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**Keywords:** Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur; welcome culture; welcoming practices; housing refugees; conviviality; solidarity; everyday life; migration; refugees.

**Field of study:** Ethnology.

**Time and geographical area:** 2005-2015; 2015-2016. Germany; Europe.

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# THE SUMMER OF WELCOME

*Before the so-called refugee influx into Germany peaked in 2015, the term Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur [welcome culture] emerged as a political response to the negative attitude towards immigrants within the German society. During the summer and autumn of 2015, a new set of welcoming practices emerged as large groups of local Berliners engaged in the refugee situation – some by housing refugees in their own home. At this stage, the concept of welcome culture was no longer nourished by the input of political actors alone, it had become a part of a public discourse. The present article is based on ethnographical fieldwork, and is a part of a comprehensive master thesis that is focused on Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur – more specifically, how different forms of welcome culture in light of the refugee influx into Europe in 2015 emerged in the everyday life, of civic initiators in Berlin, Germany. With inspiration from John Law’s Modes of Ordering I examine the informants’ different practices and rationales for engaging in the refugee crisis. Taking inspiration from the concept of conviviality I analyze how the home and certain notions of solidarity, inclusion and ‘homeliness’ become part of the practices and rationales for housing refugees, and perform different versions of engagement. I conclude that the informants’ welcoming practices and rationales are in and out of sync, with each other and the political concept of welcome culture.*



Before the so-called refugee influx peaked in 2015, the term *Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur* [welcome culture] emerged as a political response to the negative attitude towards immigrants within German society.<sup>1</sup> During 2015, the term became a salient subject of public discourse and a symbol of civil society's initiatives as a response to the refugee influx. I focus on the first part of *Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur* – more precisely, different practices of *welcoming* refugees into the homes of locals and surrounding society. This focus has mainly been chosen due to the topicality of the 2015-refugee influx, which implies that the possible effects of the long-term establishment were not yet, or only vaguely, to be discovered during the course of fieldwork that was conducted less than a year after the influx peaked. I believe that the civic initiators are an important, but rather overseen group of actors in the context of *welcoming* migrants and refugees into a new society. According to a report by the Bertelsmann Stiftung concerning *Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur*, civic initiators are seen as a pivotal part of providing refugees with a head start in their new society; securing their integration and, over time, a more coherent society.<sup>2</sup> My motivation for this article may be found in the experiences I had when I lived in Berlin, from 2015 to 2016, which was during the peak of the refugee influx. Here, I followed the situation closely in the media, and even more closely in my everyday life, as many of my friends and fellow students were involved in different initiatives evolving around the refugee situation. In the media, these *welcoming* practices, were often referred to as a reflection of German *welcome culture*,<sup>3</sup> however, the civic initiators I knew/met, did not recognize this portrayal, or simply did not want their engagement in the refugee crisis to be seen as a reflection of the political concept of *welcome culture*. On the contrary, some saw these actions as a critique of/response to the government's way of managing the situation. This made me curious about, the civic initiators motivation for engaging in the refugee crisis, and the different understandings of *welcome culture* that emerged within the public discourse around this time. Thus, with inspiration from John Law's *Modes of Ordering* I examine the civic initiators rationales for engaging in the refugee crisis, and how they *enact* different forms of *welcoming* practices in their everyday life.

The empirical material I draw on in the article includes 8 semi-structured interviews with nine locals; the managers Ralph and Lisa from the organization *Über den Tellerrand* (ÜdT);<sup>4</sup> the student Marco who founded the accommodation organization *Among us*; the student Hannah who lives in a collective; the student

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1 Roth, 2013; There does not exist an accurate expression for the German term *Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur* in English, therefore I use welcome culture – a direct translation of the German term.

2 Roth, 2013; 2014; Bertelsmann, 2015.

3 *Morgenpost.de* (a); *zitty.de*; *spiegel.de*; *Tagesspiegel.com*; *focus.de*; *zeit.de* September 2017; Trauner and Turton, 2017.

4 The meaning of the saying translates into: 'to think outside the box'.

Jana also living in a collective; the photographer-couple Sally and Andy; Ute who lives with her husband and daughter, and the single George, who at some point during the refugee situation in 2015 housed or engaged with refugees on a daily basis. The majority of informants have not previously been engaged in volunteer work with refugees. Their engagement emerged, rather spontaneously, during the refugee crisis in 2015. Some informants housed refugees illegally, and emphasized their engagement as a direct response to the governments way of managing the refugees at that time. Other informants focused on the long-term effects of housing and engaging with the refugees, in order to give them a head start in society. Marrying the concepts of conviviality and the *welcoming* practices of my informants, I shed light on the relatively new and unsearched field of how the home and certain notions of solidarity, inclusion and ‘homeliness’ become part of the rationales for housing refugees, and shape different versions of *welcoming* practices. In the analysis, I show how the different welcoming practices and rationales of the civic initiators are in and out of sync, with each other and the political concept of *welcome culture*.

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## Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur – the Context

In this section, I shed light on the emergence of *welcome culture*; initially as a part of a political strategy, and more recently as a part of a public discourse, as it in 2015 became a point of reference for societal and media actors during the refugee influx into Germany. Since 2005, the German government has developed the concept of *welcome culture* as part of a greater effort to improve the existing attitude toward immigrants in Germany and to establish Germany as a country of migration.<sup>5</sup> The report ‘Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur in Deutschland – Herausforderungen und Lösungsansätze’,<sup>6</sup> shows that more than 47% of the Germans believe that there are too many people with a different ethnic background living in Germany. This was viewed as highly problematic since Germany is one of the largest countries of immigration in Europe. With a current declining population, the country is facing a need for labor force in the future and by attracting well-qualified and documented immigrants the country might be able to maintain their productivity.<sup>7</sup> By *welcoming* the well-qualified and documented immigrants the additional hope was that the immigrants would integrate into German society – thereby also securing a more coherent society in the future. A report from the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees; BAMF), describes *welcome culture* as a three-step mod-

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5 Heckmann, 2016.

6 *ibid.*

7 Roth, 2013; Bertelsmann, 2015.

el where the *welcome* phase (Phase der Zuwanderungsentscheidung/Vorintegration) is a sort of pre-integration stage and the *acknowledgement* phase (Phase der langfristigen Etablierung in Deutschland) is connected to the long-term establishment of immigrants in Germany. The two phases are connected by an intermediate phase of *orientation* where the refugee is helped through the first processes of establishment and integration by the authorities.<sup>8</sup> *Welcome culture* is not merely an approval of social diversity; it may also be understood as a political strategy that strives to make Germany a more attractive country for a certain type of immigrants.<sup>9</sup> As such, *welcome culture* might be seen as an instrument to pursue a specific political agenda that aims at integrating well-qualified migrants in a structured and uniform way. I refer to the government initiated concept of *welcome culture* as *political* in order to emphasize that this concept, to some extent, differs from the understandings of *welcome culture* in my empirical material.<sup>10</sup>

In 2015, around 1 million refugees came to Germany after the German government under Angela Merkel announced that Germany would receive the refugees who were stranded on the outskirts of Europe. The surprisingly large number of refugees provided the government with unimaginably big challenges, in terms of securing a fast processing of the asylum applications and providing the refugees with basic needs and care. Various political and civic voices criticized the government's way of handling the newly arrived refugees, who in some instances had been gathered into large emergency shelters in abandoned buildings or remote places without access to proper sanitary conditions.<sup>11</sup> During the summer of 2015, a growing number of local Berliners intervened in the refugee crisis by helping out at emergency shelters by handing out clothes or food. Some showed their sympathy and support of the incoming refugees by protesting in various squares in Berlin or by hanging large banners with the words 'Refugees Welcome' from their windows. Others engaged on a more personal, day-to-day level – for example by housing refugees in their own home.<sup>12</sup>

Serhat Karakayali and Olaf Kleist from the Berliner Institut für empirische Integrations- und Migrationsforschung (BIM) refer to these months during the summer of 2015 as 'The Summer of Welcome' [des Sommers des Willkommens].<sup>13</sup> The civilians who engaged in the refugee situation soon became an international symbol of Germany's migration approach at that time. And, their activities were often referred to as the reflection of German *welcome culture* in the media.<sup>14</sup> Still, some civic initiators viewed their engagement as a response to the gov-

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8 Roth, 2013; 2014; BAMF, 2013.

9 Roth, 2013; Bertelsmann, 2015.

10 Heckmann, 2016.

11 Morgenpost.de (a); zitty.de; spiegel.de; Tagesspiegel.com; focus.de September 2017.

12 Morgenpost.de (b), September 2017.

13 Karakayali and Kleist, 2016.

14 BAMF.de; Zeit.de, September 2017; Trauner and Turton, 2017.



**Banners with the text 'Refugees welcome' hanging from housing estate in Berlin. Private photo.**

ernments way of managing the incoming refugees. At this stage, the concept of *welcome culture* was no longer nourished by the input of political actors alone. It had become a concept *enacted* and defined by civil society. As presented in the aforementioned reports, the political concept of *welcome culture* does not apply directly to the civic initiatives I examine in this article.

In the following section I shed light on different strands of literature that examine the concept of conviviality as modes for *welcoming* and integrating refugees into society.

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### **Conviviality in the perspective of migration**

As a way of pursuing the analysis of civic initiators who through acts of solidarity share their home and everyday life with refugees, I have found inspiration in the concept of conviviality. *Convivencia* is the Spanish word for conviviality, which derives from a historic idealization of the cultural interaction between medieval Jews, Muslims and Christians and their collective consciousness. It is

an alternative to xenophobic and liberal multiculturalist discourses circulating in Europe.<sup>15</sup>

*We can define convivencia in the broadest sense of the concept, to live in the company of others with whom we interact with empathy, sharing, communication, and the regulation of conflict. One should bear in mind that when people live together, conflicts arise: this need not be seen as a problem but rather as an impetus to change. From this definition, we understand convivencia (active relations between neighbors), in contradistinction to coexistence (minimal, passively produced relations between neighbors), and to hostility.<sup>16</sup>*

This understanding of living together is, as much other conviviality-literature, conceptualized in regard to city planning in diverse ethnic urban areas and does not per se tackle the question of living together under the same roof. Still, this notion of shared life and interaction in diverse settings is highly applicable for the current research because it depicts how the current accounts, of locals who house and engage with refugees on a daily basis, are somewhat different to the political concept of *welcome culture*. Conviviality involves *active* relations and points towards considering individuals through the meanings of their interrelatedness and interdependency, and offers an alternative to the rather technical concept of *welcome culture* developed by the German government as part of an ongoing effort to improve the perception of immigration nationally.<sup>17</sup> During the past few years, scholars from various theoretical backgrounds, especially in migration and diversity studies, have brought conviviality into play in order to examine different modes of togetherness.<sup>18</sup> Sociologists Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayutham explore the concept of conviviality in everyday life among immigrants in Sydney and Singapore; with a focus on how spatial ordering and gift exchange shape encounters, networks and intercultural habitus, such as disposition, habits, and linguistic adaptation, they point towards civilians who voluntarily engage in and facilitate practices that bring together locals and immigrants.<sup>19</sup> These practices that, among other things, involve gift exchange and intercultural knowledge exchange, create opportunities and foundation for the production of cross-cultural embodied commensality.<sup>20</sup> These productions of space of intercultural care and trust is very similar to the ways in which my informants engage with the ref-

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15 Erickson, 2011:115.

16 Erickson, 2011.

17 Nowicka and Vertovec, 2014; Trauner and Turton, 2017.

18 Gilroy 2006; Freitag, 2014; Lapina, 2015.

19 The authors refer to the civilians, or civic initiators as transversal enablers (Wise and Velayutham, 2014).

20 Wise and Velayutham, 2014; Wise 2009.

ugees; for instance by helping them to find a doctor or by assisting them with the paperwork for their asylum application.<sup>21</sup> According to the report ‘Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur in Deutschland – Herausforderungen und Lösungsansätze’<sup>22</sup> the authors argue that, civilians who engage with the incoming refugees are not only important in order to create bonds between diverse groups in society, they are emphasized as crucial players who mediate between refugees and public authorities.<sup>23</sup> One of the main arguments in the report is that public authorities are not adept at handling *foreigners*; they do not possess sufficient language skills and are not equipped to handle possibly traumatized people.<sup>24</sup> The report suggests that civilians might be more prone to meet the refugees on equal footing and with their assumed knowledge about the German bureaucracy they may enable a fruitful dialogue between refugees and public authorities. Civilians who join the process of *welcoming* and helping refugees to get established in their new society may thus contribute with something *less* organizational than the governmental body.<sup>25</sup>

The civic initiators that Wise and Velayutham define are in many ways similar to the informants’ in my empirical material; they operate on a more proximate, everyday level as opposed to what the government and aforementioned reports suggest – or are entitled to. By understanding the informants’ engagement through the concept of conviviality I am able to analyze them as enactments of *welcome culture*

In the following section I will introduce the empirical material I draw on in this article. Then I present the methodological approaches, before I move on to present the theoretical resources I utilize.

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## Fieldwork, Informants and Material

The empirical material that creates the basis for the current article is part of a comprehensive master thesis and has been generated in various areas of Berlin, Germany during two courses of fieldwork. The process of forming this collection of empirical material has been an ongoing process for a longer period of time, stretching back to the late summer of 2015 ending in the beginning of May 2016. The first period took place from the beginning of September 2015 to the end of March 2016 when I lived in Berlin as part of an Erasmus exchange program studying at the Humboldt University. I arrived in Berlin as the German government

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21 Wise and Velayutham, 2014; Roth, 2014.

22 Roth, 2014.

23 Karakayali and Kleist, 2015.

24 BAMF, 2013.

25 BAMF, 2013.

announced that the German borders would be open for all refugees wanting to stay in Germany, regardless of country of arrival.<sup>26</sup> During the first period, I followed the refugee crisis in the media and more closely at the university where students and professors were actively taking part in different ways. During the autumn, I volunteered in a clothing depot in the former Tempelhofer airport, one of the largest refugee camps in Berlin. Here, I got a sense of how the government managed the accommodation and care of around 5000 newly arrived refugees who lived crammed together in tents erected in the large, cold hangars without privacy or access to the surrounding society.<sup>27</sup> As part of another research project, I conducted participant-observation and semi-structured interviews in the organization ÜdT; a non-profit organization founded by three students that host cooking events for refugees and local Berliners as a way of spurring a sense of belonging and engagement across diverse cultures – a contrast to the rather secluded refugee camps.<sup>28</sup> The first course of fieldwork, which has just been presented, is not something I draw directly on in this article. It is rather an illustration of how I worked my way into the field I am currently studying.

The second course of fieldwork took place during the first ten days of May 2016 and consists of 8 semi-structured interviews with nine local Berliners who at some point during the refugee influx in 2015 engaged with refugees in a way that implicated and affected their everyday life.<sup>29</sup> Each interview lasted from 1,5-2 hours and took place in the homes of the informants. Few informants wanted to conduct the interview elsewhere in order to shield the refugee or because of conflict in the home. In those cases, we met at a café or restaurant of their choice in their neighborhood. I got in touch with the informants through my social network in Berlin or through social media platforms such as e.g. the Facebook group 'Place4Refugees'. The informants include: Marco, a 30-year-old PhD student, houser and founder of the organization Among Us, which he founded while trying to relocate a refugee he was not able to accommodate any longer,<sup>30</sup> and the 28-year-old student Hannah, who lived in a collective together with her boyfriend Andrew, two friends and a 21-year-old refugee named Assam; Jana, another 20-something student also living in a collective of five, including a 17-year-old refugee from Afghanistan; the British-German couple, Sally and Andy, who housed an Afghan family and as a response to the refugee situation embarked on the photo

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26 This decision overruled the 1990 Dublin Convention, which determines the State responsible for examining the applications for asylum lodged in one of the Member States of the European Communities. [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content), 10.17.16.

27 Mameli, Flavia Alice, Sarkez, Josefine Løndorf & van Wetteren, Anne (2017).

28 Since the launch in 2013 the student founded organization has grown into a large international organization with sub-projects such as Kitchen on the Run, ([ueberdentellerrand.org](http://ueberdentellerrand.org), September 2017).

29 Nowicka, 2006.

30 [among-us.org](http://among-us.org).



project ‘No Stranger Place’ that portrays local Berliners who live together with refugees;<sup>31</sup> the 30-something Ute who, together with her husband and 6-year-old daughter, housed a 19-year-old Syrian man named Amos; and the architect, George, whose life changed after housing refugees over the course of several periods in 2015; the ÜdT-managers, Ralph and Lisa, who did not house refugees in their own home, however, their involvement with the refugees at ÜdT affected their everyday life to such an extent that they would spend most of their waking hours with the refugees. These had, according to Ralph and Lisa, become some of their best friends. The empirical material also includes: field notes from my everyday life in Berlin, meetings, seminars and lectures at the university as well as random and undocumented conversations with friends and strangers. Impressions from visiting exhibitions, watching movies or attending demonstrations. A selection of prints such as newspaper articles, reports concerning *welcome culture* in Germany, posters, flyers, stickers and photographs from various sites in Berlin. I have not yet come across literature or reports that deal with the topic of locals who house and engage with refugees on a daily basis, however, I include the aforementioned reports from BAMF, BIM, Roth and Bertelsmann on *welcome culture* as part of my empirical material. The reports seek to define the concept of *welcome culture* that prior to the refugee crisis in 2015 emerged as part of a political strategy by the German government. I draw on the reports in order to illuminate some of the initial inspirations and aspirations of *welcome culture*, with the aim of examining how the civic response to the refugee influx enabled new forms of *welcoming* practices.

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## Theoretical and Analytical Resources

In this section, I will present the theoretical resources I utilize in the examination of the informants’ engagement in the refugee crisis. The theoretical resources depart from the empirically grounded and interdisciplinary research program actor network theory (ANT). Understanding theory from this perspective dismisses classic concepts of theory as something that can be proven right or wrong and enables a much more pragmatic view on theory that emphasizes practice and actors.<sup>32</sup> This constructivist, and so-called ‘anti-essentialist movement’, opposes philosophy of science, claiming that it is much more relevant to study how things *are* done rather than how it *should* be done.<sup>33</sup> With a somewhat pragmatic way of viewing theory, and by not prioritizing to develop clear-cut theories within theory of science itself, the ANT research program presents alternative ways to theory

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31 <http://www.unhcr.org/no-stranger-place.html>,

32 Hallberg, 2013,

33 Hallberg, 2013: 82–83,

where, for example, the object under study guides where to look and how to pose questions.<sup>34</sup> With the performative turn in ANT focus is on the question of how networks co-exist without falling apart despite tensions, inner contradiction and ambivalences.<sup>35</sup> This is based on the ontological assumption that an entity, i.e. a phenomenon like *welcome culture*, is constituted by its relation to other entities.<sup>36</sup> The British sociologist, John Law, is one of the leading figures in (post-) ANT, which is the theoretical resources I draw on in my examination of the civic response to the refugee situation in 2015.

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### Modes of Ordering

As a way of establishing the rationales for engaging in the *welcoming* of refugees, I draw on John Law's 'Modes of Ordering'. In the book 'Organizing Modernity' John Law addresses organizing and the process of ordering.<sup>37</sup> He does so by analyzing how organization and management is performed in the Daresbury laboratory in England. With the laboratory as point of departure, Law not only shows that there *are* performances in organizations, he establishes the idea that organizations might be understood *as* performance. He exemplifies this by illustrating how the laboratory has different actors who play different roles.<sup>38</sup> With roots in STS and ANT, Law deviates from the notion of a 'single' or 'pure' organization or order and argues for a 'plural' and 'complex' mode of ordering that implies materiality, corporeality and enactment; a network of different 'versions' or 'logics' of organization.<sup>39</sup> Law notes, 'The ordering modes are tools for sensemaking',<sup>40</sup> which are not concerned with undefeated organization, but are devoted to empirical and different modes of ordering. There is, according to Law, no undefeated logic, but several logics that constitute/form an organization. The different logics and versions support and interfere with each other, and in some cases some logics might seem more dominant than other, however, this does not mean that they do not need other logics. It is, according to Law, a way of ordering the modern social world. In that case, examining the informant's rationales for engaging in the refugee work implies paying attention to how the different roles and logics are enacted and how they shape different versions of engagement (*ibid.*).

Law operates with four modes of ordering: 'enterprise', 'administration', 'vision' and 'vocation', which he develops based on his own fieldwork and em-

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34 Latour, 1999; Law, 2004; Hallberg, 2013.

35 Sandberg, 2009.

36 Elgaard, 2003.

37 Law, 1994.

38 Law and Moser, 1999.

39 Law, 1994:83.

40 Law, 1994:83-84.

pirical material generated in the Daresbury laboratory. This imply that the four modes of ordering are context specific. Law characterizes them as, ‘fairly regular patterns that may be usefully imputed for certain purposes to the recursive networks of the social. [...] They are recurring patterns embodied within, witnessed by, generated in and reproduced as part of the ordering of humans and non-humans relations’.<sup>41</sup> The modes of ordering work as an analytical tool which makes it possible to highlight essential dimensions and significant patterns in the field I examine. I now continue to the analysis where I turn to my own way of putting John Law’s notion of modes of ordering to work in relation to the empirical field of Berlin citizen’s rationales and motivations for engaging in the refugee crisis.

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### Introduction to Analysis

In the following sections I draw on my empirical material in order to identify some of the informants’ rationales and motivations for engaging in the refugee crisis. Though my informants were mainly engaged in the same kind of work (sharing home and daily life with refugees), I learned that they had different arguments and ambitions for initiating refugee activities as well as different ways of practicing their engagement. With inspiration from John Law’s Modes of Ordering I have identified different ‘logics’ that shape different versions of engagement.<sup>42</sup> The issues I highlight, throughout the analysis, are directed towards the informants’ arguments, ideals and aspirations, and how they together shape different versions of engagement, among other things including different concepts of solidarity, moral responsibility, integration, conviviality, gift giving and reciprocity. The three logics I present in the analysis, are not to be seen as fixed or separate entities but as dynamic and closely related logics or versions that overlap, support and interfere with each other.

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### Three rationales for engaging

I utilize Law’s Modes of Ordering as an analytical resource in order to qualify the informants’ different logics for engaging in the refugee crisis. I draw on the logic that creates the basis of the ordering modes, as analytical resources. The rationales are based on arguments, practices, conflicts and negotiations and are dependent on various components such as norms, convictions and social network. This thus means that the rationales should not be seen as fixed or separate entities but as dynamic and closely related logics or versions that overlap, support and interfere

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41 Law 1994: 83.

42 Law, 1994: Law and Moser, 1999.

with each other.<sup>43</sup> By operationalizing the different ways of speaking about and doing or enacting *welcome culture*, I have been able to structure the diversity and plurality of my empirical data that consists of different logics, which constitute the following three rationales:

- Transitory integration actions
- Sustainable integration
- Reciprocity.

The three rationales are constituted by a set of coherent logics, ways of understanding and enacting engagement. The rationales might be seen as a hybrid between theory, mini discourses, stories, histories and empirical data. Each rationale is a summary of characteristic traits joint together by particular ambitions and means, however, they should not be understood as three exclusive ways of engaging but merely as networks or patterns of different logics. The rationales appear in combination with other rationales and in some cases one rationale might appear more dominant than another. While some rationales mutually support and include each other, others contradict and interfere with each other.<sup>44</sup> By using the rationales as a mode of ordering, I show that different forms of *welcoming* practices are shaped by different logics and that the political concept of *welcome culture* is challenged by these different logics and practices.

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### Transitory Integration Actions

Finding impetus to act on behalf of six refugees sleeping in the street emerged spontaneously as the architect, George, was on his way home from a party on a chilly night in September 2015 and decided to bring home the six men to sleep in his apartment. At this point, the 40-something architect was not engaged in the refugee topic and knew only little about it. Nevertheless, seeing the refugees asleep on the ventilation grill triggered a sense of responsibility within him. Considering possible dangers or risks was not what filled George that night. According to George, bringing them home was the only *right* thing to do.<sup>45</sup>

The next morning the men had left, but somehow George managed to find them outside Landes Amt für Gesundheit und Soziales [the State Office for Health and Social Affairs; LAGeSo] where he learned that chaos was raging. LAGeSo is the governing body for processing asylum applications and accommodating the incoming refugees. The number of incoming refugees increased massively during 2015, which had an almost immediate effect on the number of asylum applica-

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<sup>43</sup> Law, 1994.

<sup>44</sup> Law, 1994.

<sup>45</sup> MII050916.



**A snapshot of how George managed to accommodate the six Syrian refugees in his 2-room apartment. Photo George.**

tions that soon went sky-high. Still, LAGeSo remained the only place where the refugees could go in order to register their asylum application. LAGeSo could not keep up with the increasing number of asylum seekers, which meant that thousands of newly arrived refugees waited in lines in and outside LAGeSo; without water, food or a place to sleep. And, with stories of security men treating the refugees poorly, the situation soon went from chaotic to critical, which made locals, like George, respond by coming by each day in order to follow the situation.<sup>46</sup> Other informants explained how the situation that evolved around LAGeSo created feelings of anger and frustration directed towards the government for not doing *enough*, which eventually made them get up and do something about it themselves.<sup>47</sup> Sally and Andy, who housed an Afghan family during the peak of the influx, explains how they and other citizens blamed the German government for the chaos and neglect that emerged around the refugees around that time.

*Andy: I think, when it comes to the legality of things the government, particularly in Germany, is in a different position to react and respond than individuals [civilians] are. I mean, we certainly felt the situation and responded as a human being.*

*Q: what made you respond?*

46 n-tv.de; tagesspiegel.de (b), September 2017

47 M050916

*A: you don't respond like; oh my god what do we do about insurance. What about the possibility there is that they download what on my Wi-Fi. All of this comes a bit later for a lot of people. If you think about all of these things ahead of time, then you simply don't do it [house refugees]. It is too complex. And then you have the situation with the government where they say; there is no middle ground between providing. Because the government is legally required and obligated to provide a certain standard of accommodation and care. If the government can't provide that they don't provide any care. I think a lot of people responded by saying; it is not okay to provide no care, so we will respond and take on that and to hell with the consequences. So, there was a lot of anger and frustration with people at the start, with like; why isn't the government responding? Why aren't they doing this and why aren't they doing that? And actually, because they can't [according to the law].<sup>48</sup>*

The couple expresses an understanding of the two government and civilians as two actors who are in different positions and have different possibilities for acting: The government according to the law or a 'certain standard'; the civilians according to a moral responsibility or as 'human beings'. Acting according to this logic is portrayed as an opposition to the 'law-abiding passivity' and entails a certain emotional state that does not leave room for considering possible consequences.<sup>49</sup> Whereas, the government, as the governing and legislative authority, is both legally and morally obligated to consider possible consequences of their role and possibilities in situations of emergency. Marco, the founder of the organization Among us emphasizes how the legality of things, for instance in terms of housing undocumented refugees, which, according to the law, is illegal, influenced his engagement in the refugee crisis.

*If you don't have a legal status in Germany you don't get support by the government and we [Marco and the members of the organization] felt like this is not the right way because it's not about status. These are people; real persons and real humans and they fled for reasons. Because you don't flee from home if you don't have to and this was our thought: to support those people who are not supported by the government.<sup>50</sup>*

Helping those refugees that the government is not legally obligated to help shows a certain human view where everyone is equally important and entitled to receive help and care. By emphasizing the 'realness' of the refugees' vulnerability

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48 M050916.

49 Law, 1994; Kelz, 2015.

50 M032016.

and their reasons for fleeing, he argues that it is not ‘right’ only to support those with a legal status. According to Marco, the documented or well-qualified refugees should not be more entitled to receive care and support from the government than the undocumented or precarious refugees. However, this stands in direct opposition to the political concept of *welcome culture* that explicitly outlines whom it applies and does not apply to.<sup>51</sup> Most Western political ideas of solidarity and responsibility is considered in relation to more or less fixed categories for example family members or fellow citizens. The presented logics overstep the boundaries of established communality and illustrate versions of solidarity and responsibility that challenge these ideas.<sup>52</sup> As shown in the above examples, there are different notions and ways of acting according to the moral responsibility rationale. The rationale is characterized by concepts of *humanness*, solidarity and, is driven by certain emotions, and notions of moral accuracy. The informants’ put these logics in contrast to political or legal accuracy. These logics, chiefly performed in situations of emergency, may appear somewhat hasty and transitory compared to the following rationale, which is focused on long-term and sustainable solutions.

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### Sustainable integration

For some informants, the transitory integration actions turned into a stronger commitment of sharing home and everyday life with the refugee. As the following examples show housing and engaging on a daily basis with refugees is not merely about giving them food or a roof over their head. The sustainable integration rationale is driven by goals and aspirations to integrate the refugees into German society, mainly through housing and social interaction between locals and refugees. These aspirations do not deviate from the political strategies, per se, but in the way, they are performed. According to the informants the ways in which the refugees are *welcomed*, have implications for their integration into society. Like the transitory integration rationale, it entails notions equality, right and wrong. But also, notions of proximity, interaction and participation. Marco emphasizes the importance of having the refugees among locals in small entities, like a home, which he puts in contrast to a ‘big thing’ like Tempelhof: Berlin’s largest emergency camp, which by the end of 2015 accommodated around 5,000 people.<sup>53</sup> In the following quote, Marco explains the importance of providing the incoming refugees with a place where they can feel at home in order to give them a head start in their new society.

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51 BAMF, 2013; Faist and Häußermann, 1996.

52 Komter, 2005; Kelz, 2015; BAMF, 2013; Roth, 2013; Bertelsmann, 2015.

53 M032016; Morgenpost.de (b) September 2017.

*We [Among-us founders] wanted to have people, not in a...big thing like Tempelhof because it's senseless. So, we wanted to have the refugees in these entities where they can feel at home and where they really get a connection with Germans, or with locals let's say. I think that is a good thing for the refugees but on the other hand I think it's a good thing for those people who offer their rooms or their flats; to learn from the refugees. It's a two-sided-integration. It's not only the refugees who have to integrate themselves; we all have to change and get closer in a way.<sup>54</sup>*

Ute, who together with her husband and daughter housed a Syrian refugee named Amos, supports this logic and argues that 'integrating people [refugees] is a problem if you have a refugee camp with hundreds or thousands of people. It is easier [for the refugees] to begin a new life with German people around, like in a family where you can discuss cultural things.<sup>55</sup> According to this logic living together in small entities is not only important in terms of integrating the refugees, it also offers a *two-sided-integration* where the refugees and locals mutually interact, challenge and *shape* each other. Ralph, one of the managers from ÜdT, supports this idea of interacting and building social bonds with the refugees as 'the basis for long-term sustainable integration. Because people come here and learn the language they gain social skills, get access to social networks, professional networks and work, flats – all this.<sup>56</sup> At the communal cooking events held by ÜdT, locals and refugees are able to meet and interact with each other, which – according to this logic – is seen as a good foundation for mutual integration. Understanding this logic in connection to Erickson's definition of conviviality, reveals versions of sustainable integration that are preconditioned by social interaction between diverse groups of people.<sup>57</sup> According to Ralph, it is necessary to engage with the refugees as valid and important players that may contribute to and 'shape' the society in the same way as locals.

*I guess most people would say that [the work of ÜdT] is called integration. But it's also inclusion or giving people [refugees] the right to be a part of society and it's not helping [or volunteering] but overcoming the helping because we [as society] are seeing that most Germans always thought that they had to help the refugees. So, these helpers, those are the people to be helped. What we [as society] need is that they [German citizens and refugees] come together on an equal footing and learn how to live together. When we live together in society it is very important that we all have the*

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54 M032016.

55 U05102016.

56 M05062016.

57 Erickson, 2011:124.



*possibility to participate and shape society in the same amount. This is only possible if we are accepted on the same level and have the same rights and possibilities.*<sup>58</sup>

There is, according to the above quote, a somewhat clear difference between ‘including’ and ‘helping’ the incoming refugees. The latter is noted as a non-committal way of engaging, whereas the first is viewed as an ongoing commitment that one cannot make a cut from. Ralph’s notion of integration or inclusion implies *granting* the refugees access to, and making them a part of, the society through social bonds. This implies a strong social engagement from both the refugees and the locals. According to this logic, integration might be seen as a trajectory that provides the refugees with access to society and provides all players – locals and refugees – with equal access and responsibility to participate and shape society. With this in mind, the juxtaposition of integrating and helping insinuates a certain logic that sees the latter as a biased relationship between locals as helpers and refugees as those in need of help. This thus illuminates a version of sustainable integration where equality, mutual responsibility and participation plays a focal role for the informants’ engagement and integration of the refugees. In other words, there is a need for both locals and refugees to engage in order to create a more coherent society. This logic of integrating and *including* the refugees in society is supported in the aforementioned reports – it might actually be seen as one of the primary aspirations of the political concept of *welcome culture*. As such, it is not the question of *whether* to integrate and include the refugees into society, but the question of *how* to integrate and include the refugees into society that constitutes the difference between the informants’, and the government’s enactment of *welcome culture*. The sustainable integrations may thus be understood as logics that challenge the law by pursuing its own ways.<sup>59</sup> They do moreover appear somewhat similar to the logics of transitory integration actions. Still, these actions first of all seek to do what is *right*.

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## Reciprocity

Finding impetus to engage in the refugee crisis is, as touched upon in the previous sections, constituted by various logics and ways of engaging. The different enactments of conviviality and solidarity may from a Maussian context be under-

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58 R05062016.

59 Law 1994: 77.

stood as a *gift* given to the refugees.<sup>60</sup> According to Jana, who together with her collective housed a young Afghani refugee, housing and engaging on a daily basis with refugees is ‘a really personal thing. If I was in a similar situation I would be glad if someone would do the same for me’.<sup>61</sup> This illustrates a logic that applies to the proverbial notion; one should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself. This appears to be the fundamental idea of the reciprocity rationale. However, there are other logics on the line and finding meaning and self-approval in housing and engaging with the refugee is, according to the following quote, another motivating factor for engaging in the refugee crisis.

*Q: what motivates you to keep on doing this [housing/engaging with refugees]?*

*George: I don't know. Today there came another person [refugee] I didn't know but he [refugee] was so nice and I looked into his eyes and saw that he needed help and...I have a nice feeling. It gives such a good feeling back when you do good to others. I can't say no.*<sup>62</sup>

George is not able to pinpoint or make a clear argument for maintaining his engagement in the refugee crisis. He rather navigates after a form of *sixth sense* in order to determine whether someone needs help or not. The ‘nice feeling’ and self-approval George gets in return for helping the refugees entangles him in a deeper and more committing sense of engagement, which he seemingly cannot withdraw from or ‘say no’ to as expressed in the above quote. This personal enhancement and self-approval is supported by Lisa, one of the managers from ÜdT.

*I am not sure that I have a clear incentive – I just got sucked in by the positive energy. All the experiences I got here are all positive. I have never learned so many new things or met so many new people. After each community evening, I go out with a positive feeling and I want to come back.*<sup>63</sup>

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60 Mauss, 2002 The presented notion of gift exchange and reciprocity rests on Marcel Mauss' notion of gift exchange and reciprocity in archaic societies which entail 'to give gifts (by giving, one shows oneself as generous, and thus as deserving of respect), the obligation to receive them (by receiving the gift, one shows respect to the giver, and concomitantly proves one's own generosity), and the obligation to return the gift (thus demonstrating that one's honor is, at least, equivalent to that of the original giver). Gift-giving is thus steeped in morality, and by giving, receiving and returning gifts, a moral bond between the persons exchanging gifts.' anthrobase.com, 2016.

61 M05052016.

62 MII050916.

63 L06052016.

Lisa's notion of being 'sucked in by the positive energy' is similar to George's account of not being able to resist helping the refugees. While explaining how she got engaged in ÜdT, Lisa noted how everything 'kind of evolved' around her and pulled her in, in an almost supernatural way.<sup>64</sup> These accounts are in some ways similar to Law and Moser's illustration of 'vocation' as a mode of ordering, which holds 'access to a reality and a vision, which transcends the mundane'.<sup>65</sup> Both informants tell of how their engagement is driven and maintained by the *positive* and affirmative feelings they get in return. At first glance, this seemed to stand in contrast to my initial view and understanding of the informants' engagements as somewhat altruistic.<sup>66</sup> However, seeing these presumed incompatible concepts (volunteering and reciprocity) through the lens of gift exchange, the political scientists Anita Manatschal and Markus Feitag argue that they might appear as interrelated concepts. Because there is, according to the logic of gift exchange, no such thing as a *free* gift.<sup>67</sup> The authors illustrate that the motives as to why human beings perform activities in which time is freely given up in order to benefit another person, group or organization are both 'other-interested' and 'self-interested'.<sup>68</sup> Though there are notions of reciprocity and self-interest in the accounts of these informants, they should not be understood as calculative or premeditated kinds of self-interests. They rather emerge in the dynamic or as a result of their engagement. Still, for some informants, more explicit aspirations and ideas of reciprocity were unfolded.

*We've [the collectivists] always had quite a united feeling about what we want in the flat; that we want a lot of cooperation, that we want people to participate, to be each other's kind of point of reference or to be a family group. We didn't just want to contact a charity and say, send us someone, because we had quite a definite idea of what we needed as a community. We wanted someone who actively searched the same values in living together.*<sup>69</sup>

Deciding to house a refugee was, as Hannah explains in the above, not merely about finding any refugee, it entailed finding a candidate who could affiliate and live as a 'family group' according to the norms and values of the collective. According to this logic, meeting these expectations entails personal engagement in the daily life of the collective. According to Hannah, having certain expectations

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64 L06052016.

65 Law and Moser, 1999:259.

66 Manatschal and Freitag, 2014:209.

67 Mauss, 2002:xii; Manatschal and Freitag, 2014.

68 Manatschal and Freitag, 2014:209.

69 M050316.

of the refugee is not a problem ‘as long as you are clear about them’.<sup>70</sup> This notion is supported by Jana, who utters ‘we [the collectivists] had imagined making him [the refugee] a part of our Wohngemeinschaft [collective] like an equal member with all responsibilities and liberties’.<sup>71</sup> Sharing a home and daily life with the refugee did, according to Jana, imply offering the refugee to become an ‘equal member’ of the collective with all the ‘liberties’ and ‘responsibilities’ that come with that. The notions of equality and responsibility are somewhat similar to the logics in the transitory integration actions rationale and sustainable integration rationale, however, emphasized in a slightly different way. In this case Jana feels committed to the collective and the refugee they took in. And, seeing him as an equal member works as a legal basis for expecting commitment and participation in return. The following expresses a different logic where commitment is less important.

*This [housing the refugee family] was just a stopping point. Because they [the refugee family] wouldn't stay in Berlin – and that was fine for me [Andy]. I especially didn't want them to feel obligated to me in any way by maintaining a relationship. People have done the same for [accommodated] me many times in my life.<sup>72</sup>*

As opposed to Jana and Hannah, Sally and Andy has not intentions of maintaining a relationship of obligation. Andy reveals that he acts according to the law of reciprocity where you do good and expect that someone would do the same if you were to end up in a similar situation. The obligation to return the favor is meanwhile not necessarily aimed at the refugee family and does not hold you in an obligated or indebted relationship. It rather implies that *doing good* is tied to the expectation that it will be compensated by previous or future rewards.<sup>73</sup> In this case, housing or sharing daily life with the refugees is not aimed at a long-term relationship or integrative practices. It rather works as transitory integration actions in a situation of emergency. Meanwhile, living in intentional communities with people who care and are engaged in each other's lives is, according to the sustainable integration rationale, an important part of their daily wellbeing and motivation for engaging in the refugee situation.

The examination of these independent and, rather grass-root like interventions, in the refugee crisis, has illuminated versions of *welcome culture* where the home and everyday life are seen as important parts of welcoming and integrating the newly arrived refugees into the informant's homes and the German

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70 M050316.

71 M05052016.

72 M050916.

73 Manatschal and Freitag, 2014.

society. By opening up their own home and daily life the informants enact different versions of *welcome culture* where concepts of solidarity and conviviality extends to the refugees to whom they do not have an obvious connection or responsibility. As illuminated in the sustainable integration rationale some of the logics for housing and engaging with refugees on a daily basis rested upon ideas and aspirations to integrate and foster societal coherence, which illuminates logics that are somewhat similar to the political concept of *welcome culture* that aims at *welcoming* and integrating the refugees in order to create a more coherent society.

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## Conclusion

In this article, I have illuminated how civic initiators in Berlin responded to the refugee influx into Europe in 2015. Departing from the political concept of *Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur* – that since 2005 has been a part of the political strategy for creating a more positive attitude towards immigrants within the German society – I have investigated how the informants relate to the concept of *welcome culture* that was portrayed in the media and by the government, at that time. By utilizing Law's Modes of Ordering I have shed light on the informants' rationales for engaging in the refugee crisis. Here, I found that the informants in general viewed their engagement in the refugee crisis as a response to the government's way of managing the refugees, which they no longer could vouch for. The informants articulate an understanding of *welcome culture* that appears somewhat different than the political concept of *welcome culture*. The form of engagement or *welcome culture* that my informants ascribe themselves to, emerge through certain everyday life activities and engagement in their home or social network. The home is here seen as a *safe* place where the refugees can rest, interact and integrate alongside the locals – something that the government is not capable of providing the refugees with. These differences are emphasized in the informants' rationales for engaging. However, as I illuminate in the transitory integration rationale and the reciprocity rationale the government is restricted to act according to the law, while the civic initiators rather act according to a moral responsibility, or the law of reciprocity. This might appear to be a common, or natural explanation. Still, to *welcome* and integrate refugees into the home and/or society in order to strengthen social cohesion appears to be an aspiration shared by the informants and government. As such, it is not the question of *whether* to *welcome* and integrate the refugees into society, but the question of *how* to *welcome* and integrate the refugees into society that constitutes the difference between the informants' enactment and the political concept of *welcome culture*.

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### Overview of interviews

- M032016: Marco. Interview conducted 03.20.2016, in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin, Germany.
- M050316: Hannah. Interview conducted 05.03.2016, in Neukölln, Berlin, Germany.
- M050916: Jana. Interview conducted 05.05.2016, in Wedding, Berlin, Germany.
- M050916: Sally and Andy. Interview conducted 05.09.2016, in Wedding, Berlin, Germany.
- MII050916: George. Interview conducted 05.09.2016, in Neukölln, Berlin, Germany.
- M05062016: Ralph. Interview conducted 05.06.2016, in Schöneberg, Berlin, Germany.
- L06052016: Lisa. Interview conducted 05.06.2016, in Schöneberg, Berlin, Germany.
- U05102016: Ute. Interview conducted 05.10.2016, in Biesdorf, Berlin, Germany.

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**Dansk resumé**  
**Velkomstkultur: Conviviality og solidaritetspraksisser**  
**blandt civile initiativtagere i**  
**Berlin under flygtningekrisen i 2015**

Før den såkaldte flygtningekrise ramte store dele af Europa i 2015, udviklede den tyske regering, under Angela Merkel begrebet *Willkommens- und Anerkennungskultur* [velkomst- og anerkendelseskultur]. Dette begreb opstod som en politisk strategi, der søgte at skabe en positiv diskurs omkring flygtninge blandt den tyske befolkning; da denne i tiltagende grad var negativ. Henover sommeren 2015 valgte lokale borgere, på eget initiativ, at engagere sig i flygtningekrisen – nogle ved at huse flygtninge i deres eget private hjem. De lokale berlinere satte således gang i en række nye former for *velkomstpraksisser*. Dette betød samtidig, at *velkomstkultur* gik fra at være en del af en politisk strategi til at være en del af den offentlige debat. Denne artikel er en del af en kandidatafhandling og tager udgangspunkt i feltarbejde genereret blandt civile initiativtagere i Berlin, Tyskland, der i kølvandet på flygtningekrisen i 2015 valgte at huse flygtninge i deres eget private hjem. I artiklen undersøger jeg, hvorledes forskellige former for *velkomstkultur* opstod blandt de civile initiativtagere i Berlin. Med afsæt i en performativ forståelse af *velkomstkultur* som forskellige *praksisser*, der gøres, og med inspiration fra John Law's *Modes of Ordering* undersøger jeg informanternes argumenter, rationaler og idealer for at engagere sig i flygtningekrisen. Ved hjælp af koncepter som *conviviality* analyserer jeg mig frem til, at hjemmet og bestemte forståelser af solidaritet, inklusion og reciprocitet spiller en særlig rolle for informanternes engagement.

Jeg konkluderer, at de forskellige *velkomstpraksisser* og rationaler, er *in* og *ude* af sync, med hinanden og den politiske forståelse af *velkomstkultur*.