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'I Want to Give Something Back': Social Support and Reciprocity in the Lives of Young Refugees

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"I Want to Give Something Back": Social Support and Reciprocity in the Lives of Young Refugees

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Abstract

This article analyzes the support relationships of 10 asylum-seeking young people who fled to Germany between 2010 and 2015. It highlights their wish for reciprocity as a need in their country of destination and expands upon Sahlin's typology of reciprocal relationships (generalized, balanced, and negative reciprocity) by the type of "refused reciprocity." "Refused reciprocity" occurs when people are keen to reciprocate for support they have received, but they live in environments that restrict their agency. The article argues that participation means not only provision of support, but creation of opportunities for people to experience themselves as self-effective actors. They become self-effective when they can cope successfully with new and difficult situations on their own.

Résumé

Cette article analyse les relations de soutien de dix jeunes demandeurs d'asile ayant fui en Allemagne entre 2010 et 2015. Il souligne leur besoin de réciprocité dans leur pays de destination et élargit la typologie des relations de réciprocité de Sahlin (réciprocité généralisée, équilibrée et négative) avec le type « réciprocité refusée ». La « réciprocité refusée » survient dans les cas où les gens désirent rendre la pareille pour le soutien reçu, mais vivent dans des environnements qui posent des limites à leur agentivité. L'article soutient que la participation ne se limite pas à la prestation de soutien, mais comprend la création d'opportunités permettant aux gens de se reconnaître eux-mêmes comme des acteurs auto-efficaces. L'efficacité personnelle apparaît lorsque les personnes réalisent et sentent qu'elles peuvent faire face des situations nouvelles et difficiles avec succès grâce à leurs propres capacités.

Introduction

In recent years, research on refuge has increased in response to the global rise of people who are forced to leave their places of residence. During the "long summer of migration" in 2015, volunteers created a "culture of welcome" in Germany, Austria, and other European countries (Hamann &

Karakayali, 2016). They helped refugees[1] upon their arrival at the main train station in cities such as Munich, or supported professionals in social service institutions. At the same time, populists and right-wing parties are on the rise. They gained a voice in the parliaments of many European countries such as Germany, Austria, Hungary, and the Netherlands. Right-wing parties and populism in the United States and Australia are also a problem (Siim et al., 2019). In this mélange of solidarity and rejection, asylum-seeking people receive material support in their countries of arrival. Whether and how they are seen as having a right to a different form of support is part of controversial public negotiations. In Germany, for example, the head of Die Tafeln, a non-profit social movement that gives food to people in need, decided in February 2018 to spend no more money on food for refugees, because older German people might feel disadvantaged in comparison to those seeking asylum. This incident is a moment in a debate on allowing or denying support for refugees within hostile nation states. In this debate, refugees are represented primarily as beneficiaries of support and receivers of welfare state benefits that could also favour other people in need (such as homeless or poor people). This problematic image constructs a binary between people perceived as having a "genuine right" to support within a welfare state system, and those whose rights are seen as negotiable.

Also in the academic literature, refugees are seen primarily as recipients of support (Barnes & Aguilar, 2007, p. 235). Little is known about how they experience received (or denied) support from volunteers and professionals and how they may or may not participate in reciprocal exchanges.

Reciprocity influences well-being. It is the principle of mutual giving and taking in social relationships and is a universal moral code (Gouldner, 1960, 1984/2005). The exchange of birthday or wedding presents or the mutual offering of assistance during a loss or special events are examples of reciprocal behaviour (Stegbauer, 2011). Reciprocity can be viewed from different perspectives: What motivates someone to give? What kind of relationship does that person have with the receiver? How does the recipient perceive the receiving of support?

In this article, the meaning of reciprocity in social support relations of asylum seekers is interpreted on the basis of 10 qualitative interviews with young refugees who fled to Germany from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. I chose this focus on the basis of the content of the interviewees' narratives. The material was analyzed using a grounded theory approach. The paper examines three questions:

1. What forms of social support relationships are revealed in the material?
2. How do the young refugees experience these relationships?
3. What is the meaning of reciprocity in the social support relationships of the young people?

First, the article provides insight into the bureaucracy that confronts young refugees in Germany. This section is followed by explanations of the theoretical perspective of "reciprocity" and the state of research. The next section describes the methods used in the research project. The focus is on the interview analysis and a theoretical conclusion. The article concludes with implications for an inclusive approach that considers the possibility of reciprocity as a condition for participation of young refugees in receiving countries.

Young Refugees in Germany

Young refugees are a heterogeneous group. They have their own wishes and coping challenges on their way to adulthood. In this phase of life, they are forced to flee. At the end of 2019, 79.5 million people were on the run. Twenty-six million searched for refuge in other countries; 45.7 million were internally displaced. Forty per cent of the world's displaced people were children. Seventy-three per cent of those who crossed the borders of their home country were hosted in neighbouring states (UNHCR, 2020). Only a comparatively small proportion were able to reach countries within the European Union, although numbers of refugees rose in countries such as Germany. Between 2013 and 2017, Germany received about 1.6 million applications for asylum (BAMF, 2019, p. 5). Numbers have decreased since 2017, with increased restrictions at European borders. At the time of data collection, the main countries of origin for applicants were Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan—which are reflected in the sample of this study. Within recent years, about two-thirds of all asylum applicants have been under the age of 30. About 50% were minors. Almost two-thirds of all applications were filed by males (BAMF, 2019). In January 2019, 41,211 refugees were registered as unaccompanied minors and were cared for by child and youth services (ISM, 2019, p. 3). This figure

1. The term "refugee" appears in Article 1 of the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The terms "refugees" and "asylum-seeking people" are both used in this article. The latter highlights people's abilities to act in their search for asylum. It also emphasizes that the reasons for flight are not always accepted as such by the countries of destination. Being categorized as a refugee thus has enormous consequences for people's agency, since the provision or denial of residence controls access to goods, services, and societal systems such as the labour market or the health system. I understand the terms "flight" and "refugee" as the subjectively experienced need for people to leave their place of residence in order to secure their survival.

does not include possibly even greater numbers of unregistered minors. Once young people arrive in Germany, they find themselves entangled in institutional and legal responsibilities. Accommodation and care depend on whether the young people are under the age of 18 and whether they arrive with a parent or family or without a custodian. Adult asylum seekers and refugee families are admitted to initial reception centres. For unaccompanied minors, clearance by the youth office is initiated. A guardian is assigned to them and their needs are determined. Accompanied children usually live with their parents or other custodians in initial reception centres. Adult refugees and families receive a certificate of notification as asylum seekers. If they are allowed to stay in Germany, they are distributed to the federal states. They live in receiving institutions that are responsible for their (medical) care, or they can live in their own flats if housing is available. Refugees apply for asylum at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

Reciprocity as Theoretical Perspective

Simmel (1908/2005) describes gratitude as a social bond. Gratitude may cause interactions and social exchanges in response to a voluntary act of giving (p. 104). Members of society consider it to be ethical-obligatory. Mauss (1968/2005) explains social cohesion through social exchange. He presents a comparative study on the exchange of gifts in "pre-modern societies." For him, these societies can be understood by virtue of the principle of reciprocity. Blau (1968/2005) explains reciprocity not only as an integrative mechanism, but as a device that can generate a divergence of power and social asymmetry. He assumes that people initiate contacts with the expectation of a certain outcome. Reciprocity is the obligation to give in return once a person has benefitted from a contact. The paradox of social exchange is that reciprocity not only creates friendship; it may also lead to status differences between people (pp. 126–132), such as when the giver claims a superordinate status and creates dependency. Gouldner (1960, 1984/2005) describes reciprocity as a universal norm and distinguishes between reciprocity and charity. In the latter, the giver does not expect compensation. Gouldner extends the discussion on reciprocity by questioning the perspectives of giver and recipient: even if a giver defines the giving solely in terms of charity, the recipient does not necessarily interpret it in the same way. The recipient may interpret a charitable action in terms of reciprocity and may feel compelled to return it. Sahlin (1965/1999), however, emphasizes that reciprocity is embedded in societal structures. He distinguishes between generalized, balanced, and negative reciprocity (p. 154). Generalized reciprocity is an altruistic exchange with a weak expectation of reciprocity; balanced or symmetric reciprocity implies a direct exchange of equal value by the involved parties (such as a gift exchange), whereas negative reciprocity is an attempt to receive a gift without expectation of return.

For the current analysis, the focus is on how the interviewed actors are involved in social exchanges, and their capacity to give and receive.

State of Research[2]

Social support alleviates detrimental life events and circumstances. It can promote well-being and prevent disruption, stresses, and strain. A main component of support relationships is reciprocity. Several studies explore the meaning of reciprocity in networks of old people (Brown et al., 2003), in the workplace (Bowling et al., 2005), in families and among friends (Nelson, 2000), in communities (Wellmann & Wortley, 1990), and in caregiver relationships (Neufeld & Harrison, 1995) as well as its role in coping with illness (Takizawa et al., 2006). The studies conclude that reciprocity is indispensable to well-being. They point out that *giving support* is just as important as or even more important than *receiving support* (Brown et al., 2003; Väänänen et al., 2005). If social support is to be truly supportive, it is essential to give and receive it (Williams, 1995). Dunbar et al. (1998) studied distress in social support relationships of people categorized as having and not having a disability. They found that people categorized as "having a disability" can in some cases experience depression when they receive support. Their results underpin the inequity hypothesis, which states that unequal relationships create stress, such as when someone receives more support than she or he is able to return. Shumaker and Brownell (1984) offer the thesis that people who feel unable to return a benefit "may be less likely to seek assistance or accept it when offered" (p. 14). A relationship between provider and receiver could come to an end because the imbalance is too great. Jung (1990) suggests

> the possibility that the receipt of support, without previous giving of support in return, may have different effects (the feeling of guilt) than the receipt of support from persons with whom there is a previous or expected future reciprocated exchange of support. (p. 250)

Whether support is provided by friends, family members, or strangers can thus make a significant difference in the recipient's experience.

2. This article was written in 2019 and accepted for publication in 2020. The state of research thus refers to 2019 and before. During finalization, further research could be included only in selected cases.

Reciprocity has been given little attention in research on refuge. However, some studies do refer to reciprocity in passing. In their analysis of community social support for Cuban refugees in Texas, Barnes and Aguilar (2007, p. 235) found that they receive support before the potential for a reciprocal relationship can arise. In their study on social support networks of Somali refugees in Canada, Stewart et al. (2008, p. 137) showed that the Somalis in their research value reciprocity. However, they perceive their current living situation as impersonal and do not benefit from reciprocal relationships. Smith (2016) and Maiter et al. (2008) discuss the importance of reciprocity in theatre and community projects with asylum-seeking people. The cooperation of refugees, locals, and pedagogical staff creates a venue for mutual exchange. Breithecker and Stöckinger (2020) led interviews with 12 volunteers in refugee work in a German town. The authors found that the motives to engage range from commitment, to magnanimity, to self-interest. Some respondents said they expected thanks from the refugees.

While these studies hint at the importance of reciprocal relationships and the perspective of volunteers, there is still a need for studies that systematically reconstruct reciprocity in the biographies of refugees from the perspective of the refugees themselves.

Methods

In spring 2016, I conducted 10 qualitative interviews (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2010, pp. 138–145) with young refugees in the Rhine-Main region of Germany. The project[3] reconstructed possibilities for and barriers to participation in the lives of young people. The interviewees[4] were aged between 17 and 31 at the time of the interviews and fled to Germany from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan between 2010 and 2015 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Study Sample

Name	Age	Country of origin
Alexander	27	Syria
Amir	24	Syria
Bassam	18	Syria
Daniel	17	Iraq
Fatih	22	Afghanistan
Karim	25	Syria
Marku	31	Syria
Said	24	Syria
Tarek	23	Syria
Zarif	23	Syria

All of them arrived in Germany without their parents or other custodians. While some were accommodated in facilities of youth welfare, others received barely sufficient support from social workers. The interviews explored life before the young people were forced to leave their home countries; experiences during flight; the living situation in Germany; and desires for the future. Initially the topic of reciprocity was not the focus of the study. It was made relevant by the interviewees themselves. Taking a sensitive approach was important, since the young people had already experienced hearings by the Federal Office for Migration and Flight and interrogations by police officers. Contact was initiated with the help of gatekeepers with whom the young people had already built trusting relationships. These gatekeepers (social workers in social services, as well as volunteers) were requested to ask for an interview with young people who were psychologically capable of doing so and who had an interest in telling their story. The procedure was explained to participants in detail. It was important to clarify the researcher's interest in their individual views. The interviews were conducted in German and English. The sample was limited to young people who were able to communicate in either language. Despite this challenge, the interposition of an interpreter was omitted in order to avoid artificiality. The interviews held in German were translated into English for this article. The analysis was done using category building in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1996). Topics were identified in the material (open coding), and categories were built and related to one another (axial coding). The results were gathered in the key category "wish for reciprocity" (Strauss & Corbin, 1996).

Results

This section identifies family members, friends, and other refugees on the run as well as social workers in the welfare system and informal support givers in the migration country as relevant support givers. While the young people were receiving and providing support before and during their flight,

3. The project was funded by the Institute of Education at Mainz University in Germany. Data collection and analysis as well as all procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the university's Ethical Commision of Faculty 02: Social Sciences, Media, and Sports.

4. Names of interviewees have been replaced by pseudonyms. The author expresses her heartfelt thanks to the participants for sharing their stories.

they ran the danger of being mainly assigned the role of recipients of support in the country of destination.

Exchange of Money, Information, and Experiences: Social Support Before and During Flight

Bassam was 18 years old at the time of the interview. In 2012 he fled from Syria, where he had lived with his parents and six siblings and attended school. Because Bassam was to be drafted into Assad's army, the family decided that he should leave the country. He was supported by his father, who "for this group … gave money … then I went to Turkey." Other interviewees named friends who helped organize their flight. Zarif was 23 years old and fled to Germany in 2015. He studied civil engineering in a city near Aleppo. His priority was to complete his undergraduate studies despite the dangerous situation in Syria. Before he finally fled, Zarif visited his parents in Aleppo and was picked up by members of the Islamic State but managed to escape. A friend loaned him the money for the journey. Both friends fled together. Twenty-four-year-old Said also fled with a friend from Syria. Said's mother died 10 years beforehand, while his father lived with his stepmother in Jordan. The friends were fleeing to Germany and assisted each other during the whole trip: "He was with me until now."

But it was not only family and friends who supported the organization of flight. Friends from other countries also played a central role, as emphasized by 25-year-old Karim. Karim studied engineering in Syria and fled to Germany in 2015. He left Syria when he received a "decision" to go to "Assad's army." Karim was supported by friends in Sweden, France, and Germany whom he contacted via Facebook. His friend in Germany described the country as safe: "Then I have told everyone that I am going to Germany."

The support that these young men received went hand-in-hand with the desire to support those left behind and to repay the money borrowed as quickly as possible. Zarif reported his sense of pressure to return what he had borrowed: "I have no money.… And at the same time I must pay for my friend." Zarif lived with other Syrian refugees in a house in a small village. He attended school and hoped to pass his German language exam level B1 in a few months. He repeatedly voiced his concern about not knowing how things would develop. His situation was characterized by dependence on government services.

Said also had to draw on money from others to pay for his flight. He received emotional and financial support from his father. In return, he wanted to improve the living circumstances of his family and friends by studying in Germany: "I can study here and I can build something for my friends and for my family."

While some of the young refugees had recourse to support networks, others began their flight with almost no support and became dependent upon strangers. Daniel was 17 years old at the time of the interview. When he was two months old, his family fled from the Taliban in Afghanistan and sought refuge in neighbouring Iran. The family lived unregistered and changed their residence regularly in order to remain undiscovered by the authorities. At the age of 13, Daniel began to work on a construction site, where the police found him. He was deported to Afghanistan without the knowledge of his family. Daniel had to be completely self-sufficient because he had no family contacts there. He travelled back to Iran and searched for his family for an entire year, but without success. Finally, he decided to flee with a friend. With the help of smugglers Daniel and his friend travelled from Iran to Turkey: "For two days, we just ran." They had no plans for the rest of their route. In Turkey, they met another escape helper who offered to bring them to Greece for a sum of money. The two were transported by car, ran for more than a day on foot, and covered part of the dangerous route by rubber raft across the Mediterranean Sea. After arriving in Greece, Daniel was completely disorientated: "I did not know where to go." He got to know other refugees, who advised him to go to Germany.

The cases illustrate the creation of mutual support networks during flight. These networks were of great importance, especially for those who had no support in the organization of their flight. They consisted of people in similar situations, grew by directly sharing information, and—with exception of the service of smugglers—required no service in return. Those young people who had received the support of family and friends felt an urgent wish and pressure to "give something back." The experience of support went hand-in-hand with reciprocity intended in the future.

The Receiving of Support in Host Countries

Narrations about support and reciprocity in the country of destination, Germany, occupied the largest share of the interviews. The young men mentioned family members in Germany—teachers and caretakers in pedagogical institutions, and volunteers, as well as employees of social welfare services—as part of their support network. Whether or not the young people had become part of the German youth welfare system made a big difference in the support they received and whether or not they could reciprocate.

From Recipient to Giver: Reciprocity as a Consequence of Support in Youth Welfare Facilities

Fatih was 22 years old at the time of the interview. In 2010, he entered Germany as an unaccompanied minor. Fatih was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. When he was two years old, his home was hit by a rocket. Fatih's parents died and he grew up

with his aunt and cousin. At the age of 16, he and his cousin were to be recruited by "Islamic fighters." "Then I had to flee." Fatih fled to Germany and was picked up by the police, who brought him to a clearing house for unaccompanied minor refugees. He claimed to have relatives in the Rhine Main area who had lived there for twenty years: "I contacted my aunt from there … 'Your nephew is here.'" Fatih spent three months in the clearing house. During that time he received support from his cousins: "My cousin was always there. My girl cousin was there.… here I have this problem … we somehow managed it, until I learned the language." In addition to practical support, Fatih's relatives gave him confidence. Their support enabled him to become increasingly independent. Finally, Fatih was accommodated in a youth welfare house close to where his relatives lived and was able to increase his contacts with them. Fatih highlighted the importance of his caregiver. She was always there for him: she made "everything possible." She worked as a link between the institution and the school and motivated Fatih to graduate: "Mrs. —— took care that I could attend school.… I did not like school … and then Mrs. —— said to me, 'You have to go to school." Fatih emphasized his caregiver's encouragement: she "always told me we did it so far, we will also handle the rest." It is striking that Fatih said "we," signalling that his caregiver was always at his side. She strengthened his "self-confidence" and helped him "to keep my path straight and then go." Meanwhile, Fatih had completed his training as a nurse and worked in a clinic. In the future, he hoped to "study medicine." He moved into his own flat but still was in close contact with his caregiver, the young people in the youth facility, and the clearing house where he first lived. He visited "his old caregivers from time to time," collected "clothes" and gave them to the "new refugees there." He received clothing from his circle of friends or bought it himself: "I collect or either buy. I have enough money now and I earn well."

Fatih's case clarifies how the initial support of relatives and the child and youth services gradually became superfluous and enabled the young man to become autonomous. The experience of receiving support transformed into a reciprocal relationship. Now Fatih could support others. Or, in Sahlin's words, the young man established reciprocity and symmetry in contrast to a previously unbalanced relationship.

Bassam, housed in a youth welfare facility as well, also emphasized the importance of reciprocity for his future. Bassam was picked up by the police when he arrived in Germany. He was kept in a basketball court and had to sleep on the ground. From Munich, he was taken to three more cities. For three months, he lived in a clearing house for unaccompanied minors before he was finally taken to a youth house. At the time of the interview, Bassam had lived in Germany for half a year. Like in Fatih's case, social workers in the youth welfare house fulfilled an important function. Bassam visited a refugee class in a vocational school but was dissatisfied with his separation from local pupils and the slow learning pace: "Class … only for refugees … we are under-challenged." In the youth welfare house, Bassam received tutoring in German in order to be able to learn according to his abilities. The tutor was compensating for Bassam's schooling experiences and met his wish for education. Bassam felt empowered to go his own way with the help he received. The support from social workers even served as a role model. Bassam aimed to learn a social profession "to help the people.… I like to be a pedagogue." He became familiar with the profession as a recipient of support and wanted to give support by bringing his knowledge and professional commitment into society in the future.

Caught in the Trap of the Receiver: Denied Reciprocity and Irregular Support of Refugees Above the Age of 18

While young people in the child and youth welfare system received constant support from pedagogues, the situation of those outside the child and youth welfare system differed. Zarif, Karim, Said, Tarek, Alexander, Amir, and Markus were not included in facilities of the youth system because they were older than 18 when they entered Germany. They lived together with other asylum-seeking people in small houses and apartments.

Only Alexander and Tarek reported the support of professionals. Tarek was 23 years old. He fled to Germany from Syria and lived with other young men from Syria in a house in a small village in Hessia. The young men were visited weekly by staff from the social welfare centre, who helped them organize an internet connection and translate letters.

At the age of 27, Alexander fled to Germany from Damascus, together with his three brothers. Like Tarek, they all lived together in a rented apartment. Alexander mentioned two employees of the social welfare department as supportive contacts. At the beginning of his time in Germany, he and his brothers were placed in a camp with many more people: "If you need to eat, you have to wait for four hours.… It was not clean. A month in the tent and other people in a building." Finally, two staff from the welfare department helped him to leave the camp and move into his own flat: "They gave this place to us." Once they arrived in their new apartment, Alexander could establish contact with a cultural centre in the city, where he met other people, listened to "music," and went to "parties." The low-threshold cultural centre acted as a networking hub. It allowed contact with other refugees and locals. Support from the large welfare associations did not play a big role in his life. Asked whether he received support from social institutions such as Caritas,

Karim did not know what kind of support Caritas would provide.

Instead, contacts with volunteers were highly relevant in the lives of all the young men. Zarif described making the acquaintance of a young woman in Germany as a turning point after flight:

> She helped me a lot. She has found a flat … she is very active, everything. When I want an appointment with a doctor, she does it. When I want to meet with others, she does … like my … big sister.… I learn at school. I want to go to university faster.

The woman provided practical support and acted as a gatekeeper to more participation in Germany, integrated the young man into everyday life, and translated between the official and school structures and Zarif's lifeworld. The sequence shows that providing and receiving practical support was accompanied by strong emotional ties, as he referred to the young woman as "sister." At the same time, Zarif stated that he had "a lot of stress" when he called "the girl." In the future, he did not want to continue receiving support, but aimed to return something*:*

> People are very, very nice and very good and very helpful. In the future, I want to give something back for this country.… Thank you for Mrs. Merkel…. Thank you for German people. I would like to study here in Germany. I also would like to help people in the future for Germany.

Zarif clearly demonstrated his wish and desire for reciprocity: like Bassam and Fatih, he wished to contribute to the common good. To be unable to contribute thus far, however, led to "stress." He was grateful for the support given to him by the state and individuals: "Germany paid for my food and drink. Paid for everything." Simultaneously, the support had become a burden: "I want to give something back here. But first maybe I need one year to finish my German language course … I would like to learn and I would like to work." Zarif clarified that he could reciprocate only if he had access to German language courses, education, and the labour market, in order to be able to provide for himself by earning his keep.

Tarek was also aware of this dilemma: he wanted to give something in return for the support he received, but that was not yet possible. He received support from a female volunteer: "I do not know what I can do for ——. —— always helps." The woman compiled grammar exercises so that Tarek could learn German language at his individual level.

Said also received informal support from a family: if he received incomprehensible letters from the authorities, he photographed them with his smartphone and sent the photo via WhatsApp to the family, who provided quick feedback. The family compensated for difficulties such as a monolingual contact with authorities and supports with the help of digital media. Beyond practical support, the family fulfilled emotional functions: "We can eat together and we can sit together and just talk." The family served as a guide, thus enabling Said to acclimate himself in Germany: "They are like one who stood behind you and he or she tells you go from there and go from there and do this and don't do this." Said also experienced support as both a chance and a burden. He was looking for ways to return to the family but could not find forms of reciprocity that seemed appropriate: "The word 'thank you' is not enough." As a barrier to reciprocal action, Said mentioned his missing work permit and an imposed waiting: "I prefer to work something to … to help someone but I'm still in my house and just waiting … no one likes to sit for nothing." Despite these barriers, Said imagined a transnational space of action. He wanted to build a life in Germany and in Syria, his home country:

> I prefer to make something in this country … also I will try to build something in my country. If I have allow to stay in this country I will.… But no one knows what happens. Maybe … they will sent all of us to Syria.… I prefer to build my country and this deep connection between me and this country.

Said aimed to return the support he had experienced by committing to Germany. That led to a strong identification with Germany—in addition to his identification with Syria. Whether he could build a future transnationally in both countries depended on whether he was granted a long-term residence permit.

Amir and Markus also hoped to remain in Germany. Their desire seemed linked directly to their wish for reciprocity and their gratitude. Markus completed his law studies in Syria. He was 31 years old and lived in a shared flat in a city in the Rhine Main region. His goal was to study in Germany and to find a good workplace. When asked at the end of the interview whether he wanted to add anything further, he said, "Thank you for Germany. Thank you for the German people and thank you for you." Markus considered "close contact with neighbours, with friends," and togetherness and reciprocity as strong values of his country of origin. He aimed to put those very same values into practice in Germany.

Amir shared this strong wish "to give something back." Amir was 24 years old, having fled Syria and now living in a Hessian city. He had to cancel his studies in economics in his home country because of the war and was attending an integration course. With the support of volunteers he found his own apartment and intended to study in Germany in

order to contribute to society: "In five years … with work … I hope to help back."

Wish for Reciprocity: A Theoretical Conclusion

The young people's narrations highlight their wish for reciprocity as an urgent need, especially in their country of destination. They experienced the support of professionals, volunteers, and family members already living in Germany. *Practical support* was given by helping with translations, teaching the German language, and organizing appointments. *Emotional support* was given by listening, encouraging, and strengthening young people's self-confidence. The results show that young refugees above the age of 18 who were cared for in youth facilities obtained a wider range of support from pedagogical staff as compared to those young people who were not cared for by youth services as a result of their greater age. The ones who lived in houses and apartments depended mainly on representatives from the social welfare department, cultural centres, and volunteers.

Some respondents felt unable to respond adequately to the support of volunteers and suffered as a consequence. Experiencing a power imbalance led to stress (see also Blau, 1968/2005; Dunbar et al., 1998; Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). *Barriers to reciprocity* were difficult or delayed access to education and work. The interviewees wanted to earn a livelihood but depended on state and individual support—with the exception of Fatih. Fatih finished his training and returned the support to newly arrived refugees by reciprocating with donating clothing and being available as a contact person. Other interviewees *imagined reciprocating in the future:* they wanted to express their gratitude to individuals and to the state of Germany and strove to contribute their abilities to the common good. Their strong orientation towards occupations that offer professional help and support such as doctors and social workers is striking.

By lending support, the young people could experience self-efficacy. The experience of agency is key, especially in the context of flight: the young people managed to flee and were now trapped in strong dependencies. Refugees who received support from the youth welfare system were more able to build reciprocal social conditions as opposed to young refugees beyond the reach of the youth welfare system. Thus, those older than 18 years of age depended more on informal support from individuals, reinforcing their sense of being unable to return adequately.

Based on this analysis, Sahlin's (1965/1999) differentiation between social interactions in generalized, balanced, and negative reciprocity can be extended to "refused reciprocity," such as when people are keen to reciprocate received support but live in environments that restrict their ability to act (or, in their understanding, prevent them from doing so adequately). Society as a whole must respond to such refused reciprocity by recognizing young people's capacities, skills, and knowledge. It is important to reduce social barriers that increase their vulnerability, and instead to strengthen their agency. To accept their right to self-determination means to provide them with a legal status that gives them the power to go their own way in society and create independence.

Discussion

The well-being of young refugees is linked to their potential reciprocal action. The provision of support must go hand-in-hand with strengthening young people's ability to act. It must not put them in a position of dependency but needs to support their self-determination.

In public discourse, young asylum seekers become visible mainly as recipients of support. It is important to take into account their capacities, knowledge, and need for reciprocity and to create social environments in which reciprocity can arise. This is precisely what young people wish and need. To reach this goal, they must have a right of residence and access to societal systems such as education or work. If access is denied, reciprocal action is hardly possible. While the young people know exactly what they want to achieve in Germany and how to create reciprocity, they need inclusive conditions at the political level. Social welfare systems must prevent refugees' dependence on informal support, since it may evoke even greater feelings of commitment than formal support networks do. Youth and welfare services must provide support to all young refugees, regardless of whether they are above or under the age of 18. Informal support relationships can then be a complementary aid and will not need to fill the gap in missing professional structures.

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