

Refugee Resistance against Deportation in Germany, Post-Deportation, and Social Work

Abstract: In this article we explore discourses and practices of refugee activist struggles in the context of deportation and post-deportation and their connection to social work. We examine knowledge production in refugee activism, direct action against deportation, and self-organised post-deportation social support by migrants. Thus, this research complements studies on migrant activism around the right to stay by addressing the question of how refugees in Germany articulate their criticism of and resistance to deportations as well as how migrant activism in the form of social support in Mali responds to the needs of migrants after deportation. Our research is based on documents from refugee activism since the 1990s, interviews with activists in Germany and Mali, and observation. We highlight the need for social work to pay attention to migrants' struggles against deportation and to support migrants post-deportation.

Keywords: migration, refugee activism, deportation, post-deportation, social work

1. Introduction

In this article, we explore discourses and practices of refugee activism in Germany and Mali in the context of deportation and post-deportation (Rosenberger, Stern, & Merhaut, 2018) and their relation to social work with refugees. The history of concerted activism by self-organised migrants/refugees in Europe dates back to at least the 1970s, but intensified in the 1990s (McNevin, 2006; Jakob, 2016). Refugees have asserted their rights again and again. Self-organised migrant/refugee organisations have brought their criticism of isolation and human rights violations to national and international attention, and developed strategies to reach out to other migrants/refugees and invite them to join a political struggle against exclusion,

marginalisation, and deportation (Ataç, Rygiel, & Stierl, 2016). Migrants in France – the *Sans-Papiers* – formed a significant movement in the mid-1990s as a response to the government’s policy of pushing more and more immigrants into illegality (Freedman, 2008; McNevin, 2006). To argue for their right to stay, *Sans-Papiers* activists evoked the connection between migration and France’s role in sustaining colonial-era global inequality. In this paper, we turn to refugee activism in Germany (Odugbesan & Schwartz 2018) to explore whether and, if so, how they draw on such notions in the struggle against deportation – in a societal context in which Germany’s role in the Pan-European project of colonialism has not yet been widely acknowledged (Bechhaus-Gerst & Zeller, 2018). Another focus is on deported migrants who continue or take up the struggle for their rights in their countries of origin or in the countries to which they have been deported (Lecadet, 2013). By studying this, we are broadening the scope of existing work (Rosenberger, Stern, & Merhaut, 2018) to include refugees’ agency in the struggle against deportation beyond the European context.

Even in critical social work scholarship around migration and refugees (Initiative of Professors on Social Work in Refugee Accommodation Centers, 2016; Prasad, 2017), the target group at times appears to consist in passive victims and not actors and producers of knowledge. In this paper, we link scholarship on refugee activism to the theory and practice of social work in order to critically reflect on social work in the realm of migration and deportation. Social work literature mainly deals with issues such as support for refugees in the asylum application process, regarding housing, labour market integration, or access to education and health care. Refugee/migrant activism is not taken up or reflected upon in German social work scholarship. This might be understood as being due to the traditional dilemma of the social work profession being caught between the state (which finances the social services) and the clients it serves. If social work considers itself a human rights profession that is committed to politically independent self-determination (Staub-Bernasconi, 2016), it has to deal with the problem that laws and state practices are at times inconsistent with human rights and social work ethics. In practice, it is thus faced with the decision whether to engage in supporting migrants in their attempts to avoid deportation. In addition, social work’s task does not end with the deportation of their clients. The latter may be catered for by social work initiatives in their countries of origin or in the country to which they are deported. In this paper, we complement studies examining migrant activism on the right to stay by addressing the question of how refugee activism in Germany articulates – discursively as well as in practice – its criticism of

deportations, and how refugee activism in the form of social support in Mali responds to migrants' demands and needs after deportation.

2. Postcolonial migration: structural factors, migrants' autonomy, and externalisation

The causes and impacts of migration are diverse, as are the responses to migration. This diversity is reflected in different theories of migration (Schwenken, 2018). We primarily draw on three bodies of work. First, the historical structural or World System approach focuses on the penetration of capitalist economic systems into non-capitalist or pre-capitalist societies, arguing that this diffusion creates a mobile population that tends to make the decision to migrate, by choice or by necessity (Portes & Walton, 1981; Massey, 1988). The claim is that migration is caused by an unequal distribution of economic power in the world economy. This perspective holds that global capitalism and inequality force and enable people to migrate. The World System perspective is particularly important for the field of social work to understand why people come to Germany to better their life chances. It enables us to situate migration to Germany in a broader historical context. As will become evident in the accounts of refugee activists, migration today cannot be understood without considering the 500-year history of European colonialism.

The second body of thought we rely on is that around the autonomy of migration. This perspective was first put forward by Moulier Boutang in the early 1990s. In contrast with the idea of a "Fortress Europe", which keeps migrants out, it stresses the uncontrollability of migration (Bojadžijev & Karakayali, 2007). The concept of the autonomy of migration moves the social and subjective dimensions of migration centre stage. Unlike the theoretical strand mentioned above, this perspective "understand[s] migration as a social movement in the literal sense of the words, not as a mere response to economic and social malaise." While not "consider[ing] migration in isolation from social, cultural and economic structures [, ...] migration is understood as a creative force within these structures" (Papadopoulos, Stephenson, & Tsianos, 2008, p. 202). The advantage of engaging with the autonomy of migration is that migrants' practices can be taken as a point of departure, thus avoiding an analysis that only focuses on the aspect of migratory control (Scheel, 2013a).

Third, we draw on insights into externalization as a strategy to respond to migration (Buckel, 2018; Lessenich, 2016). In 2015, the German and

Austrian governments temporarily opened their borders following pressure by migration movements during “the long summer of migration”. Since then, we have witnessed an externalization of the migration regime, in which the scope of migration has not diminished, but in which migration to Europe is managed through the securitisation of the Mediterranean Sea, in North, West and East Africa, and in Turkey (Hess et al., 2017). Europe is externalising its borders in cooperation with often autocratic regimes such as those of Sudan, Eritrea and Turkey. At the same time as celebrating a “welcome culture”, the German government and authorities have continued to tighten Germany’s and Europe’s migration and asylum regime (Pichl, 2017). This encompasses endeavours to increase deportations from Germany and facilitate deportations, push-backs and repatriations from North Africa to countries further south.

3. Social work, global inequality, and the South in the North

Social work’s task as a discipline and profession is to describe, explain and respond to social problems. In 2014, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) proposed the following definition of social work, which was also approved by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW):

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014)

It is extraordinary for an academic discipline to state its normativity and dedication to social transformation. Moreover, such an understanding of social work means that it cannot confine its mandate to the needs and requirement of the society in which it is based. As Borrmann, Klassen and Spatschek put it, “the impact of globalization on all aspects of daily life has challenged most social workers to move beyond local considerations and operate outside and across political, cultural and geographic boundaries” (2007, p. 9). This all the more pertinent if one considers that social problems that have often been considered local in the past, such as poverty or marginalisation, are increasingly recognised as being embedded in global

structures of inclusion and exclusion. If social work wants to adhere to its ideological basis of empowerment and social justice, it needs to be cognisant of globalised capitalism as well as other structures of domination such as racism and sexism (Cox & Pawar, 2006). According to Staub-Bernasconi (2016), social work needs to be conceived as a human rights profession that is politically independent and allows a distinction to be made between legal and legitimate demands, i.e. based on the principles of human rights and social justice. While the double mandate of serving the state and the individual may already lead to manifold contradictions, adding the third mandate – accountability to the profession’s self-conception – implies a multiplication of tensions.

Understanding migration as an effect of, and influenced by, colonial legacies and globalisation, i.e. globalised capitalism, means approaching any related social work as an already transcultural endeavour. Departing from such a perspective, we consider it useful to turn to the reflections of the (potential) clients of social work. We examine how refugees or migrants reflect on and act with regard to their situation in Germany, including after deportation, and bring this into dialogue with the challenges of social work. We thus take seriously the commitment that “social work research and theories is [...] applied and emancipatory [...] and] co-constructed with service users in an interactive, dialogic process” (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014).

At the risk of generalising, refugees coming to Europe can be conceptualised as the global South in the North. Here, the global South serves as a “metaphor for the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance to overcoming or minimising such suffering” (Santos, 2016, p. 18). This South “also exists in the geographic North (Europe and North America), in the form of excluded, silenced and marginalised populations, such as undocumented immigrants [...]” (Santos, 2016, p. 19). This population is also constituted by people who legally reside in Germany (for instance because of pending asylum proceedings, or with tolerated residence status), but who know that their only long-term prospect of evading deportation is to go into hiding or marry a German or European citizen – because their country of citizenship is considered a “safe country of origin” or protection rates are very low. The total number of deportations from Germany was 104,730 from 2014 to 2018 (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2019). The deportation numbers to certain countries, especially those that have been declared “safe”, have increased considerably: deportations to Morocco increased by a factor of 13

between 2015 and 2018, those to Algeria by a factor of 12, and those to Tunisia by a factor of 22 (Mayntz, 2019).

4. Migrants' perspectives

We depart from the assumption that marginalised sections of the population such as refugees have specific insights into political and social conditions due to and marked by their experiences of flight, migration and arrival or life in Germany. That perspectives of side-lined segments of society can contribute to social analysis and theory in a particular way has been highlighted by scholars of feminism and race-critical studies. In the preface to her book "Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center", hooks writes about her experience of growing up in a small town in Kentucky, USA:

Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. [...] This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us an oppositional world view – a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity. (1984, preface)

However, other scholars of postcolonialism, notably Spivak (2003), have problematised the notion of the excluded and voiceless having privileged access to reality. From this viewpoint, they – just as much as the powerful or dominant – are also not exempt from moving within given discourses. In the following, we thus do not propose to understand refugee/migrant activism as the less distorted or truer perspective on migration or deportation. Still, we believe that the specific experiences of migrants/refugees and the perspectives that they are forced to take on due to political and social constraints influence their analyses and are worthy of attention. Postcolonial studies have only recently made their way into German/Austrian debates on social work (Castro Varela, 2018; Prasad, 2018a). The contemporary situation of refugees in Europe, and in Germany in particular, has brought many issues of global inequality, human rights (violations) and racism into the academic, political and public discourse. In this article we want to focus on the issues of deportation and anti-deportation resistance, as well as the

situation of post-deportation: some of the pressing issues of contemporary German migration society.

5. Methodology

Drawing on grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, Corbin and Strauss, 2008), our methodological approach is rooted in the interpretative paradigm and constructionist perspective of qualitative research. We thus understand social realities as an active process of construction through different actors' practices and interactions. We therefore take a perspective of enquiry into the practice of *doing resistance* among refugees in Germany. We explore the agency of these actors in contemporary German society and focus on how they articulate the issue of deportation. The different types of data we considered relevant to our research question were collected and analysed in a circular process that allowed us to adopt an open, flexible research approach. This aspect was important to us to diversify our perspectives and verify our interpretation outcomes. One major concept that emerged from our analysis of the documents, interviews and observation is, for instance, that refugee activists emphasise the continuity of their native countries' colonial exploitation as a reason for their presence in Germany. This perspective not only has discursive effects, but also generates practical responses, as we will show below.

This paper is based on the analysis of documents reflecting refugees' struggles in Germany from 1994 until today. 1994 is taken as a starting point because it is the founding year of The VOICE Africa Forum (later renamed The VOICE Refugee Forum), a self-organised political refugee organization that has continuously mobilised against deportation. Documents include published articles by activists, speeches, flyers, banners, slogans etc. from initiatives such as The VOICE, The Caravan for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants, Afrique-Europe-Interact, Corasol, and Refugee Strike Berlin. This material can mostly be found online or – in the case of flyers – has been collected at public events such as demonstrations. We followed the principle of saturation: when we no longer came across new aspects in the materials produced by the above initiatives, we halted the process of data collection.

Furthermore, we conducted interviews with ten refugee activists in Germany and in Mali in 2017 and 2018. The interviewees in Germany were chosen because they are members of the initiatives from which the written material was collected. They, and the members of the initiatives they are

active in, mainly come from countries such as Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya and Sudan, whose citizens have a low chance of being recognized as refugees or granted some other form of protection in Germany. According to statistics for 2018 by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, Kenyan citizens had a protection rate of 1.2 percent, Malians 6.8 percent, Cameroonians 7.3 percent, Nigerians 13.9 percent, and Sudanese 25.7 percent (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019, pp. 2–3). Initiatives in Mali were chosen because they are particularly well-known for post-deportation work and are in contact with – and partly funded by – NGOs in Germany. The interviews were conducted and recorded in German, English and French, then transcribed and translated into German.

Finally, one of us, Daniel, undertook observation at demonstrations by refugees (for example, in Jena, 24.6.2017) and the other, Juri, at a visit to a refugee camp (Ellwangen, 27.7.2018). After the visit to the refugee camp, one refugee activist who monitors and supports the struggle of inhabitants of the camp was interviewed in person and over the phone. This particular refugee camp – a so-called “first reception centre” where asylum applicants have to stay for several months after their arrival to Germany – was chosen as a site for research because many African camp residents had resisted an attempt by the police to deport a fellow inhabitant. This incident was a major topic of discussion in the media and party politics, and subsequently the police raided the camp in a particularly harsh manner. Through activist networks, we heard about the ongoing struggles of refugee activists within and outside the camp, amongst other things against the charges brought against those who resisted the deportation attempt.

Shinozaki (2012) highlights the relevance of the researcher’s positionality and self-reflexivity in the field. We understand our research on migration as neither “insider” nor “outsider” work (Nowicka & Ryan, 2015). Rather, we consider our positionalities as those of both researchers and political activists for the rights of migrants. Daniel has been active in anti-racist and decolonial work for almost two decades. In 2012 he became involved in supporting the refugee struggle in Berlin. Later on, he joined the transnational network *Afrique-Europe-Interact*, which is committed to freedom of movement and self-determined development. The relations he thus developed allowed him to conduct the interviews in Germany and Mali. Juri is a social worker with several years’ experience in working on migration and with refugees in Germany. Furthermore, he participates in local networks in the city of Kassel that facilitate empowerment projects for migrants, helping them gain access to education, housing and employment. He is part of knowledge exchange projects with East African social work

organisations. As white German academics and professionals, we see a responsibility in supporting the struggles of people oppressed by a nationalist, racialized, and capitalist system of migration in Germany and Europe. We now turn to analysing the articulations of refugee/migrant activists.

6. Postcolonialism as a political location

Activists hold that the foundation of contemporary global inequality is not acknowledged by German majority society or state agencies in Germany. At the same time, everybody is fundamentally aware of the consequences of past European policy on Africa:

They know what they did. I don't think that there is a single European who doesn't know what colonisation is. Or who doesn't know what enslavement is, [...]. There is nobody who isn't aware of that. (Corasol activist, 12.7.2017)

However, they believe that this awareness is suppressed. It cannot really be acknowledged and “unconsciously, people tell themselves: no, Europe is not the reason for Africa's current problems” (Corasol activist, 12.7.2017). The long history of exploitation of Africa and subordination to the needs of Europe is regarded in German society as “a natural order: by nature, the European was made to be above the African”. Only because the “dominant position of Europeans vis-à-vis Africans [...] has become sort of a norm, an irrefutable reality” can German citizens, despite their knowledge of historical facts, adopt the attitude that “You do not have the right to be here and therefore you have to leave” (Corasol activist, 12.07.2017). The interviewed activist characterises migration to and the presence of so-called refugees in Europe as the “weight of history” and in some way as a “historical revenge” (Corasol activist, 22.12.2017). In this perspective, colonialism and its continuities in the present serve as a means of analysis to make sense of African migrants' presence in Germany.

In 2012, refugees from all over Germany defied mandatory residence law, mobilised across refugee camps and set out on a protest march from Southern Germany to the federal capital Berlin, insisting that they must be present and visible when decisions about their lives were made. They occupied public spaces, buildings, embassies, churches, trees and roofs and took to hunger strikes. The politically most significant occupation took place at the square of Oranienplatz and lasted from 2012 until 2014. In the context

of the weakening of the protest camp at Oranienplatz in 2013 and 2014, the remaining, mainly African activists started confronting the mounting public opinion against their presence in Berlin with internal discussions on colonialism (activist at Oranienplatz, 6.8.2017). The idea was to take recourse to the history of colonialism or, first of all, to spread knowledge on the subject, to make their presence in Germany understood:

[T]he refugee mobilization in Berlin was instrumental in shifting the meaning of the square such that it came to represent an anticolonial struggle, which came to be intertwined with claims to local space in order to express these positions. (Bhimji 2016, p. 37).

In an essay in the self-organised journal “Daily Resistance”, an activist with Refugee Strike Berlin who had been central to the occupation of Oranienplatz wrote:

It may be too easy to say that we are here because of the Berlin conference in 1884 and its consequences, but the facts and connections must be acknowledged within German society and by the authorities. (Bino 2016, p. 4)

In a similar vein, and in the run-up to the 2007 G8 Summit in Heiligendamm, Germany, The Caravan for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants (2007) lobbied for putting colonialism on the protest agenda:

The wealth of the so-called rich countries of the North, especially the “Group of 8”, the Greedy 8, accrue from the massive and inhuman exploitation and colonization of our countries.

Here, refugee activists reiterate Faisal Garba’s understanding of contemporary migration as “a response by ordinary people to dispossession through neoliberal globalization” (2017, p. 2). Refugee activism takes recourse to postcolonialism as a political location, as a memory and legacy of a colonial past that has effects in the present (Frankenberg & Mani 1993).

The practical effects of this thematization of colonialism were, for instance, that some Sudanese migrants returned to Hannover, where they had lived before joining the protest in Berlin, to start their own protest camp at Weißkreutzplatz in order to fight for the right to residence (activist at Oranienplatz, 6.8.2017). They discussed the history of Sudan, the relationship between British colonialism and the separation of Sudan into North

and South as well as Germany's role in recent Sudanese history. This served to build a "political ideology" amongst Sudanese refugees, as an avenue to acquiring a historically informed understanding of their own situation (activist at Oranienplatz, 6.8.2017).

7. "We are here because you destroy our countries"

Reference is often made to colonial structures in the present to underline people's right to stay in Germany. However, it is also evoked in order to demand changes to the conditions of migrants' countries of origin. This is connected to the desire to be able to live a good life at home (activist of The VOICE, 8.1.2018). It is connected to the clear stance that deportation is not an option, as this is part of the unequal relationship that forced people to leave their homes.

If you don't want refugees, don't create them. We are not here because we are happy to stay here. [...] Just make peace and justice in Africa, we will go back. We will go back to Africa, there is no place like home. [...] Give us back what you take from us. The colonialism. (observed in person at demonstration in Jena, 24.6.2017)

The intervention at this demonstration by refugees from Sierra Leone and Afghanistan ended with the words "Give us back, we go back! Stop, stop, stop – Stop deportation!"

It is noteworthy that the widely referenced slogan "We are here because you destroy our countries" is not understood as a political statement directed at the German asylum authorities or the "receiving society" to encourage them to refrain from deportations and grant residency (Corasol activist, 13.7.2017; activist at Oranienplatz, 6.8.2017). It should thus not (or not only) be understood as a strategic statement to further people's political demands. Rather, refugee activists draw on this perspective to give each other the courage to endure the struggle for their rights:

We take this as something of a leitmotiv of our struggle. That is what gives us courage, I might even say, the right to affirm: No, we will stay here. That we precisely have the right to stay. Because behind this slogan you see the whole history of Africa, you see slavery, colonisation, neo-colonialism, contemporary capitalism. [...] Even though the Europeans codify laws every day that tell us: you have to leave, you have to leave.

This then becomes something like our counterpart to the laws that are passed against us. (Corasol activist, 13.7.2017)

Looking at protesters' banners at Weißkreutzplatz in Hannover, a similar impetus could be seen to speak to their own people and to give each other strength. In October 2014, banners read "I continue fighting at Weißkreutzplatz – Whatever happens, I stay strong – Whatever the situation" or "We fight – don't give up! Never!"

Analyses of refugee activism point out that references to reasons for migration in the sense of "We are here because you destroy our countries" have primarily served to buttress demands for the right to stay (Jakob 2016, p. 185; Bhimji 2016, p. 6). In his examination of protests against "Fortress Europe" in Europe and Germany, Pierre Monforte highlights the fact that "[t]he explicit comparison between current European immigration and asylum policies on one hand and the periods of colonialism and slavery on the other" can be found "in particular in documents relating to deportation policies" (2014, p. 160). This can be confirmed for our research, but it further points to the fact that the addressees of such articulations are also the migrant activists themselves: they serve to strengthen social and political cohesion to continue the struggle against deportation.

8. Direct action against deportation and recognition of refugees' agency in social work

While refugee activism has helped generate knowledge around the reasons for migration and the right to stay, it has also undertaken direct action against deportation. One critical incident in the discourse on deportation in Germany consisted in the events around the refugee camp in the municipality of Ellwangen in April 2018. A refugee from Togo was supposed to be deported from the camp at night, but refused to follow the police officers who came to take him into custody. Several other refugees from the camp joined the scene to put pressure on the police officers to release him. In this situation, the police decided to leave without the person. The incident was widely covered, especially by the conservative German media, constructing a narrative that the state was failing to execute the rule of law due to the violent behaviour of African refugees (Welt Online, 2018a, Welt Online, 2018b). A few nights later, a huge police operation encompassing hundreds of officers raided the camp to deport the person and to arrest others who

supported him at the first police encounter. This operation was also widely covered by the German media.

Furthermore, we interviewed a refugee activist who supports the refugees that face legal repercussions for their anti-deportation activism (26.7.2018). This interview was not audio-recorded due to the repressive legal situation faced by local community activists for migrant rights. He explained that several activists are being sued for resisting the law. If they are convicted, they face deportation due to criminal offence regulations. All of those accused of having committed crimes while resisting their fellow resident's arrest have been taken away from the camp in Ellwangen and distributed across other camps in order to break the resistance and organization against the deportations. He also told us about the second police raid, when hordes of masked police officers stormed the camp and surrounded the buildings. Doors in the buildings were forced and several people jumped out of windows, fearing for their lives. He complained that the police raid carried strong symbolic weight. In his opinion, it was executed on such a huge scale to convey to the German public that the state was taking action in what was portrayed in the media as a lawless camp where an African mob went crazy (see also NDR 2018 for a critical perspective on the media coverage). He talked to many people in the camp after the incidents and was told that they felt traumatised by the events since they had brought back memories from their experiences in Libya. The situation in migrant holding facilities in Libya has been likened to Nazi concentration camps by German diplomats from the embassy in Niger (Deutsche Welle Online, 2018). Nevertheless, German and European authorities continue to cooperate with the Libyan coast guard to push back refugees into Libya as an active strategy of externalisation of the European Union's borders. According to the interviewed activist, there is a strong need to support people who are deported to West Africa. He highlighted the point that many people struggle with severe mental health issues during and after deportation.

9. A critical perspective on repressive asylum policy and practice and its implications for social work

Since refugee camps in Germany are places where the rule of law applies, the police operation in Ellwangen can be fundamentally criticized because of human rights violations. As highlighted by activist groups monitoring the court cases, most inhabitants had not been involved in the initial confrontation with the police, but were still targeted by the police intervention

in the aftermath. Many people and families who were traumatized by the experiences of their migration route through Libya were exposed to a raid on their temporary homes in the refugee camp. This was likely a re-traumatizing experience, especially for children, parents or people with mental health problems. The decision for operating such a massive police raid in the night can thus be understood as a violation of the human rights of hundreds of people living in the camp, as the authorities seemed mainly to be thinking about the media coverage instead of the well-being of hundreds of people affected by the operation. This raises the question of accountability of the decision-makers responsible for authorising the operation in the political and administrative structures of the federal state. It appears as if office-bearers and members of the state authorities were afraid of appearing to lack strength. They reacted with large-scale symbolic and even direct violence towards human beings, thereby also risking re-traumatization. In addition, there is an evident strategy of criminalising the activists who resisted the attempted arrest for deportation by the state of Baden-Württemberg. The lawsuit is ongoing. It is monitored by a group of activists from NGOs and initiatives. They demand further investigation of the operation, arguing that the violent raid into private rooms within the refugee camp without search warrants was an illegal and unconstitutional practice by the police (Justizwatch, 2018).

More generally, the conditions in communal accommodation for refugees have been criticised as violating fundamental human rights by social work scholars (Prasad, 2017, pp. 352–353). The comments on the Global Definition of the Social Work Profession (2014) state that “Social change initiatives recognize the place of human agency in advancing human rights and economic, environmental, and social justice”. Thus, social work can be understood as also committed to acknowledging refugees’ agency in resisting what they consider violations of their human rights. The “Position Paper: Social Work with Refugees in Refugee Accommodations Centers. Professional Standards and Socio-Political Basis” holds that social workers should also engage in political work in its own right, “to participate conceptually and structurally, to publicize and lobby” and to support clients regarding, for instance, “protection against violence inside and outside the accommodation facilities” (Initiative of Professors on Social Work in Refugee Accommodation Centers 2016, p. 3).

The Ellwangen case of resistance against deportation and of police misconduct brings to the fore major questions for social work carried out in camps, providing consultation, childcare, leisure activities, and psychosocial support. While we were not able to conduct interviews with social

workers in Ellwangen, the ethical dilemma they face is evident. On the one hand, they are supposed to follow ethical principles of the social work profession in terms of people's self-determination and anti-oppressive practice. On the other hand, they work within a space that contradicts people's human rights. Here, the question of the violation of ethical principles can be expanded: for instance, should social workers offer "voluntary return consultation" services to convince refugees that they should opt for "self-deportation" (Ulu, 2013)? Furthermore, the question needs to be raised of whether social workers need to develop intervention strategies in the face of oppressive structures in refugee camps in order to bring change to the organisations running the camps.

Staub-Bernasconi (2016) conceptualises the social work profession as a human rights profession with its own ethical mandate (see also Ife, 2018; Prasad, 2018b; Schirilla, 2018). As mentioned above, the German authorities have become more repressive in their policies towards people whose asylum applications have been or are likely to be rejected. Social workers, in turn, support refugees in their everyday lives in multiple ways. Once refugees are confronted with a rejected asylum application, strategies of micro-resistance on a casework level are often employed to prevent their deportation. Based on several years of experience in this field by one of this paper's authors, this can entail deportation prevention strategies such as finding church asylum placements, developing a legal support strategy, finding vocational education placements that can protect them by giving them the special legal status accorded to trainees, interventions at the Home Office when refugees face oppressive street-level bureaucracy situations, or even support for people who choose to go into hiding from the authorities, becoming undocumented migrants or sans-papiers. Government officials often decry and even try to criminalize such practices, but in fact they can be understood as a clear example of following the third mandate, based on professional ethics that urge social workers to support marginalized and oppressed people in their daily lives.

10. Social work in post-deportation realities

In our interviews with migrant activists, it was highlighted that there is an urgent need to support deported people, especially the many people facing mental health issues in the context of deportation. One urgent issue that was brought up was cooperation with organisations or actors on the ground in the countries to which people are deported.

Professional social work organisations in Germany working with refugee populations often support people extensively up to the point at which they (have to) leave the country – but not beyond. Here, the German government-funded programme *Perspektive Heimat* (Perspective Homeland) – in place since 2017 – might be seen as an attempt to provide support for returning migrants (Feneberg, 2019). Consultation centres abroad are supposed to support deported persons (or so-called “voluntary returnees”) with their reintegration. However, it is a pro-deportation initiative that encourages so-called “voluntary return”. The European Union seeks to develop networks and cooperative initiatives with organisations in the Global South to offer social support services to deported migrants (Kennis, 2019). From a critical perspective, one might consider such programmes to be part of the externalisation strategy of the EU and the German government. These strategies rely on cooperation with local partner NGOs or social services on the ground. In the context of activist fieldwork in West Africa, we had the chance to visit two NGOs operating support services in Bamako, Mali. They will be introduced here in the text to give concrete case examples of social support on the ground. As mentioned in the introduction to the paper, the dilemma faced by the social services is found here as well. There is a need to raise funding for the organisation, which might come through other (mainly Global North-based) NGOs or through EU/national government programmes attempting to establish support services in the context of the border regime and externalisation strategies (see also Frelick et al., 2016). Headley and Gordon (2015) have presented that dilemma through a case study of a community-based Jamaican NGO supporting deported Jamaicans coming from prisons in the US, UK and Canada. This NGO was founded and established by deported Jamaicans. The authors are acutely aware of the problematic aspect of cooperating with deporting institutions such as the UK Home Office because of the need for financial support.

In some countries of origin, self-organised organisations have already been set up by forcibly returned migrants and provide support to deportees. The most significant difference is that these explicitly oppose and struggle against any practice of deportation. Here, we limit ourselves to the practice of two organisations in Mali. Mali is an important country of both departure and transit for migrants from Central and West Africa. Currently, it is also the country in which the biggest contemporary German military operation is taking place. The German government is showing increasing interest in the region not only through large military investments but also through cooperation projects with neighbouring countries, such as Niger,

with the aim of fighting terrorism and in order to establish a border security network on these important transit routes from West Africa to Libya.

During recent research in Mali, we had the chance to speak to members of two organisations in the capital Bamako which have been founded (and are principally run) by deported migrants and offer support to deportees arriving in Mali (10–11.10.2018). We also visited their facilities. The NGO ARACEM (Association des Refoulés d’Afrique Centrale au Mali) is an organisation founded and run by Central African migrants deported to Mali from neighbouring countries and stranded in Bamako. It receives about 50 deported migrants per month, who arrive from North African countries and Niger. These countries receive financial and technical aid from the European Union to prevent migrants from reaching Europe. Many of the migrants are traumatized due to the experiences they have undergone on the journey, including extortion, torture, rape, being left in the desert without food and water, etc. Often, they are arrested in Mali since they have no social networks and are branded as vagabonds when living on the streets of Bamako. ARACEM offers a shelter where deported people can stay for some days when they arrive in Bamako. They also make visits to imprisoned migrants and provide them with food and necessities. Furthermore, ARACEM is involved in political work to decry the effects of the European migration regime and the practices of authoritarian governments in Africa of deporting fellow Africans to please their European counterparts.

The NGO AME (Association des Maliens Expulsés), based in Bamako, was founded by deported migrants and is supported by the German NGOs Medico International and Brot für die Welt. AME mainly supports deported Malians who either also arrive from African countries by land or who are deported by aeroplane from European and other countries. The organisation operates in different fields of social work practice: 1) On the group work level, they bring together deported migrants in Bamako to share and discuss their situations with other people who have had the same experiences. This level can be also seen as a means of organising the community and building a local network. 2) The community outreach strategy is important to make contact with homeless deportees in the streets, especially around the bus stations, in order to connect them with the organisation. The staff at AME highlight the fact that many deported people suffer serious mental health problems and that support structures are lacking. 3) A family reconciliation strategy focuses on the families of deported migrants, explaining to them the hardships that the deported family member has faced. Often the families see the deported members as people who have failed the family, given that families often invest considerable amounts of money into

the project of migration. This psychosocial family intervention aims to reintegrate people into their families. 4) On the casework level, AME helps people to find educational or labour market opportunities. 5) The NGO also organizes political work in the form of campaigns or street actions to raise awareness for the issues of migration and deportation. The AME's approach can be seen as multidimensional social work practice using different methods to improve the situations of deported people, while at the same time lobbying for freedom of movement and an end to all forms of deportation.

11. Conclusion

Our paper has introduced a postcolonial perspective on social work in order to highlight the complex issue of migration and deportation. We have undertaken this by foregrounding refugees' agency in resisting deportation and taking care of each other in post-deportation situations. We hold that refugee activism and resistance is a highly relevant topic for contemporary social work in Germany due to the substantial number of people in Germany threatened by deportation, and the dire conditions they face in refugee camps. Our empirical data from refugee activism highlights the fact that they make a clear connection between the historical injustices of colonialism as well as contemporary forms of North-South exploitation in order to underline their right to stay in Europe. This is mirrored by actual resistance against deportation in refugee camps. Both dimensions should be taken into account by social work theory and practice if these are understood as based on human rights and committed to their clients' agency and right to self-determination. Community-based social work approaches should reflect on how to engage with refugee activists' analyses, struggles and demands.

Furthermore, we have highlighted that post-deportation is another relevant field for a social work profession. In line with the ethical foundations of social work in the Global Agenda as well as with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (especially Goal 17), there is a need to recognise refugees as political subjects at the forefront of struggles for their well-being and rights. The goal of support in solidarity with migrants' struggles should be to empower the voices and standpoints of the marginalised group of migrants/refugees in order to develop critical knowledge and an understanding of global migration.

What is more, social work practice with refugees and migrants could engage in building partnerships with social work stakeholders in other parts of the world. The issue of how to go about this in practice needs to be devel-

oped in close cooperation with initiatives or NGOs in the countries suffering from an unjust world order and its migration regime. We believe that recognition of the perspectives developed in this research on refugee activism can contribute to the implementation of the triple mandate of social work and the global ethical principles of the profession. It urges us – as scholars and practitioners of social work – to take action in working towards global social justice, one of the core issues of the social work profession.

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