

Article

Buddy Schemes between Refugees and Volunteers in Germany: Transformative Potential in an Unequal Relationship?

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Abstract

Since 2016, many German citizens have participated in so-called ‘buddy schemes’ in which volunteers provide personalised support to refugees to help them build their new lives in Germany. These relationships are characterised by ethnic, gender, and age differences between the two parties. This article looks at buddy schemes from the perspective of both volunteers and refugees and investigates whether their relationships open up spaces for transformative citizenship practices, or rather reinforce exclusionary discourses. Drawing on feminist theories of care, the article describes how volunteers and refugees attach meaning to their activities and roles in the relationship. On the one hand, values attached to caring relationships, such as emotional closeness, trust, and respect, contribute to migrants’ heightened sense of self-esteem and autonomy and foster volunteers’ sense of responsibility for fighting against inequality. On the other hand, both parties enter into particular logics of care that potentially reinforce power hierarchies between them. These ambiguous dynamics influence the possibility of transformative citizenship practices on both sides. While some volunteers and refugees develop and take a critical stance on restrictive migration policies in their relationships with others, others reinforce their exclusionist viewpoints on who deserves to be helped and by whom.

Keywords

buddy schemes; citizenship; gender; migration; refugees; volunteering

Issue

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1. Introduction

Since the increased refugee influx in Germany in 2015, many volunteers all over the country have actively sought to facilitate refugees’ starting a new life in Germany, marking what has been subsequently termed a veritable ‘dispositif of helping’ (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017). Others went so far as to talk about a new movement of volunteering for refugees (Karakayali & Kleist, 2016). In the beginning, most volunteers were supporting state-run temporary shelters by providing short-term relief assistance in a situation that was depicted as an emergency situation by both governmental institutions and the media alike (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Karakayali & Kleist, 2016). From 2016 onwards, administrative settlement processes became swifter and

more institutionalised. While many asylum seekers were still waiting for decisions on their right to stay in the country, they slowly began to move from communal shelters into independent accommodations. Around this time, volunteer buddy schemes started to gain popularity among volunteers, city councils, and civil society organisations who argued that they were a useful tool to move towards longer-term support for migrants’ successful social and economic integration into German society (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend [BMFSJ], 2019). In the buddy schemes, German volunteers provide personalised support to one or several newly arrived refugees. The buddy schemes build on the assumption that because of their formalised citizenship, resident volunteers have privileged access to the relevant cultural, economic, or social capital needed

to facilitate migrants' integration into society (Arbeiterwohlfahrt Bundesverband e.V. [AWO], 2016). The activities volunteers engage in within the buddy-schemes are varied and involve administrative, social, and emotional support. They are not focused only on one project, institution, or activity. Some volunteers engage in formalised partnerships with refugees, which are officialised by written agreements with non-governmental organisations. The great majority, however, maintains relationships that are more informal in nature. Thus, what distinguishes buddy schemes from other voluntary activities in refugee aid are the particularly intimate and long-term relationships between volunteers and refugees on which they are often based and the very informal, non-institutionalised context in which they evolve (Cantat & Feischmidt, 2019). In this sense, the buddy schemes represent a move away from a humanitarian imperative of helping in times of conceived crisis towards a more personalised form of long-term informal social support between individuals who choose to care for each other's needs outside of organised public structures within the private realm. In this sense, voluntary buddy schemes are similar to informal caring relationships which are often found among family members or friends.

The intimate caring relationships that characterise buddy schemes may well be interpreted as a rebellious practice of non-reciprocal and disinterested service to the 'Other' (Van Dyk, Dowling, & Haubner, 2016). They are noteworthy practices of a certain kind of civil disobedience in the cases in which volunteers support refugees who are threatened with deportation or who are discriminated against. At this point, it is important to recognise that since 2016, the buddy schemes have been operating in times in which migration policies in Germany have seen wide-reaching changes, with the overall aim of reducing refugee arrivals (Hess et al., 2016). As a result of these legislative changes, many of the volunteers active in buddy schemes are now accompanying refugees who are threatened with deportation or face severe restrictions through their settlement conditions. At the same time, however, volunteers may reinforce highly gendered and hierarchic relationships of dependence between Germans and foreigners instead of contributing to refugees' increased autonomy and participation in society. This is because buddy schemes are built on unequal power relations between 'helpers' and those individuals who are to be 'helped' which is -not least from a postcolonial perspective- paradigmatic of a wide range of humanitarian and aid relationships in development, migrant and social work contexts all over the globe, which have been criticised for their victimising effects (Cantat & Feischmidt, 2019; Cook, 2007; Schott-Leser, 2018).

The above-mentioned political significance of these emotionally and morally charged relationships is easily overlooked 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 individ-

uals (O'Connell Davidson, 2005). Furthermore, buddy schemes appear to continue to promote a 'myth of apolitical volunteering' (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017) because, through some of their practices, they seem to locate social welfare provision for asylum seekers permanently outside the state's responsibility.

In light of these contradictory perspectives on volunteering and its effects on migration politics, this article focuses on the relationship between volunteers and refugees in buddy schemes. In particular, the article asks: Have buddy schemes in Germany turned volunteers into civil society activists in the fight for migrants' rights? Do buddy schemes help increase migrants' and asylum seekers' possibilities of making autonomous decisions and becoming their own rights advocates? Drawing on feminist theories of care and Isin's and Nielsen's (2008) theory on 'acts of citizenship', I argue that volunteers and refugees develop specific logics of care which are grounded in their different gender, age, and class positions. By relating their personal experiences of mutual care with gender, class, and age positions, volunteers and migrants link individual action to structural constraints for the political transformation of prevalent migration regimes. The first section of the article conceptualises buddy schemes through theories of care as both representative of particular sets of practices and moral values. In the following section, I describe the nature of the unequal relationships between buddies and how they experience these. I continue by analysing the consequences of gendered, classed, and ethnicised differences for their caring practices and their understanding of justice and migration policy. I conclude that buddy schemes have the potential to both reinforce and break down differences between volunteers and refugees which arise out of the care logics that guide their relationships in different contexts.

2. Methods

The article is based on interview material collected in the context of a small research project on civil society activism for refugees in the city of Bielefeld, employing a focused ethnographic research methodology (Knoblauch, 2005). I started in 2016 by mapping different institutions and organisations active in civil society support for migrants in Bielefeld through documentary analysis and observation. In addition, eight managers (project coordinators in organisations, the city council, and the church), as well as 12 volunteers active in humanitarian shelters, were interviewed in order to investigate the structures of volunteer support in the city (Stock, 2017). Based on the findings, the subsequent data collection focused more prominently on the nature of buddy schemes. I was interested in the subjective views on volunteer support of both implicated parties- refugees and volunteers, in order to investigate the effect of caring practices for acts of citizenship on both sides of the relationship. Thus, in 2017, I participated in several training events organised for and by volunteers involved in buddy schemes in the city.

Through contacts with both volunteers and associations, a female research assistant and I were able to select and interview a total of six buddy pairs. This resulted in a total of 12 interviews: six volunteers and six asylum seekers. The interviews were semi-structured, between one and two hours long, and involved questions about the nature of activities undertaken together, interviewee's perspectives on the meaning and significance of buddy schemes, as well as the perceived connection between buddy schemes and migration policy on local and national levels.

Our interviewees mirrored the socio-economic characteristics of other volunteers and asylum seekers we talked to and met in training events. The volunteers were middle-class, female, and roughly between 50–65 years of age. Only one interviewee was in her early twenties. Five of the volunteers had been working in social professions and included social workers, psychologists, teachers, and nurses. Some were already retired.¹ The asylum seekers were around 20–30 years old and male, originating from Mali, Guinea, the Ivory Coast, the Balkans, Syria and Ghana. All of them had an insecure or temporary residency status at the time of the interview.

The majority of the interviewed volunteers were not aware of the refugees' legal difficulties to settle in Germany when they got to know them. The interviews were all conducted in German, in which all refugees were conversant. Both parties in the relationship were interviewed independently at a time and place of their choosing. By interviewing both asylum seekers and their buddies of the same buddy pair, I was able to compare the similarities and differences to the care dynamics of their particular relationship. This strategy also enabled me to take into account how different interpretations of the meaning of the same events and practices by both parties shaped the relationship. The fact that both my research assistant and I were German citizens and female has surely impacted on the type of rapport we were able to establish with both asylum seekers and volunteers. While it allowed the volunteers to talk more freely about their gendered roles as women and mothers, it may have increased asylum seekers' distrust in our capacity to understand their position as male refugees- not least because of the fact that the interviews were usually arranged through our contact with the volunteers and not through our contact with the asylum seekers.

The fact that German was not the asylum seekers' native language may further have impacted negatively on the interview situation. However, we sought to par-

ticularly increase the asylum seekers' trust in our intentions through the mediation of their participation by their German buddy partner and also by the guarantee of treating the information they provided about their buddy partner confidentially.

An extensive analysis of the impact of researcher-interviewee rapport is beyond the scope of this article. However, it might be worth mentioning that my knowledge of some of the asylum seekers' countries of origin has certainly helped both in the interview process and the analysis, as well as the fact that both my research assistant and I had been introduced as trustworthy individuals to the volunteers beforehand (either by civil society organisations or other friends of theirs).

3. Buddy Schemes as Caring Relationships

In general, buddy schemes in migration involve pairing up a German citizen with a refugee². Simply speaking, for the volunteer, this means taking on responsibilities of care for one or a group of refugees. Here, 'care' refers to a range of practices because activities that buddies undertake with each other are rarely clearly defined from the start and instead develop throughout the relationship. In the excerpt below, a volunteer explains how her relationship to the refugee slowly developed through initial contacts in the temporary shelter where she had helped him with the translation of an official letter:

Well, and from then on, he contacted me with every paper, every letter. I signed a paper when he moved into his new apartment, kind of saying that....I am making sure that -in the words of the landlady- that not a whole African family moves into his one-room apartment. Well, and in-between we invited each other to our birthdays and what have you. He has laid the floor in my apartment, according to the principle 'I have helped you, now you help me'. Ah, well and in the meantime, we have organised his passport -that was also a hell of running around and applications and back again.

In all of the cases we encountered during participant observation in training events and during the interviews, volunteers had met their buddies in 2013–2015 while they were active in humanitarian support in shelters for newly arrived refugees.³ Similar to Scheibelhofer's (2019) analysis, the volunteers mentioned that they felt particular sympathy for the refugees they agreed

¹ I actively intended to include male buddies and those with migration background in the research, in order to count on valuable contrasting perspectives. While I was able to establish contact with three of them, I have not been able to agree on an interview date with them and/or their buddies. In line with the information we gathered from social organisations in the city involved in buddy scheme programs, the buddy pairs we interviewed represent 'typical' characteristics in terms of participants' gender, age, and class composition in the context of the city of Bielefeld. Nevertheless, the findings of this very small sample are not generalisable to buddy schemes in general and can only identify noteworthy aspects which require further investigation in order to enable theory building.

² There are, of course, also buddies who do not hold German citizenship. We have been in contact with one male buddy from an African country, for example, who came to Germany twenty years ago as an asylum seeker himself. However, the majority of buddies in Bielefeld are still people who were born in Germany and have spent most of their life there.

³ Conversations with social workers confirmed that this was a frequent pattern observed in buddy schemes and has also been documented by Scheibelhofer (2019) in the case of Austria.

to accompany later on. Thus, even though their first encounter was shaped by humanitarian and depersonalised care logics in the context of acute crisis, both parties described their evolving relationship like friendship, like an intimate and emotional connection with someone they actively choose.

The activities which the volunteers and the refugees mentioned most frequently included accompanying asylum seekers to interviews at the job centre, doctors' appointments, or to the office for asylum claims (*Ausländeramt*), translating and explaining official letters to them, mobilising personal networks to help during their job search, and teaching German. Refugees, by contrast, helped their buddies to move house, did handy work for them, or accompanied them to social gatherings with their own family and friends. Some helped their volunteer buddies to improve their English or French language skills. A lot of time was also spent on simply spending free time together and getting to know the city. Both parties met to take part in cultural activities such as concerts and visiting museums or markets. Several volunteers went on holiday with the refugees or on day trips to visit different German cities and sights. The volunteers had been in regular contact with their refugee buddies for eight months to over two years when the interviews were conducted.

These activities and the personal commitment that buddies feel towards each other can be meaningfully conceptualised as caring practices. In this sense, Thomas (1993, p. 665) has suggested that care is both the 'paid and the unpaid provision of support involving work activities and feeling states' and can be provided in public or domestic spheres, and in a variety of institutional settings. Care is approached here as an empirical concept based on *practice and values*, which can take many different forms (Alber & Drotbohm, 2015; Held, 2006). Philosopher Virginia Held (2006, p. 14) argues, for example, that care concerns not only practices and specific values but also specific ethical thinking. Crucial in her understanding of care is that specific ethical values develop on the basis of experience, reflection, and discourse concerning care practices. This also means that ethical thinking and values connected to care can only develop through practical engagement in caring relationships. Similar ideas have been put forward by political philosopher Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2012), who proposes that 'thinking' with care is particularly fruitful to develop inclusionary political consciousness and awareness for difference.

An ethics of care values interdependence and dependence on others—a fact which is often not sufficiently acknowledged by moral theories that depart from the assumption of autonomous and rational individuals (Held, 2006; Tronto, 2000). It also values emotions such as sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness (Sevenhuijsen, 1998). In a similar vein, Mol (2008) argues that care relationships between patients and volunteers in hospitals are grounded in a 'logic of care', which is based on a set of shared moral understandings

that give rise to a collaborative approach to social support in which both caregivers and care receivers are implicated in taking decisions on the best strategy of action. Mol opposes this approach with logic of choice, in which patients' autonomy and individual decision-making are central.

In line with the principles of ethics of care outlined above, it may be possible that the caring experiences of buddies in migration contexts activate moral values in both parties which give new meaning to both partners' understanding of their social position in relation to each other, their relation to the state, and their differential degree of inclusion into society. In this context, the literature on buddy schemes in other realms of social work provides evidence that relationships between buddies generally involve a mutual added value such as friendship, trust, and gratitude, which goes far beyond the functional value of social support (Hopitzan, 2012; Zwania, 2008). This is also visible in the interviews, in which both the volunteers and the refugees often define the relationship not through the activities they are doing together but through the emotional support they are giving and receiving, as well as the moral values attached:

I feel I am responsible and I think, someone has to be there to translate all of these (official letters regarding his residency status). Someone has to be at his side, without interfering with his private life....I am there when he has questions and needs help. This is how I see this buddy scheme.

4. Linking Care and Acts of Citizenship

Tronto (2000) argues that moral values of responsibility, empathy, or responsiveness that are developed through caring relationships also influence people's understanding of justice and democracy. Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) goes even further to argue that caring relationships represent an essential feature of transformative politics and represent a basis for alternative forms of organising. In this sense, buddy relations may also influence both volunteers' and refugees' conceptualisations of justice and citizenship in relation to migration policy. In other words, it is possible that the practices of confronting together the many difficult moments in which asylum seekers require support in order to successfully claim basic rights and services may effectively challenge and transform both asylum seekers' and volunteers' ideas about who deserves to be included into society and on which moral and political basis this has to occur. Hence, caring practices may not only influence how people think and feel, but also alter ways of engaging with the state, public institutions, or friends and family. In this sense, buddy schemes may actually alter people's political agency in both public and private realms of life.

In this sense, Isin and Nielsen (2008, p. 2) argue that citizenship is not produced only through legal status or the individual rights-claiming activities of individual citizens,

but rather through political, ethical, and aesthetic deeds which he calls ‘acts of citizenship’. He describes these as constituted through collective or individual deeds that rupture social-historical patterns, because they are not necessarily related to formalised and ritualised expressions of formal citizenship such as voting or protesting. For Isin and Nielsen (2008), theorising acts means:

Investigating everyday deeds that are ordinarily called politics. But acts of citizenship are also ethical (as in courageous), cultural (as in religious), sexual (as in pleasurable) and social (as in affiliative), in that they instantiate ways of being that are political. These ways of being constitute the existential conditions of possibility of acts. (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 2)

White (2008, p. 4) defines acts of citizenship as inherently those activities which break with the ‘habitus’ of a persons’ social position in the Bourdieuan sense⁴. In other words, she suggests that an act of citizenship must arise from a breakdown of our capacity to recognise how we should act from our social position in society, while simultaneously responding to this crisis with an invention, a new way of reacting to difference and injustice, for example.

In the case of the refugees and the volunteers, this could mean that the caring practices they engage in through the buddy schemes give them the opportunity to re-evaluate their respective social positions in terms of gender, class, and citizenship rights in a different light, and adapt their views and practices in such a way as to find creative ways to deal with differences and rights hierarchies between their own and their buddies’ positions. Recognising the potential for transformation of concepts of citizenship in care work thus means valuing and acknowledging how citizenship is enacted, reproduced, and contested through the material, emotional, and moral dimensions of care. Because of care’s primary association with women and family-related tasks in the private sphere, care activities and the values attached to them have often been neglected or overlooked in assessments of their political significance regarding citizenship practices (Erel, 2011). The theoretical significance of care thinking then lies in reinterpreting volunteer action in the informal and often private realms of social life as a particular form of knowing and thinking about migration, citizenship, and the state.

5. Unequal Relationships and their Effects on Care Logics and Citizenship Practices

The significance of caring relationships for enactments of citizenship can only be unearthed if their interdepen-

dence with other realms of functioning society is duly acknowledged, particularly in relation to unequal power relationships between states, markets, and citizens. In this context, Ticktin (2011) and Fassin (2012) have shown, for example, how states use a caring discourse to justify very inhumane migration politics by converting ‘rightful’ migrant receivers of care into passive victims, rather than into actors who are able to transform their own fate and claim their own rights.

On a related note, many writers on care have shown how gender, class, and citizenship structure the ways in which people are enmeshed in particular caring relationships which reinforce inequality, rather than mitigate it (Anderson, 2000; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Simply put: power may be manifested over others by helping them, as well as by hurting them (Anderson, 2000, p. 144). This is also why Isin and Nielsen (2008) warn us that acts of citizenship do not always only encompass claims of justice and democracy, but may well also include forms of domination. This is particularly the case when caregivers consciously or unconsciously act with the aim of consolidating their superior position of power or social status over other groups of people in society they are caring for—but not about.

In this sense, Cook (2007) and De Jong (2017) use a postcolonial perspective on women in development to show how some women from the Global North enact exclusionary and degrading practices when engaging in helping women from the Global South. Wang (2013) uses a care perspective to demonstrate how particular logics of care help white, western, female volunteers in a Chinese orphanage to perform their status privileges through the emotional labour they engage in while delegating reproductive care tasks to Chinese personnel. Here, ‘help’ and ‘solidarity’ may be a dominating rather than a liberating form of support.

Braun (2017) is applying these insights from decolonial studies in her ethnographic study on female volunteers in migrants shelters in Germany. She argues (2017, p. 45) that the roles that female volunteers act out in their encounters with refugee women often build on historical and colonial notions of feminine charity which legitimise and define not only who is to be helped and the scope of such help, but which also influence who is to be included into German society and who is not.

The danger that buddy schemes actually lead to further exclusion of migrants rather than to their heightened autonomy and inclusion into society is therefore real, particularly if one considers that buddy schemes are developing within a context of a migration regime which is dominated by humanitarian logics, security concerns, and crisis management rather than characterised by a preoccupation with migrants’ rights (Hess & Kasparek, 2017).

⁴ According to Bourdieu (1990), habitus refers to ones’ habits and dispositions. A critical feature of habitus is that it is embodied, and not only composed of mental attitudes and perceptions (Reay, 2004, p. 433). It is expressed through ways of ‘standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 70). Habitus is acquired through the reality that individuals are socialised in. Thus, habitus represents how society’s structures, culture, and personal history shape the body and the mind, and as a result, shape a person’s social actions. Habitus is not a deterministic concept. Bourdieu was quite explicit about the fact that habitus can lead us to draw on transformative, as well as constraining, courses of action— but always in the context of the demands that impose themselves on individuals in the form of predispositions towards certain ways of behaving (Reay, 2004, p. 433).

Existing social work literature on buddy schemes in child and family-related social work (Dietsche, Guidon, & Ochsner, 2009; Kautza, 2013; PerzImaier & Sonnenberg, 2013) further demonstrates that buddy schemes inherently hinge on the idea that one member in the relationship is 'more knowledgeable' or 'more experienced' than the other and can, therefore, provide support in times of need. This concept implies an intrinsic power imbalance and inequality in buddy relationships. In our case, these power imbalances are further compounded by gender, class, and age differences between the volunteers and the refugees. In one of the buddy relationships, volunteers are represented by relatively privileged, middle-aged women with high social status, economic security and German citizenship. On the other side, the refugees are frequently young, single men with precarious legal status, insecure future prospects, little economic means and a very low social status. In the interviews, both parties were generally very aware of the differences in their position. One of the volunteers described it as follows:

This is not the same level. He is half my age, thus: a child. You know? In my mind, he is a young man. That means, we do not have the same interests, not the same taste, not the same taste in music, you see?

Citizenship status constitutes a very specific aspect in which both parties were made aware of how legalised differences between both parties translated into acute power differences in their relationship. In the interviews with the refugees, for example, some of the young men expressed that they often felt the need to justify the legitimacy of their claims to stay in Germany to their buddies. In the same vein, the volunteers frequently mentioned that they were aware of their privilege in having access to political, social, and economic rights and services while asylum seekers were excluded from them. Both parties often referred to the fear they had of making the refugees dependent on their help and talked about the difficulties in helping them become autonomous in Germany. Refugees often voiced awareness for having to be grateful for the services and help they received from volunteers and stressed their continuing need for outside support.

In what follows, I will show that the awareness for these differences in social status, inclusion into society, and power not only shape the practices and activities both parties engage in but also structure the relations of trust and mutual support on an emotional level in particular ways. They thus form the basis for the justification of specific 'logics of care' (Mol, 2008; Wang, 2013) which guide the practices and values that both refugees and volunteers' adhere to. In this way, they also influence the ways in which both volunteers and refugees think about citizenship, migration policy, and the state. It will become clear that, rather than being an 'either-or' choice between the reinforcement of existing inequalities or rebellious practices of transforming injustice, the buddy re-

lationships display a rather complicated terrain in which different care practices and values of both refugees and volunteers intersect and mix (Braun, 2017; Scheibelhofer, 2019). In this way, they also impact on how both parties perform citizenship practices or 'acts of citizenship' which have the capacity to both reinforce existing relations and subvert them.

6. Caring Practices in Buddy Relationships: Reinforcing Inequality?

Mirroring the studies by Scheibelhofer (2019) and Braun (2017) referred to above, our interview material shows that status inequalities and gendered roles between refugees and volunteers are continuously reproduced in buddy relationships rather than effectively transformed. One example of this is the 'division of labour' between volunteers and refugees within the buddy scheme. Many of the female volunteers saw it as their role to teach refugees cultural values, such as ways of behaving and ways of being in Germany. This was mostly achieved by spending time with the refugees doing all kinds of daily activities. These activities could be meaningfully described as 'emotional labour' or nurturing care (Wang, 2013) because they are grounded in the mobilisation of volunteers' emotional capital (Reay, 2004) to the benefit of their buddies in order to bestow them with certain cultural capital useful for acquiring social standing in Germany.

Among the important values which volunteers were keen to promote through their involvement in the buddy scheme were punctuality, the willingness to educate oneself, and to work hard. As Braun (2017) shows, these values are closely connected to a German protestant and bourgeois conceptualisation of charity and female notions of social status. Acting out and passing on these values served to reinforce women volunteers' own social status. In some cases, it meant that women refused to offer their support to refugees who did not commit to these values in the desired manner and thus became the basis for excluding certain types of refugees as 'legitimate' buddies. One volunteer thus explained why she would prefer not to accompany any African refugees, based on her experience with one African refugee she knew through a friend:

I told him, you have to be on time at your work, otherwise, you will lose the job and he is never on time or rarely on time and things like that. That is no good for me. This is an issue I have drummed into my lads early on. First be on time, second reliability....If someone does not arrive unexcused one or two times, I tell them that I am not continuing like that.

Similar ideas are echoed by the refugees we interviewed, who acknowledge the volunteers' role as 'mediators for German culture', as one volunteer described herself. The refugees often stressed that they feel obligated to fulfil

a range of expectations regarding their behaviour in order to be a 'good' buddy partner, showing gratefulness and thus being worthy of the volunteers' support and time. In the refugees' eyes, it is vital to show respect towards elderly people, be punctual, and be reliable in order to have a working buddy relationship. In their experience, their German counterparts particularly value these issues.

In the interviews, while the volunteers frequently stressed that their relationship with the refugees was based on mutual support, the refugees often did not feel that they were able to support the volunteers in a meaningful way. When the refugees engage in care for their volunteers, the nature of the activities they undertake is generally rather different from those which the volunteers provide for them. Generally, they consciously decide not to share too many details about their cultural values and traditions, their political views or the situation in their home country in order to not challenge the volunteers' views or moral values, or simply to avoid upsetting them with painful details of war and political upheaval.

However, the refugees often take on domestic tasks and activities for the volunteers. These tasks are often related to traditionally 'male' domestic tasks which imply the use of physical labour, such as help moving house and carrying furniture, accompanying the volunteers to places where they will transport heavy things, and doing DIY in their home. There are only a few instances where the refugees are able to exchange knowledge and care with the volunteers that are based on their cultural capital, for instance, when refugees cook traditional dishes from their home country for their buddies or when they teach them foreign languages.

The division of tasks between volunteers and refugees exemplifies two different aspects of care, which could be described as nurturing and emotional tasks on the one hand, and commodifiable reproductive tasks on the other. These divisions are based on the gendered roles of both carers, in that nurturing and emotional work are often delegated to women while certain domestic tasks such as carrying furniture or repairing things are often traditionally associated with male household members.

However, the socially constructed difference between these aspects of care is not only based on gender, but also on class and 'race', as Anderson (2000) shows in her analysis of the relationship between female domestic carers and their female employers. Wang (2013) draws on Cronquist, Theorell, Burns and Lützen (2004) to conceptualise this as a dichotomy of work responsibilities versus moral obligations, which are both two fundamental aspects of care that may or may not overlap. In Cronquist's et al. (2004) conceptual distinction, nurturing care focuses on relations and interdependence, while the reproductive labour approach towards care is more focused on practical tasks. This suggests that gender, ethnic, and class differences between volunteers and refugees are continuously reproduced through dif-

ferent logics of caring practices that both parties perform within their buddy relationship.

In the care relationships observed here, particular 'German values' are constructed as cultural capital, which is deemed more valuable than the cultural capital offered by the refugees. Only the volunteers possess this more highly valued capital, which they are able to transfer by engaging in nurturing work, thereby using their emotional capital which furthermore reproduces their social identity as members of a particular gender, class, and 'race' (Reay, 2004). In return, the refugees provide care in the form of commodifiable domestic labour, rendering the need to hire external help obsolete and thus informally replacing economic capital.

For both the volunteers and the refugees, commodifiable forms of care are less valuable than nurturing labour because the former does not depend on the provider's personality and could easily be provided by someone else. In this way, the division of labour in the buddy schemes reproduces power differentials and social inequality between the refugees and the volunteers through care, rather than contributing to more egalitarian and therefore inclusionary relationships between both parties. This also affects the ways in which both volunteers and refugees construct differences on the basis of their own class and gender roles between who is worthy of care, what care actually means, and who is able to provide care in society.

7. Overcoming Difference through Symbolic Kinship

Both the volunteers and the refugees found it difficult to define their relationship as a formal 'buddy scheme', based on contractual relations and support by two equal parties. Instead, they considered the other as part of their family. 'For me, Ms Heidi is like my mama', is the way one of the refugees describes the relationship. This was common in the interviews. Another refugee, whose buddy was around the same age as he said: 'For me, Maria is like my sister. I have told her that. She is family. That is more than friendship. Friends go, family stays.' The volunteers often referred to their role as being like grandmothers or mothers. In accordance with the literature on the relationship between paid carers and the families they work in (see for example Baldassar, Ferrero, & Portis, 2017), the volunteers and refugees were able to deal with their status inequalities by conceptualising their buddy relationship as kinship. Treating the relationship as akin to family relations helped both parties to accept the care of the other despite, and maybe even because of, their unequal social positions and power differentials.

Howell (2003, p. 465) has defined 'kinning' practice as a process whereby 'a previously unconnected person is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people that is expressed in a kin idiom.' In this definition, kinship is understood as something fundamentally relational rather than being biologically de-

terminated. Kinship is negotiated on a daily basis through diverse activities, with caregiving being the most significant one (Baldassar et al., 2017).

The very act of caring, which is the reason why the relationships were formed in the first place, provided both parties with the necessary emotional and affectionate basis to ‘convert’ buddies into kin in the absence of biological ties. In this sense, care serves here as a particular type of social action performed among people who conceive themselves as belonging to each other through kinship (Alber & Drotbohm, 2015; Baldassar et al., 2017; Howell, 2003). The kinning process helped both parties to reproduce their social roles and positions, but also enabled them to maintain affectionate and caring relations despite social differences. This is evident in the various ways in which both refugees and volunteers refer to their activities in the context of the family. On the side of the volunteers, treating the refugees as their children or grandchildren allowed them to extend their gender roles as ‘mothers’ and ‘family carers’ to the buddy relationship. In this way, they were able to reproduce the basis upon which important aspects of their social status in Germany is based.

Simultaneously, through kinning, refugees’ social status is, at least symbolically, augmented in the eyes of volunteers and refugees alike because it has allowed refugees to become at least symbolically included into ‘German’ society as part of a family. Because of the strong link between kinning and care, some of the volunteers also implied that these kinning relationships were grounded in moral responsibility and non-negotiable willingness to support the other in every possible way despite their different social and legal positions. This played an important moral role in volunteers’ decisions to support the refugees even when these had problems with the law or were threatened with deportation. In these cases, it initiated them to take a critical and radical stance against government logics in order to stand by their ‘kin’. Kinning also implied including the refugees into very intimate family activities—which had to take place sometimes against the will of other family members, such as adult children or husbands (see also Scheibelhofer, 2019). Here, the women volunteers were particularly forceful in making decisions about refugees’ access to their homes by inviting them to family gatherings, birthday parties and other celebrations, which ritualised their ‘membership’ in their family and symbolised—by extension—their inclusion into German society.

For the refugees, the linking of buddies to kinship was a way of conceiving of the relationship as durable over time. Refugees often expressed the conviction that contact with their buddy would not cease, regardless of whether circumstances would change in the future.

And I want....If I have money someday, or what have you, I want to look after Ms Ingrid, the same way she has looked after me....This will not change. Until I die.

In this sense, the relationship morally extended any contractual relationship of support, which could be ended by the other side at any time. It signified a moral commitment to mutual lifelong support and help. This also meant that for the refugees, there would come the time when they could ‘repay’ their favours, and break even.

When I have a residency and when I am working, when I have money, I could ask her if she wanted to come to Africa with me. Visit my family. My mother is there.

The fact that both parties agree to view their relationship as being formed of family or kinship ties demonstrates that moral values associated with an ethics of care, such as caring for each other’s ‘family’, bind them together in relations of mutual support, despite their different social positions.

8. ‘Rebellious’ Transformations in the Lives of Both Volunteers and Refugees?

The previous sections have shown that buddy schemes bind people of different social status together in caring relationships, which both involve practices which reproduce unequal power positions as well as promote transformative and inclusionary positions for both parties. The question remains whether these caring relationships also impact the citizenship practices of both parties in significant ways.

In the interviews, there is evidence to show that buddy schemes have actually contributed to the constitution of ‘acts of citizenship’ for both the refugees and the volunteers and therefore represent both interesting examples of transformative spaces for migrants’ rights as well as exclusionary practices. On the side of the volunteers, this was particularly evident when they talked about the consequences of their increasing knowledge about migration policy and the resulting moral and political responsibility they felt towards acting in accordance with their new knowledge.

Well, for example, I have looked closely—already at the past election—, how do the different political parties position themselves regarding political changes in Africa, or not only in Africa but generally, well for me a more just world order I would find meaningful....Well it is a big topic which I do not necessarily understand fully, but I am interested now in knowing which party is working for political transformations and which are not, and then I am voting accordingly.

Some volunteers also pointed out that their relationships with the refugees have introduced activism for migrants’ rights into their everyday relationships, so as to voice their concern with friends and acquaintances, even risking conflict and problems over political opinions on migration.

Before I would never have talked about this issue with friends, but now, it is a piece of my life now...and this generates unpleasant discussions...where I have to take my stance and have to explain again and again...and to some, I simply say: you? No. Or I have eliminated people from my Facebook friends list, for example.

The same woman also commented that her involvement in the fight for legal status for the refugee from Mali whom she is accompanying had actually compelled her to go to demonstrations and public events around migration policy again, which she had last done in the 1970s when she was active in the feminist movement. The refugees also showed signs of having developed new ways of relating to the power differences between themselves and the German population in general. Here, transformations in their awareness of moral values, of autonomy, and a different view on life and German society are mentioned.

I am the same person I was before, but now, I know that I am responsible. I am taking care how to treat others, what I should be doing. I have started to learn a lot because I know that I can adapt and become like the others if I learn, if I learn to speak German, for example. And I look after myself. That I stay healthy. That I try not to make mistakes. Going on the wrong track. This is what has changed.

Another refugee told me about the renewed feeling of self-esteem and self-worth which the buddy scheme allowed him to gain, mostly due to the emotional support he received in difficult situations, such as job interviews and before test situations more generally:

(She teaches me) how to believe in yourself. There is someone who says: I am here if you need me. She gives me security.

However, some volunteers' acts of citizenship have also involved exclusionary practices. For some female volunteers, for example, their newly gained knowledge about refugees' multiple motivations to come to Germany made them more critical concerning refugees' claims for permanent settlement options in Germany. Some, for example, mentioned that since they understood migration law in more detail, they had developed a more informed opinion about who deserved a right to stay and who did not. For some volunteers, this meant that they were refusing to accompany refugees threatened with deportation or who refused to obtain educational qualifications or learn the German language.

Exclusionary practices were also evident on the side of the refugees, albeit only in one case. A practising Muslim among the refugees argued that he no longer wanted to have any dealings with highly religious, Christian volunteers, or Germans in general, because he

felt that the differences in values were too strong and any close relationship would be counterproductive. This opinion was the result of his experiences in a buddy scheme in which he felt constantly proselytised by his German buddy. These findings also indicate that the ways in which logics of care actually promote acts of citizenship which are conducive to transformative views on migration policies in civil society are strongly related to the political and economic contexts and the social fields that both parties in the relationship are enmeshed in. These contexts shape how both parties in the relationship are able to transform their social roles and their habitus of action in light of the needs within the buddy relationship.

9. Conclusion

In the context of increasingly restrictive migration and asylum policies taking hold in Germany and Europe, it is important to ask to what extent volunteer action in favour of refugee and asylum seeker support is contributing to more inclusive migration politics 'from below'. The present article has contributed to this discussion by examining the ways in which buddy schemes, which developed out of institution-driven opportunities for volunteering in a humanitarian sense, contribute to transforming migration policies and experiences of citizenship.

Buddy schemes in the realm of refugee support in Germany are an example of spaces of social action by two groups of people who are ordinarily not recognised as important 'political actors' in public life. Both volunteers, in this case the middle-aged women, and their buddies with insecure residency status, traditionally do not occupy powerful social positions from which to claim transformations in unjust migration regimes in the public realm. Furthermore, the unequal relationships between volunteers and refugees, as well as the political, social, and economic context in which they are enacted, influence the care logic that both parties engage in and impact on the ways in which they can think about migrants' citizenship, rights, and political participation. The examples have shown how the resulting unequal power relationship between both parties is constantly negotiated. In many instances, it is not subverted and may even be reinforced through the buddy scheme.

Despite (or maybe even because of) these differences between both parties, buddy schemes can enable both actors to engage in acts of citizenship through care practices that are conducive to more inclusive migration politics. This is because mutual practices of informal social support are able to activate a set of moral values that are conducive to transformative politics. The volunteers and refugees we interviewed all indicated a heightened sense of awareness for migrants' rights claims, the role of the state, and the responsibility of civil society to transform migration policies. In all interviews, both volunteers and refugees mentioned that the buddy relationship has made them learn about the importance of their own voice in affecting the course of events in the life

of the other. It is in this sense that buddy schemes may be looked at as an important element for more egalitarian refugee politics, which include both the host society and refugees in their realisation. Hence, buddy schemes are an interesting example of how political consciousness develops through seemingly 'apolitical acts' in the private sphere which may harbour far-reaching transformative potential.

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Conflict of Interests

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