained to me, it was not always so simple to host, and he encountered challenges which forced him to recognise his privileges:

> Horst: It's difficult to share your private life. You want to be alone but you cannot. And then you have this privilege conflict. You don't want to say, 'no' to a person who needs to be there. I think this conflict is also there. And sometimes you also have these different expectations. And you have different expectations of living together of duties and respect of boundaries maybe. The nice part of hosting is that you get to know different people. Also for me to speak French. Because somehow I feel connected to West Africa or Central Africa, because I lived there for so long. I share somehow the spirit of some people. Often they have also supported me in my daily life. I did some voluntary service in Chad for an organisation for rural development. Also because of Schlafplatzorga, I got to know many details of the people. I got to know the point of view many refugees of the repressions they have to deal with. It changed me a lot and also made me angry sometimes.

For Derrida, 'The very precondition of hospitality may require that, in some ways, both the host and the guest accept, in different ways, the uncomfortable and sometimes painful possibility of being changed by the other' (p. 48). Thus Horst's account demonstrates that he recognises his privileges and also self-identifies with the refugees in some ways, but nevertheless accepts the fact that the experience of hosting changed some of

his perspectives to the extent that it made him angry. Similarly, Christian, who had the experience of hosting for a shorter period of time, told me:

> So far it was easy going. Usually I don't have so much time to stay with the people and have dinner with them. But usually if somebody comes around we get to say hello and get to know a little bit. Often we would start discussions about living situations. Some people are, "hey why don't you find a living situation for a longer time for me? I am from Ghana. And there are always some white kids doing some social work somewhere. So why I cannot stay at their places for a longer time?" And I say, "You are totally right. After one year in school they go somewhere to help the world and be a better human being whatever." (Laughs). I get this critique. "I don't know what they do there in these places." They were right on point. And I was just sitting there and I said that you are totally right. But I said, "I am sorry, I cannot give you these places because I don't know them."

Fazila: How often do you host?
Christian: About five days a month. It's not a fixed thing but it depends on the situation.
Fazila: Do you think there is some equality between yourself and refugees?
Christian: It's like some moments when we are not talking about refugee related topics but like sports or music and subjects in which we are not too fixed in the situation we are in. But I can hope and can only hope that they can say something negative to me and feel comfortable enough.

Christian described himself as being active in anti-racist struggles. Thus, he offered his place for refugees to stay as an act of solidarity rather than an act of charity. It is significant that he understood his visitor's remark, since he brought up the idea of equal exchange and equality where the implication was that Europeans could easily visit African countries such as Ghana and find places to stay, but the reverse was not possible. Christian also distanced himself from the notion of 'volunteering' since he mentioned that he didn't personally know people who volunteered in Africa. Furthermore, it is important to recognise the refugee's agency in this unequal context since he asks Christian about the possibility of staying in other people's rooms in Berlin. It is significant that Christian mentions that he perceived some level of equality which can be best understood as a rupture, when the host and the visitor spoke of issues which had less to do with 'refugee topics' and instead focused on matters of mutual interest. It

is also significant that the idea that refugees should have the leeway to express their views was important to him. If we take into account Derrida's perspective that absolute hospitality requires the 'host' to allow 'guests' to behave as they wish, there must be no pressure or obligation to behave in any particular manner. Thus, even in hoping that the refugee who was a visitor in his house should feel comfortable enough to complain demonstrates that Christian refused to set expectations about the behaviour of the guests in his house and instead aimed to reverse the power dynamics at play.

Another member, Fernando, recognised the inevitable nature of inequality, but nevertheless allowed for possibilities of social exchange:

> Sometimes I have good chats. I met some interesting people through hosting. When you do the shift you don't have the chance to talk with people much. So hosting is also a way to socialise. But it's difficult to claim that you are on an equal footing if someone is staying at your house because he doesn't have a place of his own. But within that unequal space-I mean if you share a space for a few days you can and you have the time you can have the opportunity to cook together and have a chat and you can have an exchange. And so with a few people I can remember having interesting conversations. Some people just want to come and sleep and then they are tired and that's okay and leave the morning after. In some cases I am busy and they do their thing and I do their thing. I generally like it. On the one level it's not such an issue and it helps someone quite concretely and that's why I do it. There are many times I enjoyed doing it. Having a bit more interaction with this person than at the shift.

On the occasion when I hosted a family of Pakistani origin, I felt that the dynamic between them and myself was far from equal. I tried to engage them in politics by inviting to the demonstration 'Unteilbar' which was held in Dresden. During the train journey and the demonstration, I recognised that even though we were originally from the same city, I was forced to confront the unequal situation because of my stable position in Europe, my social class, and my ability to interact on equal terms with European activists. During the time they lived with me, I realised I was relieved that they were relatively independent and had their own schedule, but I also felt responsible for their well-being and was thus unable to separate the humanitarian from the political.

Thus power relations tended to persist, but one can perhaps best think of the exercise of power as malleable, reversible, and dynamic since the

refugee had the freedom to resist and exercise his freedom. For example, even in the context of solidarity, it was the refugee who exhibited some power and the will to decide whether he or she wished to engage in social exchanges or to simply rest and resist socialising with her or his host. But on the other hand, it was very difficult for them to leave if they did not like the conditions because the alternative was to return to the camp and face deportation or be homeless in Berlin. Foucault has noted that

> Power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free. If one of them were at another's disposal and became his thing, an object on which he could wreak boundless and limitless violence, there wouldn't be any relations of power. Thus, in order for power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free. One of them were completely at the other's disposal and became his thing, an object on which he "could wreak boundless and limitless power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides (Foucault 1982, p. 789).

Thus in the context of hosting and receiving, power relations continue to prevail but in an unstable and malleable way, since the refugees are not entirely free to leave or stay. Similarly, the host is not compelled to host the refugee, but may feel forced to do so out of his or her moral and political commitment. Therefore, in such a context when neither subject is entirely free, hierarchies between the refugee and the host prevail. However, in the context of solidarity acts, where hosts are conscious of unjust migration politics and their own privileges, one can always hope to shift power relations.

In some cases, people who hosted over a longer period came to know some of the refugees who stayed with them. In such instances, they would arrive at a consensus that they would not allow these refugees to be on the street. In this way some refugees were favoured over others, with the result that they ultimately experienced a relatively stable situation since they always found places to stay. For example, Tony provided her experience of offering accommodation to a refugee over the long term, stating that hosting became part of her everyday flat life:

> Yes, it's already part of my WG life. Right now we have for one month Mohammed staying at our place. For a month he stays at Beatte's place. And so he is like a flatmate. And I don't have to make any special arrangements. It's very easy going and before I had different people. But I always get a good feeling that they can rest for some days. And they are very open to

> share and nice. But I can understand why supporters stopped. It's also very very difficult when people tell you what their situation is. And how desperate it is and that they have no chance of getting asylum. They are so long in illegal status. And what racist experiences they had at the camp and then you hear this and you feel happy that you can help them. I feel overwhelmed at times.

Thus, in this manner, divisions between refugees and hosts were disrupted when the idea of hosting became normalised. For Tony, the act of hosting was not simply limited to supporting homeless people, but rather an expression of solidarity towards people who were illegalised and racialised. Thus, she was able to change the everyday conditions of her existence and life whilst creating a novel lifestyle and new possibilities for herself and to permanently reside with a refugee who she came to see as her flatmate. In this act of solidarity she experienced some personal 'joy' out of supporting people in precarious situations which signified inequalities even as she aimed to minimise the divide between herself and the refugees she hosted.

For Nina, hosting was also a display of hospitality such that she enjoyed social exchange but nevertheless experienced some challenges:

> For me what was most enjoyable was that it was most helpful for the people living at my flat normally. It was like getting up in the morning with a good feeling. But also sometimes like dinner conversations, breakfast conversations. Because I sometimes I just had nice times with the people who stayed at my place. The most challenging is that it's actual work. Like normally when you have guests in the house you have food in the house, that there is fresh sheets and that they are washed afterwards as well. That the room is prepared. It's not sounding like a lot of work but if there are four people staying at your place then really it gets to be a lot of work. The other challenge is to communicate clearly, that I have capacity to host to but then don't have the capacity for other stuff.

Nina was a long-term member of Schlafplatzorga and had extensive experience of hosting refugees. It is significant that she alluded to the mundane aspects of hosting, which involved much work in her opinion. Thus for Nina hosting became an endeavour which involved doing rather mundane tasks.

In many ways, the hosts aimed to normalise the situation and the encounter between themselves and the refugees they hosted. They engaged in ordinary talk and everyday acts such as cooking and eating

together. The hosts did not perceive the refugees to be in exceptional states and treated them as guests whose visits they could seek pleasure in or could be difficult in other circumstances. Similarly, the refugees initially engaged in these quotidian activities and it was only over time that they brought up more difficult and challenging matters related to their migration status.

It is precisely these quotidian ways of being in the context of providing hospitality and hosting in private accommodations that enabled both hosts and refugees to challenge the boundaries which the state, populist movements, and the right-wing media were insisting on creating between refugees and the host society. Power relations and inequalities between hosts and refugees were disrupted, if not eliminated, through everyday social exchanges, networking, and normalising these particular encounters and ways of living.

Contact Persons and Refugees

In addition to doing shifts and hosting, the members of the group worked closely with the refugees on a one-to-one basis and tried to meet their specific needs. These close ties further helped bridge boundaries between refugees and members of civil society to some extent, but when the support network worked closely with individuals' problems and concerns, inequalities tended to surface more readily in comparison to hosting and hospitality situations when discussion of individual problems could be temporarily avoided. In the summer of 2018, I worked with two people and even though I tried to engage in exchanges in a manner that was egalitarian, I don't believe I was always successful. For example, when I met with Ali (who told me that he was an anarchist in exile in Europe) in order to discuss the arrangement of funds to pay his rent, the inequalities between Ali and myself easily surfaced. Ali had no resources of his own and it was agreed that Schlafplatzorga together with another group would pay his rent. He told me that several of his family members were quite religious, that he had managed to drop out of religious training, that his mother had died when he was young, and subsequently his father had also passed away following his mother's death. Since my own family members were from a Shiite background, I gathered from his name and the fact that he was from Iran that he was also a Shiite. He confirmed my perception and told me that he was not a practising Shia. I told him that I enjoyed

watching Iranian films and he told me that I must watch his film. I asked if it was on YouTube and he said the trailer was on YouTube, but the film itself was on his hard-drive. I invited him to some forthcoming events in Berlin and told him it was important to be networked in the city and to find a good lawyer. I learned from him that he had acquired political asylum in Greece, and had done some translation work while he was there; however, he had not been paid for his work and therefore he had decided to come to Berlin. We then talked about politics in Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Such an exchange could be understood to be of a very ordinary nature between two people in a popular café in Berlin. However, the hierarchy between Ali and myself became apparent when we said our goodbyes and he ended with the remark, 'You are very kind person.' I immediately tried to even out the awkward situation by refusing to accept this compliment. Ali followed up his statement with a WhatsApp message, 'thank you for today' and a link to his film. I realised that even though I was trying to maintain an equitable encounter, since Ali was at the receiving end of my gestures this inevitably rendered any sense of equality void. Rancière notes that 'politics runs up against the police everywhere'(p. 32). It is indeed very difficult to shift certain orders in situations where one individual is equipped with knowledge and resources and the other is seeking a better situation. I later thought to myself that perhaps it was unrealistic on my part to try to be at the same level with someone so new to Berlin, even though I had tried to work from a presupposition of equality.

I came to realise that shifting configurations was a matter of process when I met with Lamine that very same evening, a former searcher at SPO, who since then had managed to network successfully amongst various people in Berlin. Beatte, who later joined us, comfortably took a sip from Lamine's Maté drink, and I realised at that juncture that I related to Lamine in a relatively equal way when there was no need to provide any solidarity. It also turned out that we had the same plans for the evening—an event organised by the group Borderline Europe at a leftist space, K9, in the district of Friedrichshain in Berlin. Thus, this account shows that over time it is possible to develop genuine friendships and share political and other interests and make decisions together when refugees are in relatively less precarious states. Lamine was no longer at the receiving end of 'distribution of equality', but rather we encountered each other on equal terms. Even though in solidarity work solidarians recognise their privileged positions and come to understand refugees they encounter as equals,

they nevertheless continue to remain on the receiving end, and the existing system or 'policing' in Rancière's terms continues to prevail. Thus reciprocity is seldom achieved, and perhaps it is only when refugees can make decisions and socialise together with solidarians as equals that emancipation can occur over time.

Such inequalities also became visible when I worked with a woman of Kenyan origin since she could no longer reside in her camp as her case had been rejected. Fearing deportation, she arrived in Berlin and contacted Schlafplatzorga. One of the members managed to find a room for her for five months, but she was unable to pay the entire rent. We decided that the group would supplement the rent and that she and I would meet to brainstorm ideas about how we could raise funds. I met with her to discuss this matter and together we agreed that we could organise a solidarity East African dinner followed by music. However, I was the one who decided upon the spaces where we could possibly hold the event and contacted friends who had access to cafés and a kitchen. I also met with Angela to plan a second event where she would talk about her own experience as a beautician with a colleague of mine to discuss the concept of 'beauty' in relation to migration. Although Angela was present at the majority of the meetings to discuss the food menu and the organisation of the events, it was I who helped with setting up contacts for the proposed events. A few months later, we once again met with Angela's flatmates and together we came up with the idea of holding a 'Nail Art' event on a Saturday. Angela was relatively more involved at this event and on the day received several clients. Compared to some of the other solidarity events, I did realise that even though not much money was raised through these events, they were organised in a way that furthered her participation and input. As Florence told me during an interview session:

> I think that we should do events such that the searchers can organise and propose events. I think that this event with Angela about beauty is so good and it starts from which she already does and because Angela can be directly involved and what she can do and I think we should really go in this direction. Searchers need to be involved in fundraising. They can propose and organise different kinds of activities. I can imagine fundraising to be in a very different way. I don't think it should be a huge event but different small activities and discussions or whatever because I think like there are many advantages in knowing more people who could offer and support us and make us more visible and raise more money of course.

Although these events did help with greater involvement of refugees and respected migrants' individuality and values, the obvious disadvantage was that they did not help generate large amounts of funds, such as in the case of solidarity parties. However, in doing so, these events helped raise funds for tickets for public transportation, and supported campaigns such as anti-deportation, rights to stay, and open borders.

Overcoming borders, hierarchies, and inequalities proved to be a constant challenge when working closely with refugees since their issues readily surfaced during such situations. Nevertheless, it was through close associations and working together to resolve some of the difficult problems of housing, raising funds, and asylum procedures that stronger relations between refugees and members of the group were fostered. Moreover, in some instances it was only through such joint endeavours that a few of the refugees did attain formal status in the German state and subsequently developed friendships and relationships which were on a relatively equal level with some of the long-term members of the group.

Solidarity Events and Sociality

One way that hierarchical elements within the solidarity group came to be disrupted was through sociality. Human sociality is understood as 'a dynamic relational matrix within which human subjects are constantly interacting in ways that are co-productive, and continually plastic and malleable, and through which they come to know the world they live in and find their purpose and meaning within it' (Long and Moore 2012, p. 41). The social exchanges and relationships which followed from social exchanges between the refugees and the members could then be understood in dynamic terms–sometimes on par but in other instances in hierarchical ways, such that the privileges of the members gained prominence.

Many of the members told me that they had very few friendships with refugees which they would consider to be on equal terms:

> Nina: There is super different relations. There are some searchers I know quite well and perceive as friends and it's a difficult question on how you deal with this asymmetry and so on. I also feel a bit separated and something and I feel conscious that I should not create this shitty paternalistic position which I am in. And I just try to be then polite and friendly and be helpful as I can then be in this more friendship thing. And for me the personal solution is to focus on

getting the offers and then I feel I also do some consulting during the shifts and try to figure out places where people can go. But I don't really have a good method to address this privilege and hierarchy and stuff.

Fazila: Have you maintained connections with the refugees for over a longer term?

Nina: Yes and no. I have very very few long-term friendships with searchers and refugees in comparison to the contacts I have. I think it's because I feel really really split about this hierarchical dynamics. Real friendship would mean for me would mean to talk about each other's' problems and how you are. Somehow for me gets to be really difficult. But most of them they are not primary support relationships. I don't really remember that it was a searcher who was mainly a searcher. I have some friends amongst refugees but those are through organising stuff together and who were in the protests together on a horizontal level. There is also this hierarchical dimension but it is not so much as in the first layer.

Fazila: Do you think you had a reciprocal relationship?

Nina: I think it was me who was doing the giving because I had the resources to do something. Also I don't think I receive well. For example there are instances when people cook when they are coming to my place. People borrowing my bike and then going to bike repair workshop and repairing the breaks or the horn? And there are some things which I understood as reciprocity. And also in the relationships where I feel like people became friends, it's also for me that gets more horizontal. It's not like in this physical way, ah 'I do this and this for you' but being there for each other in a more meta way. We created WhatsApp for everyone so that people could articulate stuff and share information and for people to say how they are. I am not sure how it works now because searchers are not so actively using it. But I think it is a good possibility from our side to share information and to make things more accessible with less work.

Fazila: Do you think you get to know the searchers?

Laura: Sometimes it's difficult to start a friendship. There are a lot of searchers. Also from the other side that people might be in need of social contacts. And more lonely, then it's not an equal relationship. And also you cannot build this relationship to everyone but it can happen. Yeah. One or two friends of mine can become friends of mine.

Fazila: How do you relate to the refugees? Do you have relationships with them?

Jörg: I have not been with the group that long-four or five months. And the searchers are very young-sometimes as young as 19 and 20. It's another relationship with them when you are with such young people (laughs). The older they are, then it's easier. One of them that I know best is almost the same age as I am. I see of course that sometimes he is on the streets and I cannot help him. I never feel that there are these different levels. But at the same time I can see that it can be hindering having a real relationship. I see it also when I see other members of Schlafplatzorga have that I don't know whether consciously or unconsciously –but there is no room for that. There is always that hierarchy. And I wonder how that comes. Even in the cases when they know each other very very well. One example is that one searcher lives as a kind of flatmate with one of the members. Even though he lived with her for a very long time, I see that she behaves in another manner with another flatmate. There is a hierarchy between them. There is just that kind of situation that he is in trouble. I don't know how to solve that trouble actually. I think that is why I am cautious. I don't want to make it too easy for me-making friends out of them. Actually, if you see that it's just a man or a woman or a person in trouble then there is no reason for a kind of relationship then.

Differences with respect to age, gender, social class, level of education, social capital, and resources are some factors which tend to create hierarchies and diminish the possibility of mutual reciprocity. The group members recognised that paternalistic attitudes and working from a moral imperative was not of much value. Thus, many members believed that to even try to establish equal relationships between themselves and the refugees that they 'solidarised' with would be futile and somewhat paternalistic and would not shift the status quo. As has been pointed out by several scholars, solidarians understand themselves as politically inclined and tend to differentiate themselves from the ideological underpinnings related to the idea of humanitarianism (Redfield 2012, p. 451; Rozakou 2016; Theodossopoulos 2016). Members of SPO were not any different in this regard despite the diversity amongst them.

Most members were aware of their privileges and often spoke of sharing privileges rather than establishing social relations with the people they supported. Even people of colour and refugees who formed part of the group recognised some of their privileges in terms of skills, educational

level, the varying jobs they held, and their relative levels of stability. However, this is not to say that there were no opportunities for refugees to establish social relations. During the shifts, I observed that many of the refugees socialised with each other and with members of the group. For example, Alif, who was present during most shifts, assisted with translations since he spoke Arabic, English, and French fluently, which helped facilitate social exchanges. Many of the refugees who came to the shift to search for spaces chatted with him and shared cigarettes and drinks. On the days when I participated in the shift, several of the refugees would speak to me about their interest in music, the politics of their home country, and their present situation. However, like many of the members of the group, I did not actively push for friendship, but rather allowed interactions to develop in natural ways. In her study of solidarity groups, Katerina Rozakou (2016), who worked in Greece with refugees and immigrants, demonstrates that commensality was the manifestation of a sociality that transcended or even reversed hierarchies, and the political formation of sociality was grounded in the level of human interaction, and in the ways in which activists sought to engage with the 'other'. However, in Berlin, interactions between activist groups and refugees in many instances reproduced racial hierarchies since refugees were the beneficiaries and the members' role was to provide support.

Solidarity Parties

There were several social events as the members in the group held parties, went to picnics, and organised social actions in order to raise funds for the groups. Members of the group invited refugees to several of their parties and parties of friends. For example, upon his return to Berlin, a special party was organised for Sharif, who was popular amongst many members of the group as well as the refugees who formed part of the group. He had to return to his camp in order to complete his paperwork and could no longer stay in Berlin. However, when he came to Berlin for a short visit, he immediately contacted some members of the group. Beatte hosted a dinner party for him that very evening. Several of the people who knew him came to enjoy the vegetarian Thai dinner. At the dinner, Sharif actively participated by talking about his various experiences to everyone present, selecting music on the laptop and talking about his inventive ideas for various products. For example, he had designed a woman's shoe at his Heim (home) and he showed us a paper model of the shoe. I introduced him to

electronic cumbia, which he seemingly appreciated. Additionally, there were three more refugees who joined the dinner and actively participated in the ongoing conversation. It was a warm summer evening and the guests floated in and out of Beatte's balcony and kitchen smoking and drinking following the dinner. In this manner, the power relations between refugees and Berlin's long-term residents tended to relax at the many parties, political demonstrations, fund-raising activities, outings to lakes, music festivals, and films where at least two to five refugees and migrants actively participated together with the SPO's regular 6 to 10 members. But, at the same time, I would argue that the refugees did not feel entirely comfortable in all situations, and the dominance of German supporters became apparent at some events.

For example, on another occasion, we were invited to Beatte's party. There were a number of her personal friends, around eight searchers (who came at different points in time). Two of them brought friends along with them and five members were also present. Although the 'searchers' came, ate and drank, and tried their best to participate in the party, the majority of them sat with each other and did not interact much with the German guests or the members of SPO. Nor did the German friends or the members make much effort to interact with them. Occasionally, they tried to join in the conversations, such as when Nina spoke to me about her attempts to join a kickboxing class—a searcher sitting next to me did participate and Nina translated in German about her experience with kickboxing. I spoke to Lamine, who had become a long-term friend of the members, about the possibility of doing a solidarity dinner together for a searcher at the radio studio space in which he was an active participant. However, I had minimum interaction with some of the other refugees and did not and could not engage in conversations of sufficient depth mainly because of language barriers since my French and German were not so fluent. On a theoretical level, I connected with the refugees since many of them were from former colonised countries and first-generation immigrants to Western Europe, but social class, differing language abilities, age, and gender were some of the barriers which I could not always manage to overcome even in relaxed social situations. Nevertheless, I did observe that solidarity work brought about the gathering of refugees and privileged European citizens in common spaces in ways in which perhaps professional volunteerism within NGOs could not always do, since the focus in such organisations remains on humanitarian and compassionate values where they actively try in vain to demarcate politics from humanitarian

actions. In the case of solidarity work, activists recognise the very social and political injustice ingrained in the asylum policies.

Solidarity parties were a popular way to raise funds. For this purpose, spaces where people with left-wing ideologies, anti-racists, anti-fascists, refugees, migrants, and LGBTQI people would feel comfortable were hired for a small fee or free of cost. Bands and DJs were contacted, food and drinks were organised, and the event itself was advertised through websites, list-serves such as Reflect, and a local free magazine, which advertised events to and by people on the Left, namely *Stress Factor*. The solidarity groups also depended on Facebook for the publicity of their events. The purpose of the solidarity party varied and organised groups as well as individuals would generally come together to organise a party. A solidarity party was rather labour-intensive but solidarians were willing to make the effort since in many ways it brought people together and shifted the meanings of spaces when activists and refugees gathered to enjoy some music and dance together, but more significantly it was one of the most lucrative ways to generate funds. In some instances, solidarity parties were held following major demonstrations.

These parties tended to be inclusive of Berlin's diverse population and they were generally multi-generational, and it was not uncommon to find older activists at the parties. During my fieldwork and ongoing activism, I attended countless solidarity parties as there was at least one in Berlin per week. I enjoyed experiencing the unique spaces with their particular architecture, political artwork, and outlandish murals. Moreover, I liked the idea that people came together to enjoy music and consequently raise funds rather than through individual private donations.

The solidarity parties were not entirely unproblematic. Much like other fund-raising events, the decision-makers and organisers were almost always the citizen solidarians rather than the refugees, and the refugees' agency was limited during such events. For example, at one solidarity party which I attended in Berlin, a longtime friend of mine who wished to DJ was rather offended because he did not even a get a chance to participate. The party was organised by a *Bleiberecht* (right to stay) group and it included a line-up of various live music, spoken word, and hip hop. Included in the lineup were also a DJ, Bino from Wearebornfreeradio. Since I knew the DJ quite well, he invited me to go along with him and warned me that he would not be playing before 1 o'clock, since the hosts wanted the live bands to play before him. I agreed to go and we arrived at 11. At the entrance, various flyers were laid out on an information table and two

Germans greeted us. Flyers for the forthcoming 'Welcome Parade' were also laid out on the table. Donations began at four euros. It was a mixed setting where many young white Germans and refugees and migrants of Afghan and Iranian origin were socialising with each other with relative ease in the bar area, while a DJ played in the corner. Posters of forthcoming and past demonstrations were posted on the walls and a statue of a tiger directly above the bar lent the bar space its own unique character. I spoke to two young men from Iran and Afghanistan. At one end of the bar there were pots set up with the label Küfa and groups of five or six men served food in exchange for donations. For much of the time they remained seated around the food, occasionally getting up to serve food and receive donations. They told me with much pride that they had prepared the food, which included rice, vegetables, salad, fried plantains, and fried dough balls. Downstairs in the dance area various people continued to dance to the live bands. The people from Afghanistan and Iran also joined in but those who had been involved in preparing the Küfa diligently stayed by the food talking amongst themselves. The live bands continued to play well past 1 am and Bino did not receive an opportunity to DJ since he had to be home by 3:30. On the way back, we discussed the possible reasons regarding the decision for live bands to perform prior to the DJ. It was obvious to Bino that it was a deliberate decision on the part of the organisers of the solidarity party in order to attract crowds. He told me that he knew very well that he was put at the end because he was less well known and that even solidarity groups tended to operate with a neoliberal and capitalist agenda. Bino already had a sceptical vision of solidarity work and when he didn't receive an opportunity to perform at the solidarity party, he was even more critical of some of the work. He was of the view that even though many of the solidarity parties were held in not-for-profit spaces which were managed by the people who owned these spaces, the parties themselves did not always convey egalitarian values.

When Schlafplatzorga organised a party, there were similar issues since the party group did not necessarily include the input of the people who came to the shifts in need of temporary accommodation, but rather the sub-party group consisted mainly of EU citizens and refugees who were also members of the group and were regularly involved in the daily workings of the group. The party, held at a leftist space, K9, with hip hop bands and DJs, proved to be a financially successful and an inclusive event well attended by EU citizens, people of colour, refugees, migrants, and even school children. However, the agency of the searchers was generally

limited since they didn't participate in its organisation and were at the receiving end. Nevertheless, the practical and some of the socio-political consequences of the party need to be recognised, since the funds generated from the solidarity event were meant to support refugees with accommodation in Berlin such that they could receive opportunities to work in the city, to interact with the residents, and to possibly avoid deportation. Furthermore, these efforts were expended by the activists not because they felt 'sorry' for the refugees and migrants, but because they vehemently opposed the German state policies and laws that discriminated against the groups which they supported.

The Techno Festival

There were variations in the ways in which social encounters took place. In some cases, refugees and solidarity workers could easily access certain events, but other events required funds to attend and it was only the financially privileged who could do so. For example, it was easier to attend a birthday party or an informal gathering in a park, since such events were free of cost, but there were occasions when it became difficult for refugees to participate on account of restricted finances. Unlike NGOs and professional volunteerism, groups such as Schlafplatzorga did not have much funding and much of the money was raised through small actions and micro-funding. However, there were opportunities for outings when other solidarity groups invited members of Schlafplatzorga to participate. For example, in one instance, organisers of a leftist music festival group invited about seven members from the group to the festival free of cost. The group decided to invite three refugees who they knew well to the techno festival, but because of limitations on the ticket they could not invite many of the refugees. Nevertheless, the refugees who went to the festival received the opportunity to leave the city and to be at an event which they otherwise would not have been able to attend because of the high cost of admittance. Similarly, the presence of refugees at the festival also somewhat transformed the atmosphere. As Christian explained to me:

> The searchers had quite a good time. But the people who came with this group just doubled the POC (people of colour) rate for the festival. It's like I said we cannot change society. I was impressed but a bit sad. It's sad for the festival that it's such a white festival. And it showed me that it makes

> sense to do such effort. It's definitely a left-wing festival. They have good ideas- but they cannot change society. And say that, "we definitely need 25% POCs people in this festival." That's why we do it like this and we cannot force it. You can think how to make it easier and blah-blah. But everything costs money. So how many free tickets can they offer? Things like that. And we are still living in this society. Just because you have good ideas about it and sometimes you cannot solve it.

Christian recognises that there are limitations and restrictions within different settings even though he believes that the refugees' presence benefited the left-wing festival normally attended by young white Germans. Yet it needs to be recognised, given its political ideology, that a techno left-wing event would not necessarily have invited a mainstream humanitarian or NGO group to participate. It is only because of SPO's left position with respect to migration as well as the nature of their work that they received the invitation. Similarly, Tony, another Schlafplatzorga member who went to the party, had a positive view with respect to the presence and inclusion of refugees in a predominantly white leftist space.

> Yes, the two searchers who came were at the info-table all the time. But all in all it was a new impressions for them because they had never been on a festival before. I remember my first festival and it was always really crazy all this stuff going on everywhere. I mean this techno scene. And they both really really liked it. Also this sleeping in tents together and cooking together. Having this holiday kind of feeling out of reality. But I thing they really enjoyed it with the people because I think it was like a left wing festival. The people I had the feeling were very open and aware in trying to talk. I think just to dance in a nice friendly environment can be also very empowering at some point. For me it was not the best music for me because it was too much techno but at the same time you could see the people were the ones you see at Berlin's soliparties and 70 percent of the people had a political T-Shirt on.

However, even at a left-wing music festival there were some problems since many of the refugees were subject to stereotypes and experienced instances of racism. As Florence told me of her experience at the festival

> It was a techno festival. For me it was really nice and really interesting to go there with other people from Schlafplatzorga because we got to know each other better and for searchers like for me it was really nice because for most

> of the time we are in this situation that they have a problem and I try to help. That's really a difficult relationship for me. It's something like you have to do and I am in this position and at this festival –it was like more we are here and that we can go dancing together and we can listen to a concert together. One is quite free in whatever he or she wants to do. Everyone is like there and we can eat and cook together. Everybody has a place to sleep. Still there is quite a difference-most of the time-like ten times a day –they were asked if they had weed to sell. I can't imagine a situation like this- but I can imagine a situation where you feel that you don't belong to this place. Because everybody is coming there and pretending to know what you are doing there and that has nothing to do with who you are. And of course there are differences. And for the relationship between people there was a very interesting one.

Thus, for Florence participation in the festival was enjoyable and it helped foster better relations among the group members, but she was conscious of the fact that for the refugees it was not entirely easy to participate in a techno festival where it was the norm to consume drugs. The interactions that occurred between white festival attendees and the refugees demonstrated how racial hierarchies come into play. Thus even in the context of solidarity actions, which were not grounded in troubling emotions such as 'pity' and 'compassion', hierarchies and divides persisted. Fanon's work offers a genealogy of race, a history of decolonisation, illustrating how the (wealthy, white) coloniser exists only through his relationship with the (poor, dark) colonised (Fanon 2004, p. 2). 'For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man…his inferiority comes into being through the other' (Fanon 1967, p. 110). Each exists only through the other and the nature of their relationship constructs their ontological polarisation, and wealth exists in relationship to poverty; indeed it is predicated upon poverty and whiteness exists only through the social construction of blackness (Kane 2007, p. 353). In the context of a music festival which was principally attended by young white Germans, their encounters with refugees cannot simply occur in equal terms because their very presence helps the white festival-goers define their whiteness in relation to poverty such that they come to understand the refugee as the impoverished migrant whose sole reason to attend the festival is to earn money through illicit means rather than to enjoy the festival. In addition to the problematic encounters between refugees and white festival-goers, one of the group members who attended the festival also demonstrated a certain perspective which could be understood as a less than optimistic

view. For example, Beatte provided me with a detailed account of her experience at the music festival.

> I think it's necessary to involve everyone who is also the searchers and therefore you have to have the awareness of the other side, that festival people, that someone is coming. And it's somehow a political context. So there should be awareness. Awareness should be spread somehow. People are coming, people of colour. Also refugees and migrants. And this should be not done. There should be no racism, there should be no sexism. This should be part of the festival. To feel safe. There could be people without papers. We asked the searchers to come along. Everyone was asked but then because of appearance and somehow having a good relations with some people, there were three people we focused on. Who everyone was aware of that there should be three people. But we didn't ask them in the organisation process. We knew that they would not be competent enough to organise a tent, organise a sleeping place, organise an air-mattress. So we organise everything for them but not including them, which could be then better- because of time reasons. Also because of lack of time of several members, it would not have been easy to organise together. And then after we managed to sleep and to eat together, we have enough food and drinks and water and also coffee in the morning. And nice sleeping situations.
>
> In the festival we noticed that the night was too cold. So we didn't prepare the people for the cold night. Because actually I was prepared. I went to a festival two or three weeks beforehand. But I was not aware of it. This is an important point for the next time. So we were not prepared for the entire situation there. And somehow for next time we should talk about for next time for the person who never attended the festival, who are maybe Moslems and who are not used to being in extreme situations like this. It's an extreme situation- a techno festival, it is. And there should be awareness from both sides. But they really enjoyed the time. They loved the festival. And now for example Hassan, he is asking, "Beatte are you doing party?" And he wants to join. And it's an equal situation. It's just a friend. So, yes let's do party together and meet somehow. So there is a lot of trust between the searchers and myself.

In the above account, Beatte provides her perspective on how the refugees who participated in the festival could have been better included. She offers her personal reflection on refugees' experiences at the festival. For instance, she noted that there were challenges involved in including refugees in a space generally frequented by German young people who enjoy a particular kind of music, and therefore it could not be assumed that everyone

should or can enjoy this space in the same manner. However, she did observe that the refugees who participated eventually enjoyed the festival. When I spoke to the refugees who went to the festival, they told me that they all enjoyed the experience, the music, and the people, and that they would like to go again. Whereas the group members provided me with lengthy reflections about their experience and their perspective with respect to the inclusion of refugees at the festival, the refugees themselves simply told me that they had had a good experience. In this respect, solidarity acts facilitated social and dynamic relations between differing actors. Consequently, solidarians did try to mitigate regimes and boundaries between refugees and citizens.

The participation of the two refugees in this festival is noteworthy since it allowed them to be in a lively space where there were young people, music, food, and political workshops, which they enjoyed. However, their presence and experience at the festival was not entirely without problems since the refugees did encounter instances of racism. Moreover, they were not involved in the organisation of the festival and there were limitations on the number of refugees who could participate since there was a limited amount of free tickets available. In this sense the notion of solidarity cannot always be assumed to contest the status quo and bring about social inclusivity, but rather in some instances activist groups can inadvertently reproduce inequalities and racial hierarchies.

Solidarity at Demonstrations

There were other solidarity events where the presence and inclusion of refugees led to congeniality. For example, an initiative called 'We'll Come United', comprising people from different social, anti-racist, and political networks from Berlin and Hamburg, organised a community carnival parade in Hamburg. On its website, the initiative put forth several demands including a stop to deportation, equal and social political rights of migrants, an end to deaths in the Mediterranean Sea and at the Greek camps, family reunification, urban citizenship, and an end to a racist system. About 40 trucks representing various initiatives in Germany participated in the carnival parade. Schlafplatzorga did not have their own truck but decided that it would be important for some of the searchers in the group to participate in the carnival. Furthermore, since the action was in the form of a 'parade' rather than a 'demonstration', it was considered safe for people to participate even if they were illegalised in Germany. Alif, one of the members

who spoke multiple languages and was at the shift every time the refugees came to search for accommodations, decided to mobilise the searchers. About 10 people signed up to go to the festival and 6 of the refugees promptly arrived at the bus station for an early morning start to Hamburg from Berlin. It was a comfortable bus ride to Hamburg and members and refugees joined different groups at varying points during the parade.

The atmosphere at the parade was relaxed and the police cars were stationed at a comfortable distance. It was significant that all of the refugees felt enough at ease to participate in the march, to spend time at a leftist bar located nearby to play some hand football, chat with people and recharge their phones, and enjoy the hip hop concert at the end of the festival. Although Anthony, who listened to hip hop, did tell me that that the German hip hop bands spent far too much time shouting and that they didn't realise that hip hop was also about rhythm. In comparison, he favoured the American hip hop bands and believed that they were the kings of this genre. At the end of the trip, when we finally reached Berlin, Anthony realised that it would be difficult for him to re-enter the emergency homeless shelter where he had been staying during the last few days since it was quite late. A member's boyfriend then invited him to his place. It was an uncomfortable moment for all of us, since Anthony had participated in the parade and had been with us throughout the event, and leaving him on the street while we returned to our homes felt rather unjust. Consequently, I was relieved when Anthony decided to accompany Alejandro to his house. On the way, we spoke about the different places we had resided in and visited and compared the prices of bottled water at kiosks, corner stores, and Spätes in different countries such as Italy, Germany, the UK, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland. Thus, the participation of homeless refugees in Berlin at a carnival parade in Hamburg demonstrated that solidarity efforts did help break boundaries and bring about change in a way that could be understood as doing some level of politics, since these acts occurred in the face of discriminatory policies and laws rather than simply 'care and compassion'.

There were nevertheless instances of hierarchies at play even in this example, since it was ultimately the members who helped facilitate the trip for the refugees and informed them of the meeting points, schedules, arrival time, and departure time as they were equipped with the social capital to do so. Nevertheless, it was the refugees themselves who made the decision to attend and march during the parade and they themselves decided which aspects of the parade was of most interest and relevant to

them. However, unlike the music festival, which was mainly a festival where young white Germans with left-wing orientation participated, the carnival parade was relatively more inclusive and perhaps even more relevant to the plight of the homeless refugees, and thus expressions of solidarity could be easily articulated and hierarchies between members and homeless refugees came to be temporarily diffused.

Politics and social gatherings intertwined when members and interested searchers from SPO attended demonstrations together and then followed this up with purely leisurely activities such as visiting Berlin's nearby lakes during warm weather. For example, one summer day, on the Telegram communication system, a member posted that SPO members should participate in the Seebrücke-Seehoffer demonstration in Berlin. Several of the members agreed to participate and on the day of the demonstration four of the members and two migrants with their friends met by the Neptune Fountain with some food and ate lunch together at the rally. One of the members distributed some of the SPO leaflets to the people at the rally. One migrant, Omar from Chad, also participated in the demonstration. I asked him what he thought of the rally and he told me that it was good that there were people who were supportive. However, he remained mostly quiet and it seemed to me that he did not feel completely comfortable. Afterwards, we went to the lake and Alif joined us. Elias, a long-term activist, stayed with the demonstration until the very end. Beatte, Fernando, and Alif went on their bikes and Omar and I went by bus. The group did not want to pay the entrance fees for the lake since the refugees were unable to do so and in order to demonstrate their solidarity, they climbed over the fence to the lake area. I was helped over the fence with the additional support of bikes. Beatte and Alif chatted away and Fernando made some notes in his diary. Omar looked pensively at the lake. Afterwards, we decided to get some pizzas and to meet by a church square. The church was huge and covered all four sides of the square. Three people on bikes and two on foot biked and walked around the church several times looking for each other until we somehow found each other. It was a comical scene and somehow added a convivial atmosphere, which in my view had been missing at the political demonstration and at the lake.

These accounts demonstrate that the idea of solidarity extended beyond that of attending to refugees' immediate needs and included people attending social gatherings, going to political demonstrations and on social outings, and normalising exceptional circumstances such that this served to contest the division and regimes between host society and

newcomers created by the state and the right-wing elements. However, whether the social environment and its dynamics helped produce change on a larger scale was debatable. Sally Anderson argues that participating in society and community proper appears to require shedding all involuntary affiliations, and that an open cosmopolitan stance requires a further shedding of 'one's own kind of people, people similar to oneself' (p. 104). The solidarians did make efforts to create open and cosmopolitan spaces, but there were limitations to the ways in which such spaces could be enacted because it was not easy to include refugees in all social events at all times. Furthermore, in many cases refugees did not always identify with people on the left and their political views. Many searchers within SPO, for example, simply wanted to live their everyday lives with dignity and not attend the demonstrations, festivals, and parties which formed the fabric of the radical left in Berlin.

The Küfas

Solidarity groups in Berlin also devoted much time to raising funds through collective actions such as cooking, solidarity parties, screening independent films, lectures, and even selling solidarity cocktails in the park during summer. Such actions did help the people who participated with a collective sense of being which would have been absent if groups had merely depended on private donations. On several occasions, such events also helped unite refugees and solidarians since they worked together, even though in some cases inequalities in terms of decision-making and levels of participation continued to prevail. Furthermore, the events helped shift the dynamics of certain spaces. Refugees now occupied spaces which were normally dominated by anti-fascist and anti-racist young white Germans and people from various European countries. Following the refugee movement of 2012, when several refugees broke out of the isolation in the camps and came to Berlin, it was common to observe refugees and refugee solidarity groups organising parties and Küfas (Kitchen for All) at left-wing spaces such as former squats, bars, and cafés, which included the New Yorck im Bethanien New York, K9, Prinzessinnin Gärten, Möbel Olfe, B-Lage, Rauche Hause, and Supa Molly in Berlin. Several of these spaces were equipped with kitchens and bars, which the groups used to prepare meals and serve drinks. In some of the bigger venues, it was possible to raise funds through 'soliparties', which tended to be very popular

among younger Germans and where hip hop bands and various musicians with a left-wing orientation would often perform.

Refugees were relatively more involved in Küfas, fund-raising events which involved cooking and selling food at a nominal price. Fund-raising through these social and political actions was one of my favourite activities in Berlin. I enjoyed the preparation for these events since it encouraged conviviality and I appreciated the experience of chopping vegetables, cooking, and eating together while conversing. There were several groups which raised funds and aimed to bring political change through Küfa.

Schlafplatzorga and Solizimmer were also amongst the groups that tried to raise funds through several social activities such as Küfas, soliparties, and selling drinks at leftist co-operative bars. Later, another initiative, Kiez Kantine, which organised Küfas each week, became immensely popular amongst the left, solidarity workers, and refugees. These occasions also lent visibility to the groups since these events were open to the general public. Schlafplatzorga regularly organised a vegan Küfa once a month at a café which allowed solidarity groups to use its space on the days they were shut for their own business. The ingredients were mainly collected from 'food share' initiatives in Berlin, a concept and method which had attained much popularity in Berlin. The aim of food-sharing was to save and distribute surplus food from waste, thus sending a message against everyday waste, and traders, producers, and individuals offered free groceries that would otherwise have been thrown away.

As at other events, refugees who had become friends of the support network over time were present and assisted in the preparation and collection of the food and socialised with each other. However, the members were responsible for the main organisation and always made the decisions for the menu, and the refugees had little input in these decisions. The main course tended to vary. On one occasion, when hamburger buns became available through food share, a vegan burger was invented quickly and the support network and the refugees together prepared the patty. Since there were also a lot of potatoes, mashed potatoes, chips, and potato salad were prepared. The food was laid out in buffet style and people could eat as much as they wanted. Various tasks were allocated evenly amongst the people present. I sliced some cherry tomatoes for the salad and invited several people to share this task with me. I chatted with Mohammed while he meticulously sliced the cherry tomatoes. Since it was a hot summer day, I decided that this task needed to be performed outside. Various passers-by greeted us as we sat outside preparing for the

evening dinner. In this manner, the solidarity group claimed the streets and sidewalk in Berlin and transformed it into a site of social activity which included both refugees and European citizens.

An information table was usually set up at the entrance with flyers and a donation box. By the end of the evening the group had often collected 120–140 euros, which was a paltry amount given the effort invested in preparation for the meal. But as one solidarian remarked, 'it's nice in the end to come together and work'. However, the Küfa was largely organised and managed by a few members of the groups and the refugees had little input in the decision-making and organising of the Küfa. It was usually on the day of the Küfa that they supported the event through chopping vegetables and cleaning rather than making actual decisions about the menu and the cooking. Thus, I found the Schlafplatz Küfa to evoke divisions between refugees and citizens in an overt way even though it did help to bring different groups of people together in a common space.

Similar to Schlafplatzorga, there were various groups who organised Küfa events in order to raise funds. To provide a comparative perspective, I will provide an account of two Küfas I attended and supported. One of the Küfas was organised by the initiative Solizimmer. Their monthly café Soliküfa was held at the café-bar B-Lage, which I was quite familiar with since I had attended several events, lectures, and screenings there. B-Lage was located in Neukölln at the end of a tree-lined street and always looked inviting and friendly. The Küfa event was advertised through a Facebook events page, and upon receiving the notification I offered to help with the preparation of the food. When I reached the café, Ron was already there and I entered a mid-sized kitchen with an adequate cooking range, well equipped with pots and various cooking utensils. There were several chopping boards as well and I noted that a woman was washing some carrots in the sink. Ron and I started to peel some onions. The windows in the kitchen could not be left open since the odour from the kitchen supposedly disrupted the ambience in the neighbourhood. Soon my eyes began to water heavily and I decided to peel and grate some ginger and garlic instead. Ron explained to me that it was Mary, a migrant of Ethiopian origin, who directed the entire cooking event since she was a professional chef. The menu included lentils, cabbage, potatoes, carrots, salad, and rice. When Mary arrived, it was immediately clear to me that she was indeed the head chef in the kitchen. She started to dice and chop the peeled onions and some tomatoes very finely at the speed of light. Soon there were more women in the kitchen, and they chatted with each other

as they continued to peel and chop more ingredients for the Küfa. Soon some of the pots were put on the stove and onions and tomatoes were fried in one pot, rice was cooked in another, and cabbages, carrots, and onions were cooked in yet another. The colours red, white, and green began to blend nicely and the dish looked promising.

Soon Mary decided to take a break and invited me outside for a smoke. She said she had some mint cigarettes and so I joined her and she asked me where I was from. I told her that I lived in England and that I was born in Pakistan and that I had always visited Berlin over the summer and did some research here. She told me that she was Greek-Ethiopian and had resided in Greece for 20 years, but had to leave Greece during the economic crisis. She had arrived in Berlin in 2014 and had been living here ever since. It was very difficult for her—she had to leave everything behind and was completely displaced in Greece because of the crisis and then came to Germany. However, she didn't have any means of survival and went to KUB for support. She learned about Solizimmer at KUB, which had been supporting her since then. She said that she would like to open a restaurant in Berlin, but didn't have the financial means to do so. I envisioned her running a restaurant, but then she said that she was indebted to Solizimmer for their support since they had helped her a lot. She had four children, two of whom were adults and two younger ones from another marriage. Her mother lived in London and she had contemplated moving there, but realised that it was not easy to survive there either. She said she would probably visit her mother there and then make a decision. When we returned to the kitchen, the lentils were perfectly simmered to the point of perfection. The bar was also open and a donation box was placed on the top of the bar. There were people already drinking and seemingly enjoying the last days of the summer. As I had to leave early, I decided to eat outside, which caught some people's attention, which in turn prompted them to go to the café-bar to ask for food. As I started to leave, I realised that they would definitely enjoy the meal and make appropriate donations, and also enjoy the summer evening in a nice café in Berlin, but would remain unaware of the chef's complex life trajectory.

There were variations in the ways in which Küfas were organised. In some cases it could be a stand-alone event and in others eating was combined with music, lectures, talks, solidarity parties, concerts, and even demonstrations and parades. The aim of Küfas tended to vary

considerably. While the purpose of some was to raise funds for practical purposes, they were also organised to fund radical campaigns. For example, in one instance I attended a Küfa organised by some individuals who simply described themselves as a group of people working together to stop deportations. The Küfa was advertised as 'Stop Deportation Küfa' through various channels including flyers and the O-platz media channel. The event was not organised by a particular initiative, but by a group of people who had come together to consider how to best stop deportations and to show solidarity with people who were being deported. Their plan was to hold workshops on the topic of deportations and to organise regular Küfas each month. The flyer for the event conveyed the following message:

> In Berlin, deportations happen all the time. Every night, the danger of police raids looms for people without German passports, whom they want to get rid of. People are being taken out of their beds and forced on deportation plans. This takes place all around Berlin, in refugee accommodation centres in our neighbourhood s and in apartments around the corner. While most of Berlin sleeps, the German border system enacts its ruthless practice of expulsion. When the state unleashes this child of violence, it is up to us to stand in their way. It is our collective strength that can create underground networks of practical solidarity. It is our involvement that can create environments where people can feel safer. Let's not sleep through their deportation raids, but instead organize ourselves to resist and fight for the right to stay for everyone! The Anti-Deportation Café will not just be for food and drinks, but let it be a space where we collectively organize our resistance! Pakistani food, donations want to go to the struggle for the right to stay.

The image included people holding a banner which read *Abshiebung ist mord* (Deportation is death) and *Kein Mensch ist illegal* (No person is illegal). The text and the image clearly conveyed that to participate in the Küfa meant participating in an act of resistance. I decided to participate in the Küfa and invited a good friend along. It was located at New Yorck im Bethanien—a venue I had long since gained familiarity with. When we entered the venue, three Pakistani men served food, which included fried rice, chickpeas, and *aloo pakoras* (potato fritters). I asked them if it was spicy and they told me, *Un ke hisab se banain hain* (It was prepared in accordance with their tastes). I figured that it was not very spicy, but they gave me an extra portion and I put some euros in the donation boxes. My friend seemed to enjoy the *pakoras* and I explained the recipe to her and

the multiple and versatile uses of chickpea flour. I went to get a drink at the bar and met a woman from Belgium who was passing through Berlin and had resided in the city for some years. She said she was trying to connect with some of the political groups in different EU countries. I provided her with some information about the campaign to close down Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre in Britain. I also told her about the group Schlafplatzorga. Soon, some of the long-term searchers from Schlafplatzorga began to arrive. I greeted them and I talked with them about our forthcoming solidarity event and Küfa on the following Saturday. I asked them if they would be around to help with the preparation of the food and they said they would try to be there. Anand was curious about the music at the event and wanted to know if they would use percussion. We encouraged him to inquire about it, but he did not seem to enjoy the music and left the dinner. However, another searcher, Omar, stayed. Since he spoke fluent German, he spoke at some length with the woman from Belgium and was clearly disappointed that she was leaving Berlin that very evening. The live band performed and the German audience clearly enjoyed their performance, but none of the Pakistani men who had cooked the meal or the refugees who represented Schlafplatzorga seemed to relate to it. Nevertheless, it seemed to be a successful event since over 50 people were present. For the rest of the evening, I did not manage to speak to any of the Pakistani migrants. Despite the fact that they were of Pakistani origin, I could not manage to engage in any conversation with them, but rather socialised easily with the refugees who were connected with Schlafplatzorga. We managed to communicate in the common language between us, which was German. It was only with Anand with whom I communicated in English. These were the long-term searchers who were present regularly at shifts looking for temporary accommodation, and since I participated in the shifts regularly and was responsible for finding rooms for them to sleep in, I had come to know them quite well. Despite the obvious difference in our respective situations, the searchers from SPO and myself, in this particular social situation, chatted with each other with ease and out of a sense of familiarity. Thus, the Küfa in many respects helped raise funds for various purposes, and to develop social relations between the refugees and solidarity workers, even though, as discussed above, not all refugees and solidarity workers participated in similar ways. In many ways, participating and organising Küfas can be understood as doing politics since the idea of Küfas primarily means working, eating, and socialising together with the aim to establish social justice and equality and

to contest a neoliberal world order. Contentious politics has been defined as 'concerted, counter-hegemonic social and political action, in which differently positioned participants come together to challenge dominant systems of authority, in order to promote and enact alternative imaginaries' (Leitner et al. 2008, p. 157). The mundane act of cooking and eating together is not always understood as politics and is generally meant to form part of the domestic sphere, but the political dynamics of such actions should be recognised given the fact that the very act of coming together in a common space engenders social exchanges between citizens and non-citizens while working to contest unjust policies.

Given that in Germany asylum seekers are housed separately in camps which are often located in remote towns and villages, it should be understood that the state does not encourage such forms of collective behaviour amongst citizens and non-citizens. Thus, the solidarity of Küfas becomes instrumental in facilitating exchanges between citizens and refugees which otherwise would not have been possible. However, even more significantly, the Küfa represents a politically left perspective, since it is generally organised by groups and people who self-identify as anti-racists, anti-fascists, and opposed to border and immigration regimes.

In order to attain some insights into the ways in which the solidarity workers also understood the Küfa, I decided to interview some of the people in this respect. Beatte, who was mainly responsible for the Küfa organised by SPO, provided her insights in the following way:

> There is this Küfa kitchen for everyone, which happened 1 and a half years ago in time. And I love this Küfa and it's about food. Food brings people together. Food can be everything. And then brings people in an easy way. Sharing experiences and cutting stuff. And in the moments of preparation and in the moments of cooking you get together somehow physically, because you are sitting together. And then also in a cognitive way because you start to talk about stuff maybe randomly and maybe related to migration situation. And this kitchen brings people together makes a nice exchange possible for people who are not so political and for people who are actually quite political, neighbours who just pass by at the café where we are doing it. And then making out of it collecting donations because people want to give money for this. It's a dinner because it's delicious and it's a dinner because they want to support Schlafplatzorga action. It makes a good feeling for raising money and it's also a meeting point for friends and family and also new searchers, former supporters, future supporters, old members. And sometimes it's working and sometimes not. For example there was this

> one guy sitting alone in a corner. You are somehow occupied with other stuff because of organising the Küfa, you feel a difference then. I wanted to say Küfa is not excluding but it is actually. In some moments, when the person is not feeling welcome then.

Thus Beatte's account provides a positive experience of the Küfa. In her view, the Küfa extends beyond the sole purpose of raising money since it helps generate sociability and interactions as people work together. She also thought that the Küfa might produce deeper discussions about the topic of migration. Thus, a mundane event such as chopping vegetables and cooking could potentially serve to transform people's experiences and perspectives on issues such as migration and also help create reunions. Yet Beatte did not completely idealise this action as she recognised the fact that even in this highly sociable and convivial context, one could not dismiss the possibility that people could experience exclusion. Jörg provided a similar perspective about his own experience with the organisation of the Küfa:

> Küfa is one of the best things of Schlafplatzorga. You are just cooking together, inviting people. Having a good time. There is just fun actually. Just the shared experience of cooking and eating. There is no dogma in there. And I want to keep that also. There is the opportunity for also breaking hierarchies between searchers and members and also opportunities for potential offers. People may ask, 'What is Schlafplatzorga? Giving my couch what?' And then people come to the Küfa and they meet the people and they see for themselves. And normally, then there is a lot of new offers actually. Because nobody feels pressed to oblige and people feel that if I want I can join. And if I don't I can leave my 5 Euros and come again (laughs).

Thus Jörg understood the Küfa's dual function, which on the one hand helped bring refugees and their support network together and on the other helped the group with visibility and in turn generated offers. Thus, for him also, the Küfa went beyond its material benefits, since the actions helped bring people together. The fact that Jörg mentions that people did not feel pressured to actively participate demonstrates that the Küfa needs to be regarded as a safe space where strangers meet, eat together, and leave at will. Many of the solidarity workers including myself appreciated the fact that Küfa resulted in shared experience and collective behaviour. Denzel, a migrant, often searched for places to stay in Berlin, but at the

same time supported SPO's work and understood its practical implications. He provided the following account:

Fazila: Apart from looking for sleeping places, there are a lot of other activities that go on-such as the Küfa, going to a music festival, organising a party etc. Do you think that these activities are important?

Denzel: I think that these activities are really really important. They are super important. Apart from looking for sleeping places, people need to connect. To have that connectivity and to make people feel at home. For example the Küfas, a soli Kitchen where people come and eat at little or no cost. You have something, you give. If you don't have something then you are still welcome. It permits you to meet and talk to people. Because life is not only about getting a sleeping place. You can get a sleeping place. And then what next? You need status. Let's not forget that most of these migrants don't have status in Germany. So they cannot get the house on their own. Some of these Solikitchen and parties permit you to meet people and talk to them. Maybe you can create friendship and something else comes at the end. You get a possibility of getting status. You can get it. You need status. It also helps with finances. Because apart from the connectivity, the Küfas help you raise some small funds. The migrants don't work. When we send them to sleeping places, they need tickets. So how do you expect them to buy a ticket? The small funds we get from the Küfas and Parties are used to buy tickets. Sometimes we use them to buy food as well. When people are looking for a sleeping place and they are hungry, it's good to have the possibility of giving them a cake.

Thus, Denzel understood the practical value of the fund-raising action from the perspective of one who had resided in various countries. It has been long established that networking among refugees is crucial for their survival and mobility within the host state. Denzel explicitly mentions the significance of the Küfa and similar events in this connection. I recognised this important aspect of the Küfa as well, and during my shifts I often invited refugees who were looking for places to stay to the Küfa, so that they could have the opportunity to meet new people at these events.

The complexity of solidarity events is evident. In many instances, different activist groups, refugees, and migrants from various countries came together in a common space to achieve common goals. These solidarity events differed from traditional fund-raising events since they were always held at leftist spaces, activists and refugees, citizens and non-citizens worked together to create the event, the attendance price was always *spenden* (donation-based) or free of cost for those who couldn't pay, and food was cooked in a manner such that it coincided with left politics. However, at the same time, it was EU citizens who generally made major decisions regarding the choice of space, bands, and other details, and who had the know-how and social capital to access the required resources for solidarity events. Furthermore, even though refugees and citizens participated together in various ways, there was always some unevenness to the ways in which they came together.,

Concluding Comments

Grassroots solidarity initiatives such as Schlafplatzorga and related groups in Berlin strove to display solidarity and political and humanitarian commitment, and aimed to make the city an open place for all refugees regardless of their formal and legal status. They tried to find living spaces for refugees who were avoiding deportation by leaving their camps. In this way, solidarity activists came to participate in anti-racist endeavours. Solidarians recognised and interrogated their own privileges and power and tried to share these privileges by offering to provide accommodation to individuals who they understood to be racialised within the German state. There were positive outcomes for some refugees resulting from the solidarity encounters since some of them were able to reside in Berlin, network with local residents, resist deportation or isolation in the refugee camps, learn German, and in some instances work in Berlin. To a certain extent, solidarity work should be understood as acts of resistance towards Germany's immigration policies, which consisted of housing refugees in far-flung camps, deporting them, or offering work opportunities and integration courses (which focused mainly on German courses and an understanding of 'German way of life') to a limited number of refugees who 'qualified', such as those who had attained formal refugee status or had higher chances of doing so.

At the same time, there were limits to solidarity efforts since racial hierarchies and power relations between the people who offered support and

those who received support could not always be easily overcome. Solidarity work also came to resemble humanitarian work, since the group's focus remained on meeting refugees' everyday practical needs and there were no overt campaigns against unjust asylum state policies, even though groups such as SPO aligned themselves with political initiatives which focused on anti-deportation activism and with groups which campaigned for everyone's rights to the city. Refugee justice struggles related to hospitality and sharing of individual privileges can have limited impact when the power of the state remains unchallenged. In several respects, SPO's work raises important questions about who, exactly, is positioned to offer hospitality to refugees, and who should be determining the conditions of membership, and to reflect on the type of politics that informs such forms of hospitality (Fortier 2013; Walia 2012, 2013; Moffette and Ridgley 2018). Although the group members often participated in demonstrations and protests in the city, SPO's focus remained on offering practical support at individual levels such that the goal of finding accommodation for refugees in Berlin risked becoming an end in itself, which in turn did not help in shifting systemic structures. SPO only made contentious politics possible to the extent that they supported refugees who were not meant to be in Berlin and who encountered border closures, but they did not develop campaigns of their own in ways which could overtly reflect their political stance and political history.

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CHAPTER 5

Intersectional Feminist Solidarity and Activism amongst Refugees and Migrants at International Women's Space in Berlin

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the ways in which a feminist intersectional solidarity group, International Women's Space (IWS), expressed their solidarity with and support for female refugees through their activism by providing them with multiple platforms to present their narratives in three published books, on their websites, at conferences, and in various public and private spheres. I will additionally discuss how IWS equipped refugees with knowledge regarding asylum laws through regular lawyer's workshops. The chapter also focuses on IWS's protests and activism during international women's events. Finally, it discusses the meaning and impact of intersectional feminist activism and solidarity in the context of migration when there has been a rise in xenophobia and politics of hate in the German state and in Europe.

IWS began in 2012 during the occupation of the Gerhart-Hauptmann School. Initially, the group consisted of 30 women which included a mix of female refugees and female European citizens. The women were of the view that the refugee movement was increasingly male dominated, and that there was a strong need for a space where refugee women could organise and mobilise based on their specific needs. IWS made their presence and ideology known via a sophisticated and regularly updated website. On their website, they explain their mission statement as follows:

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F. Bhimji, *Border Regimes, Racialisation Processes and Resistance in Germany*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-49320-2_5

> International Women Space (IWS) is a feminist, anti-racist political group in Berlin with migrant and refugee women and non-migrant women as members. We fight patriarchy and document everyday violence, racism, sexism and all kinds of discrimination. IWS was formed in December 2012 during the Refugee Movement's occupation of the former Gerhart-Hauptmann School in Berlin-Kreuzberg. We created a Women's Space there, which remained open until the summer of 2014. We worked to form a women's front within the Refugee Movement that brings the fights against both racism and sexism together. After the eviction of the school, International Women Space continued working, with new members joining us. In 2017 we founded a registered association.
>
> We are fed up with people speaking about us and not with us. Women's resistance is often oppressed, and Women's history hidden or ignored. We take on the responsibility to counteract this by documenting, making visible, and publicising our stories in our own words.

The mission and ideological statement of IWS encompassed an anti-racist and intersectional feminist politics. Similar to many groups which supported refugees, IWS offered practical solidary, but at the same time it was also a group which overtly challenged state politics regarding asylum laws in concrete ways through publication of books, readings, launches, conferences, and street protests. Members of IWS included refugee women and Germans who advocated on behalf of refugees in different ways. As some of the women in the group explained to me:

Alex: First of all I think it is not offering too many practical solutions. Yes, when women come and when they need a place to stay. We also do these lawyer's meetings. We do offer practical help. But it's mostly about doing political work. Trying to make the voice of migrant women and refugee women visible. To show a different image of women refugees. So what we do is more like theoretical work and more feminist work. Documenting history. Researching feminist history. And publishing it. And making voices of women visible. Especially refugee women. More present inside the refugee struggle. (For me) practical solutions are like in singular cases. Real change is not going to happen. It will not change the political structure. It's a better front to fight in. We don't want to help one or two women to stay.

Jennifer: We founded IWS because of the political situation we were confronted with when we came here as refugees and migrants. Our concept of feminism is different, because the rights we are fighting for is not the same rights that white women are fighting for. We are fighting for the very basic human needs for women in this country. And the other kind of fight is not the same. Justice for example with Rita. A good living environment. Access to health. Access to basics. We are fighting for the basics. Our demands are not on the same page, so we always organise ourselves differently.

Uli: I understand IWS aims to make stories visible which was not visible in this society. And which are actually silenced. In order to keep their power structures working these stories are silenced. And I understand IWS to reveal these stories. And to put the hegemonic society in its place. And to tell them that we are also part of IWS. To write a different kind of history, a history which is not based on conquering violence but a feminist history and a mixed history.

Lica: I think we are definitely feminists because we are organising women for women. And our focus from the very beginning was always the refugees' situation in Germany and Berlin. Because all the laws around it in Germany are completely unfair. And put the women completely in isolation and create invisibility. It accumulates so many layers of rejection that women already have in the patriarchal and capitalistic system. So it is and you are always invisible. I think the system here is not easy. Everywhere you need to move before you understand the system. But the system here is really complex. It's not made to be understood. And our big struggle was to self-educate yourself. It's about empowerment. Yes. But it's about self-educating ourselves. It's very connected to learning. Women should have the opportunity of learning.

The above excerpts demonstrate that the initiative recognised the ways in which discriminatory aspects of asylum laws which denied basic human rights came to intersect with gender. The women convey that the political work of IWS overlapped with humanitarian work such as re-representing refugee women in particular ways, providing them with lawyers' services, and engaging in anti-racist work by taking to the streets.

I came to understand IWS to work within the framework of intersectional feminism since over time IWS expended considerable efforts in challenging multiple vectors of oppressions and in disrupting the gender, race, and class logic. IWS apprehended that black refugee and migrant women's experiences could not be understood in similar ways to those of male refugees, and that their gender, race, class, and status affected the ways in which they were treated by the German state and society. Kimberly Crenshaw (1989) argued several decades ago that black women's multiple forms of discrimination need to be understood:

> I am suggesting that Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men. Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination-the combined effects of practices, which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women-not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women. (p. 149)

Similarly, feminist, activist, poet, and writer Audrey Lorde wrote in her book *Sister Outsider:*

> Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a mythical norm, which each one of us within our hearts knows "that is not me." In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside in this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing. By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretence to homogeneity of experience covered by the words sisterhood that does not in fact exist. (Lorde, 1984)

Collins and Bilge (2016) stressed the importance of understanding the complexities of society through an intersectional lens:

> Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analysing the complexity of the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organisation of power in a given society even better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to complexity of the world and themselves. (Collins and Bilge, p. 5)

Black women refugees bore the double brunt of racism and sexism in ways that their male counterparts did not necessarily experience. There were many women refugees from countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Cameroon, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan who had travelled to Germany by themselves and resided in reception centres and refugee mass accommodations where they encountered much injustice, isolation, racism, and violence. In this context, when women migrants needed visibility to express their experience of injustice, IWS intervened and supported some of the women refugees so that they could not only voice their experiences of multiple oppressions, but also share the narratives of their fights and struggles against what they perceived as wrongdoing by the state. Even though I argue that IWS understood the multiple oppressions women encounter based on gender, sexuality, and immigration status and aimed to contest state domination, unlike some feminist advocacy groups, IWS didn't define themselves explicitly as an intersectional feminist group. For example, for some feminist groups such as Sisters Uncut, a UK-based feminist group, the possibility of putting intersectionality into practice was first and foremost seen as based on maintaining safer spaces, but what constituted a safe or safer space was contested and negotiated (Ishkanian and Saavedra 2019). What was of utmost importance for IWS in their own view was that there needed to be a space for women refugees which allowed them to find ways to challenge the oppressions women encountered, to empower themselves and female refugees through different but concrete means. IWS aimed to achieve these objectives by meeting weekly in an office space, making visible refugee women's narratives, through participation and organisation of conferences, through readings, organising book launches, organising public demonstrations, providing a space for refugee women to meet weekly, providing practical support to refugee

women such as pro bono lawyer's workshops, and maintaining a detailed website where they archived their activities and interviewed women.

IWS's work was guided by particular values and political ideologies, but they were at the same time very focused on achieving concrete and material outcomes such as books and conferences, and above all struggled to retain a physical space where women could meet, participate, and develop their activities.

The Political Culture of IWS

The political culture of IWS differed from leftist solidarity groups such as Schlafplatzorga, described in the previous chapter. For example, in the majority of leftist anti-racist groups which worked to support refugees, there was much time spent deliberating and debating proposed actions until a consensus was achieved. In the case of IWS, the focus remained on publishing books, meeting deadlines for grants, and planning for concrete actions rather than debating over particular points at much length. In this manner, material culture also gained significance within IWS, such that specific objects became embedded with collective meanings and gained significance for social groups as the material expression of collective processes (Appadurai, 1986; Miller, 1998). An important contribution of the anthropology of material culture is the analysis of how objects have a social life (Kopytoff, 1986; Barassi, 2013), and in this sense the books that IWS published therefore became the medium through which political and social relationships were developed since the publications became available and accessible to individuals, feminist groups, refugee and migrant support groups, students and academics, and women's book stores in Berlin. Furthermore, there were individual requests for the books, and I observed some of the women members regularly go to the post office to mail out the books. Denise stressed the importance of publication of books in the following manner:

> Maybe because we are old style. The older members of the groups are still into books. We don't know what the future of books will be. But we like a lot that our book is complete. We think what we have to say doesn't fit into this small communication. There are marvellous online websites now where you can publish a lot. But I don't know if our focus group is interested in reading online long texts. I usually don't read a long text in a mobile phone. But maybe because of my generation. So for us it is important to have a

> physical book. To go deeper into the subjects. I wanted to propose a conversation with the society… After the school we had to be concrete. And the book is a concrete proof that we have been there. I mean the title of the book, 'In our own words.' The title of the second book 'We exist. We are here' could be also the title of the first book. But the end of the occupied school was so dramatic that everyone thought that we also as a group had finished.

IWS members asserted their presence and ideology from the very inception of their formation. I started to attend the meeting organised by IWS at its start, when they met on the women's floor at the occupied school Gerhart-Hauptmann School in 2013. At the time, about ten women from different African countries resided on the third floor of the occupied school. A woman of Italian-Croatian origin, Tanya, with whom I struck up a strong friendship, also lived in the occupied school. Tanya also participated regularly in the meetings. These meetings were held on Saturday afternoons, which enabled me to participate regularly each time I visited Berlin. The women who attended the meetings and formed part of IWS were from various countries with different status in Germany with respect to formal citizenship. The women were also differed in terms of sexual orientation, age, race, formal education, and social class. At these meetings, I met social workers, a film-maker, Roma activists, counsellors, and women with and without formal employment. However, the women asylum seekers who resided on the third floor of the school rarely attended the meetings but rather participated in the lawyer's workshops, when a female lawyer visited the occupied school and provided relevant and practical information to the women. At that time, IWS met informally as it was not until 2017 that it became a registered association. In the words of Denise, the women's floor and IWS within the refugee movement came to represent women's exclusive needs:

> Our women's floor, like other women's occupations, created a possibility for us to rely less on state institutions and their frameworks, empowering us to enforce and activate our feminist demands through the self-organisation of women. Moving to Berlin gave women the opportunity to find a job, (even though many women were officially not allowed to work) and to engage politically with different feminist networks - fighting together for their rights. IWS were all about the formation of a space for our own self-determined freedom. The organisation of our own places was followed by concrete actions against sexism and the corrupt structures within a patriarchal

> and male dominated world. We put lots of effort in transforming the rooms and facilities of this floor, as well as introducing a number of activities during our 17-month stay at the GHS.

Thus IWS worked to fight patriarchy and gender-based violence and to make particular demands on the state for refugees' rights. Not all of the women living at the occupied school understood the contributions of IWS. For example, an activist, Mariam, of East African origin, actually opposed the presence of the group because of the presence of white German women and the lack of participation of the African women who actually resided in the school. She was of the view that IWS simply used the space but did not involve or contribute in any visible manner which benefited the women.

Funding Matters and IWS

There was also much debate and discussion about the ways in which the funding was utilised. Initially, IWS received some startup funds from Mama Cash, a funding agency which supported activism by women, girls, transgender people, and intersex people. On its website, Mama Cash's policy is described as follows: 'Mama Cash strives for a peaceful, just and sustainable world in which every woman, girl, transgender and intersex person has the power and the possibilities to participate fully and equally.'

Consequently, IWS decided to use the funds they received for their activism and make the narratives of the women visible through publication of books rather than meeting the immediate practical needs of the women. It was a difficult moment for IWS since they had to explain to women in dire circumstances how funding and grants worked. At that time, the women refugees who were living in the school had practical needs and did not comprehend why the women met each Saturday in their space where they resided, received funding, but did not express any practical solidarity towards them. Thus the focus of the discussion during the meetings revolved around explaining allocations of funding, the role of the group within the refugee mobilisation at the time, and understanding the legacies of colonialism. In some instances, debates and discussions became rather heated when women questioned the role of the group as well as white German women's role within such a group.

In the subsequent years, IWS received funding from different sources. However, discussions around funding continued and the group expressed

caution with respect to the manner and the sources of donations. For example, in 2019, IWS had applied for funds to a beer company, Quartiermeistre, which offered limited amounts of money to different social groups in Berlin. IWS was successful in receiving some funds, but objected to their process of allocating funds. The beer company sent invitations to the winners to a reception and a celebration, but did not tell the invited groups if the company would support them or not. The company requested that the groups make a five-minute presentation and be photographed. IWS members objected to this process because they did not wish to publicly compete with other solidarity groups whom they collaborated with. Furthermore, the members were of the view that the work of IWS could not be explained in five minutes. Most of the members felt that such methods of funding reflected a neoliberal and capitalistic venture. This issue was discussed extensively and the group sent a carefully written email to the beer company in which they expressed their views and criticism of the funding process. As Alex told me:

> I think it is problematic if we work with a group, which is a capitalistic agency. They make their money from selling. So they make publicity by being a social project and this publicity is serving them and serving the groups that get money from them. But I agree that putting people together in competition in this way, and the way made it like a TV show, like a reality show. They could tell the group who won, instead of keeping it as a secret from them.

Nevertheless, IWS made a collective and pragmatic decision to accept the funding and to write to the funding agency to express their discomfort with the process. In the end, some of the members went to the office of Quartiermeistre and received the funds. Such concerns about the funding process conveyed the political ideology of IWS and their commitment to collaborating and building alliances with various social and political groups in Berlin instead of being in competition with them. Thus, IWS members spent considerable time and effort to obtain funding. In 2017, IWS became a registered association and the group became eligible to apply for further funding, but they also had to demonstrate on paper their activities and future goals.

In addition to securing funds through grants, IWS also raised money through organising solidarity parties and events. For example, each year IWS organised a solidarity party in collaboration with a leftist space,

Regenbogenfabrik. The solidarity event worked in similar ways to the many solidarity parties (see Chap. 5) held in Berlin, where there was home-cooked food, local live bands, a small market, and much networking and socialising amongst the people who attended. In 2019, members of the radio group Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio also attended their event with their table and merchandise, which comprised sweatshirts and bags in different colours. The IWS table with books was adjacent to the radio group table and some of the members bought the sweatshirts. In this ways solidarity groups in Berlin supported each other's work and collaborated during events. On another occasion IWS managed to raise relatively significant funds when a group entitled 'Soli-Crepes' offered to support IWS. The group made crepes in the kitchen at a leftist space, B-Lage, while a few members of IWS sat in the café at the IWS table with the books, information leaflets, and flyers about upcoming events and demonstrations.

IWS and Meeting Spaces

The physical space where members of IWS met and developed their activities acquired considerable significance. The space was not limited to just holding meetings, because meetings could be convened in any office or even cafés, but having a consistent space with all its dynamics allowed the group to develop in ways that made it possible for them to fulfil their larger goal, which was to provide a way for migrant women to develop their politics. Lila and Jennifer provided me their view of the significance of the physical and ideological space:

Lila: The office is a possibility to include more women that protest because it gives a space. Because there are a lot of women who are looking for a space, for a place to arrive or for an address to find. Having a space makes IWS more inclusive because not all women can be on the street. And they will go on the street if there is stability and safety and the office is giving that. I find it as part of the political work the office.

Jennifer: Women have to take spaces. Be it in the bar, in the streets. It's more radical to take to the streets, but we have to take all the spaces. Even in gentrification, even in the private sphere. So it's a political action. We can no longer remain silent.

Thus, the material space was of significance since it was used to provide a supportive structure where women migrants could feel safe and comfortable. Given the constant shifts in asylum laws, increase in right-wing anti-immigrant politics, and the ever-increasing threat of deportation, it became even more important for female refugees to come together and find their common ground in spaces where they could contest violence and xenophobia, which was becoming the norm in Germany.

IWS struggled to find a regular space to meet. When the Green Party and the police who were brought in from different parts of the country tried to evict the people from the school in June 2013, a few of the members actively participated in the resistance and protested against the eviction by refusing to leave the school and climbing on the roof to draw attention and support from German citizens and Europe.

These protests drew substantial local, national, and international attention. However, even though some of the people who had occupied the school acquired the rights to stay there for a number of years, the district prohibited them from holding meetings there. Thus, IWS encountered the challenge of finding different meeting spaces and offices throughout the city. For a number of years, the women met at different locations, in private homes, and in cafés until they found a permanent space in 2018, not far from the Gerhart-Hauptmann School where they first started in Kreuzberg, Berlin, a district well known for its political activism and cultural life.

This office was far removed in terms of organisation from the meeting room in the formerly occupied school and some of the other spaces where the group met. As one entered the office space, one could readily see IWS's material accomplishments, since in the front room books published by IWS were neatly arranged on a bookshelf. It was in this front room that women refugees socialised amongst themselves, laughed, joked, chatted, and planned for forthcoming activities in several languages, while some of the women members worked to secure funding and wrote emails in smaller groups in the meeting room on their laptops. Posters and flyers of past and forthcoming political events and demonstrations particularly connected to women on the walls further conveyed the particular political ideals of IWS. At the entrance of the office, flyers for various political events taking place in Berlin sat on shelves. The meeting room consisted of a long table with chairs around it, which took up much of the space. The walls were covered with various political posters. For example, on one wall there was a poster with an image of a fist with the words 'solidarity with women's

struggles of the world', a poster for the freedom of Lula Livre, and a poster which related to IWS's conference 'When I came to Germany' in several languages conveyed IWS's political and alignment with global struggles. There was also a black chalkboard stand, where the agenda was usually noted. At the other end of the room, there was a computer and a photocopier. Adjacent to the meeting space, there was a small kitchen with a table and a few chairs, where members made coffee and tea and at times meals. The kitchen was also a space where members of the group and refugee women came together to meet, chat, and discuss ongoing matters in an informal way.

The Women at IWS

The women at IWS described themselves as anti-racist feminists, some of whom were migrants themselves who strove for social justice for women asylum seekers, recognised refugees, and migrants. They were of the view that the struggles of black women, women of colour (BPOC), refugee women, and established migrants overlapped in several respects. Among the women who co-founded IWS and were especially active in the group were three who were born outside Germany and understood the commonalities between the fight for migrants' rights and refugees' fights for justice. Two of the women, Denise and Lila, were from Brazil, but nevertheless connected with the refugee mobilisation. Another prominent activist and member, Jennifer, was of Kenyan origin. Denise, a film-maker and a journalist who had produced the film *Residenzpflicht*, stated that she understood the context of many of the refugees residing in Germany since Brazil and other countries in Latin America also had a colonial past and these countries continued to be under the direct influence of the United States. Some of the women who were engaged in feminist and refugee struggles in Berlin came to know of IWS through participation in demonstrations on International Women's Day and International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Amongst the various members, there was also a journalist from Korea who documented some of the events and happenings for IWS as well as for a Korean journal.

The members of IWS included German women as well as women whose origins were outside Germany. They aimed to relate to each other on an equal level, since they shared the political vision, direction, and working culture of IWS. Upon entering the office, the women almost always greeted each other with hugs and kisses. Thus tensions were kept at

a minimum level, since the group was very task oriented and focused on completion of their goals. Refugee women who resided in Berlin and in nearby refugee accommodation centres dropped into the office and often chatted with the members and amongst themselves.

The members of IWS should be understood to lead a feminist life in their display of wilfulness and desire for social justice: many of the members resisted the eviction of the occupied school and fought for their space; they continued to meet in different spaces in the city for four years and published three books and organised a major conference during this period; they acquired an office space in a popular district of Kreuzberg, they supported women who were seeking asylum and continued to resist against gendered violence and injustice in persistent ways. As Sara Ahmed notes, the wilfulness of women relates not only to disobedience but to desire and the acquisition of a voice as a refusal to be beaten (2017, p. 73). Thus, it was in such a wilful environment that German, European, and refugee women came to work together. Denise offered her perspective in the following excerpt of her interview with me:

> Fazila: How do you feel about the fact that IWS members consist of migrant and non-migrant women?
> This is a challenge. A historical challenge. I think in this group the challenge is to remind all of us that in this group we are not going to let this happen. But it's a process because people come with visions-they have addictive thinking of the way they were socialised. They were programmed to be Eurocentric and racist and phobic and all that. Of course we are not free of that. You cannot create a society which is completely unaffected by all of this. Because we have this constant regular work we are able to minimise this imbalance. At least we try a lot. Otherwise it's impossible to work together.

As Lica explained to me:

> As we define ourselves we are a women who have a history of migration but there are also women who experience who are working together in the group. We have these women who doesn't have this experience. They are working together in this group and I think also there is a feminist statement. We create not exactly a division. Because if you relate to the group and the political direction we want to go and taking responsibilities and positions inside of the group. But of course the topic we discuss we are confronting and related to migration.

Uli, a white woman and long-term activist in the refugee mobilisation, provided the following comments:

> I see that I am working with them on the same cause. I don't want borders. I come very much from the no border movement. I don't like nationalities. I don't like privileges. I think privileges are completely fake and a result of hierarchy. A result of hierarchy and a result of capitalism. And this means a result of violence. And so my aim is to work against these privileges. And to share them actually.

Thus, the members of IWS should be understood as leading feminist and intersectional lives given that they persistently, collectively, and wilfully strove to challenge borders, nations, racism, and patriarchy and worked to achieve these aims through working with each other in ways that did not allow for much tension to arise (Fig. 5.1).

Fig. 5.1 The Women at International Women's Space

Meetings at IWS

IWS consisted of about 20 women members, originating from countries such as Kenya, Brazil, Korea, the United Kingdom, France, and the United States. There were several white Germans who participated regularly in IWS meetings and activities. There were no obvious signs of hierarchies within the group, but as in many initiatives some people assumed or were capable of assuming more responsibilities than others. As Alex commented:

> There are some women I am more close to and some more women I am less close to. I know that the group is interested in having a structure that there is less hierarchy. There is hierarchy, but hierarchy is produced by the simple fact that there are women who invest more in the group and less in the group. And there is more informing what is going on. And those who are coming less often and don't always know what is going on. IWS is a mixed group and many of us are migrants. I do think it is a group that is run by migrant and refugee women. I think definitely it is the migrant women who give the direction and the tone here.

And Lica understood the workings of the group in the following manner:

> Our objective is to be non-hierarchical that people are welcome to come and to listen. And of course we develop personal relations inside. But we are very very focused on the group. We work a lot. We work fulltime. It's like when we are not in the space we are not working. Of course we spend time together which is not work, but the activism is always what brings together. And as migrants we praise our achievements and now of having an office. This is so important because we depend on it for our everyday living here. Because you know the everyday racism and sexism that happens here and we really count with this space to be able to keep strong. And our objective is to work on the changes we want to work.

In this sense, it would be difficult to argue that IWS encompassed prefigurative strategies and practices because over the seven years there were women in the group who had acquired more experience and knowledge, and consequently they also came to guide the workings of the group. IWS met twice a week and also held a lawyer's workshop each month. On Mondays, the meeting were relatively open-ended and the women met from 1 to 7 pm and discussed in small groups various topics and planned for forthcoming activities.

The formal meetings were relatively more structured. The meeting would generally start with a list of topics, which were written on a chalkboard. For example, one meeting I attended included the following agenda items: response to emails sent to IWS, the Karawane Festival in Hamburg, and the discussion of a topic related to a book celebration. During the meeting, the women decided upon the importance of attending the women's festival in Hamburg to be hosted by Karawane, a refugee advocacy association based there which defined itself on its website as a network of individuals, groups, and organisations of refugees, migrants, and Germans based on anti-imperialism and anti-racism. The women unanimously decided that it was important to connect with this group. Thus the meetings conveyed IWS's working methods, their politics, and the ways in which they demonstrated their solidarity with refugee women.

In addition to the members' meetings, a 'Refugee Women Self Organised Group' met on a weekly basis where they planned various activities and socialised. Jennifer spoke favourably about their meetings:

> It's only until November last year we have an office. Otherwise we were hopping from office space to office space. And it was never possible to have our own space. The difference is now, like for example, this woman just walked in now. She just came in to say hello because she knows that this space exists. We know we have seen this difference because when we have space and then we have no space. It's now in February that we organised a 'stop isolation 'it only involves the refugee women. And this way they are able to join the conversation. So in this way we are not excluding and we are open. Now we have made applications for funding to do things that they feel that must be done. Now they meet every Friday. They meet once a week. They plan to visit the *Heims* and speak to women. If we get this funding then this will be their first project.

The following week IWS did receive some funding for the proposed project and Jennifer and the women asylum seekers who resided in Berlin planned to visit various refugee accommodations in Germany in order to explain to the women some aspects of the asylum process as well as to hear their narratives.

Some of the members also met for a German class on a weekly basis, which was designed by a teacher with a left political perspective. She had taught Level A1 German classes to the refugee women when IWS was still at the school. After the eviction, she proposed a different sort of class, which was designed for women who spoke German and understood the

language but needed more confidence. Because IWS understood themselves as a political group, the themes varied from historical texts to current texts on issues related to their work. It was the instructor who brought newspaper articles in most cases. The issues covered were usually related to the history of international conflicts, such as topics related to the sanctions from the US (and Britain) against Iran. They also read about Germany's arms exports, involvement in armed conflicts, and the history of the German right-wing Nazi period and its consequences. In one session that I attended the women read a text entitled 'Im Fadenkreuz der Rechten' (In the crossroads of the Right). The newspaper clipping detailed the expansion of far-right politics in Germany. Although I attended one such class, I discovered that it was too advanced for me and felt frustrated that I could not participate fully. However, it is significant that the women made their political commitments and their anti-racist perspective part of their German class.

Lawyer's Workshops at IWS

Once a month, IWS provided a lawyer's workshop for women refugees. A well-known female lawyer in Berlin offered workshops and advise at IWS to refugees who generally came from the reception centre, *Eisunhuttenstadt*, and nearby camps. Usually 10 to 12 women attended the meeting. They generally bought a group ticket and self-financed their trip to the office of IWS where they attended the workshop. The format of the lawyer's workshop tended to vary over time. At the inception of IWS, when the women met at the occupied Gerhard Hauptman School, the lawyer met the women individually and attended to their personal needs. Following the eviction of the people who resided in the school, the women also could no longer hold their meetings there and began to meet in various spaces over the subsequent four years. During this period, IWS ceased to offer lawyer's workshops to the women. When IWS managed to find a permanent office space, they were able to reconvene the workshops. In the initial two months, the lawyer, Julia, conducted intensive workshops around the topic of the types of 'Duldung'. After a few workshops, it was decided that it was more useful for the women to ask questions and that Julia would answer their questions in depth publicly such that the regular participants as well as refugees seeking support could listen to her responses.

The following fieldnotes which I took during the meeting help to explain some of the workings and complexities of the workshop.

The women sat around a table eagerly waiting for Julia to arrive who was running late. They had a number of queries and questions. As soon as she arrived and sat at the table one of the women, introduced herself and said that she was from Italy. She asked Julia, if her case fell under Dublin. Julia replied in affirmation. She subsequently went on to explain that the state had six months to deport, two weeks following the time they sought confirmation from Italy if she indeed had been in Italy. The lawyer explained and repeated this information. At this juncture, Jennifer, a long term IWS member who was of Kenyan origin intervened and told the women that it was important that they understood all the information and if they didn't then they should ask again and if needed she could provide translation in Swahili. Julia, the lawyer subsequently explained some further details and advised the women that it was not advisable to appeal negative decisions regarding Dublin. She went to the extent of drawing out a timeline on the blackboard so that the women could visualise the futility of appealing after a Dublin case was found. Several of the women had questions about Duldung and the lawyer explained the difference between 'good' Duldung and 'bad Duldung', the difference between 'first applications' and 'second applications'. Jennifer, asked the women if they understood everything. She stressed that women should equip themselves with much information, because information was power. She told the women to be knowledgeable about the laws since Germany expected you to know the laws. She stressed to the women to not sign anything and advised them to share their letters with their lawyers. 'It's your right and it's your right and your right' she told the women. Many of the women then had queries regarding deportations. 'Can they deport us from anywhere?' 'Can we be deported if we have received a Duldung?' 'Can we be deported without advance notice?' The lawyer responded to all of these questions. Jennifer told the women that to self-organise themselves against deportation, and to deport yourself against deportation. 'Be creative.' She advised the women. After the meeting ended, she once again advised the refugee women that upon receiving Duldung it was better for them to find a good Ausbildung (work internship) which, takes three years and to consequently increase their chances of formalising their status in Germany as well as to continue their life. She advised the women that doing an internship was a better option than getting married. She cautioned the women with some humour, 'If you get married to a white man you would have to care for him and probably have to walk his dog even if you are tired. If you go to Africa, you might be too ashamed of him to even introduce him to your family and you will end up staying in a hotel. It will be three years of complications. It will be much easier to do an Ausbildung and you will improve your chances.' As I smiled, Jennifer told that it was important that we explain these things to the women. (Fieldnotes, 27/5/2019)

On another occasion, a month later, one of the women asked Julia about the process of legalisation given that she was pregnant and did not have any legal status in Germany. Julia asked the woman for further details, referred her to another lawyer who specialised in the legalisation of illegalised migrants, and recommended various options.

Following this session, the IWS women asked the women if they were happy with this format or whether they would prefer to meet the lawyer on an individual basis. The women provided positive responses as follows:

> 'The information is useful. At least you can go to the *Auslanderbehorde* (Foreigner's office) and say that, 'I know the law'. (Everyone laughed)
> 'The discussions are really good, but it should be both. So there should be some privacy. People can go one by one and she can see each person for 10 minutes.'
> 'I'm very grateful for this workshop. In Germany you work in darkness, you don't know things. But we don't want to get information and we get mixed up. So privacy is good. The main thing is that you get information and go away with something. We should meet with the lawyer privately for fifteen minutes. Because in Germany, it is very difficult to get a lawyer. We are very grateful. Thank you so much.'

Following the responses, it was decided that the lawyer's workshop would revert to its former format where women would meet with the lawyer on a one-to-one basis. It was further decided that IWS should network with the initiative Women in Exile and together offer an intensive workshop on the changes in asylum laws.

The lawyer's workshop was significant since many women elected to avail the services and acquired new knowledge concerning asylum law. In some ways, the lawyers' sessions should be regarded as epistemological interventions made by the IWS members, given that there was a great deal of information which was difficult to access primarily because it was usually in German. Such events were also particularly useful because the asylum laws tended to change frequently and it was important for the women to stay up to date with these changes. Moreover, the IWS members themselves were not always familiar with all of the complexities of the asylum laws, and it was useful for them to acquire information from the lawyer, who specialised in immigration law, about the shifts and changes in policies. Thus the IWS members and refugee women were all novices and the only expert in the room was the lawyer, who was equipped with

information. In this way, IWS served as a source of information for the refugee women who had limited resources, and the group aimed to empower them with knowledge.

The purpose of IWS extended beyond publishing and disseminating stories about refugee women since they also tried to intervene in practical ways. These forms of practical assistance were necessary, but there were limits to such actions since they did not always help in changing the laws, but rather in working and negotiating the laws. The workshops did not necessarily mobilise the women into collective action against the laws, but simply helped them to comprehend the extent to which Germany and the EU laws favoured or did not favour the presence of immigrants in the state. In this sense, IWS also came to provide practical support, which created hierarchies between the members and refugees who they helped. On many occasions, I observed refugee women thanking the members profusely for their 'help'. I also observed that some refugee women received more legal support than others. In this sense, the workings of IWS resembled SPO where some refugees were favoured over others in terms of the support they received. There were refugee women who were also more active in seeking advocacy and made it a point to visit the space regularly, attend meetings, and support the members with the sale of books at various events.

'Giving Voice' and Narratives of Intersectional Experiences

In this section, I will discuss how IWS represented some refugee women who encountered multiple oppressions and who struggled against unjust asylum procedures. By publishing their stories, IWS aimed to make visible refugee women's lived experiences, racialised experiences, encounters with power structures, and their resistance. IWS published three books in which they documented testimonies of refugee women told in first person in several languages. In addition to the publications, the IWS members organised book launches, conferences, and book readings across the country, where some of the contributors to the book told their stories to audiences in person. IWS also posted several of these stories on their website in German, English, Turkish, Arabic, and Vietnamese.

Feminist scholars have long noted the significance of narratives, believing that they challenge dominant discourses, can be understood as acts of

subversion, and can encapsulate lived experiences (Anzaldúa 2007; hooks 1991; Cole 2009; Madison 1998).

IWS mediated the experiences of the refugee women for the readers in the form of written testimonies and provided them with the opportunity to write about the strategies they employed to contest multiple intersecting forms of oppression such as racism, sexuality, patriarchy, and gender-based violence in the context of migration. Thus, the stories of refugee women that IWS documented should be understood as accounts that reflected their intersectional experiences and feminist struggles. The refugee women demonstrated in their writings that 'gender alone did not marginalise, but rather made relevant the multiple interactions between gender and race, class, religion, faith, disability, poverty, sexuality, age and so on' (Cole, p. 565) in the context of migration.

IWS published three edited collections of refugee women's stories. The first book, *In Our Own Words: Refugee Women in Germany tell their Stories*, was self-published in 2015, and funded by Mama Cash, documenting stories of contemporary experiences of refugee women in Germany. The book was distributed through multiple channels including IWS's website, their office space, at the group's book launch, at various book readings and events, as well as at several independent bookstores in Berlin. I purchased two copies for 10 euros from a women's bookstore in Kreuzberg and by coincidence I ran into one of the contributors and asked her to sign my copy. I later gifted the signed copy to a friend in Manchester, who was a midwife who worked with refugee women. IWS sold and distributed almost 5000 copies of the book, which comprised ten testimonials. In addition, members of IWS travelled all over Germany to give readings and took part in discussions about its contents. Thus the book received much attention and provided further visibility to the contributors. In the foreword to the book, members of IWS explained the volume's purpose:

> As migrants from Latin America and refugees from African countries, we wanted to listen to share with women coming from the Middle East, the African continent and the Balkan countries. To answer our own question: "What are we doing here?" we needed to speak to each other to understand the paradox of seeking protection in one of the western countries, knowing the roles they play in destabilizing our regions, through wars and neo-colonialism…the individual stories reflected our different backgrounds, the

political contexts, the previous struggles and how each of the women managed to survive the hardships they were about to denounce.

It is significant that in the foreword, the role of colonisation and neocolonialism as a cause of the de-stabilisation of various regions was emphasised. In this sense, the book should be understood to be in alignment with the refugee mobilisation since these very ideas were foregrounded during the refugee tent protests and occupation of the school. However, the contents of the book emphasised refugee women's stories, which was a significant development, since during the refugee protests at Oranienplatz in Kreuzberg, there were only a few women refugee activists who received recognition and visibility for their activism. The absence of women during the protests was understandable, since they had multiple responsibilities such as attending to children and family members and could not risk incurring health problems from camping outside or being arrested. Thus the book allowed women to articulate their intersectional experiences, something which they couldn't do during the actual protests. At the same time, the book included testimonies of women who had been active in the refugee resistance at Oranienplatz and the Gerhart-Hauptmann School. In this way, the book could be understood to be an extension of the protests staged at Oranienplatz, since it also served to represent political ideologies that were the very foundation of the tent protests.

The writers of *In Our Own Words* included women from countries such as Kenya, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Serbia. In their stories, the women were represented as activists and survivors of their experiences of multiple oppressions in Germany as well as their countries of origin. They wrote about their hard-fought struggles in the German state and their experiences of violence. There were several who criticised the state's asylum policy in their writings. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Napuli Langa's, who was a prominent activist during the refugee mobilisation. The interview was conducted by IWS and later published in the book in the chapter entitled 'I hear you asking yourself: "what can I do?"'

IWS: How has it been for you to be a woman, sometimes the only politically active refugee woman, in Oranienplatz?

Napuli: First of all, to tell you the truth, it's hard. You fight as a woman and you also fight as a political activist. Even within your own people you know, men surround you. It is always very difficult,

> you have to say "I am here and this is my voice". I am just referring to what I was practicing in Oranienplatz. I cannot say my voice was not heard. But it was hard to fight for this position, you know? For example, if I was lying down in the tent, and someone new arrived and saw me there, there could always be the chance that they would think "Maybe she is not a good woman" or they would say "To whom does she belong?" Sometimes what helped was that I can speak English and Arabic. So I could introduce myself. But sometimes I would leave for three days and when I went back I had to introduce myself again, explain who was I know, you know? I was telling everyone, so they could all see, you know the power, a woman speaking and this is when they can respect you. But if you keep quiet, they can say any rubbish about you. This is what I was really fighting for. So I have to show I can fight and I do not apologise for it. (p. 201)

Napuli was one of the most vocal and visible activists during the refugee mobilisation at Oranienplatz. In her interview she describes vividly the challenges she encountered as a woman. These intersectional perspectives had not been the main focus during her activism in the square and her support network. The movement had mainly recognised her as a vocal Sudanese activist rather than a female activist who also aimed to challenge patriarchal values and beliefs while contesting the rights of refugees in the German state. Included in the book were also narratives of women who were less visible than Napuli, but had nevertheless fought racisms and for their rights as women as they struggled to acquire asylum status in Germany. For example, the following is an excerpt from the chapter titled 'It is about freedom of movement'. The author did not provide her name anywhere in the chapter and remained anonymous:

> A: But it came to a point of my life that I had to leave, to break the spell put on us, the women of my family, the women around me. To make a different life than that of my mother or my grandmother, to grow and be able to offer my children something more. This something more is my politicisation. It is not about poverty, the money, the status or class. In fact the Germans should know that some of us here lead a more humble life than we did in our countries. What we women are looking for, in most cases, is freedom as human beings,

> the right to be a woman, and the joy and the freedom that comes with it. We have to work for the liberation of all women and it is important for Africans and Europeans, Asians, Latin Americans, North Americans and all women in the world to have the chance to meet and speak to each other, strategise together, imagine a better life for us … It would be better if the Europeans could get rid of their racism and address issues that affect us in society, no matter what skin colour we have. (p. 49)

The writer recognised her own development and reasons for being in Germany. At the same time, she did not idealise Germany and voiced against the racialisation of migrants in Europe. Thus her individual experience and perspective were reflected in her writing and became accessible to a wider audience.

The first book also included an interview with political activist Mimi, who was of Kenyan origin. She died shortly after the police tried to evict all the people staying in the occupied GHS. Mimi was among the people who had resided in the school and refused to leave during the eviction process. The following is an excerpt from her interview:

> Mimi: Then I was told I had to leave the country because I was not married to the German for long enough. I didn't accept this. Then I started fighting for my rights and today I am still here. The German government has often tried to deport me. I am still fighting for my right to stay. I still I haven't been granted a permanent residence permit. I've never been given a real chance to train in a profession. I've still never really been seen as part of this society.

In sum, the first book conveyed the refugee politics of the German state and the resistance since some of the writers included women who had been active during the refugee movement at Oranienplatz and the school. At the same time, the book described the intersectional lives of the refugee women and the ways them came to survive the racist immigration policies. The books refrained from depicting women as 'victims' but rather emphasised the idea of refugee politics and the women's survival tactics.

Three years later, in 2018, following the publication of *In Our Own Words*, IWS published their second book, titled *We Exist, We Are Here* with a foreword by Asma-Esmeralda, who described herself as a black, queer, transcultural activist, and conveyed IWS's intersectional position

within refugee politics. This book, which was also self-published, was launched on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Launching the book of testimonies produced by predominantly black migrants and women of colour on a day when violence against women is recognised internationally demonstrated IWS's acknowledgment and recognition of refugee women's intersectional lives. The writings and the women's oral stories further linked refugee women's experiences with racialised violence. As Crenshaw has argued, intersectionality means moving beyond 'the single axis framework', and it is of utmost importance to consider how 'intersecting identities of race and gender shape experiences of discrimination and subordination' (Crenshaw, 1989, pp. 139–140).

The second book self-published by IWS raised issues which were not included in the previous volume. At this time, the political climate had shifted further to the right since the publication of the first book, *In Our Own Words*. For example, at the time of the refugee mobilisation and the publication of *In Our Own Words*, AnKER centres (see Chap. 2) had not existed. The following is an account written by a woman who was living at such a centre, where she experienced violence at the hands of security guards and later the police:

F: I can tell you that the guards provoke people. I think they like to provoke and beat us, and then to call the police. And when the police come and see you are a refugee, they do not care about you. They will take you to the station. And when you arrive, they do not ask you anything. How many times have they done that to me? Sometimes you see on the faces of some security that although they provoke us, or intend to, it is not something they enjoy doing. But these guards don't stay at the camp for long. People understand that. Well, after that, when I realised that what people were saying was correct, I went to Nuremberg to see my lawyer…This guard was new. As I walked past him he called, "Come back!" I turned around. I said, "Yes? What is the problem?" He told me, "Your bag! Your handbag." "Yes, what about it?" I asked. "Open it", he said. I took out my paper and told him to look inside. He pointed to the toilet next to the entrance and said, "No go in there, you open your bag, empty everything from your bag!" I knew that was why they put Kanganese people to hit them. I said: "Okay, no problem…But why?" I saw that the others had not been treated like that. No-one else had been asked to

> empty their bag, just me. And all of the people who passed by, I was the only black person. "You are just looking for problems!", I told him. (p.157)

It is evident from the above account that F. narrates her testimony as a black woman who had experienced aggression by the security guards and later the police at the refugee camp. According to her testimony, the security guards attacked and threatened her because she was a black female asylum seeker. Thus she was critical of the securitisation and institutional racism at the camp. In this sense, the political aspect and dimension of the book needs to be recognised. In their stories, the women voice how gender, race, and their asylum status within the German state interacted with institutional powers of the state, police, security guards, and deportation authorities.

The book also includes a story of a lesbian woman and her experiences with sexuality in Cairo. The following is an excerpt:

> N.: In Cairo, queer spaces do exist, but there is a shady aspect to them. It is hard to get involved. Mostly queer spaces are guys' spaces, for parties and things like that. As were just starting our relationship we were happy just to be cute together alone. Otherwise we would have our own parties at home. For sure there are some spaces that are safe in a sense, but nothing is really safe. The police can come at any time.

Thus the multidimensional and intersectional nature of oppression, struggles, and protest is made explicit in the above text and in many of the other testimonies.

IWS published their third book, *Als ich nach Deutschland Kam* (When I came to Germany), in German in 2019. Whereas the other two books were self-published, this book was published by a German publisher and sold for 15 euros. The book was inspired by the contents of the conference which IWS had organised with the same title. This book aimed to connect narratives and experiences of early migrant women from countries such as Vietnam and Turkey, many of whom had lived in the former DDR with the experiences of contemporary migrants. Unlike the first two books, which were written in different languages, this book included testimonies of women translated into German. Nevertheless, their testimonies were archived in various languages on IWS's website.

The aim of the three books was not simply to retell the stories of the women, but rather to facilitate an exchange between IWS members and the women seeking asylum or who had sought asylum in the past. This is notable because within IWS there were several women who were from Brazil, France, and Kenya. Even though some of these women were relatively privileged since they had social capital, resources, and permanent status within Germany, they did experience displacement in some form, a factor which most likely influenced the ways in which they interpreted, edited, and selected the refugee women's narratives.

The refugee women in all three of the books were represented as agentic and wilful instead of 'victims' as they were understood in the mainstream. Needless to say, even though many of the members of IWS included migrant and refugee women, black women, lesbian women, and women whose own lives were marginalised not only because of their gender but because of their numerous crisscrossings between gender, race, class, religion, disability, and sexual orientation, the power dynamic between those who *give* voice to women and those who tell and write their stories warrants recognition. As Cole citing bell hooks and Clough reminds us, 'telling stories is a political act, one through which writers may seek to emancipate, but narratives, as well as having the potential to bring about change, can reaffirm existing conceptions and marginalisation and keep in place "existing structures of domination"' (p. 570). Hence, colonisation, Othering, racialisation, and domination can continue to occur when a group has the power to select the 'voices' even if the stories are facilitated and told in collaborative ways. Drawing on Michelle Fine and bell hooks' work, Cole puts forward a cautionary note with respect to speaking for the marginalised:

> It is argued by some critical feminist academics that much qualitative research has "reproduced, if contradiction-filled, a colonizing discourse of the 'other"' and can be a "'tool of domination' which 'others"' (Fine 1994: 70). bell hooks issues a chilling warning to researchers about the dangers of "othering": I am waiting for them to stop talking about the "Other," to stop even describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference. It is not just important what we speak about, but how and why we speak. Often this speech about "Other" is also a mask, an oppressive talk hiding gaps, absences, that space where our words would be if we were speaking, if there were silence, if we were there. This "we" is that "us" in the margins, that "we" who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance. (p. 570)

Even though the women narrated their stories in the three books published by IWS in the first person, the dangers of representation of racialised refugee women cannot be discounted since the members of IWS had the power and authority to select the narratives, edit, proofread, photograph, format, illustrate, and print the book as they chose to. It was the members who also organised conferences and workshops, and decided at which leftist events it was best for women to tell their stories and receive publicity. In this sense, IWS's influence, authority, and control over refugee women's self-representation needs to be considered. It was also significant that the IWS members did not include an account of their lived experiences and the focus remained on refugee women. Cole contends:

> Nor is it enough for researchers to acknowledge their own subjectivity. They still need to be aware of the intersections of emotions, fictions (in the Foucauldian sense) and fantasy and to work with the multiple constitution of those discourses through which the subject is produced, and be aware of how, out of the intersection of these, certain stories get to be told. (p. 571)

Members of IWS did not always recognise their subjectivity, emotions, and vulnerability, and their connections to the women whose stories they published was not visible. They did not include their own voices in the stories. In this way a binary relationship surfaced between those who spoke about their lived experiences and those who had the power to interview refugees and represent their experiences, with the result that there was much potential left to work collaboratively to build feminist worlds. Nevertheless, it should also be recognised that the refugee advocates in this situation were from migrant backgrounds, women of colour, and lesbian women, and therefore the power dynamics between IWS members and refugee women must be understood in more complex ways.

The books represented fragmented aspects of the refugee women's lives. Heath Cabot (2016) has commented on the representational tropes that tend to dominate various refugee advocacy campaigns. She contends, deploying the metaphor of 'ghosts', that refugees' testimonies used by advocacy groups as well as ethnographers can simultaneously result in silencing the very people that they aim to give voice to. She writes:

> I argue even in cases when advocates and ethnographers alike seek to incorporate or write the voices of refugees in ways that make them legible as active subjects, "ghosts" persistently haunt these representations. Refugees

> thus often appear both present and absent, agentive and yet silenced. "Ghosts" index subjects who have been partially captured through the representational tactics of advocates and ethnographers; and yet simultaneously they evade capture, highlighting shadows, gaps, and the limitations of knowledge itself.

Heath encourages refugee advocates and ethnographers to nurture the 'humility of not knowing'. In this regard, IWS's representation of refugee women should be understood to be filtered in ways that foregrounded their agency and aspects of their intersectional lives, but at the same time did not necessarily provide a multi-layered and complex account of their lives.

The individual testimonies published also tended to obscure the idea of a collective resistance against the unjust asylum laws since the focus remained on individual struggles. Nevertheless, as the following paragraphs will show, there was a sense of collectivity invoked during some of the events that IWS organised.

Book Launches and Networking

IWS organised book launches following the publication of their books. The launch events helped IWS gain visibility, manifest their political ideology, and engage in networking activities. I attended the book launches for the second and third books.

The launch of the second book, *We Exist, We are Here*, was held on 25 November, 2018 to coincide with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. I attended the book launch as well as the march that preceded the event. Prior to the launch, there was a demonstration where I saw a few members of IWS who I recognised. One long-term member helped translate a woman's speech into German at length, when she spoke in French about her particular experiences and resistance at the rally. Following the rally and the march, the book launch was held at a popular space in Berlin, known as the 'Aquarium at Südblock' in Kreuzberg, where many workshops, events, screenings, book launches, discussions, and even concerts are held on a regular basis. Given its long-term popularity, the event drew a large audience of over 200 people. At the launch itself, Jennifer briefly spoke about the ideology and the inspiration for the book, an excerpt of which is as follows:

> The tradition of testimonials literature emerged from the feminist movement of the 1960s. It was traditionally used as a tool to give voice to the voiceless. Often times the poor and illiterate women's stories are not documented. We wanted to continue this tradition today in our own communities. Our book, 'We Exist. We are Here' has taken us two years to complete…. To be exist to be here perfectly describes the act of defiance of women speaking without hope. Women, who had come to Germany against all odds. Women who had made it, even though they were not supposed to. In spite of the fact that the system work against us. In spite of the patriarchy. In spite of the misogynist and the racist attacks against us. We say, 'We are and we will be here.'…Today is the 25th of November, the international day of violence against women is a very important day for us. And for us to have the two events together was very important for us. We wanted them to coincide because in the book, the women are speaking against the violence they experience once they reach here. And this is the violence we are denouncing in every sense of the word we are denouncing.

Thus Jennifer's introduction reflected and conveyed the ideology that IWS stood for: working against patriarchy, racism, and misogyny, and above all self-assertions of their existence and power. But the speech tended to reproduce the very power dynamics and hierarchical conditions which IWS aimed to disrupt. The refugee women were assumed to be 'voiceless' and 'without hope' whereas members of IWS were assumed to have the capabilities to 'empower' women.

The launch event served as an opportunity to network and exchange stories at an informal level. I observed many women talking and socialising with each other throughout the event. For example, I obtained the opportunity to network with several activists at the launch. A few weeks prior to the book event, a woman who I knew closely through my participation in Schlafplatzorga (see Chap. 3) had been deported to her country of origin. On this occasion, I was able to talk to several women who explained to me the limitations of rights of deportees even in cases of unlawful deportation. After having spoken to at least three women on this topic, I did feel that I had left the book launch with some useful information. Thus, the book launch functioned as a networking event where women shared information, connected, and socialised with each other as they ate and drank. At the same time, copies of the books were distributed and sold at such events.

Upon publication of their third book, *Als ich nach Deutschland Kam*, IWS held another book launch in June 2019, which was supported by the

Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. The book launch was well attended with about 50 people present despite competing events in the city. At the conference, there was a video presentation of interviews of three women from migrant backgrounds. Denise, who was a film-maker and one of the founding members of IWS, conducted these interviews. The women reflected on their personal experiences, but also offered their perspectives on the intersections of gender, racisms, migration, and sexual orientations and their activism. Subsequent to the video presentation, there was a panel discussion amongst three women who reflected on the book, the conference, and the general plight of women migrants in Germany and the ways to contest and challenge this situation. Following, the video presentation and the panel discussion, there was time set aside for informal networking and socialising. I met a friend, Andrew, who I had not seen for a while and we discussed Brexit and Pakistani politics under its new leadership. Another IWS member later joined us and discussed with Andrew about the current situation of a woman who with her family had experienced racially motivated attacks. Since Andrew had consistently supported this woman for over six years, it was useful for an IWS member to network with him in this connection, since the initiative was trying to support M. in prosecuting her perpetrators. It was in this way that the book launches came to serve as a space for socialising, making links, and networking.

The book launches served as a platform to contextualise refugee women's voices since panellists, activists, and speakers from migrant backgrounds reflected on the workshops, the book, and their own activism. In many ways, such events could be regarded as spaces where different forms of knowledge were shared which were outside the mainstream discursive thread. These events were very much in tune with leftist events held in Berlin, and therefore there was already an audience for such collective gatherings where people met to network and exchange ideas and knowledges to further their support work and activism. Networking was an integral part of these events, and people did not leave immediately after the events but rather were able to exchange ideas and discuss pertinent issues over drinks and food.

The Conference as a Collective Gathering

In 2017, IWS organised a conference where refugee and migrant women who had arrived in Germany in different periods came together and participated in panel discussions. At the conference, there were six panel

discussions which focused on the experiences of women who came to West Germany as guest workers, to the former GDR, to East Germany as contract workers, and to the reunified Germany as migrants and refugees.

Members of IWS transcribed and revised in German all contributions to the conference for the publication of their third book. The book documented the six panel discussions and the testimonies of the women who took part in the discussion. On their website, IWS acknowledged the heterogeneity of the book's contributors in the following way:

> The women are refugees, migrants, Germans of Colour, Ossis and Wessis, illegals, workers, academics, artists, and activists. Personally and radically, they provide insights into their biographies, their communities and their solidary associations. Their successes and their resistance point the way for the common feminist struggle that lies ahead. (https://iwspace.de/2019/03/als-ich-nach-deutschland-kam/)

The two-day workshop was held at a not-for-profit leftist space, in a large building, *Flutgraben*, measuring 3800 square metres, which housed 50 artist studios. The workshop focused on the intersectional experiences of women who came to West Germany as guest workers, to East Germany as contract workers, as well as recent migrants and refugees to the reunified Germany. The titles of these panels were 'Self Organisation and Feminist Work in the Context of Migration', 'German but with a Migration Background', 'Racism and Racist Violence in Germany from the 90s until now', 'Waiting Time and Surviving the German Asylum System', 'Refugee Women in East and West Germany', and 'Guest Workers in West Germany and Contract Workers in East Germany'. Various associations and foundations including the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and Mama Cash supported the conference. Jennifer had personally invited me to attend the conference and therefore I made it a point to attend and travelled from Manchester to Berlin on the weekend. The two-day workshop reflected the idea of collectivity since on each day over 250 women came together, networked, ate lunch, and listened attentively and interacted with the panellists. The workshop foregrounded intersectional feminism and women's narratives of migration at different periods of time to the former East and West Germany, as well as in the contemporary period. Moreover, the conference helped historicise the specificities of women's experiences of migration and showed the extent of women's diverse experiences with racism, integration, and acceptance over time in the former East and West

Germany and in the current context. There was much debate and discussion with respect to Vietnamese women's experiences of migration when they came to East Germany. Most importantly, the conference, like many events in Berlin, provided simultaneous translations in several languages, which included German, Turkish, English, Vietnamese, Farsi, and Arabic. As Denise told me during her interview:

> But our first decision was translation. Because we knew that if we didn't have the most professional translation then this discussion simultaneously on an equal level would never happen because we had different women speaking in the panels. Super academics and women that were illiterate. The women were invited and the translation was important. I wish we could always have money to have top translation.

Thus IWS prioritised accessibility to discussions at the 'When I came to Germany' conference and consequently made the decision to allocate a considerable portion of the budget to translation services. The idea of accessibility also demonstrated a continuation of the values and political culture which prevailed during the refugee mobilisation at Oranienplatz since at plenary meetings, and at various discussions, translations were always made available in several languages.

IWS additionally posted video recordings of some of the panellists' discussions on their websites in these various languages (see https://iwspace.de/als-ich/). The following is an excerpt from the panel discussion entitled 'Waiting Time and Surviving the German Asylum System'. A German black feminist activist of Cuban origin moderated the panel. In the following excerpt, D. spoke about her individual resistance against deportation and her experience of violence at the hands of the German police:

D.: My name is D. I have been in this country for almost 6 years. I was having deportation last year in 2016 two times. I had the first deportation in June when I was in my room and sleeping in the *Heim* (refugee accommodation). One morning I heard somebody knock on the door. I got and opened the door and saw a police at the door and there were six police. One woman and five men. They came in the morning and told me that they have to go to Cameroon now. Then they asked me about my *Ausweiss* (ID card) They told

me that I should give my *Ausweiss* to them. They told me that then they are going to pack everything in the room. They told me that my time is over in this country. So they will be deporting me to my country. Then they took me to the Airport at 3 o'clock….So I went to the airport. They asked me to put my bag on the table. I did that. Then after I removed my dresses. I was empty. I told them I will not to go to Cameroon because I have already been in this country for six years. I have a problem in my country. If I go to my country, how am I going to do. I don't have a mother. I don't have a father. I was crying. The police came and said pick those dress up and I said, "No. I am not going to Cameroon."

Asma-Esmeralda: You removed your dress and that was your resistance? That is how you were fighting them?

Yes. When I removed my dress, then they carried me back to the car and they took me back to the Heim. The second deportation was in September. They bring with them handcuffs. 6 police and one woman. They tie my legs. They tie me. Everyone was outside. And only one person should leave me alone. The six police they carry me. They just push me in the car. Pushing someone as if I had done something bad or killed somebody. It was not good for me. It was a challenge for me…. The way they put me in the car. Another one would hold me here and another one would hold me there. As I was going. Another woman wanted to press my neck. And then I bite her. And the way I bite her hand, they were talking in the language. I couldn't understand them. When they brought me to airport, they removed the chains and carried me. I wanted to defend myself and then I fall down. The way I fall. My dress was dirty because I was in this sleeping dress. Then they put me another room. There was a doctor there and she put some medicine in my mouth. I throw it. I was only crying. Then they carried me to the plane. And I was struggling and fighting them. They put me right on the back. They

said that the doctor and the police will travel with me because I was making a lot of noise. There were two women on the plane. And they said they will not take me. Then the police bring me to same room. Then they released me without anything….Deportation is a very bad thing. It's very difficult. It is not easy. My sister Mary. I call them. I call International Women's Space. They came and they were with me in the first deportation. They were with me at the time of the second deportation. They are helping my sisters. I thank the association. They are looking for a lawyer. I thank Mary. I thank Denise. I thank Lica. I thank all of them in this association. The problem is too much.

Asma-Esmeralda: We need better laws to protect the women. When situations like this happen I hope that International Women's Space carries on the work they are doing and fighting for better laws.

D.: They are doing good work. They are comforting me. Because, when I don't have anyone to talk to. I really thank them. I really thank them.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, Germany tried to deport people in scores who arrived in the country from Sub-Saharan Africa, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Some states were considered to be 'safe countries' in comparison to countries such as Syria and Eritrea. Furthermore, the German state because of its adherence to the Dublin law also tried to deport people to border European countries such as Italy, Greece, and Spain if they had first arrived in these countries and had their fingerprints taken there. Hence, because of the Dublin Regulation, people lived their everyday lives in a state of 'deportability' (Genova 2002). Refugee women were no exception in this regard and thus lived in a precarious state in Germany. Furthermore, there were many black and Muslim women migrants who lived with deportability and encountered everyday racisms as well.

A large audience consisting of women from several walks of life heard D. narrate her detailed account of repression and resistance. D. provided this narration in this instance within a particular context and framework since there were three other women on the panel who told their stories of seeking asylum in Germany. In this manner, D.'s personal account formed

part of a larger narrative about the difficulties and challenges of seeking asylum in Germany. Because she was part of a panel on a particular issue, her narrative could not simply be understood as testimony of 'individual courage', but rather served to reflect a common struggle against Germany's asylum policies. Video recordings of the women's testimonies were subsequently uploaded onto the IWS website in six different languages. In this manner, IWS provided material and individual support to D., but thereafter, the association ensured that her voice did not stand alone but that it formed part of a larger collection of voices reflecting everyday forms of survival and resistance against deportations, against racism, against waiting for long periods whilst seeking asylum, against the Lager system, and above all for the right to freedom of movement. D. was a black woman who was threatened by deportation and twice survived it. In this connection, by providing D. with multiple outlets where she could express her individual story, IWS not only helped provide visibility to women's intersectional experiences and lives but made their subversive testimonies form part of a collective action. It is noteworthy that Asma-Esmeralda, a political activist and the moderator of the panel, in her concluding point mentioned that it was important for IWS to 'fight for improved laws', so that migrants would not be threatened by deportation and carry the burden of deportability in their everyday lives. Thus, at the conference, the idea of fighting systemic change prevailed.

The conference offered an opportunity for women migrants who had come in various phases and stages to Germany and former East Germany to network and to build further alliances, and was applauded by some of the panellists who in their video interviews with Denise provided their thoughts on the conference. The women reflected on the importance of networking and the significance of connecting past stories with contemporary stories of migration. These video recordings were screened at a book launch following the conference and were made available on social media:

M-P K.: I've noticed networking is needed and the booth of resources by us women, the whole women's movements. The networking with everyone, and specific for us women. Networking also means how can we create a space and an atmosphere for women no matter what status they are in. The best example I've seen yesterday at your conference. A safe space but a room of diversity at the same time. To share experiences, injuries,

wishes, needs and visions and that you know that you are not alone.

R.: I think in the future we need to approach even more women so that our histories connect and then to visit the next generation of migrants who are arriving now to go to the shelters, show the films, writing to speak about it. There are wonderful formations to make the stories heard. To this extent we are on the right track, we need to tell these stories. Yes of course there are differences. And yet there is a racist system, again and again there is stigmatization and Othering, the criminalizing perspective, and here we can connect and see where in the history this has taken a different turn.

M. V.: Often you stop, you bring together all this experienced grief and stories, but then not to take the step forward. And I believe it's important to gather and think about a second step, what society do we want to imagine? How can we build resistance together? Otherwise we get stuck in the solidarity and gratitude about women telling the stories, but we have to create a political strategy to resist. And these are hard times, which calls for political alliances. It doesn't work anymore that you work in small elitist groups. It's important that very different groups need to learn anew strategically how to form political alliances on a political level. It doesn't need to be harmonic, there can be conflicts, discussion, but these alliances need to be relatively stable.

These reflections demonstrated politicised projections into the future, because the women with migrant backgrounds understood that there was much work that needed to be done in the near future with respect to networking, creating safe spaces, connecting different histories of women, and building political alliances. These reflections further demonstrated that migrant women valued collective anti-racist endeavours and actions. It is significant that M. V. during her interview speaks of the importance of building political alliances and going beyond 'telling stories'. It is noteworthy that she understands the significance of safe spaces for women where they not only can tell the stories but also participate in political actions. In this sense, solidarity acts translate to politics and go beyond the focus on the individual.

During the conference, refugee women from heterogeneous backgrounds demonstrated their willingness to continue to challenge racism and systemic inequalities despite the state's injustice towards them. In this sense, the women displayed what Sara Ahmed terms 'feminist tendencies; if we tend towards the world in a feminist way, if we repeat that tending that tending, again and again, we acquire feminist tendencies' (2017, p. 6).

At the conference, there were further conversations related to topics and themes concerning interactions between old and new migration waves, racism, and feminism. According to the panellists, the divisions between old migrants and new migrants made feminist work difficult because of the lack of unity between the two groups. The panellists were of the view that within the feminist movement, there were migrants who were 'integrated' and who understood the 'new migrants' to not belong in the host state, and this caused a breach in the international feminist movement. The women on the panel were of the opinion that it would be crucial for the feminist movement if they were to collectively define themselves as an internationalist movement. The panel also criticised new migrants' reports in the media about the 'greatness' of Germany, which some panel members didn't think was the case.

It was significant that the panellists went beyond recognising the official narratives of the different waves of migration to Germany, and also acknowledged the problems and concerns between migrant women who came to Germany at different points in time. The need to build alliances between new migrants and old migrants should be understood as a need to politicise the common concerns of immigrants such as racism, sexism, xenophobia, and homophobia, which cut across generations. Most importantly, the conference served to demonstrate the continuity of racist state practices within different time spans.

It was through such conferences and book launches that IWS were able to manifest their political ideals and provide avenues which furthered their visibility and fostered further alliances. In this way, refugee and migrant women's activism needs to be understood such that it encompassed ideas about networking, about building links between migrants who arrived in Berlin in different periods of time, about formulating strategies for resistance and future possibilities, about highlighting racisms and colonial experiences, and most significantly about situating refugee women's individual testimonies and lived experiences within a larger framework of collective actions and discussions.

IWS and Advocacy for a Roma Woman

In addition to publishing testimonials, and organising conferences, IWS advocated on behalf of individual migrants who they believed were subject to racialisation. For example, in 2019, IWS supported a Romanian woman, M., when she and her family survived racist attacks in Berlin. M. had been living in Berlin for several years and had resided in the Gerhart-Hauptmann School at the time of its occupation and participated in several of the demonstrations. Since M. spoke Spanish and I also had some knowledge of Spanish, I had come to know M. and was always happy to see her. Thus, when I heard of her experience which is recounted below, I was quite shocked and was glad to know that IWS was supporting her fully in this regard. M. was very well networked amongst the activists since she had resided in the occupied school, and she was especially well connected with the people who spoke Spanish who supported her in her struggles to find housing for herself and her family. I often ran into M. in the parks, on the streets, and during various events in Berlin. I knew that she would have loved to reside in Kreuzberg and was constantly seeking support in this regard. However, it was not always possible to find a flat in this much desired location in Berlin. On one occasion, when I was attending a leftist conference, 'Unframed Festival' at New Yorck im Bethanien, a space which regularly hosted and organised leftist events, I heard the Roma activist speak at an IWS workshop where she provided her testimony of the racist attacks she and her family had experienced at a subway station close to where they lived. She spoke in Spanish with vivid gestures, and with emphatic expressions. As she spoke, she pointed to her wounds and continued to gain attention from her audience of about 50 people. After she had told her story, there was a lengthy discussion amongst the people as to how she should receive support with respect to her legal standing and the resources she would need to prosecute, and how best to make her case visible while preserving her anonymity. M.'s account was later published in the *Freefugee Newsletter*, and her testimony was also posted on IWS's website. IWS also made it possible for her to speak on a feminist radio show. An excerpt of the piece, which was published in English and German, is as follows:

Roma Woman Is Suing Racist Attacker

On March 29, M., her husband and her brother-in-law were traveling in a Berliner U-Bahn when they were attacked by a woman with a knife. The woman stabbed the brother-in-law in the abdomen and missed only by 2 cm the liver. When she wanted to attack M.'s husband, he could avoid it. Then she tried again and M. pushed her so she would lose her balance. She failed to knock down the attacker and was stabbed deep in the neck. When she tried to take the knife away from the woman, the attacker bit her hard in the hand. All this time M. shouted "please help!! ", but nobody in the wagon moved. When the train stopped at the next station, M., her husband, and her brother-in-law, though bleeding and deeply injured, finally managed to hold the woman down. Only then did a man, who saw the whole scene on the train, intervened and held the woman's hand.

The police arrested the woman. M. and her family were hospitalized. M.'s husband is seriously ill and recently had surgery. He's back in the hospital by now.

The criminal police have informed M. that the attacker is a German woman and that it was a racially motivated crime. The woman is being prosecuted. However, the police also advised M. to sue the woman for damages. They recommended that she be advised and represented by a lawyer.

We want the case to become public! Rarely is racist crimes reported. About this specific case, the media doesn't mention the motive of the crime or that the attacked were Roma. If it had been the other way around – a non-white woman had attacked an older white person – that would have been scandalized.

We want M. and her family to be properly represented in the lawsuit. However, a good lawyer is expensive and the family does not have the necessary resources. Therefore, we are supporting them and are calling you to do the same. Whether you are an association, an initiative or an individual – support M. and help justice prevail!

I knew that this story was only a fragmented aspect of M.'s life and it saddened me somewhat to see her lively and complex persona abbreviated in this manner such that she came to be represented as a victim of racialised attacks. Nevertheless, the testimony did produce some effective results as members of the group as well as some former members of IWS additionally networked with activists who had worked closely with M. and supported her in the process of state prosecution. In Europe, Romas have come to be systematically racialised. Despite their formal citizenship status within Europe, they have encountered much discrimination and prejudice

and they often do not have equal access to societal structures such as housing, good schools, and adequate healthcare. Vince Enikö contends:

> The political intersectionality assumed by Roma feminists addressing sexism, racism, classism and homophobia should acknowledge the realities of structural intersectionality. Institutionalised forms of Roma women's representation have the chance to resonate with the experiential or structural forms of intersectionality if – while formulating political and policy demands – they are able to assure the participation of multiple Roma women perspectives in this process. Or, put differently, if they are capable of providing Roma (women) at the grassroots with the power to control their means of production, reproduction and representation. But obviously, this effort in itself would not be enough for generating systemic change: for this they need alliances across gender, and across different social and ethnic groups that could generate political action enforcing national and international stakeholders to really act on behalf of the socially and economically dispossessed classes of present-day European societies. (p. 449)

Although IWS did not specifically campaign for the rights of Roma women, it is noteworthy that the feminist group intervened and supported a Roma at the time, when she survived a difficult situation, and made it possible for M. to self-represent her experience of violence and racism. In this sense, IWS made it possible for M. to ally with a group which supported women across different racial and ethnic lines. The support that IWS lent to the Roma woman also served to further demonstrate their anti-racist stance.

Street Protests, Speeches, and Alliances

The members of IWS participated in street protests and demonstrations. Some of these included marches during International Women's Day and International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, for Black Lives Matter, for the annual carnival and parade organised by refugees and refugee solidarity groups, *Unteilbar* (Indivisible, which demonstrate against the far right and extremist parties), and several marches and rallies at the local, national, and transnational level.

The IWS members asserted that the police violence which many of them witnessed and experienced during the eviction process of the occupied school affected their perspective, and consequently the group decided to participate and organise their own marches during International

Women's Day and International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and also to conduct their book launches on this day. Jennifer stressed the importance of the role of IWS in these two annual marches in Berlin:

> Our demands are not on the same page, so we always organise ourselves differently. Once we go into the feminist movement that has been organised here for a long time we get lost. They are more. It's their country. Our voices are suppressed. Our demands are not projected as we want them to be. So we start our demonstrations differently and most times we come together at the end. Because in the end it's women struggle. But then the demands are completely different…. The women when they travel here they are equally vulnerable. There is no support structure to support women in the *Heim*. When there is a situation of violence, there is also a different structure of reporting this violence, because the state of violence is not taken seriously.

Thus fighting the state's migrant policies always remained in the foreground for members of IWS. The fight persisted for the elimination of 'Lagers', which dominated the refugee movement during the occupation of Oranienplatz and Gerhart-Hauptmann Schule, and IWS members put these demands at the forefront on International Women's Day by carrying out a separate march with their own demands.

The IWS members and one member in particular, Jennifer, regularly gave speeches during the rallies. Although IWS consisted of at least 15 active members who regularly attended meetings, it was predominantly Jennifer who delivered the speeches at demonstrations and consequently achieved much more visibility. However, the scripts which she read from during the demonstrations were written collectively, but the people at the protests and marches were unaware of this fact.

In some cases, IWS received emails inviting them to participate in a specific demonstration and to make a speech. Members of the group collectively decided upon participation and the nature of the speech. Participation in these demonstrations allowed the initiative to build further alliances and also to increase their visibility. The themes and topics covered in IWS's speeches tended to vary, but the group generally focused on refugee and migration politics and the ongoing racialisation of refugees and in particular refugee women. IWS's protest speeches thus should be understood in the frame of refugees' everyday habitus in the German state. As Jennifer told me:

The topic of the speeches is always about the refugees and migration. And migration politics. We don't want this division between migrants and refugees because we are all migrating. We are talking concretely about the migration topics without these hierarchies. Because we are not represented in the mainstream and the politicians represent us the way they want to.

An excerpt from an IWS speech is provided below:

I want to remind us that we need to fight with all our power. The implementation of the new German policy and package on migration. New legal measures, recently approved by German parliament will represent a crackdown on Asylum seekers. It will include the deprivation of rights and the expansion and use of detention. The status of recognised refugees will become precarious as this measure will include a downgraded version of the Duldung status. The so called orderly returned law in other words deportations, will allow federal states to place people awaiting deportations in regular prisons as long as they are physically separated from other prisoners. And this is a temporary measure. The master plan is to gain time while each German state can expand their migrant detention capacities by 2022 meaning reactivating already existing facilities or build new ones to already incarcerate those who come here seeking for protection. In Berlin, people will be detained in a facility at a deportation centre in Schönefeld Airport. Let's organise and protest against this. (Applause). We should also be aware of the measurement target as it criminalises civil society solidarity. We don't know how this will happen and I will tell you. But I will tell you that if they go ahead with the absurdity we will resist. (Applause). It is not possible that the original draft of the new policy includes clearing the entire process of deportation, for example, embassy and doctor appointments as state secret. So let's stay firm on the side of the people seeking asylum. Let's pay attention on the pressure that the state will put against us. Let's stand together and create obstacle for the implementation of such laws. (Applause). We want to take this demonstration to commemorate our sister Rita O′. Rita who was killed recently, the remains of her body was found in the forest in Brandenburg, just next to the Lager where she was living. She was already reported missing since the 7th of April. We have questions. Why is it taking for the police three months to find her body in a place, which is just next to where she is living? Why do we get to know about her death only through social media? Why is there no public outcry about this matter? Rita was only 32 years old. She came to Germany when she was 25 and applied for asylum. Through racist laws, she was forced to live isolated in the Lager, where she was waiting for her

> decision on her asylum procedure for seven years. I want you to take a moment of silence to remember our friend Rita. (Moment of silence) (Black Lives Matter, July 5, 2019)

Thus, the speech at the annual Black Lives Matter march touched on themes such as the forthcoming new asylum law and its repercussions for refugees, and the injustice related to Rita's death. These themes came to form an integral part of Black Lives Matter's campaign since Jennifer emphasised the idea of resistance against police negligence and racist structures.

IWS strove to challenge the racial hierarchies present in the asylum system, since the initiative focused on resisting institutional racism and the state's asylum policies very explicitly on the streets as well as on social media, and on their websites. IWS's alliance with Black Lives Matter, and its presence on the streets, additionally demonstrated the group's collective endeavours and their willingness to build alliances with other organisations.

IWS's words at the Black Lives Matter rally also showed the extent to which gender and racial violence interacted since Jennifer specifically protested and cried out against police negligence and asylum policies which segregated and isolated women such that it became possible for violence to occur and go unnoticed, dismissed, and disregarded over a period of time. When IWS came to know about Rita's death and the police failure to find her body quickly, the group gave a press release, they went to the *Heim* to learn more about the case, they uploaded a short video related to the case, and they actively tried to find a safe space for her family to stay in Berlin. Thus IWS strove to challenge structural racism and power and build alliances with groups which were involved in similar forms of resistance.

While previous studies have focused on refugee and immigrant protests, there has been less discussion about how women refugees participate and build alliances with local, national, and transnational politics, campaigns, and actions. Black Lives Matter, a campaign which started in the United States for rights and justice for black people against institutional violence following the violent death of Trayvon Martin, gained momentum and popularity in various cities in Berlin as well. The initiative organised an annual march and several events. Black Lives Matter also supported IWS by advertising the book launch of *Als ich nach Deutschland Kam*.

IWS also forged links with several other initiatives in Berlin. For example, the group almost always participated at the annual 'We'll Come United' anti-racist parade. In the summer of 2018, IWS had their own van and members and IWS activists made several speeches which were met with loud applause. IWS was introduced before Jennifer spoke. The speaker told the audience that IWS was a feminist political group which was active against racism, sexism, and intersecting power structures. Jennifer delivered the following speech at this significant rally, parade, and demonstration where several thousand people participated and where several self-organised and solidarity refugee and migrant initiatives participated:

> We are here and we will fight. Germany is one of Europe's biggest weapons trader, bombing, blowing up bridges and buildings. Supporting puppet regimes. Empowering *jihadis*, ruining the lives of countless women. When they say that they want to take action they don't mean lifting sanctions on food and medical supplies. They don't mean not sending weapons. They don't mean accepting refugees. No. Never. Because suddenly refugees become the invaders while the aggressors become victims. Are we really welcome here? When we hear the big outcry of women from the Lagers all over Germany regarding the deterioration of living conditions and when people cannot move freely and when they must live again under *Residenzflicht*. In the new AnKER Centre and Deportation Centre will accelerate deportations. People are locked up in places where basic standards are not being meant. Financial support is being reduced. Psychological torture including constant threat of deportations. Fascism and racism in Germany is not new. But it is rising now at an alarming rate. This is happening on three levels. On the streets and the state level in German society. When the AfD first appeared it was a scandal in the media and now it has normalised. Racism too has become normalised in the eyes of the society. How can it be normal to hear that non-white people are chased on the streets? It's by no means an isolated incident. Children are afraid to speak their own language on the train for being fear of being seen as their target. This has an effect on us, we feel isolated, trapped and vulnerable. How should I respond? Would I have reacted differently as political people put the responsibility on ourselves to react. But it should not be our problem. Not every day. Not any day. But when we come together we regain our strength. Unity is our strength. We also need to be creative. Because we cannot depend on the police to keep us safe. The state will not protect us. German national politics is moving to the right. The right wing government even have their own section of so called 'feminism.' This is racist in the strongest sense of the word. Sexism and rac-

> ism cannot be fought separately. And so we have to fight against forms of racist and sexist violence. We have to understand whether we are connected whether in the *Heims* and the prisons and the streets. In the workplace and inside houses whether coming from the state or the police or the street In case you forget, "we are here because you destroyed our lands."

Jennifer's speech reflected the vision and aim of IWS. It is significant that the group criticised different elements of the German state: the police, the right-wing party AfD, and the asylum policies which isolated and ostracised women. The speech also conveyed explicitly the extent to which IWS's activism was intersectional since Jennifer forcefully stated that sexism and racism could not be fought separately. Such criticisms in the public sphere in a German city showed how solidarity work and political activism intertwined and came together. The notion of solidarity needs to be reconceptualised in this context, because feminist solidarity towards refugees does not mean simply providing support and counselling to women migrants on a one-to-one level, or offering material support or providing platforms for women to voice their individual testimonies, but rather feminist and intersectional solidarity work becomes politics when it actually becomes part of a collective mobilisation process in the public sphere.

Jennifer's participation in the rallies also revealed the extent to which women of migrant backgrounds could potentially mobilise for social justice. Migrant women members of IWS such as Jennifer, Lica, and Denise had relatively more social capital and resources and therefore could offer solidarity to refugees, write and make speeches at demonstrations, and thus advocate on women asylum seekers' behalf in varied ways. In this way, these migrant women's privileges need to be acknowledged, but on the other hand it should be recognised that these very women were also subject to racialisation within German society.

Concluding Comments

This chapter has focused on how a women's activist group, IWS, expressed their solidarity with female asylum seekers, recognised refugees, and migrants. The actions of IWS need to be understood in their full complexity. IWS should be understood as an activist group which worked within an intersectional framework because the group recognised the multiple oppressions which migrant women encountered, and aimed to make such

inequalities visible and to contest power structures through participation in demonstrations and rallies and through building various alliances and networks. For example, the initiative's intersectional activism was evident during Jennifer's speeches when she specifically mentioned that race and sexism could not be fought separately. The idea of intersectionality surfaced in the narratives of the women on IWS's web pages and books when they offered testimonies of their encounters with racist state policies, gender- and sex-related violence. Intersectional activism also became a key point during book launches and conferences when speakers spoke of their multiple marginalisations and their resistance.

Most importantly, IWS's solidarity efforts and intersectional activism came to fill a niche in the male-dominated refugee mobilisation where, except for a few women, it was male refugees who had been most visible. IWS subsequently provided an ideological and physical space for women where they could share their testimonies, receive practical support, rally, and voice their anger against the German state's asylum policies. In this way, the space continued to survive long after the eviction of the tents at Oranienplatz and the eviction of the people at the school. The political importance of such a space could not be discounted since women refugees with fragile immigration status could not always publicly rally in the street. However, it became necessary for women to find a space where they could feel they belonged when the state denied their existence and the bureaucratic structures made it difficult for them to participate on a political level. Consequently, a safe space where only women were permitted to meet to voice their intersectional experiences, and to propose actions, became greatly important since such a space allowed them to collectively make their demands and resist, which otherwise would not have been possible.

IWS mediated individual narratives of refugee women and to some extent represented them in idealised ways in their three books. However, through organisation of conferences and situating these narratives within a collective framework, the stories formed part of a collective endeavour. During conferences, the book launches, and panel discussions, the political ideology of IWS became much more apparent.

According to the emic perspective of IWS, they were a group which fought for the rights of asylum seekers and engaged in anti-racist work. The previous chapter demonstrated how the group Schlafplatzorga engaged in anti-racist work and supported refugees through the practical work of finding homes for refugees in Berlin. IWS's goals were similar to

that of SPO, since they also defined themselves as an anti-racist group and supported the idea of open borders. Nevertheless, the strategies of IWS differed considerably from SPO's since IWS focused on providing practical support as well as shifting narratives of refugee women in the public domain.

IWS also demonstrated solidarity through offering practical support to women on an individual basis through lawyer's workshops, and in some instances through finding accommodations for refugee women in Berlin. Thus in this context IWS's solidarity actions should be understood in political as well as in humanitarian terms. In this way, hierarchies between refugee women and established migrant women in Berlin prevailed since the refugees were almost always at the receiving end. But the unequal dimensions between migrant women who offered solidarity and refugees who were at the receiving end could potentially be understood to be less pronounced because established migrant women did not always represent the dominant group in the German state and were racialised as well. IWS's speeches, activism, and visibility in the streets showed that advocacy, solidarity, and political activism can occur in ways that break outside the frame of traditional solidarity work, when members of white European society support refugees because in this context migrant women mobilised against unjust asylum policies in the German state.

A few refugee women did get involved in supporting the actions of the members of IWS. For example, the female refugees became visible at public events, and through taking an active role in selling the books at these events and in some instances through participating in panel discussions. More importantly, it was the access to a consistent and physical space which IWS had started with and lost and then gained again that in actuality facilitated the participation process of refugee women. Nevertheless, some level of hierarchy remained visible, since it was always the more articulate and expressive women with social capital who could participate in discussions, organise events, organise technical support, and offer translations.

Similar to many solidarity groups, IWS also depended on funding and grants. The members spent considerable time finding means to finance their various projects. Although IWS were generally reliant on small grants to fund their projects and the running of the website and the office space, the material aspects of solidarity work need to be recognised. In this sense, solidarity work may also come to resemble humanitarian actions which also depend on funding and charities to support them. However, the

manner in which the funds were allocated differed since the funds were spent on anti-racist actions and projects, and the women who IWS supported were not understood as vulnerable individuals, but rather as actors in their own right.

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CHAPTER 6

There Is Empowerment in the Air: Media Activists Decolonise the Radio

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the workings of a radio project, Wearebornfree! Empowerment Radio Humanity Matters (We!R) which was founded and envisioned by political activists from various African countries in 2016. This chapter provides an analysis of the ways in which these radio presenters and their guests mediated anti-racist messages and contested border regimes and populist right-wing ideologies through discussions and music on air, whilst recording some segments of their shows on Facebook Live. I will additionally discuss Wearebornfree Radio group's collaborative activities and the ways in which their alliances functioned.

Wearebornfree Radio emerged out of the refugee protests supported by German and European activists. The activists of East and West African origin initially sought support from European solidarity workers, but subsequently worked in autonomous ways. The three media activists focused on decolonial action, thinking, and organising, whilst communicating their own perspectives coupled with anti-racist messages. In this way, they conveyed their own epistemologies, and created a forum for an exchange of heterogeneous experiences and views, whilst adopting a critical stance towards neocolonialism and colonial domination. The activists believed that decolonisation of the media space and the idea of a common humanity served as a useful strategy for mobilising against borders and racialisation. Therefore the radio project should be understood as a political project (rather than an enactment of liberal multiculturalism) because the

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Wearebornfree Radio crew (as they called themselves) of East and West African origin actively sought to claim the media space in the German context, denounced institutional and societal racism, and emphasised equality. Thus, the chapter will illustrate how the media activists went beyond discussing refugee issues and refused to be positioned as refugees in need of solidarity, support, and care.

Participating on the Radio

I regularly participated in the shows and even designed some of them. For example, following Aretha Franklin's death I did a show about her music and political life in collaboration with one of the radio hosts, Bino. On another occasion, Bino and I read some poetry by a Pakistani female feminist poet, Kishwar Naheed. I also regularly participated in a monthly reading show where a group of people including a white German man read and discussed various postcolonial texts.

At the studio space, I felt at ease, enjoyed the vibes, and remained hopeful. Even when there were no broadcasts, I felt that it was an enjoyable experience to simply visit the studio space and to meet artists and musicians of colour. However, I was conscious of some of my privileges and refrained from interfering with or influencing the content of the shows and simply enjoyed the space and participated spontaneously while on air as well as off-air. For example, on several occasions I visited the studio space when there weren't any broadcasts. On one such occasion, the radio crew were present in the studio and were watching videos on YouTube of female musicians popular in Senegal and the Gambia. At the studio, there were also two German friends of one of the hosts, who they had got to know through the initiative Afrique Avenir where they had done their internships. One of the women had travelled with Mohammed when he had gone to Senegal. Mohammed was also a photographer and film-maker and he showed me a short clip of a man dancing in the village with much intensity with a large group of children. Later, we also watched an interview of a female African artist on YouTube. Meanwhile Moro cooked some vegetables in peanut sauce and rice and we all had a meal with some tea. I did not feel like an outsider at the studio space.

In some cases, feminist groups criticised the radio project and the studio space for being predominantly male. In this connection, several white European women who were friends with the group ceased to visit and participate in the show. However, as a woman of colour, I always felt

comfortable in the studio space since I connected with the radio group on many levels. I felt that I shared some of their worldview, their sense of humour, their ways of dealing with shortcomings, and their politics and struggles against racial injustices, fortress Europe and externalisation of borders, and unjust asylum policies. Additionally, I found a connection with the radio because I could share my ideas about colonial legacy and neocolonialism and participate in South—South, North—South, and North—North conversations (Fig. 6.1).

The Beginning of Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio Project

A group of African activists from various countries had formed the group 'African Refugee Union' during the refugee mobilisation at Oranienplatz in 2013 in order to reflect upon their reasons for migrating to Europe. The aim of the group was to comprehend the legacies of colonialism and

Fig. 6.1 The author at Wearebornfree empowerment radio

neocolonialism and together they came up with the slogan 'We are here because you destroyed our countries.' The group made links between neocolonialism and deaths in the Mediterranean Sea, immigrant controls, borders, deportations, and different aspects of the migration laws and regime in Europe. However, several of the refugees were disappointed by the fact that many of the African people focused on acquiring formal status, 'papers', and citizenship rather than engaging in conscious reflection. They believed that all humans are born free and for them it was important to reflect and to understand the common link of 'humanity'. They thus formed 'Wearebornfree Humanity Matters', a group which emphasised the importance of empowerment, emancipation, and humanity. Bino was also of the view that the movement needed a structure. 'How many times can you be on the street? We are not street people. We are builders. We are innovators', he asserted. Some of the activists opposed structures, but he argued that the advantage of a structured movement with an office space allowed for further organisation, connections, and visibility. Thus, Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio Humanity Matters became a structured media platform in 2016. The project was especially interested in advocating for the rights of women, LGBQTI people, and marginalised groups including people of colour. The group described their mission statement as follows:

> Dear Friends and Enemies Listeners
>
> Wearebornfree! Empowerment Radio (We!R) is an independent radio format of, for, for and by Friends and Enemies. It was formed throughout the German Refugee Resistance and focused on empowerment. Especially interested in Women*, LGBTQi and other marginalised groups such as Black people and People of Color and others. It serves as a platform and network to reach those we cannot reach through street protests politically, socially, culturally and economically.

Later the following statements were added to We!R's mission statement:

> To decolonize our minds, bodies and spirits. To instigate movements of optimism and happiness through accepting individuals for whom they are in all our programs and events. To strive in raising awareness by improving communication, coordination and organization of all activities. To be creative and dare to dream big.

In addition, Moro, one of the media activists, was of the view that the radio conveyed a strong anti-racist agenda and that the platform conveyed the following message:

> Through our experience in the system, as activists and People of colour, we will feel unsafe and insecure from the daily police violence and harassment of our brothers and sisters. It is therefore our task as media activists with an independent platform, to join those who dare to stand by these victims and vulnerable people to investigate and uncover these untold stories to the general public.

Although the radio project started as a collaborative endeavour, including seven people from African countries such Niger, Chad, the Gambia, and Mali, many of the people could not commit for various reasons. Two of the activists, Bino and Mohammed, remained dedicated to their vision, and Moro, a social media activist, joined them a few months later. Together, they sought support from a few German activists, acquired a studio space, contacted the Berlin-based radio project Reboot FM, received slots on its shows, and began to broadcast online and on 88.4 FM in Berlin, and 99.7 FM in Potsdam. The radio project's presenters self-identified as Wearebornfree Radio 'crew' on the radio. The radio crew managed to retain an upbeat energy and it was evident to the listeners that they found great pleasure in being part of Wearebornfree Radio and doing the shows even when discussing serious topics..

The radio group collaborated with free radio in Berlin and Brandenburg and were connected on the radio channels 88.4 MHz in Berlin and 99.7 in Potsdam. Since the group did not have an official licence at its inception, they needed to be switched on and aired through other radio stations. During its first two years various non-commercial and free radio stations in Berlin and Potsdam helped connect Wearebornfree Radio on a daily basis. Such collaborations need to be understood as building political alliances with non-commercial radio, which advocated anti-capitalism and freedom of movement. In 2019, Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio, the only radio show hosted by African migrants in the German state, became a registered association after two years of running and became an equal partner with other non-commercial radio groups.

We!R group started when they found a space within a house project which was used as a political and meeting space for different projects. A smaller room within this space was apportioned for the radio studio.

Initially, this space was understood as the 'refugee office'. It was located in Kreuzberg, where people of different backgrounds, sexual orientations, and largely left political perspectives resided. It was also a district which was governed by the Green Party. The refugee tent protests described in Chap. 3 had also taken place in this district.

We!R started doing their shows from a small studio space of no more than six square meters. On one occasion, I even witnessed the radio crew remodel and redesign the small studio space so that it could accommodate more people with ease.

The studio space was well equipped with red and yellow mics, headphones, turntables, cassette players, speakers, several shelves, and recording equipment. The computer screen showed images and photos of people broadcasting in the studio and the walls were covered with large posters depicting the Wearebornfree logo and images from past demonstrations.

Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio had initially received some support from solidarity activists who were active in the refugee protests. In its initial phase, it operated very much as an extension of the movement, focusing on refugee-related issues. However, a year after the inception of Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio, many of the European activists ceased to participate actively and Bino, Moro, and Mohammed began to work relatively independently. Over time, Wearebornfree Radio developed its own identity. As Moro told me, the refugee movement could be understood 'as one big movement but now with several branches and Wearebornfree Radio was one such branch'. Everyone needed a space for their own voices and Wearebornfree Radio was no exception in this regard.

Diana McCarty, a media activist and a founding editor of the award-winning free artist radio Reboot.fm 88.4 FM in Berlin and of the radia.fmnetwork of cultural radio stations, called the radio project Europe's first African-organised, built, and run radio station. The hosts and friends of the station received this title with much joy. Jerry, a friend of the station, stated that he felt very happy that Wearebornfree Radio had received such a title in Berlin since the city was an important and major centre in Europe.

Emancipation, Decoloniality, and Humanity on the Radio

Bino and some of the other people of African origin selected the title of the radio group, 'Wearebornfree Empowerment Humanity Matters', to convey broader notions of emancipation, self-determination, and humanness, rather than the title 'Refugee Radio', which in their view was limiting and narrow. Their goal was to critique the continuing colonial domination of Europe within Africa. Aníbal Quijano (2007) asserts that the European paradigm of rational knowledge was not only elaborated in the context of but as part of a power structure that involved European colonial domination over the rest of the world. It was such power structures which the radio project and the activists opposed and resisted. While the aim of the refugee mobilisation had been to demand specific refugee rights, the radio project was much broader in its scope, aim, and philosophy.

The radio crew did not claim objectivity or neutrality. Richard Grusin (2015) contends that 'mediation operates not by neutrally reproducing meaning or information, but by actively transforming human and nonhuman actants, as well as their conceptual and affective states' (p. 130). In this sense, I argue that the African presenters through their multiple messages which centred on emancipating Africa and non-whites strove to transform the conceptual and affective states of their intended audience. In many respects, the radio group conveyed their views in non-dualistic ways, such that they didn't adopt the role of providing information in 'neutral' ways to their intended audiences, but rather they themselves posed as active participants and were engaged and involved with the contents of the show. In this way, they liberated themselves from posing as neutral observers.

With the passage of time, the radio crew worked to decolonise the media space and invited guests of African origin to the studio (although white European guests continued to be welcomed) and forged alliances with local groups such as Afrique Avenir, Black Lives Matter, and the community and cultural organisation Young African Art Market (YAAM). Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio attained international recognition as student groups (including many African American students) from Chicago regularly visited the studio each summer. Thus, the non-commercial media landscape of Wearebornfree Radio came to bear a decolonial leaning when black activists, artists, young migrant groups, LGBTQI groups, and

people of colour found their way to the studio and shared their creative productions.

The radio discussions included a wide array of topics which affected 'humanity' such as the everyday and institutional racism which refugees encounter in Europe, LGBTQI issues in Berlin, and the repression and genocide of Rohingyas in Burma. The radio group concentrated on the effects of colonial legacies and the continued colonisation of African states, the contestation of the state apparatus, the rise of right-wing populist parties, and the growing securitisation of refugees in the EU. At the same time, the radio group emphasised notions of 'humanity', 'love', and 'affect'.

The hosts understood radio to be a platform for their activism and mobilisation, and an important focus was to empower refugees since the project had emerged from the refugee resistance movement. The hosts often sent out greetings to refugees and migrants in the Lager and urged them to remain empowered and to continue resisting against the German asylum system. To this end, Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio should be understood as a project which spoke to the interrelatedness of the present day and historical situation of migrants, refugees, LGBTQI, and people of colour.

The project did not simply exist in a vacuum and present Afrocentric or refugee centric views, but rather became a platform for people to voice their experiences of everyday and institutional racism. The racial violence that people experienced was exposed through talk, music, and by guests who participated in some of the shows.

The aim of Wearebornfree Radio project extended beyond simply presenting 'positive' and 'idealised' images of refugees or Africans in German society, and because the radio project emerged out of politics, it managed to sustain and propagate some aspects of the movement. For example, as discussed in the previous chapters, the refugee movement at Oranienplatz highlighted the fact that refugees from former colonised countries were in Europe precisely because these countries bore the brunt of colonial legacies: 'We are here because you were there', an aphorism borrowed from Ambalavaner Sivanandan, a leading intellectual of the left, which encapsulated complex histories and contested certain perspectives. These ideas and ideals became part of the Wearebornfree shows. As Bino explained to an audience at a panel following a film screening organised by Afrique Avenir:

Because of the big problems humanism is facing there and here we decided to come out with this platform. As many of my friends say that we are called "refugees". And we say, "no" that this status is not ours. We are humanists. And that's the name of our radio, "Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio" which stands for humanity. Usually I do not tell where I come from, but for the sake of this house, I will say I am from the world but my roots are in East Africa, Uganda. So I entered this land in 2010. But you know as we from the other side to survive here, we have to seek asylum. So that's how it happened but due to the situation in 2012 we decided to protest the situation. And I think that is the beginning of Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio.

During the protests I realised that my voice could go Kaput. I needed to rescue my power and wherever…. You know it was a street struggle and we started on the street. We didn't have an opportunity to go to the parliament. Since we were on the street and we used to talk a lot. I forced myself to talk because the situation I was in forced me to talk. Even in the Lager before I broke this silence. I talked a lot to my friends. I was telling why aren't we getting food? Sending the packet back. They were giving us food in packets. What is this? Why are we not allowed to learn Deutsch? So there were a lot of thoughts within me. So when I got the opportunity to go outside I did. So the idea came from the media-the mainstream media and the way they were reporting about our protests. Also sometimes if we have things we wanted to put in the media we could not see the media. But if there were fights you could see them there. Then you will expect journalists every time to come. "Hello we want to have interview with you." But when we went on the street to protest they didn't come. But with the fight they could come. So I saw that there was a great need to have a self-organised media. And within that movement I participated a lot and went outside and gave speeches. So when the need to make our voices our strong I proposed a radio, but by then it was difficult because the situation in Oranienplatz, the main camp we had here, was getting tense. Eviction. Eviction. So it was difficult to concentrate on that. But the idea didn't die even when the protest was evicted. I brought the idea to the Media Group, which is a Left organised media group by German friends with us. I was there, so I proposed that. I asked my friend, Mohammed and said, "Let's start a radio". And he said, "let's just do it"! I said, "Okay. I will ask the team. A friend of us who I knew was working on radio." So we started like seven people in our place at Waldemarstrasse. But because of our situation, people were looking for places to sleep and it was difficult. So in the end we remained only the three of us. Yeah. And that is the formation of Wearebornfree Radio.

At the very outset of his speech, Bino emphasised the notion of 'humanity', which in some ways contradicted his strong political position.

However, on air, the crew managed to bridge these concepts. A Universalist idea of humanism has been the subject of much criticism, but in this context Bino's reference to humanism and his appeal to a common humanity must be understood in the context of challenging the neoliberal order, racial hierarchy, nationalism, and xenophobia.

As Gilroy notes, 'then we may ask how a refiguration of humanism might contribute to Europe's ability to acknowledge its evolving postcolonial predicament. Its relationship with migrants, refugees, displaced people, denizens, racial and civilisational inferiors and others judged infrahuman whose lives have no value even when they fall inside the elastic bounds of the law' (Gilroy 2011). Thus, in the context of refugee activism and struggles, humanity is not understood necessarily in universal terms and in fixed ways. An appeal to a common and dynamic notion of humanity additionally helped refugees decry fixed understandings of the term 'refugees' which mainstream society and media locks them into.

Through its stance on the concept of humanity, the radio project asserted that its anti-racist position was critical of white hegemony and, at times, even of the white left European solidarity activists. They were of the view that the solidarity workers failed to understand the notion of equality and often did not provide them with the space to function in equal and empowering ways. It was evident from many of the radio shows and the ways in which the project functioned that We!R sought to build alliances. At the same time, the radio group found satisfaction in self-determination and sovereignty.

In addition to their strong political message, the radio crew conveyed the importance of love and affect in very expressive ways. The three men were not shy to express their 'love for humanity' through music, through their commentaries, and through their use of multiple media outlets. They repeatedly reminded their audience to choose love of humanity rather than love of capitalism. In this way, the presenters appealed to the senses of their audience. As Grusin (2015) has argued:

> To understand radical mediation as affective and experiential rather than strictly visual is to think about our immediate affective experience of mediation as that which is felt, embodied, near—not distant from us, and thus not illuminated or pictured, but experienced by us as living, embodied human and nonhuman creatures. Where remediation focused largely on the visual aspects of mediation, radical mediation would take into account the entire human sensorium (p. 132).

Such affect-laden ways of mediating must be understood in the immediate wider political context of Europe. The radio programmes were broadcast when the far-right political party with their ideological underpinnings of xenophobia, Islamophobia, and anti-immigrant views had not only gained popularity, but had become part of some official discourses. Thus, these messages of love, good vibrations, overcoming of selfish interests, and openness served as an antithesis to the politics of 'hate' which had gained momentum in Europe. At the same time, in such situations the listeners heard the political perspectives of the radio hosts and therefore the radio project needs to be understood as a project which not only emerged out of the refugee protests, but was also dynamic in that it continued to develop and branch out in autonomous ways.

Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio and Sovereignty

The three radio producers and hosts built the studio and designed, organised, and planned each show. They worked independently and in some instances spontaneously planned and designed their shows, whereas at other times they put much effort, deliberation, and thought into the shows. Thus, in many respects the radio project transcended refugee politics and should be regarded as a decolonial project, given that the three radio hosts sought to centre themselves and work independently of the European support network, which was part of the radio project in its initial phase. Bino and Moro offered me their viewpoints with respect to solidarity:

Bino: What solidarity means to me is to come together. Because it means you feel a pain not only from one side. But what I have seen and what I have witnessed in the refugee movement in the leftist movement, being in the centre of it. I realised that we have been seen as vulnerable people, who need help, seeking help from people who seems that they are okay they have all the privileges. So we can help you. So that is not about privilege. It is about understanding the situation. You need to feel the same pain with the person that you are solidarising with. But what was happening in my experience I saw with most of the people. I saw coming was that they were saying, "Ah, we are in solidarity with you. We are in solidarity with refugees." But they could see us as powerless persons or humans and that they are there to empower

us and support and in this way they could not bring us on equal level to see the political side of it. That really these people are protesting for a fair cause. Not just searching to be helped. They want to change something. So for me this makes me go back on the point of solidarity. Because there is no equality. If we talk about in terms of the Leftist movement. It becomes another form of imperialism but coming in the leftist way. That you see we are not on the other side. So this is the "Neo-leftist liberal" mind. To say, "Ah we are together", but in actual sense we are not together. But the mind says you are vulnerable. I am here. I have the knowledge. I am academy. People came here (to the studio) with the idea of solidarity. While our concept is clear. It is all about empowerment. By empowerment we mean that we see each other as equals persons. Equal persons is coming together, sharing ideas together and putting forward these ideas together. It could be the Radio, it could be the public gathering. It could be whatever, writing. But because of this idea of manipulation project, I decided not to call Refugee Radio. It was an intended plan from my understanding of the situation. Because, I knew that there would be many intruders. Also once it is a Refugee Radio, anyone can use that name. We are here for the Refugee Radio, We are from the Refugee Radio. Everywhere. So I said this is Empowerment Radio and our aim of Born Free is because that's what we believe in now. So I said, I want to start, "Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio" And in this way anyone who will identify with Wearebornfree will be a member. It's not automatic but it could be automatic. So when the solidarity group came in, they fought me actually to change that name. They wanted it to be Refugee Radio. I said, No. I said, "the idea is there. And I am putting it in practice." So, if you want to make Radio with me it should be really "Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio. Without Refugee." And the solidarity crew became uncomfortable with us. And we said this is a colonial mind-set and they left. We wanted our own emancipation. We didn't want a "Solidarity Radio." In our own platform, that can't be. This is why you don't see many white faces running up and down to organise everything for us. We organised our own techniques. It is an emancipatory place. It's always painful to speak out the truth. It is a self-organised refugee place. But

those people supporting the self-organised place. Where are they? You could see them Oranienplatz. Because there they had visibility. There the people needed their voice. But here we are "voiceful" and we don't need their voice. That's why they are not here. That is why to me Solidarity doesn't make sense. It is useless to me.

Moro: I was a very big fan of solidarity. As time went by, solidarity has to be mutual. I have to give. You have to give. I have to give. You have to decide. But not only to mean that I am solidarizing with you because I have the privilege. I am German. I have the privilege. I have the right. I have the money. I have the voice. So I have to decide for you. So this is where I disagree with solidarization. Solidarity. We have to accept it. But it has to be based on mutuality. Not to say, that you have to decide on behalf of me. Because I have been seeing this German people who are privileged. And they have the voice. And they know how to get help people and they know how to get money. But in the name of this, they sit and decide this is what we are doing for the refugees. And they come and tell the refugees. This is what we want to do this and this. Conclusion. Full Stop. They don't listen to the other side, to the refugees whom they are giving the support to. So from there I get to critique the process of solidarization. Also solidarity people want to move with people who wants to listen to them. Anybody who wants to criticise them, they turn back on them. There are lots of groups. And all these groups came after Oranienplatz. It was a very big movement but after that it was split in different groups and different solidarizers. It came out of who wanted to move with whom.

Thus, the three radio hosts were critical of the notion of solidarity and held the view that it did not lead to equality, and therefore they developed and organised their shows independently. White Germans and Europeans participated in the show as guests, rather than as individuals who were present to offer support. Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio confronted solidarity activism, since the crew were of the view that solidarity work didn't always offer self-determination to the extent that migrants originating from colonised countries could be actively free to work towards deracialisation.

Many of the white European citizens from the refugee movement and protest ceased to visit the studio. But the Europeans who did join the shows came to enjoy the lively atmosphere and to work on an equal level. In some instances, the Europeans participated because of their interest in African countries such as Senegal or Rastafarian music, politics, and culture. For instance, a white German Rastafarian regularly participated in the shows because he enjoyed playing reggae music and formed a close friendship with one of the radio hosts, Moro, such that they spent much social time together.

Women were always welcome to participate on the radio and to speak of their opinions. Over time, several feminists joined the shows as guests or as colleagues. Moreover, the radio studio welcomed transgender women to participate, who were often denied entry in some feminist spaces in Berlin. However, the radio group were cautious with their alignments because they did not want to receive 'solidarity' from European women such that the power dynamics would be tested. It was evident that they wanted to work with European women as colleagues such that equality prevailed amongst them.

The radio group aimed to maintain equality and to dismantle hegemonic relations between refugees and EU citizens since the radio producers did not see themselves as in need of support or solidarity, but rather desired to make their own voices, politics, music, and culture visible in the media. Thus We!R should be regarded as a decolonial project where three men of East and West African origin produced, designed, and hosted the shows. The shows developed their own character, such that it became an antithesis to mainstream media. The radio crew never hesitated to criticise the 'Babylon' system in ways not heard on mainstream radio. In this way, We!R strove towards emancipation and decolonisation so that the hegemonic and colonial voices did not eclipse the lesser-heard voices.

We!R Radio's Shows

The Format, Content, and Scheduling

Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio adopted a hybrid format which included characteristics of talk radio and music shows. The shows featured news, music, and discussion sessions on a broad range of subjects. They were closely connected to news and events in Berlin as well as news from various countries in Africa and other parts of the world.

The radio group frequently covered news about Germany's migration policies, and the racialisation of refugees, migrants, and people of color. At the same time, the talk shows covered news related to demonstrations and protests against racial violence. The radio hosts always made announcements of future demonstrations to be held in Berlin with further commentary about the importance and rationale of such mobilisations.

In 2019, the radio station started a monthly reading show where the radio crew read texts by authors such as Frantz Fanon and Achille Mbembe. The book *Why I'm No Longer Talking To White People About Race* authored by Reni Eddo-Lodge became a particular favourite amongst the radio crew and their guests.

The studio space was presented as an open and welcoming one. According to Bino, any individual or group could spontaneously join the shows and air their opinion, play their favourite music, or promote their creative projects. In this respect, novice authors, theatre groups, and musicians often joined the shows to talk about their work. However, over time the radio station included regular guests and the shows gained their distinctive characteristics. For example, on Fridays, the show was led by Mohammed with his own version of 'Top 20s' interspersed with talk and discussion. On Saturdays, Moro hosted his upbeat 'Saturday Segment' show, where he and a DJ played contemporary African music. On Sundays, Bino discussed politics and played music. In the second half of the Sunday show, two German men played jazz and soul music.

The scheduling of the shows was relatively fixed. For the first two years, the shows were aired almost daily including on weekends. Upon receiving its licence, the radio group broadcast their shows three days a week on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday afternoons from 1 to 4 pm. The radio shows incorporated social media into their programming, and on several occasions segments of shows were live-streamed on Facebook so that listeners could additionally view clips of the radio shows.

Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio had its own theme song, 'We are born free', created and composed by Muzoke, a friend of the radio, especially for Wearebornfree Radio. The lyrics, '*I feel reggae in my beat. Reggae music is my life. Yes we are born free. Yes you are born free. And that's the way you should live. Hear this frequency 88vier. 88four. Hometown Berlin*', included Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio's manifesto, according to the radio crew. The theme song explicitly demonstrated the radio station's commitment to emancipatory ways of living.

We!R always played different tunes from various parts of the world at the start of their programmes. The rationale behind starting the show in this manner was to convey spontaneity and variety, which the radio crew believed reflected the essence of Wearebornfree Radio. The hosts would then play the theme song at the beginning of the show, sometimes in the middle of the show and at times towards the end. It was evident that all three of the radio activists were very fond of this song and identified with it since they often cheerfully sang along with it and commented on its lyrics. Such levels of participation further demonstrated the radio group's engagement with the radio. Their gestures need to be understood as activism as they made their voices heard in the ways they wanted to by singing along with tunes they chose to play.

The Radio's Intended Audience

Given the political position of the radio crew, their anti-racist messages, their emphasis on decoloniality, their focus on injustices, their emphasis on resistance and empowerment, their focus on the political situation in various countries in Africa, and their choice to play reggae and a range of African music, as well as music from other parts of the world showed that the radio's intended audience was definitively refugees, migrants, the African diaspora, Africans in Africa, and the left in Germany and outside Europe. However, the radio show's aim was to include a broader audience and often addressed the far right and the radio's 'enemies'.

Wearebornfree Radio didn't simply aim to find an audience locally in Berlin, but rather frequently addressed African audiences, politicians, and leaders and implored them to take a firm position against European and Western leaders. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o has argued for the decolonising of the African mind. Imperialism, he writes, has left its mark on the minds of the previously colonised so that they personalise what was once far off and different and become detached from their immediate surrounding and culture. In this connection, he writes that Africans are groomed for such thinking from childhood in colonial and missionary schools such that they see Africa, its languages, cultures, traditions, and practices as 'backward', dark, evil and generally disdainful'. Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio recognised such views amongst Africans and within African society and thus strove to advocate against hegemonic European ideas and ideals and

endeavoured to be an empowering and emancipatory project which aimed to shift particular mind-sets of its audiences within Europe and in the African continent as well.

Greetings from the Radio

While on air, the We!R crew always sent out greetings to 'friends' and 'enemies', and the group described the studio space as being open to everyone regardless of their viewpoints. The presenters repeatedly invited guests to participate on their shows. The crew often greeted people who had participated on the show by name. For example, I often heard my name mentioned on the radio. All three of the hosts often called out 'Greetings to Fazila out there in Manchester!' And I returned their greetings via WhatsApp or Facebook messenger. The listeners were always made to feel special since greetings were sent out using terms of endearments. For example, the three presenters often sent out welcoming messages in appealing styles such as 'Our dear listeners, our lovely listeners.' Moreover, the hosts repeatedly spoke about the importance and significance of 'love' on the radio. The radio crew thus adopted a personable, affect-laden, spontaneous, and friendly style of broadcasting, while remaining focused around particular political viewpoints.

The language spoken on the radio was primarily English; however, at times, the radio crew did switch to Bambera and Madinka when they greeted their listeners, which showed that they wanted to include a broader audience. As Bino pointed out:

> This is the colonial language we learned. We are not professionals. And in this platform we learn all languages. Wearebornfree, as the name of the radio indicates, it's free for everything. We welcome all languages. We don't want this colonial language to dominate our space. We want our brothers and sisters to take the platform and speak their own languages.

Music on Wearebornfree Radio

Music formed an important and integral part of Wearebornfree Radio. Moro understood music in terms of past, present, and future tense. He often told his listeners while on air that music gave him a feeling that was unimaginable and served to form part of his own cultural memory. In some instances, when he played certain tunes on the radio, he would mention how it reminded him of his past, his youth, and his childhood in the

Gambia. At the same time, because he was a Gambian migrant residing in Berlin and broadcasting shows from a studio there, he destabilised the idea that a radio project could be solely about 'culture and roots' devoid of politics.

The radio station often played reggae music originating from the Caribbean as well as Africa. The radio crew regularly played the music of Lucky Dube, Bob Marley, and several other reggae artists. Bino, Mohammed, and Moro frequently sang along and commented on the lyrics and demonstrated their affinity with the artists.

In addition to reggae music, the radio also played songs by African artists from Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, the Ivory Coast, South Africa, and the Gambia who sang about the continent of Africa and various themes in indigenous languages as well as in the colonial languages, English and French. A Malian singer-songwriter living in France, Fatoumata Diawara, who sings about war, emigration, and female circumcision, was an all-time favourite, and Moro and Mohammed played her songs frequently. Diawara was regarded as a heroic figure amongst her fans and was much revered and respected by the Wearebornfree crew as well. Moro introduced her music to me and I subsequently attended her concerts in Berlin with Mohammed and Moro and many friends, and saw the film *Mali Blues* in which she plays an important role. Another favourite of the radio crew was the Beninese artist and activist Angelique Kidjo. When I found her CD at a charity store in Manchester, I took it with me to Berlin and played some of her tunes for the radio's listeners and read out some of the lyrics translated into English which were included in the CD package. The listeners were thus treated to her songs such as *Agolo*, sung in Swahili in her melodious voice.

Through music, the radio advocated and mediated messages of social justice, empowerment, humanness, and feminist struggles. More significantly, it was through their voices and through their choice in music that the radio presenters and activists aimed to decolonise the public sphere. In Germany, the choice of music for the left was largely punk, techno, and rap. Rarely did non-commercial radio play music which originated in Africa, South Asia, or even Latin America. The radio project filled this void.

The radio group did not limit itself to playing African music. In some instances, they played reggae music which originated in the Caribbean as well as South Africa. On other occasions, the radio crew played hip hop songs and Afro-Beats, and black American blues and jazz were also a favourite. Nina Simone was frequently played on the shows. Similarly, the radio crew communicated their ideology and politics to their listeners when they played songs by the American musician, BB King. Bino frequently played Tom Morello's song 'Let Freedom Ring'. At times, the radio crew also entertained and simply played tunes by Phil Collins, Elton Jones, Abba, John Lennon, and Simon and Garfunkel. I personally enjoyed the mix of music played on the radio simply because of the sheer variety. For example, in one instance, after playing three or for pop songs from the 1980s, Mohammed aired songs by Akua Naru, a popular female Ghanaian-American rapper and poet. The artist served as a reminder of the presence of prominent black American musicians, while the poetry potentially reminded the listeners of the importance of self-mobilisation and activism by musicians and artists of colour.

Thus, the radio hosts played a wide assortment of music in terms of genre, language, region, and time period. Given the political leanings of the radio crew and the fact that they had resided in different places at different stages of their lives, it was not surprising that they elected to play different genres of music. The inclusion of African, African American, South Asian, and Latin voices further showed the extent to which the radio could be understood as a decolonial project. In this way, the radio project came to challenge the dominant voices and the privilege and power associated with these voices. The radio shows allowed for a multitude of voices to acquire visibility, not always heard on mainstream media. The music also conveyed the group's continued activism and protest since it was through music that the radio hosts delivered significant messages (Fig. 6.2).

Mediating Rastafari Culture and Resisting the Babylon System on the Radio

An important aspect of Wearebornfree Radio was its role in mediating Rastafari politics, culture, music, and language for their listeners. In this manner, the radio presenters deployed, defined, and redefined the contents of the radio show for its listeners in Germany and elsewhere. Moreover, a focus on Rastafarian culture also allowed them to shift the

Fig. 6.2 Mohammed playing music at Wearebornfree Radio

attention away from being 'refugees' to differing ontologies. The shows regularly played reggae music and employed language familiar to Rastafarian culture. One of the first radio shows which Wearebornfree Radio aired was related to the Rastafarian concept of 'overstanding'. As Moro fondly recalled when I spoke with him:

Moro: We did a show on the radio about "Overstanding". That was the first radio show. Terry was my own guest. We had one hour thirty minutes radio show. Really great and interesting. We spoke about the Gambia in general. We spoke about my tribe. We spoke about the daily life in general. We spoke about Rastafarians, which was the first guy I brought to the studio here. We did this "Overstanding" to give our own understanding about the word, which we say Overstanding. We just gave our own opinion on how it's supposed to be in the eyes of Rastafara and in that context.

The Rastafarian movement since the time of slavery and European colonialism has struggled and fought for justice and Rastafarians and Africans in the diaspora are understood to be fighting the 'Babylonian' system (Western, white and corrupt culture). According to Yasus Afari (2007), even though the colonised peoples struggled to regain and retain their divine human rights and dignity when facing the assaults on their civilisations, the European and American colonialists were duty-bound to make reparations to the nations and peoples who had been wronged and diminished by the acts of slavery and colonialism. The principle of repatriation meant the act of implementing a system that restores or returns a person or people to their native land.

The radio crew regularly employed Rastafarian language such as 'Overstanding' and 'Babylonian System', and broadcast reggae music. One such show was entitled 'The Overstanding Radio Show', and was aired in two parts. In the first part, the hosts deconstructed the Rastafarian word 'overstand'. The hosts explained to their listeners, 'As humans, we must comprehend certain ideas such that we are "over" it rather than "under" it.' Subsequently, the hosts asked the listeners to consider why the word 'understanding' was used rather than 'overstanding'. The hosts explained that in Rastafarian culture, language was crucial and was often used playfully. In the second part of the show, Moro, who was born in the Gambia, provided information about its colonial past as he understood it. These expressions and articulations on the radio (which at the time of its inception was not licensed and two of the hosts were in the asylum process) demonstrated the radio's playful and subversive stance. It was a project which was definitely outside the mainstream frame. Terry and Moro discussed how they understood and interpreted the concept of 'overstanding', and at one point during the show they entered into a meta-discussion about the Rasta word:

Terry: When we communicate. We communicate ideas. If I have an idea and I will ask you, "Did you get it?" what will you say?

Moro: (Laughs) So if you say "understand" then you are under the particular thing or particular idea. This means that you don't get it. If you tell me an idea and if I get it then I would rather say that I would "overstand" it than "understand"

Terry: If you got it then how can you be under it? You have to be over it. There is a change of perspective.

(Moro and Terry both laugh.)

Terry:	And also Rasta promotes equality. So how can you be under something?
Moro:	We must be over the idea, which is created by humans. I will now always say overstand. But what if you and I are equal in both ideas? None of us are above the idea and we are both equal and neutral to that particular topic? What if we have equal knowledge on that particular topic?
Terry:	We can say we "equal-stand" each other.
Moro and Terry:	(Both laugh)

Thus, the idea and concept of the word 'overstand' was at first briefly explained to the listeners, but subsequently the radio show hosts started to discursively deconstruct this word, whilst joking and laughing. The ways in which they engaged with each other also did away with the notion of power and the authorial stance of the media since their voices did not convey expertise or absolute authority on any particular topic.

As I listened to the shows, I often felt that I was an equal participant and found these exchanges to be a refreshing change from the authoritative voices and traditional forms of mediation within mainstream media. The Rasta shows did not simply present or explain Rasta culture to the audience in an essentialised form, but rather the individuals on the show discussed, debated, and exchanged ideas and articulated their own feelings towards Rastafarian ways of being. But more importantly, the format of the show conveyed an oppositional stance in which not only the content conveyed resistance, but also the very format of the show where the hosts laughed, joked, and did not always self-represent themselves as 'experts.'

Rastafarian 'word-soundpower' signifies the shared experience of sound quality, the agency and spiritual potential of a speaker, and the collective resistance against linguistic forms imposed by colonial rule (Bean 2014, p. 49). For example, one interpretation of the word 'overstanding' according to the Urban Dictionary is that 'life is more difficult than it need be, because it is in the interest of those in power to keep things the way they are.' The radio presenters played with the meaning of the word. In this manner, the radio became a discursive space where ideas were mooted and re-defined.

The hosts' allusions to Rasta language did not mean that the radio crew was promoting the radio project as a Rastafarian project, but rather the individuals endeavoured to inspire collective resistance against a political ideology that was concerned with maintaining power through domination and exclusion in Germany or anywhere else in the world.

The radio group regularly played reggae music, and one of my favourite reggae music shows was aired on October 15, 2018, and was dedicated to Lucky Dube (1964–2007) close to his death anniversary. Lucky Dube was a South African reggae musician and a Rastafarian who had recorded several albums in Zulu, Afrikaans, and English. He was murdered on October 18, 2007 in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Rastafarian reggae that inspired Lucky Dube was itself deliberately structured as a 'universal' form, and its construction of Africa was key to an assumed and intended universality which was due not only to its relationship to pan-Africanism, Ethiopianism, and Civil Rights soul and R&B, but also to the efforts of influential Rastafarian ideologues in the 1960s (Chude-Sokei 2011). Given Lucky Dube's ideology of freedom, manifested in songs such as 'House of Exile', it wasn't surprising that the radio hosts often selected his music, since his views aligned with the radio initiative's platform, political ideology, and its efforts to promote values of humanity, freedom, and empowerment.

The group expressed their love, passion, and utmost respect for Lucky Dube, which in turn matched the radio project's discursive stance regarding struggles, pain, empowerment, resistance, change and resistance, emancipation, unity, pan-Africanism, and universal love. In showing their alignment with Lucky Dube and Rastafarian culture, it became evident that the radio project did not limit itself to focusing on refugee struggles as had been the case for the tent protests at O-Platz, but rather campaigned for equal rights and empowerment in a broader sense and thus resisted being understood in narrow terms as 'refugee radio'. As Bino commented:

Bino: That's it. The world of empowerment and resistance. And also not to cry cry, "Oh I am a refugee, Oh I am a woman, Oh I am a kid." Just stand up! Because if it was so, then this radio wouldn't be in existence. And cry, "Oh I don't have 'Papier'. Oh I am a refugee." Oh Come On. You have the voice. You have the power. Just stand up. And fire the Babylon. Lucky Dube. We miss you in flesh. In fact we will never miss you in spirit.

While alluding to Luck Dube's worldview, the hosts reinforced the importance and significance of remaining empowered while devaluing the idea of helplessness and pity. It is significant that the introduction and commentary ran into the first 17 minutes of the show before Luck Dube's song 'War and Crime' was played. The aim of the show was to inspire, encourage, and empower its listeners. However, contradictions must be noted since in this instance Bino did not criticise the structural conditions that prevented non-white people from finding their voice. In this sense, the radio, in prescribing the idea of individuality and self-empowerment as opposed to collective actions, created tensions between these methods of resistance.

However, by expressing their relatability to Lucky Dube and by idealising him and naming him as their teacher, the presenters conveyed the importance of fighting against all regimes of oppression including migration regimes and the rise of far-right discriminatory politics in Germany. At the same time, Lucky Dube's anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa could be understood potentially to bear immediate relevance for migrants in Germany and in various European countries, given the growing hostility towards them in the form of intensified border controls, increased surveillance and deportations, as well as the rise of right-wing populist politics.

Following the many words of adulation, the show's hosts decided to play some of Lucky Dube's music. The radio played his popular song 'War and Crime':

> Nobody knows what is wrong
> And what is right
> How long is this gonna last
> Cause we've come so far so fast
> When it started, you and I were not there so
> Why don't we
> Bury down apartheid
> Fight down war and crime
> Racial discrimination
> Tribal discrimination

Even though Bino, Moro, and Terry broadcast in real time from a studio space located in Kreuzberg, a cosmopolitan and multiracial neighbourhood in Berlin defined by left political activism and awareness, the message within the song was pertinent since the refugee politics and incidents

of police harassment towards black men in nearby Görlitzer Park and the U-Bahn station area continued on an almost daily basis. Moreover, the lyrics become especially relevant at a time when far-right politics in Europe, often supported by the white working class within Europe, deflected their anger onto immigrants, Muslims, and people of colour, rather than the privileged elites and hegemonic politics which perpetuated economic inequalities in the first place. Hence, Rastafarian-themed shows and reggae music allowed the radio hosts to resist the current political climate.

Since Wearebornfree Radio crew regularly played reggae music, it was not surprising that when UNESCO added reggae music to its heritage list in November 2018, the news was met with much enthusiasm by the radio project's activists. The BBC's report focused on reggae's Jamaican roots and its popularity in Britain and musicians and artists such as Desmond Dekker, Jimmy Cliff, Bob Marley, and Marcia received mentions. However, Moro recognised reggae's popularity within Africa and made it a point to tell the radio's listeners, 'Reggae was embraced all over the world especially in Africa where artists such as Lucky Dube and Alpha Blondie became household names.' In doing so, he made it known to his listeners that the popularity of reggae was not limited to Britain and Jamaica and that it was also popular in South Africa. In this way, he managed to contest the epistemologies offered by the mainstream media, the BBC, which provided a limited history of reggae music's roots. Nevertheless, on May 11, 2019, on the death anniversary of Bob Marley, Moro dedicated an entire three-hour Saturday segment of the show to the musician, playing many of his well-known and less popular songs, while commenting on some of the lyrics and singing along with his favourites.

The radio presenters' dedication to Rastafarian culture and politics can undoubtedly be understood as a form of decolonial activism which enabled them to contest racism, hegemonic migration discourse, and racialisation in their own terms and language. These expressions need to be regarded as an extension as well as a development of the refugee movement which began in 2012 in Berlin. Some of these ideas had formed part of the movement, but during the protests there was little room for discursive spaces to fully develop explorations of Rasta culture, politics, and music. The East and West African voices not only dominated the media landscape but their repeated use of Rastafarian language, such as when they spoke out vociferously against the 'Babylon' system and 'mafia', which excluded migrants,

advocated closed borders, and perpetuated racism, further demonstrated their efforts to resist and to strive towards self-determination.

The Polizei, Deportations, and Anti-Racist Activism

An important focus of Wearebornfree Radio was to challenge everyday and institutional racism. The following statements by Moro on the radio, which were simultaneously streamed on Facebook Live, conveyed the ideological message of Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio. Wearing a striking blue and gold jacket, seated in the studio with his headphones on and speaking passionately into the mic, Moro mediated the following video and audio anti-racist message:

> Moro: The refugee politics in Germany are killing us here. We cannot retreat. We say what we know and what we experience on the radio. Let's stop the tribalism and look forward. We should not stay you are Gambian. You are Senegalese. You are African. You are European. We are not supposed to share a table. You have what you know. You have what I know. Let's stop hatred. Let's stop racism. Let's stop discrimination. Let's stop racism. Let's stop stigmatization. We should go forward.

Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio regularly aimed to draw the attention of its listeners and viewers to the imminent issue of racialisation of refugees, black men and women, and other people of colour in a multitude of ways. However, the key message remained that individuals and groups must not be oppressed and give into experiences of racism. The radio project recognised the presence of everyday and institutional racialisation of individuals and groups by German society and the state, and expressed their perspectives through monologues, narratives, and conversations. The phrase 'we know that the Babylon system is alive and well' was often repeated. Thus the radio crew endeavoured to shift mind-sets and views of racist individuals and groups, which included the police, politicians, and the state, while encouraging and empowering those affected by racism. In this regard, the radio addressed its intended audience, which included 'friends and enemies'.

Consider the following monologue by Bino on the radio. In this instance, Bino had posted his show on Facebook and had gone live, which only served to reinforce his message as the audience could simultaneously

listen to him on the Internet and on the radio and see him offer a solo performance on Facebook. Consequently, Bino's utopian vision and his view of empowerment were conveyed simultaneously via three media outlets. Furthermore, his performance was historicised since the post remained on the Wearebornfree Radio Facebook timeline. On Facebook, the audience first caught a glimpse of Bob Marley's image on the screen and then Bino made an appearance, where he spoke directly to an audience and into a red mic (November 9, 2018).

Bino: Deportation is a violation of human dignities. How beautiful, we will hail you if you Polizei, men and women and say, "No. I am not going to harass people. I am not going to chase them. To put them on chains. No. They are humans like us. So they should do whatever they want. They should be wherever they want to be. Deportation? No. We say no to Deportation. O our lovely people". The Polizei. Blah Blah. We will be happy to hear that. We will be happy to hear that. All over Europe. All over the World we will be clapping hands for you all if you stand for the truth for the marginalised people. And say, "No. Enough is enough. These people have been humiliated. Enough. Their rights have been violated. They have been exploited live and direct from their homelands. So now they are here. They are coming to us. We, the exploiters. The oppressors. And again we oppress them? No. We Polizei. We are gonna say, 'No'. We are here to protect them. O I would love to join you." O how wonderful it will be that they…. But you say, "No. I am here to chase them. No. I am here to deport them. No. I am here to hunt them." When will you be deported hmm Police? Where is your humour? Where is your humour? Are you a human? Are you really a human? You see your fellow humans being humiliated and dehumanised and still you work for the oppressors. No. This is not how we are meant to be. No way. No. It is time to check your mind. Even if you love money. Even if you have nowhere to live. No. You better quit the Polizei job. And say, "No from today, I am a human like other humans and I would never hunt them." No. Those building borders say, "No. No more borders…Because we are all migrants. You are all migrants. You migrated to Europe. You migrated to America. Africa is the land of your ancestors. It is time to say, 'No.' We can change the system together. Forget the Babylon system."

On the radio, Bino performed this piece with Bob Marley's song 'Everything's Gonna Be Alright' set on low volume in the background. In his solo performative piece, he recognised a multitude of existential risks which refugees encountered such as deportations, colonialism, racism, and oppression. He thus appealed to the very order and state apparatus, the *Polizei*, which imposed borders and restrictions and monopolised power to look at themselves and become aware of their own intentions and perspectives and thus change their actions. More importantly, in doing so he indirectly alluded to the historical and postcolonial factors responsible for migration.

Holmes and Castañeda (2016) have noted that the mainstream media and political discourse on the so-called refugee crisis had paid relatively little attention to the historical, social, economic, or even political determinants of immigration and 'refugeeism'. By foregrounding the historical factors, and by making a plea to the state to rectify their actions, it should be understood that Bino performed a political act even though it was highly unlikely that the *Polizei* would have tuned in to the radio or watched him go live on Facebook while he performed his act. Bino's appeal for humanity in the face of adversity appears as striking, intense, creative, and humorous. Above all, the listeners come to hear the voice of an individual on the radio and could visually see a man on Facebook who had been directly affected by colonialism and racism and who then made efforts to deracialise society. Therefore, vis-à-vis the theatrical performance, not only did Bino enact linguistic and political agency, he also created a discursive space within the media landscape, and thus challenged and destabilised the normalised notion of the state as a protective entity. In doing so, the radio project and in this particular case the social media becomes a site of contention, de-linked from the hegemonic white European counterparts.

The performance needs to be regarded as hopeful and humorous, reminding the audience that even in the most difficult times, it is important to remain optimistic and empowered through humour and creativity. In that sense, the radio group remained positive, buoyant, and at the same time subversive during discussions of police discrimination and brutality, discriminatory asylum laws, and ongoing deportations. Wearebornfree Radio should be understood as activist and protest media which demonstrated solidarity in an egalitarian sense to people affected by racism. The radio project opposed notions of charity and victimisation, and opened up a political space which favoured political activism, confrontations, and

resistance, and simultaneously stressed the importance of humanity and spirituality.

Mohammed and Moro also aired their thoughts about institutional violence and racial profiling at the hands of the police. In one instance, Moro provided an hour-long passionate account of his personal experience of racial profiling. As I listened to his account, I realised that such rage and anger can only emanate when one is directly affected by an unjust situation. Following his account, aired on his former morning hourly show, Moro reinforced his message against racial profiling and criminalisation of black people, when he posted in the Fight Racism! Equal Rights Justice Facebook group, which he had created, his account in a script format, an act which amplified his stance against racial profiling since several of his friends read his posts while sympathising and empathising with him. Accompanying the script was an image of 8 to 10 police standing alongside their van in Görlitzer Park. The following excerpt was narrated by Moro and later posted on Facebook:

> Racial profiling by the German police at its extent.
> The first time to got control by police in Görlitzer park.
> I was passing by the Park, suddenly found 3 police vans, with bunch of police.
> Then I was stopped and asked to put my bicycle beside, put of my jacket and raise my hands up.
> I asked why? The policeman told me we are on a general control.
> I responded general control, but why not stopping other people's passing by different from blacks, while only stopping blacks for control?
> #police: we doing it because black people are the ones selling drugs, and committing crimes here.
> #I: Responded but I'm not dealing with drug, neither committing crimes, I have been living here for 3 years now, coming here and chilling like the way others chill different race from me, but always when there are police, you always approach the blacks without controlling others.
> But I'm not surprised, I'm expecting this always, because I'm black and I'm criminalized.
> #Police: Nooo that's not true, Don't say that
> #I: Of course that's true and am gonna say that again.
> I was checked everywhere, inside my wallet, inside my bag every single hole and from my jacket and my body.
> Then my phone was collected, they found 2 phones with me,.
> #Police: why you have 2 phones?
> #I: that's not your concerned, I deal with my phone's.

> The small phone with Lyca communication and the smart phone for Internet and calls, so you shouldn't ask me of why am having 2 phone's.
> #Police: Unlock your phone?
> #I: for what reason?
> #Police: if it's a stolen phone or not
> #I: Okay so am I not able to buy this phone by myself?
> #Police: No we're going to control and if not stolen, we give you back.
> #Police: Do you know anyone here or you know what they are doing here?
> #I: every one here is my brother, because they are Africans, and the same time blacks being criminalize including myself as a black.
> #Police: Police but do you know what are they doing here?
> #I: I don't care what they doing, but I know that they hangout to chill as the same as how the other race's chilled.
> But always police control and criminalization against them, because of our race and background.
> At the end they gave me my Ausweis (I.D.) and the telephone.
> #Police: have your phone and Ausweis.
> #I: Is it a stolen phone or not?
> #Police: No everything is fine, you can go now or you stay if you want to.
> #I: No I'm going to stay here as normal as the others staying around.
> #Police: Okay then have a nice day
> #I: you too and have a happy black control day, because that's always your mission here, but as I said it's never a surprise, because that's how we the blacks recognise ourselves like that….racial profiling by police.
> Concluded……. (Moro, October 9, 2018).

Although Moro did not specify, it was the West African migrants who sold marijuana (the sale and consumption of which continued to be unlawful) to mainly white Europeans and tourists frequenting the city that the police harassed and anyone who looked like them in the park. While the police seldom profiled European citizens who consumed marijuana, the sellers who eked out a living received the brunt of police hostility and frequently experienced police violence in the park and the neighbouring area. The options for the refugees were limited and since their first EU country of arrival was almost always Italy, they did not have the right to work in Germany on account of the Dublin law, but nevertheless they tried to find a way to survive economically. Moro was of the view that the refugees were denied the right to work by the state on the one hand, and criminalised by the police apparatus on the other. The refugees who sold drugs at Görlitzer Park had limited opportunities for integration in the German state. Thus in recounting his personal experience of racial profiling on

multiple media outlets, Moro foregrounded the subject of migration regime and racialisation of migrants. Elsewhere at a panel discussion he spoke directly and explicitly about this topic, which was also aired on the radio.

The radio always made it a point to provide updates and news about refugees' experiences with institutional racism. When the police attacked camps inhabited by asylum seekers in various federal states in Germany, Wearebornfree Radio and Moro in particular made it a point to report these incidents on air. The media activists came to understand such occurrences and encounters between the police and refugees residing in camps as incidents which simply served to augment hate and nationalism. On several occasions, the police would enter the camps in the middle of the night, searching for individuals to deport, and cause much commotion, unrest, and counterattacks in the camps. For instance, when 200 police attacked a refugee camp in Donauwörth, Munich, Moro discussed this issue extensively on the radio, interviewed a Gambian activist from the camp, and simultaneously posted on Facebook a video clip which depicted the police attack which the refugees had filmed during the incidents. Moro, who spoke Mandinka, translated the people's comments and responses to the situation: 'You could hear them speaking in Mandinka saying that "let's video them and put it all over the world. Leave the boys to come out"'. Following the incident 20 Gambian men ended up in jail, and their court cases are pending to date. Thus the radio show put forth a concerted effort to provide a narrative from the point of view of the asylum seekers.

In a subsequent instance, Moro presented a phone-in conversation on social media between what he described as fellow Gambian activists and himself regarding the confrontation between the Gambian refugees and the police in the camp. He presented this 40-minute show in English and translated some of the statements in Mandinka, one of the languages spoken widely in the Gambia. The aim of the radio show was to reach people directly affected by the occurrences as well as other segments of German society.

In another case, when a security guard forcibly administered drugs to, suffocated, and killed an international student from Cameroon, at the University Clinic in Hamburg on April 26, 2019, Moro reported this racist incident on the radio and live-streamed his reports on Facebook. Subsequently, he urged people to come together to fight against racism

and vehemently criticised the racist order and the excessive powers of the security system in the German state.

In this regard, Wearebornfree Radio provided instances of racialisation which were relatively absent in mainstream media. This understanding of mediation known as the 'activity which expresses the relationship of otherwise separated experiences' (Williams 1977, p. 172) was put into effect when the radio hosts strove to explain, interpret, and provide their perspective on incidents and situations which would not otherwise be accessible to their audience in the German media. But more importantly, the media activists who relayed this information were themselves susceptible to such forms of racialisation, and thus the idea of non-dualism and mediation becomes particularly significant in such contexts.

Given the current rise in the popularity of far-right and populist political parties and the demise of the centre-left in Europe, the radio crew consistently spoke out against racialisation of non-whites, institutional racism, immigrant hostility, and nationalism. Balibar and Wallerstein contend that:

> racism is not an "expression" of nationalism, but a supplement of nationalism or more precisely a supplement internal to nationalism, always in excess of it, but always indispensable to its constitution and yet always still insufficient to achieve its project, just as nationalism is both indispensable and always insufficient to achieve the formation of the nation or the project of a 'nationalization' of society (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, p. 54).

Thus, for Balibar nationalism and racism interconnect and complement each other. Gilroy argued that the overall crisis of post-war society was evident in inner-city decay, poverty, unemployment, bad housing, and problems in the education system. This crisis was often 'lived through a sense of "race" such that national problems were seen as caused or aggravated by "immigration"' (Gilroy 1993, p. 23). Following the gains of the far-right political parties in the German Parliament, when the far-right party secured representation in 14 of the 16 German state parliaments by October 2017, and when the AfD became the third-largest party in Germany after the 2017 federal election, claiming 94 seats in the Bundestag, Wearebornfree Radio did not hesitate to react and respond. But it did so with humour and in a non-offensive style. The show, entitled 'Reflection Hour', began with the song 'If one day you go away, never be astray' sung by musician Alibeta. A monologue by Bino followed the song:

> We should use our brain to cultivate what is happening around us, around inside of you as person, around you as individual, around you as community, around you as human. Why don't we take that pain ourselves? And think about one another. And listen to one another Our dear listeners, there is much great need today, where everything is upside down to listen to each other. Maybe through listening we will find a solution without shedding blood, without shedding tears. Without losing energy. Without losing our properties. You can imagine how long it takes, thousands and thousands of people to build a community but within a second to destroy it. Is that freedom we want? The choice is yours. Our dear friends and enemies listening to Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio. You can choose the way you want to go. The road you want to travel. You travel on the left side? (Laughs). On the right side? Or front side. Or back side? It's your choice. But Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio will always remind you to struggle for who you are and we are and what we want to be. This message goes out to our colleagues who are always hunting us whom they think we don't belong to Germany. Our dear friends and enemies of PEGIDA, Legida, Sogida, Bogida, Dogida, Which path do you want to take? You want to remain racist? And that is the path that you think will make you great? Dear our lovely (laughs) AfD. Alternative für Deutschland. I think-let me hope that you are listening to Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio. Hmm? We hear that now you are in Parliament. (Laughs). This is interesting. (Laughs). AfD they are in Parliament. So can you surprise us? Because we know who you are. But can you just just just make a surprise? And turn today to the other side? Eh? The left wing? (Laughs). How happy will you be. How much we will glorify you. Just try it. And say something humanistic. Hmm? So yes. Our dear listeners. You are stilled tuned to Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio So now I will jump jumpjumpjump and cross the continent and go to the States and play the song by the lovely Tom Morello, "The Road I must travel. The Road I must travel." So. PEGIDA, Legida, Sogida. And also those who are hiding, Please, it is your high time to choose the way. The revolution is at hand. Our great messengers have told about the revolution. You heard a lot from Nelson Mandela. You heard a lot from Malcom X. You heard a lot from Marcus Garvey. You heard a lot from Angela Davies. You heard a lot from Nina Simone. You heard a lot from Thomas Sankara. You heard a lot from Rosa Parks (Bino continues to name revolutionaries). You must choose the road now. Stay tuned. The song plays. The Road I must travel its end that I cannot see.

The message is delivered in a sermon-like manner, but the target of the message is not a church audience, but rather the extreme right-wing politicians and populists which have been depicting hostility towards migrants

and racial minorities in the German state. By urging the populist movement to take the 'right path' and by playing with the name PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident), a nationalist party which was founded in 2014 in Dresden, Germany, the radio show continues to depict its political position in a playful and carnivalesque tone and manner such that certain 'truths' and right-wing ideologies are contested and the authoritative voice of the populist movement is deprivileged. Furthermore, the listeners hear much laugher during the show, which can be understood to subvert the power of the right-wing populist movement. As Bakhtin (1984) asserts:

> This is why festive folk laughter presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts (p. 92).

In the rest of the show, Bino pretends to have a doctor—patient phone conversation with PEGIDA and encourages him to visit the studio so that he can feel better:

Bino: Hello, I heard someone is sick. Yeah I was wondering what is happening. She will be fine. Just tune on to 88.4 MHZ Berlin and 90.7 MHZ Potsdam and the person will be okay. We will give you the tips on how to be human.

: Yes, our colleague PEGIDA. Don't worry. We are open. Just come in. Also bring AfD. Yeah. Yeah. Bring. You mean? Alternative für Deutschland? Yeah. Yeah. Bring them. Or give them our direction to listen to Bornfree. Your name again? PEGIDA? I heard about you. How crazy you are. We know you. Yeah. Yeah. You are really sick. You really need the Empowerment Radio. We know racism. We know that disease. It's killing us. We will heal it. Nevertheless. Don't worry. We will heal. For the moment just listen to this song. I get you point. Hmm. Sorry for you. Racism kills. Exactly. Don't cry (In painful voice). Tune in please. Listen to this message.

The radio plays the song 'Wearebornfree' Bakhtin (1986) contends in his work *Speech, Genres and other Late Essays* that all real and integral understanding is actively responsive, and constitutes nothing more than the initial preparatory stage of a

> response (in whatever form it may be actualized). And the speaker himself is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding. He does not expect passive understanding that, so to speak, only duplicates his or her own idea in someone else's mind…. Rather, the speaker talks with an expectation of a response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth (with various speech genres presupposing various integral orientations and speech plans on the part of speakers or writers) (p. 69).

In the sequence above, Bino playfully performs an imaginary phone conversation and even seeks a response from the 'enemy', the extreme right groups, and invites them to visit the studio. The audience hears Bino's voice trying to console and sympathise with PEGIDA and AfD, who in Bino's understanding is suffering from the disease of racism. Thus, through satirical rhetoric and playful performances, the radio presenter conveys his notion of dialoguing with 'enemies' as well as his stance towards right-wing politics in the German state. These acts, broadcast on air (and subsequently uploaded onto social media and Mixed Cloud), reveal the radio show's political ideology and anti-racist actions. Bino also speaks about a 'common humanity' and tells his audience, the far-right party in this case, that the radio group could teach them to be 'human' if they were to visit them.

In another show, Bino played the song lyrics 'Traveler, Travelling, If you don't belong then something is wrong. Then you gotta keep movin on…' sung by female reggae singer Dezarie. The listeners heard Bino's lamentations and views about the limits on travelling within Europe after the song:

> Bino: Yes, we are all travellers. But what surprises is that some people don't want to give opportunities to travel. They don't want to give newcomers opportunities to travel. If you know your history, then you will not tell your brothers and sisters not to be here. Because people were travelling from one place to another. So those who are saying that people are travelling "illegally" blah blah that is ignorance. And that should be stopped. Every human should be given the opportunity to live wherever he or she or they wants to live. No one is having the right to say, "You can move" and "You can't". What about you? Why do you have

> the power to tell me that I can't move? If people, talk about human rights and integration for *alles*. That is a lie and that's what I call everyday lies and truth. Let us be human. Let us struggle and that all humans on this planet are free. Every creature on this planet has the right to move without telling anyone that I am coming. Germany will talk about human rights. It respects that. But if people come to Germany, you criminalize them. "You don't have Papier." People are hiding, because you told them to hide. And you are the one who told them to be a criminal. And by the way, who is a criminal? Me who is exercising my inborn rights? I am a criminal. Or you who is violating my inborn rights?

Borders, nationalism, right-wing hostility, and even the German state's integration policy were a subject of much discussion on air. The radio show also routinely played songs which addressed such themes. In this regard, Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio created a virtual and media space which rang of freedom, openness, and creativity, and it was obvious to its listeners that the project's discursive field and platform were in opposition to the official state discourse and the right-wing rhetoric which played up to physical and ideological borders.

On February 20, 2020 a far-right white extremist German man killed ten people of Turkish and Kurdish backgrounds in two Shisha Bars in Hanau, Germany. Following the attack all three of the radio crew demonstrated complete solidarity in different ways. They expressed their views and asserted the fact that these attacks needed to be linked to larger political ideals espoused by populists and politicians. They were critical of the media, which represented the individual as a 'lone wolf', with mental health issues. Moro urged the German society to take collective action against these attacks and to stop the 'hate', and acknowledged the collective power of resistance:

> Moro: I call it a terrorist attack. Some people call it a racist or a Nazi attack. When there is an attack from brown to white people it is directly declared as a terrorist attack…it's very sad to have your fellow human being attacking you because of your race, your origin and your religion. People are hating migrants. People are hating refugees. People are hating Muslims. It's very

> scary for me as a migrant, as a Muslim, as a black person from Africa living in a society where people are witch hunting migrants, refugees and Muslims. So how can we solidarize? How can we stop this situation? Right wing extremism is increasing. Why should we hate each other? Society has to protect us and come out and say, "We are tired of Islamophobia!", "We are tired of racism!", "We are tired of anti-immigrant propaganda!" Let's come together. I went to the demonstration yesterday. I would like to say a big thank you to everyone. I heard, "Refugees are Welcome Here. Say it Loud. Say it Clear" "No to Nazism". I would like to say a big thank you to everyone. I am proud of Berlin. We can have our own space without them. Love all the refugees. Love all the migrants. Love everyone.

Thus, at every juncture, and at every turn, the Wearebornfree Radio crew resisted racialisation and colonialism and battled for humanity, but at the same time their messages were replete with notions of 'love' and 'gratitude'. For the radio crew, love was an emotion which could help resolve many issues. In this connection, they stopped short of being militant media.

Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio espoused and valued freedom of movement and considered movement to be a human right. These views were very much in alignment with the refugee movement, which demanded freedom of movement for all and understood it as a human right. Given that the radio project emerged from the refugee movement, it was not surprising that the idea of freedom of movement was emphasised on a regular basis. However, unlike the movement, which made explicit demands for the rights of refugees, the radio project offered anti-racist perspectives while advocating freedom of movement in creative formats, as the above sequences illustrate. It was through music, through performances, through satire and humour, through monologues and dialogues, that Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio mediated these ideas in a non-dualistic sense about these significant issues. The radio project can be regarded as a movement which opposed territoriality, nationalism, racism, and colonialism and struggled for the idea of open borders, humanity, freedom of movement, and decolonisation. However, the radio project went beyond reiterating the refugee protests where specific demands had been made on the state. Thus the radio project should be understood as an ideological one which focused on migration politics, African politics, music, culture, and decoloniality.

Africa and Transnational Solidarity

The radio crew frequently updated its audience with headline news from different countries in Africa. The hosts made it a special point to begin with news from African countries. Prioritising news from Africa needs to be understood as the radio's effort towards decolonisation, since news from the African continent receives minimum attention on mainstream media platforms. As Mohammed once explained while on air, since the radio crew understood 'everything to begin from Africa, it was important to begin with news from Africa'. Following the news section, the radio crew almost always offered their own commentaries and frequently stressed the importance of ending conflicts between countries on the 'continent', and implored their African listeners to appreciate life, to value humanity, to love one another and the planet's eco-systems, and its plants, animals, and trees.

The radio shows additionally included discussions and news from other non-European countries. They understood the African continent's social problems as connected to its colonial legacy. Consider the following conversation between Moro and Mohammed on the radio:

Moro:	Equality has always been advocated by Africans who were oppressed. But it has never been recognised by the Westerners who are the perpetrators. We talk about equality but Europeans are not talking about equality. They never want to talk about equality. Because they don't want to see us in this position. They have some other complaints which they talk about.
Bino:	Human Rights.
Moro:	Human rights, which they want. Because all of this human rights was declared by themselves. It was declared in their own interest, but not in the interest of the continent. If you go to the continent you find much injustice happening. All because of the political oppression. This political oppression was formed by Western interference. (As we see this is our weekly rooting, daily rooting.) But until now there are many conflicts going on. There are many injustices going on. But we want to emphasise equality. I mean this has been going on for decades. Equality has always been advocated by Africans.

But it's sad because until now we don't have our own way of ruling our continent. We don't have our own way of ruling our territory without the interference of the West. I think this is where all the problems lies. Gambia to say we want to rule ourselves as Gambians, Uganda to say we want ours. It's not so easy (laughs) because all what we did from our country is coming from Westerns. All the interest we get is from the West. So how are we going to get our own sustainability? This is where the problem is. So we have been saying how can we get our own sustainability without depending on others? We have got independence in the 50s and 60s. We have an independent constitution. But until independence is not right. Because until now we are dependent. Most of these Francophone countries are relying on France for their economy. The capital is manufactured by France. Is this the forward of Africa or downfall of Africa?

Bino: Downfall.

Moro: Imagine the country which get its independence from the colonisers in the 60s, until now the currency is manufactured by those colonisers. (Much laughter). It's crazy. Why should they print money for them?

Bino: I heard German want to print money for Uganda.

Moro: Don't let them do it.

Bino: Instead of saying we are going to open institutes and show you how to print money. To educate your children. Instead they print. They still do it. Because they already printed our IDs. National IDs were printed by the Germans.

Moro: Yeah. Yeah.

Bino: You know. And the one having the contract. So what is that? I think Africans are the people who are regarded as failures, it is time to see ourselves as superiors.

Moro: Exactly.

Bino: To see ourselves as superiors. We have to do it. As the president of Ghana was trying to do it. I think the other people didn't understand it. And many others were trying to push for that. So that could be one step. Africa to see itself powerful like America. Just put yourself in those

shoes. And then you can tell people that you are the liberator of Uganda. You younger people are the liberator of the Gambia. We don't want these perpetrators here.

Moro: Exactly.

Bino: Once we open the hands for America. For the European Union. That was the fall of the lovely continent. So we the new generation have to do something.

Moro: I think we need the knowledge. They got the resources from us. But the talent is here. We need our own technology. Unless we have our own technology we are never going to rise.

Bino: Everyone is talking about the telephone. Whatever telephone you have, it has elements from the Congo.

Mohammed: We need to change our mentality. We know that the telephones cannot work without Africa. We know that the cars cannot work without Africa. But as long as this mentality of white is into our head, still we our poor.

Bino: (Whistles)

Moro: Because Africa believes that we won't work without whites.

Mohammed: It's sad. African man don't believe that Africa is a place to be. It's sad. It's sad. 60 years now. We don't give value to ourselves. White man will come and corrupt. But I will play something. We love it. (Mohammed plays the song 'Afrika' sung by a Senegalese musician, Ismael Lo).

It is evident that the Wearebornfree Radio crew believed that the economic, political, and social problems in present-day African countries are a consequence of neocolonialism. In 1965, the Ghanaian President, Kwame Nkrumah, founded the term neocolonialism. He believed that the essence of neocolonialism is that the state to which it is subject is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty but in reality its economic system and thus its political policy are directed from outside. According to Nkrumah, the result of neocolonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment under neocolonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and poor countries of the world.

These issues with respect to the plight of African countries were frequently discussed on the radio shows through monologue performances and discussion shows with various guests, and amongst the hosts. However, what is noteworthy is that the idea of neocolonialism was being explained on independent radio in Germany during a period when anti-immigrant sentiments were running high in that country. Thus, such discussions were not only intended for African audiences, but were also meant for Europeans who failed to understand some of the complex reasons for migration and did not understand neocolonialism or the legacy of European domination on the continent. The radio group always urged Africans to contest European dominance and hegemony and to shift their ways of thinking. As several scholars have argued, the colonisation of mind is a factor in both colonisation and in the failure of decolonisation. As mentioned previously, a slogan frequently employed during the refugee movement was 'We are here because you were there.' Thus talk about neo-colonialism in present-day Africa on the radio could be understood as an expansion and further development of some of the ideological elements which formed the basis of refugee protests in 2011. For example, when on December 5, 2019 58 people from the Gambia drowned and were killed off the coast off Mauritania, Bino posed the question about the presence of German consulates and NGO foundations all over Africa and asked why at the same moment people from any part of the Global South were not welcomed in Europe. Without directly alluding to the actual incident, he talked about the pain he experienced when Europe did not welcome people. He subsequently stated that 'love' was the only solution and went on to play some music from Tanzania. Moro, who is from the Gambia, provided an extended and emotional discussion about the situation and sent out messages of condolence to Gambians in the Gambia and strongly urged them not to take unnecessary risks in order to reach Europe.

Wearebornfree Radio's participation in transnational activism further demonstrated how it engaged in decolonising media. Bino, Moro, and Mohammed almost always participated and talked about various transnational solidarity actions and demonstrations occurring in Berlin even though the hosts were of Ugandan, Gambian, and Senegambian origin. Furthermore, the radio group almost always related news about different African countries and provided their insights and commentary in a manner which depicted their connections, relations, and ties to the news stories. Thus, the radio did not limit itself to broadcasting migrants' concerns with the German state's asylum policies, but also discussed and supported

transnational activism in Germany. In this connection, the radio was able to focus on Africa in a way that was not possible during the tent protests, and shift the attention from 'refugeeness'. For example, during the Nigerian and Senegalese elections taking place in February 2019, Moro sent 'all the brothers and sisters' in Nigeria and Senegal good wishes, stability, and peace, encouraged democracy, and dedicated a song to them. He further commented on the ongoing uprisings and protests in Sudan and expressed his utmost solidarity with them. Similarly, when people in Sudan removed Omar al-Bashir, Bino sent out a lengthy congratulatory message to the people of Sudan. He also participated in the solidarity demonstrations in Berlin and interviewed people who participated in the demonstrations about their views of the uprising in Sudan, which he played on the radio the following evening. The purpose of the demonstration was to show solidarity with the Sudanese activists in Sudan against the current Sudanese regime, as well as to expose the fact that the EU was continuing to fund the Sudanese regime and that the German government and the Sudanese dictatorship were maintaining friendly relations. The protesters called for the international community to put pressure in appropriate places. The radio played back recorded speeches held at the demonstration and Bino conducted a brief interview with an activist who told him that one aim of the Sudanese solidarity uprising was to reveal Germany and the EU's financial support of the Sudanese militia government in exchange for stopping immigration from Africa to the EU.

Mohammed reported about the Libyan conflict when Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army marched in Tripoli, igniting fears of renewed war in the region. He followed the news brief with a short commentary encouraging peace and dialogue:

> Yo. Yo. Fighting. Fighting. Fighting. Why can't we promote peace and come together and enjoy the world? This is a question I am asking myself and other people who are part of this world. Let us think about it. (Plays short clip from Bob Marley's song 'War'). War! War! Bob Marley said, 'Let us think about our attitude. Let us change everything'. There are so many solutions. We should give room for dialogue and to overcome the conflicts. Wearebornfree Radio says, "No." Mohammed subsequently followed up on his comments by playing Marley's songs 'War'…*And until that day the African continent will not know peace*… and 'So Much Trouble in the World'.

In this way, the radio hosts' activism transcended local concerns and campaigns in a variety of ways. The radio crew mediated their views through personal reflections, actions, and discussions, and through music. In this way, the radio shows did not limit themselves to a medium which simply played African music or talked about 'African culture and roots' in order to inform white German listeners or to evoke a sense of nostalgia for its African listeners in Germany. Thus, decolonising the mediated space meant providing critiques of the continuing domination of Europe in Africa (and possibly China in the current context), being critical of its leaders, and inspiring people to seek change.

The aim of the radio group was not necessarily to always provide a deep analysis of conflicts in particular regions within Africa, but the radio group did not profess to be regional experts, political analysts, comperes, or pundits. However, Mohammed, Moro, Bino, and many of their guests on the show explicitly challenged European hegemonic forces and at the same time advocated peace, love, and stability. In this manner, the radio shows stopped short of becoming a presentation of current affairs mediating information between Africa and German listeners. The radio crew tried to constantly remind their listeners of the idea of a common humanity, while expressing and establishing their own relationship with Africa on air in different ways. Thus the radio shows acquired a distinctive trait which differed from talk shows that offered analysis of regional conflicts and global politics.

In some instances, the African hosts spoke about Africa in nostalgic ways. For example, while on air, Moro commented that music for him reflected 'African roots, tradition, and culture.' He further mentioned how much he looked forward to finally visiting his 'lovely lovely traditional' country in Africa. These comments no doubt hinted towards an essentialisation of African culture, such that memory and nostalgia took precedence over political meanings and content. Similarly, on one show, which hosted an author of a book about the author's recent visit to Cape Verde, the author read passages from the book which reflected on the nation's beauty, culture, and music. The radio show also played some music from Cape Verde. However, the show came to resemble travel shows which Othered and romanticised Africa. On that day, as a listener I also got caught up in romanticising Cape Verde and could not help but also send in a request for the radio to play Cape Verde's popular musician Ceseria Evora's well-known song 'Sodade' and a further request that the guest explain to me the song's meaning. It turned out to be a love song of

longing and yearning. However, such shows, even though they were more the exception than the norm, served to demonstrate how politics of movement, spirituality, love, and humanity could actually come to intertwine within a single project.

The radio group did not always restrict themselves to discussing African politics, but when instances of injustice occurred in countries around the world, they did make it a point to report on it. Often they relied on secondary sources such as the *Guardian* and *Al-Jazeera* to comment on these issues. For example, Wearebornfree radio reported on the repression of Rohingyas in Myanmar at the height of the crisis. Similarly, the radio station advocated peace without demonstrating any form of overt alignment when tensions between Pakistan and India ran high in February 2019. Furthermore, Moro asked me to comment on the conflicts by connecting me to the radio show from Manchester. I advocated for peace and voiced the importance and significance of the right to self-determination for the people of Kashmir. Similarly, when there were protests in Berlin for the freedom of Kashmir and against the Indian occupation, Bino accompanied me to the protests and we managed to broadcast live on the radio some of the speeches during the rally. In this way, the radio group continued to not only demonstrate solidarity with African countries but also to relay news about regions where they believed injustices and hegemonies prevailed, that is, in areas which did not receive sufficient attention in the mainstream media. Thus, the radio group acquired a transnational dimension which was not always obvious even if it was present during the refugee protests at Oranienplatz, since the focus was on improving the conditions of refugees within the German state.

Expressions of Solidarity on International Women's Day

Even though the three male presenters did not engage in feminist debates on a regular basis, on International Women's Day, the Wearebornfree Radio hosts dedicated their shows to women around the world, while recognising their own privilege and power as men. The radio group believed that African women's voices and their sufferings and struggles were often omitted and white European women's voices tended to dominate feminist actions in Europe. This point of view showed that the three men on the radio were conscious of the fact that it was important to include transnational and black women's voices during discussions of feminisms in Europe. Scholars and popular accounts have been critical of

politics of white feminists, since they frequently work within, benefit from, and reproduce a system that they fail to recognise (e.g. Reni Eddo-Lodge 2017). Thus, a racial as well as a transnational analysis of feminisms is generally absent in European feminisms. The radio station also supported this perspective. In order to demonstrate their solidarity with African feminisms, the radio show played several songs sung by female African musicians from various countries within the continent and subsequently spoke of women's struggles on the African continent:

Moro: We cannot forget our African women today. As we heard that Kenya is going to do a mass demonstration today which is the first time in history. So on that note I would like to say thanks and congratulations to our African women for going on the street and demonstrating.

Mohammed: So when we speak about gender equality sometimes we forget the problems that women face in the continent, outside Europe, because if you go there you would see that domestic labour- 99% of the work is done by women and men are sitting on the throne directing them do this-do that. Sometimes acting violent.

Moro: It's a pity if we talk about women on International Women's Day and we only think about it in the European perspective. For me as a person of colour or as an African person has seen injustice and violence against women in the continent. I mean there are many women and there are women who have privileges and these privileges are covering them. If we talk about European women, many of them have privileges. In Africa you can touch a woman and beat a woman without law (without being criminalised). To beat a woman here is a crime. Domestic violence is the main issue in the continent. So it will be very interesting for African women living here in European land to talk about violence and make equality for African women. I am very impressed by the young female artist in the continent who are advocating for equality of women in the continent. So me myself, Mohammed and Wearebornfree crew want to see equality. We want to see African women as equal to European women regardless of their race, age, or background.

On International Women's Day, the radio crew continued to focus on transnational themes and demonstrated their solidarity with African women, who they perceived to experience more violence and inequality compared with European women. While this fact might be a matter of perception, it is nevertheless significant that the male radio crew brought up the issue of domestic violence, which was actually the theme of the 'Million Women Rise' demonstration in London organised mainly by women of colour. Although Million Women Rise understood that it wasn't only African women who experienced domestic violence, the hosts of the radio show focused on injustices incurred upon African women within the continent. They believed that women in Europe were protected because domestic violence was criminalised in Europe whereas in African countries this was not the case. This is a significant point which demonstrated their continued ties and links with the African continent and their ongoing efforts to engage in transnational activism through the media. In this respect, it was also a call to the African diaspora in Europe to participate in transnational acts and to use their resources to improve women's conditions in Africa. Such discursive actions connected to African feminisms further illustrated the shift and development of the movement which had made visible the struggles of refugees in the German state rather than the actual conditions on the African content and elsewhere.

The radio show aimed to include multiple voices and multiple feminist struggles, which transcended national borders. For example, when I sent some messages related to the *Aurat March* (Women's March) taking place in Pakistan, and statements from a British-Nigerian activist, the hosts immediately read and commented upon the messages.

Encounters with Artists, Alliance Building, and Working with the 'Left'

The guests who participated in the shows of Wearebornfree Radio tended to vary. There were a number of men from a range of African countries such as Cameroon, the Gambia, Senegal, and Burkina Faso, as well as younger people from Syria and Afghanistan who wanted to either voice their opinions or play their music and thus make their art activism visible. Many transgender women also found the radio group to be a safe space and participated regularly. For example, Farzadah, a transgender woman of Afghan origin, participated regularly for almost six months and played Urdu *ghazals* rendered by Begum Akhtar, who was a prominent South

Asian vocalist. On some weekends, white German men also visited the studio and played their favourite jazz and soul vinyl on air. Various DJs also participated in the show. In addition to musicians, there were writers, theatre producers, actors, and political activists who regularly came on the show and entered into discussions with the radio crew on various topics. Several female musicians, singer-songwriters, theatre producers, and writers participated in Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio as guests. During the shows, they introduced their creative work, played their music, read from their books, and spoke of their theatre productions.

Thus the radio became a space where people forged networks with each other while conveying messages of what they understood as empowerment and self-determination. On one occasion, the radio crew invited a woman from an Afghan and Hazara background and she spoke of her forthcoming theatre piece in Berlin and of the persecution of Hazara people in Afghanistan. On another occasion, a woman of South African origin, residing in Barcelona and part of an organisation called 'Rise Ubuntu Network', visited the studio and spoke about Ubuntu philosophy and its four dimensions of being which included, culture, economy, ecology, and spirituality. She also spoke of the importance of healing from colonisation and decolonising one's mind-set. On this occasion, I was also present in the studio and we talked about the significance of striving towards finding equality between North and South countries and of also establishing connections and alliances between South-South countries.

The radio project also made alliances with individuals and once a month a group of people read various texts written by black authors on the topic of colonial legacies and neocolonialism.

The studio became a safe space for younger teenage refugees to attain visibility and to be active, since the radio project also collaborated with several young people and younger groups. For example, the radio group regularly invited on their shows a group comprising Syrian and Afghan young people who had started their own Internet radio project 'Radio Omniyat' funded by a local group, 'Durchstarten'. At the studio, they broadcast live shows around various themes such as teenagers' wishes and the celebrities they followed.

On my several visits to the studio, I always observed men from various countries chatting and eating in the studio space. During the World Cup season, many of these men formed a group and went to watch football at a nearby betting store. I often joined them and cheered for all of the smaller countries. However, Bino and Moro were of the view that the

radio did not draw enough African migrants since it did not offer 'solidarity' in the conventional way that Germans and Europeans tended to, and they were of the view that many refugees preferred to collaborate and trust white Europeans rather than African-run groups.

As the Wearebornfree Radio project attained visibility, several leftists and local community groups invited the radio group to air their shows from their spaces. For example, Wearebornfree Radio participated each year at the annual 'Unframed Festival' held at a leftist space, New Yorck im Bethanien in Berlin. The aim of the festival was to focus on various sociopolitical debates. During these shows, the radio group ensured that the guest on the show represented the African continent. On one such occasion, the studio was relocated to one of the rooms and the three radio crew arrived early to ensure that all the technics worked. A pink sheet with the words 'Wearebornfree Radio' hung on one side of the wall. The show was aired live on radio and the Internet and Mohammed video-recorded some clips of the show, which were posted on Facebook. On this day, the radio group had on Art Melancholy, an energetic rapper who was visiting Berlin from Burkina Faso. His mother was a Griot singer and he drew his inspiration from her. Art Melancholy had also been invited to perform at the Unframed Festival where 'Matter of Words' was the theme. The radio show also invited a Berlin-based rapper who rapped in English and spoke about his forthcoming album, 'I'm a vegetarian.' Since he was bilingual in French and English, he also did some of the translation work during the show from French into English. In addition to the rappers, a white male songwriter and guitarist, a DJ artist who produced mix-tapes, a community activist from YAAM, as well as the three radio hosts from Wearebornfree Radio also formed part of the show. On that particular day, I did the moderating of the radio show for three hours and faced the challenge of showing the connections between the various artists and the hosts. On the show, I spoke of the importance of forging links between art and activism. Throughout the show, I also encouraged the artists, the community activists, and the hosts to speak of their sources of inspiration for their creative endeavours, the meanings they assigned to their projects and performances, and the ways in which their work was connected to social justice and activism. All of the artists performed some of their music live on air and subsequently commented upon their work. In my view, in addition to the focus on African art activism, the show mediated anti-racist as well as anti-capitalist ideologies since the artists and activists aired such thoughts

and almost all of them stated that they were always in search of platforms which allowed them to voice their views freely.

The radio shows were also broadcast outside the regular studio space in community spaces such as YAAM. Audiences and visitors to YAAM were invited to join in Karaoke-like performances to sing along. Wearebornfree Radio thus managed to convert a bar space into a studio space such that it was transformed into a site of resistance. Over time, Wearebornfree Radio's collaboration with YAAM was enhanced such that the group did their shows from YAAM and live-streamed some clips on Facebook. The development of this collaboration wasn't surprising given that a community activist from YAAM and the Wearebornfree Radio crew shared anti-racist visions, were staunch critics of white hegemony and power, but at the same time desired an open community and always expressed their ties and links to Africa.

Once a month, the Wearebornfree Radio group moved the studio to a bar at YAAM. While the radio crew played music, several non-professional artists sang and danced along. Once when I was present, Jerry, a community activist from YAAM, commented that 'this is not Deutschland, this is Africa.' His comment somewhat rang true, since people of African origin seemingly felt comfortable and free to express themselves in this bar—studio space. The community-run bar was an atmospheric space, African masks decorated the walls, and people chatted, drank, and played table football. Many of the people present seemed to be acquainted with one another. Even when I attended the radio performance, I ran into people I knew. In one instance, I met someone who was studying fashion design who I had met through a friend a few months earlier and we continued our conversation on the topic in the bar.

During the radio show, mics were placed on a table in the centre of the bar. People who wished to sing or perform lined up along the edges of the bar or in the entranceway and immersed themselves in the lively community bar—studio space. The radio crew set their system in one corner of the bar while musicians, dancers, and various artist performed to the music provided by Wearebornfree Radio. A number of people gathered around the small but lively bar to listen to the music and musicians perform. A singer sang about migration motivations: 'the reason why we travel abroad, because the system is down in Africa. We see black people crossing the Mediterranean sea and daily dying….' However, at the end of the song, Bino contradicted him and said that people should not be compelled to explain their motivations and provide reasons for their movement, because

he believed that people should feel free to move and not be compelled to provide any explanations.

In the summer of 2019, a well-established women's refugee group, Women in Exile, invited We!R to participate in their three-day workshop for refugee women, which was held at Oranienplatz. On this day, the radio group set up a stage and organised technology at the square. They played music and conducted interviews with some of the women, which were broadcast on air. Their presence at the square and the collaboration with a well-known group such as Women in Exile demonstrated their continued commitment to refugee rights and concerns, as well as their openness towards forging links with women's political groups (Fig. 6.3).

Wearebornfree Radio additionally aligned with The Committee for an African Monument in Berlin's 14th Gedenk March which took place on February 29, 2020 to commemorate the African victims of enslavement, and to protest the trafficking of enslaved people, colonialism,

Fig. 6.3 Wearebornfree Radio at the Women in Exile workshop at Oranienplatz, Kreuzberg, Berlin

neocolonialism, and racist violence. We!R announced plans for the forthcoming march on the radio. On the day of the march, Mohammed and Bino participated, while Moro read out the objectives of the march and played reggae music which conveyed anti-colonial and anti-racist messages. As he played this music including tunes by Lucky Dube, he continued to tell his audience to remember the victims of the 'Babylonian System' and 'the Colonial System' and to continue to resist against colonialism and neocolonialism. To this end, Moro did not come across as a neutral observer, but rather as an involved and active participant who believed in the importance and significance of anti-colonial and anti-racist resistance. After playing a few songs, Moro connected his intended audience to his colleague Mohammed who was at the Gedenk March via his phone and the audience heard some speeches from the demonstration in real time. In this way, We!R brought together the studio space and the site of street protests.

While the radio formed and forged new alliances during the three years of its operation, the three radio presenters depicted an uneasy and complex relationship with the left in Berlin. The German activists who had participated in the refugee protests at Oranienplatz seldom visited the radio studio. Bino was of the opinion that the left was always keen on displaying solidarity, but he felt that it was difficult for them to work as equals. As Morro and Bino commented on air:

Moro: There are sometimes blending and mixing of leftists. We are also fighting the same things that the left is fighting for, but sometimes there are contradictions and mixing and blending from the so-called leftists. Sometimes, the leftists are denying the fundamental right of others. Because what I believe is this that these white leftists see only their struggle. They don't see me and you and them, but they see themselves as privileged people living in society. They can say what they want. They can do what they want. And they can work freely on that. Me and you and him cannot do 100% what they do. We cannot do 100% what they say. So we don't accept that.

Bino: Someone said the Left is more dangerous than neoliberalism. They go inside you. We see them speaking about you and me. They are speaking in our tongue. They have

become the good experts about the African problem. Our dear listeners, we have to reflect on this.

Moro: I mean we are not against leftists totally, but we say we don't accept the way things are going. As Bino mentioned before you look beyond him or outside him, why don't you look at him and bring him or her out in order to narrate. The leftists have money and they can do things. And they go outside and invite so called experts from Africa and bring them in while there are people within their own circle who are perfectly capable of narrating those stories. But they don't see you.

Bino: So (for example) Bobby Wine will go back to Uganda and praise Germany. But the revolutionaries are here. Of course we do not have the popularity. So he will go back to Uganda and say that the Germans (left) are supporting the revolutionaries. But the revolutionaries are here. They prefer the experts from Sudan, from Uganda, but the not the people who are here.

Moro: This is what we mean about lefties. Before you look beyond us or above us, please see us on eye level. And then bring us in. We have a lot of experiences to narrate. No one knows all, but we know the focal points which you wanted to hear from those people you invited from outside. We ourselves could tell you, "We know these experts from Africa we would like to invite-but not from you own choice. If you do that then we see this that you are underrating us." We understand that because of your privileges and power you can make the decisions.

Mohammed: It's a matter of reflection. We are not perfect. It's not that all left people are bad. We are talking about people who are making decisions without reflections. This helpful mentality is also bullshit sometimes. I remember as Bino was saying that at Oplatz, people were bringing second hand clothes which they would not give to their white neighbours, they will not take it into the church, they will not take it into their society-but they will just

> grab it and bring it to Oranienplatz. Because, why? Black people are there, homeless people are there, refugees are there. We are not hungry people. I want people to understand that.

This commentary is significant, since it demonstrates a critique of the left and the difficulty of building alliances with groups and individuals from the left for the radio crew. Such conversations also demonstrate their struggles for equality. These viewpoints on the radio formed part of their everyday activism and reflected their struggles to end racial hierarchies in the German state. Such tensions between refugees and the left were also manifested during the protests at Oranienplatz, when many refugee activists believed that their autonomy and independence was constantly threatened by the presence of European solidarity workers and activists. In some instances, the more politically minded refugees felt that the presence of white solidarity activists during the protests was none other than a form of colonisation. The radio crew thus continued to be conscious of these issues and often aired these views on the radio. In many respects, Wearebornfree Radio needs to be understood as an extension of the refugee protest at Oranienplatz since it did emerge from this resistance, but at the same time it was a different type of space since the white solidarity activists were largely absent in the decision-making and the group forged alliances and partnerships with activists and community groups in Berlin on equal levels.

The participation of Wearebornfree Radio at the Unframed Festival and at YAAM, their connection with Women in Exile, and their active participation at the Gedenk March and at many other such spaces demonstrated Wearebornfree Radio's political ideology. The We!R project was decidedly an anti-racist, anti-colonial, and decolonial project which went beyond the idea of struggling for citizenship and making specific demands for the rights of refugees.

The radio networked independently and on their own terms since the group was not forced to rely upon solidarity groups, which mainly comprised white Germans and European activists from the left. The partner radio group, Reboot FM, gave Wearebornfree adequate leeway to form their own alliances and networks. These alliances with the African community and activists, people of colour, and some white activists from the

left who only came to the studio as guests demonstrated the radio's success in functioning independently. The radio show was keen to provide a platform for people from the African continent, people of colour, activists, and anyone who wanted to say something on air, and they managed to do so with much success. As the radio group always repeated, reiterated, and reinforced on air, the studio was open to both 'friends and enemies'.

Concluding Comments

The radio project invited its listeners (friends and enemies) to suspend their beliefs and to participate in ways such that they could envision a world where everyone was equal and empowered. The radio group put forward an ideology which explicitly condemned, critiqued, and challenged colonial histories, neocolonialism, and racialisation of people within Europe and elsewhere. Through a critique of colonialism, the radio crew helped illustrate for their listeners Europe's continued domination of many countries, the extension of EU borders into Africa, the unjust system which caused deaths in the Mediterranean, and above all the rise of extreme right-wing populism in Germany leading to loss of lives. Bino, Moro, and Mohammed and the guest in the studio mediated these views in a variety of forms such as discussions and creative projects involving music, monologue performance, and fiction writing.

The radio project provided people of African origin as well as different newcomers to Berlin a space which they could claim. The radio project's aim was not to assimilate or integrate into Germany's wider media, but rather to provide alternative views and opinions that differed from the mainstream. The radio project focused on music, politics, and culture in dynamic ways. Sometimes it functioned as a community radio for the African diaspora relaying news and events occurring in African countries. At other times, it aired news and critical commentary about events occurring in Germany.

The Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio project cannot be described in terms of traditional understandings of mediation theory where 'mediation is understood to come between, or in the middle of, already preformed, pre-existent subjects or objects, actants or entities' (Grusin 2015). The group that formed Wearebornfree Radio themselves were the 'actants'

and 'objects'. They enacted on the radio news, politics, and culture they experienced, observed, and were emotionally moved and impressed by. The group's ontological forms of expressions differed from traditional ways of broadcasting, and thus the ways in which the group shared their epistemological information differed such that it was multiscaler rather than restrictive and narrow. For example, although all three of the radio presenters had been affected by asylum policies in the German state, their resistance was not restricted to demanding immigrant rights in a vacuous and liberal manner, but instead they situated their personal experiences and experiences of racialised minorities within the historical and contemporary context of European colonialism and hegemony. Achille Mbembe (2017) contends that in a liberal democracy, formal equality can be paired with the natural prejudice that leads the oppressor to disdain those who were once his inferior even long after they have been emancipated, and without the destruction of prejudice, equality can be only imaginary (p.83). In many respects, Wearebornfree Radio recognised these sentiments as they experienced them and criticised power and the continued dominance of Europe as a hegemonic global force.

This chapter also demonstrated the slippages between politics and humanity. The radio crew emphasised humanity and love on the show. However, in this context, the notion of humanity must not be equated with a Universalist and reductive idea, but rather an appeal to 'humanity matters' must be understood such that it encompasses anti-racist and anti-colonial struggle since there were shows on the radio which were profoundly critical of institutional racism, the restrictive asylum policies, and the rise of xenophobia and nationalism. The crew also understood the notion of 'humanity matters' in opposition to capitalism and a neoliberal order.

Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio should be regarded as a decolonial project since the group frequently contested European hegemony in dynamic ways and presented their own epistemological reflections. Wearebornfree Radio was a platform which emphasised self-reliance, sovereignty, and self-determination in their everyday workings and functioning, as well as in terms of their perspectives, meanings, and content. On air, Bino, Moro, and Mohammed claimed the media sphere and voiced their views with relentless energy. They engaged in discussions which included a racial analysis, they participated in transnational activism, they

built alliances with communities which promoted African culture and creativity, they shared news and activism from different parts of the world, they included non-white guests on the show, they played music from different parts of the world, they organised workshops, readings, and lectures focusing on African politics, they screened films in their studio space which focused on black struggles and ongoing resistance of people in the developing world and in Germany against hegemonic systems, and most significantly they distanced themselves from being categorised as 'refugees' in fixed ways. The radio group centred Africans and people of colour in their shows in varying ways. Moreover, they mediated ideas of empowerment where much of the time empowerment came to mean self-determination and autonomous ways of working. As pointed out by Mirzoeff and Halberstam J. (2018):

> Media is such a dominant, powerful, and daunting set of representational apparatuses that we cannot simply overturn them all. So we must hijack the spaces they colonize and decolonize the sites that they have infiltrated. (p. 122).

In this regard, Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio did strive to take over the media space and thus endeavoured to challenge coloniality by producing and designing their own shows and transmitting their political ideology. Aníbal Quijano (2000) proposed that coloniality is modernity; and coloniality, as we know, is not only territorial, it is a way of thinking, a mode of desiring, a set of relations. To this end, Wearebornfree Radio aimed to shift particular meanings and abstractions which continue to be prevalent in society to this day.

In some respects, the radio project could arguably be understood to work as an extension of the earlier refugee protests where the refugees' voices did become visible through occupation of various spaces, because the three individuals as well as several guests and participants on the show claimed this important space and made themselves visible and heard. However, they did so in relatively autonomous ways since they self-produced the shows and thus self-mobilised and empowered themselves and their listeners through transposing the public sphere to an autonomous, independent, and decolonial project. We!R came to critique

solidarity actions. In the midst of the so called refugee crisis, much of Europe had been caught between two responses: compassionate pragmatism versus fear of cultural, ethnic, and religious difference (Holmes and Castañeda 2016). On the radio shows, Bino, Moro, and Mohammed and several of their guests resisted and challenged both of these responses. They were of the opinion that although solidarity groups were committed to supporting refugees in various ways, the relationships between refugees and solidarity activists caused uneven situations. Therefore, instead of depending and relying upon solidarity networks, the hosts sought to work independently.

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CHAPTER 7

Conclusion: Reconsidering Refugee Activism and Solidarity

This book has traced the different ways in which refugee activists and solidarity workers in Berlin in contemporary times have fought against border regimes instituted by the nation-state and the structural and everyday racisms and violence experienced by refugees. To this end, the empirical study provides a nuanced analysis of the anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles of three initiatives that emerged from a common and collective refugee tent protest, which started in Germany in 2012. The book thus demonstrates the ways in which activism can actually extend beyond endeavours for citizenship and formalised status within the nation-state. The book also shows how refugee actions and activism adopt many forms.

The study showed how three very different types of initiative, a practical solidarity group, a feminist group, and a radio project, continued their resistance in different ways, but focused on dismantling racialisation and racial violence while making visible explicit links between colonialism, neo-colonialism, and current migration in the German state. There has been much discussion in scholarship across disciplines about refugee activism (e.g. Ataç et al. 2016; Rygiel 2011; Bhimji 2016; Chimienti and Solomons 2011), humanitarian interventions (e.g. Agier 2011; Fassin 2012; Nyers 2006; Ticktin 2011), and volunteerism (e.g. Braun 2017; Hamann and Karakayalli 2016). However, previous scholarship understood refugee activism, solidarity work, and protests as political forces in their own right and as acts of citizenship, but did not always include analysis of the ways in which resistance and solidarity work could potentially

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enact an anti-racist and anti-colonial perspective. Such a view gains significance in the contemporary context of migration to Europe given that refugees come to Europe increasingly from the Global South and encounter regimes and racialisation. In this connection, the resistance to the dominant logic of migration and actions warranted discussion since the activists made increased efforts to destabilise the power of the racial state.

The study showed how Germany's asylum policies became increasingly restrictive, as people from the Global South tried to immigrate to Europe. Refugees came to be ostracised in camps located in far-flung areas where police raids and police negligence frequently occurred. In one instance, the death of a refugee woman in South Brandenburg remained uninvestigated for three months. The police found her remains after more than two months in the woods, but the mainstream media neglected to report on her death. The news was only discussed on social media and amongst refugee women activist groups.

Since refugees in Germany were compelled to live under the threat of deportation in reception centres and camps, their hypervisibility and invisibility and their subsequent Othering put them in a perpetual state of precarity. Most recently, the state of Bavaria opened a one-stop *Anker* centre, which serves as a reception as well as a deportation centre. Thus, each federal state within Germany has the sovereign power to exclude and exploit refugees at will, while the mood and politics of the federal states influence policy making at the national centre. With the rise in the popularity of extreme right parties in many of Germany's eastern states, the centre-right parties have also shifted to the right, and 2019 measures were passed at the level of the state which included the 'Law of Orderly Return' (Geordnete-Rückkehr-Gesetz), making it easier for Germany to deport refugees and consequently furthering their precarity.

The study thus described and examined in detail the ways in which refugee and activist groups participated in fighting such forms of structural and everyday inequality and racisms in differing ways. The forms of resistance were by no means employed in discrete ways and there were several overlaps, but each group did have a specific focus. The activists recognised that it was not always possible for all refugees and even members of the civil society to be present in the streets at all times, and therefore there was a need for differing spaces where people could come together, and feel inspired, and even angry, to struggle, fight, resist, and make necessary interventions in ways that made sense to them. Despite the divergence in the strategies and the political tools the actors employed,

the study showed that the target remained the nation-state and racist ideologies, which formed the basis of asylum policies.

Activists sought varying ways to resist the nation-state's efforts to restrict migration and enforce regimes. The book shows that despite the differing focus and strategies, the notion of doing prefigurative politics and the idea of collectivity and sociality remained important. Anti-racist ideals and the recognition of racism governing the asylum polices and migration regimes, the recognition of the unjust politics of the externalisation of EU borders, the understanding of institutional violence, and above all the everyday experience of deportation procedures and the recognition of the injustice associated with deportations are what defined the politics of the refugee activism and groups. The understanding of the structural realities, state, and the biopower exercised over refugees through securitisation and above all their refusal to be deterred in the face of criminalisation in the era of the growing popularity of far right anti-immigrant agendas made the groups distinct from humanitarian and volunteer-based initiatives, which solely focused on citizenship or attending to recognised refugees' everyday needs.

Political Ideologies and Activism and Solidarity

The study first described briefly the refugee tent protests at Oranienplatz and the subsequent occupation of the square and a school. Following the suicide of an Iranian refugee in Würzburg, several refugees decided to leave their camps and come to the centre of Berlin and make their demands visible. They set up tents in a square in a popular Green Party-led *Bezirk* (district) of Kreuzberg in Berlin. During the tent protests, refugees from various countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sub-Saharan African countries came together at Oranienplatz. The refugees differed across gender, class, age, social capital, and sexual orientation. Additionally, white Europeans, people of colour, and established migrants residing in Berlin came to support the refugee groups. The people ate together, slept in tents, held plenary meetings in multiple languages, which were translated so that everyone could participate in the discussions, organised several demonstrations, and tried to negotiate with politicians. Furthermore, many of the people who were part of the protests decided to reside in a nearby school that was occupied in agreement with the Green Party, which governed the district of Kreuzberg. Two years later the African American

activist Angela Davies visited Berlin and tried to enter the school, but was denied access.

The political ideology of the movement was overtly anti-racist and anti-colonial. The activists made visible the links between colonial legacies, neo-colonialism, and the economic and political fragilities of the countries from which refugees arrived. They employed slogans such as 'We are here because you destroy our countries'. Some refugee activists were of the view that the involvement of white European solidarity workers within the movement reproduced colonial and unequal structures. Nevertheless, refugees and European activists understood that the 'Lager' (camps) systematically isolated refugees from mainstream society. To this end, activists demanded that the state put an end to holding refugees in these camps and the slogan 'Break Isolation' was central to the campaign, and they understood such separations as racialisation. Simultaneously, the activists also protested against increasing levels of deportations to so-called safe countries and to European countries where refugees may have been first fingerprinted. A group of activists also went to Brussels with their demands. However, almost a year and a half later the refugees encountered evictions despite several agreements with the district and politicians. When over 1000 police surrounded the Kreuzberg area, activists came out in scores and organised protests round the clock. The support shown by activists and their protests was decidedly against overt forms of institutional and everyday racism.

The activists within the refugee movement were heterogeneous in terms of gender, class, social capital, sexual orientation, and age, and consequently their needs differed. Thus, during and after the eviction of refugees from the square, the school, and the hostels, various solidarity and activist groups came into existence. One such group was Schlafplatzorga, which aimed to situate refugees in temporary private accommodations after their eviction by the Berlin Senate. This group also adopted an anti-racist and anti-capitalist vision and the activists were of the opinion that refugees should not be left homeless on the street or be deported from Germany. The initiative understood that the refugees were racialised because of the state policies and immigration laws, but simultaneously believed in the autonomy and agential capabilities of refugees.

To this end, a group of people began to work within the existing structures of the refugee movement and started to connect refugees on the street with European activists who they knew. The refugees subsequently found temporary solutions as they often found places to stay for a few days

in the homes of European activists. Although the support network initially considered this initiative as a temporary project, it continues to exist to this day. Germans, Europeans, and asylum seekers participate in mediating for refugees who are homeless and illegalised in Berlin or those who are forced to leave the camps because of deportation threats. In some instances, some of the refugees had legal status, but they could not find accommodation because they were in low-paid jobs in Berlin.

In addition to Schlafplatzora, another group which started during the refugee movement in 2012 focused on the rights of refugee women. Members of IWS included migrant women from Brazil and Kenya and were of the view that the refugee movement did not address the needs of the women who experienced violence and isolation in the camps and were also racialised because of their immigration status, as well as by the very fact that many of them had arrived from the Global South. On their website, they explicitly stated that they were a feminist as well as an anti-racist group who wanted to defend themselves against the violence of the asylum system and migration policies which influenced their lives. The group also recognised the colonial legacies of Europe, since several members of the group originated from countries which had been affected by the structural violence of colonialism.

IWS aimed to shift some of the racialised perspectives of refugee women in the public's imagination through publications of their testimonies in their own words. Additionally, IWS organised a conference which brought migrant women from different periods together and aimed to blur some of the divides through sharing their similar experiences of racisms and violence. IWS also organised book launches, which enabled them to draw further attention to women's stories of violence, struggle, and protest. In this way, these stories formed part of a larger narrative of struggle rather than being individualised representations and accounts of courage and bravery. The book launches and various events also helped put the stories in a larger intersectional framework.

The third initiative which this book focused on was a radio project, Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio (We!R). Wearebornfree Humanity Matters was an anti-racist and decolonial visionary project formed during the refugee protest by a group of refugee activists. These activists wanted to go beyond the idea of making explicit demands of the state and so they created a project in order to express their ideals. To this end, they decided to form a radio project, which served as a platform for the manifestation of these ideals. After the radio project was conceived, activists and refugees

broadcast shows and the three activists from East and West African countries provided news about Africa, played African music, and spoke up against the neo-colonialism, racialisation of refugees, and extreme right-wing politics in Germany. This project also recognised the links between current migration and neo-colonialism. The media activists frequently alluded to the Berlin conference which had taken place in 1884 at which the major European powers negotiated and formalised claims to territory in Africa.

The three initiatives had different approaches to the ways in which they resisted the structural and everyday racisms which refugees in Germany experienced. However, there were some similarities with respect to their political ideology, since they were formed during a period of dissent and what could be understood as radical politics. All three groups overtly decried structural violence, racisms, and sexisms and supported the rights of LGBQTI people and groups and came to foreground an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist ideology criticising the nation-state for the closure of borders.

In this sense, refugee activism should be understood to encompass anti-racist struggles that comprehend that asylum laws and politics tend to be rooted in the history of European racist and imperial practices. Thus, refugee activism needs to be understood such that it goes beyond simply engaging in politics of citizenship.

Solidarity and Activism as Extensions of Refugee Protests

In several ways, the different initiatives could be understood to sustain the politics and culture of the tent protests. In their emic understandings, the members of the group did not perceive themselves as doing volunteer work and were acutely conscious of the imperialist history and closed-door immigration policies of Europe. Several of the participants who formed part of this study had emigrated from countries which were former colonies of imperial powers such as Britain, Portugal, and France and thus understood the connections between imperialism, capitalism, racism, sexism, the strengthening of the idea of nation-state, alienation, and anti-immigrant policies. And there were many activists who believed in no-border policies and opposed the very idea of a nation-state.

Some of the group members also maintained the leftist culture of lengthy deliberations and self-reflection which had prevailed during the refugee movement, while others did not and preferred rapid outcomes. The members of the groups which either started during the refugee movement or were inspired by it also demonstrated their collectivity by participating in various demonstrations and political actions in and around Berlin.

On the other hand, some of the political furore which had surrounded the protests at Oranienplatz remained absent in the groups. None of the groups made specific demands on the state, but rather articulated their ideals and vision in different ways. At the same time, it must be recognised that even though the group members defined themselves in political ways, they did develop personal relations with the refugees and did come to support them. Because of the very impossibility of refugees being able to reciprocate this level of help, the development of inequalities cannot be denied even in this very politicised context.

Some of their collective power also faded as group members worked around individual projects and did not make collective demands. For example, IWS focused on intersectional politics and augmenting the voices of refugee women, SPO supported refugees threatened by deportations, and the We!R Radio project focused on decolonising the public sphere while fighting for equality and self-determination. Their focus was of much import, and each group managed to attain recognition and form alliances with several Berlin-based activist groups, but the unified political strength remained absent which had to a certain extent defined the O-Platz refugee movement during 2012 to 2014.

Political Activism, Practical Solidarity, and Humanity

This book also demonstrates that refugee activism and struggles cannot be understood to take place in the absence of practical interventions and care. The study illustrated that in several instances, it became difficult for the people who offered solidarity to disambiguate politics and care work. For example, SPO's continued efforts to house homeless refugees who in many instances were threatened by deportation or who were illegalised could be equated with doing anti-deportation work and doing politics, but at the same time the idea of hosting homeless individuals needs to be understood as doing care work. Furthermore, members of SPO also

worked with refugees on an individual basis and tried to support them with their documentation. Thus, such acts led to the reproduction of inegalitarian structures and hierarchies between European solidarity workers and refugees from different countries in the Global South instead of bringing about radical transformations.

Similarly, in the context of feminist and intersectional activism, the book shows that some of the work by the initiative IWS could be understood as doing politics, while in other situations the support network engaged in offering practical support such as lawyer's workshops to women and other forms of practical assistance and 'help' on an individual basis such that refugee women did receive support with everyday practical and citizenship matters. Thus, in this situation unequal dynamics between established migrant women and new arrivals also surfaced, since it was women with experience who advised, guided, and supported refugee women.

The radio project We!R also emphasised politics in conjunction with notions of humanity, love, and respect. The media activists were of the view that given that politicians and the German nation-state were threatened by 'humanity', and that capitalism was fully embraced, they had to emphasise humanness. Thus, during many of their shows, the radio presenters communicated the notion of love and care for one another versus individualism and capitalism.

Thus in this way refugee activism and solidarity work included the idea of humanness and care work in conjunction with the notion of resistance against regimes and racialisation processes. However, unlike established and bigger humanitarian NGOs, the activists and solidarity workers recognised the racial injustice of migration and did not understand their activism in 'neutral' ways.

Impact of Refugee Mobilisation and Solidarity Work

The empirical study also showed how these grassroots initiatives through their bottom-up mobilisations managed to have some positive impact.

The book demonstrates that divisions between European citizens and refugees came to blur over time. These divisions were not overcome because of the formal integration methods which the nation-state imposed upon refugees and which only 'recognised refugees' could fully access. Rather, as has been discussed in this book, it was through struggles for ideals such as open borders and no-borders; anti-racist, ant-capitalist

fights; decolonial processes; and sociality that some refugees and members of European society found common ground.

The study illustrated that even within solidarity networks with an explicit anti-racist position, hierarchies and divisions emerged and refugees come to be represented and understood in particular ways. At the same time, it illustrated the importance and significance of the self-reflections and debates which took place within these groups, even though at times they did not produce the desired results and the status quo was maintained. This is not to say that these groups always adopted diverging paths—in fact the study demonstrated that participants and members of the group did came together ideologically as well as physically during various events and major demonstrations.

The study further demonstrated how the groups related to each other and the ways in which they formed various alliances. None of the initiatives worked independent of one another or other groups. SPO, for example, formed alliances with groups which helped them with rent payments for refugees. They also connected with anti-deportation groups and anti-gentrification groups in Berlin. Similarly, IWS formed links with groups such as the Alliance of Internationalist Feminists and Black Lives Matter. The radio project forged connections with the popular non-profit African organisation YAAM in Berlin and they were even invited by the well-established feminist group Women in Exile to broadcast from the public square Oranienplatz, where they held their two-day workshop.

In December 2019, Wearebornfree Radio organised an event which was funded by the Amnesty International branch in Berlin in which different anti-colonial and anti-racist initiatives such as Info Point YAAM, Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland e.V. (ISD), Women in Exile, IWS, AfricAvenir, and Berlin Postkolonial came together in order to discuss their struggles, to find common ground and networks. The coming together of such organisations in this manner demonstrates the extent to which anti-racist resistance movements and struggles for refugee rights could merge and inspire each other and ultimately find common ground. During the meeting which was moderated by a prominent black performance artist, there were discussions of ways to find common solutions given each group's distinct characteristics. The different groups recognised their common struggles, fights, and goals. The coming together of the activist groups in Berlin in order to reflect, think, and talk together about past and contemporary forms of racialisation and colonial histories and to recognise the power of emancipation, as many people

acknowledged and rearticulated the slogan 'We are born free', thus demonstrated the ability, power, and strength of the refugee resistance in Germany to go beyond making demands for formal status.

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Index

A
African Refugee Union, 183
AfricAVenir, 247
Agency, 4–6, 85, 87, 92, 94, 96, 108, 109, 138, 139, 159, 202, 208
Alliances, 7, 55, 56, 73–76, 139, 166–168, 171–177, 181, 185, 187, 190, 226–234, 236, 245, 247
Als ich nach Deutschland Kam, 156, 160, 174
Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), 41–43, 175, 176, 212–215
AnKEr camps, 27
Anti-deportation activism, 127
Anti-Deportation Café, 121
Anti-racist struggles, 4, 6, 52, 54, 96, 244
Art Melancholy, 228
Asylum systems, 14, 18, 23, 29, 35, 38, 40, 41, 57, 70, 74, 174, 188, 243
Ausgrenzung, 24
Auslanderbehorde, 29, 30, 39, 82, 149

B
'Babylon' system, 194, 199–206
Berlin Postkolonial, 247
Biopolitics, 11
Biopower, 29, 241
Black jobs, 26, 37, 43
Black Lives Matter, 171, 174, 187, 247
Blondie, Alpha, 205
Book launches, 135, 150, 151, 159–161, 166, 168, 172, 174, 177, 243
Border regimes, 2–5, 10, 13, 14, 25, 27, 59, 181, 239
Borders, 2, 4–7, 9, 23, 25, 28, 38, 42, 52, 56, 62, 66, 67, 71, 72, 74, 76, 79, 84, 95, 103, 121, 123, 127, 144, 165, 178, 181, 183, 184, 204, 206, 208, 216, 217, 226, 234, 241, 244, 246
Bureaucratic structures, 177

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F. Bhimji, *Border Regimes, Racialisation Processes and Resistance in Germany*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-49320-2

C
Capitalism, 3, 6, 50, 52, 144, 190, 235, 244, 246
Chartered flights, 38
Chemnitz, 41
Citizens, 3, 25, 27, 29, 33, 43, 44, 49, 59, 65–67, 71, 72, 75, 84, 107–109, 114, 119, 123, 126, 131, 141, 194, 210, 246
Collectivity, 7, 76, 81, 82, 159, 162, 241, 245
Colonialism, 1, 3, 6, 12, 44, 52, 62, 95, 138, 183, 201, 208, 217, 230, 231, 234, 235, 239, 243
Contentious politics, 4–14, 123, 127

D
Daily Resistance, 58
Davis, Angela, 49, 62, 63
Decoloniality, 187–191, 196, 217
Decolonisation, 60, 112, 181, 194, 217, 218, 221
Deportation, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 18, 23–25, 27, 34, 35, 37–40, 42, 49, 50, 68, 71, 72, 74, 77, 80, 84–86, 91, 98, 102, 110, 114, 121, 126, 141, 148, 156, 160, 163, 166, 173, 175, 184, 204, 206–217, 240–243, 245
Detention, 2, 5, 24, 27, 28, 35, 37, 38, 40, 42, 173
Dezarie, 215
Diawara, Fatoumata, 198
Donauwörth, 33–35, 211
Dube, Lucky, 198, 203–205, 231
Dublin Regulation, 39, 49, 56, 57, 61, 71, 72, 76, 84–86, 165
Duldung, 39, 147, 148, 173

E
Economic migrants, 24, 26
Eisunhuttenstadt, 147
Emergency shelters, 86, 87
Equality, 4, 8, 12, 51, 66, 95, 96, 101, 122, 182, 190, 192–194, 227, 233, 235, 245
Everyday racism, 26–28, 71, 72, 145, 165, 239, 242, 244
Evictions, 15, 49, 50, 53, 57–60, 62, 68, 69, 132, 141, 143, 146, 147, 154, 171, 177, 189, 242
Evora, Ceseria, 223

F
Federal states, 27–31, 33, 37–39, 42, 173, 211, 240
Female refugees, 32, 55, 131, 135, 141, 178
Feminist activism, 3, 131
Food-sharing, 118
Friends and enemies, 206, 213, 234
Friendships, 1, 81, 82, 92, 94, 95, 101, 103, 106, 125, 137, 194

G
Gerhart-Hauptmann Schule (GHS), 50, 53, 54, 68, 138, 154, 172
Global South, 13, 23–25, 29, 40, 52, 221, 240, 243, 246
Görlitzer Park, 205, 209, 210
Grassroots politics, 8
Green Party, 15, 50, 57, 68, 141, 186, 241

H
Hazaras, 227
Hierarchical relations, 8

Hierarchy, 8, 25, 66, 67, 79, 80, 84, 95, 98, 101, 103–106, 112, 114–116, 124, 126, 144, 145, 150, 173, 174, 178, 190, 233, 246, 247
Homeless refugees, 4, 65–67, 69, 73, 75, 86, 87, 115, 116, 245
Horizontality, 77, 81
Hospitality and hosting, 92–100
The House of 28 Doors, 68
Humanitarianism, 4–14, 69, 105
Humanity, 6, 11–13, 60, 62, 181, 184, 187–191, 203, 208, 209, 215, 217, 218, 223, 224, 235, 245–246

I
Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland e.V. (ISD), 247
In Our Own Words, 137, 152, 154, 155
Institutional racism, 24, 27–32, 156, 174, 188, 206, 211, 212, 235
Institutional violence, 3, 31, 32, 174, 209, 241
International Women's Day, 142, 171–172, 224–226
Intersectional activism, 4, 13, 19, 177, 246
Intersectional feminist activism, 3, 131
Intersectionality, 135, 155, 171, 177
Intimate ethnography, 15
Islamophobia, 17, 191

K
Kantine, Kiez, 118
Kontakt-und Beratungsstelle für Flüchtlinge und Migrant_innen e.V. (KuB e.V.), 74
Kreuzberg district, 53, 60
Küfas, 18, 79, 88, 89, 117–126

L
Lager, 3, 31, 32, 49–52, 59, 69, 72, 85, 86, 89, 166, 172, 173, 175, 188, 189, 242
Lampedusa in Berlin, 56
Law of Orderly Return, 240
Lawyer's workshop, 19, 131, 136, 137, 145, 147–150, 178, 246
Left politics, 4, 8

M
Mama Cash, 138, 151, 162
Mandinka, 211
Mass accommodations, 18, 28, 30, 61, 135
Media activists, 57–63, 181–237, 244, 246
Media Group, 2, 50, 58, 189
Mediterranean Sea, 72, 75, 114, 184, 229
Migration policies, 2, 7, 8, 14, 95, 195, 243
Mobility, 125
Morello, Tom, 199, 213
Movements, 2, 5, 7, 9, 26–28, 30, 35, 41, 49–52, 54–58, 60, 63, 66, 67, 70, 71, 74–78, 84, 91, 93, 100, 134, 144, 153, 160, 166, 168, 172, 184–186, 188, 189, 191–193, 205, 214, 217, 224, 226, 229, 242, 247
Multi-sited ethnography, 15
Music, 81, 91, 94, 96, 102, 106, 108, 111, 113, 114, 120, 122, 181, 182, 188, 190, 194–201, 203–205, 217, 221, 223, 226–231, 234, 236, 244
Music festival, 107, 110–113, 116, 125

N
Nail Art, 88, 91, 102
Narratives, 13, 19, 58, 66, 131, 135, 138, 146, 150–159, 162, 166, 168, 177, 178, 206, 211, 243
Nationalism, 2, 10, 18, 190, 211, 212, 216, 217, 235
Nation-state, 3, 6, 10, 14, 17, 25, 28, 239, 241, 244, 246
Neocolonialism, 3, 16, 95, 152, 181, 183, 184, 220, 221, 227, 231, 234, 242, 244
Neoliberalism, 231
Networking, 70, 73–76, 84–92, 100, 125, 140, 159–161, 166–168
Network system, 70, 74
Neukölln, 88, 119
New Yorck im Bethanien, 117, 121, 169, 228

O
Occupations, 5, 50, 53, 56, 60, 131, 132, 137, 152, 169, 172, 224, 236, 241
Oranienplatz, 1, 2, 14, 15, 49–63, 68, 69, 74, 152–154, 163, 172, 177, 183, 188, 189, 193, 224, 230, 231, 233, 241, 245, 247
Orderly Return Law, 37

P
Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA), 36, 41, 214
Police, 10, 12, 15, 29, 32–38, 42, 49, 51–53, 59, 71, 101, 115, 121, 141, 154–156, 163, 170, 171, 173–176, 185, 205, 206, 208–211, 240–242
Police attacks, 33–35, 211
Police negligence, 33, 174, 240
Populist parties, 24, 188
Practical solidarity, 8, 18, 19, 65–127, 138, 239, 245–246
Precarity, 25, 240
Prefiguration, 76, 77
Private accommodations, 67, 73, 86, 87, 100, 242
Privileges, 17, 25, 43, 55, 57, 66, 67, 71–73, 78, 79, 92, 95, 98, 103–105, 126, 127, 144, 176, 182, 191, 193, 199, 224, 225
Protests, 1–6, 10, 13, 14, 18, 27, 35, 41, 49–63, 69, 127, 131, 132, 141, 152, 156, 171–176, 181, 186, 189, 191, 194, 195, 199, 203, 205, 208, 217, 221, 222, 224, 230, 231, 233, 236, 239, 241–245

R
Racialisation, 3, 6, 14, 18, 23–44, 55, 74, 154, 157, 169, 172, 176, 181, 193, 195, 205, 206, 211, 212, 217, 234, 239, 240, 242, 244, 246, 247
Racial state, 6, 240
Radio Omniyat, 227
Raids, 33, 35, 121, 240
Rastafari culture, 199–206
Reboot FM, 185, 233
Reception centres, 26–28, 30, 31, 38, 135, 147, 240
Refugee camps, 4, 24, 26–33, 36, 126, 156, 211
Refugee mobilisation, 5, 6, 15, 16, 24, 51, 54, 62, 63, 138, 142, 152, 153, 155, 163, 177, 183, 187, 246–248
Refugee Movement, 2, 3, 49–63, 66, 68, 70, 117, 131, 132, 137, 154, 172, 186, 188, 191, 194, 205, 217, 221, 242, 243, 245

Refugee resistance, 2, 16, 52, 54, 62, 152, 188, 248
Refugee Tent Action, 49
Relational dynamics, 3, 7, 66, 67, 92
Representations, 7, 17, 158, 159, 171, 212, 243
Residenzpflicht, 26, 49, 50, 85, 142
Right-wing ideologies, 24, 41, 181, 214
Right-wing politics, 215, 244

S
Safe countries, 26, 28, 30, 33, 35, 43, 165, 242
Securitisation, 5, 27, 32, 35, 156, 188, 241
Self-determination, 6, 187, 190, 193, 206, 224, 227, 235, 236, 245
Simone, Nina, 199, 213
Social encounters, 7, 110
Sociality, 7, 15, 66, 103–126, 241, 247
Social media, 3, 19, 32, 91, 166, 173, 174, 185, 195, 208, 211, 215, 240
Solidarians, 7, 67, 72, 84–92, 95, 101, 102, 105, 108, 114, 117, 119, 126
Solidarity, 2–15, 17–19, 24, 35, 43, 44, 57–63, 65–127, 131–179, 181, 182, 186, 190–194, 208, 216, 218–226, 228, 231, 233, 237, 239–248
Solidarity parties, 75, 103, 106–110, 117, 120, 139, 140
Solizimmer, 73, 118–120
Structural violence, 33, 243, 244

T
Testimonials, 151, 160, 169
Trennungsgebot, 37

U
Unteilbar, 43, 97, 171

V
Violence, 11, 32–35, 54, 63, 98, 121, 132, 135, 138, 141, 143, 144, 151, 152, 155, 160, 163, 171, 172, 174, 176, 177, 185, 188, 195, 210, 225, 226, 231, 239, 243
Visibility, 5, 6, 35, 49, 52, 56, 73, 118, 124, 135, 151, 152, 159, 166, 168, 172, 178, 184, 193, 199, 227, 228
Volunteerism, 4, 5, 107, 110, 239

W
Wearebornfree Empowerment Radio (We!R), 3, 15, 60, 62, 140, 183–236, 243, 245, 246
We Exist, We Are Here, 154, 159
Willkommenskultur, 8, 10
Women in Exile, 32, 34, 55, 149, 230, 233, 247

Y
Young African Art Market (YAAM), 187, 228, 229, 233, 247