# Coming Together in the So-Called Refugee Crisis

## A Collaboration Among Refugee Newcomers, Migrants, Activists and Anthropologists in Berlin

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**ABSTRACT:** In 2015, Germany entered what would later become known as the 'refugee crisis'. The *Willkommenskultur* (welcoming culture) trope gained political prominence and met with significant challenges. In this article, we focus on a series of encounters in Berlin, bringing together refugee newcomers, migrants, activists and anthropologists. As we thought and wrote together about shared experiences, we discovered the limitations of the normative assumptions of refugee work. One aim of this article is to destabilise terms such as refugee, refugee work, success and failure with our engagements in the aftermath of the 'crisis'. Refugee work is not exclusively humanitarian aid directed towards the alleviation of suffering but includes *being* and *doing* together. Through productive failures and emergent lessons, the collaboration enhanced our understandings of social categories and the role of anthropology.

**KEYWORDS:** collaboration, engagement, Germany, productive failure, public anthropology, refugee work

In autumn 2015, the arrival of refugee newcomers,[1] primarily from the Middle East but also from Central Europe and Africa, in Germany reached a significant peak (BAMF 2015). Berlin, the city where all the authors lived at the time, found its administrative structures challenged as they attempted to respond to the situation. One of the leading German newspapers, *Tagesspiegel,* reported that more than 600 refugee newcomers were being registered daily (Schönball 2015). The media predicted contradictory impacts of migration on the economy and society. The public perception of the involvement of migrants and refugees in violent events that autumn intensified a collective sense of crisis (Holmes and Castañeda 2016).[2]

However, what has been referred to as the 'refugee crisis'[3] in Germany can be understood as the expression of a diversity of positions concerning an unknown future understood to challenge existing social and political structures, including the identity of Europe itself (Holmes and Castañeda 2016). On the one hand, *Willkommenskultur* (welcoming culture), a term initially coined to refer to policies in favour of the economic integration of refugees (Hann 2015; Joffe 2015), became the framework for understanding a large number of volunteer initiatives[4] supporting the refugee newcomers (Bochow 2015). On the other hand, Germany experienced a rise in conservative protests and right-wing attacks on refugees and their supporters (Jäckle and König 2017). Media outlets of different political inclinations reported on very different crises, effectively activating and interpellating different 'publics' (Briggs 2003; Warner 2002). But

to an extent, they all highlighted the uncertainty of 'integration' – often along the lines of cultural, ethnic and religious difference. Such differences became more prominent in the longer aftermath of the 2015 'refugee crisis'.

In the intervening years (2016, 2017), the peak of the initial enthusiasm of the *Willkommenskultur* was followed by a gradual dwindling of support for the refugee newcomers. This was accompanied by a certain sense of fatigue on the part of the welcoming supporters and by the mainstreaming of an anti-refugee discourse in the public sphere and amongst politicians (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018). There was, so to speak, a *Stimmungswechsel* (mood shift) from 'indifference to ambivalence, to xenophilia and xenophobia' (Borneman and Ghassem-Fachandi 2017: 105).

In the midst of debates saturated with significant uncertainty and affective overtones, a group of anthropologists in Berlin began thinking in September 2015 about different ways to engage the issue. One of the principal ideas involved finding ways of bringing together academics, activists, refugee newcomers and other diverse publics[5] with the purpose of improving, challenging and creating alternatives to existing efforts at 'integration' (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Holmes and Castañeda 2016). In this article, we describe a series of encounters in Berlin that were triggered by a co-organised event, a Sufi music concert performed by Tümata Berlin, a local Sufi music therapy network, for refugee newcomers. We also describe subsequent collaborative reflection, analysis and writing in relation to these encounters.

## A Series of Encounters

All authors of this article entered into the collaboration at various points. However, the starting point, as mentioned above, was a public concert by Tümata Berlin. Twenty or more refugee newcomers, the majority from Syria, attended the event. Amongst them were those who lived in a shared apartment located in the same building. One of the authors, Mohamed, a refugee newcomer, helped organise the concert and came with a group from the refugee camps in South Berlin (Dahlem). The *Sharehaus* Refugio, an initiative supported by the City Mission of Berlin (*Berliner Stadtmission*), where locals and refugees live together in a shared apartment building, offered space for the concert.

Nasima contacted Tümata Berlin and asked them whether they wanted to perform for the refugee new-

comers. Mustafa invited some of the local refugee newcomers and helped translate the flyers. Gabi and Johanna helped prepare for and organise the event. Maria circulated the flyers and spread the word on social media. Mohamed brought the refugee newcomers living in a local refugee camp to the concert. Lilas, another refugee newcomer who came to Berlin a few months earlier than Mohamed, as well as Seth, joined the collaboration after the concert.

Immediately after the event, Mohamed went back to the refugee camp in Dahlem. Maria went to dinner with a few Sufi musicians and members of the audience from the neighbourhood to a local 'Turkish' restaurant in Neukölln. A few days after the event, Nasima returned to Refugio to join the newcomers in *Dabke,* a Syrian line dance event. On the same evening, in another part of Berlin, Maria, Johanna and other colleagues from the anthropology department of Freie Universität Berlin attended a public lecture by Arjun Appadurai in an overcrowded room, which considered 'traumatic exit', narratives of identity, and the 'ethics of hospitality' (Appadurai 2015a). Mustafa was in Cairo but was in communication with the organisers before, during and after the event. Seth was waiting at the German consulate in San Francisco trying to return to Berlin, as he had been forced to leave due to irregularities in his immigration paperwork. Gabi continued to coordinate refugee-welcoming initiatives in Brandenburg and started to learn Arabic.

The initial music event had taken place in the migrant-majority neighbourhood of Neukölln in Berlin. Tümata Berlin itself was quite diverse in its constitution: native white Germans playing music with first- and second-generation Turkish migrants led by their Turkish teacher. Tümata members not only co-organised the event but also shared comments on an early draft of this article. Members from other Sufi networks in Berlin also attended the event.

After the event had been going on for some time, some refugee newcomers from one of the temporary camps in Berlin came in the room but then soon left for a Halloween street party in another part of the city. Another group of refugees, however, stayed until the end. The dwindling number of refugee newcomers at the concert and their dissatisfaction with the non-Arabic and non-German Sufi music played at the concert were perceived by many as a 'failure' of the event to ensure refugee participation. And yet, the concert succeeded in bringing together newcomer-refugees and the refugees who had arrived earlier, the friends of refugees, refugee activists, Sufi networks, and anthropologists. These identity categories (refugee, ac-

tivist, Sufi, anthropologist) were neither clear-cut nor stable before, during or after the event. In various stages of the collaborative engagement, these categories merged, and other hybrid identities emerged in the process. In the collaboration itself, some of us played more active roles as activists/organisers. Others participated in the event and shared their experiences, while others assumed a more active role in writing about it.

The anthropologists formed a diverse group. Twelve anthropologists joined the Sufi concert. They were connected by birth to countries across the world: Bangladesh, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Egypt, Germany, Italy, the United States and Venezuela. They were at various phases of their anthropological careers – professors, post-doctoral researchers, doctoral and master's students – and were all located in various academic institutions within and outside Germany. Several of them pursued the collaborative writing of this article alongside two refugee newcomers and a refugee activist.

The concert developed into ongoing collaborative encounters, forming both the objects that we analyse here and the means by which we write about them. The planning and realisation of the Sufi musical event and the subsequent meetings, discussions and write-ups were part of a multi-faceted and temporally shifting *experimental collaboration,*[6] which was all about trying out multiple methods of engagement and encountering differences. The event was a nodal point, triggering productivity and influencing our 'expansion' through other networks beyond its confines. Soon after the concert, Nasima, Mustafa, Mohamed, Seth and Johanna joined a follow-up meeting with the refugee newcomers who had attended the event. Over the next two years, Mustafa kept in regular contact with Mohamed, translating for him during various discussions. Maria developed a friendship with Lilas and recorded several of their numerous conversations. Nasima and Gabi shared their thoughts on a daily basis. All authors (except Mohamed) were present at the last collaborative meeting in 2017. It was arranged in a café right next to *Sharehaus Refugio*, where the concert had taken place. More than analysing the afterthoughts about 'only' one event, these encounters created a reflective space to discuss our interests and share the experiences of our engagements elsewhere.

Coming together did not transcend the privileges, power discrepancies, and social and administrative categories in which we are all imbricated. Each of us came to refugee work through different entry points and overcame specific difficulties to become *engaged*

in our work. Our collaborative engagement of refugees, migrants, activists, and anthropologists is part and parcel of refugee work within anthropology that goes beyond conducting ethnographic research on refugees. While we consider *engagement* as a broader frame of action, *collaboration* requires a specific mode of engagement with a stated goal of intensified exchange. Collaborations require conditions for stabilising them into larger projects. Even in the absence of dedicated funding for our collaboration we continued to meet. *Coming together* produced ripple effects, which each author carried over at the time with their refugee work elsewhere.

The productivities of our collaboration were not born out of a composite of distinct, stable 'cultural' identities – neither national (German/non-German), religious, (Christian/Muslim/Sufi/Secularist/Atheist), ethno-racial (white and people of colour), gendered (men, women and other genders), classed (professor/doctoral student/graduate/undergraduate), nor expert (academic anthropologists/Sufis/activists/refugees) identities – but out of the engaged mingling of identities which helped mobilise a collective politics of well-being (Fischer 2014).

As a vulnerable group, refugee newcomers experience sustained trauma in their *forced* path of deterritorialised identity as well as structural discrimination on a daily basis. Yet, some concerns connect the refugees with the non-refugees in the contemporary neoliberal moment. In Berlin, everyday struggles – such as housing, gentrification, financial stability, professional security, access to education, mobility, neighbourhood organisation, childcare and safe spaces – in one way or another involve all of us and the general public. Finding common ground of solidarity may not immediately resolve the structural inequality and the hierarchies of dependency within refugee work and the broader struggle against austerity measures, but it is a necessary step in that direction, a step which may open new doors along the way. *Coming together* in collaborative engagements and encounters facilitates that process of finding common ground. How did we, the authors of this article, venture into these forms of engagement and collaboration?

## *Coming Together*: Spelling Out the Recipe, Mixing Methods

In this section, we spell out our recipe, our methods for doing things, without trying to leave our failures aside. In contrast, through our failures emerged some of the most productive lessons. We reflect on the lim-

its and possibilities of collaboration in *coming together* with people fleeing war, hunger and poverty, and aspiring and working for a better life elsewhere (Appadurai 2015a) or longing to return to their respective home countries (*Deutsche Welle* 2017). We hope this article contributes to engaged, public anthropology in action, to breaking down distinctions between *doing* and *theorising.* We illustrate this by focusing on three closely overlapping domains: *engagement, collaboration* and *emergent lessons* from *productive failures.*

For Nasima, Sufism in Berlin was a *field of enquiry* that she combined with refugee work, a *field of engagement* (Selim 2018). She collected notes from the diverse publics involved in the Sufi musical event described above and compiled them into a first, rough draft. This text was circulated amongst those interested in collaboration through writing. The right margin of the document grew as comments were added, and the track-changes option changed the colours of the text, as different authors cut, added and revised. The refugee newcomers and activists contributed through recorded and transcribed meetings with the anthropologists as well as hand-written and typed responses and commentary that were added to the text.

In different constellations, we met each other in local cafés, at the Freie Universität Berlin, in the living rooms of our apartments, and at various events, spending at times hours (and often half a day) to share experiences and challenge each other's opinions. We took turns revising drafts and meeting and discussing together, sometimes recording these conversations and sometimes writing simultaneously together using shared writing platforms. During this collaboration, all the authors were engaged in refugee work in various capacities. The shared experiences and insights were drawn from these other engagements, and they provided materials for our discussion meetings and shaped the arguments of this article.

All authors of the article had been engaged in refugee work in Berlin at the time the concert took place and thereafter. Mustafa maintained regular contact with the refugee newcomers in the Dahlem neighbourhood and translated conversations to and from Arabic. Seth engaged with LGBTQ refugee initiatives in Berlin and worked on his reflections on Europe's so-called refugee crisis. Nasima volunteered to translate for Urdu- and Bengali-speaking refugee newcomers. Maria collaborated on a photo-story project with refugee newcomers, and Johanna conducted *Tai Chi* classes with women refugees in an organisation that provided them with various forms of social support. Gabi coordinated local welcome initiatives throughout Brandenburg (a province surrounding Berlin), and Lilas was about to begin her work as a psycho-social counsellor working with other refugee newcomers; she was also engaged with several other refugee initiatives. Mohamed continued his efforts to learn the German language and to find employment as an Arabic language instructor.

The materials from the working draft were presented to the anthropological public on three occasions. In the winter of 2015, Nasima, Maria and Johanna presented the first draft at a working group meeting of anthropologists and graduate students at the Freie Universität Berlin. In the summer of 2016, Seth, Maria and Johanna presented a revised version at an anthropology conference in Milan. The questions raised by other anthropologists challenged our initial arguments. Their critical comments pushed our conversations and writing in new directions. In the spring of 2018, Mustafa, Maria and Gabi shared their after-thoughts in a meeting with anthropologists, students, activists and a broad interested public in Berlin. This third occasion included an audience far beyond anthropologists. Our collaboration was discussed as part of a broader panel of refugee initiatives and collaborative research projects.[7] The engaging discussion that followed encouraged us to sustain our focus on how collaboration amongst various publics opens up many possibilities:[8] raising awareness for multiple groups, promoting understanding, and questioning and confronting received knowledge and categories.

## Engagement: Meeting, Writing and Living

Refugee work and the politics of asylum-seeking in Germany have a long, convoluted, multi-directional history (Loescher 1993). During the 2015 'refugee crisis', many initiatives and organisations in Berlin engaged with initiatives that were about sharing *experiences,* bridging differences between 'us' and 'them' and promoting collective well-being – for example making music, story-telling, dancing, eating together *with* refugee newcomers and discussing 'fears and hopes' together. Anthropologists in Berlin too were involved in engagements, research and publications.[9] Amongst various initiatives, the collective got involved in a series of conversations with Syrian and Iraqi refugee newcomers living in the local camps. The concert was a spin-off of ideas emerging from discussions in the recently formed collective of engaged anthropologists based at the Freie Universität Berlin.

Collaboration leaves curiosity open to what may happen. Moreover, the urge to write about this collec-

tive experience emerged only after the event. In that sense, what we did is an example of action anthropology (Rubinstein 1986; Tax 1975). In some cases, experimental methodologies may lead to *more* ethical engagements with people, more profound forms of listening or paying attention to others, and to uncertainty, instability and hybridity in ontologies, knowledge and written accounts (Mann et al. 2011; Stevenson 2014). The ethics of our engagement and methodology was contested when we presented an early draft of our article to anthropology colleagues. We received comments such as 'Is this really refugee work?' 'Was it ethical to write about the event when the initial motivation was not anthropological research but refugee activism?' 'Can this be considered anthropological work?' This early criticism made us reflect on those categories (refugee work and anthropological work) and the challenges of collaborative engagement.

*Writing* ethnographic text is a crucial aspect of doing anthropology, though this is not often necessary in Sufi practice, refugee 'integration' or refugee activism. A few days after the concert, Nasima sent out a broad invitation to write about the event *together,* to which four anthropologists responded and which others declined. The Sufi musicians of Tümata Berlin, the Refugio, and a few refugees were also invited to be co-authors. Two refugee newcomers joined. Others declined the invitation because they were busy *doing* other things they needed to do *well.*[10] Tümata Berlin continued to play music in concerts and at organised music-therapy seminars. Refugio continued to mobilise refugee newcomers and their friends with diverse events. Many refugee newcomers continued to advocate for and search for educational and employment opportunities in Berlin.

While anthropologists often get involved in various versions of practical work with people, writing remains a key mode of anthropological work, and the *poetics and politics* of representation are crucial (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Anthropological writing is not just a device of research dissemination. It is also a practice through which the *field of enquiry* itself changes – as the writers are forced to translate thoughts into words – into a *field of engagement.* We suggest that the work in the *field* involves not only documentation (as in ethnography) but also *correspondence* with others and maintaining sustainable relationships, a broader aim of anthropology (Ingold 2014, 2017). *Correspondence* refers to 'living *attentionally* with others' (Ingold 2014: 389), disrupting the *lonely anthropologist* figure (Gottlieb 1995) through the process of collaboration.

## Collaboration: The Returning Manuscript

Writing this article together humbled the anthropologists in their understandings of doing public anthropology (Borofsky 2000; Checker 2009; Purcell 2000; Scheper-Hughes 2009). In our meetings, we all struggled to make sense of the obsession with concepts of the anthropologist authors. The refugee activist (Gabi) and the refugee newcomers (Lilas and Mohamed) caused the anthropologists to rethink the importance of jargon, concepts and appearing up-to-date in theory and scholarship. Across many drafts and more than a dozen rounds of collaborative writing, we struggled to reduce the social science jargon to a minimum. The point has been for anthropologists to come together with non-anthropologist refugees and activists in a *field of engagement,* in multi-directional refugee work.

Following Stacy Pigg (2013) and the 'slow research' paradigm (Adams et al. 2014), we argue that sitting down, listening to each other and writing together about it can open up a space to question received certainties and incorporate contested perspectives. By organising and participating in the event with refugee newcomers, their friends, activists, and Sufis, we all *enacted* other identities. By writing it up together, we attempted to challenge the power hierarchies in our own narratives, which is what Charles Briggs might call 'communicable cartographies' (2005, 2007).

For example, 'writing an article for anthropologists' was not of any interest to Lilas but to include the voice of a refugee was. That motivated her to be part of the discussion and the writing process. She also contributed to the discussion of the early and late newcomers. She pointed our attention towards how the timing of the arrival generated a rift between the reception, perception and participation of the refugee newcomers in the *Willkommenskultur* and its aftermath, when the welcoming support began to dwindle. Mustafa spoke of some form of *post-refugism moment*: the more time that refugees had, the more resources they were able to build up, and their needs changed accordingly. The ones who arrived later had less time and resources. Gabi, as an experienced activist in refugee work, underlined this point by stressing the hidden dynamics of intersectionality and drawing attention to the 'multiple subjectivities' amongst refugees (Giordano 2008). By saying 'the refugee is not a programme', she opened up the discussion: For whom is the *Willkommenskultur*? What is it about for each person/group? Together, we reflected on the different perception of the concert amongst

one refugee group staying at the Refugio and the other group of refugee newcomers who had stayed briefly and then left the concert early.

Lilas, Mohamed and Gabi, as co-authors, challenged the narratives, categories and perspectives of each individual in the collaboration. Lilas and Gabi learnt about anthropological concept-building in the process and emphasised their wish for the presence of the 'voice(s) of refugees' not only as informants but also as authors. Gabi constantly asked 'But what is it [anthropology] good for?' in the process of writing and discussing the paper, and she questioned the direct use of anthropological work to understand the lives of the refugees and activists involved in the collaboration. These discussions evoked strong reflections on the part of the anthropologists about how to collaborate with refugees and activists in the context of the 2015 'refugee crisis'. The anthropologists involved tried to articulate answers to that question during our discussions. We hope that this article will encourage other anthropologists to try to respond to these two questions: What is anthropology good for? What do we learn by collaborating with others?

## Emergent Lessons from Productive Failures

'Failure reveals a different side of human aspirations, limitations, and measures than does success' (Appadurai 2015b). Our engagements and collaborations were only partial successes in the sense of bringing together different people, practices and interests. This insight is useful in thinking about the 'failures' of the experimental collaboration. As we mentioned above, many of the refugee newcomers left for a Halloween party and some of the organisers felt like the whole event was, therefore, a failure. In the first meeting after the concert, we came to know from Mohamed that they were interested in learning about and experiencing 'German culture' (which Halloween ironically was understood to be, in a sense because it was a big street party in the centre of Berlin) and sharing 'Arabic culture' with Germans, but they were not so interested in other cultural performances (such as Turkish and Sufi music).

This can be considered a failure only if people are focused on particular aims – for example, that of having (a specific number of) refugee newcomers attend for a specific period of time and participate in specific ways. However, if we allow ourselves to let go of the logic of efficiency and hegemonic moralities of humanitarian success, and instead experience events

as they unfold in multiple directions, we can see the productivity of such failures.

What counts as *legitimate* refugee work? After the presentation of an early draft of this article, other anthropologists challenged us. Some argued against the idea that our encounters and engagements, the Sufi concert, and the subsequent collaborations could be considered *refugee work*. Others challenged the ethics of our collaboration in a time of humanitarian crisis with life and death stakes. Many considered legitimate refugee work to be humanitarian service performed *for* uninvolved refugees. Deeply seated within a humanitarian logic of care,[11] such perceptions led to an ongoing emergency crisis with specific moralities focused on the genuine imperative to meet survival needs: food, clothing, shelter, medicine and so forth, while neglecting crucial aspects of becoming-in-the-world and aspiration and action towards alternative futures.

This insight pushed us to re-examine together the category of refugee work and the relationship between suffering, well-being and temporality. The usual focus on the past of refugee newcomers needs to be replaced with a focus on present well-being and future-oriented possibilities (Appadurai 2015a). In that sense, collaboration here can be understood as more than assisting refugees with achieving the goal of one-sided integration: how integration is often made to be the responsibility of the immigrant, migrant or refugee (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). Lilas, for example, positioned herself against the concept of 'integration'. Her goal was not to become German but to live together with her German neighbours as a Syrian. This reveals another measure of aspiration which is of immediate relevance to many refugee newcomers. Voicing her objection to integration repeatedly as a co-author was one of many instances in which she stepped beyond the role of passive informant in need of refugee assistance.

We must acknowledge here the various forms of structural violence (Farmer 1996) affecting refugee newcomers as well as different types of social suffering (Kleinman et al. 1997) experienced by them. More recently, some anthropologists have moved away from a foreboding sense of 'dark anthropology' (Ortner 2016), with its exclusive focus on the suffering others as objects, towards an 'anthropology of the good' (Robbins 2013). However, we position ourselves with those who acknowledge and theorise suffering and well-being as part and parcel of the contemporary experience. Furthermore, we suggest that collaborative efforts towards collective well-being might enable

anthropologists to move with research participants through this continuum.

## Conclusion

When does welcoming stop and living together start? In one of our discussions, Maria raised this question, and we have continued to think against this dichotomy. As much as we appreciate and participate in *Willkommenskultur* initiatives, we simultaneously aim to critically examine the political economy of voluntary initiatives – including our own. We seek not to disparage efforts focused on humanitarian goals and survival, but to dig into the structures and contexts of their mobilisation. We posit that *welcoming* must at some point be replaced with *living together.*

Understanding the contemporary welcoming initiatives and collaborative engagements in relation to past struggles and achievements in refugee work is important. We feel that we must remind our readers that any contemporary initiative must situate itself in the much longer history of refugee work in Berlin. On the one hand, there has been a significant backlash against migrants and refugees from right-wing extremists in Germany and the role played by the centrist liberal and conservative politicians regarding the legislation of regressive refugee laws (e.g. limiting the possibilities of family reunification).[12] On the other hand, the general public's knowledge about asylum laws has increased and the continued struggle of refugees as a political group has entered the mainstream discussion. The consequences are ambivalent and multi-fold, and they are both positive and negative. It is clear that what had been considered a minority concern before has become a majority concern since the so-called refugee crisis. The debate surrounding refugees and migration has become highly politicised and continues to receive public attention.

In such moments of critical awareness, anthropologists have been not only documenting and theorising what is going on but also joining broad publics in collaborative encounters. The anthropological field, therefore, is not only a field of *enquiry* but also a field of *engagement.* Given this reality, we emphasise anthropology as a form of *praxis* and, to employ a Latin American concept indicating the mutual production of action and theory, as 'a theory of transforming action' (Freire 2018: 126). Such engagements might include writing with non-anthropologists, being questioned and challenged, and having the instability of concepts and realities highlighted through

multi-directional, multi-vocal coming together. The engagements, encounters and emergent lessons in this particular collaboration made us aware that 'we' (anthropologists, refugees, migrants and activists) are caught up in shared crises as well as in the mundane realities of everyday life. In times of growing xenophobia, nationalism and austerity, we continue to struggle to collaborate and write, and in these processes we succeed and productively fail.

Since the 'refugee crisis' in 2015, there have been discursive shifts with impacts on the configuration of refugee and migration categories as well as on the widening spectrum of populist and anti-immigration sentiments (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018). In this critical moment, *coming together* by staying engaged with one another offers possibilities for destabilising difference, re-imagining the role of anthropology, and working towards alternative futures.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

1. We use the term refugee newcomer in response to the many terms that designate people who fled their countries and arrived in Germany that autumn. In German, *Geflüchtete* and *Flüchtlinge* are commonly used terms for the refugee newcomers. While the former (*Geflüchtete*) gives a more active connotation to the process of migration, as it is a past-participle adjectival construction meaning 'those who fled', the latter (*Flüchtlinge*) is rather essentialising as a noun that refers to the condition of being a refugee. In Germany, these two connotations seem to mobilise different positions in refugee work, including notions of deservingness and of the radical alterity of refugees. In contrast, *Asylsuchende* (asylum-seekers) is a technical, administrative term for those who submit an application for asylum. *Asylant* (asylum people) is often considered to have xenophobic connotations.

2. *Refugee* and *migrant* are unstable categories and not necessarily separate groups, but rather socially constructed terms dependent on changing historical and political contexts (Allen et al. 2018). *Migrant* usually connotes chosen mobility and undeserving of state support whereas *refugee* usually connotes forced mobility and deserving of state support. Both terms are often differentially racialised (see Holmes and Castañeda 2016).

3. *Refugee crisis* is a contested term. Many refugees, activists, and politicians have questioned for whom it is a *crisis* and argued that the term refugee crisis could be replaced by terms such Europe's identity crisis or bureaucracy crisis to broaden the spectrum of realities involved when talking about the 2015 phenomenon (Hahlen and Kühn 2016; Nougayrède 2016). Framing the issue of a large number of people seeking asylum as a crisis makes the term refugee crisis problematic.

4. This included a large number of local and national initiatives, volunteer networks, neighbourhood collectives, and associations.

5. Although things are rapidly changing, anthropology has often been conceived of as a discipline of observation and reflection in a field in which the anthropologist should not interfere. Although the key practice of 'participant observation' suggests that anthropologists should become practically immersed in people's lives, anthropologists are sometimes hesitant about interfering with the conditions of sociality that they see. Throughout the history of anthropology, this has created a division between anthropologists focused on 'theory' and those focused on 'practice' (Rylko-Bauer et al. 2006; Van Willigen 2002).

6. Paul Rabinow (2011) argued for a shift away from individual projects to trying out experiments in collaboration, asking for more participation than observation. Adolfo Estalella and Tomás Sánchez Criado (2018) discussed *experimental collaboration* hinging on forming epistemic partnerships in the field.

7. Mustafa, Maria and Gabi participated in an interactive panel discussion with anthropology students and a refugee women's group that took place in May 2018 as part of a lecture series, 'Engaged Anthropology *und glokale Zugehörigkeiten* [and Glocal Belonging]'. Mustafa is currently collaborating with a Madrid-based non-governmental organisation to share experiences and transfer knowledge on how to engage with refugees on a different level.

8. See Didier Fassin (2013, 2017) for ambivalent accounts of the problems of imagining/encountering between ethnography and diverse anthropological 'publics'.

9. Hansjörg Dilger and Kristina Dohrn's (2016) edited volume discusses research collaboration in the aftermath of the refugee crisis, which was conducted by undergraduate students to document the perspectives and experiences of refugee women living in local camps. See also Dilger and colleagues (2017) for a (self-) critical account of the structural limitations and the ethical and practical challenges of seminar-based research projects about the refugee newcomers.

10. During the third presentation of our work in 2018 (mentioned above), we discussed how refugee work should probably begin from personal/professional needs and motivations, which entails the question: 'What does one do well?'

11. Miriam Ticktin (2011) criticises the humanitarian 'regime of care' in France based on care and protection for the unintended consequences of privileging a few at the cost of many. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi's edited volume (2010) also discusses the global politics of combining humanitarian aid and military action with legitimising tropes of rescuing lives and alleviating suffering.

12. Since March 2016, the German government had suspended family reunification. In 2018, the suspension was lifted to limit the number of family members of refugees with subsidiary status to one thousand people per month (*Deutsche Welle* 2018).

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