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Renegotiating the city: refugee resettlement between surveillance, austerity, and activism in German urban communities

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the politics of refugee arrival and integration at urban level in Germany following the migration influx in summer 2015. How have cities redefined themselves? How have newcomers and residents with different subjectivities constructed their identity, social belonging, and justified their rights-claiming? What kind of changes can be observed in city's social spaces? Supported by critical geography, securitization, ethnographic approaches, the paper aims to identify the grey areas of the urban social spaces and presents two accounts centred on: (1) city as sites of bureaucratic politics, austerity urbanism and surveillance; (2) city as sites of sanctuary/solidarity practices. It argues that the refugees' arrival offers the chance for German cities to envision a social project through engaging a politics of 'bounding' which involves the re-framing of refugee displacement in relation to urban development by covering both the lived (camp) experiences of those on the move and local population's needs.

KEYWORDS

Moral urbanism; refugee resettlement and integration in Germany; austerity urbanism; surveillance measures and crimigation; identity- and boundary-making in German cities

Introduction

The refugee influx starting in August 2015 has changed the outlook of many German cities: More than five years after the German Chancellor Angela Merkel's famous words '*Wir schaffen das*' (we'll make it), many cities find themselves in a post-euphoric state of disillusion and pragmatism. Several integration reports and survey results show first positive effects of local governments' adaptive crisis management and integration efforts.¹ However, the federal government's increasingly restrictive measures and the polarization of debates surrounding migration control reveal a gradually changing climate in Germany resulting from policy practices between securitization, austerity urbanism, sanctuary/urban moralism, and refugee activism. How have cities redefined themselves? How have newcomers and residents with different subjectivities constructed their identity, social belonging, and justified their rights-claiming? What kind of changes can be observed in city's social spaces?

This paper aims to unearth some of the myriad ways in which German cities are reshaped by different kinds of action in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee influx. It does so through examining several focus issues and their developments and effects at both macro- and micro-levels based on a theoretical construct that considers the city as a volatile space. Although cities have elaborated different adaptive and novel approaches to respond to refugees' arrival, several commonalities

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and specificities can be observed in our city samples: An assessment of cities' crisis management reveals inconsistency and contradictions of their role as sites of security, bureaucratic and austerity politics, and sanctuary practices. The endurance of refugee immobility has prompted the emergence of counterspaces for urban and refugee activism which struggles to manage many challenges posed by neoliberal austerity urbanism, security concerns and crimigation, cultural differences, and the pandemic crisis. Due to the strict federal rules and the limits of their capacities and resources, many cities have experienced worsening social segregation and increasing discontent from residents and local firms as a form of urbanized asynchronicity. Hence, the paper suggests that the refugees' arrival offers the chance for German cities to rethink a social project through engaging a politics of 'bounding'. It involves the re-framing of refugee displacement in relation to urban development through opening new negotiation spaces with the federal and state authorities and adequately addressing both the lived (camp) experiences of those on the move and local population's needs and expectations (Engler, 2021; Mayer, 2016; Sturm, 2007).

A rapidly growing literature in migration and refugee studies has highlighted the multi-level refugee governance and its effects upon refugees' situations in the German and European contexts particularly in the aftermath of the 2015 irregular flows (Bohn & Alicke, 2016; German Expert Council, 2018; International IDEA, 2018; Johansson, 2016; Lippert-Rasmussen & Vitikainen, 2020; Soederberg, 2018; Vollmer & Karakayali, 2017). Whereas some of them remain descriptive due to its reporting character, efforts from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective have begun to collect broad data in city samples and target groups and to develop adequate methodologies for in-depth theory-based analyses. For instance, scholars depict the difficulties of gaining access to target groups including collecting correct information. They, therefore, suggest introducing alternative survey instruments and elaborating new rights discourses (e.g. the right to be heard) as a remedy to address the problems of data gathering (Kühne et al., 2019; Moraru, 2020). This paper builds on these ongoing research efforts and will contribute to highlighting the emerging new urban social (counter)spaces with critical voices found in the contentious politics of migration in the conjuncture of bureaucratic regulations/security measures, citizen initiatives and refugee activism, and daily integration challenges. Its original insights lie in the identification of grey areas of the city's contradicting bordering and integration practices which shows the juxtaposition of 'the state of exception' as a primal form of modern government (Agamben, 2005) accompanied by the emergence of vibrant novel social spaces as a form of urban resistance and informality.

The paper has four parts: Section II first lays out a theoretical frame derived from critical geography, urban studies, and ethnographic story-telling approaches. Herein the city is reframed as a volatile space between surveillance/austerity urbanism, on the one hand, and urban moralism and refugee activism, on the other. Furthermore, this section will give some methodological notes that justify the selection of city samples and describe the process of data generation process including the design of a survey with local practitioners as a target group. In light of this theoretical construct, Section III first shows a brief history of migration flow in Germany that has reshaped many cities' social and economic life and policy development. It then analyses policy evidence from several selected city samples surrounding two major aspects: (1) cities as mediators and implementers guided by bureaucratic rigidity, economic austerity and surveillance while addressing various concerns and needs faced by asylum-seekers and local population; (2) cities as sites of urban informality including urban moralism/sanctuary practices, identity- and boundary-making, and refugee activism. Besides examining the changing face in three major cities (notably Berlin and Hamburg as city-state, and Mannheim), exemplary evidence in other cities serves to support the paper's

major argument (notably the ‘anchor centres’ meaning ‘Centre for Arrival, Decision, Repatriation (AnKER)’² in Heidelberg and Bamberg, the launching of several collaborative initiatives for enhancing integration work in Berlin, München, Düsseldorf, Münster, and Magdeburg). The conclusion reflects upon the moving frames of cities’ negotiation process from a welcome culture towards a more nuanced picture of disillusionment accompanied by rising concerns of political, socio-economic, and cultural challenges. It also gives several thoughts for future research concerning the design of data gathering and possible pathways for conducting cross-disciplinary studies.

Reframing the city: old and new spatiality between surveillance, austerity urbanism, and sanctuary

Scholarly efforts and artist performance to highlight the city’s changing face influenced by migration influx have revealed the increasing ambivalence of cities as a site of arrival, sanctuary, solidarity, and securitization (Darling, 2008, 2013; Hancock, 2012; Wood, 1994). Asylum as a spatial experience becomes gradually detached from the territorial framing of the nation-state. Instead, it moves towards a re-territorialization in both interior and exterior spaces (e.g. urban borderlands) that (re)produce and maintain refugees’ immobility (Engler, 2021). These discussions have opened new venues for re-considering the refugee experience as an overlapping dimension of the bureaucratic/instrumental and social spaces. Interdisciplinary efforts that combined the approaches of different disciplines (law and politics, ethics, urban geography and forced migration) have provided nuanced accounts of sovereignty, welcome, hospitality, surveillance and othering process intertwined with different negotiating lines *within* the city. The reassertion of ‘sanctuary’ as a public good, for instance, have helped create a micro-politics of cultural change and enhance a recognition of the city’s relational responsibilities by recurring to the historical roots of sanctuary that provided protection for fugitives in biblical times (Darling, 2008; Goodall, 2011, p. 7).

As such, ‘cities’ might be viewed as an assemblage with several layers. First and foremost, the city is a useful analytical category, whose concepts and standpoints are subject to change depending on the functions and visions they are designed for and associated with. For instance, ‘the mobility turn’ found in geography studies as a favourite explanation frame helps trace cities’ changing functions. In this mobility frame, space is created and ‘constructed as a result of the flows of people, goods, services, systems and the interactions between them’ (Hannam et al., 2006: 2ff; cited in Nyers & Rygiel, 2012, p. 7). Secondly, cities are mediators between (national) bureaucratic politics, economic rigidity, and translocal politics of presence. Thirdly, against the backdrop of globalization, cities turn out to be ‘the junction boxes for international interactions at the local level’ (Clark et al. (2008) cited in Darling, 2009), attract ‘strangers’ coming together, amid ‘continuous contestations of who belongs and to whom the city belongs’. In light of these layers, our theoretical frame constructs ‘city’ as contestation sites between bureaucratic politics, surveillance and austerity urbanism, on the one hand, and sanctuary/urban moralism and informality, on the other hand.

City as sites of bureaucratic politics, surveillance and austerity urbanism

Derived from the rational policy model (Allison, 1968, pp. 35–36) that categorizes government action as ‘acts’ and ‘choices’, the city as a milieu of bureaucratic politics has its main tasks to correctly implement government’s policy as organizational outcome. In a federal political system like that of Germany, the city also enjoys a certain degree of autonomy to decide its own local affairs

based on the subsidiarity principle, where concurring groups/actors bargain and compete against each other, so that their preferred course of action might get adopted. Meanwhile, controversial voices within the city concerning emergency plans, established policy frames, organizational structures and modes of decision-making can cause institutional crises. For instance, at the height of the 2015 refugee influx, new laws were introduced in Germany as a response to local actors' critiques seeking to negotiate a decent accommodation for asylum-seekers, thereby causing constant change of complex social-political orders (Hinger et al., 2016). Following the organization of a protest camp in 2016, the city government in Bochum broke the rule and agreed to allow asylum-seekers living in the mass reception centres to visit German language courses.³

Cities have also become a site of securitization and surveillance. Analysts observe that the emergence of new risks and the consideration how to tackle them would require a shift of paradigm in security policy (Daase, 2002, p. 9), in which the focus should be put on coping with the *security paradox* and crisis prevention, instead of threat prevention. Unlike the security dilemma found in the traditional (neo)realist rationale, a *paradox* signifies a situation 'in which the condition of possibility is also the condition of impossibility' (Kessler & Daas, 2008, p. 212). Driven by the logic of coping with the security paradox, risk politics has become a central component particularly in the nexus of policy fields between security and migration. As observed by Pécoud and de Guchteneire (2006), a largely shared feature of contemporary migration policies is their restrictive nature. *Irregular* migration is commonly understood, in security terms, as a 'problem' and many countries encounter this 'risk' with a tendency moving from the creation of 'the state of exception' to the generalization of a security paradigm as the normal technique of government (Agamben, 2005, p. 11). Terrorism-related concerns have further fuelled this trend and put borders in the spotlight, reflecting the porosity of borders and calling for greater surveillance. In multiple ways, the city has been involved in several collaborative security and surveillance measures ranging from the strengthened coordinated anti-terror control in exchange of information about terrorist suspects, restrictive migration and border policy including deportation measures, criminalization towards irregular migrants to externalization measures of establishing refugee camps outside the border (resulted from the deal between the EU and Turkey in 2016).

Furthermore, cities are places of the politics and power of austerity urbanism, which has framed public policy particularly in metropolitan and regional capitals for regulating and allocating limited resources. As an analytical concept originally applied in the US context, austerity urbanism describes 'the intensification of existing neoliberal practices that have resulted in deeper and wider entrenchment of pro-market solutions to housing provisioning, whilst implementing additional fiscal retrenchment of the social state' (Peck, 2012; cited in Soederberg, 2018, p. 2). It also represents a structural frame within which urban movements operates along the logic of profit-oriented deregulation and 'growth first' strategies. As part of neoliberal reform efforts pushed by the European Union, Germany's state and city governments have introduced entrepreneurial modes of governance in more and more policy areas (e.g. the outsourcing of security tasks in refugee camps to private security firms mandated either by state or by city governments) and new toolkits for dealing with social polarization. Such governments' actions have paved a path for converging asylum regime, bordering policy and city's austerity practices leading to the endurance of camps, displacement and a massive shortage of affordable social facilities (e.g. housing and public services, see Mayer, 2016; Sowa, 2020). Consequently, the city's most vulnerable are subjected to the violent bordering practices of such neoliberal practices that reinforce the 'hierarchy of mobility' as undocumented and unhoused persons are displaced, and rich residents' property rights upheld as borders are spatially enforced in city space.

Against the backdrop of considering ‘migration’ in rigid security and economic terms, ‘refugee’ as a concept becomes increasingly controversial. This is due to the dynamic of refugee flows and the ensuing policy responses which have challenged the state-centred conception of citizenship and blurred the distinction between migrants and refugees (Mountz, 2011; Scheinert, 2017). The 1951 *Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (GC)* has set out core elements of the legal definition of ‘refugee’ with the focus on providing protection from persecution on grounds of one of five reasons (race, religion, nationality, opinion or group membership). It also has upheld key provisions that interdict discrimination and criminalization for illegal entry and *non-refoulement*, i.e. forced return to the country of origin. Between 2013 and 2014, Germany introduced *Temporary Humanitarian Admission Programme (THAP)* for Syrian refugees. Besides humanitarian criteria, it added ties to Germany (e.g. family ties) and ability to help rebuild Syria after the end of the conflict as criteria to obtain an asylum status. In particular, as from January 2020, a new federal law has entered into force involving the training or employment toleration (*Ausbildungs- und Beschäftigungsduldung*) for those refused asylum-seekers whose deportation is temporarily suspended under certain conditions. The law guarantees them a reliable residence status for a certain period of time by means of *Duldung* if they complete vocational training or pursue employment.⁴ The introduction of these new regulations signifies a shift in the concept of ‘refugee’: It has evolved from that of a recipient of humanitarian aid to that of a recipient with different layers, whose admission status will be determined by a set of requirements covering not only humanitarian and economic elements but also temporality, membership and territorial mobility. This development highlights not only ‘how movement cannot be analyzed without reference to class and capital, how mobility in asylum seeking is both socially stratified and socially stratifying’ (Ihring, 2017, here cited in Scheinert, 2017, p. 133). Despite the opening of a new window for those refused asylum-seekers to stay in Germany for a certain period of time, it also shows a reinforcing hierarchy of refugee status with the quota refugee occupying a lower position (i.e. no *non-refoulement* for refused Asylum-seekers from Afghanistan which is regarded as a third safe country) and the perpetuation of a hierarchy of citizenship status within the host country against the backdrop of an increasingly rigid bureaucratic politics faced by refugees and their local employers (Pettigrew, 1998; Zetter, 2007).⁵

City as sites of solidarity/sanctuary practices and politics of presence

In countering the prioritization tendency of refugee categories and addressing the heterogeneity of refugees’ (im)mobilities, the emergence of diverse solidarity/sanctuary practices and politics of presence/urban informality has reshaped the city’s outlook found in street protests with the slogans ‘welcome culture’ and ‘We have room’. ‘Solidarity’ as a concept has both interpretative and normative dimensions. As noted by Ahmed (2004, p. 189), solidarity ‘involves commitment and work, as well as recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground’. The common ground may be construed as an inspiration for justice and the empathy towards fellow citizens and strangers rooted in the religious and moral convictions. Hereafter ‘solidarity’ can be reframed through analysing how the crisis is changing policy measures undertaken by state and civil society actors as well as public (mis)perceptions. As such, the normative ground of solidarity will be re-energized through the endeavour to improve risk and safety management.

Besides solidarity practices, four aspects of urban sanctuary practices can be identified: legal, discursive, identity-formative and scalar (Bauder, 2016, pp. 1, 7–10ff). The legal nature of urban sanctuary involves the engagement of the municipal legislative body (i.e. city council) supporting sanctuary initiatives. The emphasis on the discursive aspect of sanctuary initiatives ‘involves challenging exclusionary refugee discourses that often circulate through national media and national political debate’ (Bauder, 2016, p. 7). Moreover, Bauder considers the evolving transformative process of political identity and subjectivities as well as the imagination of the city as a space of belonging, not only for citizens but also for newcomers. Cases of Canada’s sanctuary city show how solidarity expressions and practices have enabled the formation of a collective urban community that makes no distinction between citizens and migrants, or between residents with or without status (Bauder, 2016, p. 8). A further aspect common to sanctuary-city policies ‘involves rejecting national approaches towards migration and refugee admission’ (Bauder, 2016, p. 9). At best, many urban sanctuary initiatives prove to be an attempt ‘to rescale migration and refugee policies and practices from national to local scales’ (Bauder, 2016, p. 10). Such *rescaling* efforts assert ‘a form of power and politics at the sub-national level’ (Sassen, 2008, p. 314; here cited in Bauder, 2016, p. 10) which strives to gain a space of autonomy and may constitute a threat to national sovereignty.

In other words, as cities embrace specific values and become a site of arrival, sanctuary and solidarity, the question at stake is how cities promote a language of hospitality that introduces a form of ‘moral urbanism’ in justifying governments’ ordering responses to asylum requests (Carrière, 2017; Darling, 2013). Different forms of moral urbanism may emerge, depending on how asylum is articulated, thereby shaping the expectations of both citizens and noncitizens alike. For instance, since 2005, Sheffield has become the first sanctuary city in the UK, becoming ‘a place with a “welcoming tradition” through a series of high-profile events of refuge and their reiterative embedding in the public imaginary’ (Darling, 2013).

Besides various urban solidarity/sanctuary practices, cities are also sites of activism among non-citizen migrants. Analysts use different terms to highlight this phenomenon. For instance, ‘the politics of presence’ and also on way through which ‘urban informality’ can be viewed as producing ‘political significance’ and ‘a different relation to citizenship’ for forced migrants allows for migrant perspectives into or about the city, rather than the other way around. Similarly, other scholars focus on how migrants ‘contribute to the differential positioning of cities’ (Schiller & Çağlar, 2009), ‘how immigrants have transformed the metro region’ (Teixeira, 2017; Johnson, 2015), and how migrant civil society can be ‘new voices in the struggle over community development’ (Theodore & Martin, 2017). Likewise, Isin’s (2009, p. 367) term ‘activist citizenship’ upholds the newly emerging types of citizen subjectivities. In those new spaces, non-citizen migrants engage in making claims to belonging, to rights and to being political through a variety of strategies. Isin and Rygiel (2007, p. 189ff.) notice an enactment of a form of citizenship ‘from below’ as political beings and *de facto* as citizens (e.g. being new ‘*Berliner*’), in spite of the lack of legal status, political membership or documentation of belonging. In this ‘spaces of abjection’, ‘peoples who are disenfranchised from citizenship (whether formally through status or informally through poverty and war) are finding new ways of claim-making in such spaces’ (Isin & Rygiel, 2007, p. 189ff.). Examples of such new types of citizen subjectivities emerging in relation to (im)mobility include: displaced peoples, slum-dwellers, refugees, non-status and irregular migrants, and the Sans-papiers, grass-roots-organizers in shantytowns and ‘the squatter citizen’.

In sum, city’s multifaceted outlook can be approached through framing it both as sites of bureaucratic politics/surveillance/austerity urbanism, on the one hand, and sites of solidarity/

sanctuary practices and politics of presence, on the other. This theoretical frame is supposed to offer an interdisciplinary prism for illuminating the changing face shaped by the 2015/2016 refugee influx in the selected German cities.

Some methodological notes

With the methods of participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, storytelling, and a stratified target group survey, the field data gathering took place between March 2017 and April 2021 which includes several primary sources from the perspectives of refugees, municipal integration officer and community organizers. Derived from the hermeneutic tradition, the use of ethnographic description and understanding allows ‘textualists’ to pay attention to ‘the way in which the ethnographer’s own field experience is translated into ethnographic report and a new degree of awareness about the way in which the ethnographies are constructed’ (Aunger, 1995, p. 97). Theoretical perspectives concerning refugee integration and storytelling as social practices will further complement the research frame through reflecting upon participants’ cultural, social and political contexts as well as studying unstated fleeing experiences and interactions between community workers and refugees (Cooper et al., 1983; Hansen & Kahnweiler, 1993; Perry, 2008). Focal participants during the author’s field work were several refugee families (from Syria and Libya), municipal officers charged with the task of integration, community voluntary workers, and professionals involved in monitoring refugee integration work. Finally, the conduct of a stratified target group survey helps gather accurate data concerning refugee integration measures and their effects upon the city. By applying the random walk method, a relatively high score of participation among respondents (68% with 17 received responses out of 25 target persons and groups in our city samples) that match the characteristics of being engaged with refugee resettlement at the community level enables the generation of correct and projectable inferences. The result of this survey thus provides a segment of city’s changing face which covers not only a comparison of community workers’ and local population’s changing perceptions towards refugees prior to the 2015 refugee influx and after several incidents of police violence and criminal acts between 2016 and 2021. It also reveals a nuanced picture of the city’s changing role particularly concerning the question of its moral duty. **Table 1** provides an overview of the field work information.

Cities as sites of migration flows in post-war Germany – history, specificity, and structural change

Germany’s migration flows in the post-War era were mainly driven by labour migration, accompanied by several irregular migrant/refugee waves triggered by important political events and wars in the neighbouring regions. Between the mid-1950s and 1973, over 2.6 million ‘guest workers’ from Turkey, Italy, Greece, and Spain arrived to support a burgeoning manufacturing industry, most of them were supposed to return to their country of origin (Wiesbrock, 2010, p. 37). In the early 1970s, despite an economic downturn, the number of migrants falling into the category of family reunification continued to rise. At that time, Germany had gradually turned into a country of immigration, a fact which was ignored by politicians and society until 2005, as the major ruling twin sister parties – the union of Christian democrats and Christian socialists continue to embrace a restrictive refugee policy since the 1970s. Towards the end of 1980s, the dissolution of communism and its aftermath brought another wave of migration flow of ethnic Germans from the

Table 1. Interview and target group survey sampling chart (between March 2017 and April 2021).

	Number of Interviews		Stratified target group survey	Total	Participatory observation
	Men	Women			
Local Government		2	3	5	
Asylum-seeker	2	2		4	
Local stakeholders (Business, NGOs, community workers)	2	3	19	24	
Local migrant communities	2	1	3	5	
Joint local and migrant events					5
Main organizations of key informants	(1) Wir Zusammen (Düsseldorf);	(2) Applied University in Hamburg	(3) Diehl Foundation with the focus on social work (Magdeburg)	(4) Refugee Support e.V. (based in Münster); (5) Refugio München	

former Soviet Union with a special status. The refugee influx from the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s has triggered several political bargaining processes leading to several reform steps of the refugee policy. Finally, an inflow of highly skilled migrants since 2001 was deemed to address the labour shortage particularly in the sector of information and technology.

In receiving newcomers with heterogeneous backgrounds, municipalities are responsible for various tasks ranging from tackling housing, education, job training and integration issues to regulating social welfare issues. Many cities have introduced an integration commissioner (*Integrationsbeauftragte*) and the formation of a foreigners'/migration council (*Ausländer- or Migrationsbeirat*). The latter is supposed to represent the interests of the local population with migration background. In the course of the past regular and irregular migration flows, a structural change gradually took place on urban level whose rationale has moved away from the activation of welfare state towards the promotion of networked self-governing communities as the 'social space' (Kamleithner, 2009; Rose, 1996; cited in Pütz & Rodatz, 2013, p. 173). As Pütz and Rodatz (2013) observe, two overlapping dimensions come into play. On the one hand, spatial security policies serve to control increasingly marginalized urban spaces and specific (migrant) inhabitants. In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Muslim communities are often regarded as risks. On the other hand, the city government has launched a number of initiatives that connect the principle of 'from help to self-help' with migrants' economic potential and encourage residents of marginalized neighbourhoods to take their own economic, social, and cultural leadership. In this context, the community or 'ethnic networks' are conceived as resources being driver for economic integration. From the perspective of refugees, administrative distribution decisions, the existence of ethnic and family networks, and better job perspectives have usually motivated them to move to certain regions and big cities. Consequently, the social life of the continually growing minority communities with a self-governing function has become part of many cities' sub-cultures (e.g. the Turk and Arab neighbourhoods in Duisburg and Berlin as well as the ethnic Germans from Romania in Mannheim, see Swiaczny, 2000, pp. 65, 69). Migrants also have increasingly played an important role in the city's integration work and economy. Results of two recent studies show how refugees and high-skilled migrant labour often brings the decisive (entrepreneurial) mindset including the readiness to take risks to the table. For instance, the Migration Founders Monitors finds that the number of migrant founders is particularly high in Berlin and in North

Rhine-Westphalia (NRW). Whereas Berlin as an ‘international start-up hotspot’ attracts first-generation migrants, second-generation migrants shape the start-up scene in NRW.⁶ Meanwhile, the promotion of economic integration and ethnic communities’ self-governing leadership particularly in big cities often has not produced benefits the city has expected. Several studies highlight the impacts of the varying degrees of integration among different groups of migrants in German cities. For instance, Mannheim (i.e. ethnic Germans from Romania) and Duisburg (the Turk communities) witness how an insular social life of those densely clustered ethnic communities has reinforced their structural and social marginalization.

Since August 2015, Germany has become home to more than 1.5 million asylum-seekers with Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Turkey being the top sending countries. 425,000 of them are from Syria and many of them are young male applicants and unaccompanied minors. This wave of irregular flow has fundamentally changed the composition of Muslim communities in Germany today: Families of Turkish origin now make up only 45 per cent of Muslims. Every fifth Muslim now comes from the Arabic-speaking Middle East.⁷ Following the so-called EASY quote system, asylum-seekers are assigned to a central facility, and eventually to local authorities in different states. The 2017 Königsteiner key (*Königsteiner Schlüssel*) assignment quote based on tax revenues and total population saw Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW) state receiving most asylum-seekers (21.14%), followed by Bayern (15.43%) and Baden-Württemberg (12.97%). Hamburg usually receives 2.5% of the total sum of asylum-seekers each year. So far, this assigned quota norm across German regions has functioned efficiently without large deviation. Meanwhile, German large cities (e.g. Munich and Mannheim), particularly those city-states (i.e. Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen) become overburdened and face unique challenges, as they remain newcomers’ preferred destination due to ethnic networks and larger job markets. The geographic boundaries in Berlin and Hamburg further have posed a great challenge, as they remove ‘the potential for greenfield development or the settlement of their allotted arrivals in less populous regions’ (Katz et al., 2016, p. 2).

City as sites of bureaucratic politics, austerity urbanism and surveillance: evidence from Hamburg, Berlin, Mannheim, Heidelberg, and Bamberg

By considering the city as ‘sites of bureaucratic politics and surveillance’, its changing face can be understood through an evidence-based analysis in the city samples with the focus on three issues: (1) strengthened migration and security control through the (re)arrangement of anchor centres and the tendency of criminalization towards refugees; (2) refugee resettlement measures related to housing and urban development; (3) city as policy mediator and collaborator to enhance integration as part of post-neoliberal urban policy.

Strengthened security and migration control

Against the backdrop of a militarized European border regime along the Mediterranean coasts and the routes through the Balkan states, cities become an important arena being involved in massive border enforcement, in which the re-scaling of spaces and borders takes place for securitization measures. Besides enhanced policing efforts in public spaces and infrastructures of mobility supported by the Federal Police Force, cities cooperate with European agencies for cross-border data sharing. Furthermore, in case of immigration status violation, cities have report obligation vis-à-vis border authorities, thereby making difficult for undocumented migrants and for migrants who are unsure about their status, to access public services and resources. In other words, the

construction of a ‘Fortress Europe’ found in its downscaled politics of exclusion has facilitated a gradual change of cities, neighbourhoods and public institutions by turning themselves into urban borderlands (Lebuhn, 2019), thereby making vulnerable groups easily to become prey of shadow economy. A news coverage issued in 2019 gave an estimate of 200,000–600,000 undocumented people living in Germany. Especially in big cities such as Hamburg, undocumented people including those rejected asylum-seekers represent a significant size whose precarious living situation (with limited access to the health care, overcrowded housing, being subject to the arbitrariness of landlords and employers, and the fear of imprisonment and deportation) has not yet received sufficient attention in public debates.⁸

In particular, in responding to federal and state governments’ policy decision to restore sovereign control of migration flow through establishing arrival centres for asylum-seekers (Ankerzentren), cities have provided different types of buildings to guarantee a fluent functionality of the social space for efficiently accommodating newcomers and proceeding asylum application. In Heidelberg, for instance, the re-arrangement of arrival centres has enabled a speedy asylum decision (within 48 h). Based on a categorization effort among asylum-seekers in three groups (Cluster A with strong protection needs, Cluster B with refugees coming from the third safe countries as well as Cluster C with refugees coming from other countries), asylum requests should be examined in a required form of interview and written procedure. In its research report issued in February 2021, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) drew a positive balance of anchor facilities’ work in Bavaria and other federal states by stating that asylum procedures of first-time applicants in those centres are ‘processed on average five days faster than in the other BAMF locations’ – on average 77 instead of 82 days.⁹ However, the Heidelberg model has been criticized for having impeded refugees from seeking timely qualified consultation. The whole asylum procedure runs the risk of failing to comprehensively assess asylum seekers’ situation, thereby violating refugees’ rights and claims for protection (Moll, 2016, pp. 63, 71). Similarly, an oppositional politician considered the anchor centres’ disenfranchisement practices as a political failure, in which asylum-seekers have to live in very confined spaces during the entire procedure and are ‘cut off from independent counselling structures and civil society’.¹⁰

Moreover, a close look at the location of those buildings serving as arrival centres (e.g. in former barracks outside the inner city) reveals how the ‘*espace instrumental*’ (Lefebvre, 2000, p. 282; cited in Devlin, 2021, p. 139) of a military camp manifests the functionality of state authority in efficiently managing accommodation based on logistical requirements, instead of addressing individual needs. As such, individuals easily become part of subjectivizing logistics and are prevented from participating in urban life. Most anchor centres in Bavaria are located in former barracks. In Bamberg, for instance, after the withdrawal of the US army, the people of Bamberg first hoped for cheap housing. But things turned out differently. In 2015, the Balkan Centre for refugees from the former Yugoslavia was established on the large former barrack grounds. In 2018, it became an anchor centre, which has accommodated asylum-seekers from Syria, Iraq, and Iran. It also prepared for voluntary repatriation or deportation to sending countries. During the coronavirus crisis, there have been only about 600 people in the facility. Originally, the facility was to be expanded for 4500 places. After criticism from residents and the city of Bamberg, the centre is asked to receive no more than 1500 asylum-seekers.

Despite the reduced number, local activists repeatedly criticized the facility as mass accommodation. For years, the Bavarian Refugee Council has been calling for decentralized accommodation for asylum seekers. ‘The problem is that the people are isolated from the outside world. We can’t just go in there as aid and support organizations. We only get a glimpse of what’s going on inside.’¹¹

Evidence shows how such exclusion and isolation practices have shaped and exacerbated newcomers' alienation feeling, paved the way for conflicts not only among heterogeneous groups of asylum-seekers in the facilities, but also between asylum-seekers and security staff. At some centres in Mannheim, conflicts between refugees and security staff were reported after several Arab men complained that the latter interfered with their family affairs concerning the issues of language courses and medical consultation for their women and children. Refugees from the anchor centres tell the Bavarian and Munich Refugee Councils about serious abuses, fatal living situations and experiences of violence (e.g. in Ingolstadt). For ANKER-Watch, a monitoring initiative based in Bavaria, those reported incidents highlight the structural problems associated with the cooperation between the government and private security companies. Derived from the logics of austerity urbanism, such cooperation often falls short of guaranteeing the quality and professionalism of the employees hired by the security companies.¹²

In several extreme cases, immobility and exclusion practices have played out in contributing to alienation and radicalization tendency of some young male asylum-seekers, whose terrorist attacks and crime between 2015 and 2020 (e.g. terrorist plot at a Berlin Christmas market in 2016) have prompted local population's rising security concerns. Consequently, 'crimigration' as new topoi in public (mis)perceptions casts shadow upon the preparedness of local engagement for refugees. The result of the author's target group survey carried in April 2021 confirms for the first time the emergence of the association of refugee with criminality in public (mis)perceptions since 2016 (16.67%) comparing with the early public opinion towards refugees prior to the 2015 refugee influx (0%). In October 2020, a young tolerated refugee from Syria had attacked a gay couple in Dresden. During the trial, while Abdullah al H. H. does not regret what he did in killing 'infidels', a psychologist reports on his religious fantasies whose root causes might be traced back to his realization that he would be deported and had no prospects in staying in Germany.¹³ The death of Aman Alizada in a camp near Hamburg in August 2019 and the death of Qosay K. following a policing control in Hamburg in April 2021 further confirm the devastating negative effects of security and (im)mobility control refugees often are subject to during and after their stay in urban borderlands.¹⁴ Hence, several reinforcing risk factors can be identified as being responsible for the increase of this group's susceptibility to crime: precarious living conditions, mass housing, solitude and the absence of female family members, few opportunities for legal employment, and often an insecure prospect of remaining in the country.¹⁵

Housing for refugees intertwined with austerity urbanism

In his essay *Making Heimat*, Saunders cautions that arrival cities are 'where the new creative and commercial class will be born, or where the next wave of tension and violence will erupt'. Indeed, tension and conflicts have occurred while addressing the housing issue for many asylum-seekers in Hamburg, Berlin, and Mannheim, which is strongly intertwined with neoliberal austerity measures, top-down regulation attempts, and resistance from the local population. Hamburg and Berlin as city-states have received more asylum-seekers per square kilometre than other federal states. This turns out to be a big problem, as both cities have the densest urban population and the lowest availability of development land (Katz et al., 2016; Wolff, 2018). Though both cities face the similar problem, they have undertaken different paths of solution with different outcomes.

Hamburg is the only German state that created a streamlined housing *and* asylum support system incorporated in the Central Coordination Unit for Refugees (*Zentraler Koordinationsstab Flüchtlinge* (ZKF)) in October 2015. The ZKF is tasked with the management of all stages of refugee

resettlement that includes accommodation/housing programmes, preliminary integration measures, coordination of local voluntary work, and organization of citizen participation. As of April 2016, Hamburg had accommodated 39,000 asylum seekers. As a canal city, it has its own specific borough infrastructure. Given the fact that a majority of residential land in Hamburg is fully developed, the local government approved new policies to build housing for asylum-seekers in non-residential areas. Several emergency measures were launched including tent cities on its periphery and confiscating commercial property for refugee housing. However, housing needs continued to grow throughout 2015. In 2016, as the local government looked for new housing sites (e.g. in a commercial area in Hamburg's affluent district Eppendorf), a number of neighbourhood initiatives mobilized to protest the city's plan and to file lawsuits against the city. Under the disguise of nature reserve policies, those lawsuits were driven by a feeling of 'not in my backyard' against the presence of asylum-seeker housing. Even though the city won almost 40 lawsuits, the construction delay imposed by the legal proceeding had pushed the city planner to change the plan by locating asylum seeker housing sites in poorer neighbourhoods. It followed that many of the follow-up housing units are far outside of the city, which, according to an asylum seeker housing site manager, has made any prospect of a good integration work even difficult (cited in Wolff, 2018, p. 13). Later, an agreement was reached in June 2016 between the local initiative 'Hamburg for Good Integration' and the Hamburg Senate. This agreement stipulated how new housing locations will be distributed throughout rich and poor neighbourhoods. It also defined a goal of housing no more than 300 asylum seekers at a given site that should avoid the emergency of a 'planned ghetto' (Wolff, 2018, p. 15). Later, further agreements were reached between the city and various stakeholders (demand groups and housing companies) to ensure the creation of heterogeneous resident structures at the locations of the refugee shelters with the perspective of housing and successful integration.¹⁶ In so doing, Hamburg attempted to strike a balance between the incorporation of the urgent refugee housing issue into its decade-long strategy of social integration¹⁷ and top-down urban governance often with the aim of regulation, marketization and co-optation (Kuhn, 2014; cited in Scheller & Larsen, 2020). Still, as the outcome of the target group survey reveals, due to the failure to consequently introduce heterogeneous resident structures, the housing market and the social index in the neighbourhoods (e.g. in Eidelstedt) affected by large-scale refugee shelters have considerably deteriorated.

Compared with Hamburg's situation, Berlin's refugee policy has been framed through a rigid budget policy. As a neighbourhood city, it received 55,001 and 16,889 asylum-seekers in 2015 and in 2016, respectively. Being an arrival city, Berlin is famous for its lengthy process of asylum-seeking procedure, combined with incidents of inappropriate treatments towards asylum-seekers and its already-crowded and extremely regulated housing market (i.e. the 2020 law on rent cap). In general, the housing process for migrants goes as follows: newcomers register and declare first their intent to seek asylum at the State Office for Health and Social Affairs (known as the LaGeSo). From there, they are assigned to large *Lager* (reception centres), which housed hundreds to thousands of asylum seekers at a time. The primary *Lager* is located in a hangar at the former Tempelhof airport. In 2016, in response to record delays at the LaGeSo location, the LaGeSo had announced a second location at Tempelhof itself. Two years after the initial influx of displaced persons arrived in Berlin, in July 2017, 28,000 of the 80,000 registered refugees remained without access to stable rental housing and continued to stay in precarious housing situation (LAF, 2017; cited in Soederberg, 2018, p. 4). In September 2020, Berlin still faced an instable accommodation situation for refugees, accompanied by continuous changes of operators and contact persons. This has led to a growing accommodation work taken over by the state-owned companies, which in turn

has undermined the principle of subsidiarity deemed to ensure the priority transfer of social work to voluntary operators.¹⁸

The main reason for the continuous instable accommodation situation for refugees can be traced back to the 2001 bank crisis and 2008 financial crisis, whose consequences have obliged the Berlin Senate subject to austerity measures supposed to solve its legitimization crisis through adopting a market-facilitating approach to housing issues. In spite of the effort of introducing a Refugee Management Coordination Centre (under the aegis of LaGeSo) and the counsel of the private consulting firm McKinsey & Company, the understaffed LaGeSo failed to alleviate backlog, to address the deteriorating housing conditions, and to ensure new arrivals to have access to vital services including healthcare, food, and (follow-up)-shelter (Soederberg, 2018, p. 7). Following the information of helpers who work with asylum-seekers, for residents in the camps, the most important thing has been to find permanent apartments. ‘Everybody is waiting for the delivery of mails [*sic*]. A letter can decide about your destiny in one second.’¹⁹ The feeling of anxiety and uncertainty seems to become a normal part of life in the camps in Berlin.

In particular, the Berlin Senate’s intervention to regulate the housing market appears to have made the housing situation in Berlin even unpredictable. Its intention to stop the uniquely rising rent price (in comparison with other German metropolitan cities) through the law on rent cap was deemed to address the specific needs of its inhabitants, whose average income is far below than that of other cities. The city government faces the problems of a decreasing number of housing supply due to its past rent cap law and the shift of inhabitants’ preferences moving to the suburb areas (e.g. Potsdam) which is the consequence of the continuing lockdown measures during the pandemic.²⁰ In view of the unsolved housing problems, serious concerns remain regarding sharpened social segregation among social groups with low income, as refugee migrants have been regarded as concurring applicants for getting less expensive housing in the city.²¹

Mannheim has been connected with the scene when foreigners arrived at the central station welcomed by crowds of cheering Germans, not only in the 1960s, when ‘guest workers’ from southern Europe came to meet the demands of Germany’s booming economy but also in September 2015. With the facility of refugee ‘turnstile’, the summer 2015 saw more than 80,000 refugees arriving in around 150 special trains via the Balkan route. While the majority were immediately assigned to surrounding regions, around 12,000 were temporally sheltered in Mannheim’s three former US army barracks that make up a fifth of the total city area. Unlike other German cities, Mannheim has seen itself becoming a migration society. Already in 1974, it introduced a city’s commissioner who should be charged with the task of migration and integration issues. During the period of refugee influx, the city’s commissioner has coordinated a day-to-day town meeting bringing together senior members and community groups at the same table. The aim has been not only to help qualified newcomers having access to the workplace, but also to establish community networks.

Meanwhile, with its 44% population having migrant background, Mannheim has continuously experienced ethnic tensions between Muslim and Jewish communities. Local authorities have also faced an unprecedented unequal burden of resettlement and integration work as most asylum-seekers want to move to the city. Furthermore, Mannheim’s specific infrastructure for receiving asylum-seekers has been under criticism as it facilitates the formation of ghetto inside the city. The advantage of its unusual set-up turns out to be a disadvantage. On the one hand, the barracks have provided far safer and sturdier accommodation for refugees than the makeshift tent cities and container clusters found in Hamburg or Berlin. On the other hand, the camp risks having a ‘ghetto character’ and creating a parallel society which directly undermines the city’s integration drive. Urban planners have been alarmed following the Cologne attacks on New Year’s Eve in

December 2016 that highlight the risks of housing refugees in already segregated communities as well as the challenges of cultural differences concerning the protection of young women's safety in the public sphere.²² Later, in the midst of the discussion if the State Baden-Württemberg should follow Bavaria's decision and establish anchor centres, Mannheim made it clear that it only would agree to make its Coleman barracks available if it did not have to receive asylum seekers in temporary and follow-up accommodation.²³ With a close look at the situated materiality of the reception centre and its policy framework, Mannheim's spatial politics towards refugees can be considered as 'the outcome of risk-benefit calculations', whose spatiality contributes to its residents' immobility, containment and suspension (Nettelbladt & Boano, 2019, p. 78).

City as mediator and collaborator between federal policy action and local activism

Despite the city's contradictory politics in pursuing neoliberal austerity as well as self-governing integration strategy, it has fulfilled two functions being a mediator in addressing the BAMF's policy errors and collaborator in supporting urban and refugee activism to foster institutional change. For instance, the ombudsman service in Hamburg has dealt with complaints from asylum-seekers against the BAMF's reportedly wrong asylum decisions. In its 2nd yearly report between 2018 and 2019, 139 cases have been under examination involving either asylum-seekers' housing problems or problems with the (state) authority. Meanwhile, due to the rising number of complaints against the BAMF's decisions, local courts face the challenges of a lack of resources and competence.²⁴ Furthermore, the city has been active in supporting urban and refugee activism found in a post-identitarian mobilization of diverse actors whose work is aware of the connection of different critical issues and their thematic boundary (e.g. housing, refugee, precarization, racism, sexism and diverse social backgrounds). For example, the Berlin Senate has provided helping hands in carrying out an independent complaint management project to improve the housing situation in refugee camps. The project began with the organization of a monitoring group (Future Factory Heinersdorf) which was initiated by a group of refugee women. Later, the group found broad support from its neighbourhood administration (i.e. Pankow) and numerous institutions and organizations.²⁵ During this process, the Senate Department for Integration, Labor and Social Work (SenIAS) has acted as a strategic collaborator to help create pragmatic bonds that encourage not only refugees' participation, but also push for grassroots-oriented institutional reforms and programmes tied to specific needs of citizens (Scheller & Larsen, 2020, p. 122).

Nonetheless, criticism has emerged from communal practitioners concerning the city's integration work. They not only critique the disproportionality of refugee resettlement burden the city has to face. Also the lack of an integrated approach to develop programmes from an intersectional prism that address the related issues of sexualized and racist violence both refugees and local population face has reduced the probability to think about those intertwined issues together while managing available resources in a more efficient manner. Following the comments of some survey participants conducted in April 2021, one detects several disillusioned voices as follows.

It is illusory to accept every refugee who wants to come to Germany. Aid must be targeted more strongly at the countries of origin ... With the current policy, many resources are spent on very few people. An extreme example: Costs for the accommodation of unaccompanied minor refugees amount to 60,000 to 80,000 € p.a. For this, one can maintain an entire school in the countries of origin.

Why the cities? Why not distribute the people in rural areas where they can have direct contact with the people who live there? Why do we allow some primary schools to suffer under the burden of refugee work? ... From my point of view, there is no reason why cities in particular should provide settlements.

In Hamburg it was said that ‘refugees must finally get out of the DIY stores’ because they had been housed very badly there. At the same time, Schleswig Holstein (SH) complained that they had beds and places ready, but the refugees did not come or did not stay. Scholz²⁶ managed that miserably at the time. He kept the people in the DIY stores instead of organising appropriate places for them in the SH’s suburb and rural areas.

The most important prerequisites for integration are language acquisition, job and housing. Many language courses had to be cancelled due to Covid-19; refugee children are also affected negatively due to the lack of face-to-face teaching.

To sum up, the examination of the focus issues found in the city samples demonstrates a high degree of contradiction and ambivalence of the city’s borderland and resettlement practices. The emerging local discontent concerning the disproportionality and inefficiency of the city’s resource management, unequal burden-sharing between cities and rural areas as well as the integration problems some primary schools face on a daily basis has further exposed how many German cities are re-organizing their lives with newcomers. But it is only part of the story.

Cities as sites of sanctuary/solidarity practices: forms, models and their effects

Similar to US cities (e.g. Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York), which claim themselves as solidarity city and were opposing national restrictive measures and deportation practices particularly under the former President Donald Trump, there are also initiatives that stand up for solidarity in German cities such as Hamburg, Berlin, and Hannover. The solidarity and sanctuary practices in our city samples can be approached from the following aspects: (1) legal and discursive action through rights-claiming; (2) formation of new subjectivities through identity- and boundary-making; (3) rescaling efforts found in urban and refugee activism.

Legal and discursive action

During the refugee influx in summer 2015 and immediately after the fire in the Moria camp in Greece in September 2020, initiatives have been formed in some German cities to declare themselves ‘Solidarity Cities’ whose idea is ‘to create networks and spaces of solidarity in the cities and influence urban politics’.²⁷ Inspired by the solidarity cities movement in America and other European cities, these initiatives have defined the goals of their action through presenting the slogans found in their counterparts such as ‘no deportation!’, ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’, and ‘access without fear’. As such, these initiatives have encouraged refugees and non-refugees alike to claim their rights through their presence in the city (i.e. no one should be subjected to special control because of their residence status, the colour of their skin or their appearance). Specifically, these initiatives have opened new social spaces by enabling the formation of self-organised networks among refugees, migrants, tenants, the urban poor with the slogan of ‘City for All’.

For instance, in Munich, where radical rightist groups gather together for street protests, civil society takes a stand for tolerance and cohesion with slogans such as ‘Munich is colorful’.²⁸ A new initiative FindingPlaces emerged in Hamburg as a result of partnership between Hamburg’s Hafencity University (HfC) and MIT’s CityScienceLab that seeks to bridge concurring concerns through community input. Residents from each of Hamburg’s seven districts supported the city’s search for identification of possible sites for additional housing in the framework of workshops at HfC. Since then, more than 30 such locations had been vetted and approved by Hamburg’s

city government, allowing for 7000–8000 of a target 20,000 units. Indeed, FindingPlaces’ collaborative approach has enabled people with different viewpoints ‘to come together and meet face to face and hopefully develop a better understanding of the values and concerns that they may not have agreed with initially’.²⁹ Further examples can be found in the organization of an event between different stakeholders in Hamburg on 10 December 2017 designed to enhance the city’s sanctuary role in providing rights protection as well as in the presentation of a closing project ‘Migration in my town’ in Münster. During the 2017 meeting in Hamburg, migrant and refugee organizations have presented their activities including the support for undocumented persons. Together with representatives from Brighton/UK, Los Angeles/USA and Barcelona/Spain, the event has provided a platform that networked local and international (migrant) activism and called for the city government to adopt an inclusive integration approach. The project in Münster involved an international comparative study of integration work between Norway, Germany and the Netherlands with three workshops that addressed respectively the issues of migration work, integration at the job market as well as critiques against racism.³⁰ The participants noticed that, while both the state and the city have provided a facilitating institutional environment, the real integration work begins and can be pursued only through interactions between refugees and local population including enhanced local and refugee activism (see the next sub-section).

Furthermore, several academic initiatives came into existence thanks to the support either from the federal government or from grass-roots social and educational actors. They aimed to create a facilitating learning environment for high-skilled refugee academics to equip themselves with further training and qualification suitable for the job market. Funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) till the end of 2022, ‘Academics in Solidarity’, for example, is a nationwide mentoring project for refugee and vulnerable academics based at Freie Universität Berlin, which links researchers with mentors in Germany and transit countries (i.e. Jordan and Lebanon). The project also offers training for further academic qualification and reintegration into the academic labour market. A further example is the organization of a series of discussions ‘Science and Escape: Exchanges between Refugee Academics, German Students and Scholars’ in Magdeburg between 2016 and 2017, which was a collaborative effort between students, the faculty staff of a local university, and social work actors (i.e. Otto-von-Guericke-University, Roncalli-Haus, and the Caritas association).

City as a volatile space of identity- and boundary-making

The varying pathways of migrants’ presence in different city spaces and their role as scale-maker in influencing the cities’ (re)positioning within national fields of power have gradually changed the criterion of identity- and boundary-making both for inhabitants and for refugees themselves. The city sees itself experiencing an oscillating self-identification process while addressing multiple challenges. City spaces (including the emergence of counter-spaces) thus become elastic, fluid, increasingly networked, unreal, even filled with many contradictions. The results of the author’s target group survey and several integration reports at the city scale confirm the dynamic of such a contrasting identity- and boundary-making process, which praises either the virtue of mixing categories, transgressing boundaries and inverting customs reflected in the diversity of cultural adaptations or insists on *new* exclusionary solidarities with binary construction (i.e. citizens versus non-citizens) along the lines of religion, gender, country of origin or ethnic identity (Krzyszowski & Nowicka, 2020).

More than five years after the 2015 refugee influx, many local voluntary workers consider themselves to have become more tolerant and that they have learned how to deal with intercultural dissonances concerning the role of gender in the family and society.³¹ In Berlin, many residents begin to call newcomers as new Berliners. In Hamburg, migrant students are eager learners in an international preparatory class and have been part of a pilot programme (i.e. six-year primary school – schools shape the future). As revealed in the author's target group survey, 75% of respondents share the opinion that the 2015 refugee autumn has changed the face of their city with a varying degree ranging from 'very strong', 'strong' to 'moderate'.

Meanwhile, political elites of the ruling union parties have distanced from their advocacy of welcome culture politics and claimed that '2015 is not allowed to happen again' – a statement with a twofold political meaning. First, Ms Merkel's famous words 'We'll make it' has been a political struggle for her in the past five years at both domestic and European levels. Today, she would prefer not to be associated again with the theme 'refugee'.³² Second, this statement has become a powerful weapon for different factions within the union parties: Ambitious candidates for the coming federal parliamentary election can be empowered to pursue a back-to-the track restrictive migration policy deemed to appeal potential voters of the rightist populist party (Alternative for Germany (AfD)) which was a big winner of the 2017 parliamentary election due to its anti-refugee position.

Furthermore, a recent study unravels how Islamophobia as a transnational European exclusionary project has shaped old migrant groups' attitude towards refugees (Krzyzowski & Nowicka, 2020). Another study shows how the construction of 'good citizens' through the German language course training has reproduced and enhanced Eurocentric norms (Heinemann, 2017). Concerns also arise with regard to the question of local young women's safety in the public sphere resulting from the encounter of different value systems. In the aftermath of those criminal offence cases committed by (rejected) young male asylum applicants, the association between the number of refugees and the rise of crime offence has been a topic of discussion. Consequently, as shown in the target group survey, respondents' perceptions towards refugees associated with solidarity sink since 2016 (from 23.53% to 16.67%). Political and economic challenges and cultural differences including women rights and different education styles have become the top themes of refugee integration issues. Some scenes from several primary schools, for instance, reveal the existence of conflict potentials and false expectations at school, not only between refugee students and local students but also between refugee parents and teachers. Many refugee parents have expected that it is teachers' duty to punish their children at school in case of disobedience.³³ Following the results of a recent study, refugee students might get lost along the way in the German school system as a consequence of the interplay of diverse factors: the distribution of refugees landing in schools located in deprived areas, a lack of time for parent-teacher conferences, overburdened and less qualified teachers for diversity-sensible teaching. The threat of ghettoizing already deprived schools and further segregation only reinforces the existing boundary-making process that sees inequality and digital discrepancy students with migration background face in the German school system.³⁴ The covid-19 lockdown measures have further worsened such situation in making the year 2020 a lost year for integration reflected in much less employment for refugees during the crisis, cancellation of many language courses, and the lack of adequate resources for remote learning in accommodation facilities.³⁵

From the perspective of refugees, while the arrival in Germany was supposed to be the final station of their long fleeing route within Europe, the forced (im)mobility they have experienced between the first registration centre, different camps, and the long waiting time for the clarification

of their status have strained the psyche of many refugees. Furthermore, the connection with their home country via internet has often created a unique subjectivity with a cross-spatial mindset in relation to the city, coupled with the reality of legally required *immobility*, discrimination and frustration experience, and new challenges posed by a lengthy bureaucratic asylum application process. Once obtaining officially the refugee status, many refugees pursue the goal to apply for citizenship in the future through labour and social integration.

Rescaling efforts in urban and refugee activism

Notwithstanding the increasingly contested identity-negotiation process, a number of novel urban initiatives have emerged at the scalar level which are either supported by federal and local actors or led by refugees (long time and new) and migrants' communities themselves with significant effects to lend allyship to non-directly affected communities, advocates and activists. The initiative '*Wir Zusammen*' (*we together*), for instance, has gathered 234 big, middle and small enterprises to work on refugees' economic and social integration at the workplace. Based in Düsseldorf, '*Wir Zusammen*' was launched and pushed personally by Chancellor Angela Merkel in winter 2015, as she saw the necessity to include firms and corporations from different branches to work on a long-term strategy for refugees to have access to the labour market. The initiative includes corporate and state actors as well as a number of partners whose cross-branch expertise is deemed to help the firms recruit and train refugees and local staff for cultivating an inclusive working place. Its interim report between 2016 and 2019 shows specifically how its efforts to fight against racism and anti-refugee position at the workplace have created a platform for enhanced dialog and experience exchanges between firms, refugees and partners from different walks.³⁶ In a similar vein, a philanthropic foundation in Magdeburg has incorporated the idea of refugees as potential *Stifter* (agency) into its social work. During a coffee meeting, refugee families and children were invited to join a parlour game with senior habitants. Encounters like this might well pave the way for an intergenerational and -cultural integration work.³⁷ In addition, a cooperative integration work between local networked refugee advocacy and experts in Munich has proposed methods such as intercultural commuting which aim to create new understandings of different behaviours that arise from different life contexts – in education, at work, at school, and in all areas of life between local population and refugees.³⁸ Meanwhile, discontent has emerged from local firms whose refugee employees (particularly from the sub-Saharan African countries and Afghanistan) still face deportation measures due to rigid interpretations of the 2020 law of training and employment toleration. In an open letter, 42 local firms in Allgäu/Bavaria have complained about the state government's ignorance of their needs in April 2021. A Swabian initiative 'Right to stay through labor' points out the drawbacks of the new refugee law whose proclaimed goals to offer refugees new perspectives for work and to obtain residence right turn out to be a false promise.³⁹

Besides urban activism and resistance organized by local actors, refugee leadership in advocating for refugees' own political presence through imagining the city as a space of belonging has gradually gained relevance. As the co-founder of the movement 'Seebrücke' (sea bridges) – a movement that campaigns for safe escape routes and de-criminalization of sea rescue, Tareq Alaows announced at the beginning of 2021 that he would be the first refugee from Syria to run for the Bundestag. His intention was to give a political voice to those who are on the move and who live in Germany as refugees. A further example of refugee activism is the engagement of Anas Aboura based in Hamburg. Like Alaows, Aboura comes from Syria and fled to Germany in October 2015. His work

involves networking with a number of organizations within Hamburg to plan culturally *inclusive* events. He wishes for a collaborative approach to resettlement, incorporating mentorships and cultural exchanges.⁴⁰ Aboura is not alone in expressing his desire for a deeper cultural exchanges. Amal, Berlin! as a mixed editorial team provides German-speaking readers with the exile journalists' view of German society. It also publishes articles on both the Arabic and the farsi/dari pages that appeal Iranian and Afghan Berliners.⁴¹

In spite of the spread of refugee activism on urban level, it can easily become target of hate and resentment in social media and at street. Despite the support Alaows has received for his candidacy, he has been subject to harassment and discrimination, including death threat against his family in Syria.⁴² Furthermore, concerns arise regarding politically tainted local engagement (Schmid et al., 2019) and the lack of volunteers for social engagement in certain boroughs in some cities (e.g. Berg Fidel in Münster), where migrant communities have a high percentage. As many engaged senior volunteers retire from their decade-long social engagement, they have problems to find a successor for their work. The lack of willingness of certain migrant communities to get involved in community work might have paved the way for social fragmentation, in which ethnic tensions for instance between Turks and Kurds take place from time to time.⁴³

Altogether, the emergence of new subjectivities, contradictions and tensions found in the identity- and boundary-making process and various forms of activism shows how the integration policy in our sample cities has become increasingly contested. Very often, the city as a volatile space has witnessed the co-existence of different contrasting worlds whose binary construction goes alongside the fault lines of (non)-citizenship, gender, and heterogenous ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds in an increasingly reified manner.

Discussions and reflections

As shown above, the city samples' securitization, urban austerity and solidarity practices are characterized by a high degree of ambivalence and volatility in the multi-layered urban spaces embedded in a neoliberal static exclusionary border regime. Notwithstanding the solidarity acknowledgement and the emergence of a variety of initiatives organized and led by different stakeholders, many cities experience the limitations of their understanding of citizenship and national identity, capacity and resources to tackle daily challenges of integration and discrimination problems. As shown in [Table 2](#), some commonalities, differences, and unparalleled specificities can be identified in our city samples regarding the multifaceted changes in urban spaces.

First, refugees' fleeing and asylum-seeking experiences, alongside the city's responses to accommodate and integrate them, have prompted the creation of volatile spaces, in which control, deportation, and sanctuary practices go hand in hand leading to the juxtaposition of contrasting realities. Cities like Hamburg, Berlin, Mannheim, Heidelberg, and Bamberg have realigned camps whose spatiality in terms of organizational and legal barriers has produced an espace instrumental (Lefebvre, 2000; cited in Devlin, 2021) refugees are subjected to for efficient asylum-procedures which has hindered access for civic groups to help address asylum-applicants' needs. As such, the functionality of those anchor centres embedded in a reasoning of neoliberal austerity urbanism contributes to the isolation, distancing and immobility of their residents, reinforcing the endurance of segregation as a manifestation of urbanized asynchronicity (Sturm, 2007). The tendency of criminalization, security control, rigid bureaucratic reasoning, political and economic challenges, cultural differences perceived by the local population, and the pandemic lockdown measures have further exacerbated such segregation. At the same time, the 'camp' and the resulting urban borders or

Table 2. An overview of the refugee resettlement developments and the entailing changing face of German cities.

	Hamburg (canal city-state)	Berlin (neighbourhood city-state)	Mannheim (arrival city)	Düsseldorf/Magdeburg (MD)/ Münster (MS)/Munich	Bamberg/ Heidelberg (anchor centre and first reception centre)
Bureaucratic politics, securitization and urban asterism practices	A significant size of undocumented people with precarious labour and housing situations; crimigation and police control (death cases of Aman Alizada and Qosay K.); anchor centre in Rahlstedt Central Coordination Unit for Refugees (ZKF); neighbourhood initiatives and lawsuits; Hamburg for good integration ; Heterogenous housing structure Ombudsman service dealing with refugees' complaints against the BAMF's asylum decisions	Long asylum application process and instable accommodation situation in the Lager Unpredictable housing situation for both refugees and inhabitants Independent monitoring management system (supported by the Future Factory Heinersdorf and the neighbourhood administration in Pankow) designed to improve the housing situation in refugee camps	Arrival city for guest workers and refugees via the Balkan route; refugee camps in three former US army barracks with a ghetto character ; Conflicts between refugee families and security staff Spatial politics based on strict risk-benefits calculations High density of ethnic networks with a self-governing function (ethnic Germans from Romania); structural and social marginalization of those clustered ethnic communities	Monitoring work of ANKER-Watch and Munich Refugee Council; local firms' discontent against the state government's deportation measures (Allgäu/Bavaria)	Anchor centres as an instrumental space ; Heidelberg model for speedy asylum decisions disenfranchisement practices reinforcing refugees' isolation, alienation and immobility
	Disproportionality of refugee resettlement burden between the city and rural areas; integration problems at school	High rate of migrant founders; international start-up hotspot for first-generation migrants; integration problems at school			Corona cases in anchor centres; integration problems at school
Sanctuary and Solidarity practices	Solidarity City; FindingPlaces' collaborative approach	Solidarity City; New Berliners; 'Academics in Solidarity' based at Freie Universität		Intercultural commuting (Munich); Munich is colourful ; concerns about discrimination and hostile position towards refugees; 'Science and Escape: Exchanges between Refugee Academics, German Students and Scholars' in MD Wir Zusammen (Düsseldorf); Refugee as Stifter (MD); refugees as active agency Lack of communal volunteers/ local leadership in integration issues; social fragmentation and ethnic tensions (MS)	
	Aboura's advocacy for collaborative cultural integration	Amal Berlin!			

demarcations are permeable and changeable (Gelardi, 2021), which prompt the emergence of (counter)-spaces for negotiating diverging interests and deliberating action, as found in the various forms of solidarity practices and refugee activism (e.g. protest from local firms and the Alaows and Aboura cases).

Secondly, Berlin and Hamburg have experienced a high degree of disproportionality of refugee resettlement burden in relation to rural areas aggravated by continuing housing problems. In view of the failure of official approaches of planning better ‘camps’, different grass-roots movements arise aiming to connect camp accommodation with housing issues. Whereas different stakeholders in Hamburg has collaboratively pushed for the implementation of heterogenous housing structures, Berlin has experimented the introduction of a housing monitoring management system – a movement initiated by refugee women. Thirdly, though the anchor centres in Bavaria have deviated from the total forms of barracking (in comparison to those in Mannheim), a broad networked counter-space of urban moralism has emerged that regularly monitors the centres’ security control and promotes intercultural learning (e.g. ANKER-watch and the method of intercultural commuting).

To sum up, our analysis has exposed the convergence of reinforcing neoliberal austerity urban forces with the increasing permanence of border and asylum regime *inside* the city as a response to accommodate irregular migrant flows since 2015. The entailing manifestation of social segregation as a form of urbanized asynchronicity will not only impede the promotion of binding force that cities and city districts can exert upon their inhabitants. The city’s contradicting role as both the implementer of borderland regime and collaborator of integration initiatives has also weakened its potential in empowering the refugees as actors and elaborating comprehensive sustainable urban strategies for collective welfare and flourishing.

Conclusion

This paper has set out to identify the grey areas of the changing face of the city in Germany following the refugee influx in summer 2015. It finds that, despite official integration endeavours, the city has manifested multiple contrasting realities trapped in a volatile space of tensions between securitization surveillance, austerity measures, and urban sanctuary practices. As such, German refugee politics is at best contradictory, fragmentary, and ambivalent: Whereas some municipalities experience novel forms of urban and refugee activism, the endurance of refugee immobility resulting from the functionality of anchor centres, the crimigration tendency, and the unsolved housing problems embedded in a strict neo-liberal austerity urbanism have hindered possibilities for re-framing refugee issues from a relational and integrated perspective that is ready to challenge the limits of the traditional understanding of citizenship and to incorporate urban and refugee activism into the city’s increasingly fluctuating but vibrant spaces.⁴⁴

As the configuration of migration control, people on the move, refugee resettlement, urban development, and socio-economic and demographic change unfolds, a number of research challenges remain concerning the questions of fieldwork design and particularly the paradigm used in the migration and urban studies. In spite of a careful design to conduct the random stratified target group survey, the fieldwork of this study has encountered limitations to obtain reliable data that can represent diverse fleeing and asylum-seeking experiences of heterogenous refugee groups. Further work is hence encouraged to sharpen its cross-disciplinary tools and methods for adequately designing research scope and sampling and generating reflexive theory-based outcomes (particularly vis-à-vis a hard-to-reach and hard-to-interview population). At stake are the

issues concerning the connection of city's integration efforts with refugees' fleeing experiences (including addressing their root causes) and to take seriously the implications of refugees' informal politics and the entailing dialectics of boundary- and identity-making in relation to long-term urban planning. For instance, the consideration of law as a tool of resistance through the prism of judicial activism can open a new path of rethinking the (il)legality of migrants' status and state action. In a similar vein, the use of performance art in experimenting the constellation of in-between spaces can help tackle tensions and contradictions many cities face and inspire them to liberate from the rigid reasoning of post-neoliberal urban governance through discovering the potential of diversity and informal citizenship based on the principle of equal dignity.

Notes

1. See for example the state government Baden-Württemberg's 2018 integration report; Expert Council on Migration and Integration (SVR) (2018). Target group stratified survey conducted by the author in April 2021, details see the methodological notes below.
2. The term 'anchor centres' first appears in the federal government's coalition agreement in 2018. Refugees are to be accommodated here until they are either distributed to municipalities or deported to their country of origin in case of rejection of their asylum application. The first seven centres came into being on 1 August 2018 in Bavaria, which are existing facilities (in Bamberg, Schweinfurt, Deggendorf, Donauwörth, Zirndorf, Regensburg, Manching). Later, anchor centres were also established in Saxony and Saarland. Some facilities in other federal states (e.g. in Baden-Württemberg and Hamburg (in Rahlstedt)) are called 'Landesaufnahmestellen' (state reception centres) or central first reception facility and are viewed to have the same function as anchor centres. See RNZ, 24.04.2018, p. 8; Philipp Woldin (2019).
3. See Nadja Schlüter (2021).
4. See Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (2019).
5. See also Nina von Hardenberg (2021).
6. See the 2021 Study of Migrant Founders Monitors, 27th April. 'Refugee: Success Factor for a Successful Integration', DIW, Uni Saarland, Uni Münster, published on 23 May 2019, available at Flüchtlinge: Erfolgsfaktoren für eine gelungene Integration | marktforschung.de (visited on 6 April 2021).
7. See Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) and the German Islam Conference (2021).
8. See Rainer Link (2019); 'Menschen ohne Papiere in Hamburg,' available at <https://hamburgasyl.de/themen/menschen-ohne-papiere-in-hamburg/>.
9. See BAMF (2021).
10. Says Ulla Jelpke from the Left Party in an interview with the Funke-Zeitung. See Finanznachrichten (2021).
11. Says Thomas Bollwein of the Bavarian Refugee Council. See Bavaria Radio (2020).
12. See the website of ANKER-Watch <https://www.anker-watch.de>, supported by several refugee councils based in for example in München and Würzburg.
13. See Wiebke Ramm (2021).
14. See Stefan Buchen et al. (2021) and Peter Burghardt (2019).
15. NDR Info (2018).
16. 'Cooperation agreement. Mixing housing makes for good neighborhoods and integration.' City Hamburg, press office of the department for urban development and housing, 17 July 2018.
17. See City Hamburg (2007).
18. LIGA Berlin (2020).
19. Barbara Caveng, a Swiss artist who works with asylum seekers, describes the life situation in the camps. Cited in Zanghi (2016).
20. The law on the rent cap in Berlin (MietenWoG Bln) has been in force since February 2020. The Federal Constitutional Court's ruling is based on the reasoning that sees the responsibility of such legal regulation residing in the competence area of the federal government, instead of the state government. See Heidtmann and Müller-Arnold (2021).

21. See Stefan Luft (2017).
22. See Philip Oltermann (2016). Several comments of the target group survey conducted by the author in April 2021 also share this concern.
23. See RED/DPA/LSW (2018).
24. See Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg (2019).
25. See Berlin Senate Administration for Integration, Labor, and Social Issues (SenIAS) (2019) and Future Factory Heinersdorf (2018).
26. Olaf Scholz, Hamburg's former mayor and the federal government's Vize Chancellor between 2017 and 2021.
27. See Federal Centre for Political Education (bpb) (2019).
28. See Effern (2020).
29. Alexis Zanghi (2016).
30. See *Westfälische Nachrichten (WN)* (2018).
31. Information retrieved from 'Fünf Jahre "Wir schaffen das". Euphorie, Ernüchterung und Pragmatismus.' German Radio Programme 'Zeitfrage', 2 September 2020.
32. See Nico Fried (2020).
33. Comments from the author's target group survey conducted in April 2021.
34. See SVR (2018).
35. FN 32; Alexander Hagelüken (2020).
36. Information obtained through the author's interview with a representative of 'Wir Zusammen' during an annual spring conference for small and medium-sized enterprises in Frankfurt on 16 March 2018. Further information see www.wir-zusammen.de.
37. Information gained through a participatory observation in Magdeburg in March 2017 and an expert interview in April 2021.
38. See Interview zum Interkulturellen Pendeln – Refugio München (refugio-muenchen.de).
39. See notes 4 and 5.
40. Zanghi (2016).
41. See <https://amalberlin.de/de/project-de/>.
42. In April 2021, Alaows decided to retreat from his candidacy supported by the Green Party based in Oberhausen and Dinslaken. See note 3.
43. See Völker (2018).
44. Insight gained from several participatory observations and interviews conducted between December 2018 and September 2019.

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