

## **Memories, normative ideals and empathic solidarities in Europe in the aftermath of refugee arrivals in 2015–16**

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### **Trauma, identities and self-perceptions in the context of psycho-social engagement in Germany**

The discourse on trauma in the psycho-social field is not a new one. But it underwent a challenging renaissance in Germany beyond the psycho-social field, in 2015. There had been two main images in media and society: the one of refugees as traumatized victims or as threatening perpetrators.

In the field of psycho-social and volunteer services there had been an intense request, desire for training on the trauma concept and respective treatment approaches to become able to deal with the challenges in the encounters with refugees. But it became obvious that *trauma* was more like a black-box disregarding personal uncertainties, sorrows, ambiguities and conflicts in those encounters between refugees and care givers as well as volunteers.

Following Rechtman and Fassin (2007/2009), the concept of trauma would allow an interlock of subjects that experienced and those who execute or witness violence. In their perspective, trauma becomes a principle of expressing indignation, neglecting other moral and political positions. At the same time, not all of the (passive) victims do accept those discourses. One main question is, how the process of establishing the social figure of the victim and the “producing” of trauma creates and strengthens areas of nameless and unrepresentable (transgenerational) memories and emotions. And how can one prevent her-/himself from feelings of guilt and perpetration of offence by “treating” the traumatized ones.

Our research in refugee shelters, interviewing 16 Arabic and Farsi speaking refugee women and 16 German female volunteers in Berlin and implementing pilot dialogue groups to moderate those encounters showed that the developing relations are complex, highly emotional and challenging for both sides. The project analyzes processes of solidarization and solidification between female volunteers and refugee women discussing main underlying issues such as individual motivations, perceptions of the self and others, dealing with violence and social structures for those encounters. The dialogue groups created a safe space where emotions, conflicts, irritations and misunderstandings on both sides could appear. The data shows a much more differentiated picture on the needs and expectations on both sides than knowledge and support in handling *traumata* could provide.