

# Bordering and Debordering Spaces of Asylum in the City of Frankfurt: Municipal Refugee Accommodation and Neighbourhood-Based Volunteering

Martina Blank

*Department of Human Geography, Goethe-University Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main, Germany,  
mblank@em.uni-frankfurt.de*

**Abstract:** The segregation of refugees in collective accommodation centres represents an integral component of the European border regime and its complex interplay of inclusion and exclusion. The corresponding spatial, symbolic and discursive demarcations, however, are not simply implemented politically from above, but negotiated on the ground on a daily basis. One crucial group of actors in the German context are neighbourhood-based volunteers. These groups frequently accompany accommodation centres with support structures. Based on contributions in the field of critical border studies and on the example of a municipal accommodation facility in Frankfurt, Germany, this paper demonstrates how volunteers, through their practices and engagement with refugees and others, on one hand, and dominant discourses, institutions and regulations on the other, participate in the production of locally specific spaces of asylum that are marked by simultaneous and contradictory processes of bordering and debordering.

**Keywords:** critical border studies, European border regime, everyday bordering, local spaces of asylum, municipal refugee accommodation, neighbourhood-based volunteering

## Introduction

In early August 2019, after a joint trip to a swimming pool, I dropped a friend off at the accommodation centre for refugees, where she had been living since May 2016. As we stepped out of the car to say goodbye, the porter came rushing towards me gesturing that I could not stay there. I explained to him that I would only be a minute and soon be driving off. I said goodbye to my friend and cast a glance at the compound behind the fence. What I saw was isolated sadness. However, it had not always been like this. Between November 2017 and June 2018, I had frequently visited this accommodation centre in Frankfurt as a volunteer. Initially, I had felt just like I did now: I perceived the entrance and porter as unwelcoming and the whole compound as a very sad place. Yet this perspective had changed completely over time. In my almost daily visits, I had increasingly come to see the gate as insignificant, purely circumstantial, often even as

welcoming, and the compound as a friendly neighbourhood in which I met friends and acquaintances and went about various activities. Only a year earlier, my daughter had played with my friend's daughter in the compound's yard, while we had been sitting together in a large circle of friends in a flat shared by a group of refugee women, drinking coffee and celebrating someone having passed their exam. Now, almost a year later, it was back: that image of a fenced-off, sad, isolated camp. Once again, I could strongly sense it: the border.

Collective accommodation centres for refugees were politically contested in Germany long before the rise in the number of new arrivals in 2015 (Jakob 2016:14 ff.). Likewise, in German academic debates, this type of accommodation, in which refugees are housed all over the country, has been regarded as inhumane and associated with the isolation and disintegration of refugees through segregation, stigmatisation and control (Lebuhn 2016; Pieper 2008; Täubig 2009). Scholars refer to the accommodation centres as "total institutions" (Täubig 2009) and "camps" (Pieper 2008) that serve as "tools of disenfranchisement and displacement" (Pieper 2008:351–352) for unwanted migrants. This generally applies to all phases of accommodation: from the reception centre to immigration detention (see also Isin and Rygiel 2007). Following a slight relaxation prior to 2015, we can currently observe a renewed intensification of this camp policy (Kreichauf 2018).

Collective refugee accommodation and everyday border demarcation in the accommodation regime represent an integral component of the European border regime (De Genova and Roy 2020; Dunn and Cons 2014; El-Kayed and Hamann 2018; Pinelli 2018). In the process, the social production of space (Lefebvre 1991) plays an important role. As argued elsewhere (Blank 2019a), the European border regime engenders specific "spaces of asylum", which in turn support the border regime while simultaneously constituting part of its negotiation. However, the treatment of accommodation facilities in terms of "camp theories" or as "total institutions" in reference to Agamben (1998) and Goffman (1971), is too hermetic to grasp the complexity and fluidity of this element of the border regime (Dunn and Cons 2014; Tazzioli and Garelli 2020).

On the one hand, as studies on refugee camps all over the world have shown, camps are heterogeneous, complex localities that are negotiated on a daily basis (e.g. Agier 2011; Dunn and Cons 2014; Pinelli 2018). This also holds true for the German case, where the accommodation system is very heterogeneous due to the federal differentiation by state and municipalities (Blank 2019b; El-Kayed and Hamann 2018; Hinger and Schäfer 2019; Hinger et al. 2016) and the political programme is not simply imposed from above, but reconstituted on the ground in the (local) encounter between various actors, discourses, institutions and regulations. As a result, the accommodations differ considerably from one another.

On the other hand, the focus on the camps as a space of exclusion may obstruct the view of the more complex interplay between always incomplete (Tsianos and Karakayali 2008), highly differentiated and mutual inclusions and exclusions, and the simultaneous in-betweenness and constant crossing of borders (Agier 2011; Schulze Wessel 2016). A glance at the *production of borders*, in

contrast, allows for a specific focus on these processes and thereby also reveals the spaces produced in this way (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002:129).

Regime analysis, which has developed into one of the most prominent approaches in migration research (Horvath et al. 2017), has proved very useful for the analysis of the complex negotiation of the European border and its regulating effects (e.g. Tsianos and Karakayali 2010). As Tsianos and Karakayali (2008:329) posit, one core topic of regime analysis is overcoming border studies' focus on inclusion and exclusion, which, according to them, is inseparable from a concept of society as a container. This critique may apply to the above mentioned treatment of accommodation facilities in terms of "camp theories" or as "total institutions" and their focus on exclusion (cf. Tazzioli and Garelli 2020), but it does not give justice to the latest developments in the field of border studies. I am going to show that new critical border studies with their process-oriented shift away from the border as a fixed, territorial line to the border as the practice of *bordering* (Newman 2006; Paasi 1998; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009, 2012; Yuval-Davis et al. 2019) and the expansion of borders as fixed social spaces to *borderscapes* (Brambilla 2015; Brambilla et al. 2016b), provide a formidable toolkit to understand bordering and the social production of container-spaces as parts of the production of asylum regimes without reifying them. New critical border studies allow us to understand the consistent engendering of definitions of inside and outside (Brambilla 2015:19) that permeate a large part of the accommodation regime as inherently contradictory interplay between bordering and debordering (Brambilla et al. 2016b:4) on the ground and thus complements regime analysis with its focus on negotiation, regulation and the broader borderscape.

The migration-regime perspective rightfully calls for the adoption of the migrant perspective in the study of border regimes, for it is above all the dynamic of migration that constantly sets regimes in motion (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015). While several studies on refugee camps have already followed this call (e.g. Agier 2011; Tazzioli 2018; see also, for the German case, Hartmann 2017), in the following, I wish to demonstrate that the supposed counterpart is also anything but monolithic and that the actual establishment of borders in the accommodation regime is brought about by a variety of actors and practices. As Rumford (2012:897) argues, the constituency of those shaping borders is increasingly large and diverse and if we want to understand the production of spaces of asylum such as accommodation centres, we need to take into account "the efforts of ordinary people leading to the construction, dismantling, or shifting of borders". One crucial group of actors in the German context are neighbourhood-based volunteering groups that emerged in 2015 with the rise in the number of new arrivals (Hamann et al. 2017). Most of these "welcome initiatives" developed spontaneously and independently of traditional civil society organisations working with migrants (Karakayali and Kleist 2016) and many organised themselves at the local level as neighbourhood-based initiatives. They filled the gaps that were left by state authorities and offered assistance to refugees by teaching German and supporting refugees in their everyday needs. These groups also frequently accompany accommodation centres with support structures and thereby participate in

the production of these spaces. The new volunteers have been criticised for failing to develop participatory approaches for the active participation and inclusion of refugees (Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017:21–22). However, coming from outside of the apparatus of “humanitarian government” (Agier 2011) and searching for contact to their “new neighbours”, the volunteers aim at and contribute to openings and transgressions that mark important variations in the “local production of asylum” (Hinger et al. 2016).

Thus, in the following, I trace the production of borders in the accommodation regime by placing a particular focus on this borderwork (Rumford 2012) of volunteers in refugee support initiatives. Based on contributions in the field of critical border studies and on the example of a municipal accommodation facility in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, this paper demonstrates how volunteers through their practices and engagement with refugees and others, on the one side, and dominant discourses, institutions and regulations on the other, participate in the creation of locally specific spaces of asylum that are marked by simultaneous and contradictory processes of bordering and debordering.

First, I will reconstruct some central aspects of the spatialised exclusion associated with collective accommodation. Subsequently, the concepts of bordering, borderscape and borderwork are introduced, in order to inspect, in the following section, moments of the negotiation of border production based on the example of an accommodation facility in the city of Frankfurt. In doing so, I will examine (a) explicit contestations of the accommodation space, (b) everyday borderings at crossing points and (c) in the broader borderscape and, finally, (d) border narratives. It will be shown that the bordering associated with collective accommodation is not just one-directional, but also accompanied by a series of transgressions and practices of debordering.

## **Data Collection and the Volunteers’ Perspective**

The deliberations in this paper are based on an ethnographic study of the reception of refugees in the city of Frankfurt, with a phase of intensive fieldwork between November 2017 and June 2018 and follow-ups until spring 2020. While migrants’ perspectives on this case have been described elsewhere (Blank and Hannes 2021), in this paper I focus on volunteers, based on my fieldwork as a volunteering researcher in a neighbourhood-based welcome initiative.

I started my fieldwork by joining a homework-tutoring group in an accommodation centre and soon after extended and multiplied my activities. In the phase of intensive fieldwork, I volunteered Monday to Friday afternoons as a tutor for homework, German language, and literacy in two community centres and two accommodation centres for refugees. The main body of the material presented here has been collected in this first accommodation centre or with regard to it. In addition, I participated in volunteered leisure activities with refugees. I attended the monthly plenary meeting of the volunteering initiative and public meetings regarding the reception of refugees. As a volunteer, I assisted particular refugees with local authorities, administrative burdens, looking for flats, seeking funding for language courses, professional development, and so forth during the course of

my fieldwork. One tutoring relationship developed into the friendship mentioned in the beginning.

The collection and analysis of the material followed the considerations of situational analysis by Adele Clarke (2005), combined with content analysis following Udo Kuckartz (2016). It has mainly involved participant observation and “eropic” dialogues (Girtler 2001:147–168), i.e. open field conversations predominantly guided by the counterpart, as well as document analysis and qualitative interviews. I kept detailed field notes regarding my conversations with refugees, volunteers, staff members of the accommodation centres, the district manager, members of the municipal unit for refugee accommodation, social workers, and volunteers from other places. Additionally, I conducted two group interviews with the volunteers of the initiative, in which I participated, and four in-depth interviews with the district management, the coordinators of a second, city-wide operating volunteering group, and two social workers in the field. I summarise my findings in the form of aggregated and anonymised data in the following account. For reasons of data protection, no details are included that may allow for the identification of accommodation or actors.

Situational analysis also served as methodology to reflect my positionality (Rose 1997) as a female German academic volunteer and the power relations embedded in the field. The “dispositif of helping” (Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017) in this type of volunteering implies hierarchical power relations between volunteers and refugees; researching as a volunteer means getting in touch with refugees on a basis of assistance, which moulds the information provided to the researcher, who is frequently perceived as representative of the asylum regime. At the same time, my specific access to the field enabled me to get in contact with people who usually fall short in qualitative studies based on interviews and questionnaires, like illiterate women with childcare obligations, whose everyday spaces and practices could thereby be included into the study. My research was guided by the attempt to build mutual relationships of trust with the participants involved. I notified all of them of the study and was provided with consent to participate. I shared my insights and reflections continuously with the corresponding participants. In the case of the volunteers, I was also invited to a concluding discussion round, reflecting a paper of mine on spatial pitfalls of neighbourhood-based volunteering (Blank 2019b). One paper was published collaboratively with a refugee participating in the study (Blank and Hannes 2021). In order to reflect on my personal entanglement with the subjects of my research, I was supervised by a professional coach specialised in questions of ethics in research through a university program co-developed on the occasion of my research.

## **Collective Accommodation and Spatialised Exclusion in Germany**

The segregation of refugees in collective accommodation in Germany and the related territorial, social, symbolic and discursive inclusions and exclusions form part of a dominant political programme aiming at outward isolation and inward control (Isin and Rygiel 2007). This corresponds to the description that dominates

the literature on the German case, i.e. of collective accommodations being relatively closed social spaces with a strong exclusionary character (e.g. Lebuhn 2016; Pieper 2008; Täubig 2009; Vey 2018; see also, for a very similar argument in comparative European perspective, Diken 2004). This spatialised exclusion is realised by a whole range of factors as diverse as legal guidelines, architectural measures, everyday practices and discourses.

One essential factor contributing to the exclusion through collective accommodation in Germany are legal guidelines. Today's practice of segregated collective accommodation has developed alongside the tightening of asylum legislation from the early 1990s onwards and evolved as a tool for control and deterrence (Jakob 2016:15; Pieper 2008:40–78). However, as El-Kayed and Hamman (2018) demonstrate, this system is highly differentiated both socially and locally. On the one hand, the specific accommodation depends on the refugee's country of origin and thus their prospect of being granted the right to stay. In addition, there are socially differentiated forms of accommodation—for example, for women travelling alone or unaccompanied minors. On the other hand, the precise legal guidelines differ widely between the German states, regions and municipalities. Although federal law generally stipulates separation and segregation of refugees via collective accommodation (§53 of the German Asylum Act), individual states and municipalities do interpret this guideline quite differently (Hinger and Schäfer 2019). The result is that the degree of segregation (ranging from isolated mass accommodations to decentralised housing) depends heavily on the decisions made at the state and local levels. In a broader sense, the legislative production of borders in the accommodation regime also includes the house regulations of facilities, which in turn correspond to state and local political requirements. This may include, for example, rules on entry and exit, visiting hours and rules of conduct, and the specific use of spaces by residents. According to the state- or municipal-specific interpretation of the rules and their particular implementation by facility operators, residents and visitors may be subjected to more or less strict regimes of control (Vey 2018:46).

The territorialisation of refugees into segregated and controlled forms of housing is, moreover, influenced by legal guidelines that do not directly refer to accommodation. Spatial restrictions concerning residence and movement, such as the obligation to stay in the assigned states and municipalities (§ 56 of Asylum Act, § 61 of residence law, or *AufenthG*), limit the scope of movement for refugees. Employment restrictions or a lack of entitlement to government-subsidised language courses deprive refugees of opportunities for social participation and thus confine them even more rigidly to the private sphere and thereby their place of residence. This reinforces feelings of isolation induced by segregated accommodation (Pieper 2008:116 ff.). That said, there are local variations: the city of Frankfurt, for example, is supportive in language acquisition and foots the bill for language courses for those refugees who have no entitlement to funding from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. This is complemented by civil society infrastructures such as volunteer language classes (Blank 2019a). Hence, federal exclusion mechanisms may be overruled locally by conflicting provisions and

alternative efforts for inclusion, which then open up distinct everyday spaces for residents of collective accommodations and allow for alternative passages.

At the same time, refugees are subjected to countless social exclusions that are unspecific to asylum law, such as the lack of financial means for social participation or discriminatory rent markets. In cities like Frankfurt, where there is a considerable lack of affordable housing, the rent market, with its social and racist exclusions (Müller 2015), becomes a mechanism that confines refugees to accommodation centres. This applies early on, when the municipality has a duty to house refugees, as it impedes alternative approaches to municipal refugee housing such as decentralised accommodation, as well as to the subsequent period when refugees are entitled to move into their own apartments, but cannot find affordable housing. Consequently, refugees remain in collective accommodations far longer than the legally required period.

The most salient demarcation in the context of collective refugee accommodation is the visible constitution of a confined space. German accommodation centres are usually surrounded by some form of fence or barrier and the movement of people in and out is subject to certain rules and control. This territorialisation (Sack 1983), is substantiated in different ways, according to the respective type of facility and political level in charge. However, residency papers are essential documents and identity papers are constantly checked.

The segregation of refugees is often reinforced by an isolated and remote location that is secluded from the rest of society. Its most extreme forms, namely accommodation centres situated in the middle of the woods, have been scandalised by affected refugees as “jungle camps” (Jakob 2016:14). And yet, in cities, too, refugees are often housed on the outskirts or in remote industrial parks. The prevailing architectural design of collective accommodation centres (Cachola Schmal et al. 2017) renders them clearly distinguishable and typically serves as spatialised stigmatisation of their inhabitants (Pieper 2008:18, 316 ff.). This is often accompanied by a lack of access to urban infrastructures such as public transport and shopping facilities, but also opportunities to meet neighbours and other local residents (Blank 2019b). That said, there are certainly marked differences in this regard between and within municipalities and even within individual city districts and neighbourhoods (ibid.).

Finally, exclusion through collective accommodation takes place via the discourse that addresses it, such as in representations in political debates, in the media or in academia. Many descriptions, including the more critical ones, quite naturally make recourse to a social space called “accommodation facility” and ascribe a certain stigma to it, thereby simultaneously contributing to its production. Such descriptions contribute to the spatial “ontologising and naturalisation of what is distinguished and denoted by them” (Pott 2018:128; translation by the author).

The collective accommodation of refugees in Germany is thus accompanied by distinct material and symbolic exclusions. Yet the situation on the ground is determined by the specific set of actors: security services can alleviate or reinforce the extent of control; staff at government authorities may be supportive in the search for alternative accommodation or block it; residents can successfully or

unsuccessfully claim for improvements or in different ways come to terms with the status quo; facility operators can make use of certain scopes for action or interpret regulations in the strictest possible sense; political groups can create a sympathetic public or reinforce rejection and isolation; neighbours can display welcoming or unfriendly attitudes; and volunteers can create alternative opportunities for social interaction or strengthen existing structures of exclusion. All these actors, in their combined everyday behaviour, produce locally specific situations of refugee accommodation. Considering the everyday level, then, we can find a whole range of processes, practices, and relationships that simultaneously expose the gaps and openings in this part of the European border regime. Hartmann (2017), for example, shows that the residents frequently challenge boundaries in the German reception system. However, while Hartmann juxtaposes the dominant production of space, on one side, and residents' everyday forms of resistance on the other, I proceed from the notion that the spaces are shaped by a more multi-faceted structure of actors and inherently contradictory practices and that actors such as volunteers need to be taken more into account in order to understand the production of local spaces of asylum.

Thus, in the following, I wish to abandon the focus on accommodations as spaces of exclusion and instead turn to moments of productions of space that transcend the accommodation facility by tracing the practices of refugee support initiatives accompanying such facilities. As it were, critical border studies provide an adequate toolkit for doing just that.

### **Bordering, Borderscapes and Borderwork**

For some time now, the European Union's borders have not only been located on the fringes of Europe, but both outside of and within this political construct (Balibar 1998). As a result, the negotiation of borders is shifted to multiple locations and increasingly occurs in everyday situations of work, housing, etc. (Yuval-Davis et al. 2019). It is precisely these everyday polymorphic border processes that are the core focus of critical border studies (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009, 2012). This type of research, firstly, replaces the erstwhile notion of borders as a stationary, territorial line with a concept of border as a practice of bordering (Newman 2006; Paasi 1998; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009, 2012; Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002; Yuval-Davis et al. 2019). Secondly, the expansion of borders from fixed social spaces to borderscapes in the sense of Appadurai's (1996:33) "fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes" widens the scope to include distinct moments of border production and border-transcending practices (Brambilla 2015; Brambilla et al. 2016a; Laine 2017). From this perspective, borders are constantly recomposed anew by different entities such as bodies, discourses, practices and relationships, thereby continuously engendering new definitions of what or who is being included and excluded (Brambilla 2015:19). The factors contributing to spatialised exclusion in the context of collective accommodation listed in the previous section can thus be comprehended as components of such a borderscape. This borderscape is not identical with the social space of the accommodation (which rather represents one dominant product of the

processes engendered by the borderscape) and should be conceived, in a radically constructivist manner, in view of the particular border situations in question. The term borderscape thereby takes into account the fact that borders do not exist in the same form for all people concerned and are not experienced by every person in the same way (Rumford 2012:894).

Rumford (2012:897) suggests a procedure he refers to as “seeing like a border”, which means “taking into account perspectives from those at, on, or shaping the border, and this constituency is increasingly large and diverse”. He thereby shifts the focus to what he calls borderwork: “the efforts of ordinary people leading to the construction, dismantling, or shifting of borders” (ibid.). This definition of borderwork takes into account the fact that bordering is not the exclusive work of states or supra-national entities, but increasingly of sub-state and particularly non-state actors (Rumford 2006, 2008; Vaughan-Williams 2008; Yuval-Davis et al. 2019). Thus, when we investigate border production, we are frequently dealing with heterogeneous and inconsistent borderings and simultaneous processes of bordering, debordering, and rebordering (Rumford 2006; Yuval-Davis et al. 2019).

Although these terms usually depict processes of the opening and (renewed) closure of nation-state borders and their supra-nationalisation, said terms can also be transferred to everyday bordering and urban processes (Lebuhn 2013; Liao et al. 2018). Cities are of special importance for the reconfiguration of global border regimes (Bauder 2016; De Genova and Roy 2020). Municipal decision makers, local administration staff, operators and residents of accommodation facilities, security services, social workers, refugees, activist groups, volunteers, and many more: they all participate in the everyday processes of bordering, debordering, and rebordering. This includes political contestations, everyday practices, but also narratives (Paasi 1998), which symbolically charge places such as the collective accommodation facilities studied here as places for *newcomers*, thereby drawing boundaries between them and an imagined, allegedly already existing society. Conversely, alternative narratives of inclusion and community may serve as a tool for transcending such borders (Karaliotas and Kapsali 2021).

Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of border production in the accommodation regime requires not only examining mechanisms of exclusion as described in the previous section, but also transgressions, crossings, and openings. In fact, openings are inherent to any border (Schulze Wessel 2016:48). Hence, the production of borders also involves the creation of contact zones. The term contact zones is mainly used in the literature, proceeding from Pratt (1992), to describe the encounter of distinct cultures. In the following, however, contact zones shall be understood more fundamentally as spaces of encounter as opposed to the border’s function of closure. This also follows Pratt’s (1992:6) definition of a contact zone as “... the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations”. That said, these spaces are far from neutral, but rather characterised by the same power asymmetries that dominate the establishment of borders in the first place (Pratt 1992:4).

Based on a number of select moments of border production associated with an accommodation facility in Frankfurt am Main, I will dedicate the rest of this article to reconstructing the interplay between bordering and debordering. In doing so, my focus will be on the openings and the zones of transition and contact. Central to this is the borderwork of the volunteers occurring in the encounter with refugees, facility staff, rules, discourses and the specific structural and architectural environment.

## **Bordering and Debordering in the Context of Refugee Accommodation in Frankfurt**

Following 2015, when Germany underwent a sudden massive rise in numbers of refugees, the city of Frankfurt began systematically ramping up its reception capacities through facilities like the one at the heart of this study: an old factory site comprising several building units that served as housing for refugees from the summer of 2016 onward. During my fieldwork, the facility housed about 230 residents. The housing situation is cramped and furnishings and other equipment offered to residents are of poor quality. The former factory floor is being used for accommodation, with individual living units separated only by curtains. In addition, there are barracks with multi-bed dorm rooms as well as a women's house with various shared flats. The facility also boasts two classrooms, a playroom for children, a meeting room for women and a "neighbourhood café". The accommodation centre is located on a plot that is zoned as an industrial estate, bordering on a residential area and with a good infrastructure for shopping and daily needs as well as access to public transport.

Although the city frames the facility as mere "emergency accommodation" and supposedly intends to move residents to more adequate accommodations as soon as possible, many people have lived here for several years. The facility is operated by a charity that is also in charge of security. Residents are mentored by social workers and assistants employed by the operator as well as several other, external organisations. Volunteers are invited to provide additional support and mentoring in the facility's communal rooms. There is a wide range of such activities organised by various volunteer groups, including literacy classes, German language courses, homework tutoring, a bicycle repair workshop, and a sewing group.

The accommodation's architecture conspicuously sets it apart as a form of special housing. The compound is fenced in; entry and exit are closely monitored at the gate. Generally, the premises can only be accessed by residents and facility staff as well as other service providers. Residents can enter and exit the premises at all times and are allowed to receive visitors during the day. External visitors require an invitation to enter the premises, have to provide ID at the gates and must also sign in and out. Invitations may be issued by residents or can be obtained via an official request submitted to the operating organisation. Beyond that, there is the possibility of participating in the programmes and activities organised at the facility by volunteers. Access in the latter case occurs via the facility operator or the respective volunteer initiative. Volunteers are registered in a corresponding list, while those volunteers working with children additionally

require a police background check. The obligation to register and provide ID has an obvious selective character. Those who have no named contact or valid ID are unable to enter the facility. Visitors are informed of their rights and duties while inside the compound and may be banned from entering the premises in case of misconduct. All these measures form part of the attempt to control what happens inside the social space thereby constructed. Their effect on residents and their objections to such practices is detailed elsewhere (Blank and Hannes 2021). What is of interest here, however, is the outward exclusion of non-residents from the compound, for this is precisely where the volunteer's negotiations of this border practice come into play.

### ***Everyday Contestations of the Local Space of Asylum***

As explained above, the entry and exit rules for the accommodation facility largely depend on legal requirements. That said, they are also fiercely contested. The regulations and requirements in the case studied here have been the subject of disputes between different stakeholders, such as the city of Frankfurt's responsible administrative division, the facility operator, the municipal advisory council of the district, and the local volunteer initiative, and have been debated in various committees and platforms.

One prime example of this are the differences surrounding the neighbourhood café. During the planning stages for the accommodation centre, there were a number of meetings at the neighbourhood level in which the exact arrangements concerning the accommodation were thrashed out. They included two sessions of the local advisory council of the district in question, several sessions of a networking group, which involved, among others, the local neighbourhood management and the selected facility operator, as well as countless direct disputes between different stakeholders. One aspect that was being discussed at the time was the creation of communal meeting spaces for the residents of the new facility and its neighbours. Various models were considered, such as renting rooms in the respective neighbourhood or setting up a meeting space on the premises of the new facility overlooking the street. At the end of this process, a room was chosen for the neighbourhood café that was located right in the middle of the premises of the new accommodation centre. This way, the café, which has since repeatedly changed its exact function, became the spatial expression of an unredeemed promise: the opening of the accommodation centre towards the surrounding neighbourhood. Consequently, access to the neighbourhood café, and thus the entry rules at the gate, remained a permanent bone of contention that prompted various renegotiations. The neighbourhood-based volunteer initiative in particular continued to demand an open and inclusive concept for the café. Over time, the continuing negotiation processes dealt with ever-more detailed and small-scale issues. They largely took place between volunteers and the facility operator—and often between individual functional areas such as volunteer homework tutoring and the facility operator's volunteering work coordinator. These small-scale negotiations usually concerned the everyday use of spaces, and constantly returned to the question as to who was entitled to be in a certain space and determine its current usage.

This includes, for example, the ability of refugees from other accommodation centres to participate in the volunteers' activities in the accommodation centre in question. In the area of language courses alone, there were several daily classes provided by various initiatives and for different target groups, which were initially accessible only for the residents of the facility. The homework tutoring group I worked with on the premises regarded this exclusivity as a problem because the homework tutoring was intended not only for the facility's residents, but for all refugees living nearby. And indeed, there have always been interested persons from other accommodation centres. Offering access to these refugees was therefore repeatedly negotiated between the tutoring group and the volunteering coordinator. Eventually, an agreement was reached: refugees from other facilities would be allowed to participate when they registered with the volunteers prior to their visit.

In sum, the exit rules and, particularly, the entry rules are a constant subject of negotiations. The underlying objective is the contact between volunteers and residents as well as access to the resources being offered in the accommodation. "As usual: everything is geared to this particular accommodation centre, while the others get nothing", said a member of the initiative during a discussion about a Christmas party exclusively for the residents of the accommodation. The volunteer activists from the initiative regard such practices as exclusionary and continuously try to include refugees from other accommodations in the area. The outcome is a change in the border's opening and closing function and in the design of the respective contact zones. However, the dynamics of bordering and debordering, are not only the subject and result of explicit contention, but also influenced by everyday behaviour. Such processes can be observed particularly at the crossing points.

### ***Everyday Bordering at the Crossing Points***

The most obvious crossing point is the gate that monitors entry and exit. There is a sliding gate and a small porter's lodge which residents and visitors need to pass when entering or exiting the premises. The gate is usually open during the daytime, and the porter's lodge is staffed with one person around the clock. The enforcement of rules at the gate depends above all on the concrete daily circumstances. Although there are certain members of staff that only work at the gates, they are frequently substituted by people from other functional areas or departments, which leads to a certain degree of fluctuation in personnel. In my own visits to the facility, I have experienced both the implementation of standardised processes and individually modified procedures. That said, even the standard protocol for entering varied. During the eight months that I passed through the entrance almost on a daily basis, the official process changed several times. Initially, to give an example, I had to leave my ID card at the entrance upon entry and collect it again when I left; later, I only had to show it. The reason in this case was a new official directive, according to which ID papers could no longer be retained. Apart from such changes in the standard protocol, often enough I experienced improvisation. Once I had to explain the procedure to a new porter who

had not yet been briefed. Another time a new staff member, who had been transferred to the facility from a different department within the charity, simply handed me the wad of keys. This also goes to show that the lines between distinct groups of actors on the premises become blurred in the everyday routine. This also applies to residents when they, for example, support staff by informing them about standard procedures or assist them in certain situations, or volunteers who—as was the case with our homework tutoring group—submit attendee lists to the facility operator. Thereby, the same actors who work towards debordering during negotiations at other times participate in the ritualised processes of bordering.

The premises may be entered or left via the women's house without any kind of control. The house, which accommodates several shared flats, is located at the edge of the compound and has its own entrance door to the street. Visitors, who are obligated to report to the porter, do not have to pass the main gate, but can simply ring the bell of a given apartment. The house is connected to the wider premises via its fire escape stairs, which are routinely used by the residents. It so happened that, for example, during a visit to my friend who resides in the women's house, my daughter played on the facility premises without actually ever having entered it through the main gate. At no point did staff even talk to her while playing, let alone ask her whether she had permission to be there. While the porter in the scene described at the beginning even took charge of the parking situation outside the facility, my daughter, who suddenly turned up inside the compound, was not considered a problem whatsoever. As was argued before, the border does not apply in the same way to everyone or is upheld in a consistent manner (Rumford 2012:894). As De Genova (2002) has argued for the production of illegality and deportability, this kind of arbitrariness is an integral part of the regulating power of border regimes; it does, however, also open up opportunities for noncompliance and variations, which are widely used by residents and visitors, thereby also constantly pushing the limits of control.

The gate is usually open during the daytime and refugees enter and exit the premises without paying much attention to the porter. Yet for volunteers, too, the border character is lost once they are established at the accommodation centre. This experience seems to be shared by all volunteer groups that offer programmes or activities on the premises. In an interview with the coordinators of a group that teaches German classes at various accommodation centres, the interviewees repeatedly described the ambivalence between the hermetic outward closure of the centres and the fact that project volunteers can move freely inside the premises. Other volunteer groups have had similar experiences. One of the members of a bicycle repair workshop described how "normal people" cannot enter the facility, but members of the initiative were able to enter and exit "quite naturally and unhindered". Thus, the gate serves as an initial point of selection rather than as an everyday control and vanishes from the passengers' awareness in their daily routines.

What is also interesting in this regard is the difference between members of the local volunteer initiative who often come to the facility and those who are only there on rare occasions. In fact, the two groups contradicted one another in

interviews and at meetings: while the latter group regarded access as heavily restricted, the former described it as unproblematic. What is more, as late as January 2018, a member of the homework tutoring group described the neighbourhood café as “the opposite of an open café” during a meeting, stating that you needed an ID to enter, the room was usually locked, and there were no regular opening hours or a sign at the gate. The minutes of that meeting note that “the communal café factually does not exist”. Only four months later, after having started to volunteer more frequently at the accommodation centre, the same volunteer said in a group interview, referring to the café: “I mean, there are plenty of opportunities to meet with people inside the facility, there’s no problem at all”. I found similar accounts in my own notes on visits to the accommodation centre. With each visit, my perception of the gates and the compound as a whole changed. Initially, I felt controlled and perceived the gates as hostile; towards the end of my regular visits, I described the friendly contact at the gates, I was able to move freely inside the compound and increasingly felt welcome. This changed when I stopped going to the site on a regular basis. While this could be interpreted as the internalisation of rules and the volunteers becoming part of the regime, a process criticised by some volunteering groups as “fraternisation”, it also points to debordering through everyday practices. The rules of the gate are formed in everyday life and are thereby reproduced and reshaped, as well as constantly stabilised or destabilised, through new routines.

The associated interplay of bordering and debordering can also be observed at another crossing point, the above mentioned bicycle repair workshop, which is run by volunteers together with refugees from different accommodation centres. It is located at the edge of the premises and has a street entrance during opening hours, which is open to anyone who wishes to enter, regardless of whether they are refugees, other neighbours or just regular customers. It is separated from the premises by a makeshift construction site fence. During the workshop’s opening hours, the makeshift fence is frequently pushed aside temporarily, for example, in order to fetch something. In the spring of 2018, this construction site fence remained open for several weeks while the bike workshop was in operation. Residents and visitors started using this site as an alternative short cut, and children used it to play both inside and outside of the compound. This in fact prompted the facility operator to insist that the construction site fence remain closed at all times in order to prevent the children from coming to any harm. The bicycle workshop staff were tasked with ensuring this was taken care of. This way, after having had debordered the facility for some weeks, the volunteers now became official agents of bordering.

The bicycle workshop, the neighbourhood café at the centre of the premises and other communal rooms used by external volunteers: they are all contact zones on the premises that open the accommodation centre and create passages. As a result, volunteers become important actors in the borderwork associated with the accommodation. As stated before, however, this borderwork is not one-directional, as processes and practices of bordering, debordering and rebordering constantly alternate. Moreover, they do not in the least stop at the facility’s boundaries. It therefore makes sense to consider the broader borderscape.

### ***Bordering and Debordering in the Broader Borderscape***

The portrayal of German accommodation centres as isolated camps often contrasts—even within the corresponding studies—with the descriptions of everyday practices by refugees (e.g. Kreichauf 2018; Pieper 2008). The daily activity of refugees is by no means confined exclusively to the accommodation in which they are housed. Many pursue a daily routine outside the accommodation: they work, complete professional training, attend school or German language classes, attend official appointments, meet friends, take part in initiatives, or pursue sports or other recreational activities. The exact radius of movement differs according to the specific form of accommodation, residence status, scope of opportunities and personal networks. That said, not all residents in the accommodation facility pursue daily routines or have personal networks in Frankfurt and beyond.

This is where various approaches that seek to support transitions from the accommodation to other social spaces proceed from. This includes, firstly, municipal efforts. With its integration paradigm of a “City of Diversity” (Stadt Frankfurt am Main 2011), the city of Frankfurt is regarded as progressive in supporting migrants, although the implementation of up-to-date policy measures remains below expectations (Radtke 2003). In the area of refugee policy, there are measures such as the already mentioned additional funding of German classes or the subsidising of municipal recreational activities such as trips to swimming pools. Beyond that, many civil-society groups and organisations offer activities for refugees outside the accommodations. There are innumerable volunteer-run activities and programmes ranging from tutoring and recreational activities such as museum visits and communal cooking sessions to political engagement. Some of the initiatives explicitly seek to get the refugees out of the accommodations for a while; a network offering different German classes across Frankfurt refers to this practice as “isolation breaking” and links its own programmes to a strict refusal to support any work inside the accommodation centres. Some organisations in part also provide resources for the improvement of refugees’ mobility such as paying for local transport tickets.

Many initiatives attempt to distribute information about their activities inside the accommodations, yet this information only rarely finds its way to the residents. Indeed, reaching the refugees inside the accommodations is one of the volunteer groups’ greatest challenges. Here is where the combination of volunteer work inside and outside of the accommodation centres begins. A member of the neighbourhood-based volunteer initiative once described this as a bridge “to establish a first contact and get those people out of there”. In this perspective, offering an activity inside the accommodation serves primarily as a “first point of contact”, ideally followed by a whole chain of activities outside the facility. Indeed, this bridge is eminently significant in the accommodation centre studied here: a sewing group organised by some members of the neighbourhood-based volunteer initiative inside the facility served for some women as a point of contact for a German language course offered by members of the same initiative in the neighbourhood. The initiative’s homework tutoring inside the facility and German classes in the neighbourhood are closely interlocked and involve many of the same volunteers and attendees. Another group associated with the initiative,

which organises outings, regularly establishes contact with residents in the facility via all of these activities. At an evening cooking event hosted by this group and held at a separate community centre in the neighbourhood, I met refugees from various accommodation centres, all of whom had already participated in one or several of the other activities. Other initiatives have had the same experience. The student network, which also offers German classes at the facility, reports that the language courses often serve as an opportunity for establishing contact beyond the facility—from relationships of personal support to genuine friendships. This also matches my own experience, as my participation in the general teaching activities often led to intensive one-on-one study partnerships, which would subsequently come to cover a broader range of subjects and also shift spatially: first, my mentees would meet me in the communal rooms inside the accommodation or communal rooms mainly used for the volunteer programmes in the adjacent neighbourhood. Then they frequently invited me to their own rooms in the facility or visited me at my workplace or my home, and finally we would start using public recreational places together such as swimming pools or cafés.

The networks emerging as a result encompass distinct geographic spaces and can be understood above all as debordering. This debordering, however, affects only a small share of residents and thus leads to selectivity once more. Moreover, the relationships between volunteers and residents of the accommodation often turn out to be less stable than assumed. Some establish intense and lasting contact beyond the volunteer groups' activities, while others rather maintain sporadic, loose contact. In sum, however, the boundary surrounding the accommodation centre is overlain by a whole series of different kinds of relationships that all contribute to debordering.

### ***Border Narratives***

As mentioned earlier, borders emerge not least as a result of the way they are talked about. This includes representations in politics, media, science and academia, but also everyday local narratives that leave their mark on the respective borderscapes. Such border narratives, which influence the reaction to an accommodation (Paasi 1998:75) and thus affect the strategies of borderwork (Blank 2019a:181–184), are ultimately countless and strongly depend on the perspective of observation. Dominant narratives that I encountered during my field work include, firstly, that of the accommodation as an isolated camp, a space of exclusion, or even a ghetto. A second dominant narrative is the welcome narrative, or, alternatively, that of the “new neighbours”, according to which the accommodations entail an integration mission for the surrounding community, particularly the respective neighbourhoods. Finally, there is the narrative of the friendly neighbourhood or small village, which I used myself in the initial narration of this text, that imagines the accommodation as a place of a protected community. All these narratives constantly overlap in everyday borderwork. As my own example illustrates, the narratives even change for individuals: in the initial field note, I began with the image of an isolated camp, switched to the friendly little neighbourhood, then returned to describing a camp-like scenario. This also points

to the close link between narratives and practices and their mutual influence. For the refugees themselves, too, the character of the accommodation changes, depending on the current situation: one day it is a shelter, at other times a place of repression and control, sometimes it may be a place of inclusion, sometimes one of exclusion. At times it provides resources, at others it deprives residents thereof. The same positions can also be found among volunteers, the facility's staff and in the city or municipal administrative authorities and government agencies. Positions change continuously, while they all ultimately merge into a common reification of the social space called "accommodation" as a distinct space, separated from its surrounding area. At closer inspection, the distinct narratives thus resemble each other strongly: they portray the collective accommodation as a social space whose boundaries constitute a relevant inside and outside, charging the accommodation centre symbolically as a place of *newcomers*. This contradistinction of refugee accommodation and the surrounding neighbourhood, moreover, reproduces essentialisations of a "we", the "host" society, and the "Other", a homogeneous collective of immigrants, which are typical of the German integration discourse (Hess et al. 2009) in the form of small-scale spatial objectifications. Hence, all these narratives contribute to the bordering of the accommodation.

As a result, the accommodation also functions as the (spatialised) "Other", which facilitates the constitution of a (new) (spatialised) Self in the first place. In a discussion among a small circle of volunteers from the neighbourhood-based initiative, it became clear that this neighbourhood, which serves as the presumed host society in the initiative's activities, was to some extent only created through the volunteer work on behalf of the refugees. One of the participants in the discussion said that the initiative's name itself, which already incorporated the narrative of being welcome in the neighbourhood, was ultimately a fetish, as this neighbourhood "as such" did not exist. One volunteer summed the whole matter up when she said: "I don't even know how integrated I am in this neighbourhood now. Or what this neighbourhood actually is?" Before she co-founded the initiative, she had known far fewer people in the neighbourhood, and she continued: "Well, ultimately, something like a neighbourhood may actually have emerged in the process ... The neighbourhood in fact really only came into being through the arrival of these people". Thus, the above-mentioned welcome narrative, according to which the accommodations entail an integration mission for the respective neighbourhoods, brought the group together and thereby led to the very *place-making* (Massey 1991) of the (supposed) integration space for refugees in the first place. With Agier (2019:15) following Foucault one could argue that the accommodation centre thus functioned as a heterotopia for the neighbours: "... heterotopias create an entity, real or fictional, which allows us to locate an otherness with which we can think the own self, or 'us'". Fictional *and* real, these narratives thus serve as borderings that produce and reproduce different spaces of society or, as argued in the introduction, those container-spaces of inclusion and exclusion criticised by regime analysis (Tsianos and Karakayali 2008:329).

In this sense, the narratives prove to be important in the bordering of the accommodation, while simultaneously being shaped by and shaping the

conception of the social space outside of it. These narratives all contain the conflict between bordering and debordering: the criticism of the isolated camp has a strong bordering effect in everyday life, in that it leads to both strategic and unintentional avoidance of contact in the accommodations (Blank 2019a:181–184). At the same time, however, it points to debordering as the horizon of political struggles. Conversely, the welcome narrative produces more openness for the transcendence of borders in everyday life, but it runs the risk of simultaneously contributing to a normalisation of the situation as a whole.

## Conclusion

If bordering increasingly occurs in everyday situations of work, housing etc., then the corresponding spaces created in the hearts of our cities should be understood and envisioned as potential borderscapes of the European border regimes as much as its outer limits in the Mediterranean Sea or the Croatian border. As Pine-lli (2018) has shown, it does not suffice to investigate the European border regime in the Mediterranean. In addition, we have to look at what happens after the external frontiers of Europe have been crossed. Collective accommodations, like the one portrayed here, transfer the EU's external border right into the heart of inner cities. They represent sites of reconstitution of these borders and thereby render them quasi-natural. It is therefore imperative that we do not reify the border through our own critique (Paasi 1998:83), for what we are dealing with are simultaneous and inherently contradictory, highly heterogeneous processes of everyday bordering and debordering.

The critique of the "camp theories" is important and legitimate, and, moreover, corresponds to the practical-political critique coming from refugee organisations (e.g. Break Isolation Group of International Women\* Space 2020; Karawane für die Rechte der Flüchtlinge und MigrantInnen 2006; Women in Exile and Friends 2020). But it is only one side of the story. As has been shown, volunteers accompanying municipal accommodation centres can become critical actors in their debordering. Through political contestations and everyday practices, they create passages and contacts zones and thereby contribute to the production of the local spaces of asylum. One of the most important contributions to debordering are different kinds of networks and relationships offered to residents of accommodation centres that overlay the boundaries constructed by official agents. But the volunteers also run the risk of unwillingly becoming agents of bordering by participating in daily routines of bordering and employing narratives that produce and reproduce different spaces of society for refugees and non-refugees. Their borderwork is not one-directional, processes and practices of bordering, debordering and rebordering constantly alternate.

Applying critical border studies to urban borderscapes is, thus, a promising task in order to understand the decentred spatial working of the European border and the production of spaces for inclusion and exclusion as much as the potentials for debordering in urban everyday life. As De Genova and Roy (2020:361) have argued only recently, the urban spaces of global cities have to be studied to a greater extent in these terms. If border struggles are dislocated

and re-scaled as urban struggles, as they argue, and urban refugee camps are part of the fabric of the migrant metropolis, then a deeper understanding of the working of these borderscapes is required. The bordering and debordering of a refugee camp in the City of Frankfurt presented in this paper represents one example of such an endeavour. The focus on the experience of the volunteers served to highlight the role that everyday borderwork can play for openings and transgressions in our cities. For these borderscapes do not only offer important action scopes to contest the ever-intensifying camp policy at the European, national, and local level, but also need to be envisioned as a quest for the creation of “cities for all” (Agier 2019).

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