Seethaler-Wari, Shahd; Yanasmayan, Zeynep

Unfolding intersecting forms of socio-spatial exclusion: Accommodation centres at the height of the "refugee reception crisis" in Germany

International Migration

Provided in Cooperation with:
John Wiley & Sons

Suggested Citation: Seethaler-Wari, Shahd; Yanasmayan, Zeynep (2023) : Unfolding intersecting forms of socio-spatial exclusion: Accommodation centres at the height of the "refugee reception crisis" in Germany, International Migration, ISSN 1468-2435, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ, Vol. 61, Iss. 3, pp. 39-53,
https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13140

Received: 7 September 2021 | Revised: 28 November 2022 | Accepted: 3 February 2023

DOI: 10.1111/imig.13140

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IOM UN MIGRATION

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

Unfolding intersecting forms of socio-spatial exclusion: Accommodation centres at the height of the "refugee reception crisis" in Germany

Shahd Seethaler-Wari[1] | **Zeynep Yanasmayan**[2]

[1]State Office for Refugee Affairs Berlin, Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten (LAF), Berlin, Germany

[2]German Center for Migration and Integration Research (DeZIM), Mauerstrasse 76, Berlin 10117, Germany

Correspondence
Zeynep Yanasmayan, German Center for Migration and Integration Research (DeZIM), Mauerstrasse 76, 10117 Berlin, Germany.
Email: yanasmayan@dezim-institut.de

Funding information
Max-Planck-Gesellschaft

Abstract

At the height of the "refugee reception crisis" in 2015, a large number of forced migrants had to be accommodated in Germany, which led to the transformation of old infrastructures and building of new centres. Based on extensive fieldwork in three centres in the same city, this article seeks to highlight the intersecting forms of socio-spatial exclusion in refugee accommodations in Germany. First, we unpack how differential internal and external spatial arrangements intersect to aggravate or alleviate social exclusion of forced migrants. Second, we draw attention to the ways in which the regulation of space and social relations inside the accommodation centres intersect with the dominant gendered notions of the refugee label. Despite the potency of power relations that differentially categorizes, controls and excludes, exclusion remains ambivalent as forced migrants consistently claim ownership over the space in and around the centres and build social relationships to maintain a sense of "normalcy".

INTRODUCTION

The summer of 2015 is engrained as a peculiar juncture in German and European migration history. While the arrival of large numbers of people fleeing (civil) wars and seeking protection was not unprecedented, the public and policy

discourse was quick to denote this moment as a "crisis". Behind this fear mongering media rhetoric hid a real problem: lack of EU solidarity that was necessary to manage arrivals in a smooth and dignified manner, which is what led observers to rebaptize the situation as the "refugee reception crisis" (Rea et al., 2019). One significant area of reception of forced migrants,[1] which has required concrete solutions was the provision of accommodation. In contrast with the recent policy of fostering decentralized accommodation possibilities for refugees in Germany, 2015 marked a shift when centralized accommodation centres have again become the most pragmatic option. Therefore, in this period of rapid processing, new or transformed buildings were opened to be used as accommodation centres for asylum-seekers.

Based on extensive fieldwork in three accommodation centres in a mid-size city in Lower Saxony in Germany, this article seeks to highlight the intersecting forms of socio-spatial exclusion in refugee accommodations in Germany. We do this in two steps. First, thanks to our comparative design, we unpack how internal and external spatial arrangements intersect to aggravate or alleviate social exclusion. Scholarship has rightly emphasized how spatial characteristics of camps, including but not limited to their remoteness, lead to isolation from local populations. In a similar vein, we show that physical distance is a barrier to normalized lifestyles and therefore a cause of exclusion, particularly when accommodation centres are located in socially un-embedded places. We also display that internal spatial features play an important role in how far they offer privacy and opportunities for social interaction, not only among forced migrants but also with local residents. In a second step, we draw attention to the ways in which the regulation of space and social relations inside the accommodation centres intersect with the dominant gendered notions of the refugee label. These social relations are complex and are ultimately inscribed in unequal power relations. Yet forced migrants' socio-spatial exclusion remains ambivalent as they simultaneously resist the regulation of space and social relations by developing their own relationships with the space and residents.

ACCOMMODATION CENTRES: A READING THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERSECTING EXCLUSION

The "campization" (Kreichauf, 2018:11) process of refugee accommodation centres in Europe, which produces "stigmatised and excluded subjects" urge for unravelling different layers of exclusion in these spaces. First, gathering forced migrants in a collective housing inevitably highlights demarcations of what is "inside" and "outside", casting them as fundamentally different from others. This essential form of spatial exclusion does not only reify the distinction between citizens and non-citizens but it also facilitates legal exclusion. Many scholars apprehended the legal framework surrounding asylum-seekers in the shelters from an Agambenian perspective (Agamben, 1998) underlining their 'exceptionality' (Agier, 2010; Kreichauf, 2018; Turner, 2015; for an exception Ramadan, 2013). Second, in addition to the centralization of refugee accommodation, which engenders an intertwinement of spatial and legal exclusion, remote physical location of most reception centres significantly reduces forced migrants' opportunities for interaction with the local residents and creates isolation (Agier, 2010; Göler, 2020; Kreichauf, 2018; Szczepanikova, 2013). This adds an ancillary layer to spatial exclusion in its nexus with social exclusion. Third, social exclusion is further magnified by the social relations "inside" these spatially excluded places. The relations between state agents and forced migrants in the accommodation centres have been shown to oscillate between assistance and control (Campesi, 2015; Kreichauf, 2018; Szczepanikova, 2013). However, as Szczepanikova (2013:138) points out state agents make use of these seemingly contradictory tasks in a mutually constitutive way: forced migrants' dependency on assistance is produced by the centres since they help create the perception that problems need to be "solved by others – those who are in control." Gabrielli et al. (2021) have painted a gloomier picture and argued that the asylum accommodation system in Spain leaves refugees in an ambivalent field where they have to navigate through disciplinary practices and neglect of state/social agents, leaving care out of the picture. Last but not least, scholars have shown how this "containment" (Lumpey-Sapanski, 2022; Tazzioli, 2020; Tazzioli & Garelli, 2018) extends beyond the walls of centres to the post-reception context through, among others, dispersal policies, which

reveal the longer-term consequences of the exclusion produced in the accommodation centres as well as migrants' resistance to exclusion.

Our aim in this article is to contribute to the debate by unfolding how heterogeneity in spatial and social features of accommodation centres can create intersectional forms of exclusion for forced migrants. Exclusion is defined broadly here, referring not only to the lack of rights, and resources, but also lack of access to autonomous "normalised" lifestyles and participation in societal spheres (Phillimore & Goodson, 2006; Spicer, 2008). Building on our previous work (Foblets et al., 2018; Yanasmayan, 2023, introduction in this issue) as well as critical scholarship that conceptualized 'differential inclusion' (De Genova et al., 2014; Fabini, 2017), we understand exclusion to be temporally bounded, sphere-dependent and ambiguous, often intertwined with practices of inclusion and resistance. Moreover, we are inspired by the notion of "intersectionality" initially developed in the context of black feminist research (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991) to denote the interwoven nature of social categories such as race and gender that are at the heart of inequalities. While intersectionality studies have grown from various angles (for an overview and classification see Cho et al., 2013; Choo & Ferree, 2010; McCall, 2005) we particularly rely on the emphasis on "spatialized inequalities" by feminist geographers (Amelina & Lutz, 2019; Anthias, 2012; Silvey, 2006). They not only reveal the power relations on the regulation of space and im/mobility but also the ways in which "the specific social orders of emplacement are connected with the gendered meanings of embodiment" (Silvey, 2006: 70). Intersectional studies have enriched spatial theorizations of camps by drawing attention to the sexual and gender-based violence in these spaces (Freedman, 2016) and more relevantly for this paper to the gendered geographies of public policies managing the camps (Hyndman, 2000). Similarly, we show how the constitution and regulation of space and social relations in the accommodation centres is interwoven with gendered assumptions of the refugee label and creates intersecting forms of socio-spatial exclusion.

Here, we also have recourse to the flourishing scholarship on the emergence of volunteer movements during the summer of 2015 in order show how the socio-spatial exclusion of forced migrants is shaped by the dominant notions surrounding the refugee label (Ludwig, 2016; Zetter, 2007). Scholars have attended to the role of politics (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Sinatti, 2019), emotions (Armbruster, 2019; Karakayali, 2017; Phillimore et al., 2022) and practice (Maestri & Monforte, 2020) in explaining the rise and to a certain extent sustainability (Jumbert, 2021) of volunteer movements since 2015. While the pouring interest of volunteers has been a cornerstone of the *Willkommenskultur* in Germany, it also became symptomatic of the "humanitarian reason" that Fassin (2010) argues lies at the heart of asylum policies. The right to asylum has been gradually watered down to moral sentiments and compassionate acts (Fassin, 2005, 2010), which not only construes refugees as vulnerable and powerless but also inevitably grants a much prominent place to volunteers and non-state actors (see also Karakayali, 2017). This power may be used by the volunteers to contest dominant notions surrounding the refugee label (Maestri & Monforte, 2020) but it may also end up reproducing them (Armbruster, 2019; Karakayali, 2017). For instance, Szczepanikova (2010) displays how refugee women are "preferred" objects of assistance for NGOs, construed as needy of help, and submissive, as opposed to refugee men, construed as aggressive, dangerous or at best lazy. While many scholars describe a self-distancing from and/or rejection of the attributes accompanying the refugee label by forced migrants (Häkli et al., 2017; Kallio et al., 2019; Malkki, 1995), the refugee category remains a particularly gendered label (Suerbaum, 2018) that shapes social and volunteer work. Therefore, the expectations of volunteers and their emotions of compassion directly affect the assistance granted to forced migrants which sustains intersecting forms of socio-spatial exclusion.

To disentangle the different spatial features of the accommodation centres, we follow Ulceluse et al. (2021) who single out the significance of three dimensions, namely the location, function and quality of the accommodation, in their study analysing the well-being of seasonal and circular labour migrants. The significance of the location or physical remoteness has already been well-documented for social exclusion. In a pioneering study on the refugee volunteers in Germany, Karakayali (2017:12) has shown that most of the volunteers began their involvement after the arrival of forced migrants at local shelters or housing facilities "fusing local lives with those of the newly-arrived asylum-seekers". Therefore, while physical remoteness can be a cause of social exclusion, physical proximity can be a catalyser for social inclusion. Moreover, the spatial layout and design of the place as well as the amenities provided

by the facility, or in other words "the building itself and the feelings it evokes" (Ulceluse et al., 2021:6) are crucial to understand the socio-spatial exclusion generated by accommodation centres.

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND DATA COLLECTION

After registration at the border, asylum-seekers are usually sent to one of the regional first-reception centres run by the 16 German regional states where they are then allowed to file their asylum-case. Lower Saxony, where our research site was located, is one of the larger regional states (*Länder*) in Germany and receives about 9 per cent of all asylum-seekers arriving in Germany, a quota determined according to the size of GDP and of population in each region called *Königstein* key. Asylum-seekers are then distributed to municipalities according to a quota system decided upon by the regional government. Municipalities are required to accommodate asylum-seekers but they are to a large extent free to decide the conditions and locations of the centres. While prior to the arrivals in 2015, there was a growing trend among municipalities across different federal states in Germany to move towards the goal of private accommodations, this was quickly set aside in favour of faster solutions of mass accommodations that often-involved transformation of existing structures.

This article focuses on three collective accommodation centres in a mid-sized German city in Lower Saxony that were opened at the height of the rapid migration in 2015 and reflect the diversity of such accommodations in terms of socio-spatial circumstances from a newly built model accommodation centre in a well-off neighbourhood to a restructured warehouse on the outskirts of the city. It relies on extensive qualitative fieldwork conducted in these main sites within the frame of a research project for which the first author of this article conducted fieldwork that took place between April and October 2016 and between June 2017 and April 2018.[2] Access to the field was granted officially after approaching the city administration and accommodation management. Simultaneously, she was engaged as a volunteer, translator and as a go-to-volunteer (*Pate*) of some research participants.

A mixture of qualitative research methods has been employed: participant observation in accommodation centres and in public events, focus group discussions, informal meetings and semi-guided interviews with forced migrants, practitioners, social workers, volunteers and activists (see also Vertovec et al., 2017). This article relies particularly on participant observations conducted in the three accommodation centres during the period indicated above, which involved daily visits to the field sites, spending time with forced migrants, accompanying them to doctor appointments, to employment agencies (*Jobcenter*), to foreigners' office (*Ausländerbehörde*) or meeting in other informal settings. Moreover, their use of space was particularly observed and this was supported by visual data. Additionally, this article makes use of the 25 semi-structured interviews conducted with forced migrants – 17 male and eight female migrants. With 12 of them longer term relationships were established and regular contact was maintained. Most of the respondents were Arabic speakers coming from Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. The interviews took place in the accommodation centres, in cafés or open spaces in the city and lasted between 40 min and 3 h. They were conducted in Arabic, fully transcribed and only used quotes were translated into English.

The accommodation centres under scrutiny here are albeit being in the same city offer different inner and outer spatial arrangements, which impact their social embeddedness and thereby that of the forced migrants residing there. While they all opened following an increasing number of arrivals in 2015 (*Accommodation A* in September 2015, *Accommodation B* in November 2015 and *Accommodation C* in March 2016), only *Accommodation A* continues to operate. *Accommodations B* and *C* have been closed after their rent contracts expired in October 2017 and August 2018, respectively.

INTERSECTION OF SOCIAL AND SPATIAL EXCLUSION

Social embeddedness in the surrounding space

Remote physical locations of camps/accommodation centres have been identified as an influential factor in fostering spatial exclusion of forced migrants (Göler, 2020; Kreichauf, 2018; Lumpey-Sapanski, 2022; Szczepanikova, 2013),

which hinder chances for social interaction. In our sample, none of the three accommodation centres were located in the city centre but their different locations, particularly their social embeddedness in direct surroundings and the socio-economic and political background of its residents, offered different degrees of social exclusion (see also Seethaler-Wari, 2018 on this).

Accommodation A is connected to the city centre by a 15–20 min bus ride. There are two bus stations close to the accommodation centre with several bus lines reaching them. *Accommodation B* is closer to the city centre-connected by a 10-min bus journey. Two bus lines pass close to the accommodation, with the closest bus stop towards the city at a 5 min walking distance. *Accommodation C* is located 15 min away by bus from the city centre. It is served by two different bus lines that run frequently and the station is only a few hundred metres away from the entrance.

Both *Accommodation A* and *B* were situated in middle to upper class residential neighbourhoods whose residents were supportive of the forced migrants after the centres opened. *Accommodation C*, on the other hand, was surrounded by factories, garages and a bus parking station with no neighbours or housing apartments in the direct vicinity. Even though the frequency of bus lines to the city centre was similar for *Accommodations B* and *C*, forced migrants felt much more isolated in the latter without residential surroundings. This was in stark contrast to *Accommodation A* and *B* which have both benefited from pouring interest from local neighbourhood residents and volunteers.

In *Accommodation A*, a neighbourhood initiative was created to regularly discuss the development of the centre, challenges, and needs of forced migrants. Some neighbours also offered to be private sponsors to help facilitate adaptation to daily life in Germany. Figure 1 shows the hand-made banner put up on the accommodation centre's entrance that welcomes forced migrants in the neighbourhood in German, English and Arabic and that was prepared by the children of the neighbourhood.

Accommodation B had also no shortage of volunteers and initiatives, thanks to its location and direct surroundings in a residential neighbourhood. Forced migrants were kept informed about different refugee related activities in the city and participated in German classes. When the city was pondering about the closure of *Accommodation B* in June 2018, the residents of the centre spoke up against a closure. They displayed their community spaces, children activities and "integration" measures to city officials who visited the centre in an attempt to convince the city to extend its rent contract. During our conversations with forced migrants, they revealed that after 2 years living there, it has "strangely become home". They mentioned that they could not imagine taking a different bus line to go to another accommodation centre and that they have become accustomed to the space and life in it. This moment

FIGURE 1 "Welcome" banner at the entrance of *Accommodation A*.

of closure evidences how forced migrants despite all odds develop their own relationship to the space that defies exclusion as an absolute notion. Socio-spatial exclusion is actively resisted by forced migrants and volunteers who also played an intermediary role in connecting forced migrants to different socio-cultural and educational initiatives organized in the city. The social embeddedness of the space thus facilitated social inclusion in and beyond the space of accommodation centres.

In stark contrast to the first two accommodations, *Accommodation C* struggled to find volunteers, not least due to its inconvenient location in a former industrial zone. As a consequence of the limited number of volunteers and lack of neighbours in the vicinity, bridge-building activities with local Germans were scarce and even when they were organized such as the German language course organized by two volunteers, they had to be cancelled due to the lack of participation. Forced migrants living in the *Accommodation C* explained that the courses were not regular and matching their level. It also seemed that they were not happy with the provision of in-house language courses rather than having the opportunity to attend classes in the city centre, which gives more opportunities for social interaction. Leaving the accommodation was a welcome activity not only for further chances of social interaction but also because of the unfavourable spatial layout of *Accommodation C*, which we will turn to in the next subsection. The lack of engaged volunteers also meant that forced migrants in *Accommodation C* were not made regularly aware of refugee-related activities and had to mostly learn about such offers through friends in other accommodation centres. Below is an excerpt from a conversation with Dia, 38-year-old male Palestinian Syrian, who at the time had been living in *Accommodation C* for about 6 months.

Do you know about the Refugee Law Clinic?

No.

These volunteers can help you with legal aspects of your asylum application.

Have you heard about X Café?

No.

It takes place every Wednesday in the city centre. Refugees and volunteers meet there to get to know each other, and refugees can train their German.

I don't know, no one told us about them.

Therefore, *Accommodation C* was influenced the most by the spatial remoteness with significant effects on social exclusion. This also corroborates Karakayali's (2017) finding that spatial proximity played an important role in attracting volunteers as many of his respondents mentioned finding it very difficult to avoid people who need help when they see them regularly on their way to work. Yet here remoteness is not necessarily about objective distance from the city centre but about the socially un-embedded nature of the *Accommodation C*.

Social embeddedness of spatial layout

Following Ulceluse et al. (2021), another significant spatial dimension of accommodation centres that affects the well-being and exclusion of migrants is the quality on the inside, that is the amenities it offers but also the feelings it evokes.

Accommodation A is an apartment complex that was specifically built for the purpose of housing asylum-seekers. Each apartment has three bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen and a lobby area. The bedrooms, which are shared by two persons, are supplied with basic infrastructure. There are two communal rooms and an open area outside which is meant to provide a green space for the residents and a playground for children.

Accommodation B is a transformed structure that formerly was an institute. It was rented by the city to serve as a temporary accommodation centre from a company whose housing project on the land was put on hold. *Accommodation B* offers rooms of different sizes lodging two to 12 persons. Kitchens and bathrooms are situated on each floor and are shared by 20 floor inhabitants. Over time, the accommodation had several rooms assigned for communal activities. Additionally, a large green area with a playground belonged to the plot surrounding the building.

Accommodation C is a two-story structure originally designed as a warehouse building. It was rented by the city and internally modified to create compartments of six to eight residents with an open-ceiling design. Floor

inhabitants share sanitary facilities and kitchens on each floor. There is no public green area belonging to or around the accommodation centre.

Taking a closer look at the internal spatial features of the accommodation centres through a comparative perspective allows us to detect how disadvantages of different accommodation centres intersect. *Accommodation A* offers considerably more privacy and sense of "normalcy" to forced migrants thanks to its apartment-based structure and the smaller number of people sharing amenities compared to *Accommodations B* and *C*. Its management was also the only one in the city that was officially responsible for allocating people to specific rooms (in other accommodations the allocation to rooms is managed by a city clerk). Both factors allowed for more room for appropriation of space by forced migrants and seemed to improve their quality of life. Research participants in this accommodation were in general content with their living situation, and reported no conflicts among residents. Ahmad, a 42-year-old male Syrian sound engineer, stated his satisfaction with *Accommodation A*, where he was living about 2.5 years:

I found a job in a media channel in a neighbouring city. Therefore, they want me to leave the accommodation, but I am not crazy. I live here in an apartment with my brothers, and the rent I pay is much cheaper than renting an apartment in the city.

To show how the advantages (or disadvantages) of accommodation centres intersect, it is worth mentioning here that Ahmad's participation in a public event introduced him to the local contacts who helped him find this job. Indeed, in order to enhance such encounters between forced migrants and local residents of the neighbourhood, a sports hall was built several months after the opening of the accommodation (Figure 2). Such shared activities offer the opportunity of destabilizing the socio-spatially excluded nature of "camps" as well as the patronizing relationship that is often established between locals and forced migrants.

Forced migrants were also able to enjoy outdoor activities and picnics in a forest that was accessible by a short walk. All these favourable spatial conditions helped them establish more routinized social lives.

Similarly, *Accommodation B* provided several opportunities for shared activities in its communal rooms (Figure 3). Movie nights, game evenings, or specific activities for women were advertised and organized in these rooms. They were also used to host the regular meetings of the citizen initiative where issues of the neighbourhood and the accommodation centre were discussed.

Additionally, lectures, info nights and open discussions took place addressing different themes of refuge, migration and integration. With time and an increase in donations, the accommodation also had a gym room and a bike

FIGURE 2 Opening of the new sport hall in *Accommodation A*.

FIGURE 3 Exemplary communal room in *Accommodation B*.

repair shop to which forced migrants could register to borrow or fix a bike. Moreover, an impromptu local theatre project that included performers from among the local residents as well as forced migrants residing in different accommodation centres grew in the theatre space available on site. Akin to the sports activities of the *Accommodation A*, such bridging activities have had the effect of alleviating the socio-spatial exclusion as it on the one hand enabled appropriation of space by forced migrants and on the other normalized their presence for the local residents.

Yet, *Accommodation B* lagged behind *Accommodation A* in terms of offering privacy to the forced migrants, which occasionally led to conflicts when it came to the use of shared facilities as well as of communal spaces. For instance, the use of the TV, which was installed on the second floor thanks to donations, would become problematic when people from other floors wanted to watch TV. This was seen as an invasion of the privacy of the inhabitants of the second floor and the noise that such gatherings would bring was problematized. This was also the case with internet modem on the ground floor, to which people needed to be close for a stable connection to make phone calls to their families at home, or to watch videos for entertainment. These TV and modem occurrences show the territoriality of the floor inhabitants and their perception of the corridors as their "private or semi-private" defensible spaces (Newman, 1972), rather than "public" spaces. Therefore, the familial social relationships that developed on these floors may be considered as another sign of feelings of socio-spatial inclusion and belonging to the accommodation centre. Yet when the management made a temporary decision to turn off the internet modem at 10 p.m., this again established a very clear boundary between forced migrants and the management who have power and control. We will come back to this aspect below, but here it is important to emphasize again how inclusionary and exclusionary

practices can be interwoven in forced migrants' experiences through their own experience with the spatial and social environment.

Forced migrants in the *Accommodation C* suffered from comparable conflicts that originated in lack of privacy. The biggest challenges related to the layout of *Accommodation C* were its open-ceiling design and poor lighting options. While the lower floor parcels had no windows, the upper floor had shutters that could be centrally opened and closed, leaving no choice to forced migrants. The central system of shutters failed to respond to the different sleeping needs, habits and lifestyles, thereby completely denying agency. Moreover, due to the open-ceiling design, the sounds coming from a parcel could be heard across the floor. Therefore, the inner spatial layout of the *Accommodation C* was particularly unfavourable for privacy and the development of belonging to the centre by the forced migrants.

This has also impacted the use of communal areas in the centre, which was not often frequented. Neither the TV-zones nor the common area in the entrance lobby were much used for socialization. The latter was mainly used as a waiting room or for meetings between the staff and forced migrants to discuss asylum procedures and daily needs. In the following months, a gym room was opened on the first floor, which was also occasionally used by a small group of men. Therefore, the communal spaces failed to generate socially inclusive effects in the *Accommodation C* and served more strictly for information exchange (i.e. about rules).

Another significant factor aggravating socio-spatial exclusion of forced migrants in *Accommodation C* was the lack of outdoor area. Given that it was already in a non-residential neighbourhood with only industrial infrastructure around, there was no room for forced migrants to get fresh air. They often used the parking lot in front of the building as a "front terrace" when it was not being used – and when the weather allowed. They placed a table and plastic chairs to socialize in this area. When this was not possible, they found alternative places such as the sidewalk across the street to sit outside or smoke further from the entrance, as this was often requested by the staff. This appropriation of the sidewalk seen in Figure 4 offered an alternative to the lack of open areas, but was not appreciated by the local passers-by, who made their lack of approval heard. This created a negative dynamic between local residents and forced migrants, causing further impediment to the social inclusion of forced migrants.

Due to the unfavourable spatial conditions, forced migrants grew increasingly detached from the *Accommodation C*. Therefore, when projects such as refurbishing the small slot behind the building as a private garden came up, only a handful of them showed interest. The rehabilitation project failed to foster a sense of ownership and participation of forced migrants in improving their surroundings. A research participant revealed that the garden was rarely used after being built and the residents of *Accommodation C* continued to spend as much time as possible outside of the accommodation.

INTERSECTION OF SOCIO-SPATIAL EXCLUSION WITH REFUGEE LABEL

In the previous sections, we have shown how different spatial arrangements in and around the accommodation centres enabled or disabled forced migrants' access to social activities and to a "normalised" life in a setting that is by design "exceptional" (Agier, 2010; Kreichauf, 2018; Turner, 2015). While assistance (or lack thereof) provided by the administrative staff and especially by volunteers played an important role in how far social and spatial aspects of exclusion were intertwined with inclusionary practices, all three centres' activities that were meant to assist and/or manage also contained elements of control. This is not surprising given that the literature (Campesi, 2015; Kreichauf, 2018; Szczepanikova, 2013) has already underlined the dual nature of everyday practices in accommodation centres. Our comparative framework allows pinpointing how socio-spatial (dis)advantage of the centres create different levels of control over refugee bodies. Moreover, it also displays how the assistance provided by the social workers and the volunteers intersect with and reproduce dominant notions of the refugee label (Ludwig, 2016; Zetter, 2007).

The three accommodation centres differed in terms of the availability of the administrative staff on site. *Accommodation A*'s staff members were available every day, including weekends and holidays, from early morning until the

FIGURE 4 Appropriation of alternative open spaces by the residents of *Accommodation C*.

afternoon. In *Accommodation B*, staff members were available in similar hours, yet they were not on site during the weekends and holidays. Moreover, in the second year after the opening of the accommodation centre, security staff was employed to be on the site after the regular shift. The staff in the *Accommodation C* worked two shifts, they therefore were available every day from early morning to late evening. Moreover, after the regular shift ended, security staff roamed the hallways. Depending on the spatial layout and the organisation of the accommodation centre, staff members of all accommodations were involved in "controlling" the space and the social behaviours of forced migrants differently.

We have already discussed that the inner layout of *Accommodation A* that distributed forced migrants into apartments granted them much more privacy than the ones in the other accommodation centres. The spatial layout made some rule violations go unnoticed, such as smoking in the rooms or in the lobbies of the apartments despite the official ban. Moreover, forced migrants could leave and return through their separate entrances without necessarily having the gaze of the staff. However, apartments of forced migrants were not "control-free". Administrative staff made unannounced visits to the rooms to check whether or not they comply with the hygiene and order regulations and requested forced migrants to make changes if they did not approve. These interventions into the lives of forced migrants by the administrative staff does not only establish a clear boundary of control but also reinforces the portrayal of refugees as unable to take care and/or clean after themselves. Therefore, even if highly favourable inner and outer spatial conditions (i.e. apartment-like housing and welcoming residential neighbourhood) facilitate social inclusion, the very nature of accommodation centres and/or camps that maintains power over refugee bodies make it unattainable to establish a fully autonomous life.

The communal structure of the *Accommodation B* granted more power and capacity to control to the centre staff, which showed itself in smaller (e.g. locking the communal activity rooms after use) and bigger demeanours (e.g. calling the police in case of conflicts). The staff was keen to uphold the rules and regulations of the organization

running the accommodation. Therefore, they were strict about violations. However, the inner spatial layout of the accommodation, namely the location of the staff's office in the basement and the initial lack of visual surveillance of the entrances led to limited control compared to *Accommodation C*. Indeed, later in the year, this "shortcoming" was fixed by the introduction of a security room, which led to a locked entrance and thereby more control over the visitors of the centre.

The administrative staff made use of individual and collective punishments in order to exert control. An example of collective punishment was given in the section before where the staff chose to turn off the internet modem completely after 10 p.m. in order to avoid conflicts around it. Individual punishments however were more existential. The staff had an informal policy of moving forced migrants perceived to be "problematic" to other accommodations, after recurring violations of the accommodation rules. For instance, Khalil was sent away from *Accommodation B* to *Accommodation C* because he was "caught" smoking Shisha in his room several times. During our interview, he mentioned that he found the punishment to be unfair as he saw others smoking as well. The feeling of being unfairly treated followed Khalil and he has not made any effort to develop social relations inside the *Accommodation C*. He often went back to *Accommodation B* to visit his father and brother who were separated from him and all the activities he organized and attended in the city were with his friends from *Accommodation B*. Therefore, this "removal" has negatively impacted his social inclusion in his new spatial environment.

While the control mechanisms employed by the staff rewarded "submissiveness" as an essential feature of the refugee label, volunteers' assistance emulated the gendered nature. The tremendous amount of help, support and donations offered by volunteers was praised in every event attended during the fieldwork, yet issues were raised by research participants about the selectivity of their services particularly with regard to gender and nationality preferences. Male forced migrants, who were either single or came without their families, mentioned how volunteers mainly worked with families and created free time activities for women and children in *Accommodation B*. Even on game-days which took place Wednesdays, male forced migrants who attended in order to meet German volunteers and to practise their German ended up playing with each other because the mostly-female and elderly volunteers were more interested in supporting families. This uneven distribution indirectly resulted in resentment and in aggravation of social exclusion felt by the male forced migrants of some nationalities in *Accommodation B*.

Similar to the *Accommodation B*, *Accommodation C*'s communal structure allowed more authority to the staff on the site. *Accommodation C*'s spatial layout was further beneficial for control purposes as the office of administrative staff was located at the entrance. The location combined with the double shift of the staff enabled more capacity to control/observe everyone and every activity at the entrance. During the fieldwork, when the head of management encountered Author 1 exiting the building and realized they were not "controlled" at the entrance, requested them to pop-in next time they visit the centre. Therefore, albeit informal, surveillance of the movements of forced migrants and visitors were well in place in *Accommodation C*.

Comparable to *Accommodation B*, the staff in *Accommodation C* often resorted to collective punishment in order to resolve conflicts surfaced over the (mis)use of shared spaces such as different habits/standards of cleaning after using the kitchens or bathrooms. In such cases, the administration staff would penalize forced migrants by locking the kitchens or bathrooms for several days, which would only increase the pressure on shared spaces in other floors. Therefore, it is clear that such measures were not intended to provide a concrete solution to the conflicts but to "discipline" forced migrants and mould them into an understanding of refugeeness constructed around submissiveness (Malkki, 1995, Szczepanikova, 2010).

The relationship between the administrative staff and forced migrants was also negatively affected by the gender imbalance in the *Accommodation C*. The only male-demographic of the *Accommodation C* with a female-only staff gave it a distinct atmosphere regarding gender dynamics and power relations. The control measures also employed in other accommodation centres took on a different dimension (i.e. "barging" in the rooms) when the interaction happened between a female employee and a male forced migrant, quintessentially gendering these experiences. Khalil explained the difference he sees between the two accommodation centres: "here if they go to the bathroom to shower, they do not worry about putting on clothes the way they would if women were in the accommodation too."

The male-only nature has also contributed to the lack of attractiveness of the *Accommodation C* for volunteers, intersecting particularly with the gendered nature of volunteering. As it was also mentioned by the male forced migrants in *Accommodation B*, voluntary help is fed by dominant ideas of the refugee label that mostly targets women and children (Szczepanikova, 2010) as the most deserving recipients of aid. Therefore, the male-only residents of the *Accommodation C* remained devoid of the crucial assistance. The decision of the city to have a male-only accommodation centre was deliberate and the accommodation manager explained that this demographic specificity has to do with the lack of facilities appropriate for residential areas: no schools or playgrounds exist in the neighbourhood or on the bus line to the city, which would have complicated lives of families with children. The explanation is a prime example of how public policy-makers decide which bodies are worthy of access to certain spaces. In this particular case, the intersection of unfavourable socio-spatial conditions with gendered assumptions ended up considerably aggravating exclusion of forced migrants in *Accommodation C*. Even though close friendships developed between forced migrants assisted them in circumventing the exclusion experienced to a certain extent, for some it was not sufficient to "make it through". For instance, two roommates in *Accommodation C*, Dia, mentioned above and Salim, decided to return to Syria due to feelings of isolation and despair. Dia, 10 months after his asylum procedure stalled and his father became ill and Salim a few months later, after he failed to find local contacts to help him access the social circles he wished. Salim was recognized as a refugee, and had already moved to his own apartment at the time, yet his failure to establish networks in the early phase of his arrival had longer term consequences.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper explored intersecting form of socio-spatial exclusion of forced migrants in accommodation centres in Germany. In this exercise, we draw on a broad understanding of exclusion that alludes to the lack of rights, resources, and the possibility of developing autonomous "normalised" lifestyles by forced migrants but that also acknowledges that exclusion is always interwoven with inclusion and resistance. Moreover, inspired by intersectional, particularly feminist geography scholars, we advance the idea of intersecting forms of socio-spatial exclusion that allows us to go beyond the study of the regulation of space and inquire its junctures with and impact on (gendered) refugee bodies.

We first began with scrutinizing the internal and external spatial arrangements of the centres and revealed the connection of spatial exclusion with social (un-)embeddedness and social relations in the neighbourhood. Locating accommodation centres in neighbourhoods where local populations reside and work, even if these are physically distant from the city centre, creates more natural opportunities for interaction and support. This also has the potential to facilitate the circumstances of forced migrants in the longer run, enabling them to establish autonomous lives.

Second, internal spatial layout of the accommodation centres is of crucial importance to allow forced migrants to appropriate the space around them and attempt to make it more "home-like". Our comparative framework shows that even under the generic term of centralized accommodation, considerable variance is notable from apartment style housing to open-ceiling parcels in large rooms. While the apartment style accommodation is certainly the option that provides most room for privacy, communal spaces and the availability of outdoor recreational activities in centralized forms of accommodation help foster social bonds among forced migrants and with local residents. Hence forced migrants resist giving in to socio-spatial exclusion even in dire circumstances and seek to maintain ownership over the space in and around the centres and build social relationships to meet their need for autonomy and a sense of "normalcy".

Third, despite the potential of reducing issues of social exclusion through adjustments to (socio-)spatial arrangements, accommodation centres remain places characterized by asymmetric relations between forced migrants on the one hand and social workers and volunteers on the other. The ambivalence between conflicting priorities of care and control which are deep-seated in the power relations over the regulation of space and social relations cannot be entirely eradicated. Importantly, this ambivalent relationship intersects and further feeds the dominant notions of the – gendered – refugee label that differentially rewards social behaviours and controls refugee bodies. As emphasized by many scholars (Lumpey-Sapanski, 2022; Szczepanikova, 2013; Tazzioli & Garelli, 2018), the dependency

relationship produced in the accommodation centres has the peril to carry itself well beyond and to negatively influence forced migrants' potential to rebuild their lives. Recent studies employing an intersectional angle also underlines how refugeeness interacts as an additional "burden" to pre-existing axes of inequality such as race and gender (Paz & Kook, 2021). Therefore, further research should explore how intersecting forms of exclusion, particularly dominant notions associated with the refugee label as well coping strategies persist, transform or shift over the life course of forced migrants.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is part of research project that was implemented at Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, and funded by Volkswagen Foundation. It was also supported by the Max Planck Society within the framework of the research initiative "The Challenges of Migration, Integration and Exclusion" (WiMi). Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data are not publicly available.

ENDNOTES

[1] We use the term 'forced migrants' instead of refugees and asylum-seekers to avoid the confusion about legal recognition unless we specifically refer to the asylum procedure. Yet we use "refugee label" and refugee bodies when referring to the hegemonic discourses and power relations.

[2] More information on the project can be found here: https://www.mmg.mpg.de/227364/between-accommodation-and-integration.

REFERENCES

Agamben, G. (1998) *Homo sacer: sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Agier, M. (2010) *Managing the undesirables: refugee camps and humanitarian government*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Amelina, A. & Lutz, H. (2019) *Gender and migration transnational and intersectional prospects*. London and New York: Routledge.

Anthias, F. (2012) Transnational mobilities, migration research and intersectionality: towards a translocational frame. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 2(2), 102–110.

Armbruster, H. (2019) 'It was the photograph of the little boy': reflections on the Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement programme in the UK. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42(15), 2680–2699.

Campesi, G. (2015) Humanitarian confinement: an ethnography of reception centres for asylum-seekers at Europe's southern border. *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies*, 1(4), 398–418.

Cho, S., Crenshaw, K.W. & McCall, L. (2013) Toward a field of intersectionality studies: theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 38(4), 785–810.

Choo, H.Y. & Ferree, M.M. (2010) Practicing intersectionality in sociological research: a critical analysis of inclusions, interactions and institutions in the study of inequalities. *Sociological Theory*, 28(2), 129–149.

Collins, P.H. (1998) It's all in the family: intersections of gender, race, and nation. *Hypatia*, 13(3), 62–82.

Crenshaw, K.W. (1991) Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.

De Genova, N., Mezzadra, S. & Pickles, J. (Eds.) (2014) New keywords: migration and borders. *Cultural Studies*, 29(1), 55–87.

Fabini, G. (2017) Managing illegality at the internal border: governing through 'differential inclusion' in Italy. *European Journal of Criminology*, 14(1), 46–62.

Fassin, D. (2005) Compassion and repression: the moral economy of immigration policies in France. *Cultural Anthropology*, 20(3), 362–387.

Fassin, D. (2010) *La Raison humanitaire: Une histoire morale du temps présent*. Paris: Hautes Etudes.

Fleischmann, L. & Steinhilper, E. (2017) The myth of apolitical volunteering for refugees: German welcome culture and a new dispositif of helping. *Social Inclusion*, 5(1), 17–27.

Foblets, M.-C., Leboeuf, L. & Yanasmayan, Z. (2018) *Exclusion and migration: by whom, where, when, and how?* Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Papers No. 190. Available from: https://www.eth.mpg.de/pubs/wps/pdf/mpi-eth-working-paper-0190 [Accessed 7th September 2021].

Freedman, J. (2016) Sexual and gender-based violence against refugee women. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 24(47), 18–26.

Gabrielli, L., Garcés-MascareÑas, B. & Ribera-Almandoz, O. (2021) Between discipline and neglect: the regulation of asylum accommodation in Spain. *Journal of Refugee Studies.*, 35, 262–281.

Göler, D. (2020) Places and spaces of the others. A German reception Center in public discourse and individual perception. In: Glorius, B. & Doomernik, J. (Eds.) *Geographies of asylum and the role of European localities*. Springer, pp. 69–93.

Häkli, J., Pascucci, E. & Kallio, K.P. (2017) Becoming refugee in Cairo: the political in performativity. *International Political Sociology*, 11, 185–202.

Hyndman, J. (2000) *Managing displacement: refugees and the politics of humanitarianism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Jumbert, M.G. (2021) Making it "Easy to Help": the evolution of Norwegian volunteer initiatives for refugees. *International Migration*, 59(3), 113–124.

Kallio, K.P., Häkli, J. & Pascucci, E. (2019) Refugeeness as political subjectivity: experiencing the humanitarian border. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 37(7), 1258–1276.

Karakayali, S. (2017) Feeling the scope of solidarity: the role of emotions for volunteers supporting refugees in Germany. *Social Inclusion*, 5(1), 7–16.

Kreichauf, R. (2018) From forced migration to forced arrival: the campization of refugee accommodation in European cities. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 6(7), 7.

Ludwig, B. (2016) 'Wiping the Refugee Dust from My Feet': advantages and burdens of refugee status and the refugee label. *International Migration*, 54(1), 5–18.

Lumpey-Sapanski, A. (2022) "It will kill your dreams, your goals, your everything"—humanitarian migrants, governance through containment and the Italian accommodation system. *Political Geography*, 94, 102573.

Maestri, G. & Monforte, P. (2020) Who deserves compassion? The moral and emotional dilemmas of volunteering in the 'refugee crisis'. *Sociology*, 54(5), 920–935.

Malkki, L.H. (1995) *Purity and exile violence, memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

McCall, L. (2005) The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs*, 30(3), 1771–1800.

Newman, O. (1972) *Defensible space: crime prevention through Urban Design*, 1st edition. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Paz, Y. & Kook, R. (2021) 'It reminds me that I still exist'. Critical thoughts on intersectionality; refugee Muslim women in Berlin and the meanings of the hijab. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(13), 2979–2929.

Phillimore, J. & Goodson, L. (2006) Problem or opportunity? Asylum seekers, refugees, employment and social exclusion in deprived urban areas. *Urban Studies*, 43(10), 1715–1736.

Phillimore, J., Reyes-Soto, M., D'Avino, G. & Nicholls, N. (2022) "I have Felt so Much Joy": the role of emotions in community sponsorship of refugees. *VOLUNTAS*, 33, 386–396.

Ramadan, A. (2013) Spatialising the refugee camp. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38, 65–77.

Rea, A., Martiniello, M., Mazzola, A. & Meuleman, B. (2019) *The refugee reception crisis: polarized opinions and mobilizations*. Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles.

Seethaler-Wari, S. (2018) Urban planning for the integration of refugees: the importance of, urban planning for the integration of refugees: the importance of local factors local factors. *Urban Planning*, 3(4), 141–155.

Silvey, R. (2006) Geographies of gender and migration: spatializing social difference. *International Migration Review*, 40(1), 64–81.

Sinatti, G. (2019) Humanitarianism as politics: civil support initiatives for migrants in Milan's hub. *Social Inclusion*, 7(2), 139–148.

Spicer, N. (2008) Places of exclusion and inclusion: asylum-seeker and refugee experiences of neighbourhoods in the UK. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34(3), 491–510.

Suerbaum, M. (2018) Becoming and 'unbecoming' refugees: making sense of masculinity and refugeness among Syrian refugee men in Egypt. *Men and Masculinities*, 21(3), 363–382.

Szczepanikova, A. (2010) Performing refugeeness in the Czech Republic: gendered depoliticisation through NGO assistance. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 17(4), 461–477.

Szczepanikova, A. (2013) Between control and assistance: the problem of European accommodation centres for asylum-seekers. *International Migration*, 51(4), 130–144.

Tazzioli, M. (2020) Governing migrant mobility through mobility: containment and dispersal at the internal frontiers of Europe. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 38(1), 3–19.

Tazzioli, M. & Garelli, G. (2018) Containment beyond detention: the hotspot system and disrupted migration movements across Europe. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 38(6), 1009–1027.

Turner, S. (2015) What is a refugee camp? Explorations of the limits and effects of the camp? *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29(2), 139–148.

Ulceluse, M., Bock, B. & Haartsen, T. (2021) A tale of three villages: local housing policies, well-being and encounters between residents and immigrants. *Population, Space and Place*, 28, e2467.

Vertovec, S., Becker, S., Fleischer, A., Schader, M. & Wari, S. (2017) *Addressing the diversity of asylum-seekers' needs and aspirations*. MMG Working Papers WP 17-05, Göttingen.

Yanasmayan, Z. (2023) Post-2015 refugees in Germany: "culture of welcome", solidarity, exclusion?: introduction. *International Migration*.

Zetter, R. (2007) More labels, fewer refugees: remaking the refugee label in an era of globalization. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20(2), 172–192.

How to cite this article: Seethaler-Wari, S., & Yanasmayan, Z. (2023) Unfolding intersecting forms of socio-spatial exclusion: Accommodation centres at the height of the "refugee reception crisis" in Germany. *International Migration*, 61, 39–53. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13140