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Daring to care? How volunteers and civil society organisations are shaping asylum seekers' access to citizenship through social support

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Abstract

Since the notable increase of asylum seekers in Germany in 2015, volunteers in civil society organisations (CSOs) have come to play an increasingly important role in the provision of social services and support structures for refugees in the country. By framing volunteers' activities in the field of social support as practices of care and by linking these activities theoretically to acts of citizenship, the paper discusses whether and how CSOs and volunteers are able to challenge hegemonic discourses and practices of citizenship and migrants' rights. The paper is based on an on-going, qualitative study in a city in Germany, involving different CSOs and volunteers. Findings include that volunteers' activities done on behalf of asylum seekers may further the constant enacting of rights and citizenship through practice on the local level – even if volunteers' and CSOs original intentions are not necessarily geared towards this end.

Keywords: asylum seekers, Germany, volunteer work, citizenship, civil society organisations, care

1. Introduction

Since the increase in refugees in 2015, volunteers and civil society organisations working to support state and communal institutions in efforts to accommodate the sudden influx of large numbers of refugees are representative of a so-called "welcoming culture" in Germany (Bade, 2015; Kober & Zotta, 2015). Journalists and politicians were quick to portray the wave of support volunteers were offering to refugees as a symbol of Germany's new found openness for foreigners and refugees (Butzke, 2016). In some accounts, accordingly, the entire German nation has been depicted as a people demonstrating solidarity, moral responsibility and respect for the plight of refugees. Some journalists gave the impression that volunteer activities had an underlying meaning, one of a growing political consciousness among the general population that would eventually result in claims for a politics of greater tolerance for foreigners and more cultural diversity. In this sense, some academics have since advanced the idea that volunteers and their activities represent a new social and political movement in the making that symbolizes a fundamental critique to Germany's and Europe's current citizenship regimes and migration politics and could act as a European role model for more humane refugee politics (Karakayali & Kleist, 2015; Schiffauer et al. 2016).

These voices are critically contested by those who argue that the current surge in volunteering is not an expression of some new found political consciousness on the part of civil society, awakened by refugees' plight for rights. Instead, it is to be understood as a side effect of increasing economic precarisation (Lorey, 2012) in a political context in which migration is increasingly equated with a major but temporarily restricted humanitarian crisis (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017). In these accounts, the surge in volunteerism is argued to be a state-driven phenomenon and reflects its efforts to outsource essential social services and emergency relief for refugees to civil society organisations and private businesses (Böse & Friedrich, 2015; Van Dyk, Dauling & Haubner, 2015). The use of volunteers in refugee 'management' is then understood as just another measure used by a governance-driven state to adapt the traditional welfare model, aiming to increase citizens' involvement in the satisfaction of asylum seekers' basic needs without, however, granting asylum seekers formal rights to claim these services from the state.

Such an analysis could also imply that the so-called "welcoming culture" in Germany is not necessarily founded on citizens' understanding for foreigners' claims to rights and services from the state, but is built on the understanding that refugees are passive victims in temporary need of protection and rapid relief (Akap, 2016). Self-centred motivations for volunteer-

ing, such as individual fulfilment in helping others or guilt may drive civil society initiatives. Volunteers seem to be able to recognize the specific vulnerability of asylum seekers and their need for help. At the same time, however, they maintain that "the foreigner in general" is nonetheless fundamentally inferior to or different from the national citizen and therefore cannot legitimately claim the same rights (Tiktin, 2011). If these suppositions hold true, it is likely that the "new social movement" for refugees will fade out as soon as asylum seekers' essential needs have been satisfied.

In light of these contrasting views, this paper contributes to the discussion about the role volunteers and their engagements are actually playing in shaping governmental and societal reactions to refugees in Germany or in other European countries where similar developments have been observed (Bernat et. al., 2017; Kalogeraki, 2017). Drawing on empirical material from an on-going qualitative study in the city of Bielefeld, Germany, the paper first investigates whether and how volunteers and organisations challenge the concepts of citizenship underpinning the current rather restrictive asylum politics in Germany "from below" and, secondly, investigates what role they can play in securing refugees' rights through different forms of struggle (Kivisto & Faist, 2010) and acts of citizenship (Isin & Nielsen, 2008).

In order to answer these questions, this empirical case study focuses on the practices of care, which increasingly characterize civil society organisations' activities and engagement with refugee politics on communal level in Germany. I draw on feminist theories of care to establish a link between volunteers' care practices and their political significance for practices of citizenship and refugee rights (Robinson, 2013; Tronto, 2000; Tiktin, 2011; Kelz, 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012). I argue that questions about migrants' and asylum seekers' access to social and care services are actually at the heart of questions about who is eligible for citizenship and who is excluded from it by law. Focusing on volunteer activities as care enables me to look both at the potential of civil society support for asylum seekers to transform current understandings of citizenship through practical deeds, thereby changing political consciousness in the long run (Isin & Nielsen, 2008), as well as the potentially very harmful nature of these kind of activities, which can uncritically reinforce existing divisions between those categorized as citizens and those who are not (Tiktin, 2011). Thus, by looking at the ways in which practices and ethics of care come to shape both individuals' sense-making strategies and organisations' ways of working in refugee management, I describe the ambivalent nature of volunteering and civil society involvement in refugee support in Germany for advancing the rights of asylum seekers in the country.

The first section of this article will give an overview of the context of asylum management in Germany and the role of civil society organisations and volunteers within it. This is followed

by a conceptualization of volunteer activities in the realm of refugee assistance as 'care work'. Next, I present the contextual background and the methodological approach before analysing empirical data on how care has influenced the organisational structure of refugee assistance in Bielefeld and volunteers' motivations for engaging in refugee work. I conclude by venturing that CSOs and volunteers are increasingly likely to concentrate their future activities in the realms of loosely networked, informal care activities rather than in coordinated forms of public protest. This offers serious limitations to the political significance of their activities for transforming migration policies in Germany at the national level, but at the same time, perhaps offers a new perspective on the social aspects of migration governance at local and communal levels.

2. The role of civil society and volunteers in asylum management in German local administrations: Room for acts of citizenship?

Migration and asylum seeker policies can be interpreted as part of a larger set of policies regulating how opportunities for participating in political, economic, cultural or social life are differentially allocated by the state to different categories of people in a given society. Questions about migrants' and asylum seekers' access to social and care services are at the heart of questions about who is eligible for citizenship and who is excluded from it by law.

One specific feature of German federalism is that the state has delegated and decentralized to the communal level the processes whereby rights, services and legal status are assigned or taken away from asylum seekers. Apart from a few exceptions, local administrations and city councils are charged to ensure refugees' access to social services, housing, education and – if possible – professional training and work. This situation has resulted in a great diversity of models and institutional setups all over the country and significant regional differences in the quality of state services offered to migrants and asylum seekers (Spere & Becker, 2016; Aumüller et al, 2015).

Particularly in resource-poor communities or those with political council majorities aiming to increase restrictions on asylum seekers' possibilities for staying in the country, the range and accessibility of services and social support asylum seekers have access to is often restricted. Concretely, this means that asylum seekers can have very differential access to services such as German language courses, professional training, social support or affordable housing, depending on the locality in which they live. They may face difficulties finding opportunities within the job market or taking part in cultural and sports activities. Given that asylum

claims often take several years to get resolved and many refugees are practically unable to move somewhere else during this time, this proves problematic. Their abilities to find work or take part in public and cultural life are therefore particularly restricted if they happen to live in communities that only offer limited social support structures and economic opportunities.

In the past, civil society and church-based initiatives came to play an important role, offering asylum seekers those social services that the councils in their local areas were not willing or able to fund. These activities were above all made possible by volunteer work. At least two different groups of civil society organisations (CSOs) should be distinguished in this respect. On the one hand, there are the long established social welfare organisations (e.g., churches, unions, Red Cross, etc.), which have maintained well established social services since the 1960s and have been active in migration related social services for a long time. On the other hand, there are CSOs of more recent creation, established particularly in the 1990s when welfare cutbacks and changes in the asylum laws were introduced. Some of them are migrant-led organisations; others are more general migrant-rights activist groups.

In recent years, many federal states and local administrations in Germany have adopted resolutions designating a specific part of their communal budget to facilitate asylum seeker participation in the community even if their administrative status is not resolved or only temporarily granted (Aumüller, et al. 2015). CSO have played an important role in the processes of negotiation about how these budgets are created and used at the communal level. Civil society organisations often also provide part of the funding for these activities – be it through volunteer work and arranging man power, through mobilizing private donations or in the form of gifts.

These institutional arrangements of refugee assistance and social care at the communal level can be described as embedded in a so-called "active citizen regime" (Tonkens, 2012) in which private companies, civil society organisations and individuals are encouraged to fulfill a range of roles in care-related activities for citizens. The citizenship regime represents the institutional arrangements, rules and understandings guiding state policy decisions and expenditures and claims-making by citizens in the realm of social support and protection (Jenson &Phillips, 2001, 72).

The institutional and administrative context of asylum management in Germany is one in which communal governmental structures, civil society organisations and individuals have always played an important role in providing care and informal and formal social support structures for asylum seekers. However, in the current situation, it is above all CSO volunteers, who have full citizenship rights, who are now taking on important tasks of coordinating

the self-management of formal and informal care that asylum seekers (who have only limited citizenship rights) have access to, striving to maximize the best outcomes for them. In this sense, volunteers are potentially critical in shaping and changing the understanding of citizenship and refugee rights through their active involvement in care provision and their 'deeds' of citizenship (Isin & Nielsen, 2008).

3. Voluntary support for asylum seekers as care

In the following sections, I want to focus specifically on the role volunteers play in contesting or shaping the ways in which citizenship is defined and implemented in practice through their involvement in social care provision for asylum seekers. To do so, it is useful to first look at volunteer work from a theoretical perspective on care work and ethics of care. This perspective appears suitable in light of the considerable shift in volunteer activities from humanitarian relief aid towards longer term community work since 2015 (Karakayali & Kleist, 2016). In the city of Bielefeld, this shift in volunteer activities is equally evident. Whereas most volunteers were active in providing humanitarian aid in the newly established temporary shelters in the city in 2015, most volunteers are now engaged in supporting asylum seekers by organizing their everyday lives: They support refugees in moving and house or apartment hunting, or they provide transport and accompany people to important appointments with doctors, lawyers, schools or potential employers in an attempt to mediate and represent refugees' interests. They organize used furniture, baby clothes or sports equipment. Volunteers take on translation tasks and mediate between refugees and institutions. In some instances, volunteers organize collective donations for persons who need very specific services (for example health-related), the costs of which are not covered by public services. All in all, many of these activities could be described as services that provide asylum seekers with forms of informal social protection to better cope with the risks of social exclusion (Faist & Bilecen, 2015, 196).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, most CSOs active in migration related work in Bielefeld mobilized volunteers above all in the organisation of advocacy campaigns for political change in migration and refugee politics. The organisations we talked to indicated that these kinds of activities are still undertaken; however, volunteers are more interested than ever in establishing personalized partnerships with refugees and asylum seekers. Recently, many organisations have also been promoting projects in which individual volunteers are paired up

with individual asylum seekers to provide them with social relations they can use flexibly to confront everyday challenges. Furthermore, many welfare organisations are engaged in promoting neighbourhood projects or specific activities in which citizens are encouraged to provide advice or practical hands-on support in everyday problems asylum seekers may face (e.g., bicycle repair workshops, gardening clubs, neighbourhood meeting parties, or welcome cafes).

These activities in the realm of social protection can be compared to the field of care and emotional work (Tonkens, 2012; Hochschild 1983; Guy et al., 2007) and stand in contrast to the type of work required to organize campaigns, political statements and public demonstrations for migrants' rights. Care is quite a difficult concept to pin down, because it can relate to different levels of analysis, and rather than seeing it as a theoretical concept, it is more fruitful to approach it as an empirical concept based in practice, which can take many different forms (Thomas, 1993; Alber & Dortbohm, 2015). In this paper, I understand care as involving wide-ranging practices and activities going far beyond the kinds of practices generally associated with reproductive, family-based care work. In an attempt to come up with a unifying definition of care that can also incorporate other dimensions into this concept, Thomas (1993, 665) has suggested that care is:

> "…both the paid and the unpaid provision of support involving work activities and feeling states. It is provided mainly, but not exclusively, by women to both able-bodies and dependent adults and children in either the public or domestic spheres, and in a variety of institutional settings."

The advantage of such a broad concept of care lies in the fact that the relationship between private obligations and public services and the relationship between paid and unpaid work, and thereby the normative basis and the gender-bias of care work, becomes visible (Brückner, 2004). I want to focus on the potential of these informal activities for changing citizenship discourses and transforming migration policy concerning asylum seekers' improved access to rights and social status. To do so, it is useful to link this discussion to concepts of care and feminist political theory (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012; Tronto, 1993; Robinson, 1999).

Care work and ethics of care have been of particular interest to anthropologists (Alber & Drotbohm, 2015), sociologists (Tronto, 1993), political scientists (Robinson, 1999) and philosophers (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012) working on gender relations because its practice is

and has been strongly gendered. Care remains an essential feature of transformative feminist politics and alternative forms of organising (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012) and at the same time, care has been used as a conceptual device to denominate patronising practices that do not challenge but rather reinforce otherwise very inhumane migration politics (Tiktin, 2011). Theories of care have also been employed to analyse the politics of the welfare state, its ideology and systems (Thomas, 1993). Because of this, I find that this theoretical approach with its ambivalent conceptualisations of care practices and its relation to welfare rights and state power is well-suited for framing the analysis of volunteers' contradictory role in shaping concepts of citizenship and migration. The theoretical and practical significance of care lie in reinterpreting volunteer action in the informal and often private realms of social life as particular forms of knowing and thinking about migration, citizenship and the state.

Because of care's primary association with women and family-related tasks in the private sphere, care activities have often been neglected or overlooked in assessments of social capital creation (Edwards, 2004, 14-15) or in assessments of their political significance regarding citizenship practices (Erel, 2010). This productivity of the social sphere can only be unearthed if it is recognised and its interdependence with other realms of the workings of society acknowledged (Cox, 1995, 72; de Guy, 2007)

Recognizing the potential for transformation of concepts of citizenship in care work thus also means valuing and acknowledging how citizenship is enacted, reproduced or contested through the material, emotional and physical practices of care. This type of work is usually not (or cannot) be commercialized or converted into economic or political capital in the same way as the spoken word, the public performance and the written record (Hochschild, 1983; de Guy 2007). However, the latter are usually those areas in which organisations, public administrations and volunteers increase their influence in the political realm through the recognition of their 'professionalism' and their 'expertise'.

The potential significance of recognizing care as a rebellious practice of non-reciprocal and disinterested service to the 'Other' (Van Dyk, Dowling & Haubner, 2016) is probably marginalized in a liberal world in which societal and even social relations are often understood as regulated and negotiated through contractual principles, which are adhered to by rational and autonomous individuals (O'Connell Davidson, 2005). This is another potential reason why informal care activities in the realm of refugee assistance (which are mostly performed by women volunteers) are often not brought into meaningful connection with

political action or even with the market. So, despite the potential of care work for making visible how asylum seekers are "othered" and converted into individuals living a "bare life" (Agamben, 1998) when they are reduced to receivers of aid who are unable to "care for themselves", large obstacles remain in bringing these concerns for the social into the political mainstream arena of refugee politics. I argue, however, that it is vital to unearth the effects of informal practices of care through which volunteers are likely to indirectly contribute to changes in the daily workings of organisations, their structures and the hegemonic discourses on citizenship and migrants' rights. It is through these discourses and organisational practices that projects and social policies are devised, justified and publicly implemented and migrant subjects and citizens get defined. Analysing volunteer action from the perspective of care not only allows one to investigate the occurrence of these potentially rather transformative effects of volunteer work in areas of informal social protection but also helps us to uncover the rather negative sides of civil society engagement with asylum politics. Caring also involves the risk of uncritically reproducing unjust and unequal citizenship categories between residents and asylum seekers, thus awarding a position of superiority and power to those providing voluntary support (Wang, 2013) without challenging the underlying differences giving rise to asylum seekers' greater situation of dependency in the first place (Tiktin, 2011). In the next two sections, I will focus particularly on how care work changes and influences organisations' ways of working and influences volunteers' motivations for helping. Before doing so, I will give a short overview of the context for this empirical study and the methods used.

4. Volunteer work for asylum seekers in the city of Bielefeld: The context

With 36% of the city's population having some kind of migratory history in the family, Bielefeld ranks among the cities with the highest concentration of foreign residents in North-Rhine Westfalia. This might also be one of the reasons why this city counts with a range of relatively well established migration-related CSOs and many cultural associations, often run by migrant communities. There is a longstanding collaboration between council and civil society organisations concerning implementing programs geared towards fostering migrants' access to rights and services and their chances for participating in the community. In fact, CSOs in Bielefeld have organised different forms of political protest against restrictive migration policies in the past and are politically active in promoting more open and inclusive migration policies. Since 2014, the city (with around 330,000 inhabitants) has received ca. 5,000 additional asylum seekers from a wide variety of countries. The city council estimates

that beginning in 2016, Bielefeld will host approximately 1,200 new asylum seekers and refugees with intentions of staying permanently each year (Statistisches Amt Bielefeld, 2016[1], personal enquiry).

In early 2015, the city council worked with organisations to develop an "integration concept paper" to structure voluntary work and collaboration between the various actors involved in refugee and migration work. This happened before the 'long summer of migration' (Hess, S. et al., 2016) had officially begun and can therefore be viewed as a proactive response to the gradual increase of asylum seekers in Bielefeld, to prepare communal services for the expected increase in demands for care and social support services implied with this movement. A task force composed of representatives of civil society organisations and communal structures was created and divided into four working groups (shelter and relief; participation in society; employment and education; civil society engagement).

Bielefeld city council is one of the local administrations actively seeking to extend refugee support beyond the basic necessities and pursuing an approach aiming to cater to the needs of every resident in the city – independent of their administrative status. Collaboration with civil society organisations and volunteers was expressively sought after to achieve this (Stadt Bielefeld, 2016a, 9).

Since 2015, there has been a large increase in volunteers willing to engage with refugee and asylum seekers' social support projects in the city. According to data from the council-run "Volunteer-coordination Bureau," which was set up to coordinate volunteer demands in the city, more than 800 people expressed having availability to spend time on refugee-oriented social activities between July 2015 and March 2016. More than 75% of these potential volunteers were women, almost half of them were working (either in full or part-time employment). While these figures surely only capture an insignificant part of the actual number of volunteers active in a range of civil society initiatives in Bielefeld at the moment, the general characteristics of volunteers as predominantly female (working, retired or in education) appears to match the information we have received from CSOs. The number of

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[1] The internet platform of this agency received almost 50,000 clicks in the month of September 2015 alone. Over 2,500 people rang the bureau to enquire about volunteering possibilities and donations for refugees between July 2015 and March 2016. (Stadt Bielefeld, 2016a)

organisations, initiatives and projects aimed at asylum seekers and refugees has also rapidly increased since 2014.

The findings I present in this article are based on ten semi-structured interviews with volunteers working in a temporary shelter in Bielefeld in November 2015, six semi-structured interviews with representatives of different civil society organisations involved in migrant and refugee projects in the city of Bielefeld in 2016 and an extensive documentary analysis of relevant council documentation and civil society organisations' publications regarding migrant reception and integration measures in Bielefeld between 2015-2017. The organisations interviewed were approached based on their typicality (Murphy & Dingwall, 2003, 109). Their coordinators represent the different types of CSOs active in Bielefeld migrant support networks. The ten volunteers who were interviewed were recruited through snowball sampling on the internet platform for refugees and volunteers and through another national CSO, working in a temporary shelter. All interviews were transcribed in full and analysed using grounded theory inspired, inductive coding processes with the help of qualitative data analysis software.

5. Care and associated shifts in organisational structures: From members to networks and from projects to activities

Beginning in summer 2015, Bielefeld city council started to increasingly engage in project-based funding partnerships with local CSOs to spread the provision of basic services and shelter for asylum seekers to a number of institutions. Particularly the bigger, well established and professional welfare organisations in the city were chosen to channel additional funding. Other, smaller organisations that were more politically oriented or migrant based were not involved in these partnerships to the same extent. This meant that funded organisations suddenly needed to recruit large numbers of volunteers for projects with asylum seekers.

The funding from the council tied these organisations to project-based management, meaning that very specific volunteer profiles were sought after. Volunteers had to fit into the programmed project activities with their clearly defined tasks and for specific periods of time. Most of these tasks fell into care work (school support for children, family partnerships, bicycle repair café, etc.). Volunteers often worked alongside professional social workers, thus complementing the professional services through informal support structures heavily based

on emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). One coordinator of a welfare organisation we interviewed explained that this had negative consequences for the organisations' ability to create true networks of volunteers with longer-term group cohesion:

> "This projectitis, I am not fond of this, really. You are just about to set up a group that works together, that gets on well, they start having their own ideas and bring them into the project…and then it ends, and there is no more funding. We have to write a new proposal and it can take 6 months until that goes through. Until then, the volunteers are left to themselves. No, almost no one continues without the coordination and the project funding. When the project ends, the whole thing dies."

According to this interviewee and several others we approached, project-based work neither allowed for volunteers to create strong emotional ties with the people they were caring for, nor with their fellow volunteers or the organisations they were working for – which was, paradoxically, one of the primary reasons they wanted to volunteer in the first place. This also affected the success of the projects, because they often greatly depended on volunteer participation.

Two of the coordinators we interviewed also lamented that since the additional funding sources had become available, competition for volunteers among civil society organisations had increased. Some of the volunteers we encountered were in fact simultaneously active in more than one organisation. The organisations often also used the same informal networks to recruit volunteers. This may be one further reason why volunteers were generally not interested in becoming members in membership-based welfare organisations and did not necessarily get strongly involved in the advocacy campaigns promoted by these organisations in favour of asylum or refugee rights.

Parallel to this development in the long established, membership-based welfare organisations, some new, spontaneous self-help groups emerged, led primarily by citizens who wanted to provide quick and uncomplicated support to refugees. These groups work entirely through volunteers and do not receive any funding through the council. The volunteers coordinate activities through loose network structures, communicating through internet-based media. One of the most active platforms frequently points out that they are not politically motivated, stating instead that they are "neutral," putting their focus on humanitarian support. In fact, many of the volunteers in the network did not know each other at all. Instead, they often engaged in personal friendships with asylum seekers and other volunteers. Most volunteers only came together for short term ad hoc activities and, according to some of the network operators, this was precisely the reason why the network functioned so well: The key to the success of the networks appears to have been the fact that volunteers' activities were not

commoditized in any way and volunteers were not forced to take part in any organisational structures.

The strong focus on emotional labour and individualized, informal care work done by volunteers engaged in network activities also helped them to remain outside the project-based approach to social support the council favoured in their collaboration with established NGOs. Some of the CSO representatives we interviewed also explained that in order to keep volunteers active, it was vital to support them in their autonomous decision-making. The informal networks allowed volunteers more autonomy than many of the established organisations because they provided them with the space to decide when, how and with whom they wanted to engage in personal relations of support and care. If one considers that the support provided by volunteers is mostly based on complex forms of emotional labour, in which both the care giver and the care receiver have to engage often in profound personal relationships with each other, it is possible to understand its importance.

Leaving out commodification and professionalisation of social care enabled volunteers in the loose network structure to respond flexibly and rapidly to emerging practical caring needs and to develop real relationships with the asylum seekers they were accompanying. Despite their explicitly self-proclaimed "apolitical" but activist nature, the internet platform gained strong media attention, and most people interested in volunteering came into contact with more professional organisations and activities through this network. These ad hoc informal 'care' activities actually also enabled the volunteers in the networks to influence some of the councils' policy measures in refugee management. One example is the temporary establishment of the "Café Welcome" – a coffee stall next to the registration building where new arrivals are admitted, registered and transferred to temporary shelters. At peak times in the summer of 2015, refugees had to wait there for hours without water or possibilities to sit down or rest. The volunteers of the internet activist group spontaneously provided coffee and water free of charge for days on end by setting up an improvised café in front of the building until the public administration took up the matter in their monthly coordination meetings and finally established water tanks and other measures to improve refugees' stay at the centre.

The internet platform also enabled its members to escape council control and professionalisation of social work, enabling them to instead maintain their rather 'anarchical character' as they themselves described. It is evident from studies in other regions in Germany that similar informal networks appear to be a guarantee of success for volunteering and are far more popular than institutionalised and project-based activities. According to Karakayali and Kleist (2016), civil society engagement in medium-sized German cities with 20,000-50,000 inhabitants increased between 2014 and 2015, whereas volunteering in big cities decreased. The

authors argue that this has to do with the increasing importance of informal networks for the success of volunteering activities, which are generally better developed in medium-sized or rural areas.

The examples mentioned above demonstrate how professional welfare and humanitarian CSOs have increased their collaboration with the city council particularly through their involvement in activities geared toward providing asylum seekers care-related services. However, this development has not always resulted in CSOs attracting more and longer-term volunteers and paying members in their organisational structures and also has not contributed to increasing advocacy activities on the part of these organisations. It is possible that this is because increasingly short-term project based funding does not allow CSOs to build up bases of active volunteer members who identify with the organisations they are working for. Almost all of the six CSO coordinators we interviewed were of the opinion that volunteers are more interested in investing their time and emotional labour in longer lasting relations with fellow volunteers and asylum seekers. Framed within the context of short-term care projects, voluntary care work for asylum seekers runs the danger of becoming increasingly commoditised, without the differential access to care asylum seekers may experience being fundamentally questioned and without acknowledging the importance of volunteers' involvement in emotional labour as 'acts of citizenship' but rather as a provision of social services. At the same time, loose network-type associations provide a range of informal social services to asylum seekers without receiving any additional funding from state and council sources. Even though these initiatives often explicitly avoid formulating longer-term goals, they do nevertheless influence council policy-making regarding refugees at the local level in a variety of ways through their publicly visible activities, through which they are able to sensitise the public about asylum seekers' difficulties in accessing social, economic and cultural rights in the city (Their internet presence reaches into the households of many people and makes citizens aware of asylum seekers' needs and activities, such as the film screening for refugee children at the local cinema, calls for finding local sport clubs taking on asylum seekers in their teams, calls for bicycle donations, etc.). Both forms of volunteer organisations, however, demonstrate that organisations' focus on care activities is rarely accompanied by direct political action, like advocacy or protest regarding the transformation of citizenship regimes underlying contemporary migration policies. In addition, while care work and emotional labour may be already dominating the practices of volunteers in refugee assistance, they have yet to become recognized as significant arenas for 'acts of citizenship' in voluntary organisations, local council decision making processes and in the eyes of the general public. Volunteers often mentioned in our interviews that they felt that their work was not recognized by the city council and the organisations they worked for or looked even down upon by their families

and friends. CSO representatives we interviewed lamented that they did not have the resources, training or time to acknowledge volunteers' care work adequately and to provide them with the professional and emotional support they needed. In the following sections, I present some of the reasons why care-related activities become such a prominent feature of volunteer activism by looking at volunteers' motivations for doing these activities and also at the potential of these 'acts of citizenship' for challenging hegemonic discourses on citizenship within the public and local politics.

6. Volunteers and their motivations – Solidarity in conditions of global neoliberal precariat?

In the interviews, volunteers used different strategies to express their motivations for engaging in voluntary care work, and often, they justified their activities by referring to their responsibility to alleviate human suffering, to help people in need and to make other peoples' lives liveable. This appeared to locate their motivations on a moral level of responsibility with 'the Other' (Schiffauer, et al. 2017). From an ethics of care perspective, these motivations are related to beliefs about our interdependence with fellow human beings and require instances of interaction and practices of care in order to be translated into action (Robinson, 1999). However, from a social movement perspective, feeling responsible for others in an abstract form is often not enough to establish effective solidarity between people who do not necessarily share a social identity (such as class, gender or ethnicity). In fact, this desire to help those in need, those who are suffering, requires us to identify those who deserve to be helped and distinguish those from others whose suffering is not "bad enough" to receive care and informal support (Tiktin, 2011).

It is, however, possible that the lack of a shared social identity may actually force us to find ways to connect to others despite their difference to us (Kelz, 2015, 9). Kelz (2015), referring to Butler (2004), proposes that one possible concept which helps us to connect with others is precariousness, understood here as a universal ontological condition shared by all people based on their human vulnerability. She sets this concept apart from the political understanding of precarity, which depicts the ways in which political, social and economic structures organise precariousness: "While precariousness is ontologically given, precarity is produced by social structures, where the individual interacts with the state and economic systems" (Kelz, 2015, 10). So, while precariousness is universal, the risks of living in precarity are not equally distributed and create sources of difference between people.

In the interviews, volunteers often referred both to the universal concept of precariousness and to the perceived threat of falling into a situation of precarity in justifying their motivations for helping others based on unity and difference. For instance, they frequently argued that if they had been in the same situation refugees were in, they would probably have attempted to flee to another country to save their lives – despite the legal restrictions to do so. They also referred to the possibility that they themselves had experienced situations in their lives where they had been in need of help or assistance and could therefore relate to those with similar needs. In this sense, volunteers grounded their responsibility to help in their recognition of a general human vulnerability they shared with refugees: They were aware that what happened to asylum seekers could probably happen to them, too. In fact, there is evidence in our material that the increased contact with refugees which was established through emotional labour and care activities made volunteers aware for the first time that asylum seekers received differential treatment from state and private institutions because of their specific citizenship status, their ethnic origin, their gender or their religious affiliations. In our conversations, some volunteers got emotional when describing their experiences with injustice or asylum seekers' unequal treatment and their feeling of helplessness when confronted with the legal justifications sanctioning this state of affairs. Through their personal relationships with asylum seekers, they could put themselves in the shoes of people with otherwise very different lives. This enabled them to care and to feel moral injustice – which, in my mind, is essential for thinking differently about citizenship, migration policies and the state. This is probably also partially implied in what Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) has called "thinking with care."

In other instances, volunteers compared refugees' precarious life situations with their own, better socio-economic positions. They also often referred to the increasingly limited protection socially disadvantaged groups in Germany were receiving from the state and that therefore, civil society organisations had to step in to make up for lacking or malfunctioning state institutions. Through these opinions, the interviewees expressed their conviction that the welfare state was in danger. They perceived it as fragile because of its increasingly unreliable capacity to protect the socially weak. Kelz (2015, 12) argues that these shared fears of precarity can function as an incentive to establish networks of solidarity based on an apprehension of shared precariousness and the inadequacy of state institutions. In this sense, volunteers engaging in activities for and with asylum seekers based on an apprehension of precarity and precariousness appear to share political ideas about the negative aspects of liberal capitalism and its consequences across different class, gender or ethnic divisions.

However, it is doubtful whether empathy is enough for the networks established on this principle to become relevant political activists for refugee rights. Lorey (2012), for example, shows us that the promise of security entailed in formal discourses of citizenship in a Western welfare state like Germany is intrinsically bound to the fear of the dangerous and precarious "Others". Therefore, the discourse of citizenship also has a certain disciplinary power, where citizens seek to avoid becoming 'othered' themselves by fulfilling social expectations about how a "good citizen" should be (Anderson, 2013). Fear of the migration crisis, insecurity and the perceived need for protection thus become important aspects of the subjection of citizens, where a bond between the individual, society and the state is established (Lorey, 2012). This argument may explain why even volunteers who appear to be critical of state institutions and governmental policies towards migrants were generally reluctant to understand their activities as politically motivated acts of resistance to the political system – particularly in relation to the extension of citizenship rights to all migrants – irrespective of their administrative status. This was also evident in an interview with one of the coordinators of an important civil society organisation when they were asked if volunteers were motivated to change refugee politics through their activities:

> **Interviewee:** Well, there is this idea...you see... when you want rights, the rights are not those that are written in the laws, but those that you fight for. Or else, if someone asks for a right, at that moment, it becomes a right. Well, but I have to do something for that to happen. And that requires a bit of power. And some form of political boldness.

> **Interviewer:** Do you think that this is lacking in our times?

> **Interviewee:** It is also a question of capacity. Yes, partly. We cannot do this alone. And the political culture plays a role: In the 80s, we had always said 'systems are there to be changed'. Today, that is something that nobody would say anymore. (laughs)

This example appears to confirm the hypothesis that not all volunteers are neither interested nor ready to become political activists in the traditional sense. Others may actually be critical, but favour a different approach to resistance and change: The decision to concentrate ones' energy on providing informal care and support may relate to a new form of political realism which is not "apolitical", but simply rejects the utopian idea of "changing systems" and instead believes in enacting incremental changes through 'deeds of citizenship' (Isin & Nielsen, 2008) and practical support to those in need. It is, however, possible that these types of care are also drifting into paternalistic forms of power over asylum seekers, ones that are not geared toward heightening their possibilities to become autonomous citizens but rather reinforce their subordinated position in society – particularly when they are decoupled from asylum seekers' own claims and interests for change.

7. Conclusion: Care as charity or as an act of citizenship?

The growing number of asylum seekers in Germany has been paralleled by the heightened activity of a growing number of volunteers who spend considerable amounts of time, emotion and money to provide a wide range of social services to asylum seekers. I have argued that some of these activities can be conceptualized as care work – work that bridges commercialized and non-commercialized forms of social services provided through either loose network structures or traditional forms like CSOs or associations and coordinated at the communal and local levels of public administrations.

My analysis, derived from a small qualitative study in the city of Bielefeld, Germany, reveals that volunteers and their associations often assume the role of mediators, whereby they have the power to influence how asylum seekers gain access to a mix of formal and informal services and social protection.

The findings indicate that at the individual level of interaction between citizens and refugees, the increasing involvement of volunteers and civil society initiatives in communal structures of care related services for asylum seekers have effectively increased peoples' awareness regarding the situation of refugees by making visible asylum seekers' differential access to rights in the local community. At the more organisational level, the strong focus on informal care and social support activities has also conditioned civil societies' traditional ways of working and decreased their opportunities for designing and implementing concerted political pressure and advocacy campaigns for refugee rights. This suggests that changing interactions at the personal level, which indicate shifts in consciousness, may nevertheless not always automatically make their way to the organisational level of political change.

In conclusion, I argue that a care perspective on volunteers' activities is fruitful for showing the extent to which their practices can be understood as part of changes "from below" which are products of new forms of thinking about migration and citizenship. While volunteers gain a heightened perception of regimes of inclusion and exclusion at work in migration policies through their caring activities, they are, however, not automatically contesting ways of hegemonic thinking through their actions. This is because many volunteers are only marginally interested in getting involved in public protest or in traditional forms of political action in the public sphere, and some of the current institutional contexts are not conducive in getting volunteers to play a more transformative role in citizenship policies.

However, this is not the case for all forms of voluntary activities. For some volunteers and organisations, providing informal spaces of exchange and care between people gives both volunteers and asylum seekers the chance to think differently about each other and the roles they themselves play in their respective societies (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012). New forms of informal organizing furthermore force established actors in local asylum politics to reconsider their influence and legitimacy. This is necessary for making the political personal, so to speak, and to bring migration policy into the homes and actual lives of real people who would otherwise be unaffected by migration policies. New forms of organizing, however, also re-quire more long-term strategies to effectively challenge refugee policies and society's view of 'the other' from below. They especially need to incorporate asylum-seekers and refugees themselves in the processes of their activities. Only then can the refugee-related care work become truly transformative in the sense of developing new understandings of the relation of citizenship and care.

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