

The Impact of Refugee Migration on Germany's Aging Society: A Gerontological Critique

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Abstract

This paper presents a gerontological critique of the events that made up the so-called “welcome culture” in the European Refugee Crisis in 2015/16 and of the discourses analyzing and presenting this crisis. It starts by showing how gerontological aspects are systematically overlooked in analyses of this crisis, and that the failure to include gerontological concerns in a world that is overall characterized by skewed distribution of aging societies and rejuvenating societies is also visible in the fixation on nation states as sole agents in refugee crisis scenarios. For this argument the paper resorts to Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of “liquid lives” and his assessment of international refugee scenarios. The paper also aims to contribute to a more careful understanding of the unique German role in the European Refugee Crisis in 2015/16. It will also show that, although the impact on demographic development of the aging society in Germany was limited, the refugee crisis and concomitant “welcome culture” did have a positive influence on the group of senior citizens in a social perspective and on the future ratio of German residents with migration background. The paper critically discusses terminology and data provided by the German government and the Federal Office for Statistics and provides information on the specific impact of this refugee crisis on senior citizens and their role in German “welcome culture”. The article in hand was supported by MEXT grant-in-aid: 17H05116.

Key Words: Gerontology, Aging Society, Global Migration Crisis, German Welcome Culture, World-War II Refugees

I . The Absence of Discourses on Senior Citizens in the European Refugee Crisis

Let us look at a typical academic analysis of the European Refugee Crisis in order to understand to what extent the specific situation of senior citizens, and sometimes even aging societies, is left out of the general argument, to what extent refugee scenarios are perceived as happening between nation states only: In their ambitious book *Refuge. Transforming a Broken Refugee System* from 2017, Alexander Betts and Paul Collier analyze the 2015/16 European Refugee Crisis and harshly criticize Chancellor Angela Merkel’s independent and solitary decision to welcome the refugees at Germany’s threshold – “Wir schaffen

das” in summer 2015. In general, the criticism of the two scholars aims at rethinking the ethics involved in world-wide refugee scenarios. Their inquiry is guided by two questions from opposite perspectives: what is “our”/the potential host country’s moral duty towards refugees, and do refugees or migrants have a right to migrate to the country of their choice? In their own words: “The final ethical question arises from the arrival of around a million refugees in Germany. What are the moral obligations that follow from this influx, both for Germany and for the refugees?” (Betts and Collier 2017: 98). It is clear from the way they pose their questions that they regard the “host country” as a monolithic block and see the arena of political exchange only between nation states, and refugees, in spite of their mobility, only as pawns moved between these national players. Without doubt, Betts and Collier champion the idea of a “duty of rescue towards refugees” based on “our shared common humanity”. And they argue that today’s political discourse leads to an unfair distribution of responsibilities and poses a stronger and unfair burden on those countries that have refugees right at their territorial borders, leaving richer countries (such as Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States) at a distance only to be reached by way of dangerous (?) long journeys. However, according to them, refugees who embark on such journeys will, according to today’s political discourses and international laws, inadvertently partly lose their status as refugees and turn into (economic) migrants who are in search of better living conditions and not just in search of immediate help for survival. Although Betts’ and Collier’s first criticism is directed towards the international community of states, which, in their view, had watched the Syrian civil war far too long without intervention, their second criticism is directed against the German Chancellor Angela Merkel who opened her country’s borders to refugees, even though it belongs to the rich and distant countries and thereby, again, according to both scholars, she became guilty of seducing refugees into continuing their way as far as Germany: “Against the backdrop of free-riding by others, Angela Merkel’s well-intentioned intervention has led to both practical disaster and ethical dilemmas which were entirely avoidable” (Betts and Collier 2017: 126). Although most refugees stayed in havens granted to them in other host countries, around a million continued to travel on, many with the intention to reach Germany. Betts and Collier hold Merkel responsible for the adverse consequences resulting from her political decision, namely the thriving of the people-smuggling industry to the East and South of Europe, the deaths of refugees drowning at sea, and the disadvantages caused to the Syrian homeland which suffered the loss of so many of its well-educated, well-performing young citizens who preferred Germany over their torn fatherland.

However, since it is hypothetical, there is no data at all to argue that all three adverse consequences would not have happened in a similar way, if to a lesser extent, even without Merkel’s generous gesture. We do not know how this particular crisis may have exploded, had Merkel not pulled the safety valve at Europe’s borders. One also has to concede that it was exactly Merkel’s decision which tried to solve the “ethical dilemma” ignored by so many others; after all, the refugees at Germany’s border did not perish at the threshold of that particular rich country. One can also understand the practicality of her decision, when taking into consideration that it was not only based on the expectancy of voluntary help of so many

Germans – on what grounds was she able to count on their help? – but that it also opened the way for a concrete encounter of seemingly opposite social groups, allowing non-government players, in this case among them especially the senior citizens of Germany, to take over concrete disaster management. It becomes quite obvious from Betts' and Collier's argument that they, on the contrary, serve a policy of global refugee containment and try to establish a new refugee system that will force refugees from civil wars or natural disasters to stay as close as possible to their homelands, receiving only financial support from rich nations which will stay permanently out of their reach. Theirs is the plan of a refugee system implementing strict segregation between refugees and inhabitants, or better put: between global haves and have-nots.

Thus there is a flip side to this refugee scenario painted by Betts and Collier: even though Merkel opened the borders to all refugees, those who came were primarily young well-educated males (some say up to 90%), some of which may be easily integrated – if only after a longer period of waiting and training – into the German labor market which is in desperate need of skilled workers. Furthermore, Germany's aging society could only profit immensely from an influx of young people ready to work and pay taxes for the burdened German pension system. Thus, while Betts' and Collier's argument is looking at the downside of global refugee movement, they completely disregard the benefit of refugee movement to host countries – which in itself is in accord with liberal economic concepts: freedom of movement to improve one's economic situation. Betts and Collier also do not offer any detailed investigation into the specific situation of Germany and her specific needs vis-à-vis the influx of refugees, even though they do mention twice in passing what characterizes German society, namely: "millions of Germans were themselves refugees displaced by warfare" and "Germany's need for labour to address its skewed demographic distribution of too many old people and not enough young" (Betts and Collier 2017). Although they do concede that Europe's contemporary refugee crisis is nothing new in historical perspective and that today's rich European countries are much better equipped to bear such a burden than their predecessor states in the past, both fail to acknowledge the existence of exactly this knowledge and experience in the older generations of host countries in general and of Germany in particular.

Already in 2007, Zygmunt Bauman, however, offered quite a different approach to contemporary refugee crises in his book *Liquid Times. Living in an Age of Uncertainty*. Not only does he see a causal relationship between the fate of millions of refugees from so-called developing countries and the historical past of colonialism which led to this "mass production of refugees": "Hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions of people are chased away from their homes, murdered or forced to run for their lives outside the borders of their country" (Bauman 2007: 33). Rather than blaming individual political decision making, he acknowledges the inherent structure of million-fold refugee suffering: "Protracted misery makes millions desperate, and in an era of the global frontier-land and globalized crime one can hardly expect a shortage of 'businesses' eager to make a buck or a few billion bucks from capitalizing on that desperation" (Bauman 2007: 34). He also seconds Michel Agier in his speculations whether the humanitarian worker in far-away

refugee camps does not himself become an “agent of exclusion at a lesser cost” (Agier 2002), “a device designed to unload and dissipate the anxiety of the rest of the world, to absolve the guilty and placate the scruples of bystanders, as well as to defuse the sense of urgency and the fear of contingency” (Bauman 2007: 40). The core of Zygmunt Bauman’s argument, however, is the social and economic existence of global refugees, who become the epitome of “liquid lives” in precarious times: In refugee camps, they live in “permanently temporary” locations, inside a country, society, but not as part of it. “They are separated from the rest of the host country by an invisible, but all the same thick and impenetrable veil of suspicion and resentment. They are suspended in a spatial void where time has ground to a halt.” (Bauman 2007: 45).

Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of “liquid lives” allows us to perceive the encounter of refugees and Germans in an altogether different way than Betts and Collier suggested. In order to argue this point it is important to see, in spite of all superficial differences, some important social and economic functional similarities between Germany’s senior citizens and global refugees, which in Germany led to the historical chance of a successful, if only short-lived co-operation, often referred to as “welcome culture”. Like refugees, senior citizens – *cum grano salis*, depending on their financial status, vitality and health – can be looked upon as “excess population”. Some even look upon them as a burden for the working majority, when dependent on financial support and additional health care, while their expertise, time and voluntary work is readily accepted when they can be temporarily incorporated in society to provide needed, but cheap, usually unpaid, performance and labor. For years, Germans have complained about the tremendous costs of a luxurious health-care system provided for a generation that only gets older and older, and thereby more and more costly. When located in old people’s homes and hidden away in retirement homes the “geriatric” population seems “abnormal” and apart from the bulk of population, like the refugees contained in their long-term temporary camps. Like refugees, senior citizens are simultaneously in and outside of society. Though generally accepted as part of their society, their position can become easily highly precarious in times of economic crisis, as seen in anti-aging agitation and financial cuts in countries with large geriatric strata and older cohorts. German “welcome culture” offered these two marginal social groups, refugees and senior citizens, a unique historical chance to directly encounter each other and profit from each others’ needs and contributions, from supply and demand. Never were German elderly citizens as much in demand as during the European Refugee Crisis in 2015/16.

In the following chapters background information will be provided to further explain the three main points concerning the situation and contribution of senior citizens in Germany and the political and social discourses around them: demographics of an aging society, historical experience of older cohorts in Germany, and activities, self-esteem and positioning of senior citizens in German “welcome culture”. Finally, the most important issue that needs to be pointed out is the new approach offered by this German experiment: a one-to-one interaction of social groups needing each others’ help and bypassing and interfering with nation-state agency.

II . The Demographic Impact of Refugees and German Immigration Terminology

Even though some estimated 1,046,600 newcomers poured into Germany, empirical sociologists argue that the influx of immigrants could not and cannot reverse the basic trend of Germany's aging society (IOM 2015). Some 110 million people would have to immigrate to Germany in order to neutralize the aging trend, more than doubling its population. The current increase in population only had a slowing influence on the aging process (Destatis 2018:1). However, meanwhile already one third of teenagers in Germany have "migration background", that means: one or both parents with non-German background. After 24 years of steady growth, in 2015, the median age in Germany finally started to sink: In Germany today, median age of refugees is 26 (of all foreigners 37) and of Germans 44 years of age (Destatis 2018). Thum (2017) offers comparative statistics for the age of newcomers and resident population in Germany according to which newcomers are culminating around 23 years of age which proves some effect of rejuvenation of German population by immigration. Among the consequences of such youthful immigration is the fact that the German government has started to worry about accommodation of schools and kindergartens for the many children to be expected of these immigrants in the near future. German Federal statistics are based on empirical data from earlier surveys and argue along the so-called "Mikrozensus" (the last rough estimate of trends in Germany based on a miniature survey in 2008 and therefore not entirely convincing). According to those results, the fertility characteristics of migrants only remain different from those of Germans in the first generation, and after the second generation already merge with the dominant German pattern. Based on these assumptions Stichnoth und Yeter assessed the fertility rate in Germany as 1.35 children per German woman and 1.5 children per woman with migration background (second generation). The average of children per migrant woman in the first generation was 2.3 in earlier surveys. However, this data varies strongly among migrants according to origin, ranging from Austrian women with 1.3 children to Moroccan women with 4.3 children. The authors themselves admit to the small size of their survey particularly in this case and agree that convincing data on second-generation fertility is not yet available (Stichnoth/Yeter 2013). Taking into account that most of the new arrivals from 2015 onwards are of similar Muslim background (Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian etc.) and that such mass immigration may lead to differences in adaptation behavior, there is still no satisfactory data to predict fertility in the future years in Germany. Furthermore, in a very different arena of immigration to Germany, that of Eastern EU countries, there is a small but noticeable increase of migrants of pensionable age, post-65, who are working in Germany in old-age and child care with the aim to increase their financial income. Data has been collected on these elderly only in so far as they are part of the refugee population, not at all from a gerontological point of view (Zeman 2005). Before dealing with the impact 2015/16 mass immigration had on Germany's aging population beyond mere demographic statistics, it is necessary to bring some clarity to the complicated terminology of German immigration.

General figures offered by the German Federal Office for Statistics concerning immigration ratio

to German population are extremely confusing for non-experts and demand terminological clarification. A first rough description on the Federal Office's website presents 19.3 million people "with migration background" and 10.6 million "foreigners" (Destatis 2018: 2). The rough description of 19.3 million people "with migration background" and 10.6 million foreigners translates into roughly 10 million foreigners living in Germany holding a foreign passport, while roughly 9 million people are living in Germany, holding a German passport, but having migration background, meaning that these people have moved to Germany from another country, or having sought for or already acquired asylum (1.6 million). The majority of these people "with migration background" are from Turkey, Poland, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. There is, of course, the complex figure of holders of double passports, German and other, whose data may be flawed in these statistics, but are generally counted as "German with migration background".

The German Federal Office then breaks down data into smaller divisions (Destatis 2018: 3): Out of the 81,740,000 total of Germany's population, 62,482,000 are counted as "Germans without migration background", i.e. of "German origin" in popular discourse, while 19,258,000 have "migration background in the narrow sense of the term". Of these, 5,238,000 are "Germans with migration background with own experience", 4,608,000 "Germans with migration background without own experience", 7,937,000 are "Foreigners with migration background with own experience", and 1,479,000 are "Foreigners with migration background without own experience". In order to be able to correctly understand these figures, it is important to know the meaning of the official category of "migration background" in German federal statistics:

A person has migration background, if he/she or at least one of his/her parents was born without German nationality. In detail this definition comprises foreigners who immigrated or did not immigrate to Germany, naturalized Germans, (late) repatriates and those born as Germans in any of these groups.

The expellees of World War II and their off-springs do not belong to the population with migration background because they themselves and their parents were born with German nationality. (destatis 2018: 2; transl. H.H.)

In this sense the above data differentiates between "Germans without migration background" and "Germans with migration background". The second group comprises those who have received German citizenship after immigrating (with own experience) and their off-springs (without own experience), and those who came to Germany and still hold a foreign passport (with own experience) and their off-springs (without own experience).

However, the huge group of Germans who have migration background, who have experienced migration themselves (and their off-springs) is presented in the category of "Germans without migration background". These people have migrated, voluntarily or involuntarily, and they are or were in part deeply influenced by their experience: "Germans" migrating to "Germany" after and during World War

II. The above definition excludes some 10 to 12 million German expellees after World War II who fled to Germany mainly from Eastern Europe or who were forced out of their residences in foreign Eastern European countries. By excluding these former refugees, the German Federal Office argues along legal lines: immigration prior to the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949 does not count as immigration to the Federal Republic of Germany (bpb 2018). This argument is much stronger than the argument given in the definition quoted above about earlier nationality. Not all so-called “ethnic Germans” who fled to Germany in the wake or at the end of World War II had in fact German nationality. The definition given on the website is avoiding the much more complex problem of “German-to-Germany-immigration” referring to German expellees and refugees and their problematic status in history. This also explains why “migration background” is defined as “narrow sense” because it excludes in fact 10 to 12 million former German expellees.

The paper in hand is not interested in discussing the German Federal legal category of “migration background” and whether or not people fleeing to Germany at the end of or after World War II should be counted in. It is, however, important to realize that a huge number of elderly Germans and their off-springs do share the same, or a similar experience of expulsion, flight, refuge, internment camp, and resettlement as today’s refugees and migrants, and it seems unreasonable not to count these as people having migration background. In contrast to these “expellees” of World War II, “repatriates” and “late repatriates” after 1949 are counted as people with migration background, even though they arrived and arrive from the same Eastern European countries, merely because they entered the Federal Republic of Germany after it had come into existence. They amount to 4.5 million people within today’s German population (bpb 2017). The above critical analysis of demographic data does not only show how diversified Germany’s population today is, it also emphasizes the outstanding characteristics of the make-up of today’s German senior citizens.

III. German Immigration History Since World War II

Germany has a long history of refugees that is seldom heeded abroad. As mentioned above, some 10 to 12 million people characterized as “ethnic Germans” by either side of the war were expelled or fleeing from Eastern European countries at the end of World War II, another 2 million did not survive. During the war these floods of refugees were regulated by the Nazi government and later by Allied Forces. Apart from refugees and expellees whose families had lived for generations from Russian or Soviet to Polish, and from Estonian to Romanian territories and had been forced out of their homes by the fate of war, there were also Germans only recently resettled into German occupied territories in the East in attempts of Nazi “Germanification” who had to return to their former homes they had only left a few years before. There were also survivors of concentration camps and prisoner-of-war camps who, if they had no home to go to, lingered in post-war Germany under Allied rule. Since 1949, approximately 4.5 million repatriates

(Aussiedler) and late repatriates (Spätaussiedler) migrated westward to the Federal Republic of Germany, 3 million of them came after 1987. They were welcomed as “ethnic Germans” and received financial support as well as German language classes, whenever necessary. While repatriates of the first two decades could easily be perceived as latecomers of the expellee and refugee generation, late repatriates after 1970 were often alienated from their German roots and language. East Germany, too, accepted some 150,000 “ethnic Germans”. Until the mid-1950s, there were still some 3000 internment camps for refugees in Germany. One of them, “Friedland”, well-known in German political discourse, has been in constant use from 1945 until today (bpb 2017).

Even though considered as “ethnic Germans”, these repatriates and late repatriates were not always welcome in their new German homeland. Only for a short time after World War II were “indigenous” Germans compassionate and sympathetic to the refugees they were forced to make room for. As soon as it became clear that all of them would stay because there was nowhere else to return to, competition and dissent began. Refugee acceptance and long-term cohabitation are two completely different things and should not be confused in political argument. Depending on area, the ratio of refugees to established residents was between 10% to 40%. The online journal of “Der Spiegel” had several issues in recent years on the conflicts among established residents and repatriates, the bickering and the hatred and prejudice, which clearly shows how aware German everyday political discourse in the past years has been of the contextual-symbolic and emotional significance of 70 years of German refugee acceptance. In the early years, at some time, the term “refugee” itself even became an insult (Der Spiegel Online 2018). After the “ethnic German” refugees, the “Gastarbeiter”/migrant workers from Turkey, Italy and Spain came, invited into the country to work temporarily, and yet rejected in part for the differences and heterogeneity that settled with them. And then there was reunification, again leading to mass migration from East to West, and colonialization from West to East. After the enthusiasm of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and of reunification had subsided, the differences between East and West Germans became more and more visible, and prejudice and sectarian tendencies mushroomed. Germans are still conscious of an East-West divide going through the reunified German state. And Germans remember well the decades of “Soli”, when West Germans had to pay extra taxes to support their Eastern brethren. Angela Merkel was even considering a similar taxation for the refugee crisis. In the 1990s, there was the first great influx of refugees from the former Yugoslav civil wars, then the Iraqis came, and recently over 1 million refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries. Senior German citizens have witnessed decades of refugee reception and immigration processing with all its troubles and burdens like very few other countries in the last 70 years.

IV. The Participation of Senior Citizens in “Welcome Culture”

While mass immigration in recent years may not have decisively changed German demographics, only slightly slowing down Germany’s continuing trend of an aging society, this paper argues that it did have a social and psychological impact on German senior citizens. It was especially the mass influx in 2015/16 that caught German government and bureaucracy completely unawares and forced them to rely on and mobilize older cohorts of German citizens in order to help and support integration efforts on a daily basis. Only the older generation (increased by the group of homemakers without children) was flexible enough to fill the gap in immigration and integration procedures and contribute to what was then referred to as “welcome culture”.

German senior citizens present in general a very volatile group of volunteers. According to the Federal Association of Senior Citizen Organizations (BAGSO) there are over 350 senior citizens’ offices in Germany. In larger non-profit organizations elderly volunteers amount to 40% (55+ year-olds) and 20% (65+ year-olds) (BAGSO 2018). They come from various backgrounds and volunteer in various activist and volunteer groups such as religious (Christian, Muslim, Jewish etc.), political (Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, Green Party etc.), in NGOs (amnesty international, Greenpeace, labor unions, women’s organizations etc.) and segments of Health Care (medical, psychological, educational) and vocational organizations (police, victim support groups, media support etc.). There are certain well-known and highly active senior citizens’ organizations operating nationwide on behalf of senior citizens themselves such as: “Green Old People”, “Gray Panthers”, “Evening-of-Life”, “Old People’s League”, “Senior Learners”, “Between-Work-and-Pension”, “Help Age”, “Future Old Age” and “Third Age” (BAGSO 2016).

Since 2015, senior-citizen voluntary work for integration and immigration consists mainly of the following activities: They organize and provide second-hand products and every-day commodities refugees and immigrants are in desperate need of, they accompany refugees to doctors and offices and help with all the necessary paper work, often spending hours without end in waiting rooms and even paying with their own money when unavoidable. They help to find jobs, work, education, accommodation etc., they inform refugees about clubs, support groups, NGOs etc., they organize get-togethers with games, singing, and chatting to include foreigners. They teach German language and about German culture and social life to immigrants and refugees, while at the same time educating their fellow Germans about the newcomers, their situation, needs, and hopes. The special 2016 BAGSO issue *Ältere Menschen engagieren sich für Flüchtlinge* informs not only on the current situation of integration measures, but constructs elaborate narratives on outstanding performances in order to celebrate voluntary activity and create new incentives: a 91 year-old woman working in a “multi-generation project” with refugee children; a retired mathematician teaching refugees in a 36 hours/week volunteer project; even feeble elderly citizens helping with clothes and food distribution; and retired engineers and craftsmen working together with unemployed refugees of

similar professions. These activities are either on individual and community levels, then often referred to as “Patenschaften”, when Germans adopt certain refugees to help them during immigration and integration procedures, and as “Alltagslotsen”, when volunteers help with certain parts of the integration process, or they are professionally organized and even require certain expertise and diplomas such as the “Senior Expert Service” which supports high-school and vocational school education after their members have completed a specialized training (SES 2018). But senior citizens do not only help refugees, vice versa, refugee help for senior citizens is also organized: Refugees who are not allowed to work and need to learn the German language help senior citizens especially when visiting homes for the elderly and spending time with them (BAGSO 2016). Though in Germany’s highly specialized industries and economies, there is little room for low- and unskilled workers, economic areas like the Health-Care market have started to create short-cut integration training for refugees, especially in the sector for the aging population (Schrage 2016).

The BAGSO special issue *Ältere Menschen engagieren sich für Flüchtlinge* develops a clear profile for senior citizens who it is targeting for volunteer activities: They point out the advantage of flexible working hours and mobility and underline proficiency and quality in which senior citizens supposedly excel: more practical experience in handicraft, engineering and do-it-yourself than younger generations due to changes in technology and craftsmanship. They focus on the experience and virtues of the older generation such as “pragmatism in problem solving”, “circumspection and consideration”, “respect for privacy”, and the “understanding of historical change and conditions”. And they count on the senior citizens’ “search for meaning in life and fulfillment” and their recollection and experience of Germany’s post-World War II years of times of need, flight and expulsion (BAGSO 2016).

It is part of the lack of critical (and academic) discourse on senior citizens, that there is so far no empirical data on the relationship of German senior citizens and the refugee and migration crisis. The few senior citizens that were interviewed during a field trip in August 2017 responded similar to the target profile given above. They described their activities in accordance with this BAGSO report, they also agreed in principal, duly modest, with the characteristics of the performance and virtues of the older generation. They pointed out their newly acquired proficiencies in digital and paper work, their gained internet literacy and thriving networking. They also had anecdotes to tell about clashes with German civil servants in which they stood their ground and gained more confidence and experience. And almost all of them referred to their childhood experience at the end of World War II, lingering on their own flight experience or on their compulsory intake of refugees from Eastern Europe, or mentioned their activities vis-à-vis repatriates and late repatriates from the 60s to the 80s, their experience with East-West exchange among Germans after the Fall of the Berlin Wall or even their long-term commitment to helping refugees and asylum seekers since the end of the last century.

V. Conclusion

The mass intake of over one million refugees and migrants in the European refugee crisis in 2015/16 has had an enormous impact on German society. While the increase of younger newcomers does not substantially curb the trend of an ever more aging society in Germany, they will contribute to an ever higher percentage of Germans with migration background, especially among younger cohorts. The sudden influx of these refugees and the concomitant unpreparedness of the German state has given rise to even more senior citizen volunteer participation in German society and contributed to a rise in self-confidence among senior citizens, who took over in times of need. Their positive response to the refugee crisis is partly influenced by the refugee and immigrant history of the young Federal Republic of Germany they themselves had witnessed or experienced in the past and probably also by the good intention to perform better vis-à-vis this new refugee and immigration challenge. More empirical data is necessary for a more detailed analysis of German senior citizens' attitudes and performance in the European Refugee Crisis and for an analysis of more general changes in attitude during long-term hospitality and cohabitation periods.

But most important is, that Germany's experience in 2015/16 has shown that non-state interaction and crisis management is possible, and that there are social groups in every country, in Germany in this case particularly senior citizens, who engage with refugees not only for reasons of solidarity and charity, but also because of their own need for volunteer, amateur and professional support they can gain from refugees who have entered their country. When states are reducing more and more the financial security net of segments of their societies, non-government solidarity is bound to increase. On the other hand, what happened in Germany is proof to the fact that it is just a question of time, when countries pressed by large elderly cohorts like Germany will cancel their old-age pension system and replace it with new temporal work concepts integrating senior citizens back into the work force. In a world ever more "liquid", as Zygmunt Bauman puts it, social group interaction bypassing state dominance and regulations becomes a means for survival in ever more precarious times.

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