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# **Contentious Subjects**

## **Spatial and Relational Perspectives on Forced Migrant Mobilizations in Berlin and Paris**

Ph.D. Candidate  
**Elias Steinhilper**

**Ph.D. Coordinator**  
*Donatella della Porta*

**Ph.D. Supervisor**  
*Donatella della Porta*

*To those in motion*

## Abstract

### **Contentious Subjects: Spatial and Relational Perspectives on Forced Migrant Mobilizations in Berlin and Paris**

Political mobilizations by ‘forced migrants’ for rights and recognition have proliferated worldwide in the last two decades. Yet, these contentious practices have rarely received widespread public attention. They contrast with a dominant portrayal of marginalized migrants as either passive, needy and ideally grateful objects of government or civil society humanitarianism or stigmatized outsiders and intruders in a national order. Also the academic reflection on the issue has started only relatively recently, particularly in critical migration and citizenship studies, and far less so in social movement studies. According to dominant movement theories, (forced) migrants are unlikely subjects of mobilization due to legal obstacles (including ‘deportability’), limited economic and social capital and closed political and discursive opportunities.

Against this background, my thesis explores diverse processes of political mobilization by forced migrants with a view to provide theoretical refinements and empirical complements to the body of literature in social movement studies. Given the volatile and fragmented nature of forced migrant mobilizations, the research draws from recent innovations in contentious politics, highlighting ‘micro-interactions’ in specific arenas, as well the concrete spatial underpinnings of such practices. The key guiding interest evolves around the question of *how protest by forced migrants emerges and unfolds through interactions among diverse players in specific arenas*. I analyse the making and unmaking of social ties by forced migrants, as well as the spaces they enact and embody in processes of mobilization. With a view to integrate knowledge obtained in other disciplines, the research is furthermore informed by critical migration studies, particularly the notions of ‘acts of citizenship’ under precarious conditions in exclusive migration regimes.

Designed in the tradition of ‘political ethnography’, the project both homes in on specific interactions in delineated arenas and adds a comparative element by contrasting various arenas. The project investigates four protest arenas in two European capitals, Berlin and Paris. It therefore scrutinizes and contrasts processes of mobilization in two distinct legal, relational and spatial contexts. In adding a diachronic comparison in each location, the research aims at the tentative identification of relational and spatial patterns in forced migrant mobilizations. The research shows how marginalized actors temporarily overcome structural obstacles through interactions with more powerful actors and by appropriating spaces with advantageous relational qualities. Moreover, the research documents the fragility of ties that are made and unmade both among forced migrants and with pro-beneficiaries in concrete contentious interactions.

## Acknowledgements

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In the last three years I have had the luxury to learn about political sociology, social movements and critical migration studies. Equally so, I have learned about the privilege of European citizenship; I got a glimpse of what it means to live at the margins of society and I witnessed determination, pride and human dignity. As much as I have learned within the shiny walls of universities, I have learned from the protagonists of my research. To them goes my deepest gratitude.

This thesis is dedicated to all those in motion, physically and mentally – eager to change things for the better, against all odds.

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## List of Abbreviations

AEI	Afrique Europe Interact
AfD	Alternative für Deutschland
BVerfG	Bundesverfassungsgericht
CADA	Centre d'Accueil pour Demandeurs d'Asile
CFDT	Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail
CNSP	Coordination Nationale des Sans-Papiers
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
EU	European Union
FASTI	Fédération des Associations de Solidarité avec tous-t-es les Immigré-e-s
FTdA	France Terre d'Asile
GISTI	Groupe d'Information et de Soutien des Immigré-e-s
LDH	La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme
MRAP	Cimade, Mouvement contre le Racisme et l'Amitié entre les Peuples
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OFPRA	Office Français Pour les Réfugiés et les Apatrides
O-Platz	Oranienplatz
PADA	Plateforme d'Accueil des Demandeurs d'Asile
PEGIDA	Patriotische Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes
PoC	Person of Colour
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
UK	United Kingdom

## Prologue

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Paris, 2 May 2008: several hundred sans-papiers mainly from Mali, Senegal, Mauretania but also Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey occupy the iconic Bourse du Travail of the leftist trade union CGT in the 11 district of the French capital. The protesters claim their regularisation, freedom of movement and solidarity from trade unions and civil society organizations. The protest event will last for more than a year.

Berlin, 6 October 2012: around 70 asylum-seekers from Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Eritrea and Somalia reach Berlin after a 600 kilometre foot march. On banners, they claim the abolition of ‘Residenzpflicht’ (a German law regulating the physical mobility of asylum-seekers), ‘Lagerpflicht’ (the general rule of collective accommodation, often in remote areas) and deportations. With the support of local anti-racist groups and neighbours, the protesters set up a protest camp at ‘Oranienplatz’ in the heart of the district of Kreuzberg. Hundreds of other asylum-seekers and migrants with precarious status will join the protest camp during its two years of existence.

Brussels, 23 June 2014: several dozens of forced migrants set up a protest camp in Brussels after a 500 kilometre foot march from Strasbourg in France, via Schengen in Luxemburg to the headquarters of the EU institutions. Banners read ‘Freedom not Frontex’, ‘Stop Dublin’ or ‘No Camps’. The protesters are asylum-seekers and sans-papiers from various European cities including Berlin and Paris.

Berlin, 6 February 2016: At an iconic former border post in Berlin, once separating US-American and Soviet tanks, around 50 migrant and non-migrant activists gather for a sit-in. Banners read ‘Stop war on migrants’, and ‘Freedom not Frontex’, photographs of dead bodies and mourning crowds at a sea shore are displayed on the sidewalk. The flyers distributed announce simultaneous events for this action day in Morocco, Spain and Berlin.

Paris, spring 2015: Hundreds of forced migrants including asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants set up makeshift camps underneath metro bridges for very basic shelter. Their precarious situation and visibility attracts solidarity from the adjacent neighbourhoods, spurs countless protest events and leads to repeated evacuations organized by the state. A highly contentious wave of dozens of tent camps and evictions unfolds in the city, which lasts almost two years.

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# Part I: Setting the Stage

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Researching Political Mobilizations by Forced Migrants

‘I was [politically] active in Soudan, this is the reason why I had to leave. When I came to France, I did not want to be political. When I found the situation here - it was not endurable - I realized that I had to continue fighting to get back at least our dignity, our basic rights. It is very important. Anywhere you go, no one can ensure your basic rights unless you stand for your rights. I found that it works, to let people know that our rights are abused in Europe and of course in Africa and elsewhere.’ (Interview P30)

#### 1.1. Introduction

The empirical vignettes in the prologue illustrate diverse instances of forced migrant claims-making in the public sphere. Instead of remaining at the margins of society, these individuals constitute themselves as political subjects and claim rights and recognition. Such mobilizations by a specific type of marginalized actors are considered *anomalies in most theories of political mobilization*. In this dissertation, I therefore explore how such dynamics of political mobilization by forced migrants unfold in two European capitals, Berlin and Paris. This introductory chapter sets the stage and locates the project in its academic and social context. For this purpose, section (1.2.) recalls the development of forced migrant mobilizations and traces the academic engagement with the topic. In doing so, the section identifies considerable gaps in the literature, which illustrate the academic relevance and build the starting point of this project. Subsequently, section (1.3.) outlines the theoretical and methodological perspective, from which the issue of political protest

by forced migrants is approached in this dissertation.<sup>1</sup> It furthermore narrows down the specific scope, clarifies key concepts, introduces the guiding research questions and justifies the selection of cases. In the tradition of an ‘engaged social science’, section (1.4.) argues how this dissertation contributes to key social questions of our time beyond a mere academic relevance. Eventually, the concluding section (1.5.) provides an outlook on the structure of the dissertation to guide the reader through this manuscript.

## **1.2. Setting the Stage: Marginalized (Forced) Migrant Subjectivity**

In the ‘age of migration’ (Castles, Haas, & Miller, 2014), cross-border movements of all kinds have reached a historic peak. Such patterns of migration include a wide range of *forced migrants* leaving their countries of origin for reasons of war, individual or group-based persecution and poverty (Betts, 2013; Carling, 2015). In response, various countries in the so-called Global North have, particularly since the 1980s, reacted with tightened immigration policies (de Genova, 2002; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016), including stricter border controls, increased deportations and widespread encampment of those deemed ‘unwanted’ (Agier, 2011; Boswell, 2003; de Genova, 2017; Schuster, 2004).<sup>2</sup> Recent years have furthermore witnessed an intensified selection and differentiation of forced migrants into ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’, and ultimately ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ (Gibney, 2014; Neumayer, 2005b). In this process of securitization and differentiation of migration, the international norm of asylum is no exception, but has also been gradually curtailed in most countries in Europe (Crépeau, 1995; Fassin, 2012; Noiriel, 1999; Oltmer & Bade, 2005a, 2005b; Steinhilper, 2016).

The presence of migrants has ever since led to heated social and political controversies between conservatives and multiculturalists about migrant reception in the Global North, national conceptions of citizenship and legitimate motives of migration (Balibar, 2009; Benhabib, 2004; Betts & Loescher, 2011; Ghosh, 2000; Isin, 2012). Migrant rights movements have gradually emerged in various countries in North America and Europe from the late 1970s onwards and organized multiple campaigns at the local, national and transnational level (Giugni & Passy, 2001; Monforte, 2014; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> Separate theory (2) and method (3) chapters will further expand on the respective perspectives.

<sup>2</sup> The so-called ‘long summer of migration’ 2015 constituted a temporary exception, but in its aftermath this general trend was confirmed (Hess et al., 2017).

Yet, the last two decades are a turning point insofar as migrants themselves have systematically engaged in struggles over rights and recognition. Political mobilizations by migrants of the kind illustrated in the introductory paragraphs have proliferated on all continents in the last two decades (Anderson, 2010; Ataç, Rygiel, & Stierl, 2016; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016; Tyler & Marciniak, 2013). Therefore, Imogen Tyler and Katarzyna Marciniak speak of ‘an explosion’ (Tyler and Marciniak 2013: 143) of migrant and migrant solidarity activism in this period; Ilker Ataç et al. observe a ‘new era of protest’ (Ataç, Kron, Schilliger, Schwiertz, & Stierl, 2015).<sup>3</sup> Forced migrants’ claims range from the respect for human rights, freedom of movement, access to labour markets, a fair and humane asylum process, but also include protests against deportation and the failure to prevent migrant death at borders (e.g. the Mediterranean).

The forms of mobilization and the characteristics of individuals involved are historically and geographically contingent. In Europe, the geographical focus of my research, widespread migrant mobilization was sparked in the 1990s, when undocumented migrants, self-identifying as ‘sans-papiers’<sup>4</sup>, engaged in occupations, hunger strikes and marches. Their political protest for the first time brought questions of migrant political subjectivity to the attention of a wider public (Cissé, 2002; Freedman, 2004; McNevin, 2006; Siméant, 1998). The undocumented migrant movement quickly diffused to most big cities in France and subsequently inspired protests and activist networks in various other European countries including Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Germany and Greece (Tyler and Marciniak 2013: 143). Restrictive asylum policies have furthermore fuelled new kinds of mobilizations against detention of asylum-seekers, mandatory residence, exclusion from the job market, encampment in remote areas, suspension of family reunification, deportations etc.

With radical actions such as sit-ins, hunger strikes, lip-sewing, occupation of public and private space as well as long distance marches migrants have constituted themselves as political subjects, leaving their attributed place at the margins of society and voicing claims for rights and recognition in the public sphere.

Despite increasing frequency and a predominantly radical repertoire of action,

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<sup>3</sup> This is evidently not meant to ignore the multiple forms of migrant mobilizations such as migrant self-help organizations and migrant worker strikes (Però and Solomos 2010: 2) which have a far longer history (see e.g. for France Gisti, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> *Sans-papiers*, French for ‘Without Papers’, is the self-identification adopted by the illegalized migrants’ movement in France. The term has rapidly proliferated and is still widely used in the Francophone world.

such political mobilizations have so far rarely received resonance in both public discourse and academia. In addition to the proven disproportionately low representation of migrants in the mass media (Bleich, Bloemraad, & de Graauw, 2015), migrant mobilizations hardly correspond with the dominant public portrayal of (forced) migrants and established theories of political mobilization. Discursively, the figure of the forced migrant is either constructed as a passive victim and needy object of (non-)governmental humanitarianism (Fassin, 2012; L. Malkki, 1996) or as a stigmatized outsider and intruder in a national order of things (Bigo, 2003; Nicholls, 2013b). Migrants' claims in the public sphere are, hence, considered to be disturbing 'noise' rather than legitimate 'voices' (Nicholls, 2013b, 2013c). This results in migrants being both 'casualties of care' (Ticktin, 2011) and casualties of 'excessive governance' (Stierl, 2017). Indeed, forced migrants can be understood as 'subalterns', given their widespread exclusion from discourse, (political) power, and material wealth (see e.g. Fadlalla, 2009; Harindranath, 2007).

Not least for these reasons, *migrant agency has been largely downplayed*, both in public discourse and in academia. Systematic academic reflection on the issue has started only relatively recently - particularly in critical migration and citizenship studies, and to some degree in social movement studies. Other strands of political science, such as international relations, have largely focused on migration governance 'from above'. I will briefly outline these strands with a view to identifying gaps and to locating my own research:<sup>5</sup>

In political science, the issue of migration has predominantly been addressed from a top-down perspective. While the context of *European integration* has become a laboratory for supranational asylum policy and academic reflection on its repercussions (Boswell, 2003; Moravcsik & Nicolaidis, 1999; Truong & Maas, 2011), it is striking that most of this literature concentrates on the question of how migration could be effectively governed or, in its critical turn, how governmentality impacts the lives of migrants (Balzacq, 2008; Bigo, 2003). Similarly, international relations have largely ignored migrant agency (for an excellent overview see Rother, 2013). Given the dominant top-down approach, few contributions exist in this strand of literature on the perceptions and acts of emancipation of migrants as well as mobilizations by migrant solidarity organizations. This bias is not only normatively problematic but also empirically

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<sup>5</sup> For a more extensive discussion on theories on migrant mobilizations, see section 2. on the theoretical framework of this research project.

questionable as ‘[...] migrants are not just passive objects but active shapers of their social world’ (Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer 2013: 13).

Bottom-up and transnational perspectives have been developed extensively in *social movement studies* (della Porta & Caiani, 2008; della Porta & Mattoni, 2014b; della Porta & Tarrow, 2005; Monforte, 2014). For some reason, however, the issue of migration has received comparatively little attention in this strand of literature (Eggert & Giugni, 2015; Menjívar, 2010). Whereas Emily Gray and Paul Statham (2005), Ruud Koopmans et al. (2005), Sieglinde Rosenberger and Jakob Winkler (2013), Manlio Cinalli (2007; Cinalli & Nasri, 2009) and Pierre Monforte (2014) have provided important contributions to national and transnational (Europeanized) dynamics of migrant solidarity activism, research on political mobilizations *by* migrants themselves remains scarce. In social movement studies, migrants have long been considered least-likely cases of mobilization due to ‘weak interests’ (Schröder, 2016) (heterogeneous group), legal obstacles including ‘deportability’ (de Genova, 2002), limited economic and social capital and stigmatising discourses. Given the dominant focus on ‘resource mobilization theory’ and ‘political opportunity structures’, social movement studies have generally – with some important exceptions (Chabanet & Royall, 2014a; Piven & Cloward, 1979) – devoted less attention to ‘resource-poor’ movements. Even compared to other marginalized and weakly resourced social groups (such as the unemployed, the disabled, the mentally ill etc.), migrants were expected to be less inclined to mobilize as the public discourse on membership in a society organized as a nation state is strongly biased towards formal citizens of a polity: ‘The nation state may proclaim equality for all, but equality of rights is only reserved for its core members’ (Nicholls 2013c: 171). Cinalli has even argued that asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants as ‘weak immigrants’ are ‘passive protagonists’ and ‘incapable of speaking on their own behalf’ (2008). When migration was addressed by social movement scholars at all, the focus remained on pro-beneficiaries or ‘political altruism’ (Passy, 2001).

Most seminal contributions explicitly addressing migrant activism derive from the US-American context, where particularly the spectacular protests in 2006, with millions of undocumented migrants in the streets, triggered research on political mobilizations of (undocumented) migrants and their recognition as legitimate voices in the US-American public sphere (Nicholls, 2013c; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016; Pulido, 2006; Voss & Bloemraad, 2011; Zepeda-Millán, 2017). Particularly Walter Nicholls and his several co-authors have enriched social movements studies with an

explicit spatial lens on protest by migrants (Nicholls, Miller, & Beaumont, 2013b; Nicholls & Vermeulen, 2012; Uitermark, Nicholls, & Loopmans, 2012). For the European context, Johanna Siméant's 'La cause des sans-papiers' significantly advanced social movements studies' interest in marginalized actors (Siméant, 1998), particularly theorizing the role of 'hunger strikes' in protest by undocumented migrants. In more recent scholarship, Pierre Monforte and Pascal Dufour have investigated the cultural dimension of migrant activism (2011, 2013), Teresa Cappiali the fragile relations with pro-beneficiaries (Cappiali, 2016), and Nicholls the 'niches', rather than political opportunities, in which migrants mobilize (Nicholls, 2013a, 2014). All of these contributions focus on the particular context of political activism by undocumented migrants. Empirical analyses of protest by asylum-seekers are almost non-existent.<sup>6</sup>

The discipline of *migration studies* has at least in its sociological coinage ever since been sensitive to migrant experiences (Faist et al., 2013; Vertovec, 2009; Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2003). However, this strand of literature largely neglected the contentious side of transnational migration. A growing body of literature, commonly referred to as 'autonomy of migration' (Forschungsgruppe Transit Migration, 2008; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010), has stressed the inherent subversion in international migration, yet has largely avoided an empirical analysis of the trajectories and conditions of political mobilizations by migrants. The most explicit contribution to understanding migrant agency has been made in *critical citizenship studies*, where Engin Isin introduced the notion of 'acts of citizenship' (2008). He conceptualizes citizenship as social practices, also performed by marginalized migrants acting 'as if' they were entitled with citizenship rights (Isin & Nielsen, 2008). Along these lines, a burgeoning literature has emerged which aims at thinking migration politics 'from below'. The seminal edited volume 'Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement' by Peter Nyers and Kim Rygiel (Nyers & Rygiel, 2012), but also subsequent contributions from the same theoretical angle (Ataç et al., 2015, 2016; Stierl, 2012) have stressed the transformative effects of migrant agency on macro-institutions such as citizenship. However, the community of scholars has cultivated a profound scepticism towards social movement studies (see for example Stierl, 2012), which is why a bridge to the canon of social movements studies has rarely been built.

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<sup>6</sup> A notable exception in this regard is the research by Ilker Ataç on the 'refugee protest camp Vienna' (2016).

As this cursory overview shows, the academic reflection on migrant mobilizations remains still relatively scarce, scattered across various disciplines and poorly integrated.<sup>7</sup> Despite recent progress (see for example Monforte and Dufour 2013; Nicholls 2013a; Nicholls and Vermeulen 2012), Nina Eggert and Marco Giugni note in their chapter in the 2015 ‘Oxford Handbook of Social Movements’: ‘Work on migrants’ movements is particularly necessary, as this represents one of the main blind spots in the extant literature’ (Eggert & Giugni, 2015: 168). The scarcity is certainly not owed to ‘a lack of ‘raw material’ (Eggert & Giugni, 2015: 169) but rather to a misfit of dominant theories and a lack of dialogue across disciplines.

### **1.3. Exploring Forced Migrant Mobilizations**

The overarching heuristic interest of this thesis is located in the accentuated lacuna outlined above. It intends to empirically investigate how migrants themselves, as subaltern political agents, organize and perform political protest against their marginalization and stigmatization.

#### *A Terminological Note*

Due to the widespread terminological confusion and politicization of the terms ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’ (Carling, 2015; Scheel & Squire, 2014), a brief specification of the key actors of this research is paramount. In this thesis I use the term ‘forced migrant’, defined by the International Organization of Migration (IOM) in its 2000 ‘World Migration Report’ as any person who migrates

‘to escape persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human-made disasters, ecological degradation, or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood’ (International Organization of Migration, 2000: 8).

This encompassing term is chosen for both analytical and normative reasons. Firstly, the mobilizations I am investigating include all kinds of individuals with biographies of involuntary migration. Their official label ranges from ‘illegal’ migrant, to ‘geduldet’ [temporary exemption from deportation in German foreigner’s law], ‘asylum-seeker’ during status determination, ‘subsidiary protected’, ‘refugee’ recognized under the Geneva Convention or individuals who have obtained a permit to stay in the country of destination through other means (e.g. regularization). Indeed, it is more the rule than the exception that activists’ legal status change during the course of their activism. Some

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<sup>7</sup> For excellent overviews see Ataç et al., 2016; Cinalli, 2016; and Eggert & Giugni, 2015.

forced migrants apply for asylum, engage in activism, get legal refugee status granted and continue their activism. Others become activists as asylum-seekers and continue their resistance as illegalized migrants after their asylum claim has been rejected (Ataç et al., 2015; Jakob, 2016; T. Müller, 2012).

Secondly, the term ‘refugee’ has increasingly been used to distinguish ‘legitimate’ from ‘illegitimate’ reasons of migration, based on a legal definition which has been criticised widely. The Geneva Convention stipulates that the term ‘refugee’

‘shall apply to any person who (...) owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it’ (UN General Assembly, 1967).

Due to its focus on individual persecution and its exclusion of additional reasons of forced migration such as environmental degradation, extreme poverty, civil war etc., the convention and its underlying definition is considered anachronistic by various scholars (Betts, 2009, 2013; Fernández, 2015; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Loescher, Long, & Sigona, 2014; L. H. Malkki, 1995b). As a matter of fact, the Geneva convention reaffirmed the Western bloc’s priorities by the time it was drafted. Given the ideological confrontation between liberalism and socialism, political rights were granted more importance than economic rights, and political violence was prioritized over economic violence. Hence, the term ‘refugee’ was never a neutral category, but depended on power dynamics and political interests (Fassin, 2016b).<sup>8</sup>

The political nature of status attribution is also mirrored in the fact that, being granted ‘conventional refugee’ status on the basis of the Geneva Convention has become increasingly rare,

‘which does not mean that the real causes of its attribution have disappeared, those pertaining to violence and chaos in the country of origin (...). What has changed is the migration policies of the countries in the North, and the control that they exert over those of the South (...), and over those individuals hailing from them, no matter what the situations of violence, chaos or distress that provoked their departure’ (Agier, 2011: 35).

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<sup>8</sup> Chapter 4 elaborates extensively on the politicization of forced migration in Germany and France.



In consequence, a plethora of temporary, less protected statuses have proliferated (Agier, 2011).<sup>9</sup>

Thirdly, the term ‘refugee’ has hence been increasingly used to distinguish ‘legitimate’ from ‘illegitimate’ reasons of migration based on a legal definition, which ignores the slim line between ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ migration (see for a good comment Carling, 2015). For these reasons, the term ‘forced migration’ has been introduced:

‘To refer to ‘forced migrants’ is to highlight the extremity of conditions under which certain groups ‘decide’ to undertake the migratory journey. An emphasis on forced migration implies a series of factors such as political persecution, ethnic conflict, inequitable access to natural resources, declining living conditions, and chronic and pervasive human rights abuses marking a limited agency on the part of those migrating’ (Scheel & Squire, 2014).<sup>10</sup>

It is worth noting that there have been other attempts to re-appropriate the term ‘refugee’. A wide, political notion of the term has particularly gained prominence as a self-identification of forced migrant activists (‘Refugee Strike Berlin’, ‘Berlin Refugee Movement’ etc.). Yet, for instance, in Paris, self-organized groups and migrant rights groups explicitly avoid the term ‘refugee’ for its exclusive use in mainstream discourses and speak of ‘exiled’ [exilé] instead. For the reasons outlined above, I use ‘forced migrant’ in this dissertation as an encompassing term for precarious migrants with various legal status. Only if the specific status is important for analytical reasons, I refer to ‘undocumented migrant’, ‘asylum-seeker’, or ‘recognized refugee’.

### *The Scope of the Research Project*

Given the continuous scarcity of contributions on migrant activism from an explicit social movement perspective, this thesis has a strong inductive and explorative component. Yet, in an abductive research tradition,<sup>11</sup> it also draws from previous work on migrant activism

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<sup>9</sup> Wihtol de Wenden illustrates this development: ‘During 2014–15, Europe has been confronted with an unforeseen arrival of asylum-seekers from the Middle East: 625,000 asylum-seekers in 2014 and 1.2 million in 2015, out of whom less than half got a refugee status (45 per cent), shedding light on the difficulties to enter in the categories of Geneva Convention of 1951 (individual persecution or fear of persecution)’ (Wihtol de Wenden, 2017: 433).

<sup>10</sup> Some authors also advocate for caution in using ‘forced migration’ as it maintains an illusionary binary between ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ migration (see for example Scheel & Squire, 2014). They suggest avoiding a qualifier altogether, using the encompassing term ‘migrant’. Yet, in my view, this risks masking the particular realities of precarious (forced) migrants, which are paramount to understand their respective processes of political subjectivation.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 3 for an extensive elaboration on the epistemological and methodological approach adopted in this thesis.

and theories of political mobilization more broadly. It is particularly informed by three strands of literature:<sup>12</sup>

Firstly, it approaches migrant activism from a ‘players and arenas’ perspective (Jasper & Duyvendak, 2014), which investigates processes of contentious politics ‘from the bottom-up’. In the light of the structural obstacles for the political subjectivation of migrants, the research studies the micro-interactions forced migrants engage in at the local level, with a view to investigating how niches for political mobilization are identified, appropriated, expanded, contested and lost.

Secondly, the research adopts an explicitly spatial perspective to contentious politics (Auyero, 2006; D. G. Martin & Miller, 2003; Nicholls et al., 2013b). Such an approach allows to scrutinize the patterns of spatial and social exclusion common for many forced migrants in Europe, and to investigate processes of ‘radical place-making’ (Mitchell & Sparke, 2017), including spatialized repertoires of action and the effects of certain spatialities on mobilization and demobilization.

Thirdly, the thesis intends to span insights drawn from critical migration and citizenship studies, which have so far been rarely integrated into social movement studies. These approaches have broadened the conceptualization of migrant agency to the everyday practices or ‘invisible’ resistances by migrants in almost all contexts of restrictive border regimes (Ataç et al., 2015, 2016). Furthermore, I draw from literature on transnational migration (Faist et al., 2013; Pries, 2001) to study how the transnational life worlds and networks that most migrants inhabit shape their political activism in the localities of destination.

Generally, research oriented towards an interactionist perspective entails a strong inductive attention to particular configurations. It hence asks rather broad and diverse questions to capture the complexity of fluid micro-mobilizations (see Jasper 2014: 18).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The theoretical perspective will be further discussed and justified in Chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> For their seminal volume on an interactionist perspective, James Jasper and Jan Willem Duyvendak asked the contributors to consider the following set of questions ‘about their players’ relationships to other players and to arenas. How does this player interact with protest groups: what conflicts, cooperation, tensions, dilemmas? Does it tend to follow one strategy or many? Does it have one arena to which it is restricted, or in which its capacities are especially useful? How and when does it choose to enter an arena or exit from one? What is at stake? How well are the player’s goals and means understood by outsiders, especially by protestors? What are protestors’ images and expectations about the other player? What expectations does it have about the protestors with which it interacts? What schemas, stories, and stereotypes does it deploy? What capacities does it have for bringing other players into the engagement? When does it try to do this? When does it succeed? What are its primary allies? What types of outcomes are there? Do they lead to new arenas or end here? How are new arenas created?’ (Jasper, 2014: 18).

The ultimate goal of my research project is to contribute to the understanding of *how protest by forced migrants unfolds through interactions among players in arenas*. As a result, my interest in processes of political mobilizations and demobilization is guided by the following three sets of questions:

1. With what kind of players do forced migrants interact in contentious arenas? Along which lines are social ties made and unmade? What are ‘characteristic interactions’? How do ‘strategic dilemmas’ play out?
2. How does space influence the making and breaking of relationships within contentious arenas? Which spatialized repertoires of action are employed?
3. How do every-day experiences shape contentious arenas around forced migration?

### *Selecting the Arenas under Investigation*

According to Kathleen Blee, ‘[m]uch of the salient context of grassroots activism is local (Blee, 2012, p: 15). This is especially true for migrant mobilizations, which have particularly proliferated in large urban centres, as these specific spaces provide more favourable conditions for creating weak and strong ties both within migrant communities and with native pro-migrant organizations such as human rights NGOs, faith-based groups, the radical left and trade unions (McNevin, 2006; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016; Nicholls & Vermeulen, 2012; Plöger, 2014).

This study hence focuses on urban mobilizations and more specifically on contentious interactions unfolding at the local level. I have opted to compare forced migrant protests in two urban settings, Berlin and Paris. This selection builds upon previous research on the two countries, which has identified a number of important spatial and relational differences in the issue area of (forced) migration<sup>14</sup>. According to Rogers Brubaker, France and Germany represent two ideal-types of modern citizenship regimes - the German *ius sanguinis* and the French *ius solis* (Brubaker, 1992b). Koopmans et al. have found that such seemingly abstract differences have an impact on political mobilizations by migrants (Koopmans et al., 2005). Furthermore, the countries represent distinct ‘borderline citizenship regimes’ (Monforte & Dufour, 2011), in which daily lives for undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers differ strongly. Whereas the German asylum system is characterized by accentuated isolation and undocumented migrants often remain strongly controlled by the state (‘Duldung’), the daily life of asylum-seekers

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<sup>14</sup> See also Chapter 4 for an extensive overview of key similarities and differences in the context of forced migration in the two localities.

and undocumented migrants in Paris has been less constrained due to fewer controls, and established ethnic networks as well as access to the job market in a larger informal economy (Monforte & Dufour, 2011). Monforte has also shown that not only political opportunity structures differ, but also the availability of pro-migrant allies. Whereas in France, social movement organizations involved in migration and asylum issues are deeply entrenched in society and highly concentrated in Paris, the German case is much more fragmented, since contention related with migration issues is dispersed throughout the federal polity (Monforte 2014: 17). Despite these contextual differences, both cities have witnessed waves of forced migrant contention: Paris is a crucial case in this regard, as it constitutes the cradle of the *sans-papiers* movement in Europe, with regular episodes of contention since more than two decades. Berlin on the other hand, can be considered a relevant case, as it has been the nucleus of the most active and visible forced migrant mobilizations in the last years in Europe (Plöger, 2014) and has witnessed the largest arrival of forced migrants in Europe in the course of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’.<sup>15</sup>

Drawing from the tradition of abductive reasoning and cumulative knowledge production, this research is strongly informed by already existing scholarship on migrant activism in France and Germany, particularly the work of Siméant (1998), Monforte and Dufour (2011, 2013) as well as Nicholls and Uitermark (2016). Yet, it complements these contributions in various regards: Firstly, none of the previous contributions scrutinizes explicitly the political activism of asylum-seekers. Monforte and Dufour include German ‘refugee’ activists in their analysis, yet treat them as ‘undocumented’ migrants. My research instead, intends to shed light on the particularities of asylum regimes and their impact on political activism as well as the overlap or non-overlap with undocumented migrants’ struggles. Secondly, in contrast to Nicholls and Uitermark, my research is not so much interested in the historical perspective of, and transformations in, migrant rights movements, but rather in the contentious interactions unfolding within specific arenas. By focusing on shorter time frames, I believe to add more specific insights into the spatial and relational patterns at play. Lastly, my research scrutinizes episodes of contention in time frames that have not been scrutinized so far. Uitermark and Nicholls’s analysis on France ‘fades out’ in the mid-2000s and hence misses two highly influential waves of contention – the occupation of the ‘Bourse du Travail’ 2008-2010 and the ‘La Chapelle arena’, unfolding from 2015 onwards. Monforte and Dufour’s comparison of Germany

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<sup>15</sup> For a more extensive discussion of ‘casing’ in qualitative research in general and the approach taken in this project, see also section 3. on methodology.

and France is limited to document analysis without extensive fieldwork studying the actors in their ‘natural’ setting. Besides, they do not cover the most disruptive and visible wave of contention in Germany, also referred to as the ‘Oranienplatz-movement’ from 2012 until 2014. In the light of these lacunae, my research serves as both empirical and theoretical complements to previous contributions on (forced) migrant activism in the two countries while also expanding the body of knowledge on marginalized actors more broadly. It explores the relations forced migrants establish, as well as the spaces they enact and embody to contest the processes which lead to their marginalization, the denial of their subjectivity.

In comparing contentious arenas in two urban (and national) settings, my research project adopts a specific type of case-oriented comparison.<sup>16</sup> It scrutinizes and thickly describes processes of political mobilization by forced migrants in two locations, Berlin and Paris, on the basis of various dimensions – including an attention to interactions, the dynamics and quality of social ties and space. In line with an arena-approach to contentious politics, however, the unit of analysis is the contentious arena, not the city. The case-oriented comparison in my research consists of a total of four arenas, two in each location. From a comparison of processes in highly distinct contexts, as well as comparing arenas within one location, I intend to generate insights on the patterns of interactions and strategical dilemmas ‘typical’ to such kinds of political activism while at the same time pointing to the respective specificities of the cases at hand. Furthermore, my research also underlines that the arenas are not wholly independent: they are embedded in local contexts, in histories of interaction and in transnational social spaces of migration and contention (see e.g. Chapter 8). Thus, they tend to be ‘place-based’ – but not necessarily ‘place-bound’ (Massey cited in Blee, 2012: 15).

Given that the issue of forced migrant activism remains in its infancy as far as academic research and knowledge production are concerned, the project is still located in the realm of ‘discovery’ (Keating and della Porta 2008: 271). Methodologically<sup>17</sup>, the research project therefore relies on a triangulation of different qualitative methods including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Besides its strength in studying novel phenomena, qualitative and particularly ethnographic

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<sup>16</sup> See also Chapter 3 for a more extensive discussion of this methodological perspective.

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 3 ‘How to study precarious interactions in contentious arenas around forced migration’ provides further explanations of the methodology adopted in this research, including a detailed description of methods used, the research process and ethical questions arising in research with forced migrants.

approaches are also useful for (and often the only way) to obtain information on vulnerable groups: elusive information can often only be obtained if research resembles more ‘normal communication’ and even more importantly if it can be adapted to the respective interview situation. Following the interactionist perspective outlined above, my research is based on data gathered on four contentious arenas (two in Berlin and Paris each), involving various players such as forced migrant activists but also their interaction with pro-beneficiaries, local politics and the media.

While the respective results derive from these specific cases, the ambition of an interactionist perspective goes tentatively beyond that. One of the appeals of the ‘*players and arenas*’ approach is its focus on both the particularity of specific episodes of contention and ‘[grasping] the types of strategic interactions that can be considered “characteristic”’ (Duyvendak & Fillieule 2014: 312). This allows tentative propositions of regular interactions or ‘strategic dilemmas, typical of certain players in specific arenas’ (ibid). In this sense, I intend to describe the characteristic interactions within contentious arenas around forced migration in which forced migrants intervene as political subjects with rights and voices. Considering that my research includes a comparative and diachronic perspective, the ambition is to generate insights and theories of value (yet to be ‘tested’) beyond these two specific cases.

#### **1.4. Toward an Engaged Social Science**

Above, I have provided ample arguments to support the academic relevance of this research. Yet, in my view, social scientists have furthermore a responsibility to contribute to understanding key social problems in order to inform potential paths forward.

From this perspective, the proliferation of migrant mobilizations points to one of the key social questions of this time. Forced migrants embody the contradiction of our global situation. Poverty, war, exploitation, environmental degradation due to climate change, among others, remain unequally distributed at a global scale. Vastly disparate life and survival chances are importantly determined by the ‘lottery of birth place’ (Betts, 2009; Gibney, 2014; Scherr, 2014). While root causes of forced migration are multifaceted, many have argued that they are importantly co- and re-produced by particular modes of production in a globalized capitalist economy with an unequal distribution of gains and losses (Brand & Wissen, 2012; Mezzadra, 2010; Zizek, 2015), post-colonial continuities and geopolitical patterns of domination and dependency (see eg. Hardt & Negri, 2000). In current times, according to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman,

‘mobility has become the most powerful and most coveted stratifying factor’. The global elites are able to cross borders at will, while the poor are meant to stay at home: ‘the riches are global, the misery is local’ (Bauman, 1998: 9, 74). According to Thomas Faist, ‘we live, materially speaking, in one [of] the most unequal worlds in all of human history, ever since the recording of income and wealth data in the early nineteenth century’ (Faist, 2017: 19).

(Forced) migration can be understood as a consequence of such global disparities and at times a subversive attempt to undermine their perpetuation. Consequently, the very presence of migrants is fundamentally political, as it highlights a global reality (and all-time normality of cross-border mobility) and unmask the social problem of global social injustice. It raises fundamental questions of freedom of circulation, legitimate reasons for migrating, the ethics of border controls and many other issues at stake. Numerous migration scholars have argued that a smooth ‘migration governance’ is illusionary and current border protection schemes are prone to human rights violations (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010; Pécoud & De Guchteneire, 2006; Scherr, 2016a; Weinzierl & Lisson, 2007). They often deeply interfere with human dreams, opportunities and fundamental survival chances.

For decades, global disparities and resulting human suffering have been answered with multiple practices of humanitarianism. Their positive effects for millions of individuals cannot be overstated. Yet, critical scholars have also pointed at the pitfalls of ‘humanitarian reason’ (Fassin, 2012). A starting point for many of these contributions is the assumption that an emphasis on human suffering constitutes a prerequisite of humanitarian action. Miriam Ticktin (2011, p. 14), for instance, argues that the constitution of suffering victims serves as a moral impetus for action and a key ‘political device’ to create the conditions for care and compassion. However, such an incentive to act is blamed for its de-subjectifying qualities since it portrays migrants as ‘mute victims’ who are devoid of agency (see Rajaram, 2002). This reduces them to their basic biological needs, such as food and shelter, and constitutes them as ‘bare life’ (Agamben, 1998). According to Michel Agier,

[t]he “vulnerability” of humanitarian language is the “bare life” of philosophical language (...): mere biological existence (zoè) without social existence (bios), life placed under a “ban”, i.e. a space of exception set apart from the common world but still under control’ (Agier, 2011: 147).

As a consequence,

‘the only alternative offered [to forced migrants] can be summed up as either passive submission to humanitarian assistance or the quest for illegal solutions and channels. The passive refugee is the norm; the active refugee is a scandalous hypothesis’ (Agier, 2011: 155).

Thus, at times unintentionally, recipients of humanitarian care are constituted as deficient ‘others’ who are incapable of political speech and self-determination, thus, resigned to a place of inferiority and exclusion (cf. Johnson, 2014) – eventually, they are ‘denied the right to present narratives that may disturb the dominant *truth* on asylum’ (Sigona, 2014, italics in original).

Political mobilizations by migrants claiming rights and recognition in the public sphere, hence, not only politicize their presence and by this, rub salt in the wound of a global reality of stratified rights and patterns of exclusion. They also constitute a public transgression of their assigned role as outsiders in nationally defined polities. In Rancièrian terms, political protest by ‘non-citizens’ constitutes a ‘rupture’ of the political order urging re-negotiations of rights and belonging (May, 2008; Rancière, 2010; Schwiertz, 2016). Migrant activists refuse to quietly accept structures of inequality, to be an object of seemingly smooth ‘governance of migration’ or humanitarian aid, and appropriate what Hannah Arendt has called the ‘right to have rights’ (1968). Building upon this Arendtian distinction between the pre-political ‘herstellen’ and the political ‘handeln’, for Étienne Balibar, this ‘right to have rights’ is not legal, but essentially political, it is fundamentally a ‘right to politics’ (see Ingram, 2015: p.218), which itself aims at the invention of new rights, new inclusions and empowerments of marginalized populations. In speaking as subalterns against all odds, migrant mobilizations disrupt the established ‘order of things’, they provoke a (re-)action and foremost constitute a political subject, which has been governed, but whose voice has been muted. Forced migrant protests, thus, constitute what Isin has termed ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin, 2008). Instead of requiring a formal authorization, acts of citizenship are practices through which subaltern, marginalized groups enact rights, ‘as if they were citizens’.

‘To investigate acts of citizenship [...] requires a focus on those moments when, regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens – or, better still, as those to whom the right to have rights is due’ (Isin, 2008: 18).

It is for these contexts, which political mobilizations of forced migrants expose – indeed, embody - what Angela Davis, eminent figure of the US civil-rights movement, has called the ‘refugee movement (...) the movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’, as it is ‘the movement that



is challenging the effects of global capitalism, it's the movement that is calling for civil rights for all human beings.<sup>18</sup>

The actors involved are political subjects – neither victims nor heroes. Many of their practices are precarious and contradictory. Indeed, the fragmented nature of their actions and the multiple internal conflicts among them illustrate the structural difficulties of precarious actors to organize and be recognized as political agents demanding rights and recognition in the public sphere. Following these groups in greater depth helps us understand the obstacles of precarious activism and the contentious politics of marginalized subjectivity more broadly.

### **1.5. Outline of the Manuscript**

In the remainder of this short introductory chapter, I will provide an outline of this manuscript to orientate the reader. The dissertation is structured in three parts.

After the introduction, *Part I* of this thesis is dedicated to an extensive discussion of the theoretical and methodological foundations of the research project. Chapter 2 presents and justifies the theoretical perspective bridging social movement and critical migration studies. Chapter 3 clarifies epistemological positions and methodological choices, and points at practical challenges and ethical considerations emerging while conducting research with forced migrants. Chapter 4 concludes the first part of the manuscript by introducing comparatively the two ‘borderline citizenship regimes’ (Monforte & Dufour, 2011) in Germany and France. This contextualization of the empirical cases studied subsequently in part II shows that contentious arenas around forced migration in Berlin and Paris are embedded in highly distinct spatial, relational and administrative settings.

*Part II* of this manuscript presents evidence on political mobilizations by forced migrants in Berlin and Paris. It draws from the fieldwork conducted (archival work, qualitative interviews and participant observation) in both Berlin (January –September 2016, January-March 2017) and Paris (April-July 2017) and presents findings on the issue of political mobilizations by forced migrants in the two cities. As noted above, I focus on two contentious arenas in each locality, with a view to identifying spatial and relational patterns in forced migrant activism. Given the explorative nature of this PhD, the chapters are complementary and not strictly designed in a comparative manner.

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<sup>18</sup> Angela Davis during a meeting with self-organized forced migrant activists in Berlin on 14 May 2015. Statement recorded and accessible on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/127986504>.

Chapter 5 targets a highly influential contentious arena around forced migrants in the recent history of migrant mobilizations in France, the occupation of the ‘Bourse du Travail’, the Paris labour council, from 2008-2010. This chapter has a dual purpose: firstly, it exposes the interactionist dispositions for recent mobilizations, which evidently do not unfold in a vacuum but regularly relate to interactions during episodes of contention in the past. Secondly, in adding a diachronic perspective, the section contributes to the identification of ‘typical interactions’ in forced migrant activism.

Chapter 6 scrutinizes the largest wave of contention around migration in Germany, the so-called ‘Oranienplatz’ or ‘O-Platz’-movement that developed in Berlin between 2012 and 2014. It traces the spatial and relational dynamics within this contentious arena and documents how it emerged and fragmented in consequence of complex interactions between various actors including the church, local and regional administration, various kinds of supporters and the forced migrants involved.

Chapter 7 explores forced migrant activism Paris between 2015 and 2016, an arena of contention referred to as ‘the La Chapelle arena’. Focusing on the spatial and relational patterns in the most disruptive contentious arena involving asylum-seekers in the French capital, the chapter identifies specificities of asylum activism in France as well as cleavages between a well-established ‘sans-papiers movement’ and a ‘refugee movement’ in its infancy.

Chapter 8 homes in on the active yet fragmented movement of forced migrant activism in Berlin between 2015 and 2016. Based on ethnographic fieldwork with an activist group, the chapter traces the making and breaking of social ties. It also points at forced migrant activism being both embedded in transnational biographies and rooted in social networks in Berlin. Interestingly, this chapter also hints at the existence of a transnational contentious space of forced migrants combining the sphere of asylum-seeker activism in Berlin with that of ‘sans-papiers’ activism in Paris.

The final *Part III* moves away from the specific arenas scrutinized in Part II to identify communalities and particularities in political mobilizations by forced migrants. This way, it clarifies the contribution of this work with regard to the existing theoretical literature on political activism by forced migrants. Chapter 9 outlines patterns of interaction, strategic dilemmas, and spatial configurations influential for forced migrant activism across space and time. It also lays out the core differences rooted in distinct contexts and locally specific histories of contention. Finally, the approach of comparing four contentious arenas around forced migration unveils that contentious arenas are both

place- and time-based but not place- and time-bound. Contentious arenas build upon histories of interaction and are (increasingly) connected in transnational contentious spaces.

The concluding Chapter 10 recalls the key purpose of the project, explains its main contributions in theoretical and empirical terms, but also points to its limitations and potential areas of further research. In the annex, the interested reader can find an anonymized list of all the interviews conducted.

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Framework: Spatial and Relational Perspectives on Migrant Mobilizations

‘The study of weakly resourced and less organized forms of protest, on its part, requires that we pay more attention to the sociological analysis of constituencies, the patterns of their immediate social environment and the disruptive activities embedded within them. The macroscopic pictures of political contentions need thus to be complemented by a microscopic analysis of the social fabric of disruptive practices.’ (Lahusen, 2014: 157)

#### 2.1. Introduction

In the last two decades, forced migrants have increasingly organized public protest against restrictive border politics and exclusion from rights and recognition in countries in the Global North. With highly disruptive public articulations of political claims through hunger strikes, marches, inner city protest camps, lip-sewing and squatting, many have opted against hiding in the shadow. Despite their precarious legal status, largely hostile contexts and limited social and cultural capital as newcomers in ‘host’ societies, forced migrants have appropriated niches to organize collectively, against all odds.

While the introduction set the stage and outlined the scope of this research project, I will in the following outline its theoretical framework in greater detail. Given the relative scarcity of academic literature on the issue, the project has a strong inductive and explorative component. Yet, it also embraces and combines existing literatures which touch upon the topic, including those on ‘weakly-resourced’ movements (Chabanet & Royall, 2014a), migrants’ activism (Ataç et al., 2016; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016; Zepeda-Millán, 2017) and ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin, 2017; Isin & Nielsen, 2008).<sup>19</sup> As

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<sup>19</sup> For a similar approach, see the introductory chapter to the edited volume ‘Solidarity Mobilizations in the Refugee Crisis’. Contentious Moves’ (della Porta, 2018a).

noted in the introduction, social movement studies have largely omitted activism of the resource-poor. Certainly,

[t]his does not mean that there are no protests in moments of crisis when threats to the protestor's very survival are more serious: Movements of the unemployed have emerged during peaks of economic recession and peasants have rebelled in times of famine' (Mattoni & della Porta 2014: 279).

(Forced) migrant mobilizations in times of tightening migration policies constitute an important addition to this list:

'Given the hostile climate facing immigrants and governments' frenzied attempts to secure their borders, one might have expected immigrants to adopt survival strategies that would allow them to remain hidden and under the radar. Engaging in assertive, highly visible and sometimes disruptive political actions like protests, occupations, and hunger strikes would seem counterintuitive at best and unwise at worst' (Nicholls & Uitermark 2016: 6).

Those working on movements of the marginalized have stressed that the established theoretical approaches in social movement studies 'should not be considered as infallible tool-kits' and need to be adapted to the specific characteristics of 'weakly resourced' challengers (Chabanet & Royall, 2014b) and migrant mobilizations (Ataç, 2016; Nicholls, 2014; Stierl, 2012; Zepeda-Millán, 2016). Amongst others, Nicholls has suggested studying small 'niche openings' rather than broad political opportunities, which rarely change significantly in short periods of time (Nicholls, 2014) in the realm of migration. Nicholls and Uitermark have furthermore underlined the role of grievances, arguing that restrictive and exclusionary measures against 'real people who happen to be immigrants' (2016: 8) produce multiple fissures and cracks in seemingly hermetic orders. Borrowing from Foucault, it is argued that 'where there are borders, there are resistances' (ibid).

In this vein, my research draws from a combination of three relatively recent strands of literature in social movement and critical migration studies: Firstly, the 'relational turn' in social movement studies has deviated from (or complemented) a dominant structuralism in previous theories such as the 'political process' perspective and drawn attention to the meso-level. Through this shift, concepts such as 'networks' (Diani & McAdam, 2003; Diani & Mische, 2015), 'fields' (Bottero & Crossley, 2011; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012) and 'arenas' (Jasper & Duyvendak, 2014) were (re)popularized. Particularly the most recent discussion on 'players and arenas' has stressed the role of

interactions (within the movement and with foes and allies) for amorphous and fluid social forms such as social movements (section 2.2.).

Secondly, the research is informed by an in-depth scrutiny of the spatialities of contention (Daphi, 2017; della Porta, Fabbri, & Piazza, 2013; Nicholls, 2008; Nicholls et al., 2013b) in which the specific geographies of control and contestation of the actors involved are studied in greater detail. As Nicholls has explored in various contributions, the local level and particularly the urban context can serve as an incubator for breeding political protest of precarious residents, due to the relational qualities of specific places (Miller & Nicholls, 2013; Nicholls, 2008, 2009) (section 2.3.).

A spatial sensitivity bridges to the third area of inspiration for this project: transnational migration and citizenship studies (section 2.4.). The extant literature on transnationalism has pointed to a widespread ‘methodological nationalism’ (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2003) in the social sciences and has urged scrutiny of the ‘transnational social spaces’ (Faist, 1998; Faist et al., 2013; Pries, 2001). Furthermore, numerous studies precisely on the topic of migrant mobilizations have been produced in the tradition of ‘autonomy of migration’ and ‘critical citizenship studies’ (for an excellent overview see Ataç, Rygiel and Stierl, 2016). These strands of literature have pointed to the inherent transgressive quality of human mobility and the everyday practices of resistances by migrants in almost all contexts of restrictive border regimes (Ataç et al., 2015, 2016).

In combining various strands of theory, this project capitalizes on a ‘historic strength’ of political science, namely ‘its eclecticism’ (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010). Such an approach is rather common in social movement studies, which have ever since profited from a combination and cross-fertilization of various strands of literature in sociology and political science (della Porta, 2014c). Concretely, I argue that in combination, these three literatures help to bring forward the agency of migrants that is often hidden in many contributions on migration as well as in social movement studies. I will subsequently outline the above-mentioned three strands of literature in greater detail.

## **2.2. A Dynamic Relational Perspective**

### *Relational Approaches and ‘Weakly-Resourced’ Actors in Social Movement Studies*

Quotes such as ‘contentious politics is nothing if it is not relational’ (Tarrow, 2011: 14) and ‘networks matter’ (Passy, 2003) are unequivocal proof that the relevance of networks and interactions for political mobilizations has become uncontested in the field. While

the literature on the issue has considerably diversified in the last decade, adding cultural perspectives to the dominant structuralist core (Diani & Mische, 2015; Jasper & Duyvendak, 2014), the roots of a relational approach to social movements date back to the 1970s. Proponents of the ‘resource mobilization theory’ to social movements (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) had already argued that networks provide important resources for social movement actors. Social movement literature has since then widely demonstrated that certain resources such as recruits, money and trust are indispensable for transforming sparks of resistance into sustained mobilizations (della Porta & Diani, 2009; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). Mark Granovetter’s work on ‘weak ties’ (Granovetter, 1973) has strongly inspired research on the role of brokers and the diffusion of material and cognitive resources within a movement space.<sup>20</sup> Building upon Granovetter, Alessandro Pizzorno (1986) and also Florence Passy (2003) have demonstrated that not only weak ties, but particularly *strong ties* are important for the participation in social movements in situations of uncertainty as they provide individuals with trust. Trust is for evident reasons even more important for high-risk activism, in which heavy repression is considered a realistic and often real consequence.<sup>21</sup> In a recent synthesis of existing scholarship on the role of networks, Nicholls argues that

‘different types of networks perform different functions in coordinating activists: weak ties help circulate information to different activists, and strong ties enable activists to contribute their scarce resources to risky collective struggles’ (2009: 83).

Networks including weak and strong ties are of particular importance for resource-poor actors structurally depending on the support of more established players to compensate their lack of economic, social and cultural capital (Chabanet, 2001; Chabanet & Royall, 2014b; Nicholls, 2013c; Passy, 2001). Cinalli has proven in his contributions on political altruism and pro-beneficiary activism how resources can travel from the more resourceful to the less resourceful (Cinalli 2016).<sup>22</sup> In line, Siméant has noted in her research on undocumented activism, that ‘the mobilizations of the sans-papiers, to be precise, are never exclusively mobilizations of sans-papiers. They are always complemented by some parts of the population that we will qualify as “supporters”’ (Siméant, 1998: 25, author’s translation from French). While native allies are considered indispensable for immigrant

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<sup>20</sup> For an excellent overview see also Miller (2013).

<sup>21</sup> See also Doug McAdams work on the ‘Freedom Summer’ in the US South (1986).

<sup>22</sup> For a general overview on pro-beneficiary movements and ‘political altruism, see also Giugni & Passy (2001).

mobilizations (Cappiali, 2016; Giugni & Passy, 2001; Voss & Bloemraad, 2011), research on networks of activism have also pointed out that the embeddedness in networks entails both opportunities and constraints (Diani & McAdam, 2003; Nicholls, 2013a, 2013c). For the specific context of undocumented migrant activism, Nicholls has stressed the importance of ties to strong native allies in the US, whereas Cappiali has focused on the ‘obstructive’ effects of undocumented migrants’ embeddedness into networks of the radical left in Italy (2017). Indeed, these equivocal findings illustrate the ambivalence and sensitivity inherent in relationships between forced migrants, directly affected by exclusion and repression, and altruistic pro-beneficiaries. Departing from case studies of forced migrant activism in Berlin and Paris, I intend to unpack key mechanisms structuring such relationships beyond specific contexts.

#### *From Static Networks to Dynamic Interactions*

The bulk of scholarship on networks and social movements has adopted a structuralist perspective (Cinalli & Fuglister, 2008; Diani, 2000; Diani & McAdam, 2003; Parenti & Caiani, 2013). In a recent reconsideration, Mario Diani and Ann Mische have advocated for a tentative opening to relational approaches. Among the important blind spots of classical network research is their widespread ignorance of the meanings actors attach to social relations and how they change over time – hence a temporal (or dynamic) and cultural complement to the analysis of structural shapes of networks.

‘[I]f collectivities are best theorized as complex bundles of multiple social relations, it is also necessary to look at the properties of the relational patterns that connect individual and organizational actors, as well as non-agentic elements such as events or cultural forms, and to examine their evolution over time. This in turn requires that we replace a view of movements as sets of discrete cases with one focussing on collective action fields. (...) We should note that the concept of ‘field’ is both structural and cultural; it refers to how actors are positioned in social space by their relations and affiliations, as well as how they endow those relations with meaning through mutual orientation and discursive positioning’ (Diani & Mische, 2015: 307).

Others have taken a much more decisive stance in criticising structural explanations of social movements in general:

‘[S]tructuralist analyses have been particularly problematic for (the research on) social movements, since the latter are the least structural, the least routinized, the most challenging of everything fixed and stable’ (Duyvendak & Fillieule 2014: 298).

Jan Willem Duyvendak and Olivier Fillieule concisely summarize the growing unease in



social movement studies with the established structuralist toolkit of the discipline. The traditional variant of network approaches is included in this criticism, as they usually assume relatively stable shapes of networks in their quantitative empirical analyses. James Jasper is among the protagonists of a recent trend in theories of protest ‘toward the micro rather than the macro, and toward interpretive and cultural rather than materialist approaches’ (Jasper 2014: 9). Both in his single-authored monographs (1997, 2008) and collaborations (Goodwin, Jasper, & Poletta, 2009; Jasper & Duyvendak, 2014), Jasper has observed a fundamental misfit between relatively static theories and the highly fluid, amorphous and elusive social phenomena they intend to capture. In particular, the volume ‘Players and Arenas’, co-edited with Duyvendak (Jasper & Duyvendak, 2014), outlined the contours of an interactionist perspective in social movement studies which highlights time, interaction and process, all of which are downplayed in more structural models of contention (Jasper 2014: 22). The seminal book describes social movements as complex micro-interactions of various actors (‘players’) within material and social spaces (‘arenas’) that are specific to the contentious issue at hand. These reflections both build upon and criticize the popular notion of ‘social field’ introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (1994), which had resonated strongly in the French social movement community and beyond (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; Mathieu, 2012; Péchu, 2006). Despite the existing analogies in these two conceptualizations, particularly the focus on interactions, Bourdieu’s definition of field suggested relative stability in boundaries and actors within these social forms. In the conclusion to ‘Players and Arenas’, Duyvendak and Fillieule hence argue:

‘[t]he sphere of social movement players does not seem sufficiently institutionalized, structured, and unified to correspond to Bourdieu’s definition (...) the notion of the field suggests fixed boundaries demarcating a finite list of competitors. Now, the particularity of protest struggles is that the spatial limits are both shifting over time and specific to the causes concerned’ (2014: 304).

Despite their ad-hoc creation and fluidity, interactions between players in arenas do not unfold in a social vacuum. On the contrary, ‘dispositionalist interactionism’ (Duyvendak & Fillieule 2014: 295) conceives interactions as being rooted in established social norms, histories of interactions and identities of the players involved (Duyvendak & Fillieule 2014: 299). Similar to social facts, these patterns of interaction can be relatively stable over time despite their social constructionist origin.

An interactionist perspective deviates strongly from previous analytic lenses. Jasper claims that:

‘the main constraints on what protestors can accomplish are not determined directly by economic and political structures so much as they are imposed by other players with different goals and interests’ (2014: 9).

Indeed,

‘the goals of compound players are especially unstable, because factions and individuals are forever competing to make their own goals into the official goals of the team’ (ibid: 10).

Dominant social movement perspectives tend to reify homogeneity, while its constituent parts often are highly heterogeneous – and full of internal contestation (ibid: 12). It is hence logical that compound actors (of which social movements are a particularly elusive, unstable variant) are always shifting, emerging, splitting, growing and shrinking.

This makes an interactionist perspective particularly valuable for understanding mobilizations of forced migrants. If political protest by comparatively privileged actors (such as large numbers of the participants in the environmental and global justice movements) struggle to sustain organizational structures and continuity, the additional hurdles to leave the shadows and organize collectively in public are evident for marginalized challengers. Forced migrants are a highly heterogeneous group, diverse with regard to origin, religion, gender, age, class and ‘race’, to name but a few (Sigona, 2014). Consequently,

‘[t]here are a thousand multifarious refugee experiences and a thousand refugee figures whose meanings and identities are negotiated in the process of displacement in time and place’ (Soguk, 1999: 4).

All these characteristics can provide additional obstacles for collective identity formation, and even more so, for sustained mobilizations (see also Schröder, 2016).

Nicholls has accordingly underlined the importance of temporary ‘niche-openings’ (2013) and small fissures in structurally hermetic environments, upon which immigrants act politically. By definition, such niches can only be occupied by small groups, which is why conflicts and divisions on strategies within collectivities of challengers (ibid) are at the core of such precarious mobilizations. Processes of mobilizations by forced migrants are for instance challenged by an accentuated ‘fractal’ process (Mische, 2014) due to highly different players involved in terms of class, race, gender and legal status amongst others. Players are hence also arenas in which each collective player can be broken into sub-players, each of whom can in turn be further subdivided, all the way down to individuals (Jasper 2014: 12).

An interactionist perspective is furthermore instructive, as resource-poor actors depend on the support with more powerful allies. The contentious acts of emancipation around forced migration are characterized by sensitive relationships between migrants and native allies such as human rights NGOs, as well as radical-left and antiracist grassroots-groups. Contentious arenas around forced migration are moreover strongly shaped by the interaction with state agents, trying to co-opt, pacify or repress protest, which disrupts the established order of things in exclusive citizenship regimes (see also section 2.4. on ‘acts of citizenship’).

In contentious arenas, complex and volatile configurations of various players with different interests and identities play out. In this dynamic process, the political activities of excluded actors are determined. The concept of arenas appears therefore of particular heuristic value for the research endeavour at hand.

### **2.3. A Space-Sensitive Perspective**

#### *The Relational Qualities of Place and Social Movement Spaces*

Almost simultaneously with the relational turn, social movement studies have undergone a spatial turn (Leitner, Sheppard, & Sziarto, 2008; D. G. Martin & Miller, 2003; Nicholls et al., 2013b; Sewell, 2001; Tilly, 2000), relatively late compared to other disciplines:

‘where the ‘spatial turn’ has transformed many areas of social and economic scholarship, research on social movements and contentious politics has generally downplayed the spatial constitution and context of its central concepts such as identity, grievances, political opportunities, and resources. As a result, this body of scholarship remains by and large aspatial (...)’ (Martin & Miller 2003: 143).

Since then, significant progress has been made. Most importantly, *Spaces of Contention*, a volume edited by Walter Nicholls, Byron Miller and Justin Beaumont (Nicholls et al., 2013b) provided a first systematic overview of the multiple spatialities and their co-implications for contentious politics. Most analyses build upon Henri Lefebvre’s work, who has revolutionized the reflection on space with his claim of space being socially produced and constantly re-enacted in everyday life (Lefebvre 2000, 2003). According to Lefebvre, space is not a ‘neutral container, a blank canvas which is filled in by human activity’ (Hubbard & Kitchin 2011: 4) but instead a social product, made by social relations and social activity. It is hence inherently relational (Lefebvre 2000: 48, Schmid 1998). Space is produced by a myriad of different actors in and through different dimensions, including material space, social space and symbolic space (Lefebvre 2000: 48 f.). Informed by these insights, social movement scholars have distinguished four

spatialities and scrutinized their role for contentious politics: place, networks, scale and mobility (Leitner et al., 2008; Nicholls et al., 2013b). All investigate the interaction of geography and social relations:

‘Space matters because it is relational. It is the medium through which all social relations are made or broken – and making and breaking relationships is at the core of all questions of collective action’ (Miller 2013: 286).

It has been extensively shown that certain environments are more favourable for providing resources for political protest than others (Nicholls et al., 2013b; Sewell, 2001; Uitermark et al., 2012):

‘Spatial location enables and constrains co-presence. In order for persons to interact with one another, they must be brought into each other’s presence, either personally and bodily or in some mediated fashion (...)’ (Sewell 2001: 57).

Geographical proximity provides more opportunities for new connections and relationships to establish; ‘it reduces the costs and risks associated with making these links happen’ (Nicholls 2009: 83). As banal as it might sound: place sets the base for collective action to evolve. Face-to-face interactions are favourable for creating affective feelings among protesters: ‘(...) one of the strategic values of place is that it provides favourable geographic conditions for relatively strong-tie networks to develop between different activists’ (Nicholls 2009: 84). Furthermore, William Sewell and many others have shown that safe places

‘of one kind or another are a *sine qua non* of social movements. Oppositional movements need to control spaces in order to organize their activities and to recruit activists without being subject to crippling surveillance and repression by the state (...)’ (Sewell 2001: 69, italics added by the author).

Place is relevant not only in material, physical terms, but also in its symbolic dimension. For theorists such as Iris Marion Young (1990), Doreen Massey (1991, 2004, 2005), Tim Cresswell (2006) and Sewell (2001), places are an active medium through which identities are created and contested. Interactions taking place in and through concrete places are crucial to the construction of social identities. Sewell emphasises that by occupying symbolic locations,

‘protest marches and demonstrations not only gain the public limelight but make a particular sort of statement – that the cause they represent belongs at the top of the national agenda. But while insurgent movements make use of the pre-existing meaning of places, they can also – either intentionally or unintentionally – transform the significance of protest locations’ (Sewell 2001: 65).

Protesters regularly use symbolic places (e.g. public spaces including central streets and

squares, government buildings etc.) to underline their claims. Protest events organized in capital cities convey explicitly or implicitly a *claim to centrality*. Scholarship on memories and social movements (Zamponi, 2013) has shown how challengers strategically tailor claims to resonate with the ‘public memory’ (ibid: 1). In their account of three environmentalist campaigns in Italy, Donatella della Porta et al. demonstrate how the ‘symbolic contestation of the conception of space interacted with the physical occupation of some sites, that not only acquired high symbolic meaning but also had a strong effect on the protest itself, allowing for the development of intense relations up to the formation of shared (territorially based) identities’ (2013: 29). ‘Putting protest in place’ (della Porta et al., 2013) consequently requires to consider both the material and symbolic dimension of place.

Taking these relational qualities of place seriously helps to understand why most social movements are formed around place-based hubs, in which personal, regular interaction feeds processes of up-shifting in scales. As noted above, in order to get heard and organize disruptive protest, marginalized actors need to build relationships with more established actors to access the resources urgently needed for protest, such as information, money, personnel, logistics etc. Not all places have these ‘relational qualities’ (Nicholls & Uitermark 2016: 11).

In the tradition of spatial perspectives on collective action, a sub-strand of literature has emerged on the particular role of the urban context. Nicholls and his colleagues have amply demonstrated how the urban ‘breeds’ contention, both by creating grievances for a *right to the city* (Castells, 1983) and as an incubator for the realization of *rights through the city* (Nicholls & Vermeulen, 2012) that are not limited to the urban structure (such as immigrant rights, LGBTQI rights) (see also Miller & Nicholls 2013; Nicholls et al. 2013b; Nicholls 2009). It is more common to find vibrant social movement scenes and large migrant communities in cities, both important milieus for incubation of marginalized claims in by and large hostile political and discursive opportunity structures. Drawing from the context of undocumented migrant activism in the US, Chris Zepeda-Millán has demonstrated that dense social networks among migrants can be, indeed, the ‘weapons of the (not) so weak’, even if they have previously not been politicised (2016). Meindert Fennema and Jean Tillie found that the level of migrant communities’ political

engagement is largely affected by the density of ethnic organisational networks (1999; 2001; see also Eggert & Pilati 2014).<sup>23</sup>

Beyond the specific analysis of the particular constellations in urban structures, it has been argued that for all kinds of movements, ‘the crystallization of a relatively permanent and coherent form of local organization, though not sufficient, is a necessary condition for broader kinds of political action’ (Harvey cited in Nicholls 2009: 80). As various studies have shown, social movements need ‘sufficient grounding in local milieus, in particular existing organizations and networks, if they are to mobilize resources’ (Anheier 2003: 53). Stressing relational qualities of place hence entails understanding the local level as a crucial *scale*, specifically, but not only to study mobilizations of marginalized groups.

Nicholls has argued that social movements are ‘uneven’ terrains, being asymmetrically structured around some people and places (e.g. cities or neighbourhoods) (2011). The resulting movement ‘hubs’ often become magnetic, attracting activists based in other places to join hubs and by this reinforcing their importance and allowing for the sustainability of contentious activity. Understanding social movements hence requires not only an explicit analysis of concrete places, but also of how distant locations are connected into social spaces and how mobility is used in creating and sustaining social networks. Four key mechanisms have been identified in this regard: ‘brokerage’, the connection of formerly unrelated actors via individuals in structurally influential positions in a network (Caiani, 2014; Diani, 2003); ‘mobility’, both with regard to traveling activists (della Porta & Mattoni, 2014a; della Porta & Tarrow, 2005; Romanos, 2016) and mobile protest repertoires (Leitner et al., 2008); large ‘protest events’ assembling individuals from various localities serve as ‘contact points’ (Nicholls 2009: 84) for further cooperation; ‘diffusion’, the proliferation of strategies, frames etc. without explicit senders and receivers; and ‘communication technologies’ (Bennett, 2005; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Most of these mechanisms occur in combinations: ‘new encounters may occur on the internet but rarely do these encounters develop into strong working partnerships’ (Nicholls 2009: 86). In the same vein, Nina Eggert and Elena Pavan argue: ‘Protest

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<sup>23</sup> For this study at the local level, the authors also found an effect of the political context: ‘where organisation around ethnicity is not encouraged, like Italy, Switzerland and Germany, ethnic civic communities do not seem to favour migrant organisations’ participation in the political sphere’ (Eggert & Pilati, 2014).

diffusion and deployment patterns are, therefore, not so much the result of a passive ‘contagion’ that can be facilitated by the Internet infrastructure and rapid communication flows. Rather, they continue to stem from complex negotiations of motivation, attribution of meanings, and perceptions of opportunities and constraints for acting collectively’ (Eggert & Pavan 2014; for a similar argument see).<sup>24</sup> As Manuel Castells has illustrated in his book on the *Occupy movement*, the cyber age has evidently added a ‘space of flows’ (Castells 2012: 168-169) in the Internet to a space of places. This space of flows is particularly important for marginalized actors with limited resources for moveability.

Yet, Helga Leitner et al. have also demonstrated for the case of immigrant activism in the US, that mobile protests such as bus tours have proven to be effective tools for networking of isolated, often forcefully immobilized actors. It constitutes the crucial means for establishing social relations among dispersed populations, and for accessing unevenly distributed and scarce ‘safe spaces’ and advantageous political opportunity structures:

‘The mobility of the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride enabled activists of different backgrounds and from different locales to link-up with one another in the places where the buses stopped, constructing trans-local networks (...)’ (Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto 2008: 167).

As these insights on mobility and the role of the locale/urban suggest, the notion of scale<sup>25</sup> has regained popularity in recent years. In this context notions such as strategic *scale-jumping* - including domestication and externalization (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005) - in case of opening opportunities at a certain level have been put forward (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005; Leitner et al., 2008). More recently, an integrated approach has been increasingly advocated, arguing that in times of mobility and online diffusion of ideas contentious politics is situated in a complex multi-scalar context, in which political opportunities are used and identities and networks formed at various mutually dependent levels (Juris & Khasnabish, 2013; Leitner et al., 2008; Navrátil & Cisar, 2014; Price & Sabido, 2016). This has become particularly relevant in the context of a more recent attempt to overcome the widespread ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer & Glick-

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<sup>24</sup> For a similar argument see (Mattoni & della Porta, 2014) In a moderating attempt, Pavan has suggested the concept of *multidimensional networks* with a view to overcoming the mostly artificial distinction between online and offline spaces, making ‘communication technologies endogenous to collective action networks’ (2014).

<sup>25</sup> Scale has been defined as ‘a ‘vertical’ differentiation in which social relations are embedded within a hierarchical scaffolding of nested territorial units stretching from the global, the supra- national, and the national downwards to the regional, the metropolitan, the urban, the local, and the body’ (Brenner cited in Marston et al. 2005: 416).

Schiller, 2003) - the ‘implicit assumption that the national arena is the most obvious container for political activity’ (Nicholls, Miller, and Beaumont 2013a: 17) – and to transnationalize social research. In this vein, Jeffrey Juris and Alex Khasnabish employ the term ‘transnational’ to refer to ‘a scale that transcends, yet also incorporates, other levels of analysis, including the local, regional and national’ (2013: 8).

### *The Discouraging Effects of Space*

Evidently, not all sparks of protest grow into visible disruptions. ‘Seeds of resistance’, which are necessarily planted when states exclude human beings, can only grow into disruptive mobilizations, if certain spatial conditions are met:

‘Not all places provide sufficient conditions to grow small seeds into big mobilizations. Immigrant detention centers and prisons, for instance, are important sites for producing seeds of resistance but these environments are not necessarily the best to transform early seeds into broad and sustained struggles. Detention centers in the Netherlands are homes for hundreds of hunger strikes each year but these strikes are largely ignored by the media, public, support groups, and politicians because they take place in environments that do not possess the full range of resources needed to nurture their growth and maturation. These resistances end up passing largely unnoticed, presenting only minor and uneventful disruptions in the circuits of state power. In other instances, early resistances may find more supportive and enriching environments, providing them conditions for further growth’ (Nicholls & Uitermark 2016: 10).

While cities can have advantageous relational qualities, sparks do not necessarily proliferate in every city, at every time. On the contrary, mostly they do not. Social movements are always the result of complex interactions between multiple actors, theories can never be deterministic. Part of this contingency is for instance the ambivalence of the urban structure: despite its relational qualities, it is also true that the state has usually concentrated means in urban centers to challenge the protesters and intervene in the precarious relations they develop with allies. Furthermore, the density of supportive organizations has both an enabling quality, yet can also lead to competition among pro-beneficiary actors, favouring the fragmentation of players in arenas.

In addition, states usually employ spatial strategies with the intention to disrupt the relational qualities of proximity discussed above:

‘[w]hile place can enhance the mobilization powers of activists by strengthening relations and building common mobilizing frames and identities, states may attempt to short-circuit and disrupt movements by enacting a range of place-based strategies’ (Nicholls et al. 2013a: 5).



Miller therefore argues that space should be understood in a Foucauldian perspective as technologies of power:

‘Spatial technologies of power are particular types of technologies that shape the formation and breaking of relationships – technologies that are employed, counter-deployed, and altered in processes of social struggle. Such technologies may be employed by any actor – individual or collective, civil society or state (...)’ (Miller 2013: 289).

In my research on forced migrant activism in Berlin and Paris, I therefore intend to show how specific relationships are knit together in urban centers and how these contexts can be both enabling and discouraging to the organizing efforts of migrants. I will therefore firstly demonstrate how specific geographies of state control - deliberate practices of isolation through encampment, mobility restrictions, work bans etc. - erect particular spatialized obstacles for political engagement including protest. Secondly, I will point to spatialized repertoires of contention, which aim at accessing advantageous relational qualities of certain, often urban locations.

#### **2.4. Bridging to Migration Studies**

While studies on migrant activism from an explicit social movement perspective remain scarce, a plethora of contributions on the issue has been produced in critical migration and citizenship studies.

Both ‘autonomy of migration’ and critical citizenship studies ‘share a strong normative concern with reimagining political life from the margins, particularly in relation to those inhabiting mobile and precarious lives’ (Moulin and Thomaz, 2016). Autonomy of migration specifically underlines the subjectivity of migrants as an eminently political question and challenges sociology’s traditional overemphasis on ‘pull’ and ‘push’ factors for providing explanations of migration (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). Critical citizenship studies, particularly those stressing ‘performative citizenship’ (Isin, 2017) and ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin, 2008) more specifically, scrutinize processes of political subjectivation and transgression of established (citizenship) orders despite marginality. In a nutshell, they trace, ‘how resistant subjects enact and appropriate (citizenship) rights they may not officially hold *and* escape regimes of control through (excessive and imperceptible) movement’ (Ataç et al., 2016). Hence, both bodies of literature put dominant narratives upside down and take migrant agency as the starting point for their analysis. In doing so, these approaches are more sensitive towards capturing also seemingly ‘invisible’ (Ataç et al., 2015) acts of contesting restrictive

bordering practices.

However, this body of literature has rarely been integrated in the highly differentiated body of social movement studies so far. In the following, I present various insights from migration and citizenship studies, both to frame my own research and to point to the potential for fruitful dialogue among the two disciplines.<sup>26</sup>

### *Biographies of Exclusion and Every-Day Resistance*

Even though ‘grievances’ are indispensable for the emergence of social movements, for a long time, the root causes for mobilization - human suffering - have been largely neglected by theories on social movements. They were considered ‘ubiquitous’, of little variation, and hence of little explanatory power for political action, focusing instead on endogenous resources and exogenous opportunities (della Porta, 2018a; Jasper, 2014b). The case of migration, however, seems to require a readjustment of this dominant perspective. As many migration scholars recall, the tightening of border controls, the expansion of deportation regimes and the increased categorizing into ‘wanted’ and ‘unwanted’ migrants has led to a proliferation of resistances by migrants, in the USA, Israel and many European countries (Ataç et al., 2015, 2016; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016; Zepeda-Millán, 2014, 2016). Ataç et al. hence argue: ‘In particular during the past three years, the border regime itself produced new migratory actors, subjectivities and forms of political articulation that are at once a manifestation and a consequence of the crisis’ (Ataç et al. 2015: 3). Similar to other recent contributions on mobilizations in times of crisis, it is hence argued that not only opportunities, but also threats can trigger protest (della Porta, 2015; Zepeda-Millán, 2016). Indeed, the countless restrictions against migrants, particularly the ‘deportation regime’ enacted against those deemed unwanted has planted multiple ‘seeds of resistance’ (Nicholls & Uitermark 2016: 9).

Migration scholars have furthermore criticized the social movement community for exclusively addressing open acts of protest and as such downplaying ‘invisible’ forms of every-day resistance, which are not captured by ‘common regimes of visibility - they rather attempt to elude their gaze and seek to remain imperceptible’ (Ataç et al. 2015: 7). According to Uday Chandra, ‘[t]o resist is, in ordinary parlance, to oppose or fight off what is pernicious or threatening to one’s existence’ (2015). Thus, taking migrant struggles seriously, in this vein, entails considering openly articulated political claims to

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<sup>26</sup> For one of the attempts to bridge the two strands see (Ataç et al., 2016), which is, however, more grounded in the ‘critical migration’ tradition.

be just the tip of the iceberg. Agier argues, in contexts of extreme precariousness and marginality, ‘the only revolt that is logically possible, [is] embodying a politics of resistant life’ (Agier, 2011: 155). Indeed, the every-day practices of organizing a life in contexts of exclusion and repression are to be understood as continuous political acts. Dense networks of self-help are in many cases a prerequisite for survival on the way to Europe and within the context of destination. These latent ties can at times be activated for high-risk public protest (see e.g. Chapter 8 and Zepeda-Millán, 2016). Often, ‘strong ties’ of trust are, hence, established in everyday struggles. Ataç et al. even argue: ‘It is precisely through these less spectacular, often invisible everyday struggles, for example for employment, housing, and the freedom of movement that the status quo is called into question’ (Ataç et al. 2015: 7). These ‘acts of resistance’ dismantle existing power relations and make fundamental antagonisms visible and by this accessible to contentious scrutiny. Critical migration studies, thus, suggest that an analysis of migrant agency requires a shift from a somewhat narrow focus on disruptive social movements to a broader conceptualization of resistance. The ‘embodiment’ of resistance in the specific context of forced migrants is not only mirrored in practices of ‘every-day’ struggle but also in an embodied repertoire of protest, including hunger-strikes, lip-sewing, self-harm and, indeed suicide to avoid deportation. If other means are absent, what remains as a tool of protest is the body itself (Clochard, 2016; Edkins & Pin-Fat, 2005; Siméant, 1998).

Despite its merits in reconceptualising resistance and opening up towards a more encompassing analysis of migrant agency, the literature tends to operate with a slightly overoptimistic and romanticising tone in the light of the multiple obstacles marginalized actors encounter, to visibly and sustainably disrupt exclusionary migration regimes and be recognized as political subjects with rights and voices.

### *Embedded in Transnational Social Spaces*

Another important complement from migration studies to the canon of social movement studies is a focus on the particular transnational spaces most migrants are embedded in.<sup>27</sup> It is crucial to remember that ‘[a]s a matter of fact, migration flows are characterized by migrant networks’ (Faist, 1998). Hence, migrants’ social practices, including acts of

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<sup>27</sup> Due to the inherent transnationality of most migrants’ life worlds, transnationalism as a scientific subfield has particularly been advanced within the realm of migration studies (Faist et al., 2013; Pries, 2001; Vertovec, 2009; Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2003). Transnational linkages have been studied with regard to their role for political identities and senses of belonging (Guarnizo, Portes, & Haller, 2003; Rother, 2013a), sources of economic and emotional support (Faist, 1998, 2000) as well as influences on so-called integration into host societies (Haug, 2010; Morales & Morariu, 2011).

protest, need to be understood in the light of their particular transnational biographies and networks. Various studies have shown that patterns of migration have brought about ‘transnational social spaces’ (Faist et al., 2013; Pries, 2001; Vertovec, 2009) - ‘pluri-local, durable and dense configurations of social practices, systems of symbols and artefacts that span places in different countries’ (Pries 2001: i). These spaces are

‘constituted by the various forms of resources or capital of spatially mobile and immobile persons, on the one hand, and the regulations imposed by nation-states and various other opportunities and constraints, on the other’ (Faist, 2006).

For many migrants, the nation-state is a real but rather artificial container, as their life worlds span different localities in their everyday life, through contact with their families at home or in other countries, through identification with their country of origin or opposition with the government in power. Even though they are located in a specific country or city of destination, their life worlds are never purely local, but inherently multi-layered. Saskia Sassen has observed this experience to be a general trend in globalized societies:

‘one of the features of the current phase of globalization is that the fact that a process happens within the territory of a sovereign state does not necessarily mean it is a national process. This localization of the global, or of the non-national, in national territories undermines a key duality running through many of the methods and conceptual frameworks prevalent in the social sciences - that the national and the non-national are two mutually exclusive conditions’ (2001: 187).

The social spaces in which many migrants are embedded and their transnational (mobile) biographies can under certain conditions provide important opportunities for political mobilizations. While relations to natives in localities of destination are inherently complicated by cultural, legal and linguistic differences, it is often the relationships among migrants with shared experiences and memories of violence and exclusion in transmigration and the locality of reception, which provide trust and set the basis for political mobilization (see e.g. Chapters 5, 6, 7 & 8). Many forced migrants also create social ties to activist environments and to fellow migrants *on the move*, which are often kept and can be activated for political protest (see e.g. Chapters 8).

## **2.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the theoretical framework of the project, which draws from three strands of literature, combining social movement studies with (critical) migration studies. The relational approach has brought forward the discussion on ‘players and arenas’, which renders micro-interactions of multiple players quintessential for the

development of contention. More specifically, the arena perspective has been introduced to capture the complexity of fluid mobilizations, which elude neat, stable or structural explanations. Therefore, the theoretical approach provides a compelling framework for the research project at hand. My research project intends to contribute to the understanding of how protest by forced migrants as a particular type of marginalized actor unfolds. Given the structural obstacles and the scarce resources, I am interested in investigating the making and breaking of social relations in direct interactions, including a wide range of players with at times overlapping and at times diametrically opposed interests. This results in asking questions such as: With what kinds of players do forced migrants interact and what qualities do the resulting social ties have? How do social ties develop over time and along which lines do they fall apart? Adding a spatial lense to this interactionist perspective I furthermore scrutinize the geographical underpinnings of these interactions. Drawing from insights in human geography, I investigate the ‘relational qualities’ of spaces, both in their incubating and fragmenting effects. I furthermore investigate what kind of spatialized strategies players enact to advance, or curtail, political mobilizations of forced migrants. Finally, informed by critical migration studies, I expand the notion of resistance to ‘invisible’ practices in the every-day and their entanglement with visible disruptive protest. Furthermore, I scrutinize the particular constraints and opportunities entailed in migrants’ inherently transnational life worlds.

In combining these three strands of literature, I attempt to draw attention to migrant agency, and more specifically, to processes of political subjectivation of forced migrants, which have, so far, received only marginal attention in the study of contentious politics. As contentious arenas do not unfold in a social vacuum, but are fundamentally situated in space and time, and furthermore structured by various macro-institutions, the subsequent Chapter 4 introduces the contexts of forced migration in both France and Germany.

While the respective results are evidently derived from the four specific arenas studied in this thesis, the ambition of an interactionist perspective goes tentatively beyond that. One of the appealing elements of the ‘players and arenas’ approach lies in its focus on both the particularity of specific episodes of contention and ‘grasping the types of strategic interactions that can be considered “characteristic”’ (Duyvendak & Fillieule 2014: 312). This allows preliminary propositions of regular interactions or ‘strategic dilemmas, typical of certain players in specific arenas’ (ibid). In this vein, and echoing the dual aspiration of ‘political ethnography’ (Schatz, 2009b), the empirical chapters

follow this logic. Whereas the four empirical Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 provide detailed descriptions of certain configurations and processes, Chapter 9 changes the focus with a view to evolving broader patterns.

## Chapter 3

### Methods and Ethics: How to Study Contentious Arenas around Forced Migration?

‘Taken together, the two parts of the term *political ethnography* thus imply a creative tension. *Ethnography* suggests a particularizing impulse, a desire to avoid premature empirical generalization, and a preference for inductive thinking. It implies attention to detail, to contextual factors, and to configurational thinking. *Political* suggests a willingness to bracket aspects of what we see, to simplify for analytic coherence, and to seek to produce generalizations. It implies attention to cross-case comparisons, to broadly occurring factors, and to the power of deductive logic. The phrase thus contains the potential for each impulse to perform a check on the other, in the process producing empirically grounded and theoretically stimulating research.’

(Schatz, 2009b, italics in original)

#### 3.1. Introduction

Every kind of social scientific work requires a transparent description of how the results were obtained and which obstacles arose during the research (della Porta & Keating, 2008b; Goffman, 2015). Hence, this methodological chapter is structured as follows: I will start out by justifying the epistemological perspective (3.1) and the triangulation of three qualitative methods I chose to scrutinize precarious interactions in contentious arenas around forced migration (3.2.). I will also describe the at times rough path of methodological practice (3.3.), which entailed repeated loops of *serendipity*. Eventually, I will reflect on the particular normative and ethical questions arising during research with subaltern actors in what I call ‘post-colonial encounters’ (3.4.).

#### 3.2. An Abductive & Ethnographic Approach to Social Science

As a ‘problem-oriented, rather than method-oriented’ (della Porta, 2014b: 3) discipline, social movement studies have become known for a pluralist perspective to social science

(della Porta & Keating, 2008a), including diverse (and not always complementary) epistemological perspectives and the application of a wide range of methods (della Porta, 2014b). Given this variety, it is crucial to adapt the methodological choices consciously to the specific research interest at hand.

This project is located in the realm of ‘discovery’, exploring the spatial and relational foundations of political mobilizations of highly marginalized actors in contentious arenas around forced migration. A methodology adapted to such a research endeavour, hence, needs to take at least two aspects into account: firstly, the dynamic, interactive nature of the ‘making and breaking’ of social ties in contentious politics (fluidity) and secondly, the involvement of stigmatized and vulnerable actors (subalternity).

Numerous scholars (Corbetta, 2003; della Porta & Keating, 2008a; J. Scott & Carrington, 2011; Tracy, 2012), have argued that qualitative and especially interpretative approaches are particularly useful for studying phenomena about which little is known and for grasping perceptions of social reality. Keating and della Porta argue that

‘more interpretive approaches require “softer” methods allowing for ambiguity and contingency and recognizing the interplay between researcher and the object of research.’ (della Porta and Keating, 2008: 25 f.)

Such a perspective is characterized amongst others by a) inductive elements, meaning a construction of the research problem during the process of empirical research, b) a holistic approach, treating cases as ‘interdependent wholes’, rather than breaking them down into variables, c) a strong sensitivity to cultural processes (meaning-making) and context, d) flexibility to adjust methods to the research process, e) an immersion of the researcher in the field rather than a strict separation between ‘objective observer’ and the ‘research object’.

Therefore, social movement scholars investigating contentious politics of small-scale and emerging activism (Blee, 2012), weakly-resourced groups (Chabanet & Royall, 2014a) and contentious interactions (Jasper & Duyvendak, 2014; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016) have all advocated for flexible qualitative approaches. Didier Chabanet and Frédéric Royall underlined:

‘Many scholars may be looking too hard to find general, and often causal, explanations for protest events. In doing so, they may not fully appreciate just how complex and intertwined reality is. By insisting on processes or political mechanisms, some scholars have tended to ignore protesters and to pass over their



intentions, their motivations, their doubts, and their refined sociological assessments of protesters, since they are the ones who are at the coalface of all protests and who, in a certain way, give them meaning (...)’ (Chabanet & Royall 2014b: 17).

Blee argues that the inherent conceptual and practical challenges of studying precarious activism have prevented scholars from investigating them:

‘Tiny and incipient groups are rarely the subject of scholarship. Scholars tend to prefer SMOs [Social Movement Organizations, author’s note] whose importance is clear and which are likely to endure over time. Fledgling groups are risky groups for study. They are likely to fall apart and disappear. They are unstable, sometimes radically changing focus or direction. (...) The fluidity of emerging groups makes it difficult to label them, to what any of them is “a case of”’ (Blee 2012: 6).

Based on his criticism of the tendency in social movement studies to reify homogeneity, while its constituent parts often are highly heterogeneous – and full of internal contestation (Jasper 2014: 12) - Jasper advocates for detailed, yet dynamic and flexible techniques to generate data on such complex processes. In his view, for instance, social network analysis and other quantitative means are too static (Cosmos Talk, 18 May 2017 at SNS Florence) to capture the fluidity of the shifting, emerging, splitting, growing and shrinking of (compound) players in episodes of contention.

Besides its strength in studying novel phenomena, qualitative field research is also particularly useful in contexts in which fieldwork is most difficult. This includes populations that are marginalized or repressed, but also internal group dynamics (Malthaner, 2014: 173). In such contexts, the researcher is at times ‘at the mercy of events’ (ibid). Elusive information and valid data can often only be gathered if research resembles more ‘normal communication’ and even more importantly if it can be adapted to the respective interviewee, to build trust and adjust to the specific demands of the research context. Indeed, any attempt to ‘impose a formal interview structure, instead of letting the situation develop, can harm field relations’ (Malthaner, 2014: 188).

Building upon these methodological reflections, the analytical narratives presented in this manuscript are rooted in a particular, qualitative research tradition that is both informed by existing theory (deduction) and inductive elements during fieldwork:

‘[C]ollecting first-hand data entails the idea that progress in social movement theory needs to originate in a deep interaction between first-hand data and existing theory’ (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014).

Hence, the underlying epistemology is fundamentally ‘abductive’ (Schwartz-Shea &

Yanow, 2011; Swedberg, 2012), which in fact is the rule rather than the exception in most qualitative social movement research (della Porta, 2014a: 238). This way of conducting research is far from being linear and relies mostly on a circular, or rather spiraling way of proceeding, constantly moving back and forth between theory and empirical findings.

In addition to being ‘abductive’, my research has been to a large extent ethnographic. At the core of most ethnographic research endeavours lies the immersion in a certain group, community or locale. The underlying rationale is that ‘the best way to study what people do, mean, think, or believe is to stay as close as possible to them’ (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014). Ethnographic research is more than a specific technique to generate data (participant observation), with which it is often equated. Indeed, ethnographic research requires a certain ‘sensibility’ (Juris & Khasnabish, 2013; Schatz, 2009a). It entails a particular interest in phenomena that are meaningful, dynamic and interactive, and a sensitivity to subjectivity, complexity and positionality (Bray, 2008). It therefore includes a strong normative element to get and keep ‘in touch with the people affected by power relations’ (Schatz, 2009: p.12).<sup>28</sup> Ethnographic research presupposes an attention to detail and context and a flexibility to adjust to what unfolds in ‘the field’. Given these characteristics, ethnography in political research has been considered powerful if not indispensable for studying amongst others ‘overlooked’, ‘hidden’, ‘inaccessible’ and ‘ambiguous’ manifestations and contestations of power (Kubik, 2009: 49). Given the heuristic strength of ethnographic research, the approach appears particularly promising to explore precarious interactions of forced migrants in contentious arenas: the phenomenon has been largely overlooked (exploration), it is relatively inaccessible, focuses on interactive practices (making and breaking of social relations), is interested in meaning attributed to relations and engages with actors who are subaltern, fundamentally affected and marginalized by dominant power structures.

### *Political Ethnography and Comparative Research*

Generally speaking, ethnography privileges the interest in the particular and specific over the generalizable. Yet, there is a growing body of ethnographic research with a comparative element and the tentative ambition to generate theory of heuristic interest beyond one specific case (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014; Bray, 2008; Jørgensen, 2015). Edward Schatz, indeed, considers it an inherent productive tension of ‘political

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<sup>28</sup> See also section (2.4.) on normative and ethical questions arising in research with marginalized and vulnerable populations or ‘subalterns’.

ethnography’:

‘Taken together, the two parts of the term *political ethnography* thus imply a creative tension. *Ethnography* suggests a particularizing impulse, a desire to avoid premature empirical generalization, and a preference for inductive thinking. It implies attention to detail, to contextual factors, and to configurational thinking. *Political* suggests a willingness to bracket aspects of what we see, to simplify for analytic coherence, and to seek to produce generalizations. It implies attention to cross-case comparisons, to broadly occurring factors, and to the power of deductive logic. The phrase thus contains the potential for each impulse to perform a check on the other, in the process producing empirically grounded and theoretically stimulating research’ (Schatz, 2009b, italics in original).

Such an approach poses additional challenges. In contrast to the traditionally extensive fieldwork by anthropologists of usually one year or more in one specific locality, political ethnographers seek to study several cases and broader political processes. Hence, they tend to spend much shorter periods (months, rather than years) in a certain setting and triangulate insights generated through participant observation with a range of other techniques (Malthaner, 2014: 174). Nevertheless, they have to ‘gain access to networks and establish trust with participants in relatively short periods of time and in various locations’ (Malthaner, 2014: 178). As Schatz also points out, at times political ethnographers merge with (or immerse themselves in) a specific context retrospectively through historical reconstruction, adding as much information as possible through archival work and interviews (Schatz, 2009a).

In a strictly comparative social sciences perspective (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994; Lijphart, 1971), comparisons are highly demanding, requiring cases to be ‘unitary and bounded instances of a single underlying phenomenon, such as an ‘activist group’. Yet, as Blee notes, ‘activist groups are neither unitary nor bounded’ (Blee, 2012). Due to such practical challenges and building upon a vast body of small-N case study designs (for an overview see Gerring, 2007), della Porta suggests a ‘case-oriented’ rather than ‘variable-oriented’ approach to comparison (della Porta, 2008). In such an approach similarities and differences between a small number of cases are presented in ‘thick descriptions’.

‘This means that a few cases are analysed based on a large number of characteristics. Explanations are narrative accounts with limited interest in generalization. The degree to which the cases selected do belong to the same category, and therefore are comparable, is assessed in the course of the research itself’ (della Porta, 2008: 207).

Generalizations are, hence, temporarily limited to the case studies, yet mechanisms and patterns are relevant to a wider set of cases. Given the attention to context, case-oriented comparisons are particularly intriguing, when they take time as a factor into account, hence, adopt a both cross-spatial and diachronic perspective (Della Porta, 2008).

In a variant of this idea to both dig deep into cases and tentatively develop broader patterns, Michael Burawoy has suggested the idea of an ‘extended case method’ (Burawoy, 1998). According to Maren Klawitter, a Burawoy student, this method ‘requires that ethnographers locate the ethnographic field by ‘extending out from micro processes to macro forces, from the space-time rhythms of the site to the geographical and historical context of the field’ (Klawitter, 2008).

Broader conceptions of ‘comparison’ also take into account that in a globalized world, and even more so within the issue of migration, phenomena are ‘place-based’, yet not necessarily ‘place-bound’ (Massey, 1991b: 279). Sassen notes:

‘one of the features of the current phase of globalization is that the fact that a process happens within the territory of a sovereign state does not necessarily mean it is a national process. This localization of the global, or of the non-national, in national territories undermines a key duality running through many of the methods and conceptual frameworks prevalent in the social sciences - that the national and the non-national are two mutually exclusive conditions’ (Sassen 2001: 187).

Hence, transnational phenomena, of which migration is an emblematic example (Faist et al., 2013; Pries, 2001) require ‘multi-site research rather than simply comparative studies’ (Sassen 2001: 189) to overcome the fallacies of ‘methodological nationalism’.

I understand my research as a case-oriented comparison being located in the productive tension of ‘political ethnography’. It scrutinizes and meticulously describes processes of political mobilization by forced migrants in two locations, Berlin and Paris, on the basis of various dimensions – with attention to interactions, the dynamics and quality of social ties and space. In line with an arena-approach to contentious politics, however, the unit of analysis is the contentious arena, not the city. The case-oriented comparison in my research consists of a total of four arenas, two in each location. From a comparison of processes in highly distinct contexts, as well as comparing arenas within one location, I intend to generate insights on the patterns of interactions and strategic dilemmas ‘typical’ to such kinds of political activism, while at the same time pointing to the respective specificities of the cases at hand. Furthermore, my research also underlines that the arenas are not fully independent: They are embedded in local contexts, in histories

of interaction and in transnational social spaces of migration and contention (see for instance Chapter 8). The case-sensitive and comparative arena perspective appears to be suitable for capturing the duality of the phenomenon, being place-based, yet not ‘place-bound’.

### **3.3. Triangulation & Data Analysis**

The analytic narratives in the empirical part of this manuscript are based on field-work in two cities, Berlin and Paris, and more specifically, on insights gained through interviewing individuals, participating and observing practices, and identifying and scrutinizing textual sources produced by movement actors or media outlets through (online) archival work. Each of these methods entails specific requirements, strengths and weaknesses. Capitalizing on advantages, while moderating shortcomings, lies at the base of triangulation in the social sciences (for an overview see Ayoub, Wallace and Zepeda-Millán, 2014). Subsequently, I will layout why and how I triangulated qualitative data generated through three techniques, participant observation, qualitative interviews and compilation of documents. Following Schatz, these techniques, combined with my research approach, qualify as ‘political ethnography’ (Schatz, 2009b, 2009c). Given the immersion of the researcher in a field in ethnographic research, I will subsequently also reflect on my role in the research process.

#### *Participant Observation*

In some research projects, participant observation constitutes the methodological core. Others only sporadically use the technique for a very first exploration or to identify and access potential interlocutors (see also Balsiger and Lambelet, 2014). In this continuum, my project occupies a middle ground. Participant observation was used in both locations, Paris and Berlin, to access the field, identify interlocutors, but also to immerse with a group, in order to observe (political) practices and perceptions.

Typical to social movements as fluid and fragmented entities, the boundaries of the ‘field’ are difficult to determine both spatially and temporally. Hence, most ethnographic social movement research is multi-sited and as ‘social movements are not active 24/7’, fields are ‘non-continuous’ (Balsiger and Lambelet, 2014: 153). In Berlin I participated between January-August 2016 and between January-May 2017 in dozens of activist events, including demonstrations, conferences and workshops. At the beginning, my approach was to map the terrain, trying to capture a wide range of events organized by different groups. In the large formats, my role was mostly relatively passive and

discrete – at times assisting ‘logistically’. This relatively shallow immersion (still, over time, I recognized more and more familiar faces regularly present during events) in many contexts and interaction with many people allowed me to identify patterns. In some cases, I used the participation in events to approach potential interlocutors (see section below on interviews). Subsequently, I also followed more informal events of migrant activist groups I encountered during public events. During every event, I took field notes, either during the event or directly after.

With one group of activists, I spent much more time – over the course of 10 months – in total several hundred hours in assemblies, informal meetings and protest events. The access was made possible by Mamadou<sup>29</sup>, a forced migrant activist I had met at a public protest event. He invited me to his place, we talked for two hours. I told him about my research and he told me about his activism, the countless negative experiences he had gathered with researchers during his activism. In the end, the clear message was: ‘as long as you don’t exploit us, and get your interviews and disappear, you are welcome to participate’. He turned out to be a door opener to many other activists in Berlin and Paris.

In Paris, given the shorter period of fieldwork (2,5 months) due to practical constraints, a deep immersion of the kind in Berlin was not feasible. Nonetheless, I engaged repeatedly with members of one group online and remained in contact after my departure from Paris. Hence, albeit to a lesser degree, I attempted to follow the design in Berlin to participate in various events and get a deeper understanding of practices and attitudes through deeper immersion with one group. Access to the group in Paris was facilitated by contacts previously established in Berlin.

This immersion allowed me to scrutinize the making and breaking, as well as perceived role, of strong and weak ties. In the course of my participation, I shifted from a rather passive to a more active position within the group, adopting various functions, often as translator from and to English, German and French or in assisting during administrative procedures. Various personal relations have emerged from the research.

### *Qualitative Interviewing*

For various reasons, participant observation in ethnographic research is usually

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<sup>29</sup> All names of interlocutors have been changed to guarantee their anonymity (see also section (2.4.) on the ethics of conducting research with vulnerable populations.

complemented with qualitative interviews of various kinds. A first set of reasons is practical: it is evidently only feasible to follow some activists for some time. In order to contextualize, or in Burawoy's terms 'extend' from one case (or very few observations), it is indispensable to ask for past experiences. Conceptually, furthermore, in studying perceptions and subjective attribution of meaning to certain practices, it is useful to triangulate observed practices with interviewed explication. Very fundamentally, also 'people generally don't talk about what they take for granted' (Blee, 2012: 12). This requires unveiling practices and attitudes that are not explicitly addressed. Finally, interviews have a strong normative component. They 'generate representations that embody the subject's voice, minimizing, at least as far as possible, the voice of the researcher' (Blee and Taylor, 2002: 96). This is particularly key in research with subaltern populations.

Given these qualities, interviewing has become one of the most common techniques of data collection in social movement studies (for excellent overviews see Blee and Taylor, 2002; Blee, 2013; della Porta, 2014a). The specific type of interview and the selection of interlocutors depend on the research questions and the research environment. Usually, researchers either choose among or combine biographical interviews ('life histories'), interviews on particular protest events in the past ('oral histories') or 'key informant' interview, involving a wider range of actors involved in contentious action (Blee, 2013; Bray, 2008; della Porta, 2014a). Among the important drawbacks of interviews is that '[a]ctivists have an interest in presenting themselves and the movement in a certain light' (Blee, 2013). Yet this can be moderated by interviewing a wide range of actors and taking different narratives as evidence for heterogeneity and lines of fragmentation.

While ethnographic and qualitative research more broadly do not align to the standards of representativity in quantitative research, the selection of interlocutors follows a theoretical purpose (therefore sometimes referred to as 'theoretical' or 'purposive' sampling); yet, this is also dependent on access. Research on marginalized or stigmatized movements therefore usually relies on 'snowball sampling', asking initial interlocutors to suggest or contact others to be interviewed (Blee, 2013). Given the important role of the researcher or rather the influence of the complex relations between researcher and interlocutor, the data obtained in qualitative interviewing is never identically 'replicable' (Burawoy, 1998). It is crucial in this respect to obtain a certain level of transparency through recording (or elaborating later notes taken during a

conversation, where recording is not accepted) as well as a detailed description of the context in which the interview unfolded (Bray, 2008; della Porta, 2014a).

For the purpose of my research, I conducted around 30 interviews in each city. The interviews lasted between 20 and 150 minutes and had different degrees of structuration. Due to the research interest in interactions among various actors engaged in relationships formed around forced migration in the four arenas, interlocutors included not only forced migrant activists, but also key informants from the immigrant rights movement, trade unions and politicians. Most interviews were organized around four main areas of interest – which I raised in a changing order depending on the flow of the conversation: the personal ‘path into protest’; the mobilization of resources through allies; the importance and qualities of social relations within the movement (the making of ties); and the fragmentation of the movement (undoing of ties). All interviews with forced migrant activists combined ‘oral- and life history’. The sample of interlocutors was generated through both snowballing and contacting key figures identified in previous desk work. Despite repeated attempts, I did not manage to gain access to various influential activists. Most interviews were recorded. When interlocutors did not consent to be recorded, I took extensive notes during and directly after the conversation. Interviews were conducted in English, German and French.

In both participant observation and qualitative interviewing, the quality of the information ‘is influenced by the complex relations between interviewers and interviewees, in particular the interviewer’s capacity to stimulate participation, and careful listening’ (della Porta, 2014a: 258). This relation was much more multifaceted (and at times contested) during (first) interactions with forced migrants, where power disparities were at times explicitly problematized. One interlocutor told me: ‘I would feel more comfortable doing an interview if you were PoC [Person of Colour]’ (see also section (3.4.) on positionality and ‘postcolonial encounters’).

#### *Compiling Existing Textual Sources*

In addition to participant observation and interviews, the empirical section draws from existing textual resources that have been produced independently from the research project. Such texts include reports, comments and self-representations by forced migrant activists, but also allies and opponents in flyers, (online-)texts videos (transcripts) and the



media. The idea is not to analyse multifaceted discourses or frames<sup>30</sup> but rather to complement first-hand data obtained through personal interaction with existing textual sources. According to Ruben Andersson, ethnographic research in secretive contexts and including marginalized actors requires this degree of eclecticism to compensate for the lack of access to relevant actors and to avoid excessive intrusion in at times ‘overpopulated’ contexts inhabited by journalists, care workers, academic pioneers and state agents (2016: 286). Indeed, in difficult, yet particularly rewarding contexts of fieldwork (Malthaner, 2014), ‘the researcher is at the mercy of events’ (Malthaner, 2014: 178). Given the constraints at hand, in these cases, fieldwork requires a (pragmatic) flexibility to obtain the best data available and to rely on a range of data sources.

I compiled these textual sources during protest events, online and in archival work (Ffm-Archive at Fulda, CGT Archive Paris, GISTI online Archive, Générique online Archive, The Voice Online-Archive, O-Platz online Archive, private Archives of activists). Indeed, it happened to me many times that during an informal conversation, an interview or by participating in an event, I referred to statements made by influential actors in the media, movement-produced publications or reports. Often, these more extensive reports and self-reflections were of greater value than the face-to face conversation – yet, only in its combination both ‘sources’ could be accessed and complemented.

#### *Data Analysis: From a ‘Steaming Mass’<sup>31</sup> of Data to a Compelling Narrative*

The flexibility in the phase of data collection and the compilation of vast amounts of data poses an enormous challenge for data analysis. In the case of the research under question, the ‘steaming mass’ consisted of a total of 40 interview transcripts, more than 50 pages of type-written field notes and hundreds of compiled documents. As such an amount of rich and diverse data is common to most qualitative and certainly ethnographic research, a plethora of strategies has emerged for its analysis. All aim at addressing the challenge of both embracing the rich data obtained and structuring it with a view to feeding it into compelling analytic narratives. All engage in multiple readings, yet structuring ranges from more systematic ‘coding’ to simply ‘indexing’ of texts. Nevertheless, all of these approaches share the need for (at least partial) transcription of interviews and successive identification of key themes (or concepts) and patterns.

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<sup>30</sup> For this see Lindekilde, 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Expression borrowed from Katz (2002).

I have transcribed all the interviews in their original language, while avoiding a verbatim transcription. Interviews, compiled textual sources and field notes have subsequently been imported in the software MaxQDA<sup>32</sup>. What followed were various loops of reading the scripts, highlighting passages, assigning categories. The general process and rationale was similar to the one described by Jean-Claude Kaufmann below:

‘What do I judge to be worthy of interest? Beautiful, creative, expressive phrases; interesting, informative situations, intriguing episodes; well-argued indigenous thought categories; elements close to the hypotheses in the process of being elaborated (Kaufmann, 2009 cited in della Porta 2014a: 251)’.

Building upon the categories and patterns identified, I have developed analytic narratives ‘punctuated by illustrative vignettes’ (Bray, 2008: 313). Such vignettes

‘recount specific events, moments that reveal the issues addressed by the researcher. They may be about the behaviour and reactions of individuals to specific instances, and their relationships to other people and ideas. In these descriptions, the researcher must mention all those details that are revealing. Superfluous details must be left out’ (Bray, 2008: p. 313).

In order to facilitate the reading flow, I have translated all interview passages to English and edited at times slightly, for instance, omitting passages not relevant to the argument at hand.

### **3.4. Productive Serendipity**

Most accounts of social research document successful results rather than challenges or deviations experienced in the process of the fieldwork. Yet, everyone familiar with empirical fieldwork has experienced moments of profound discrepancy between initial methodological and theoretical ideas and the realities found in the field. Depending on the respective epistemological perspectives, deviations are considered as the exception in more positivist traditions - e.g. ‘serendipity’ in the words of Philippe Schmitter (2008) – and as the rule in the generation of knowledge in interpretive approaches. The latter cohort has generated a variety of iterative and adaptive strategies, such as ‘grounded theory’ (for an overview see Mattoni, 2014), ‘extended case method’ (Burawoy, 1991) or ‘situational analysis’ (Clarke, 2005). Particularly ethnographic approaches have strongly advocated for ‘expound[ing] with full ingenuity the windings, the doubts and the

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<sup>32</sup> MaxQDA is a software developed to facilitate qualitative and mixed methods research. It allows for generating coding schemes, and includes convenient features to gain an overview related to certain categories. It is particularly useful to structure and organize large amounts of (both qualitative and quantitative) data. For further information see <https://www.maxqda.com/>.

accidents that mark out the course of the inquiries and render them possible' (Descola, 2005; see also the excellent annex in Goffman, 2015).

Yet, it is still rare to read deviations and failures emerging during qualitative empirical research, even though they might have considerable heuristic value. My research including its methodological approach was to some degree nurtured by 'trial and error'. In order to illustrate such loops of serendipity, I subsequently recall a process of fundamental revision of my methodological approach occurring during my research in response to the realities in the field.

When I started my dissertation in early 2015, already interested in social relations among forced migrant activists and with allies, I was intrigued by the relatively recent popularity of network approaches in social movement studies. Particularly intuitive appeared the method of social network analysis, as various scholars had convincingly shown its analytical power – especially in comparative perspective (Caiani, 2014; Caiani, della Porta, & Wagemann, 2012; Cinalli, 2007a; Eggert & Pilati, 2014). Given the focus on relations in my research design, I intended to explore and compare the relational structures of the forced migrant movements in Berlin and Paris and triangulate the analysis with qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participant observation.

I consequently began to map the movement in Berlin. I reached out to as many activists as I could. For the first interviews I had drafted preliminary lists with influential activists and groups, and intended to let interviewees tick the names of activists and groups on questions such as 'who do you know?', 'with whom have you cooperated?'. I indeed received responses in some cases, however, not everyone was interested or willing to fill in the list. In some interviews, respondents were unwilling to answer – for various reasons reaching from a 'too personalized' perspective and sensitivity to mere boredom due to the format. Other relevant actors identified through snowballing and document analysis did not respond to any interview request.

Various problems were evident in this approach. Firstly, the set of activists asked was not limited. I did not know the boundaries of a whole network of activists, especially as I was not only interested in studying the relationships within the self-organized movement, but also with the wider solidarity spectrum. I did obtain some valuable information e.g. with a view to identifying influential or visible actors. However, beyond this explorative purpose, due to the lack of clear boundaries, the non-response of a

significant number of important actors and the fluidity and amorphous form of the movement, the structural potential of formal Social Network Analysis was from the outset close to zero. For formal whole network analysis, comparable, detailed relational data for all (or at least the majority of) relevant groups and actors is needed. This aim turned out to be illusive. Furthermore, and typical to social network studies, the relational data I obtained was limited to the information on the following two questions: ‘which group/individual have you heard of?’, ‘which group/ individual have you cooperated with/ had direct contact with?’ Some respondents were reluctant to provide information regarding even this rather simple question. A third question ‘which group/individual would you contact for support or invitation to a protest/campaign/ demo?’ was in most cases not answered. The first two questions in turn, alone, do not say anything about the current structure of the network and the meaning and current relevance of these ties. Particularly in fluid movements such as the forced migrant movement, ‘having heard of’ or ‘having had contact with’ someone does not mean that these are contacts that are regularly activated, hence embedding important resources. Furthermore, as I figured, the support base for self-organized struggles was prevalently not formal groups, but decentralized, fluid ‘supporters’, which were evidently not included in my lists. I had to realize that formal network analysis is much more powerful if it is not only suited for established contexts rather than emerging, volatile, contested contexts such as precarious mobilizations by forced migrants.

In order to understand the dynamics of networks and their meaning, a much more profound zooming-in is necessary, at the obvious expense of systematically assessing a whole-network structure. Abandoning whole-network analysis, I therefore experimented with ego-network analysis. Ego-centred network analysis, which has rarely been used in studying social movements, is tailored to unbounded contexts and questions of embeddedness within environments of support. It has hence been used extensively in research drawing from social support and social capital. Yet, as I figured out, ego-network analysis is again both extremely time-intensive and repetitive if conducted with many alteri, as ego is supposed to provide information on alter-alter relations and their characteristics (20 alteri = 20x19 alter relations).

This method worked out even worse, as the procedure is highly time-consuming and heteronomous. In consequence, I have repeatedly experienced scepticism or outspoken opposition to structured, ‘imposed’ forms of exchange. I knew from the outset that forced migrant activism is a sensitive issue: the subjects live in highly precarious

circumstances (potential deportation, traumas, financial difficulties etc.) – and are in general fundamentally sceptical towards outsiders, which I was to witness many times despite several personal contacts. Organizing a meeting for an interview took sometimes many weeks – and many interviews started with me being interrogated: what is the purpose of this research, who profits from it in which way? Many activists have found that the multiple interviews given to journalists and researchers alike have not influenced their situation positively.

I started every interview with open, narrative parts and subsequently moved towards more structured questions on social ties and alliances. These parts turned out to be of much greater value to generate rich and extensive data on the making and breaking of ties in forced migrant activism compared to the standardized relational data. Indeed, this qualitative data allowed to identify relevant mechanisms and criteria with which ties are sustained or dissolved over time, both within the self-organized (only forced migrants) and the wider migrant rights movements. Following these experiences, I discarded network analysis and adapted the method to the situation at hand. Departing from my first intent of ‘momentary “capture” of prespecified [in my case network] data’, I gradually relied, instead, more ‘on the ongoing process of observation, interpretation, and engagement’ (Klawiter, 2008), or in Burawoy’s terms, the ‘extension of observations over time and space’ (Burawoy, 1998). From this moment on, my approach became truly abductive and ethnographic in the sense outlined above. The approach was not chosen *ex ante*, but was developed in response to the research context: it was problem- rather than method-driven.

The experiences outlined above not only led to a revision of the methods applied to generate data, but had also implications for the underlying concepts. It turned out that, in order to understand the characteristics and dynamics of precarious activism, a dynamic approach capable of capturing the making and breaking of relations – what Jasper calls ‘contentious interactions’ proved to be of much greater relevance than a static network approach. This, in turn, led to a revision of the theoretical approach towards a ‘players and arenas’ perspective, which is sensitive to both relations and spatialities.

From the perspective of a positivist research design, the process described above would qualify as a failure, as a waste of time. On many occasions, I felt reminded of Stefan Malthaner’s and Pamela Nilan’s reflection on their research in volatile and precarious contexts:

‘orienting oneself towards the standards of “formal” sociological methods, which imply control by the researcher over the context and the process of research, can induce anxiety and a feeling of failure when realizing that one is unable to exert this kind of control’ (quoted from Malthaner, 2014: 178).

Yet, this detour was paramount for me in generating knowledge on forced migrant activism. It shaped my sensitivity to the respective qualities and limitations of network analysis and ethnographic approaches, but also on understanding social movements of precarious actors more broadly. Looking back at this process, I see it as a gradual liberation from a methodological corset from which the research profited considerably.

### **3.5. The Ethics of Conducting Research with Forced Migrants**

Research ethics is crucial to any fieldwork endeavour that includes human subjects, particularly with vulnerable populations for which participation in research can be a risk to physical and psychological integrity. The study of contentious politics requires a particular sensitivity to such processes, as

‘disclosing its dynamics might expose activists to surveillance as well as repression, jeopardizing their activities if not subjecting them to personal threats’ (Milan, 2014: 446).

Similarly, research involving subjects vulnerable due to their precarious legal status and biographies of exclusion and violence, such as forced migrants, demands additional safeguards. Indeed, Ulrike Krause argues:

‘Thus, our responsibility as researchers conducting fieldwork [with forced migrants] goes beyond methodological rigour in gathering data, and ethical questions must be at the centre of this process’ (2017: 1).

Yet, ethical reflections need to go beyond a mere ‘do no harm’ agreement. Research on social movements entail a normative positioning towards the prefiguration of, and struggles for, a more equitable society. Research, hence, requires a reflexivity on the power position of the researcher and the question of who benefits from the research. Research engagements with marginalized populations encounter the additional inherent tension of, on the one hand, (academically) ‘speaking for’ someone and on the other hand, contributing to emancipatory process.

The subsequent passages, hence, reflect on a) the fundamental ‘do-no-harm’ convention in conducting research with vulnerable populations and, b) power and empowerment in research involving postcolonial encounters.

### *Do No Harm*

As sketched out above, my research has involved individuals under risk due to a) their precarious status and at times trauma, and b) involvement in contentious actions. Hence, my responsibility as a researcher called me to consider how the knowledge produced during my research might negatively affect those participating. Indeed, in the words of Giulia Borri, this work ‘involves other peoples' lives’ (2016: 62). Most forced migrants are aware of their precarious condition and tend to be sceptical towards participation in research (Krause, 2017). Every interview required repeated exchange and clarification either online, on the phone or during personal encounters to build up basic trust. I experienced particular reluctance during my initial attempts to gather standardized (network) data (see section 3.3. on serendipity). Migration and particularly asylum is a political context in which standardized forms of questionnaires are often negatively perceived by the actors involved as they appear similar to registration and identification procedures utilized by the state border authorities. For many, questionnaires were associated with the governmentality of the migration experienced. In turn, ‘to talk and act to heal the trauma’ (Field notes, 20/04/16), was accepted in most occasions, on the condition that they somewhat guided the conversation and controlled which information was spared. In consequence, a flexible approach to data collection turned out to be both a practical need and an ethical obligation.

In line with ethical standards in research with vulnerable individuals, all results have been anonymized. This entails omitting the names, but also the country of origin and other characteristic features to avoid possible identification given the small population of forced migrant activists. As will be illustrated below, anonymization stands in strong tension with the normative ideal to let subalterns speak for themselves. Yet, I have privileged the security of the individuals involved and have only used names, when quoting from documents published by the actors (which are openly accessible independently from my research).

‘Do no harm’, nonetheless needs to be evidently understood as going beyond a mere guarantee of physical and psychological integrity. Research has the potential to harm a movement. My research is a (particular) empirical description and reading of processes of mobilization of forced migrants. The empirical material on practiced and perceived social ties presented in some of the subsequent chapters, hence, documents various tensions, conflicts and power imbalances. Indeed, these are common to most

social movements even though their dubious homogeneity is regularly reified and conflicts and fractal processes usually downplayed. Hence, social scientific rigour fundamentally contradicts any attempt at idealization. Even beyond social scientific research ethics, in my conversations, my opinion that most individuals involved in the movement are well aware of the conflicts and tensions was confirmed. Hence, I follow Jeffrey Juris and Alex Khasnabish arguing:

‘Against overly romanticized views of transnational activism, ethnography reveals the inevitable, yet productive, “friction” (Tsing 2005) that ensues in the encounter between activists from diverse movements, political contexts, and cultural backgrounds. (...) For the engaged ethnographer, the goal of producing such accounts is never only to uncover internal conflicts and tensions; the ethnographer also produces critical understandings that can help activists develop strategies to overcome obstacles and barriers to effective organizing’ (2013: 4).

Indeed, it is naïve to expect precarious political mobilizations to be without contradictions. They assemble highly diverse actors with regard to both class, race, status, gender, hence with tremendous power imbalances. Yet, these ‘frictions’ (Tsing, 2005) need to be adequately contextualized but also made transparent to produce productive energy, from which these movements can profit in turn. Evidently, I am not interested in personal animosities, but rather patterns of interaction in contentious arenas around forced migration.

### *Power and Empowerment*

When I eventually met X of a highly active self-organization of female (forced) migrants in Berlin in a café in Kreuzberg, she was deeply sceptical and noted outspokenly: ‘I would feel more comfortable if you were a refugee, too, or at least PoC [Person of Colour]’ (Interview B24). A conversation - at the beginning rather confrontative on the part of the interlocutor - unfolded on white privilege, academic arrogance and detachment from activism. I found myself in similar situations repeatedly during my research.

This anecdote made explicit what is inherent (yet often not problematized) in every kind of interaction between a researcher and an interlocutor, even more so in social movement research (Milan, 2014) and particularly accentuated in research with marginalized groups such as forced migrants (Düvell, Triandafyllidou, & Vollmer, 2009; Krause, 2017). The vignette also underlines trust as a fundamental condition for qualitative research with vulnerable, marginalized or stigmatized groups.



As Stefania Milan notes, ‘suspicion towards academics and their endeavours is quite diffused amongst movement activists. Often, this does not come out of the blue, but is based on direct experience’. In many cases, the relationship is rather asymmetrical (researcher and research ‘object’), and indeed many activists have had the experience that researchers exploit precious resources such as time and knowledge to advance their own careers without clear benefits for the movement (Milan, 2014). Consequently, more and more social movement scholars and social scientists more broadly reflect on the ethics of concerning themselves, ‘not only with theory development, but also with the promotion of social change, movement building, and empowerment broadly conceived’ (Milan, 2014, p.446). The level of engagement with public debates and social structures can take different forms and degrees – as ‘public sociology’ (Burawoy, 2005), ‘engaged research’ (Milan, 2014), or ‘participatory action’ or ‘militant research’ (Calhoun, 2010; Carstensen, Heimeshoff, Jungehülsing, Kirchhoff, & Trzeciak, 2014; Greenwood & Levin, 2008; Hale, 2008). Depending on the approach taken, various types of researcher roles emerge, such as the ‘controlled sceptic’, the ‘ardent activist’, the ‘buddy–researcher’, and the ‘credentialed expert’ (David Snow cited in Milan, 2014).

Beyond ethical considerations about symmetry in research endeavours, the researcher in many cases has little choice in accepting the conditions of conversation set by the interlocutors. Indeed ‘participants in social movements are typically highly invested subjects who tend to expect from the researcher, and might even demand, some sort of political alignment with the principled ideas they embody. Access to the field might occasionally be negotiated on this ground’ (Milan, 2014, p.446).

On top of the inherent challenges as researcher in activist environments, my own research could be characterized as a ‘postcolonial encounter’ as it entailed even more asymmetrical actors with regard to their social position (and hence power). It involved me as a white, male, German citizen in his early thirties, from a middle-class background, highly educated and multilingual with privileged access to resources. Indeed, I shared very little with most of the participants in my research, with precarious legal status, (past) trauma, experiences of racism etc. They in contrast have had multiple experiences of being muted by authorities, by European activists or NGOs or by academics. Their activism was, at the very foundation, an attempt to emancipate, to speak out, to be recognized as political subjects and not as ‘perpetrators’ and ‘criminals’ on the one hand or ‘victims’ or ‘objects’ on the other hand. Gayatri Spivak asked for good reasons ‘can the subaltern speak?’ (Spivak, 1988) and pointed to the reproduction and perpetuation of

dominance in any kind of representation, including academia.

In consequence, agreements on the terms of participation were not only important to me, but also regularly demanded by activists both with and without a history of forced migration. One of the key homepages administered by the Berlin based forced migrant movement includes the disclaimer:

‘If you want to interview refugee activists for a research project, please consider your position in relation to people categorized as refugees and being active politically, and how refugee protests and the activists themselves can benefit from your project’.<sup>33</sup>

When I informed the activists I engaged with for various months about my visiting fellowship at UC Berkeley and my temporary absence, one replied by email, including the passage:

‘I have met some who really cared about the movement of migrants/refugees. But how many just interpret the experiences of migrant struggles, be it in the context of academia or etc. certainly, I consider you more as a friend, but I do not want to live again or get the feeling of an abused solidarity [solidarité abusé] because this has often been the case in one way or the other’ (field notes, 17/09/2016).

The relationships that developed and changed during my research were (re-) negotiated during the entire research process (and after). I took on many different roles, namely that of the researcher, the translator, the person giving basic legal advice, the buddy. I attempted to take reciprocity as a base-line for the research. In some cases, reciprocity was achieved more than in others.

Building and keeping trust also meant, at times, to accept and respect the limits of research, similar to what Liisa Malkki recalls from her extensive qualitative fieldwork:

[...] the success of the fieldwork hinged not so much on a determination to ferret out ‘the facts’ as on a willingness to leave some stones unturned, to listen to what my informants deemed important, and to demonstrate my trustworthiness by not prying where I was not wanted. It may be precisely by giving up the scientific detective’s urge to know ‘everything’ that we gain access to those very partial vistas that our informants may desire or think to share with us’ (Malki, 1995: 56).

Research involving marginalized individuals accordingly requires both flexibility and reflexivity for both practical and ethical reasons. Krause therefore notes, with particular reference to forced migration studies:

‘Refugees’ invisibility in research processes is (...) linked to questions of power

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<sup>33</sup> Accessible via: <https://oplatz.net/contact/>.

and representation, of speaking *about* or speaking *for* them, working *on* or working *with* them (...). And this involves questions not only about an ethical code of conduct but also especially about normative reflections' (Krause, 2017, italics in original).

Social research on the issue will never fully escape this fundamental contradiction of speaking 'on behalf of' someone who should speak for him or herself. My attempt in this research is to make voices heard that are often ignored. I therefore extensively quote activist voices, yet arrange them to resonate in an academic audience.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Situating Contentious Arenas: The Context of Forced Migration in France and Germany**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

Contentious arenas around forced migration do not emerge in a vacuum, but are strongly shaped by and rooted in social, political and spatial contexts. In this chapter, I outline key conditions in which political mobilizations on forced migration are embedded. For this purpose, I start out with a cursory overview of key developments in the politicisation of forced migration (4.2.)<sup>34</sup>, followed by a brief account of the irregularity-asylum nexus in both countries (4.3). The last section takes a closer look at the characteristics and trajectories of the national migrant rights movements (4.4.). I conclude with an overview of the spatial and relational conditions shaping political mobilizations of forced migrants in the two countries (4.5.). In resonance with previous comparative work on citizenship (Brubaker, 1992) and contentious migration politics (Monforte, 2014; Monforte & Dufour, 2011) in Germany and France, I examine in depth key contextual differences.

#### **4.2. The Politicisation of Forced Migration in Germany and France**

In most European countries, including France and Germany, forced migration was hardly considered a contested issue in the first two decades after World War II (de Wangen, 2016; Fassin, 2016b). The two relevant groups in this regard – the survivors of the war camps and those escaping from Eastern European communist regimes – were both by and large welcomed with compassion (the former) and respect (the latter) (Fassin, 2016a). In the time of economic upturn in the 1950s and 60s, these positive affects resonated with

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<sup>34</sup> More detailed and extensive accounts of the politicization of forced migration in Germany can be found in Herbert (2001), Oltmer & Bade (2005a, 2005b), and Steinhilper (2016). For the French context, see Crépeau (1995), Fassin (2016b), and Noiriel (1999).

the thirst of growing national economies for cheap labour (Fassin, 2016b). Due to this context of migration political openness, which was not least illustrated by the active recruitment of foreign labour, in Germany called ‘guest workers’, many forced migrants – who would have formally been eligible for international protection - relinquished the asylum application and never appeared in any official statistics. The comparatively low numbers of forced migrants from the real-socialist East were furthermore considered as welcomed proofs for the Western (i.e. capitalist) superiority (Oltmer & Bade 2005). The legal norm regarding asylum was numerically irrelevant and morally appealing (Bade, 2015). Until 1963, in Germany asylum applications only once surpassed 3,000, notably per year. Even in the year of the oil crisis and the consequential end of active foreign workforce recruitment, asylum applications remained below 5,000 (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2016). In France, too, numbers of asylum applications remained below 3,000 until 1973 and consisted mainly of European migrants (particularly from Spain) and from a range of soviet republics. This was mainly due to the fact that the scope of the Geneva Convention of 1951 remained limited to those subject to prosecution prior to 1951 in Europe until 1971, when France ratified and implemented the additional protocol to the Geneva Convention, eliminating the temporal and geographical reservation (de Wangen, 2016).

From the early 1970s onwards, France was confronted with rising unemployment due to the restructuring of the industrial sector and increasing automatization (Crépeau, 1995). The oil crisis of 1973 added to this economic transformation, which had already started prior to the external shock. A turning-point was the so-called ‘Circulaire Marcellin-Fontanet’ of 1972, a law that fundamentally modified the regulations regarding renewal of residence permits. Literally overnight, a large share of migrant workers was rendered illegal through legal reform (Abdallah, 2000). From this moment on, after a period of laissez-faire due to a growing national economy, a right to stay in France became subject to a work contract and proof of ‘decent housing’. Hereafter, irregular migration became increasingly problematized and contested (Gisti, 2014). The first hunger strikes by undocumented migrants date back to this time (Abdallah, 2000).

As in Germany, following restrictions on labour migration, numbers of asylum applications rose, because other channels of immigration were blocked. Nevertheless, asylum immigration remained relatively insignificant and hardly contested throughout the 70s. In France, the main groups at the time, (Chilean dissidents escaping the military dictatorship of Pinochet from 1973 onwards and the so-called ‘boat people’ from

Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, mostly fleeing communist regimes), received widespread sympathy both in public and governmental discourse (Fassin, 2016b). Despite increasing hostility towards migrants more broadly, asylum immigration kept a positive image (Gisti, 2014). Being an exception from a rule of increasing closure, asylum law was liberalized. From 1977, asylum-seekers obtained the right to work from the moment the asylum claim was filed with the agency in charge, the ‘Office Français Pour les Réfugiés et Apatrides’<sup>35</sup> (OFPRA) (de Wangen, 2016).

*From Welcoming ‘Refugees’ to Rejecting ‘Bogus Asylum-Seekers’*

While both the trends in asylum applications and the politicization of the asylum norm developed relatively in parallel in the two decades after World War II, particularly from the 1990s onwards the trajectories increasingly diverged:

In Germany, the second half of the 1970s witnessed a rapid rise to more than 100,000 applications in 1980. Firstly, this was due to restrictive immigration policies introduced for the economic recession. In consequence, the asylum procedure had become the only remaining bottleneck of legal immigration, including cases of family reunification of guest workers. Secondly, changing patterns of migration at the global scale – including consequences of decolonization and economic globalizations - increased forced migration from the Global South to Europe. Given the rapid rise in numbers and an alarming public discourse, asylum became for the first time a highly contentious issue during the election campaign to the German Bundestag in 1980. The figure of the ‘bogus asylum-seeker’ and the criminalization of migration became established in public discourse, followed by increasingly restrictive conditions during the asylum process and changes in determining eligibility.<sup>36</sup> Many considered ‘pull factors’ (e.g. seemingly attractive welfare systems in Europe) to be responsible for oscillating numbers in asylum applications rather than the ‘push factors’ such as changing situations in conflict and crisis-torn countries in the Global South. From the 1980s, restrictions were introduced ‘to avoid the “trickling-in” and integration of asylum-seekers in German society until the end of their asylum procedure and by this to serve as a deterrence’ (Herbert, 2001: 265). This was achieved through obligatory accommodation in collective asylum facilities, restrictions to mobility and a work ban. As a result of the deliberate

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<sup>35</sup> ‘French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons’.

<sup>36</sup> Torture, for instance, was subsequently only recognized as a legitimate reason to be granted asylum if it was also explicitly prohibited by law in the country of origin (Oltmer & Bade, 2005a).

separation of asylum-seekers from German society and the high rejection rates (which were in part related to the fact that many came from war-torn contexts but did not fall into the narrow definition of political asylum), asylum-seekers were increasingly portrayed as ‘economic asylum-seekers’ and ‘bogus refugees’ (Herbert, 2001: 265).

Despite these restrictions, numbers further increased, reaching more than 120,000 applications in 1989, almost 195,000 in 1990 and over 250,000 in 1991 (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2016). The largest share of applications constituted ethnic minorities from the Balkans, fleeing the violent implosion of Yugoslavia after the fall of the iron curtain. In the meanwhile, nonetheless, forced migrants had lost their symbolic relevance in the block confrontation. Generally, it was not the objective situation of victims of violence and prosecution that had changed, but rather the ‘affects and values, mobilized in the determination of their situation’ (Fassin 2016: 62, author's translation). In the early 1990s, public controversies further sharpened. Germany witnessed an interplay of xenophobic discourses in both the media and the most established political parties, preparing the ground for racist attacks in various parts of the country (Herbert, 2001: 308 f.). As an illustrative example, the tabloid BILD (the newspaper with the largest readership at the time) fuelled the outrage, noting in July 1991: ‘the Germans are neither xenophobic nor racist. But if the uncontrolled influx of asylants<sup>37</sup> continues, also violence against them will necessarily increase, too’ (Bild, 1991, author's translation). Or in 1992: ‘almost every minute a new asylant [arrives.] The tide is rising, when will the boat sink?’ (Bild, 1992).<sup>38</sup> Racist violence erupted in various locations: In the Eastern town of Hoyerswerda, neo-fascists chased asylum-seekers in the streets and set two facilities on fire. The xenophobic riots lasted for several days, were openly supported by parts of the local population and not decisively contested by the police. Similar disturbing scenes occurred in other parts of Germany such as Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Mölln and Solingen. In this political and social context, 13 per cent of the German population qualified the racist attacks as ‘legitimate expressions of popular rage [Volkszorn]’ (cited in Herbert, 2001: 315). A CDU-politician referred to it ‘not as racism but as an entirely legitimate expression of dissent to the massive abuse of asylum law’ (cited in Herbert, 2001: 315, author's translation).

After long debates within and between the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats, the two parties agreed on the so-called ‘asylum compromise’, which *de facto*

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<sup>37</sup> Pejorative term for the formal terms ‘asylum-seeker’ or ‘asylum applicant’ (Bade, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> For a more extensive overview of the hostile media discourse, compare also (Brosius & Esser, 1995).

rendered the right to asylum enshrined in former article 16 of the German constitution null and void: by introducing the safe third country, safe country of origin rules and the airport procedure, which made it almost impossible to apply for asylum in Germany. Racist attacks and the ‘assault on the right to asylum’ triggered also pro-migrant and anti-racist mass-mobilizations (Herbert, 2001; Monforte, 2014). More than 300,000 people demonstrated in Berlin in November 1992 against the constitutional reform (Kubon, 2012; Monforte, 2014). In Munich, more than 400,000 demonstrated against xenophobia (Gaserow, 2012). Furthermore, the first sustained mobilizations of asylum-seekers, the ‘Voice Africa Forum’, later renamed ‘Voice Refugee Forum’, fall into this period of a particularly hostile climate for forced migrants in Germany (Jakob, 2016).

The constitutional reform had its immediate effect. Numbers of asylum applications nosedived from the temporary peak of 438,000 in 1993 to 322,000 in 1994 and 127,000 in 1995 (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2016). Despite the drop in numbers of asylum applications, the living conditions of those remaining did not improve. Furthermore, asylum politics had meanwhile become part of the European integration process, which highly prioritized security over human rights. In 1997, the first Dublin regulation came into force, delegating the responsibility to process asylum application to the states at the European external border – which further contributed to an almost linear decrease of applications to just above 28,000 in 2008 (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2016).

Also in France, from the 1980s onward, the public perception and attitude of political elites regarding forced migration changed drastically. Under socialist president François Mitterand, elected in 1980, immigration policies first seemed to lead toward a more liberal and rights-based approach (Abdallah, 2000: 33 f.). The new government legalized around 130,000 undocumented migrants between 1981 and 1982 (Abdallah, 2000: 17). Furthermore, migrants were given the right to form interest organizations such as ‘SOS Racisme’ and ‘Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l’Amitié entre les Peuples’ (MRAP), which emerged from this shift in the legal framework (and remained close to the socialist party) (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016: 144 ff.). When the far-right ‘Front National’ won in popularity in the early eighties, however, the socialist government soon reverted to highly restrictive policies. Following the victory of conservatives in the parliamentary elections in 1986 and a subsequent cohabitation<sup>39</sup>, a set of restrictive laws

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<sup>39</sup> This French particularity describes the situation when a president of one party is obliged to share power with a prime minister from another party.



was introduced by the new centre-right Minister of the Interior Charles Pasqua. The package curtailed the right to asylum, introduced stricter rules for acquiring citizenship and facilitating deportations was introduced. Similarly to the German case, asylum applications increased from 22,000 in 1982 to a peak of 62,000 in 1989 (OFPRA, 2013) and countries of origin diversified. Yet, compared to the peak in asylum applications in Germany (more than 430.000 in 1993) (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2016), the numbers remained relatively low. Nevertheless, due to increasing unemployment and the emergence of the far right, immigration became central to an increasingly hostile public debate. As Didier Fassin demonstrated, the subsequent nosediving of recognition rates was not mainly related to changing ‘deservingness’ or increasing ‘fraud’ but rather a new politics of asylum in Europe. Both in public discourse and in administrative decisions, African boat people received far less compassion than those from South-East Asia less than a decade before (Fassin, 2016b). The figure of the previously ‘welcome refugee’ was gradually replaced by the ‘unwanted asylum-seeker’ or the ‘real refugee’ by the ‘bogus asylum-seeker’ (Crépeau, 1995; Julien-Laferrrière, 2016). In reaction to increasing numbers of asylum-applications, the French government introduced policies to discourage asylum-seekers from coming to France in the first place, and to prevent those already there from integrating in society with a view to rendering their potential deportation after rejection easier.

In 1991, an increasingly anti-migrant social climate culminated in the ‘Circulaire Cresson’, a migration law restriction, which explicitly aimed at eliminating a ‘pull-effect’ for asylum immigration by inserting far-reaching restrictions. As in the case of Germany, many of the restrictions introduced in the 1980s and early 1990s shaped the respective asylum system up to this date. Work permits for asylum-seekers were made subject to a priority clause for French citizens. Dropping recognition rates and hence, rising rejections - in 1991, 100,000 rejected asylum-seekers were estimated in France (Abdallah, 2000: 40) - triggered the first widespread protest initiated by rejected asylum-seekers in 1991 throughout the country (Siméant, 1998), involving Kurds, Angolans and Chileans among others, who had been in France for years waiting for a decision on their cases (Delahaye, 1991). Instead of mobilizing against an asylum system considered unjust, they demanded regularization *outside the asylum system*. This trend further accentuated when Pasqua announced the aim of ‘zero immigration’ in his second term in office as Minister of the Interior (Cohen, 1993). In consequence, and in contrast to Germany, France witnessed a tremendous politicisation of undocumented immigration, later termed ‘*sans-papiers*’,

which became an issue of national importance at the latest from 1996 onwards. From the early 1990s, hence, the topic of asylum was addressed together with the broader question of immigration.<sup>40</sup>

*From an 'Ice Age' of Asylum Politics to the German 'Summer of Welcome'*

In Germany, the major asylum law reforms in 1993 initiated an 'ice age' of asylum politics characterized by few reforms and harsh conditions for asylum seekers (Jakob, 2016). In 2000 the first Social Democrat-Green government introduced a citizenship reform, complementing the restrictive German *ius sanguinis* citizenship model with elements of a birthplace, *ius solis*. Despite this important novelty in immigration law, asylum law *in strictu sensu* was not touched significantly by the center-left government. On the contrary, in the process of Europeanization of asylum politics, it was the German Minister of the Interior at the time, Otto Schily (SPD), who pressed for the continuation of the Dublin regulation (Dublin II) in 2003 (Baumann, 2008; Lorenz, 2015), attributing the responsibility of dealing with asylum applications to the country where asylum-seekers first enter European territory. In consequence, numbers of asylum applications decreased constantly further until 2008, reaching the level of the early 1980s (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2016). Asylum-seekers who had been organizing political protest since the mid-1990s, in the midst of repression, received close to no public attention and solidarity remained limited to an anti-racist (radical left and faith-based) niche (see also section 4.4. on the migrant rights movements in Germany and France). A liberalizing dynamic in asylum politics set in gradually from 2010 (Jakob, 2016). The government of Brandenburg eased up on 'Residenzpflicht', allowing asylum-seekers to move within the entire 'Land' (German regions). Traveling to Berlin remained subject to explicit permission by the authorities (Flüchtlingsrat Berlin e.V., 2011). In July 2012, the German constitutional court ruled the decade-long practice to pay asylum-seekers 40 per cent below the minimum subsistence level to be unconstitutional (BVerfG, 2012).

As noted above, asylum applications had dropped constantly until 2008, when asylum applications reached the lowest level since 1983 (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2016). From 2009 onwards, numbers first moderately rose (2011: 49,000), then from 2012 onwards and due to the escalation of the Libyan and Syrian crises accelerated, to roughly 130,000 in 2013 and just above 200,000 in 2014. The rising numbers led to a re-politicisation of asylum and an increasingly strict discursive

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<sup>40</sup> See also section 4.3. on the irregularity-asylum nexus below.

differentiation in ‘real refugees’ and allegedly ‘bogus asylum-seekers’. These debates culminated as early as the summer of 2014 in another asylum law reform, this time involving the Green Party, who voted (together with the governing coalition) in the German Bundesrat in favour of adding Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia to the list of ‘safe countries of origin’. The package of asylum law reforms, in turn, also included the alleviation from key restrictions on asylum-seekers in Germany, such as the peculiar mobility restriction ‘Residenzpflicht’ and an extensive work-ban (even though access to the job market *de facto* continued to be strongly restricted). The increasing polarization in attitudes towards asylum (Decker, Kiess, & Brähler, 2014) was furthermore illustrated by two contradictory, yet interrelated trends accentuating in 2014. On the one hand, the xenophobic movement ‘PEGIDA’ (‘Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident’) started marching on a weekly basis in Dresden in October 2014 (Rucht, 2014), and rapidly spread to other cities, reaching a peak of around 17,000 participants in Dresden in January 2015. From 2014 onwards, furthermore, the originally anti-Euro party ‘Alternative für Deutschland’ (AfD), increasingly shifted towards an explicit xenophobic, anti-immigration profile. On the other hand, volunteering for forced migrants has also increased considerably after 2011. According to a survey conducted in 2014 staff members of associations involved in assisting forced migrants estimated an increase of volunteers by around 70 per cent from 2011 onwards (Karakayali and Kleist, 2015).

Despite these changes prior to the so-called ‘refugee crisis’<sup>41</sup>, the summer of 2015 became a critical juncture (della Porta, 2018b; Hess et al., 2017): Numbers of asylum applications in Germany rose due to an escalating war in Syria and shortage of funding for refugee camps in neighboring countries. In contrast to the 1990s, rising numbers did not provoke a hegemonic rejection of asylum-seekers, but led to a gradual (and temporary) mainstreaming of supportive attitudes toward ‘refugees’ (Jakob, 2016). Starting from civil society associations, in summer 2015, more and more politicians, trade unions, companies and media outlets joined in. On August 29, the traditionally right-leaning tabloid BILD (with an infamously xenophobic record in reporting on the arrival of asylum-seekers in the early 1990s) launched a campaign under the label ‘Refugees Welcome’ to connect and inform volunteers. Only two days later, German Chancellor Merkel’s quote ‘Wir schaffen das’ (‘We can do this’) prepared a fundamental U-turn in

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<sup>41</sup> I put the term ‘refugee crisis’ in inverted commas on purpose because we refer to the dominant framing of the developments in summer 2015. Yet, we claim that the phenomenon is better depicted as a ‘crisis of the European border regime’ (Schwiertz & Ratfisch, 2016), a ‘crisis of refugee protection’ (Scherr, 2016b), a ‘political crisis’ (Geddes, 2017) or, better, by avoiding the crisis terminology altogether, as ‘the long summer of migration’ (Kasperek & Speer, 2015).

governmental policy. Within a surprisingly short period of time, ‘refugee solidarity’ had moved from a niche in society to become (temporarily) hegemonic. On September 5<sup>th</sup>, the German government in a historical moment declared to open the borders and receive asylum-seekers who had been stranded in Hungary, which equalled a temporary suspension of the Dublin agreement. Following this decision, the already high numbers of daily arrivals further increased to various thousands. Pictures of self-organized welcome committees cheering at asylum-seekers at railway stations in Munich became emblematic for the rapid mainstreaming of supportive attitudes toward forced migrants (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Steinhilper & Karakayali, 2018).

However, the social climate continued to be highly polarized. The right-wing party AfD subsequently entered numerous regional parliaments;<sup>42</sup> 2015 witnessed the highest number of violent attacks on asylum-seekers and asylum facilities in one year ever counted (Pro Asyl, 2016c). Violent riots in the Eastern cities of Heidenau, Tröglitz, Clausnitz (among others), recalled the racist attacks in the early 1990s, however, this time – both politicians and the media unanimously condemned the violence. Despite the pro-‘refugee’ position of Chancellor Merkel, the grand coalition of CDU and SPD in autumn 2015 enacted the most rigid asylum laws since 1993 with the so-called ‘asylum packages’ I and II (Bundesregierung, 2016; Pro Asyl, 2016b).

In France, the developments in the 2000s, including the repercussions of the ‘summer of migration’, were somewhat different. While the second half of the 1990s introduced a wave of contention around undocumented migration (the so-called ‘sans-papiers question’), the issue of asylum became only occasionally politicised. The public debate on the issue mainly circulated around Calais and Sangatte in Northern France, where asylum-seekers increasingly gathered, attempting to cross the channel hidden on trucks, ships or freight-trains and subsequently to apply for asylum in the United Kingdom. At the beginning, most migrants originated from war-torn Kosovo Chechnya, later Afghanistan and Iraq and currently Somalia and Sudan. Most refrained from applying for asylum in France due to (depending on the country of origin) comparatively low recognition rates (Bendel, 2013; Neumayer, 2005a). In response, a camp administered by the French Red Cross was opened in 1999 but rapidly proved to be undersized (Schwenken, 2014: 175). Given the large numbers of border crossings, the UK government blamed France for getting rid of irregular migrants by facilitating the

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<sup>42</sup> In the 2017 national elections, the party obtained 12,6 per cent and entered the German Bundestag as the third strongest party.

presence close to the tunnel in the camp and by this increasing the likelihood of successful passage. During the French presidential elections in 2002, the issue became one of the key controversies during the campaign. Shortly after the entering of office of conservative Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy, the centre was closed down despite large protests of migrants and anti-racist groups (Schwenken, 2014: 176). Yet, this intervention did not stop migrants from arriving in the region and trying to cross to the UK. In consequence, precarious makeshift camps and squats popped up in the outskirts of the city of Calais, which were referred to as the ‘Jungle of Calais’ by both the media and inhabiting migrants. Various thousands of migrants lived in the camp, mostly only for a couple of months before managing to cross to the UK. In autumn 2009, after heated controversies and repression (destruction of tents, prevention of humanitarian activities by supporting associations, raffles etc.) the ‘jungle’ was evicted and burned down (Schwenken, 2014). However, the huts and tents were rebuilt shortly after and a spiral of eviction and rebuilding unfolded, due to the absence of alternatives offered and accepted by the migrants involved (Alexander, 2014; Bulman, 2016; Walker, Weaver, & Pujol-Mazzini, 2016). The fact that controversies on forced migration centred around Calais was also due to relatively low numbers of asylum applications in France, reaching just below 60,000 in 2015 (OFPRA, 2016) and around 80,000 in 2016. Consequently, the notion of a ‘summer of migration’ applied to Germany, but far less so in France. Whereas the EU witnessed the largest arrival of forced migrants in its history - with 745,000 applications in Germany in 2016 (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2016), France remained, despite an increase, relatively little affected. Nevertheless, intense public debates around forced migration emerged around the accommodation of asylum-seekers in Paris (see Chapter 7) and continued in the border zones of Ventimiglia/Nice and Calais.

### **4.3. Asylum and Irregularity in France and Germany**

As stated in the terminological note in the introduction, the phenomenon of forced migration transcends the neat legal distinction between ‘political’ refugees and ‘economic’ migrants (Carling, 2015; Scheel & Squire, 2014). In contexts of increasing restrictions on legal migration, including asylum, irregular migration is a widespread side-effect (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016; Stobbe, 2004). Indeed, even though for obvious reasons, exact numbers are non-existent, the comparative research project ‘Clandestino’ has estimated numbers above 200,000 in both France and Germany (Courau, 2009; Cyrus, 2009; Vogel, 2015). Given the important nexus of irregularity and asylum, I will subsequently illustrate how both fields interact and overlap in the two contexts of

investigation.

### *The Irregularity-Asylum Nexus*

Forced migrants are often irregular migrants in countries in the Global North, because their asylum claim was rejected or they never even applied, knowing that their complex biography of forced migration would not correspond with the restrictive definition of asylum. Despite this factual irregularity-asylum nexus, public discourses, legal frameworks and also the living-conditions for undocumented migrants vary widely across contexts. Monforte and Dufour have identified highly distinct levels of exclusion of undocumented migrants in Germany and France (Monforte & Dufour, 2011). In France, vivid public debates around irregular migration date back to the early 1970s. While restrictions on irregular migration proliferated, a wide range of newly founded associations and established human rights NGOs started to support the rights of undocumented migrants. This is partly related to a large share of undocumented migrants originating from former French colonies, adding a layer of historic or moral responsibility to the debate. Given the linguistic advantage and a large, irregular job market particularly in the catering sector, care work, construction and cleaning, many undocumented migrants remained *de facto* relatively well integrated in society, despite their irregular status (Abdallah, 2000; Brun, 2006; Courau, 2009; Monforte & Dufour, 2011). Others had lived and worked in France for years or even decades and were made irregular by law reforms denying an extension of their visa (Abdallah, 2000). Furthermore, as a ‘civic’ type of citizenship regime, France had ever since been more open to immigration compared to Germany, for instance, which for a long time remained a reluctant immigration country. As a result of this particular historical, social, and linguistic context, France witnessed various waves of regularisation of undocumented migrants, including around 130,000 in 1981 and around 90,000 in 1997/8 (Courau, 2009). Following the vast mobilizations of undocumented migrants and supporting associations and citizens in the second half of the 1990s, civil society succeeded in pushing for the automatic regularization of irregular migrants from 1998 onwards. If an irregular migrant had resided in France for more than 10 years, if he was ill or if he had children born in France, he would automatically be regularized. This meant annual regularisation of around 25,000 individuals. The automatic regularization was abolished in May 2006 with the implementation of the Sarkozy law on migration (Courau, 2009).

In Germany, in turn, undocumented migration ‘remained mainly a topic for specialised actors and became only rarely a “hot issue” in the public debate’ (Cyrus, 2009). Not least due to the German particularity of ‘Duldung’ (roughly translates to ‘tolerance’), irregular migration is both in public discourse and administration closely related to asylum. ‘Duldung’ describes a German legal (non)-status. Technically, it is a suspension of deportation, often following a rejection of an asylum application, in cases of practical or humanitarian objections to a deportation. The status is usually renewed on a monthly basis. However, it expires immediately in the moment when a deportation notice is being sent. Neither regularized nor undocumented, individuals with ‘Duldung’ are locked into a status of limbo and precariousness. Originally, ‘this legal status was understood as an exception, yet, its prevalence has reached an enormous scale. In 2013, 94,000 (Deutscher Bundestag, 2014: 24) were registered with this status, in 2016, as many as 159,678 (Deutscher Bundestag, 2017: 29). Individuals with ‘Duldung’ are usually accommodated in the same centralized structures as asylum-seekers and are subject to even more accentuated restrictions in terms of mobility, working permit and access to services. Nevertheless, in Germany, many rejected asylum-seekers tend to stay in this restricted condition rather than opting for complete irregularity (Cyrus, 2009). This is mainly due to much more regular controls in the public space (particularly for Persons of Colour), as well as a largely inaccessible job and housing market for individuals without papers (Monforte & Dufour, 2011; Stobbe, 2004). Moreover, the likelihood of escaping irregularity through regularization is generally low and limited to those with a status of ‘Duldung’.

Given these differences in two ‘borderline citizenship regimes’, the room for manoeuvre for individuals with an irregular status is larger in France than in Germany. Considerable differences between the countries furthermore exist with regard to how their respective asylum systems are designed.

### *Key Characteristics of the Asylum Systems in Germany and France*

Despite repeated attempts to harmonize asylum systems in the European Union, the respective traditions, legal frameworks and administrative implementations differ strongly between countries. In consequence, specific hardships and hence, grievances of asylum-seekers are also rooted in national specificities.

The German asylum system is distinctive from other European countries, including France, for its focus on dispersal of asylum-seekers throughout the country,

which has historically aimed at both ‘burden sharing’ and deterrence (Boswell, 2003; Hinger, 2016; Steinhilper & Hinger, 2017). Unlike in other domains, the ‘burden sharing’ between the different regions does not consist of a financial agreement between the ‘Länder’<sup>43</sup> but of a physical dispersal of asylum-seekers. The latter are distributed on a no-choice basis, according to the so-called ‘Königstein quota’ that takes into account the tax revenue and number of inhabitants of each Land. The ‘Länder’ are responsible for the ‘first reception’ (‘Erstaufnahme’) of asylum-seekers. To this end, the ‘Länder’, in cooperation with private companies and/or welfare organizations, run large ‘reception centers’ for hundreds or thousands of people. Asylum-seekers are required to stay there up to 6 months before being either deported or transferred to subsequent accommodation (‘Anschlussunterbringung’) organized by the municipalities. For the most part the dispersal within the Länder also follows a quota system. The dispersal of asylum-seekers was introduced in the late 1970s, along with centralized accommodation. The obligation to live in accommodation centers introduced in 1982 was, and still is, part of an asylum policy that aims to deter (potential) asylum-seekers. As Lothar Späth, the CDU-governor of Baden-Württemberg noted in an interview in 1982 with the newspaper ‘Schwäbisches Tagblatt’: ‘The number of asylum-seekers only decreased when the bush drums signalled – don’t go to Baden-Württemberg, there you have to live in a camp’ (quoted in Müller, 2010: 197, author’s translation). Based on the same rationale, the Bavarian ‘Ordinance on the Implementation of Asylum’ (‘Asyldurchführungsverordnung’) until 2013 explicitly stated that conditions during the asylum procedure should ‘encourage’ asylum-seekers to return to their countries of origin (Bayrische Staatsregierung, 2013). Justified with both budgetary constraints and deterrence, centralized accommodation is often highly precarious and entails a number of hardships (Johansson, 2016; Wendel, 2014a). The allocated living space ranges between four and six square metres per person, the number of persons per room from four to six (Wendel 2014: 39 f.).<sup>44</sup> Bathrooms and kitchens are shared among various rooms. The location of collective accommodation also varies; mostly, however, facilities have been built in highly peripheral areas in industrial areas of urban regions and dispersed in rural areas (Pieper, 2008; Selders, 2009). In many cases, remote former military barracks have been repurposed (Wendel, 2014b).

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<sup>43</sup> German term for States in the German federal political system.

<sup>44</sup> This passage refers to ordinary collective accommodations centres. From summer 2015, numerous emergency shelters have been opened with much more precarious living conditions. In one of these centres, the former airport of ‘Tempelhof’ in Berlin, various thousands of asylum-seekers were hosted for months with extremely limited privacy (Berliner Morgenpost, 2015).



Despite these general characteristics of asylum accommodation in Germany, considerable differences exist. Whereas some municipalities have followed the demands of asylum-seekers and support initiatives to decentralize accommodation (that is, to make private flats available), others adhere to centralized accommodation. Somehow, the German reception and accommodation system is like playing the lottery. The lucky ones end up in localities with a decentralized accommodation system, a great support infrastructure, as well as training and job opportunities. The not so lucky ones, on the other hand, find themselves in an isolated accommodation centre with no support, poor job and training prospects. Lately, the German asylum system has increasingly turned into a class system with different kinds of accommodation for different 'classes' of asylum-seekers, who are distinguished on the basis of their (prospective) legal status, their nationality, gender, age and merit. In many municipalities, asylum-seeking persons can only move into private flats once they have been granted asylum. This is especially true for single men. Women and families, just like other persons deemed 'vulnerable' are granted access to private accommodation more easily, even before their status has been determined (Steinhilper & Hinger, 2017). Due to the significant increase of asylum-seekers from 2014 onwards, numerous new emergency shelters have been built or municipal buildings reused (such as sport halls, kindergartens etc.). As a result of peripheral location, limited private space and many people sharing few kitchens and bathrooms, life in collective accommodation has been described as being usually highly precarious (Johansson, 2016; Wendel, 2014b).

Geographical dispersal and centralized accommodation was complemented in Germany by 'Residenzpflicht', particularly until 2015, when a legal reform limited its applicability, yet did not abolish the law as such. Other than the term implies, this law does not only determine the locality of residence of asylum-seekers, but it prohibits individuals from leaving certain administrative boundaries. It is therefore the harshest mobility restriction for asylum-seekers in Europe (Jakob, 2016). The size of the administrative boundaries varies across the regions ('Länder') (Selders, 2009). Until 2012 in most cases mobility was restricted to the administrative area of the immigration offices, usually the municipal borders. From 2010 onwards, various regions extended the radius of mobility to the regional boundaries. Freedom of circulation at a national level was still not allowed. Exemptions had to be requested and were decided at the discretion of the respective immigration office. Immigration offices regularly demanded fees for issuing permissions (Jakob, 2016). Violations of

‘Residenzpflicht’ could be sanctioned with fines of up to 2.500 €. In a major asylum law reform in summer 2014, entering into force in January 2015, ‘Residenzpflicht’ became limited to the first three months of status determination and to cases of violations of the law (including minor ones such as using public transport without a ticket). While the locality of residence remains determined by the state, asylum-seekers and those ‘Geduldete’ who cover their living expenses are granted freedom of circulation nationwide. However, ‘Residenzpflicht’ has formally not been abolished and its re-expansion is regularly discussed. Both centralized accommodation and ‘Residenzpflicht’ have served as means to discipline asylum-seekers, to facilitate their potential expulsion (Pieper, 2008) and to minimize contact and hence potential empathy with asylum-seekers by the German population (Jakob, 2016: 15).

In short, the reception and accommodation of asylum-seekers in Germany is a tightly regulated system. On the upside, it is difficult to get out of this system. Unlike in France (see below), asylum-seekers rarely end up in the streets. On the downside, it is hard to ‘escape’ the asylum system, which disperses, accommodates and regulates on a no-choice basis, often in precarious conditions and with very little access to society.

The French asylum system, in turn, was until the late 1980s known to be comparatively liberal. Asylum applications are usually processed in the prefecture (administration of the region), in which the asylum application was filed. Hence, the system does not foresee a systematic dispersal on a no-choice basis as in the German case. A mandatory residence or mobility restriction has never been in place. Asylum-seekers could furthermore choose to live in accommodation offered by the state or opt for a private solution (often facilitated by ethnic or kinship networks). Furthermore, until the early 1990s they were entitled to work. The turning point marked the separation of accommodation facilities for asylum-seekers and recognized refugees in 1991 (Kobelinski, 2014). Subsequently, the option of obtaining housing allowances was replaced by compulsory and centralized housing offered by the state. Yet, the reception centres for asylum-seekers ‘Centre d’Accueil pour Demandeurs d’Asile’ (CADA) were from the very beginning insufficient in their capacity. In the 1990s, only 10 per cent of asylum-seekers were accommodated in CADAs, mainly women, children and elderly people. Those who did not obtain a place in a CADA or subsidiary emergency accommodation were entitled to a monetary compensation. Once any accommodation was offered, refusal to accept this place not only resulted in no further housing offers, but also in a cut of the temporary monetary compensations (Kobelinski, 2014). Hence, the

choice was replaced by a rigid system. Young single men were systematically left without shelter and monetary compensation for the lack of housing (Julien-Laferrière, 2016). Considering itself as mainly a transit country and deliberately intending to avoid a ‘pull effect’, the French system of asylum accommodation has ever since been deliberately undersized. The degree of this shortage became particularly evident in the course of 2015 (see also Chapter 7). By the end of 2015, there were 50,000 places in CADA or emergency shelters for the entire country (France, 2015; see also *Le Parisien Online*, 2015b) in spite of 80,000 asylum applications in 2015 alone and thousands of cases still pending from previous years) (OFPRA, 2016). A report by the French Senate on the accommodation published in December 2016 concludes a chronic under-funding and a system ‘at the level of asphyxiation’ [about to collapse] (Senate of France, 2016: 5).

Given the limited number of places in CADA, they are considered as a ‘privilege’ (Interview P8) within the French asylum system, compared to the short-term solutions in emergency shelters and life in the streets. Consequently, in contrast to Germany, migrant rights organizations in France have usually advocated for the establishment of more reception centres (Interview P8, Interview P9, Interview P18) rather than for their abolition (as in the case of Germany). The limited availability of long-term housing for asylum-seekers, also discourages from protesting against precarious conditions in CADAs by their inhabitants. A former director of a large migrant rights organization in France noted in an interview: ‘In a system which leaves the vast majority without any accommodation, there is no way for those few who have received accommodation to express dissent. No matter how difficult the circumstances in the CADA are’ (Interview P18).

Yet, various studies have shown that both in France and Germany, the living conditions of asylum-seekers entail numerous hardships that are rooted in centralized accommodation and the dependence on a highly consequential bureaucratic procedure.

Due to its centralized system of accommodation alongside a set of restrictive laws, the German dispositive of asylum has been described as ‘organized disintegration’ (Täubig, 2009). Borrowing from Erving Goffman, Vicki Täubig conceptualises asylum facilities as ‘total institutions’, due to their hermetic nature, the dependence on one central authority and the concentration of all aspects of life in one location (ibid). In her extensive qualitative analysis of the everyday life experiences of asylum-seekers in Germany, she scrutinized the temporal, spatial and relational effects of the ‘total institution of asylum’ (ibid). Most respondents referred to an extension of time through seemingly endless waiting, resulting in emotions of boredom and frustration; to

a high spatial concentration of their lives in the asylum camp itself due to segregation from German society (ibid); and to a constant fear of deportation. Despite the differences in its concrete implementation, the accommodation system implies certain structural features that have serious negative repercussions for asylum-seeking persons: many facilities are located in urban peripheries or in the countryside, which complicates social relations with persons outside the facilities. The life in the centres is characterized by a lack of privacy and regular conflicts. Forced inactivity during the at times lengthy asylum procedures, and the social and spatial concentration in the accommodation centres gradually undermines an autonomous conduct of life. Numerous studies on the everyday life of asylum-seekers in Germany have documented patterns of social and spatial exclusion from the majority population and tremendous emotional and psychological strain among asylum-seekers.<sup>45</sup> Evidently, the psycho-social effects vary depending on the individual disposition and conditions in the different asylum facilities, yet, to a large degree, they are inherent in the asylum system.

Indeed, research on the French context has traced similar effects (Kobelinski, 2010, 2014). While most perceive the first days and weeks in a CADA as a relief from highly precarious living conditions (e.g. in the streets), the repercussions of semi-closed and centralized accommodation become evident gradually. After a while, the everyday life of asylum-seekers in centralized accommodation is characterized by an extension of time, a condensation of space due to limited mobility, a highly precarious provisionality of social relations and emotional states and hence a loss of an autonomous conduct of life (Kobelinski, 2014). Due to the peripheral location of most centres, social relations to French citizens are structurally complicated. The disciplinary rules in the centres create a deep feeling of dependency, control and unease among most inhabitants (Kobelinski, 2010).

#### **4.4. Mobilizations for and by Forced Migrants in Germany and France**

Within these socio-political contexts in France and Germany, which comprise both similarities and differences, political mobilizations have taken distinct forms in both countries.<sup>46</sup> Given the distinct migration histories, as well as legal and social contexts,

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<sup>45</sup> For a recent overview commissioned by the Robert Bosch Foundation, see Johansson (2016).

<sup>46</sup> This cursory overview is meant to situate the subsequent chapters of this manuscript. Much more extensive accounts of the migrant rights movements in Germany and France can be found in Monforte (Monforte, 2014) and for the French context (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016).

political mobilizations for rights and recognition of forced migrants have taken distinct shapes and trajectories in the two countries.

In France, a migrant rights movement emerged in the early 1970s during the restrictions of immigration law mentioned above, which rendered numerous migrant workers illegal and led to a rise in deportations and acts of contestation against them (Abdallah, 2000; Gisti, 2014). In this period, established human rights associations such as ‘La Ligue des Droits de l’Homme’ (LDH), ‘Cimade’ and ‘Mouvement contre le Racisme et l’Amitié entre les Peuples’ (MRAP) worked alongside more recently established migrant solidarity groups such as ‘Groupe d’Information et de Soutien des Immigrés’ (GISTI) or ‘Fédération des Associations de Solidarité avec tous-t-es les Immigré-e-s’ (FASTI). Given the relative irrelevance of asylum until the late 1970s, the organizations mainly focused on the human rights of undocumented migrants, migrant workers, anti-racism and anti-colonialism (the latter being a highly contentious issue in France due to the violent decolonization struggles in Algeria at the time) (Abdallah, 2000). Due to the high number of migrant workers who had become illegalized following immigration law reforms from the mid-1970s onwards, various trade unions had become engaged in migrant (worker) solidarity, amongst them also the large unions ‘Confédération Générale du Travail’ (CGT)<sup>47</sup> and ‘Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail’ (CFDT)<sup>48</sup>. In contrast to Germany, the migrant rights movement in France has from its emergence been closely related to mobilizations by migrants themselves. The illegalization of migrants and their acts of contestation including hunger strikes and strikes in the workplaces from the early 1970s onwards has strongly influenced the wider migrant rights movement. Not least due to these mobilizations, the socialist government, entering office in 1980, legalized around 130,000 undocumented migrants between 1980 and 1981 (Abdallah, 2000).

Similarly, in the 1980s, in the context of electoral success of the far-right Front National at the local level and the proliferation of racist violence, young migrants (so-called ‘beurs’) re-dynamized the movement. Their 1983 ‘Marche pour l’Égalité et Contre le Racisme’ gathered at its final demonstration around 100,000 participants in Paris, by far the largest mobilization concerning the issue of migration in French history at the time (Willems, 1999: 185). While internal disputes led to a rapid fragmentation of the protest alliance including migrants and supporting associations, these mobilizations had

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<sup>47</sup> Translates to ‘General Confederation of Labour’.

<sup>48</sup> Translates into ‘French Democratic Confederation of Labour’.

important repercussions: one of the highly influential migrant rights NGOs, ‘SOS Racisme’, was created in its aftermath, resulting in a subsequent integration of migrant dissent into formalized associations, close to the socialist party (Abdallah, 2000; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016).

The core French pro-beneficiary associations (re)-intensified their cooperation in the late 1980s with the creation of the ‘Réseau d’information et de solidarité’ (‘Information and Solidarity Network’) to contest deportations of undocumented migrants, including rejected asylum-seekers (Monforte, 2014). Due to this legacy of pro-migrant mobilizations in France since the 1970s, the topic of asylum was from the moment of its politicisation addressed within a broader framework of migrant rights. The associations involved argued that restrictive laws in both realms (asylum and undocumented migration) led to disenfranchised individuals with precarious residence status. Consequently, the reform of OFPRA in the early 1990s was collectively criticised and the subsequent hunger strikes of rejected asylum-seekers were supported by a broad alliance of organizations (human rights associations, anti-racist groups, trade unions) involving established actors in the field (Siméant, 1998). These associations also jointly mobilized against the immigration law reforms named after the ministers of Interior Pasqua in 1993 and Debré in 1996. In the 1990s, hence, the French migrant rights movement was highly organized, involving frequent interactions of a wide range of associations.

A major push was given to the migrant rights movement during the self-organized mobilizations by undocumented migrants starting in March 1996, which initiated the most extensive and sustainable wave of contention concerning immigration in French history. Despite multiple lines of fragmentation among the supporting associations and between the self-organized *sans-papiers* and supporters, the events in summer 1996 represented a symbolic reference point of the movement up to this date (Blin, 2008; Marin, 2006; Siméant, 1998; Terray, 2006).

In March 1996, around 300 undocumented migrants left the shadows and initiated a protest wave of occupations and hunger strikes culminating in the occupation of the church St Bernard in the 18<sup>th</sup> district of Paris (see also Chapter 7). Numerous migrant and human rights associations, as well as a collective of public intellectuals supported the struggles. National and international media reported extensively on what was at the time the largest wave of political mobilizations by undocumented migrants in Europe. With the eviction of the church in August 1996, the movement did not end. New *sans papiers*

collectives emerged all over France, loosely tied together by a National Coalition of Sans-Papiers (CNSP) (Abdallah, 2000: 48). The upcoming national elections led to an increasing resonance of the issue in the (extra)-parliamentarian French left. By early 1997, the explosive mix of increasing electoral success of the far-right Front National, the passage of the restrictive ‘Debré Law’ and the self-organized protests of sans-papiers fueled an unprecedented solidarity, mirrored in a turn-out of more than 100,000 participants at a demonstration against the law in February 1997 (Libération, 1997). The ‘sans-papiers question’ also became prominent in artistic circles. In early 1997, 66 young directors launched a public call to disobey the restrictive Debré law (Ervine, 2013: 33). During the internationally renowned film festival in Cannes the same year, all French directors displayed a three-minute short film on the protests in Paris before the screening of their festival contributions (Tarr, 2005). While the sans-papiers contributed to a national trend of reactivating the left, which eventually resulted in the victory of the socialist party on June 1<sup>st</sup> 1997, the visibility and unity of the movement gradually diminished. Yet, the mobilizations had pushed the new government to issue the so-called ‘Circulaire Chevènement’, which led to the regularization of around 90,000 undocumented migrants, the largest of its kind in French history (Courau, 2009). Following this episode of contention, the movements rallying around the asylum issue comprised associations who were specifically involved in the asylum question as well as associations that addressed migration policies more generally. Accordingly, the association involved in pro-asylum and sans-papiers advocacy, were – despite their professionalization - far-reaching in their demands: In an open letter to Lionel Jospin in July 1997, various groups including Act Up – Paris, FASTI and GISTI demanded a French immigration policy based on ‘freedom of movement’ and ‘open borders’ (Act-Up Paris et al., 1997).

As Monforte (2014) traces in his detailed reconstruction of the migrant rights movements in France, the following decade was characterized by regular interaction of a highly active and centralized migrant rights movement in France, addressing both the issue of asylum and immigration more broadly. Among the most important milestones in this movement was the 2002 ‘Coordination Française pour le Droit d’Asile’ (French Coordination for the Right to Asylum), the 2004 ‘Reseau Educations Sans Frontières’ (‘Network Education Without Borders’) and the 2006 network ‘Unies Contre une Immigration Jetable’ (‘United Against a Disposable Immigration’). Within these campaigns and during regular interactions of various associations, an active and

influential movement emerged. Yet, this highly cohesive movement was characterized by two less integrated sets of actors: associations with a clear humanitarian focus and a concentration on asylum (mainly ‘France Terre d’Asile’ (FTdA) and ‘Forum Réfugié’) and the self-organized migrant collectives. The latest from the 1990s onwards, FTdA and ‘Forum Réfugié’ opted out from a broader migrant rights movement and limited the work to ‘humanitarian’ assistance, an exclusive focus on existing asylum law and with a by and large consensual relationship with the French state (Monforte, 2014). In addition, the *sans-papiers* collectives emerging in the second half of the 1990s were only occasionally integrated in the movement and remained at its margin (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016). As Uitermark and Nicholls recall, migrant associations including the collectives had a hard time finding their place in a predominantly white and professionalized migrant rights movement in France (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016). Despite closer contacts during and in the years following the Saint Bernard mobilizations, the role of the collectives was gradually diminished in controversies over representation, autonomy and leadership. With the increasing arrival of asylum-seekers in the North of France in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as well as a Europeanization of immigration policies, the activities of the French migrant rights movement focused on the situation in the Calais region and increasingly Europeanized, establishing networks such as ‘Migreurop’ and joining into transnational networks such as the ‘No border’ network (Monforte, 2014). Contrary to the German case, which will be illustrated below, the French migrant rights movement did not undergo a major shift prior to and during the ‘long summer of migration’. The common suspect associations, cooperating since the 1990s, continued their cooperation on a regular basis. Yet, migration somewhat disappeared from the public discourse, becoming a footnote in the electoral campaigns to the presidential elections in 2016.

In Germany, small-scale, grassroots solidarity with migrants had existed ever since the presence of forced migrants in Germany. Among the early activists were volunteers associated with churches, radical left groups and professionals from the welfare associations. When asylum became a highly contested issue in Germany for the first time in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the first ‘refugee councils’, regional networks for the coordination of pro-asylum activities emerged – Berlin being the first ‘refugee council’ to be established in 1981. Multiple campaigns were launched against deportations, work-bans for asylum-seekers, living conditions in the camps amongst others. Following the suicide of Cemal Altun, who jumped out of the window on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the administrative court in Berlin, desperate about his pending deportation, the



German wide network ‘Asyl in der Kirche’ (‘church asylum’) was founded to protect forced migrants in the sacral space of churches (Flüchtlingsrat Berlin e.V., 2011). Three years later, a national umbrella organization ‘Pro Asyl’ in 1986 was formed by a broad alliance of trade unions, welfare associations, human rights organizations and faith-based associations and the regional refugee councils (Pro Asyl, 2016a). Beyond these more formalized networks, anti-racist and anti-fascist groups organized decentralized protest and direct action in favour of asylum-seekers throughout the republic from the late 1980s onwards. Their repertoire of action was as diverse as the radical left by the time: Neighbourhood initiatives bought the food vouchers of asylum-seekers and blocked supermarkets to push for the introduction of cash transfers. Groups organized legal and medical support, German classes and visited the isolated camps (Flüchtlingsrat Berlin e.V., 2011). The ‘Revolutionäre Zellen’ (‘revolutionary cells’), a militant-left group, set on fire asylum-related administrative facilities in various cities to destroy the files with the idea of providing asylum-seekers a space beyond state control (*Berliner Bündnis für Freilassung*, 2000). Autonomous legal and medical collectives were formed in many cities to support asylum-seekers and illegalized migrants from the 90s onwards (Mylius, Bornschlegl, & Frewer, 2011). Yet, and in strong contrast to France, these mobilizations remained highly fragmented and localized (Monforte, 2014: 51). In the early 1990s, temporarily, a broad alliance of associations, including both the ‘political’ associations as well as the ‘humanitarian’ service providers (‘Diakonie’, ‘Caritas’, ‘Arbeiterwohlfahrt’) launched campaigns to protest restrictive asylum laws. However, the strategy of these organizations was mainly oriented towards lobbying with politicians and the judiciary and had limited resonance among the wider public.

Largely independent from the activities of the large and professionalized associations, during the peak of anti-migrant discourse and restrictive legal reforms, a grassroots anti-racist movement emerged in Germany in the early 1990s. In this period, various influential anti-racist organizations were founded, such as the ‘Antirassistische Initiative Berlin’ (‘Antiracist Initiative Berlin’) in 1988, the ‘Antirassismusbüro Bremen’ (‘Antiracism Office Bremen’) in 1991, the Berlin-based ‘Forschungsstelle Flucht und Migration’ (‘Research Centre Flight and Migration’) in 1994, and the ‘Internationaler Menschenrechtsverein Bremen’ (‘International Human Rights Association Bremen’) in 1996.

Neither in the professionalised associations nor in the grassroots movement did (forced) migrants hold a prominent role (see e.g. Lupus 1995). In consequence, the first

self-organized political groups of forced migrants in Germany<sup>49</sup> started their protest without the support of ‘powerful allies’.<sup>50</sup> In the political and discursive ice age of asylum politics in Germany, two influential associations emerged. In an isolated asylum facility in the Eastern-German region of Thuringia, asylum-seekers founded ‘The Voice Africa Forum’ in 1994. Amongst them were Nigerian members of the opposition against the military dictatorship of general Abacha (Jakob 2016: 21). After their escape from Nigeria, they were confronted with the restrictive asylum system in Germany, which used to be particularly harsh in the Eastern regions. From their allocated asylum facilities, the group mobilized other asylum-seekers in the region. At the beginning, they were received with scepticism and sometimes open opposition – many were afraid that a potential political engagement might result in immediate deportation. ‘The Voice Africa Forum’, nevertheless grew steadily and eventually the network was renamed ‘The Voice Refugee Forum’ in order to overcome ethnic boundaries. Even though many of its founding members were granted refugee status, they continued their activities. Subsequently, countless campaigns, hunger strikes and rallies against encampment, food vouchers, deportations and ‘Residenzpflicht’ were launched and coordinated by the network (The VOICE Refugee Forum, 2014).

Almost simultaneously, yet, independently from the first sustainable mobilizations by mostly African asylum-seekers in Thuringia, forced migrants started mobilizing in the city of Bremen in 1995. Tamil asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka organized a 36-day non-stop picket in front of a deportation prison (International Human Rights Association Bremen, 2001). Shortly after, 250 asylum-seekers accommodated in miserable conditions on a ship in the coal harbour of the city, went on hunger strike (Gerling, 2015; Siekmeier, 1995). Both protests attracted considerable media attention and led to the creation of the association ‘Internationaler Menschenrechtsverein Bremen’, which was meant to provide a platform for self-organized asylum-seekers in their struggles for rights and recognition. Support remained relatively scarce and mainly

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<sup>49</sup> Practices of resistance by forced migrants, such as hunger strikes and self-mutilation, can be traced throughout the history of forced migration and restrictive politics enacted against asylum-seekers in Germany. However, scattered, episodic acts of resistance were not knit together in a sustainable network of self-organized forced migrant activists until the mid-90s.

<sup>50</sup> In a retrospective, members of the self-organized movement recalled: ‘The problem was that those who had the power, like trade unions or parliamentarians, etc. were not engaged with significant force to resist the rapidly escalating attacks on refugees’ (International Human Rights Association Bremen, 2001).

involved sympathizers of the ‘autonomous left’, at the time organized in the ‘Antirassismusbüro Bremen’.

In early 1998, a group of Kurdish asylum-seekers under threat of imminent deportation sought protection in churches in the German region of North-Rhine-Westphalia. Termed as ‘Wanderkirchenasyl’ (‘Moving Church Asylum’), the group rapidly expanded to more than 300 individuals, staying and moving between various faith-based institutions in the region (Joch-Joisten, 1999; Morgengrauen, 1998). The campaign received support from various prominent figures, including the German intellectuals Günther Grass and Margarete Mitscherlich, the journalist Günther Wallraff (Joch-Joisten, 1999) and spokesperson of the French sans-papiers movement Madjigène Cissé (Asyl in der Kirche NRW, 1999). Yet, the mobilizations never reached the size, visibility and support of the French counterparts.

Also in 1998, the International Human Rights Association Bremen and the ‘Antirassismusbüro Bremen’, were the key organizers of the first ‘Caravan for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants’. In this first national campaign of various self-organized forced migrant groups (involving also The Voice Refugee Forum), protesters travelled for five weeks with long distances marches and bus tours through 44 cities in Germany (Karawane, 1998a). Besides politicising the mobility restriction ‘Residenzpflicht’ (Goddar, 1998), the campaign linked the situation of asylum-seekers in Germany to the transnational roots of their forced migrant existence: ‘We are outraged by our treatment in Germany and are worried about the destiny of those we had to leave behind’ (Karawane, 1998a). Claiming ‘we are here, because you destroy our countries’ or ‘we are here because you are there’ (Karawane, 1998a), the Caravan politicised and contextualized forced migration beyond a humanitarian narrative.

In the same year, asylum-seekers from various francophone African countries founded the ‘Flüchtlingsinitiative Berlin-Brandenburg’ (‘refugee initiative Berlin-Brandenburg’) with similar claims and protest repertoires (Nsoh, 2008). These early mobilizations built the foundation of a protest movement with a prominent role of forced migrants therein. Yet, it unveiled also profound dilemmas and challenges for political mobilizations by forced migrants in Germany, both in relation to non-migrant ‘supporters’ and within the heterogeneous migrant community. Firstly, the visible involvement of the autonomous left provided indispensable support, yet also entailed additional constraints. Particularly with regard to the ‘Caravan’, faith-based

and more moderate leftist support remained low because scepticism (or opposition) vis-à-vis the ‘autonomous left’ was reproduced in the interactions with the ‘Caravan’ (Hesse, 1998). Secondly, the additional fragmentation of the radical left alienated parts of the already small support base. Thirdly, tensions between white anti-racists and migrant forced migrants. – particularly regarding paternalism and sexism (Antirassismusbüro Bremen, 1998; Ökumenisches Büro München, 2000; SAGA Freiburg, 1998) left deep ruptures in the emerging movement. Lastly, the movement continuously struggled to overcome cleavages of ideology and nationalism. Particularly the large groups of Kurdish, Tamil and Iranian origins repeatedly clashed (Karawane, 1998b). For these internal reasons, as well as a widespread disregard from the side of more professionalized actors, self-organized groups of forced migrants remained scarcely integrated into the (fragmented) migrant rights movement. Nevertheless, both the Voice and the Caravane continued their mobilizations and set the ground for an emerging movement.

The mobilizations at St Bernard in Paris also strongly resonated in non-migrant factions of the German rights movement. In the context of the 1997 edition of the internationally-known exhibition ‘*documenta X*’ in Kassel, a German-wide network of migrant rights groups was founded under the slogan ‘*Kein Mensch ist illegal*’<sup>51</sup> [No human being is illegal] to bridge a highly diverse spectrum of groups and individuals, from private volunteers, to anarchist groups and priests (cross the border, 1999). Following the death of a rejected asylum-seeker on board the deportation flight operated by Lufthansa, the network launched the ‘deportation.class’ campaign, boycotting Lufthansa and its ‘Star Alliance’ partners (cross the border, 1999).

In 1999, ‘no border network’ was founded in reaction to the Tampere summit of the European Union, which foreshadowed increasing cooperation and securitization of border politics in Europe (no-border network, 2004). The transnational network of mostly anarchist groups organized so-called ‘no border camps’ in various European countries from 2000 onwards (Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, 2012). Migrant rights were also increasingly represented in broader transnational mobilizations such as the counter-summit in Genova 2001 or the European Social Forum in Florence 2002

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<sup>51</sup> The expression goes back to a quote by holocaust survivor and Nobel peace prize winner Ellie Wiesel, who was quoted: ‘You who are so-called illegal aliens must know that no human being is ‘illegal’. That is a contradiction in terms. Human beings can be beautiful or more beautiful, they can be fat or skinny, they can be right or wrong, but illegal? How can a human being be illegal?’(quoted in cross the border, 1999).

(Apostolova, Fiedler, & Mezzadra, 2013). No-border camps continue to be held almost annually – 2015 in Ventimiglia (Italy) and 2016 in Thessaloniki (Greece). The German constituency of these loose transnational networks remains strong.

In Germany, the Caravan network remained the backbone of political mobilizations by forced migrants. In 2000 a ‘refugee congress’ gathered around 600 forced migrant participants, as the first event of its kind in Germany (Schwarzer, 2000; Watara, 2013). In 2001, the Caravan organized a national ‘Stop Residenzpflicht’ campaign, calling on refugees to practice civil disobedience and resist the ‘apartheid laws of Germany’ (Koch, 2001; Loschert, 2012; Watara, 2013). Parallel to the 2002 national elections, the Caravan launched a second nation-wide march (International Human Rights Association Bremen, 2001), however the resonance remained limited (Kröger, 2002).

Most of the first generation of forced migrant groups were highly male-dominated. In reaction to the lived experiences of intersectional discrimination as forced migrant women, a female-only group was founded as ‘Women in Exile’ in 2002 in Brandenburg (Women in Exile & Friends, 2014). Beyond joining broader campaigns for migrant rights in Germany, Women in Exile pointed to the particular realities of women in the asylum process with the constant danger of sexual harassment and violence by security personnel and male asylum-seekers in the camps. In 2005, a group of asylum seeking minors founded ‘Jugendliche ohne Grenzen’ (‘Youths without borders’) in close cooperation with the refugee council Berlin and the BBZ, a counselling office for young refugees (Flüchtlingsrat Berlin e.V., 2011).

Despite this proliferation of migrant solidarity and political protest by forced migrants in Germany since the late 1990s, the movement has remained highly fragmented and mostly localized (see also Monforte, 2014). Grassroots groups have rarely interacted with more professionalized organizations. Self-organized migrant collectives never attracted national attention until the 2012 ‘Oranienplatz wave’ (see Chapter 6) (Jakob, 2016).

From the second half of 2014, the situation profoundly changed, when Germany witnessed the gradual formation of nationwide ‘movement of voluntary refugee assistance’ (Karakayali & Kleist 2015: 19, author's translation), which further picked up steam during the ‘long summer of migration’ 2015 (Hess et al., 2017). Media attention as well as the *de facto* challenges of municipalities in the reception of asylum-seekers mobilized a large share of Germans who had formerly neither been active in volunteering

nor politically engaged (Daphi, 2016; Karakayali & Kleist, 2016; Steinhilper & Fleischmann, 2016; Steinhilper & Karakayali, 2018). At a surprising pace, support of forced migrants diffused from a marginalized faith-based and radical left niche to the mainstream. Hundreds of support initiatives were founded, tens of thousands collected and distributed clothes, food and organized German language courses. Many of the new volunteers, however, ‘just want to help’ and distance themselves from a political framing of their activities (Karakayali & Kleist, 2016; Kreck & Gerbing, 2015). Images of cheering crowds of volunteers receiving refugees at the railway station in Munich travelled around the globe and became symbols of a German ‘welcome culture’. This is not just anecdotal evidence. A representative study commissioned by the institute of social sciences of the protestant church in Germany found that in December 2015, refugee support was the second most-mentioned category of volunteer work after ‘sports and leisure’ (Ahrens, 2015). Another (non-representative) survey of summer 2016 found that 66 per cent of the volunteers have been mobilized during the so-called ‘refugee crisis’. However, only 45 per cent of the respondents agreed to the declaration that they wanted to make a political statement with their activities (Karakayali & Kleist 2016: 33).

While engagement in support of forced migrants has rapidly proliferated in recent years in Germany, the anti-racist and highly politicized tone has somewhat vanished. Accordingly, many self-organized groups such as ‘The Voice’ and the ‘Caravan’ have perceived the mainstreaming of volunteering for forced migrants to be detrimental to their attempts to achieve recognition as political agents rather than objects of care (glokal e.V., 2017; Jakob, 2015; Omwenyeke, 2016; Ulu, Byakuleka, & Arps, 2016).<sup>52</sup>

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

As this cursory overview suggests, the concepts ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum-seeker’ are no objective and neutral status describing a state of affairs, but have been transformed in both countries over time, depending on public discourses and political interest. Forced migration emerged on the scene as a highly contentious issue both in France and Germany in the 1970s, with subsequent major migration law restrictions in the 1980s and 90s. Yet, the number of asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants, as well as the conditions for forced migrants in the countries, beyond the political movements emerging to push for rights and recognition of forced migrants, have differed strongly.

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<sup>52</sup> See also Chapter 8 on forced migrant activism in Berlin from 2015 onwards.

From the late 1970s onwards, numbers of asylum applications diverged strongly between the two countries, with Germany reaching a quadruple of applications in the early 1990s. While in Germany asylum has remained a heatedly debated issue ever since, asylum has held a marginal role in French public debates on forced migration. Contentious politics around (forced) migration mainly circled around undocumented migration. Indeed, France, since the 1970s and even more so since the 1990s has witnessed a strong politicization of undocumented migration. Given the large informal economy as well as a historical link to former French colonies on the African continent, public perception of undocumented migration and hence regularizations, have been perceived more positively in France compared to Germany. Due to existing ethnic networks and more open job markets, many forced migrants have opted in France to stay outside the asylum system. In Germany, in turn, life in irregularity has been more complicated in the light of stricter controls in the public space and on production sites. Consequently, the vast majority of migrants opted for the asylum system and many remained as ‘Geduldete’ in Germany after a rejected asylum claim.

Furthermore, the two countries have adopted different strategies to discourage potential asylum-seekers from choosing their respective country. France opted from the 1990s onwards for a system of structural non-accommodation, with often less than 20 per cent of asylum-seekers accommodated in shelters provided by the state. Germany introduced a highly rigid system of forced dispersal, mobility restrictions and food vouchers to which also those with a rejected asylum claim were subject. Consequently, in Germany, many asylum-seekers have mobilized against the asylum system with its detrimental effect on their (mental) health and social integration. In France, forced migrants either remained quiet in order to obtain one of the scarce places in a shelter, moved on to Great Britain or mobilized outside the asylum system as undocumented migrants to obtain regularization (see the four subsequent empirical chapters on details).

Not least due to highly distinct administrative and historical contexts, the migrant rights movements in the two countries have taken different shapes. Whereas in France an increasingly connected migrant rights movement already emerged in the 1970s, involving a broad range of actors and addressing both asylum-seeker and migrant rights more broadly, the German movement remained for decades decentralized, fragmented and largely concentrated on asylum. Throughout the 1990s until 2015, the French and German pro-asylum movements showed fundamentally different characteristics (Monforte, 2014: 34). The French case was distinct due to a much higher density and durability of multi-

organizational coalitions. Furthermore, migrant rights associations and trade unions held a politicized and contextualized view that asylum was just one aspect of broader systems of inequality and exclusion that had been rooted in close cooperation since the 1970s.

With the exception of mass mobilization following the so-called asylum compromise in 1993, Germany was characterized by an ‘ice age’ of migration politics without any major contestations. The migrant rights movement has for decades remained highly localized and fragmented, rarely joining forces for national campaigns.

Similarly, mobilizations by forced migrants have differed strongly in the two countries. Whereas the *sans-papiers* established themselves as an autonomous political voice in the national debate on immigration, the German ‘refugee-movement’ remained at the margin of public attention and highly fragmented until 2012. In France, contention around forced migration culminated in (and spurred in turn) highly disruptive protests - both in 1991 and from 1996 onwards - by undocumented migrants, many of them rejected asylum-seekers. Considerable parts of French civil society aligned with the demands of undocumented migrants also due to a sense of (post-)colonial responsibility and a so-called Republican model of citizenships based on loyalty with the ideals of the Republic rather than blood-lineage.

Due to the politicization of undocumented migration (and compared to Germany, relatively low numbers of asylum applications), in France asylum remained – with the exception of Calais – at the margin of public debate until 2015. In Germany, vast mobilizations of asylum-seekers starting in 2012 and the developments during the ‘long summer of migration’ (Hess et al., 2017; Steinhilper & Fleischmann, 2016), in contrast pushed public debates on forced migration to the top of the public and political debates.

The contentious arenas that will be described and analysed in detail in the subsequent chapters do not unfold in a vacuum but are collocated in these distinct spatial, social, legal and political contexts. Existing movements, as well as administrative and discursive contexts provide specific relational and spatial opportunities which strongly shape contentious arenas around forced migration.



## Part II: Four Contentious Arenas

### Chapter 5

#### The ‘Bourse du Travail’-Arena: Paris 2008-2010

##### Autonomy, Dependence and Fragile Solidarity

‘The sans-papiers are in the front row. The sans-papiers are the first victims. The supporters and the associations must not leave us aside; this is our struggle. It is us who know our difficulties, our situation. The sans-papiers must understand that the struggle of the sans-papiers is their struggle’ (quoted in CSP75, 2008b).

#### 5.1. Introduction

While Part I of this thesis provided the theoretical, methodological and ethical ground for this research, Part II presents and theorizes empirical material on four contentious arenas in Berlin and Paris, two in each city. As the sequence of the chapters follows the chronological order of the contentious arenas, this part opens with an arena unfolding in Paris between 2008 and 2010.

The chapter outlines the making and breaking of social ties during one of the largest waves of contention in the recent history of political mobilizations by forced migrants in France: the occupation of the ‘Bourse du Travail’, the headquarter of the CGT<sup>53</sup> trade union, by an alliance of three autonomous sans-papiers collectives. Despite its long duration and numerical strength, the protest wave has received comparatively

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<sup>53</sup> ‘Confédération Général du Travail’. Translates to ‘General Confederation of Labour’.

little (academic) attention, not least because it unfolded parallel to a highly visible trade-union organized strike movement of undocumented workers (Barron, Bory, Chauvin, Jounin, & Tourette, 2011).<sup>54</sup> This is particularly lamentable as the ‘Bourse du Travail’ arena (which later was relocated to ‘Rue Baudelique’) constituted a turning-point and fundamental rupture for the mobilizations by forced migrants in France, leaving multiple ‘bruises’ (Interview P7, Interview P29, Interview P22) and relational memories on the actors involved.

Subsequently, I will be developing the following theoretical argument: the very actor constellation, antagonizing a leftist trade union and autonomous sans-papiers collectives, provides a compelling starting point for considering forced migrant mobilizations as contentious micro-interactions and against reifying the fiction of a homogenous ‘migrant rights movement’. In targeting an increasingly influential player *within* the movement, the migrants involved aimed at underlying that their struggle was as much a struggle for rights (such as regularization) as it was one for self-representation and recognition as political subjects. The chapter hence illustrates how asymmetric positions of power between those primarily concerned and pro-beneficiaries, introduced sensitive breaking points for sustainable social ties. In following the trajectory of the protest wave, I will moreover document the considerable internal resources of (some) forced migrant communities and the incubating effect of spatialized repertoires. A close-up perspective on the interactionist dynamics, yet, also unveils the fragile solidarity within forced migrant communities mobilizing within small ‘niche openings’. Such needle eyes to regularization or recognition often only allow for the passage of few, at the expense of the exclusion of others. This introduced or deepened fissures within the migrant community. While the question of autonomy remained the decisive breaking point for social ties between undocumented migrants and pro-beneficiaries, the question of ‘who practically profits’ led to numerous decisions to defect from collective action. Lastly, I argue that contentious interactions in one moment in time entered in the collective memories of the actors involved and created dispositions for future interactions.

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<sup>54</sup> For instance, in Kahmann’s article on the strike wave between 2008 and 2010 and the role of the trade unions, the question of autonomy in general and the occupation of the ‘Bourse du Travail’ is almost entirely ignored (2015). Monforte and Dufour investigate only one specific episode (the march Paris-Nice) of this arena (2013). This chapter, hence, constitutes a complement by adding a more extensive sans-papiers perspective.

To unpack and empirically substantiate this argument, the chapter is structured as follows: after providing a short contextualization of events (5.2.), I scrutinize the contentious interactions in the ‘Bourse du Travail’ arena pointing to the underlying stakes and interests of the players involved as well as the unfolding relational dynamics (5.3). Section 5.4. investigates how public officials intervene in the relational breaking points within the migrant rights movement and among forced migrants and by this, contribute to its fragmentation. Finally, I theorize how contentious interactions enter individual and public memories and fundamentally shape interactions (or non-interactions) in subsequent episodes of mobilization (5.5.).

Aiming at a detailed reconstruction and theorizing of a protest wave in the past, the chapter draws from two types of data: it is based on 10 qualitative interviews conducted in Paris in 2017 with actors involved in the arena between 2008 and 2010. Furthermore, it is informed by dozens of written texts produced by a wide range of players in this contentious arena, including migrant rights associations, trade unions, forced migrant activists, public authorities and the media.

## **5.2. Brief Contextualization of Events**

After the highly contentious ‘St Bernard’ protest wave around undocumented migration starting in 1996 and lasting roughly until 2002, the visibility of self-organized protest by migrants temporarily faded (see section 4.4. and also Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016: 88 ff.). The so-called ‘Circulaire Chevènement’ of 1997 had formalized a ‘case-by-case’ approach of regularization, which led to increasing fragmentation among the sans-papiers collectives as well as between autonomous collectives and pro-beneficiary organisations (Freedman, 2008).<sup>55</sup> The reforms also left traces on the collectives themselves: numerous poorly connected sans-papiers collectives organized protest, but increasingly focused on direct (often secret) negotiations with the respective prefect’s office to obtain regularization for their members. Furthermore, the groups mobilized often independently from a largely professionalized and white migrant rights movement (Nicholls &

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<sup>55</sup> The ‘Circulaire Chevènement’ ‘specified that the situation of certain categories of foreigners in an irregular situation would be re-examined, and thus some were automatically excluded from the process as not being within these certain categories, whatever the particular conditions of their personal situation. In addition, the proof needed to accompany the dossier requesting regularization was often impossible to gather, either because of lack of administrative services in the country of origin of the sans-papiers, which did not allow them to have access to birth certificates and so on, or as a result of the particular forms of vulnerability that they had encountered while they were in France. The obligation to supply eight years’ worth of pay slips, for example, was difficult to meet for workers who had spent the last eight years working illegally on the black market’ (Freedman, 2008: 85).

Uitermark, 2016: 88 ff.). A retrospective account by one of the leaders of the St Bernard movement, Madjigène Cissé, provides a concise summary of the movement's lines of division:

‘What can be observed today – and this can be qualified as a division – results from the behaviour of some organizations and some members of our support. We noticed that since November 1997, when some French organizations tried to take many more initiatives and to control the fight of the *sans-papiers*, that is to channel it so that it doesn't overflow. (...) And this is something that we have faced since the Left came back to power. (...) French organizations have supported the claims that were convenient for them, that is, the claims that were not too extremist, those that didn't demand ‘papers for all’, those that didn't criticize the laws adopted by Chevènement, etc. (Cissé, 1998, italics in original).

Equally, trust in the institutionalized Left was lastingly damaged:

‘In particular, the relationship of the *sans-papiers* with the political Left has been problematic, with various attempts by Left-wing parties at instrumentalization of the movement, and an eventual disenchantment due to the failure of Left-wing governments to proceed to any real or sustainable political actions in support of the movement’ (Freedman, 2008: 93).

In 2006, the second (Conservative) Sarkozy administration introduced a series of restrictions on immigration, which were bundled in the CESEDA<sup>56</sup> legislation and targeted both the right to asylum and paths towards regularization (Freedman, 2008). In reaction, a broad range of migrant rights associations created the alliance ‘Unie contre une immigration jetable’<sup>57</sup> (Carrère, 2009; Teule, 2006). While the French movement in defence of migrants gained new momentum in this phase, the collectives of *sans-papiers* held a marginal role therein.

Within the isolated and internally heterogeneous field of autonomous *sans-papiers* collectives, the ‘Coordination 75 des Sans-Papiers de Paris’ (CSP 75) has held since its official creation in 2002 a central role. Claiming the heritage of the St Bernard collective, the umbrella organization of four Parisian collectives held something like a ‘monopoly’ (Interview P29) in the self-representation of forced migrant claims in the public sphere, at least in Paris. Weekly rallies, occasional occupations of public buildings combined with regular meetings with the prefect's office to discuss potential regularizations had introduced a mix, almost a routine, of disruptive and non-disruptive actions into forced migrant mobilizations. The usual procedure of the collectives has been the following: the

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<sup>56</sup> ‘Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile’. Translates to ‘Law on entry and stay of foreigners and on the right to asylum’.

<sup>57</sup> Translates to ‘united against a disposable immigration’.

collectives have created files ('dossiers') of their members, collecting proof of presence on French territory, employment, family ties etc. to be submitted to the prefect's office. The order of submission usually privileged those who were regularly present during demonstrations. For this purpose, the members of the collective signed a list after every demonstration, which both added proofs to the files and guaranteed a constant presence in the public sphere. The demonstrations and particularly the occupations – more than thirty between 2002 and 2008 (Laske, 2009b) - were meant to constantly render visible a structurally marginalized population and to remind the prefect's office of the mobilizing capacity of a large undocumented population in Paris (Interview P14, Interview P22). As one of the organizers of the CSP75 noted during a demonstration I participated in May 2017:

. 'You, new brothers and sisters, who have left the misery, crossed the desert and the Mediterranean and have made it to Paris. You are very welcome with us. We march every Friday. Because when we march, we disrupt, if we do not disrupt, no one cares about us, we are invisible but always in danger (Field notes 16/06/2017)'.

This both disruptive and routinized arena was shaken up profoundly in early 2008, when the at the time second largest trade union CGT launched a coordinated strike of sans-papiers and entered the arena of contention around (forced) migration in Paris. Aiming at a regularization of sans-papiers via proofs of employment, the trade union had already since 2006 organized scattered strikes to pressure employers into issuing contracts for their illegalized work force – mostly in the sectors of catering services, construction and cleaning. The 2007 migration law reform 'Loi Hortefeux' opened an additional opportunity in this regard, as it introduced the employer as a key component in the process of case-by-case admissions based on economic utility (Kahmann, 2015: 421).

Acting upon this opening opportunity, from early 2008 onwards, the CGT and the migrant rights association 'Droits Devant !!' strategically targeted emblematic locations to attract the widest visibility possible (Kahmann, 2015). Amongst them was the luxury restaurant 'La Grande Armée' in the heart of Paris, which was regularly frequented by the political elites, including members of the ruling government (Le Monde Online, 2008). Most of the traditional migrant rights associations (such as GISTI, LDH, Cimade) predominantly welcomed the involvement of the CGT and particularly the new dynamic as a 'turning point' in mobilizations for the rights of undocumented migrants (Carrère, 2009, also Interview P8, Interview P21, Interview P29, Interview P30). They had even created a working group 'trade unions and sans-papiers' (Carrère, 2009, Interview P29)

to coordinate cooperation. During the mobilization, the notion of ‘les Onze’<sup>58</sup> (the Eleven) - a group of actors comprising both migrant rights associations and trade unions - proliferated as a new compound player.

Encouraged by the strong mediatization and positive response received in April 2008, a coordinated strike movement was initiated by the CGT, particularly its Parisian branch, the ‘Union Departementale de Paris’. Rapidly, the strike movement introduced the notion of the ‘sans-papier worker’, as a productive and well-integrated part of French society, into the public discourse on (forced) migration. This association of labour struggles also strengthened the role of trade unions in contentious politics around forced migration (for an extensive analysis of the strike movement, see the excellent study of Barron, Bory, Chauvin, Jounin, & Tourette, 2011), who had previously mainly operated as logistic support for autonomous sans-papiers collectives (Kahmann, 2015).

Yet, the intervention of the CGT also introduced fundamental ruptures. Firstly, the appearance on the scene of a powerful player undermined the previously central role of the autonomous collectives of sans-papiers and their struggles for both regularization and recognition as political subjects. Secondly, the CGT aimed at targeting a new constituency for their trade union and focused on migrant workers, thereby, more or less deliberately excluding those not fitting into the category. The autonomous sans-papier movement, in turn, had since the 1990s resisted a privileged treatment of those undocumented migrants with a higher likelihood of regularization (Interview P22, Interview P14). Thirdly, the CGT focused on strikes of illegalized workers at their work place. This, again, excluded the so-called ‘isolated workers’, meaning individuals scattered across multiple companies without the bargaining power to collectively exert pressure on an employer (Carrère, 2009; CSP75, 2008a).

While the CSP75 as the most influential compound player initially supported the CGT in their activities, they eventually felt left aside. The situation escalated when the CSP75 (as they had done for years before) deposited their individual cases with the prefect’s office, but were refused with the explanation that the prefect was occupied with processing the files of the striking migrants submitted by the CGT (Barron et al., 2011: 9.4/12). Encouraged to join the activities of the CGT, the CSP75 saw not only migrant’s

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<sup>58</sup> The group consisted of the trade unions CGT, CFDT (Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail – French Democratic Confederation of Labour), FSU (Fédération Syndicale Unitaire – Unitary Trade Union Federation), Solidaires, UNSA (Union Nationale des Syndicats Autonomes – National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions) and the human rights associations Autre Monde, Cimade, Droits devant !!, Femmes Égalité, LDH, RESF (Veron, 2011).

autonomy and leadership in the migrants' movement endangered, but also feared losing its bargaining power with the state altogether (Interview P22, Interview P30, Interview P29).

In consequence, the CSP75 mobilized secretly and occupied the headquarter of the CGT in the so-called 'Bourse du Travail' on May 2, 2008. More than a thousand sans-papiers squatted the building for several months in shifts, pressurizing the CGT to include them in their activities or leave the contentious arena of undocumented activism. A highly contentious wave unfolded involving sans-papiers collectives, trade unions, the prefect's office and a range of migrant rights associations.

After more than a year of occupation, countless protest events organized by the occupants and a series of failed negotiations, the security services of the trade union evicted the squat. The violent removal once more fragmented the movement and led to the splitting of multiple players, lastingly restructuring the field of contentious politics around forced migration in Paris. Following several weeks on the sidewalk outside the trade union building, the CSP75 occupied a large ensemble of abandoned buildings in the 18<sup>th</sup> district, called 'Baudelique', where they continued their protest. After another year of occupation, the CSP75 left the premises voluntarily and as such ended the longest and largest protest wave initiated by forced migrants in French history.

The two occupations and the social relations unfolding and breaking therein shed light on key interactionist patterns and dilemmas in forced migrant activism. Firstly, this case study offers insights into the contentious dynamics between self-organized groups and supporters. Secondly, it traces dynamics within forced migrant communities, in which solidarity is fragile and the dependency on the state accentuated. Lastly, the dynamics unfolding in this contentious arena entered the 'movement memory' and have since functioned as powerful interactionist dispositions for subsequent interactions.

### **5.3. Relational Dynamics in the 'Bourse du Travail' Arena**

The relational dynamics unfolding in the contentious arena were in the beginning spatially concentrated in the premises of the CGT, the 'Bourse du Travail', subsequently (temporarily) outside the building on the sidewalks and lastly in an occupied building in the Parisian North. The arena initially consisted of four main ('compound') players: the trade union CGT, the 'associations' (mostly referred to as a compound player), the CSP75, and the French executive, mainly represented by the prefect's office. Various players split in the course of the mobilizations, others entered the arena at a later stage.

### *Autonomy, Strategy and Fragile Solidarity*

With the occupation of the 'Bourse du Travail' in the 3<sup>rd</sup> district of Paris, the CSP75 targeted and exerted pressure on one of its long-term allies. The CGT and also Droits Devant!! had constituted logistical and ideational 'support' for the sans-papiers collectives the latest since the St Bernard wave in the second half of the 1990s (Cissé, 2002; CSP75, 2008a; Diop, 1997). Consequently, the CSP75 had initially enthusiastically welcomed the initiative by the two organizations and hoped for a concerted pressure for the benefit of all sans-papiers (Barron et al., 2011; CSP75, 2008a). The sans-papiers collectives, hence, joined the strike pickets of the CGT, yet were encouraged by the trade union to organize their own, independent strikes. When they routinely submitted files to the prefect's office, they were rejected on the premise that the prefect's office was prioritarily dealing with CGT files. The CSP felt deliberately side-lined and noted:

'They think we are kids. We have understood that there was an agreement to block our movement. We were betrayed' (CSP75, 2008a, authors's translation).

Outraged, more than 200 sans-papiers deviated from their traditional demonstration route on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2008 and occupied the court and staircases of the historical labour house 'Bourse du Travail', the headquarter of the Paris branch of the CGT - the labour union's regional section most active in the strikes (Le Monde Online, 2008; Remande, 2008). Amongst the occupants were men, women and children from various countries of origin and with diverse migration histories. Some had arrived in France as political refugees and became undocumented later, others were rejected asylum-seekers or over-stayers of a tourist or student visa. They repeatedly pointed to the desperate contexts from which they had left and the precarious conditions as undocumented migrants in France (CSP75, 2008a, 2008f, 2008g).

During the occupation, immediately, a very tense atmosphere unfolded between the sans-papiers and the CGT, resulting in a highly antagonistic rhetoric:

'The CGT has taken hostage our movement. We take hostage the Bourse du Travail' (sans-papiers spokesperson cited in Remande, 2008, author's translation).

In a public statement, the CSP75 further clarified:

'Among our conditions is that, once and for all, the orchestrated infantilization of an autonomous movement has to stop. We are upright men and women, responsible and capable of taking into our own hands our movement, we have our dignity' (CSP75, 2008a, author's translation).



For the CSP75, the penetration of the CGT in the contentious arena of forced migration was not only a question of leadership, but an assault to their proud tradition of autonomy since the St Bernard protest wave.

Indeed, the CSP75 was not entirely wrong in their assessment of the situation. With the strike movement, the CGT had explicitly aimed at gaining control of the sans-papiers movement, which they considered dominated by inefficient autonomous collectives with a focus on hunger strikes and occupation of public spaces. The organizers of the CGT viewed particularly hunger strikes critically as a ‘sordid, individual mode of action, based on an apolitical human rights discourse’ (Kahmann, 2015: 420). Instead, in accordance with its mandate, the CGT aimed at redirecting the movement towards a focus on labour. This also allowed for limiting the engagement to those migrants already present on French territory without engaging in highly contested claims on less restrictive access policies (ibid). To mark its difference compared to previous mobilizations, the CGT used the term ‘sans-papiers’ only in combination with the qualifier ‘worker’ (‘travailleurs sans papiers’) (ibid). One of the trade union organizers at the time recalled:

‘The question of work, immediately we perceived it as determinate. For a trade union, this question necessarily goes beyond manifestations of solidarity or support, things we have done in the past in our relationships with the sans-papiers collectives. This means that we enter into a dimension that is completely linked up with our traditions as a trade union that is to defend workers’ rights. (...) From the very beginning, this was more understood as a trade union thing’ (quoted in Kahmann, 2015: 419).

While the CGT profited from increased visibility and public recognition, also associations involved in migrant solidarity welcomed the new momentum introduced by the trade union. According to Marcus Kahmann,

‘the competences that unionists brought to the table [were also] clearly recognized and valued by employers and government officials alike. They provided them with a clear advantage over other external groups (autonomous sans-papiers groups; immigrant rights and nationality groups) operating in the field. The latter lack technical and tactical competences to pursue a labour conflict and are considered as unreliable by the authorities’ (2015: 420).

To justify their recognition and newly acquired privileged status in negotiating with the state, the CGT pushed for an effective leadership. Unlike preceding movements, migrants were gradually excluded from the decisions and the process was steered by a small core of white and male trade union organizers (Kahmann, 2015: 420, Interview P29):

‘Well, [in the CGT] there are many who are socialised in a political tradition – very Marxist, centralist, a bit Stalinist you could say. They really wanted to be in control of the strike movement. One of the most influential trade union organizers at the time, he did a lot for the emergence of the strike movement, but he comes from the ‘Communist Workers Party of France’ (...)’ (Interview P29).

Kahmann also highlights the socialization of the main organizer, who ‘was an ex-public transport mechanic in his 60s with a marked background in revolutionary Communism’ (2015: 417). Accordingly, the CGT organized the strikes their way, hierarchically, outcome-oriented and with profound scepticism towards self-organized migrant collectives and little sensitivity regarding racism, emancipation and the long-time struggles fought by *sans-papiers* for autonomy from French influence:

‘The CGT organised this movement (...) secret, not open. Hence, it is true that the collectives at the time felt left aside. But it was also them who had a bit the monopoly in the struggles and I think an actor like the CGT, who enters the movement, could be also seen as a rival. That’s how I felt it, in the legitimacy of the struggles. I think there is this entire discussion, that unfolded in the movement of *sans-papiers* – the question as to whether the struggles should be totally autonomous [from the French supporter community]. And it is true that the fact that the trade union entered the movement could be perceived positively by many, but regarding the idea of autonomy, it shakes up the idea of autonomy’ (Interview P29, see also Kahmann, 2015: 422).

Accordingly, with the CGT and the CSP75 two compound players with highly distinct visions of the movement regarding strategy and leadership entered into a contentious interaction. Whereas the CGT had institutional interest in leadership of the movement and an output-oriented strategy, the CSP75 viewed their mobilization also as what Monforte and Dufour have termed ‘acts of emancipation’ (Monforte & Dufour, 2013) – practices aiming at the recognition as political subjects and at modifying the power relations vis-à-vis non-migrant pro beneficiaries. Additionally, the CGT’s focus on collective strikes at the work places de facto meant the exclusion of large parts of the constituency of the CSP75, e.g. all ‘isolated workers’ without the option to pressurize collectively, as well as women, the elderly and the sick without a job. When the CSP75 demanded from the CGT to recognize their role and include also non-working and isolated *sans-papiers* in their negotiations (CSP75, 2008a, 2008b), the CGT responded: ‘Our job is not to file applications based on family life or medical condition, etc. We are a labour union’ (cited in Barron, Bory, Chauvin, Jounin, & Tourette, 2016). While the CGT reiterated its strategic focus on the positive category ‘worker’, the CSP75 leadership and its members saw their ‘niche’ toward regularization shrinking. The CGT intervention,

hence, constituted a broad threat for their communities and identities, but also a direct threat to themselves and their personal interests.

In addition to the trade union and the CSP75, there was a third type of player involved: the myriad of ‘associations’ engaged in migrant solidarity (and with a historically ambivalent relationship to the collectives). Due to the success of the strike movement in terms of visibility and the first successful regularisations, most associations reacted with irritation to the occupation, noting that the CSP75 had chosen the ‘wrong target’. Instead they recommended to dissolve the non-stop picket (Barron, Bory, Chauvin, & Tourette, 2014; CSP75, 2008a) in order to prevent the fragmentation of the movement. A representative of the network RESF stated:

‘They should target the Ministries of Interior or Integration, not the CGT. Those really responsible are inside the government, not outside. An occupation is a hostile action. While we are dividing ourselves, the government is rubbing their hands’ (cited in Fouteau, 2009, author's translation).

The occupants were highly disappointed by this position and increasingly perceived the associations ‘on the side of the trade union’ (CSP75, 2008b, Interview P22). This experience strengthened their sense of being dominated by the white French migrant rights environment more broadly (Interview P14, Interview P22). Various attempts to mediate in the stalemate, involving members of the most influential associations (e.g. GISTI, LDH, and RESF), failed due to an increasing scepticism from the side of the CSP75 and determination of the CGT leadership to stay in control of the strike movement. The longer the occupation lasted, the more the CSP75 became alienated from both the ‘associations’ and the CGT (Csp75, 2008, Interview P22, Interview P29 ). Their reaction nurtured the ‘sans-papiers collectives’ general suspicion towards non-migrant organizations and their intuition to ‘speak on behalf’ of sans-papiers:

‘The sans-papiers are in the front row. The sans-papiers are the first victims. The supporters and the associations must not leave us aside; this is our struggle. It is us who know our difficulties, our situation. The sans-papiers must understand that the struggle of the sans-papiers is their struggle (public statement at a meeting of various collectives in the occupied Bourse du Travail CSP75, 2008b, author's translation).

The fragility of ties, between the CSP75 and pro-beneficiaries was not a novelty in this arena, but had led into experiences made by sans-papiers collectives already since the 1990s. Claiming the heritage of the St Bernard collective, the CSP75 has kept a vivid

memory of these mobilizations, which were summarized as follows by one of its former spokespersons:

‘The struggle has taught us many, many things. It has taught us first of all to be autonomous. That has not always been easy. There were organizations which came to support us and which were used to helping immigrants in struggle. They were also used to acting as the relay between immigrants in struggle and the authorities, and therefore more or less to manage the struggle. They would tell us: “Right, we the organizations have made an appointment to explain this or that;” and we had to say, “But we can explain it very well ourselves.” Their automatic response is not to get people to be autonomous, but to speak for them’ (Cissé, 2003).

Given this background, the intervention of the CGT touched upon a highly sensitive point. Accordingly, the tone, at times, became extremely hostile:

‘We have enough of the trade union’s colonialism! (...) The sans-papiers of the csp75 have the impression that they have been constantly exploited and did not get anything in return. Nowadays in France, with the trade unions we thought of as our friends, it is like in Africa by the time of colonialism, it is like what our parents have told us’ (CSP75, 2008f, author's translation).

The longer the occupation and the stalemate lasted, the more the migrant associations felt increasingly irritated by the CSP75’s irreconcilability (Fouteau, 2009, Interview P29, Interview P21, Interview P7). None of the numerous mediations was successful, as the occupants wanted to prove a more fundamental point, an ‘act of emancipation’. One of the activists involved by the time, recalled in a personal interview:

‘The CSP75 has a very proud if not jealous tradition of their autonomy, which was also something that produced a lot of conflict. The CSP75 decides to do something, if you do not follow, they do it alone. There was not much compromise’ (Interview P7).

Even though many associations rejected the strategy of the CSP75 and criticized its perceived unwillingness to find a pragmatic solution (Interview 29, Interview 30), they found themselves in an extremely awkward position. While they appreciated the efforts by the CGT, they refrained from outspoken criticism against the CSP75 (Interview P21). While associations, CGT and the CSP75 blamed each other, the prefect’s office remained almost entirely out of focus:

‘For the prefect’s office, it was a dream. It was the self-destruction of a movement. Everyone blaming each other. It was an inferno!’ (Interview P7).

In the following weeks and months of the occupation, a paradox dynamic unfolded. While the occupants were increasingly isolated from the wider migrant rights movement, the occupation and the determination of the sans-papiers protesters grew.

*The 'Weapons of the (Not So) Weak'*<sup>59</sup>

In summer 2008, the 'Bourse du Travail' squat counted around 1,300 participants, including women and children (Bonal, 2008; Ginésy-Galano, 2009). Within, efficient structures of self-organization were established. Mattresses and cardboard were used in shifts, money de-centrally collected and food prepared for all occupants mostly by the women involved in the occupation (CSP75, 2008c; Ginésy-Galano, 2009). As one of the organizers at the time noted in an informal conversation, the squatters sustained the occupation 'à la Africaine' ('in the African way') in the absence of external support (Field notes, 16/06/2017). Through this expression, he was referring to the experience of organizing survival and also political activism under precarious conditions and with scarce resources. On the other hand, he also pointed at the existing indigenous resources of the sans-papiers, which were embedded in social (migrant) networks, and the cultural capital of certain leading figures.

Firstly, some of the CSP75 organizers had been living in France for many years. One activist was even involved in the St Bernard mobilizations in 1996 and was regularized in 2006 (after 13 years in France) but decided to stay in the movement, 'as the relay' to previous struggles and experiences (Halissat, 2016). Others had spent various years in France as legal residents, including as political refugees and had subsequently become undocumented through legal reforms. Accordingly, they had accumulated crucial knowledge on political activism, legal and administrative processes and social capital. As noted above, the memories of disappointments were the other side of the medal in this regard. These figures served as 'entrepreneurs' or 'brokers' for the movement, crucial for compensating or buffering the structural obstacles of political mobilization in a condition of illegality.<sup>60</sup>

Secondly, the occupants could rely on the strong sense of solidarity including

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<sup>59</sup> The expression is borrowed from an article title by Zepeda-Millán, who investigated the indigenous resources (social, economic and cultural capital) in undocumented migrant activism in Florida, USA (2016).

<sup>60</sup> See also the chapter by Freedman, who has equally pointed to the role of 'brokers' with specific resources in undocumented migrant activism in France (Freedman, 2008). Zepeda-Millán traces similar patterns in the US (Zepeda-Millán, 2016).

strong and weak ties within the (sub-Saharan) migrant community in Paris. These networks had ever since buffered some of the hardships of every-day life without papers in the French capital (CSP75 organizer quoted in France Inter, 2015). The migrant workers ‘foyers’ (social housing complexes mostly located in the Parisian periphery) have become important nodes in these social nets - as access points for newcomers, as reservoirs of information and social capital but also for the provision of basic needs such as precarious shelter and food (France Inter, 2015; Halissat, 2016; Laske, 2009b). Due to these indigenous resources, individuals within these networks, and to a certain degree also the sans-papiers collectives, have been less dependent on external support. This, indeed, has distinguished the West-African migrant community from the newly arriving forced migrants coming from other regions who were without established networks (see Chapter 7 on the ‘La Chapelle’- arena). Therefore, the ‘foyers’ were important spaces to mobilize for the occupation of ‘Bourse du Travail’ and to guarantee its continuation (CSP75, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c).

Thirdly, and related to the two previous types of resources, the occupying sans-papiers originated from a wide range of countries, yet, were by majority francophone, including the spokespersons, which allowed them to directly communicate with the local media and supporting citizens.

Consequently, despite a continuous and at times deepening alienation of the CSP75 with both the associations and the CGT (Fouteau, 2009), the protesters succeeded in sustaining a high degree of mobilization. This included so-called ‘debats sur matelats’ (‘debates on mattresses’), that were regularly organized in one room of the occupied building, all covered with mattresses to provide sleeping places for the occupants. These debates allowed to internally share experiences of a life in illegality, to discuss the strategy of the struggle, but also to meet potential allies. Every Wednesday, a rally was organized to the prefect’s office, and every Friday a demonstration in front of the occupied ‘Bourse du Travail’ (CSP75, 2008b; Ginésy-Galano, 2009, Interview P15). With the ‘exits’ as they called it, they aimed at sustaining visibility and disruption. As the organizers noted, ‘if you plant a tree, you have to water it. The demonstrations are our water’ (CSP75, 2008d, author's translation).

### *Eviction and Fragmentation*

After 14 months of occupation with a constantly high protest activity by the CSP75 and no significant rapprochement between the competing players, the CGT ordered the

eviction of the squat in June 2009. When the majority of occupants had left for one of their regular demonstrations, the security services of the CGT entered the 'Bourse du Travail' with sticks and tear gas and removed the remaining sans-papiers - according to the newspaper 'Le Monde' - 'brutally' (van Eeckhout, 2009). In a press release, the CGT Paris remarked:

'The delegates [of the sans-papiers] have cultivated the idea that the occupation of the Bourse du Travail might lead to the regularization of isolated undocumented workers. Voluntarily, they have led these migrant workers into a deadlock. They could have, like others, chosen to organize in the trade unions to engage in collective struggles on the work place (...) (CGT Paris, 2009a, author's translation).

The communiqué continued touching upon the fundamental dilemma which had characterized the arena from the outset:

'Who can understand an occupation motivated by a need for help and at the same time the refusal of any kind of proposal? Even more fundamentally: how is it to be understood that the CSP75 wants to damage the trade union movement and particularly the CGT while at the same time demanding its support? (CGT Paris, 2009a, author's translation).

In the media, the CGT reiterated its position, justifying the eviction with a need to re-establish order and focus on the strike movement 'in the front row for the regularisation of sans-papiers' (CGT spokes person, cited in Le Monde Online, 2009). While the CGT had since the initiation of strikes succeeded in the regularisation of more than 2,000 sans-papiers (CGT Paris, 2009a), it was exactly its position 'in the front row', and the authoritarian push for leadership, which caused the protest in the first place. An activist involved at the time and now a trade union organizer, recalled in a personal interview:

'I think the CGT is not proud of it. But, at a certain point, it was not tenable any longer. It is not only us in the building, there are also other trade unions. There is work to do. (...) It was a very painful moment for many. And no one really understood why no compromise could be found' (Interview P29).

The eviction left the migrant rights movement in Paris more fragmented than ever (Fouteau, 2009). Hundreds of migrants, including women and children, found themselves homeless on the sidewalks of the 'Rue du Temple' in central Paris. With plastic tarps and mattresses, a makeshift camp took form within sight of the CGT headquarters (CSP75, 2009).

By being expelled from the 'Bourse du Travail', and hence by disrupting the public with an (improvised) protest camp, the former occupants re-emerged as a

contentious issue on the agenda of the prefect's office, which had deliberately kept a low profile in the previous months. Moreover, the violent intervention had temporarily re-attracted widespread media coverage. Troubled by this new politicization, and to avoid the perpetuation of the makeshift camp in the streets of Paris, the prefect's office offered the CSP75 to treat 300 cases 'benevolently' under the condition that the group dismantled the camp (Fouteau, 2009; Laske, 2009a).

The offer fundamentally deepened internal divisions, which had already started within the occupied 'Bourse du Travail' (CSP 75, 2016, Interview P29, Interview P7). Conflicts emerged on the selection of 300 files out of the roughly 1,300 protesters, all exhausted by months of protest in precarious conditions and deeply afraid of 'missing the train' toward regularization.<sup>61</sup> One of the dissidents, criticising the CSP75 leadership, noted:

'The delegates of the CSP75 have secretly created a list with names and when the first meetings at the prefect's office started, we realized that there were names we did not even know, who had never been present during the occupation, the demonstrations and now on the side-walk' (quoted in van Eeckhout, 2009, author's translation).

In addition to those who did not appear on the list, there were also those who knew they would never fit into the official criteria of regularization on economic grounds and had therefore chosen the occupation as a last resort (CSP75, 2009, 2010). As a result, the protesting group experienced its first division, when around 100 protesters rejected the offer and decided to stay at 'Boulevard du Temple' and re-baptized their group into 'Collectif Sans-Papiers Solidaire de Paris'<sup>62</sup> (van Eeckhout, 2009).

Alongside some of the sans-papiers, various individual supporters looked for a way out from the impasse (Fouteau, 2009; Laske, 2009a). For many, a rapprochement between the sans-papiers collectives, the CGT and the associations, was only possible on the condition that the former occupants left the sidewalks just outside the 'Bourse du Travail'. It was believed that the immediate spatial confrontation with the CGT needed to be overcome in order to gradually approach the antagonist players (Fouteau, 2009).

Consequently, in late July 2009 those former occupants willing to leave the sidewalks at the 'Bourse du Travail', coordinated by the CSP75, occupied together with

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<sup>61</sup> See also section 5.4. on selective incentives and the 'governance of social ties' in forced migrant activism.

<sup>62</sup> Translates into 'Collective of Solidary Sans-Papiers in Paris'.



individual supporters of different backgrounds a large empty building complex of the former health insurance administration in 'Rue Baudelique' in the North of Paris (Laske, 2009a; NPA, 2009). The supporters included factions of the CGT who had opposed the eviction of the 'Bourse du Travail' and demanded to

'find a place for them, where they can breathe, gather resources and continue to make themselves heard, and to exchange with all the others in the same situation' (CGT organizer quoted in van Eeckhout, 2009, author's translation).

The contentious arena, hence, was complemented with an additional location, which gradually led to a reordering of the main players involved, since some split, or left the arena while others emerged. During the first moments of the new occupation at 'Baudelique', these factional dynamics became evident. When some of the sans-papiers recognized a CGT badge on one of the supporting activists, they inquired:

'Are you from the CGT? (...) Is the CGT finally willing to align with us? The militant answered: "The CGT is not a block from the basis to Thibault [secretary general, at the time], it consists of very different people"' (cited in Laske, 2009).

Indeed, while the eviction had fragmented the occupants, it had also deeply affected some of the trade unionists and associations themselves, who criticised the CGT's reaction (Interview P29, Interview P7). On the blog 'Ou va la CGT?' (where does the CGT go?), rank and file members of the trade union who deviated from the CGT position expressed fundamental criticism of the CGT leadership and solidarity with the sans-papiers collectives (Ou va la CGT?, n.d., 2009a, 2009b):

'There is this contempt, coloured with paternalism toward our sans-papiers comrades, who demand to organize themselves, to lead themselves their struggle, without putting their destiny in the hands of trade union experts, of the CGT or whomever' (Ou va la CGT?, 2009a, author's translation)-

The official position of the CGT, yet, remained irreconcilable and was reiterated repeatedly:

'After 14 months of unfriendly occupation to say the least, and an avalanche of fierce accusations from the CSP75, it is difficult to re-establish a normal relationship with those responsible in this organization until they have recognized that the occupation of the Bourse du Travail and the pressure on the trade union movement was not a good choice. They have to clarify first their relationship with the CGT' (CGT Paris, 2009b, author's translation).

### *The 'Ministry for the Regularization of All Sans Papiers' and the March Paris-Nice*

Directly after squatting the building, the CSP activists baptized it 'Ministry for the Regularization of All Sans-Papiers', deliberately deviating from the CGT focus on 'sans-papiers workers' (Barron et al., 2016).

The enormous spatial capacity of the new 'head quarter' of sans-papiers activism allowed for the extension of the movement, which rapidly counted several thousand members. A total of 16 collectives (CSP75, 2010) joined the movement, including 1,300 members of a collective of Turkish and Kurdish sans-papiers. Most of them had left Turkey for political reasons, however, were never granted asylum and ended up undocumented (Bell & Dilber, 2009). The weekly demonstrations and 'debates on mattresses' continued in addition to a wide range of other activities – from political organizing to adult literacy programmes and media workshops (Bell & Dilber, 2009, Interview P30). During a national sans-papiers demonstration in October 2009, organized by the 'Baudelique' headquarters, more than 10,000 sans-papiers gathered (Libération Online, 2009) and made it the largest demonstration by undocumented migrants in French history.

Yet, despite this protest intensity and positive experiences in organizing 16 collectives made up of a total of 25 nationalities, the movement received very little public attention (Bell & Dilber, 2009; CSP75, 2010). The rupture with the CGT and the network of migrant rights associations had left the autonomous movement without their amplifiers. While proving their capacity to mobilize various thousands of migrants and to organize an occupation without major internal conflicts for extended periods, they were eventually missing a leverage vis-à-vis the state.

Parallel to the largest and longest wave of political protest by sans-papiers, the CGT strike movement, in turn, expanded further and eventually succeeded in the regularization of several thousand sans-papiers (Barron et al., 2011). Both public attention and the priority of the prefect's office had shifted toward the CGT-led strike movement.

Aware of this impasse, the occupants announced a spectacular protest event in order to regain leverage: On May 1<sup>st</sup> 2010, activists of 'Baudelique' departed on a foot march from Paris to Nice, where the French-African Summit was to be held by the end of the month (Maudet, 2010). In choosing a long-distance march, the protesters

symbolically aligned with previous marches by the sans-papiers movement such as the march in 1997 from Angoulême to Paris. Furthermore, they intended to capitalize on the relational and demonstrative effects of ‘eventful’ protest.<sup>63</sup> One of the organizers noted:

‘Since Saint Bernard, every two or three years, it takes an event of disruption to maintain the visibility of our movement’ (CSP75, 2010: 12, author's translation).

Various migrant rights associations took the opportunity to declare their solidarity with the march and by this, also intended to send a signal of reconciliation to the CSP75 (FTCR, 2010; GISTI, 2010; Médecins du Monde, 2010). Despite its relational effects, the march did not result in increasing pressure on the prefect’s office. Some of the participants even argued that the direction of the march was strategically wrong, as it deviated the attention and pressure from the nucleus of contention in Paris (Interview P15).

#### **5.4. Dependence on the State, Small ‘Niches’ and Fragmentation**

The tangible ‘outcome’ of the ‘Baudelique’ occupation in terms of regularizations remained low, also after the eventful march. Indeed, the subsequent month unveiled the fundamental dilemma of sans-papiers activism once more: the prefect’s office had blocked the treatment of files by sans-papiers organized in ‘Baudelique’ until they had left the building. While protesting against the government, the sans-papiers depended on its recognition. In their explanation of the envisaged end of the occupation, the CSP75 delegates noted:

‘The prefect’s office told us that they did not want its relationship with the CSP75, established in the last 10 years, to suffer from the occupation or to end. They assured us that, if the CSP75 leaves on its own, the relationship will be reinforced and our files will be treated in a timelier way and benevolently. If not, the relationship would end. The CSP75 doesn’t want this, as it would undermine the long work of 10 years’ (CSP75, 2010, author's translation).

Similarly to what Jasper has termed the ‘rules dilemma’, the protesters found themselves trapped in rules they had aimed at changing in the first place:

‘Efforts to change an arena often end up following the rules of that same arena. Rather than ignoring it or using a different arena, an insurgent may end up embroiled in the arena’s rules for changing the rules’ (Jasper, 2008: 163)

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<sup>63</sup> For a more extensive analysis of the expressive and relational effects of the march, see the comparative research by Monforte and Dufour (Monforte & Dufour, 2013).

On the day the ‘Bourse du Travail’ was evicted, the prefect’s office offered the examination of 300 files. The CSP75 delegates were well aware that the decision regarding whom to include in the list of 300 individuals would once more introduce fissures in the movement. Yet – their adherent also demanded tangible outcomes of a long and burdensome protest:

‘... they [the prefect’s office] know in advance what they will obtain: the division, and the weakening of the struggle. Because, on the one hand, the sans-papiers have been waiting every day for many years now. It is very human, they are not able to resist the illusory perspective of regularization; on the other hand, those who know they will not fit into ‘the criteria’ [decided by the state] are not willing to dissolve the occupation.’ (CSP75, 2010, author's translation).

As expected, the question led to fierce internal divisions and fragmentations inside the occupying group, concerning the question as to whether the offer should be accepted, or how to select the 300 files as well as on decision-making procedures within the autonomous movement more broadly. Shortly after, more than 700 sans-papiers joined a newly established collective with the name ‘Les oubliés de Baudelique’<sup>64</sup> (CSP75, 2010, Interview P30, Interview P15). Many of the other collectives criticised the unilateral decision of the CSP75 to end the occupation (and hence to accept the deal offered by the prefect’s office) and once more, the selection of those 300 files to be examined in exchange for leaving the building (Interview P15). In the end, the collective player of the occupation disintegrated into its constituting sub-players, whose interests became fundamentally adversarial in the light of a small niche to regularization, which was furthermore about to close. One of those opposing the agreement with the authorities and joining the new collective explained:

‘I don’t prefer the CSP75, nor the new collective. All I want is to know what happens with my case. It is important that the prefect’s office knows why others like me do not want to leave the building. It is because we do not know what is going to happen with our cases’ (quoted in CSP75, 2010, author's translation).

The very logic of individual cases – the macro structures of the legal system – permeated into the micro-interactions within the contentious arena. In the light of a closing niche, the CSP75 had an interest to at least secure some success for its own adherents. Others suddenly realized their marginal role within the collective and desperately tried to find an alternative. The government authorities, well aware of the fragile unity of individuals in highly precarious conditions, from which they want to escape from at all cost, skilfully

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<sup>64</sup> Translates to ‘the forgotten ones of Baudelique’.

governed these fragile ties. Even though *sans-papiers* had for years chanted during demonstrations ‘le cas par cas, on n’en veut pas’<sup>65</sup>, it was exactly this logic, which had once more fragmented the movement. Hence, despite opposing the individual logic of regularization, the CSP75 (and many other collectives) were repeatedly forced into temporary cooperation with the state to obtain concrete results for its adherents.

On August 7, 2010, eventually all occupants left the building, bringing a two-year wave of protest by forced migrants to a ‘painful’ (Interview P15) end (see also CSP75, 2010; SUD Éducation, 2010).

### **5.5. Contentious Interactions and Interactionist Memories**

The end of the protest at the ‘Bourse du Travail’ and ‘Baudelique’ left a deep mark on future mobilizations of forced migrants in Paris. Interviewed seven years later, protagonists have referred to it as having ‘left deep bruises’ (Interview P22), as ‘extremely painful’ (Interview P15), as ‘profoundly damaging’ (Interview P30), or as ‘the dirty memory of migrant struggles’ (Interview P7) amongst others. Already directly after the eviction of the ‘Bourse du Travail’, the CSP75 had spoken of a ‘black moment in migrant rights struggles in France’ (CSP75, 2009).

These bruises translated into concrete relational effects on political mobilizations by forced migrants in Paris. While tensions had been inherent to the migrant rights movement and particularly to the relations between migrants and ‘supporters’ since the 1990s, the ‘Bourse du Travail’ wave left the movement deeply divided (Fouteau, 2009) with multiple rifts: between the autonomous collectives in the St Bernard tradition and the trade union-organised movement; between those who could claim the identity of workers and those who could not; between associations and collectives and within the *sans-papiers* communities.

One former spokesperson of one of the collectives involved in the ‘Baudelique’ occupation noted in a personal interview 2017 - lastingly disillusioned:

‘The Bourse du Travail episode was like the Paris Commune. There is no revolution after such moments. (...) Now, I have more contact with *sans-papiers* in Italy than in Paris’ (Interview P15).

Disappointed by the role of the wider migrant rights movement, the CSP75 has even further internalized a pride of autonomy:

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<sup>65</sup> Translates to ‘we do not want the “case by case” logic of regularization’.

‘We prefer being autonomous. We know that we are deficient, we make mistakes. But we prefer this to being dependent’ (Interview P22). Or another delegate: ‘Cooperation with the CGT? No way, they evicted us! We do not forget easily’ (Field notes, 30/05/2017).

Aware of the counter-productivity of these conflicts, which eventually benefitted their common adversary (the state authorities), various attempts of rapprochements were made. Yet, the interactionist memories sit deep, as the following account illustrates.

‘There was a meeting to organize the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the St Bernard protests in summer 2016 (...). There were some, willing to move forward, but the old stories of the Bourse du Travail came up again. All these stories of autonomy, of the CGT’ (Interview P29).

Also within the forced migrant community, the contentious interactions had lasting and largely detrimental effects. Within the sans-papiers community, mistrust has prevailed, leaving the movement highly fragmented. Since the end of ‘Baudelique’, three different groups with the same name of CSP75 (CSP75, 2016) have come to exist in Paris. A movement of several thousand splintered into different groups with relatively few members (several dozens to a few hundred), allowing prefects to continue their successful strategy of ‘divide and rule’, cultivating the competition between the different groups (Interview P7, Interview P29).

## **5.6. Conclusions**

In this chapter, I focused on one of the largest waves (both in terms of individuals involved and duration) of political protest by forced migrants in Paris with a view to identifying relational dynamics, both within the migrant community and vis-à-vis non-migrant pro-beneficiaries. Various conclusions can be drawn, which will be further elaborated in the upcoming chapters of this thesis:

Firstly, the very constellation of actors of the protest wave points to the fact that a ‘movement for the rights of forced migrants’, neatly connecting migrant rights associations, leftist trade unions and autonomous sans-papiers collectives is more an (important) fiction than a reality. Such mobilizations are best understood as contentious arenas, in which a wide range of players with highly distinct interests interacted: the hierarchic and outcome-oriented tradition of CGT with an interest in placing the trade union in the limelight; the conviction by self-organized groups to be the only ones to speak for themselves; the unease of many associations with either of the two positions; and the prefect’s office, on which, eventually, all actors depended but who governed the

fragile ties, predominantly from a distance. In such processes actors emerge, split and change sides. As this account documents, the CGT as well as a number of associations - considered as an ally of the sans-papiers collectives the latest since the St Bernard movement (Cissé, 1998) - lost their credibility and were (temporarily) perceived as key opponents.

Secondly, the analysis suggests that forced migrant mobilizations are often as much a struggle for rights (such as regularization) as one for recognition as political subjects. While the intervention of the CGT might have favoured the former, it was detrimental to the process of emancipation by forced migrants themselves. The wave of strikes coordinated by the CGT and Droits Devant! achieved the regularization of several thousand sans-papiers (Barron et al., 2011). Yet, de facto, the intervention of the CGT introduced a trade union as a powerful intermediary between the state and the sans-papiers communities. By those sans-papiers with a year-long background in political organizing, this was perceived as a fundamental assault and threat to the struggles for autonomy coming from non-migrant beneficiaries. Asymmetric positions of power, hence, introduced a breaking point in social relations, which have remained highly fragile.

Thirdly, as also Nicholls has convincingly argued, political activism of precarious migrants faces the structural dilemma of mobilizing within small 'niche openings', rather than opportunities. Such 'needle eyes' to regularization or recognition only allow for the passage of few, at the expense of the exclusion of others (Nicholls, 2013a, 2014). This poses particular challenges for internal unity, as the forced migrant community is highly heterogeneous in terms of their potential recognition by the state. Similar dynamics can be traced for both undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers (see also Chapter 6 on the 'Oranienplatz'-arena). With the CGT focus on 'sans papiers workers' and the strategy of collective strikes on the work-place, the niche for those falling out of the labour-related criteria was about to shrink. This excluded isolated workers without the leverage of striking on their work place, as well as women and children, the unemployed, the elderly etc. Relations between sans-papiers collectives and pro-beneficiaries have been historically fragile and have repeatedly broken due to disputes regarding whom to focus on in campaigns. Hence, the 'Bourse du Travail' and 'Baudelique' arena – in the view of the CSP75 - fed into a tradition of widespread distrust (CSP75, 2008a) since the late 1990, when various associations had advocated for focussing on the regularizations of those with the highest likelihood of acceptance. Additionally, the small 'niches' also introduced or deepened fissures within the migrant community. Consequently, parts of the protest

movement split from the rest on two occasions, arguing that they had been ‘forgotten’ and left behind. While the question of autonomy remained the decisive breaking point for social ties between undocumented migrants and pro-beneficiaries, the question of ‘who practically profits’ led to numerous decisions to defect from the collective action.

Lastly, the arena is ‘an example of a *community in movement* using its various indigenous assets for its own self-defence and desire to demonstrate its dignity and discontent’ (Zepeda-Millán, 2016: 14, italics in original). Significant resources were mobilized, largely without and even against the interests of potential allies. Dense ethnic networks with strong and weak ties and a long history in organizing constituted the ‘weapons of the not so weak’ (ibid). These insights point to the important heterogeneity of forced migrant populations and particularly at the importance of relational contexts in which contentious arenas are embedded. As subsequent chapters will illustrate, the case of the West-African sans-papiers differs starkly from both the experiences in Germany (see Chapters 6 and 8) and the mobilizations of other communities such as the forced migrants at ‘La Chapelle’ in Paris from 2015 onwards (see Chapter 7).



## Chapter 6

### The ‘Oranienplatz’-Arena: Berlin 2012-2014

#### Contentious Interactions and Spatial Strategies

‘We have to pick-up the non-citizens wherever they are. In every camp, in every room. The movement needs to stay in motion’

(cited in Jakob 2013b, author's translation).

‘Refugees were isolated and this was the tactic [to break it]. The government isolates refugees so that they cannot have ideas to come together, to separate them. If you come together you are strong already. The march to Berlin and bus tour at the same time was really locating the people.’ (Interview B4)

#### 6.1. Introduction

From the Parisian context, this chapter shifts the focus to the largest protest wave by forced migrants in German history, unfolding from 2012 onwards. Despite countless protest events and sustained organizational structures since the 1990s, political activism by forced migrants remained at the margins of German society. National newspapers rarely reported on the activities and solidarity was limited to the radical left and some faith-based associations. This changed fundamentally in early 2012, when the suicide of an Iranian asylum-seeker in Wurzburg initiated the most disruptive wave of contention around forced migration in German history.

Scrutinizing the emergence and trajectory of this crucial case, I will develop and empirically substantiate a spatial and relational argument. I will document that the ‘Oranienplatz’-wave did not react upon opening opportunity structures and capitalizing upon pre-existing resources, as traditional social movement theories would expect. Rather, resources were generated through spatial strategies and micro-interactions

during the mobilization. Forced migrants mobilized fellow asylum-seekers, pro-beneficiaries and obtained extensive media coverage by moving from socially and spatially isolated locations into urban centres. In organizing central protest camps, marches and bus tours, they literally left behind their excluded position and articulated a claim to urban and social centrality. The relocation from the periphery of the asylum camp to the inner city space furthermore broke the routine of forced migrant invisibility through extensive media coverage and by this tapped resources needed to sustain political mobilizations. The camps generated ‘magnetic fields’, attracting diverse support milieus from which forced migrants were previously cut off in a disintegrating asylum system. An explicit relational lens, moreover, sheds light on the contentious and fragile nature of ties that are made and unmade during political mobilizations of forced migrants. Whereas questions of paternalism, strategy and leadership regularly intervened in relations between those primarily concerned and pro-beneficiaries, their heterogeneity in terms of origin, gender and most importantly (potential) legal status, introduced delicate breaking points. Existing lines of division were furthermore deliberately exploited by public authorities to undermine contention.

In order to unpack this argument in detail, the structure of the chapter is threefold: firstly, I provide a brief outline of key events to orientate the unfamiliar reader (6.2). Secondly, I demonstrate that the contentious arena was fundamentally spatialized as the relational qualities of its different locations, as well as their strategic use by activists and policing by the state, had a significant impact on the protest’s trajectory (6.3.). Thirdly, I scrutinize the contentious interactions both among forced migrant activists and in relation with (temporary) allies and opponents with a view to show how these contentious interactions have influenced mobilizations and demobilization (6.4.).

Regarding data, the analysis is based on more than 30 qualitative interviews with actors involved in this wave of protest, including several forced migrant activists from various ‘generations’, individual ‘supporters’, representatives of migrant rights and humanitarian organizations, as well as (local) authorities and politicians. It also draws from dozens of written texts (primary sources) produced by actors during this time as well as secondary sources on the protests.

## 6.2. Brief Outline of Key Events

On January 29, 2012, the Iranian forced migrant Mohammad Rahsepar committed suicide in his room in the asylum-seeker camp in Wurzburg in the German region of Bavaria. According to fellow asylum-seekers and Rahsepar's doctor, the miserable accommodation, lack of adequate medical assistance, the insecurity and waiting in an isolated camp had gradually pushed him into depression (Jungbauer, 2012a). A request backed by a medical evaluation to be transferred to the asylum-seeker camp in Cologne, where Rahsepar's sister was registered, had been rejected shortly before Rahsepar committed suicide (Jungbauer, 2012b). In reaction to their friend's death, fellow Iranian asylum-seekers in the same facility in Wurzburg started to politicize the suicide. First, they boycotted their food packages and demonstrated in front of the city hall, demanding the improvement of living conditions during the asylum process, accelerated procedures and the end of all deportations. One of their first statements read:

'Unfortunately, Mohamad Rahsepar is not the first one to succumb to the harshness of the treatment many refugees are facing in their homeland which drives them to seek asylum in other countries where they encounter confusion, lack of health, food, hygiene and inhuman treatment and humiliation; this situation is worsened with depression, homesickness and other pressures which ultimately drive many of the most vulnerable ones to suicide. How can we prevent that? Surely, the answer would not be to swallow our anger and accept the daily tyranny; neither could acting as victims help us in any way in order to attract attention and/or sporadic humanitarian financial help. Against abuse, regardless of the time and place it occurs, we have to stand up for our rights and fight back. We have to denounce the tyranny hidden hypocritically in the so-called humanitarian authorities and do our best to bring change. The asylum-seeker who has to leave his country and take refuge in the countries that are supposed to apply and endorse Human Rights and [who] does not get his/her rightful place has to take certain steps to gain back his/her dignity' (Refugees from Wurzburg, 2012).

To increase the pressure, the protesters left their assigned accommodation, set up very basic tents in the city centre, displayed photographs of human rights abuses in Iran and declared to go on hunger strike:

'We suffer from the extremely long asylum process that sometimes takes even years and we hope every day that the torture of uncertainty will change for the better as soon as possible. This uncertainty, the fact that no autonomy is allowed to us in our daily lives, and that we are treated like prisoners, exhausts us and gradually – step by step - pushes us towards death. (...) Now, we are forced to use the last of all means available and go on hunger strike on 19.03.2012, to finally

make our voices heard and to be allowed a human life' (Hosinazadeh & Maorattab 2012, author's translation).

The public pressure built up by the Iranian group turned out to be successful. It resulted in negotiations which in turn led to an acceleration of their asylum processes. Eventually some, though not all, of the protesters were granted refugee status. The activists maintained their camp and underlined that their demands went beyond the recognition of their individual cases. One of the spokespersons declared:

'I am the voice of Mohammed Rahsepar. I am the voice of all asylum-seekers who are too afraid to join us here. I am the voice of all the isolated (...) who are forced to endure this inhumane situation. But I do not commit suicide. I demand that the treatment of asylum-seekers should change!' (cited in Jakob 2016: 109, author's translation).

In the following days and weeks, the protesters pushed for further escalation, some sewed their lips publicly to mark their status as voiceless outsiders, others announced a dry hunger strike.

Starting as a spark of protest against the living conditions in one specific asylum facility in Southern Germany, the dissent soon spread like wildfire. Tent camps emerged in other cities, loosely knit together in the 'refugee tent action' campaign (International Refugee Center Berlin, 2015). The first phase of camps included the cities of Würzburg, Passau, Trier, Aub, Bamberg, Nurnberg, Regensburg (all in Southern Germany) and subsequently also Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, and Berlin (Lobig, 2013).

In early August, protesters from the various camps gathered for a coordination meeting in Frankfurt and decided to organize a march to Berlin:

'We enter a new phase of protest. We walk, in order to break isolation' (cited in Litschko, 2012a, author's translation).

In September 2012, the different camps joined forces and organized a bus tour as well as a 600km protest march to Berlin (Glöde & Böhlo, 2015; Langa, 2015). The activists explicitly intended to upscale their protest from the local to the national level and to attract further (media) attention to their demands.

In Berlin, the news of the arrival of the march spread rapidly. Activists from the already existing 'refugee tent action' camp at 'Heinrichplatz' in Kreuzberg had engaged in extensive preparations. Through multiple channels, activists and supporters were mobilised to welcome the protesters from Würzburg. The media sphere was galvanised by the protests, too. Even the 'Tagesschau' 8 pm edition, Germany's most important TV

news outlet, reported on the arrival of forced migrant activists in Berlin (ARD Tagesschau, 2012).

In consequence, thousands of supporters from a wide range of backgrounds – radical left groups, migrant associations, neighbours, faith-based groups - either welcomed the marchers on their arrival or offered their support over the following days. Media coverage was mainly supportive (Guyton, 2012; Lindner, 2012; Markus, 2012). Kreuzberg's district mayor from the Green party, Franz Schulz, who had been informed about the camp beforehand, publicly articulated his support of the protest (Rogalla, 2012). Within a couple of days, the 'Oranienplatz'-camp became a vibrant hub of political migrant activity. More and more people from asylum camps in and around Berlin joined the protest camp at the heart of the German capital.

A second camp emerged in Berlin shortly after, when the Iranian core group initiating the March, went on a 14-day hunger strike at 'Brandenburger Tor', one of Berlin's most iconic sites (Schreiter, 2012). Despite the strike resulting in negotiations with high-rank politicians and a meeting in the German parliament, no agreement was reached (Litschko, 2012b; Spiegel Online, 2012). Disappointed by the outcome, some went back to Bavaria, others to 'Oranienplatz'. At the same time, in the midst of an icy Berlin winter, migrants and supporters from the second protest camp at 'Oranienplatz' squatted an abandoned school building ('Gerhard Hauptmann Schule') at walking distance from the tent camp (Litschko, 2012c).

In the upcoming months – until its dissolution (by some referred to as 'eviction' – see section on fragmentation below) – the camp constituted the center of the forced migrant movement in Germany. The number of activists living in the camp fluctuated between 70 in the beginning to up to 200 individuals. Countless protest events such as demonstrations, hunger strikes, petitions, bus tours etc. were organized from or supported by this activist headquarter (for a detailed overview see Jakob, 2016).

From spring 2013 onwards, both the protest camp at 'Oranienplatz' and the occupied school witnessed the arrival of a new type of forced migrants, who eventually called themselves 'Lampedusa in Berlin' - mostly Sub-Saharan migrants from a wide range of countries who had worked in Libya for several years until the civil war erupted after the fall of Muammar Gadhafi in 2011. Many escaped by ship to the most Southern island of Italy, Lampedusa (Borri & Fontanari, 2014). After being granted humanitarian protection status in the context of Italy's 'Emergenza Nordafrica' program, many found

themselves impoverished and homeless in the streets of Italian urban centers. Some eventually decided to move North to Germany and got stuck with neither a work permit nor entitlement to any kind of social benefits. The ‘Oranienplatz’ camp subsequently hosted two groups of forced migrants: those with humanitarian protection in Italy and those registered within the German asylum system.

From summer 2013, controversies around both the school and the camp multiplied due to deteriorating conditions, an accentuation of internal conflicts and an increasingly adversary role of both senate (regional government) and district (local government)<sup>66</sup>. Following various attempts by local authorities to evict the camp and lengthy negotiations, an agreement was achieved between the Senate and the majority of those living in the tent camp. A certain number of the latter were offered temporary housing and a ‘benevolent’ individual (re)-assessment of their (legal) situation. The camp was hence dismantled against the strong resistance of another group of the activists in April 2014 (Kopietz & Zivanovic, 2014). Pressures on the occupied school equally increased, which was also partly evicted, while a core of forced migrant activists resisted their transferal on the roof and were subsequently tolerated (though strictly controlled) in one section of the building until early 2018 (Maxwill & Witte, 2018) .

Protests by forced migrants continued throughout the summer and autumn of 2014 at various locations in and around Berlin, particularly when those evacuated from the camp and school were ordered to leave the temporary shelters and return to their allocated district, where their asylum claim got registered, or to go back to Italy for those with humanitarian protection status (Berliner Zeitung, 2014; Kögel, Menzemer, Hummel, & Straub, 2014).

In early 2015, the protest wave that had started three years before, faded out. Yet, the forced migrant movement has not disappeared ever since but rather entered a phase of ‘abeyance’ (Taylor, 1989). In such periods of disadvantageous contexts, nodes in an increasingly pluri-central movement continue to exist, sustaining networks and collective identity, while (temporarily) adopting a less radical repertoire of contention (Taylor & Crossley, 2013). In Berlin, activists involved in the protest wave starting in 2012 have remained engaged in various anti-racist groups until today, regularly participating at protest events and confidently ‘making place’ for migrant political subjectivity in the local migrant rights movement and the society at large. The mobilizations have hence not

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<sup>66</sup> See also the section on contentious interactions below.

only resulted in a momentary rupture of exclusive routines but have provided relational, material and symbolic resources for future mobilizations of forced migrants in Germany (see also Chapter 8).

### **6.3. Geographies of Control and Contestation: a Spatial Perspective**

While the first section provided a brief overview of events to orientate the reader, this section specifically adopts a spatial perspective in analyzing the emergence and trajectory of the ‘Oranienplatz’-wave that points to particular spatial underpinnings. It indicates both the geographies of control exerted by the state on asylum-seekers in Germany, as well as a spatialized repertoire that the latter have developed in response.

The Iranian group of asylum-seekers from Würzburg attributed the death of their friend to the structural isolation, disintegration, lack of autonomy and limited mobility in the German asylum system, which has been sketched out in Chapter 4. Consequently, one of their first statements read:

‘In the morning, when asylum-seekers wake up, they are scared of being deported. If they want to meet friends, the Residenzpflicht [mandatory residence & mobility restriction] prevents them from doing so. Everywhere in their life hurdles exist, built by the state, because we are not meant to be part of society’ (cited in Jakob, 2013, authors' translation).

An investigation following the highly politicised suicide of Rahsepar in 2012 found that four out of five asylum-seekers in Würzburg suffered from heavy psychological problems, which were partly a result of their individual biographies of forced migration and reinforced by the asylum system in place (Jeske, 2012; Staffen-Quandt). The principle investigator concluded ‘the fact that someone commits suicide does not say anything. However, it is a system, exercising structural violence’ (cited in Jakob 2016: 108, author’s translation). Commenting on the early phases of protest, one of the protagonists recalled:

‘In Germany, there are many refugee camps. All are part of an isolation system. Most of the camps are too far away from the urban centres. The refugees do not have contact with society. After the suicide of Mohamed Rahsepar we said: we do not want to continue living in isolation’ (Source B37).

The respective collective accommodation centre in Würzburg was, as many others at the time (Wendel, 2014b), located in an industrial area at the outskirts of the city, surrounded by highways and production sites, separated from ordinary social life. While the spark of protest emerged within this restrictive and isolated environment,

its continuation was strongly shaped by a relocation of the protest from the urban periphery to the city center. The protesters left their assigned accommodation and set up very basic tents in the city center, in front of the city hall. Due to its central location and the radical tactic of hunger striking, the protest immediately attracted the attention of the local population, the media and asylum-seekers from other cities in the region (Jungbauer, 2012a; Litschko, 2012b; Przybilla, 2012a). Set up in one of the central streets in Würzburg, the very presence of the asylum-seekers in the public space constituted a rupture of the exclusive routine, leading to both open opposition of the protest and expressions of solidarity (Grünberg, 2013). While the then Bavarian minister of social affairs Haderthauer, refused to meet the protesters – arguing that the state could not be ‘blackmailed’ (Main Post, 2012a) – the deputy director of the ‘German Agency for Refugees and Migrants’ (BAMF) met the protesting forced migrants (ibid). The public exposure and contestations mobilized visibility and resources for the continuation of the protest. Aware of this empowering effect, the municipality of Würzburg employed various tactics to get rid of the camp, which had transcended both expectations and previous experiences with short-termed acts of resistances by asylum-seekers, often hidden in the remote asylum facilities, away from the public eye. First the administration limited the amounts of chairs and beds allowed in the camp (Jakob 2016: 109). Later it prohibited the presence of activists with sewed lips, arguing that these images were overly shocking and that the public had to be protected from them (Przybilla, 2012c). The administrative court annulated this prohibition shortly after (ibid). Furthermore, the municipality increased the control of those forced migrants who joined the camp in Würzburg but who were officially registered in other districts and thereby subject to the mobility restriction of ‘Residenzpflicht’ (Refugee Tent Action, 2012).

When the protest had spread in the loosely connected ‘tent action campaign’ but temporarily appeared to stagnate, the core group employed another spatial strategy to revitalize the emerging movement: a march and a bus tour to Berlin. Relocating their dissent from geographical and social margins of society to the German capital constituted a *claim to centrality*:

‘we go to the centre where everything is close, the authorities, the parliament, we go and make the action there. If it is in other places, they can say, ah, this is Bavaria, this is, local but we have to bring it to the centre’ (Interview B4).

By dislocating the protest to Berlin, the protesters could moreover access place-based



opportunities in Kreuzberg, a neighbourhood which has - despite rapid gentrification (Holm & Kuhn, 2010) – kept its ‘myth’ as a diverse, progressive, multicultural and subversive epicentre, which indeed is still home to a large immigrant community and a dense network of activist groups, serving as brokers to access resources necessary for political mobilization.

‘We came to O-Platz because of the connection. We don't know Oranienplatz, we don't know anything, but we say, we have activists (...) in Berlin and they knew which place is good.’ (Interview B4)

This location was not coincidental but activists strategically used the public image as subversive stronghold and the *de facto* density of progressive social movement organizations in this part of the city (Lang, 1998; Stehle, 2006).

Moreover, the march and the bus tours had the important *relational* function of connecting a highly dispersed population of asylum-seekers in the German province and mobilizing new protesters. Both the march and the bus tours were planned to pass by numerous asylum camps. The logic was retrospectively explained by two of the protagonists of both bus tour and march:

‘We have to pick-up the non-citizens wherever they are. In every camp, in every room. The movement needs to stay in motion’ (Houmer Hedayatatzadeh, cited in Jakob 2013b, author's translation).

‘Refugees were isolated and this was the tactics [to break it]. The government isolates refugees so that they cannot have ideas to come together, to separate them. If you come together you are strong already. The march to Berlin and bus tour at the same time it was really locating the people’ (Interview B4).

Every stop during the one-month march added nodes in a growing contentious network and hence contributed to the accumulation of weak ties.

Finally, the mobile repertoire had an *expressive* dimension. The activists intended to prefiguratively practice freedom of movement by deliberately violating ‘Residenzpflicht’. Indeed, the march was symbolically and practically conceived as an appropriation and enactment of rights – an ‘act of emancipation’ (Monforte & Dufour, 2013). Literally moving forward disrupted the sense of ‘being stuck’, forcefully immobilized by an in many cases lengthy and burdensome administrative procedure:

‘We did not ask for rights; we did our rights’ (Interview B4).

Underlining their determination to resist forced immobility during the asylum procedures in Germany, on the march from Wurzburg to Berlin, the activists tore up

their ‘Aufenthaltsgestattung’, the identity document for asylum-seekers, at the former inner-German border (Guyton 2012), symbolically relating to a continuity of borders within Germany for those considered unwanted. The internal effect of this spectacular protest was a deepening of strong and emotional ties among forced migrants and between migrants and European supporters.

The expectations of the activists with regard to support in Berlin-Kreuzberg were at the beginning more than met. When the marchers arrived and set up tents at ‘Oranienplatz’, the group was enthusiastically welcomed and supported. Even more than in Würzburg, the central location and visibility of the protest resulted in a magnetic effect, attracting hundreds of individual supporters and groups as well as forced migrants from isolated asylum camps to join the protest.

During the first months of the camp at ‘Oranienplatz’, the support from the local population was immense. Tens of thousands of euros were donated, but also food, clothes and tents; local residents and shop owners in the neighbourhood of the camp offered their sanitary facilities. In most cases, it was enough to post an item on the ‘we need’-billboard at the entrance of the camp and it was organized shortly after.

‘When we arrived in Berlin, we first said we have to let the people know. There was a lot of attention because 600 kilometres marching is something special. And when they come, we say it is good that you are here, and we need this and that’ (Interview B4).

Resources that were needed to sustain the protest could be mobilized on the spot, as multiple weak ties could be accessed. The camp served as a reservoir of weak ties to civil society organizations, individual supporters and the media. In relocating the protest, the refugees had rapidly transformed themselves from ‘weakly-resourced’, isolated and dispersed communities into an emerging movement with astonishing resources and means to organize and sustain protest. The forced migrants did not need to beg for scarce support but could even choose among various kinds of assistance offered by a multitude of actors.

Due to this magnetic effect and the shift in power relations between forced migrants and supporters, at the beginning little energy was needed to reproduce the protest itself. In consequence, countless protest actions such as demonstrations, occupations of embassies etc. could be organized from the protest centres in both Würzburg and Berlin. As the camp constituted a combination of living space and political space, it mitigated the obstacle of mobilizing dispersed and financially precarious communities to participate

in the protest.

Via online communication and word of mouth, many refugees living in camps outside the urban centres learned of the existence of the autonomous space and left their assigned location in asylum camps (Interview B12, Interview B4). Several of my interlocutors had experienced the sheer existence of ‘O-Platz’ as a motivation to leave their asylum facilities in different parts of Germany and join the movement in Berlin or to engage in local refugee activism (Interview B12, Interview B24, Interview B3). It was a docking-station to meet other politically engaged people, to tap resources and to develop new ideas for political opposition.

‘There was something that was organized by Women in Exile (...) it was like a panel discussion that there was an opportunity for people to say exactly what was happening to them in the lager. And I thought yes, I have to say exactly what is happening in the lagers, and this is how it kicked off. And then from there, I knew there was Oranienplatz, at least there is something to do, and this is when I joined, and this is how I started’ (Interview B24).

While many of the founders of the movement had previous experiences in political activism in their countries of origin (such as the Iranian core group in the 2009 so-called ‘Green Revolution’), the existence of the camp also attracted many for whom the camp was a space of politicization and socialization into activism. Indeed, the protesters actively encouraged asylum-seekers from all over the country to join the protest:

‘We ask all of you, refugees and asylum-seekers, around Germany to break the isolation and to break the silence and join your brothers and sisters at the protest camp at Oranienplatz to take what is your right’ (Refugee Revolution, 2013).

From ‘Oranienplatz’, the protesters also organized further bus tours, to keep reaching out to the isolated forced migrant population. One of their announcements read:

‘To exchange experiences, put aside our common fears and start fighting together, we are heading for a ‘Refugee Revolution Bus Tour’ (...). For three weeks, we will visit Lagers [camps] in different federal states of Germany in order to spread information about the protest. (...) You can also join along the route. To spend time together, share information and be at the side of the refugees and asylum-seekers in the Lagers, we will stay near the Lagers for at least one night’ (Refugee Revolution, 2013).

Given the (initially) supportive environment, the camps became *a safe space of encounter* for an extremely heterogeneous group of forced migrants and supporters with a plethora of legal status, social backgrounds, ideologies etc. While ‘safe spaces’ beyond crippling control by the state have been considered key for all kinds of movements (Sewell 2001:

69), asylum-seekers are situated in an even more restrained system of control, from which autonomous camps can provide (temporary) relief. For the specific context of forced migration, Katharyne Mitchell and Matthew Sparke have recently suggested six dimensions of ‘safe spaces’:

‘These are: i) physical safety: through the provision of basic conditions for survival and social reproduction in areas of housing, clothing, food, and health; ii) personal dignity: through mutual relations of respect and human connection; iii) organizational autonomy: through initiating and sustaining the sites and their quotidian practices; iv) radical democracy: through organizing heterogeneous ties of political networking both locally and transnationally; v) spatial liberty: through asserting rights of mobility, especially free movement in and out of the sites; and vi) social community: through working together in solidarity across differences and with neighbours to sustain the sites’ (Mitchell & Sparke, 2017: 22).

Many accounts of forced migrants living in the camp mirror a combination of these dimensions:

‘When we came here, it was reducing and healing the trauma. Because I got to know people here not by force, not like ‘get to know these people’, in our lagers it is ‘get to know these people, whether you like or not’. You have to be in this place if you like or not, you are not allowed to move. But here we can move freely, nobody can say ‘do not go there’ (Interview B35).

This experience of autonomy and emerging imaginaries of hope led various activists to (re)-develop a sense of agency, which had gradually been replaced by apathy and despair during the asylum process. Asked by journalists why the protesters did not accept the deal offered by the local administration of Kreuzberg, to move back into asylum camps and get individual reviews of their asylum claims, an activist answered:

‘We are alone there; we cannot fight together. The authorities can take and deport us easily’ (cited in International Refugee Center 2015: 77).

Assemblies were organized translating all interventions into multiple languages and indeed, the process of developing and negotiating a collective identity did not evolve without fundamental frictions. Nevertheless, both camps created the very basis for developing ‘strong ties’ among migrants and between migrants and supporters. The ‘eventful’ character of the camp and the collective actions deepened a sense of collectivity and solidarity despite diversity.

Both in Wurzburg and Berlin, the inner-city space functioned as an open stage where refugees could articulate their claims and make sure their voices were heard

‘They want to put us out of the city where nobody knows that we are existing (...). Right here where we are is the right place (...)’ (refugee activist, cited in International Refugee Center 2015: 8).

The advantageous relational qualities of the tent camp characterizing the first phase of the protest, however, eroded over time. As will be further discussed in the section on contentious interactions below, the highly diverse and fragmented political left-wing scene left its mark on the movement. One of the veterans of migrant self-organization noted:

‘There was already a conflict during the march to Berlin. Berlin was the wrong place for the march to end. Too many actions, too many groups, too many private agendas, this was the problem when they got to Berlin’ (Interview B22).

‘Berlin is a difficult city for activism, it is a market, everyone wants his or her share. At the beginning it was good to be in Berlin, in the end, it was maybe not a good idea’ (Interview B17, similar comment Interview B15).

The combination of subsistence and political activism in the same location was potentially of even greater importance for the trajectory of the movement. At the outset, it encouraged many to join. Yet, the longer the protest lasted, the more difficult and precarious the daily life in the tent camp became. While remaining a permanent rupture of routine and drawing visibility to the realities of forced migrants in Germany, the tent camp exhausted its inhabitants. This exhaustion was one of the reasons, which contributed to the ‘Oranienplatz agreement’<sup>67</sup> (Senate of Berlin, 2014) and the dismantling of the camp (Interview B4, Interview B12, Interview B21).

Similar developments can be traced in the occupied school. At its moment of initiation, the Gerhard-Hauptmann School was squatted because it was an urgently needed safe space during the winter particularly for women, families and elderly people. It allowed a retreat from the exposed ‘war zone’ (Interview B4) at ‘O-Platz’. Consequently, one floor of the building was transformed into an ‘International Women’s Space’ – a self-organized political space for forced migrant women (Interview B4, Interview B24). The activists also intended to extend the advantageous relational qualities established in the occupied square. However, the place soon became predominantly a shelter, i.e. living space rather than a political space as the availability of a roof also

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<sup>67</sup> This agreement was the result of lengthy negotiation with Senator Dilek Kolat (SPD) and the occupants of the square. In the end, one faction of the camp was offered a ‘benevolent’ re-assessment of their individual cases on the condition that the camp was voluntarily dissolved. While some factions of the camp signed the agreement, others fiercely opposed the process and result of the negotiations (see e.g. Flüchtlingsrat Berlin e.V., 2014).

attracted hundreds of individuals who were in need and only partially affiliated to the political struggle for rights and recognition. With an increasing population and unclear rules, conflicts multiplied soon. While this was also the case at ‘O-Platz’ (Ünsal, 2015), the closed occupied building posed specific challenges with regard to assuring the security and basic functioning of the place, including internal debates on access restrictions. One of the persons involved in the protest movement at the time recalled:

‘To squat the school was maybe our biggest mistake. We built our own Lager [camp]. We locked ourselves in again. With less visibility than in the public space and more controversies’ (Interview B34).

Over time, the place became overcrowded and increasingly contested, receiving predominantly negative media coverage following outbursts of violence and opposition by the initially supportive district government (Der Tagesspiegel; rbb-online, 2013; Soos, 2014). Shortly after the dismantling of ‘Oranienplatz’, the vast majority of the inhabitants in the school agreed to move out, both because of exhaustion and anticipation of the potential consequences of a violent eviction.

The end of the tent camp was - in addition to internal dynamics - also rooted in a strategic governance of space employed by public authorities at various levels in Berlin. Indeed, from the very beginning, the incubating effect of the occupied ‘Oranienplatz’ and the school provoked unease and opposition by the regional government of Berlin, particularly the conservative Senator of the Interior. Hence repeated attempts were made to disperse and discourage the movement by eliminating the two occupied centres of the protest. Over time, opposition against the camp and the school extended to parts of the neighbourhood and the newly elected district mayor from the Green party. In the following months, both district and senate engaged in a governance of social ties and space largely avoiding open repression. Selective incentives were offered to many, yet not all migrants involved, which further fragmented the movement along lines of status and origin and led to an eventual dissolution. As part of the so-called ‘deal’, forced migrants from the camp were offered temporary accommodation in various shelters dispersed throughout the entire city.

The dissolution of the camp wiped out the material and symbolic centre of the movement with its magnetic effect. Indeed, in its absence, the spatial importance of the camp for the movement became even more evident. Difficulties for refugees to meet and organize grew substantially:

‘Now that there is no Oranienplatz anymore it is difficult to meet, we all live in different places now. I live far away, far, far away, I tell you! Bus and train maybe one hour before I get to the[occupied] school. I can’t go by bicycle; I would get lost as I don’t know the road! Now maybe it can be one month or two months that we do not meet each other, because now we are separate. But before, when we were living in Oranienplatz you went there and there were many of us, every time! We could sit together, talk’ (activist quoted in Borri 2016).

The forced dispersal reintroduced the dependence on the favour of supporting structures to occasionally use their facilities:

‘Imagine. If you have a house and the house burns. This means that you have to spread. So, you have to say, "please, in solidarity, can you take some" in this case the people cannot see you as a group like before. And maybe you are far away from your sister, from your mother, this can make connection difficult.’ (...) I always say we do not have the main place where we can gather like before, because we were scattered’ (Interview B4).

Two months after the dismantling of the protest camp at ‘Oranienplatz’, the district intended to proceed similarly with the occupied school. Due to the symbolic value the school had additionally obtained after the end of the ‘O-Platz’ camp, as well as the resistance of some of its inhabitants on the roof, thousands of political activists and neighbours prevented an eviction of the place in summer 2014 (Danielzik & Bendix, 2016). Despite this highly mediatized dissent of around two dozen activists, the majority accepted the offer, also most of the women who had been settled in the ‘International Women’s Space’. Particularly for the Women’s Space, which was in the end one of the few groups with an explicit activist focus in the school, the loss of this site was a hard blow.

‘It was a very difficult moment. After the eviction, everyone was displaced, virtually everybody (...). Now we changed situations from having a place to work and sleep to not even having a place to meet, just something very basic. So, we started looking around for women’s organizations, which already have establishments (...) but we still did not enjoy the sense of freedom, the sense of everything that we enjoyed in the school’ (Interview B24).

The alternative accommodation which was offered in exchange for leaving the autonomous protest spaces, were provided for six months. As it turned out, by the time the forced migrants were sent out of the reception centres and became homeless, also the supporters network had been notably weakened. Many had abandoned the movement because they did not want the ‘Oranienplatz agreement’. Those few who remained, now

struggled to secure the basic needs and support the ongoing precarious protests, which had by now fragmented into many protests across the city. Public interest in the migrants and their claims had in the meanwhile diminished. The dissolution and dispersal of the protesters had effectively fragmented the protest movement. The lack of a central culmination point with favourable conditions for building weak and strong ties was decisive in the fragmentation and retrospectively underlined its importance for the movement.

#### **6.4. Contentious Interactions in the ‘O-Platz’ Arena**

The contentious arena of ‘Oranienplatz’ was fundamentally spatialized as the relational qualities of its different locations, as well as their strategic use and policing by activists and the state, had a significant impact on the protest wave’s trajectory.

Yet, the arena was also strongly shaped by the contentious interactions unfolding within it, involving a range of actors with at times overlapping, at times opposed interests. In the course of the wave, various actors or ‘players’ entered and left the arena, compound players split and players changed their preferences. In order to outline the key interactionist patterns, I will scrutinize both the *internal* (among different fractions of the forced migrant activists) and *external* dynamics involving different kinds of ‘supporters’, NGOs and public authorities.

This section builds upon the broad debate on the role of networked relationships for migrant activism. In general, some degree of involvement of native allies is considered indispensable, given the structural lack of resources. Indeed, this was acknowledged by many interlocutors.

‘No doubt, there is “Herrschaftswissen” [roughly translates to hegemonic knowledge] and this needs to be made available to us, because we do not have it, because often we cannot have it, because some doors are closed to us. And I expect that it is shared with us’ (Interview B19).

In a society with accentuated asymmetrical access to rights and resources, this is quite logical. It is therefore of limited value to study the existence of such relations, but rather how they play out and how they develop over time. In most cases it is exactly the ambivalence and sensitivity inherent in relationships between forced migrants, directly affected by exclusion and repression and altruistic pro-beneficiaries. As these relations are dynamic and fragile, it is instructive to think of them as contentious interactions rather than seemingly stable ‘relations’.



I will once more start from the triggering factors of the wave in Würzburg. While the spark of protest emerged only within the asylum facility and among asylum-seekers, from the moment of public exposure, the protesters found themselves embedded in a contentious arena, involving fragmented pro-immigration scene, the institutionalized political sphere and the media. The early involvement of anti-fascist and communist support groups and the participation of a prominent Iranian atheist at the first demonstration outside the facility irritated some asylum-seekers, but more importantly some groups of civil society considering themselves as moderate (Jungbauer, 2012a).

The subsequent establishment of a protest tent in the city centre attracted a highly diverse mix of actors supporting the protesters, ranging from members of the regional and national parliament from the Greens and the Left, anarchist and communist groups, the Iranian diaspora in Germany and local anti-racist and faith-based associations (Grünberg, 2013). The involvement of a radical supporting milieu from the outset in addition to the local migrant rights scene was not coincidental, given the background of several members of the core group of Iranians. Many had been engaged as students in the 'Green Revolution' against authoritarian president Ahmadinejad in 2009 and were prosecuted subsequently. Due to this background, they had some links to the Iranian exile community and as Marxist students an affinity to radical left-wing groups (Interview B11, Interview B22, Interview B26).

Their socialization in an authoritarian regime became soon a force in their determination, and an irritation to some of those acting in solidarity. At the outset, many actors, including local politicians, supported both the means and the demands of the protesters. Yet, this changed in early summer 2012, when the protesters pushed for further escalation of the conflict. In an open letter, they reiterated their demands and ended with the line 'there is nothing more to say, everything has been said' (cited Grünberg 2013: 166). Thereafter, two protesters sewed their lips to underline their voicelessness and determination. Five other Iranian asylum-seekers followed their example during the upcoming week. This radical repertoire of contention had an ambivalent effect. On the one hand, the images of sewed mouths were diffused heavily in the German media, visibility of the protests exploded even further and on a national scale (Augsburger Allgemeine, 2012; Die Welt, 2012; Przybilla, 2012b, 2012c). On the other hand, the self-destructive means alienated parts of the pro-refugee milieu.

The vice-director of the largest asylum-related NGO in Germany, 'Pro Asyl', criticized the timing of the escalation of protest and furthermore noted that his organization had 'large problems with any kind of protest, which is directed against one's health' (cited Die Welt, 2012, author's translation). Also the 'Refugee Council of Bavaria', usually strongly supportive of the group, criticized these actions (Przybilla, 2012c). Mathias Grünberg, local politician for the Greens who had supported the protests for weeks, remarked in an open letter:

'The sewing of your mouth is unacceptable! From this moment, I cannot come any longer to your info point. I – and it is not only me – cannot do anything politically. The implementation of your, our just demands will take months, indeed years. I do not consider this action [lip sewing] to be appropriate to advance your, our demands, no, it only damages your health, indeed your life' (Grünberg 2013: 102, author's translation).

Simone Tolle, member of the regional parliament for the Green party, also distanced herself from this kind of protest, noting that the protest repertoire had not only alienated her but 'a lot of persons have contacted me and said they have problems with this kind of protest' (Grünberg 2013: 106, author's translation). Indeed, the main local newspaper commented:

'Like this, you do not make friends. No matter how good and just the cause is for which the Iranian refugees are protesting. With this "new rigidity" [quote from the protesters], it will backfire on them. Until now, they have built their protest on the sympathies in parts of the society and politics. But in this way, needy refugees become quickly incalculable radicals' (Main Post, 2012b, author's translation).

One of the supporters responded in a published letter to the editor:

'What kind of protest do you expect? Knitting socks for the winter? A concert by an Iranian strike-choir, combined with collecting money for asylum-seekers? Once more a day of sympathy from the population, which ends the next day when a demonstration disrupts the routine of Saturday shopping? No, here, human beings fight for their rights. It is not about who likes whom and who does not. It is not about friends and sympathy. It is about humanity' (Neuert, 2012, author's translation).

This change in repertoire marked a critical shift as it restructured the supporting milieu. Whereas the more institutionalized actors (most party representatives, NGOs) became somehow alienated after a strong initial support, decentralized anti-racist groups stepped in:

'We declare our unconditional solidarity with the demands of the refugees. With consternation, however, we have realized that some groups and individuals

defame their protest. (...) The questions is: Are those expressing criticism overwhelmed by this freely chosen form of protest or do they feel threatened in their role as paternalistic pro-beneficiaries?" (cited in Grünberg 2013: 165, author's translation).

What started as a debate about 'adequate' repertoires of contention eventually broadened into a general debate about the role of non-refugees in commenting on self-organized practices:

'The radicalized hunger strike of the Iranian refugees with sewed lips is without doubt a last, desperate attempt to make self-determined claims and to prove their ability to act. No one, particularly no one living in Germany, who enjoys all political and liberal rights, can presume to be in a position to judge, which means refugees are allowed to take' (Möller, 2012, author's translation).

The protesting migrants in turn disqualified criticism as 'de-solidarization' (Refugee Tent Action, 2012).

By the end of June, one of the protesters pushed even further and stopped drinking water. That time, 10 out of 13 protesters were granted a right to stay and the other claims were reconsidered. The protesters ended their hunger strike and removed the threads in their mouths (Przybilla, 2012a, 2012c). Due to their determination, the Iranians quickly earned a reputation as being extremely determined and less inclined to engage in lengthy debates with supporting environments (Interview B11, Interview B15, Interview B22, Interview B34). Not only were German support milieus alienated but also the interaction with the veterans of 'refugee' self-organization such as the 'The Voice' and the 'Caravan Network' was fragile from the beginning. Even though the 'Caravan' had supported the tent actions, offered their bank account for donations and had visited the camp in Würzburg repeatedly (Grünberg 2013: 246), the interactions with the 'Caravan' network were from the beginning highly precarious due to struggles over representation and strategy (Interview 25, Interview 34). Firstly, there was an unease with the perceived authoritarianism of the new generation. One of the old generation of activists recalls his view of the developments:

'These Iranians, these guys who were involved in the protest in Iran were very seriously anti-government at the time. You have to remember, this was an authoritarian government, it still is. This bunch of students was born there, got acculturated - so if you are born and you grow up under such a dictatorship, the likelihood is that you also have internalized some of their nonsense, this is what happened with the Iranians. Because when these guys came here, they did their protest, they were opposed to the situations they were living here just in the way they were opposed to the situations they experienced at home under the

dictatorship. But, here is a problem. The majority acted against the background of people being acculturated in a dictatorship. In other words: there is no compromise, there is nothing like democracy, there is nothing like differences of opinion. This was a big point because if you analyse it, I can say, they escalated the protest very much, beyond what the caravan was doing at the time and they had political opportunities open to them (...). But these political opportunities (...) could not be properly utilized, because of the mode in which they operated' (Interview B11).

Secondly, the first generation missed credit for their share in the new generations' success - the knitting of networks, mobilisation in camps and the gradual establishment of a refugee subjectivity within the German left.

'The dynamics of 2012 was not just something that just fell from heaven. The solidarity, the power of 2012 has been built up for 20 years. Because even when I came to Germany, the relationship between the anti-racist movement and the self-organization was different, they ignore you. If the old activist, not even me, had not started to put this into question that refugees should be actors, very special actors in their own struggle, the protest march would have been crushed. Otherwise you would have seen a refugee behind a white activist at the front' (Interview B22).

Thirdly, the sensitive relationship was furthermore rooted in partly antagonistic supporting milieus and ideologies: among the early supporters of the Iranian core group were also adherents of the so-called 'Anti-German'<sup>68</sup> fraction in the German radical left (Interview B34), whose members deduce a strongly pro-Israel and pro-US American (as the main guarantor of the state of Israel) position from the German fascist past and a fear of rising German nationalism since the early 1990s. As opponents to the strongly anti-Semite former Iranian president Ahmadinejad, the Iranians who were involved in the 2009 so-called 'Green Revolution', were considered natural allies. Yet, other support milieus and particularly the 'Caravan' is rooted in an anti-imperialist and pro-Palestinian tradition. Conflicts accentuated when in late August, the new generation of protesters, still predominantly led by the Iranian core group from Wurzburg, was invited to the 'Break Isolation Summer Camp' in Erfurt, organized by the 'Caravan' and 'The Voice' (The Voice Refugee Forum, 2012).

'In October 2011, when we started organizing the summer camp of August 2012, we thought it would be the first and only refugee camp in Germany of that year. But when the Iranian refugees started their protest tent in March and the hunger strike of refugees spread to other cities and towns, we had to realize that many

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<sup>68</sup> For an analysis of this ideological current, see Ullrich, 2013.

camps were on the way to the refugee summer camp in Erfurt' (The Voice Refugee Forum, 2012, author's translation).

Questions over representation and leadership and the role of the former asylum-seekers, who had gained a regularized status in the meanwhile, were fought out rigorously. This interaction left deep traces for many individuals involved and was even four years after referred to as 'the bruises from Erfurt' (Interview 25, similarly Interview 34, Interview B17).

Despite the multiple seeds of conflict planted in Würzburg and Erfurt that had lasting effects on the movement, the 'Caravan' and many other groups supported the march to Berlin logistically. First and foremost, the Iranians had an important argument on their side: their strategy of escalation seemed to be successful, at least in the short run and had politicized the topic of asylum in Germany in an unprecedented way.

The decentralized activist nodes of the 'Caravan' organized accommodation and food on the stops of both march and bus tour, building upon local pro-immigrant structures included associations as diverse as radical-left social centres, sports clubs and faith-based youth organizations (Loschert, 2012, Interview B15, Interview B34). As one participant of the bus tour recalled:

'We went back to the "Caravan", to "The Voice" [and said] you have been here for a long time: we need connections. First of all, we need a place to meet people. We connected to antifa[scist] and antiracist the first thing because they are everywhere, they have also contact to the refugees, they know where the refugees are, we do not know' (Interview B4).

Similarly, while criticising the timing of escalation by the Würzburg group, also 'Pro Asyl' and the 'Refugee Councils' of Bavaria and Berlin raised money and public attention for the march (Flüchtlingsrat Berlin e.V., Flüchtlingsrat Bayern e.V., & Pro Asyl, 2013; Landesflüchtlingsräte & Pro Asyl, 2012; Pro Asyl, 2012; Pro Asyl & Flüchtlingsrat Berlin e.V., 2012).

'The regional refugee councils ('Landesfluechtingsraete') and Pro Asyl align with the demands of the refugees and call for support of the protest march. The refugees urgently depend on donations for food, logistics and publicity materials' (Landesflüchtlingsräte & Pro Asyl, 2012, author's translation).

Without this support, the march and the bus tour to Berlin could not have been organized in such a short time. After four weeks and 600 kilometres on foot, the protesters reached Berlin. The march, involving the key players in the wave of contention, relocated the physical arena to Berlin. This shift involved a continuity of some players (the migrant

activists, the ‘Refugee Council’, the ‘Caravan’ and some media/ reporters), the fade-out of the local involvement by groups and institutionalized politics in Wurzburg and most importantly the addition of multiple new players in a much more complex, multi-layered and heavily mediatized arena in Berlin.

This account of the trajectory of the first phase of protest furthermore clearly shows that the protesters did not react upon opening opportunity structures, as the traditional social movement theories would expect. Rather, their protest, emerging in the most restrictive regional context for asylum-seekers in Bavaria, actively opened opportunities. With regard to supporting milieus, the centrally located protest camps developed a magnetic field which turned the established power relations upside down. Pro-beneficiaries were attracted to the prominent protesters, who had hence, a degree of choice in deciding with whom to work and whom to ignore. With regard to institutional politics, through both the public visibility (also through mediatization) and the inherent pressure of hunger-strikes as a form of action, the protesters forced high level politicians and institutions to (temporarily) open up for marginalized actors.

#### *The Making and Breaking of Ties at ‘Oranienplatz’*

As noted above, the arrival in Berlin galvanised the neighbourhood and the migrant rights movement more broadly. The activists were treated like ‘popstars’ (Interview B15, Interview B22), the media reported mainly positively (Guyton, 2012; Lindner, 2012; Markus, 2012), a dominant atmosphere of euphoria took over the neighbourhood of Kreuzberg. One veteran activist in Kreuzberg remembered:

‘During the [tent action camp] at Heinrichplatz, we, from *Kotti & Co*, were in close contact, we also did some night shifts, if support was needed. But when the march arrived in Berlin, it was first the case that on one refugee, there were five supporters. Everyone who wasn’t out of the way in three seconds had a lot of supporters around him’ (Interview B8).

The incubating effects on protest activity and the magnetic effect on resources and new activists has been described above. In this section, I focus rather on the contentious interactions which led to the making and breaking of social ties at ‘Oranienplatz’, both related to the pro-beneficiary activists and among forced migrants.

With the tremendous popularity, also the traditional supporting milieu partly changed compared both to Wurzburg and previous episodes of migrant activism. Whereas the migrant solidarity movement was a very small circle, in which most of the activists

and groups knew each other personally (Interview B19, Interview B26), a new type of solidarity network became highly visible and contested under the slippery term of ‘supporters’ in the context of ‘Oranienplatz’: a diverse set of individuals from different backgrounds supporting self-organized struggles in some way or the other.

For the protesting activists, this was a convenient situation at the outset as negotiations or compromises with established groups with explicit agendas were simply not necessary.

‘These groups we are connecting to they provide some support, which means kind of humanitarian support, but it is still ok. That's why we say it is self-organized because we ourselves will not connect to any big organizations, we don't want money from big organization, we get money from the population we get support from the population’ (Interview B4).

Accordingly, very few of the forced migrant activists involved at the time, mentioned professionalized NGOs on the question of whom they consider to be an ally of the self-organization. The more professionalized organizations pulled back either because they felt superfluous in light of the widespread individual support, and/or were alienated by the spontaneous and action-oriented protest:

‘We advertised the arrival of the march. And then, we were present at the beginning and then – I do not really know why, we somehow made a step back. In fact, it was not really the case that we were very much needed, there were so many supporters. We just said, we are there, you can contact us. That’s it’ (Interview B21).

The increasing alienation of established groups from the forced migrant activists was in most cases a mutual feeling. One of the ‘supporters’, who remained in the ‘inner supporter circle’ throughout the protest, recalled:

‘I would say, the organized antiracist groups found it difficult to engage, because it was difficult to get into the structures, because the structures were made during presence at the square, the plenaries lasted for hours and hours and many things were discussed and decided on the square. This did not really fit with the working habits of the groups in Berlin who meet once a week and plan campaigns. But at the same time, there were many, many people, also many people who had not been organized previously’ (Interview B25).

A migrant rights activist, involved in the movement for decades, perceived it similarly, from the ‘other’ side:

‘I think that the activist spectrum in Berlin was surprised – by the timing, but even more so by the duration and by the unfolding actionism. Sometimes it was overwhelming to occupy an embassy, having a demo or being on a hunger strike

every day, solidarity with the struggles in Vienna and so on. In some moments, there was a lot of actionism and little coordination. I think those who conceived themselves to be more settled both in terms of age and in organizational terms, were overwhelmed by the spontaneity' (Interview B9).

Many established groups and activists, hence, left the arena altogether or kept some distance from the unfolding processes. What prevailed in the first phase of the protest was a dedicated activist core, which had an affinity with a particular reading of 'critical whiteness', as outlined in the context chapter:

'Myself, I was not in Cologne, but here in Berlin, it has definitely led to a change of perspective, how racism is addressed, whose voice should be considered more important given racism, and has pointed to the problems of politics of representation. (...) I had the position, for instance in the plenary, I stay in the background, I really do not want to take a lot of space, as a white guy with long experience in activism' (Interview B25).

One member of the 'Caravan', active in self organized movements of forced migrants for more than a decade, articulated his criticism of this type of supporter:

'Then German activist became messengers. This is how it developed. The refugees should make decisions, the non-refugee activist can build the tent, clean the tent, cook, collect money, but no discussion. (...) we have a false idea of what solidarity means, this is why we see ourselves more as supporters and do not go beyond this distinction. This stigma came also out of the no border camp [in Cologne]. It made them feel: do not speak' (Interview B22).

The conflicts between the older generation organized in the 'Caravan' and the new generation accentuated after the arrival in Berlin. In the atmosphere of collective euphoria, when both asylum-seekers and supporters arrived on a daily basis, conflicts on power and leadership of the movement deepened further. Instead of contributing in lengthy plenary debates and negotiating positions and strategies in an increasingly diversified movement, the Iranian core group wanted to use the momentum and proceed with their way of doing things – escalation and radical self-determination. The result was a split of the emerging movement and a second protest including hunger strikes at 'Brandenburger Tor'. Once more, their strategy seemed to be successful. The photos of hunger strikers in front of the famous landmark became iconic. Warned by the developments in Würzburg, the conservative Senator of Interior Henkel, consequently tried everything to avoid the establishment of a protest camp in the political heart of the city and ordered harsh policing, including the confiscation of sleeping bags, sleeping pads and tents. This, however, drew further attention to the protesters. Negotiations were set up involving the ombudsperson for migration and integration at the federal level Boehmer



(CDU) and the Senator for Migration and Integration in Berlin, Kolat (SPD). The result was several meetings between protesters, members of the human rights committee and the committee of interior of the German Parliament, the 'Bundestag'. Boehmer later called the meeting 'the most moving experience of my term in office' (Spiegel Online, 2012).

The almost collective sympathy did not last long as the slow political processes and diplomatic moves collided quickly with the demands and determination of the protesters. After a first meeting with a delegation of the 'Bundestag', the asylum-seekers went on hunger strike again, however without solving the conflict (Litschko, 2012b). Disappointed by the lack of immediate results of their protests, the group at 'Brandenburger Tor' ended their protest. Instead of joining the camp at 'Oranienplatz' or the school, the Iranian core group opted to leave the city for Bavaria, and somehow, to leave the local contentious 'arena'. Others joined the 'Oranienplatz' camp. The Iranian core group's legacy was a tremendous visibility of the issue. In a very short period of time, the protesters had with their choice of sites and protest repertoires both literally and metaphorically moved from the German periphery to the very centre. Both previous self-organized protests and the German pro-immigrant movement had failed to centralize the marginalized voice of refugees and to politicise the everyday life conditions within the German asylum system. Yet, they also planted the seed of a lasting division between the new generation and the established self-organization of forced migrants in Germany. Taken over by some factions in the school and the 'Oranienplatz', the divisions remained even after the Iranians had left.

The Iranian core group had explicitly introduced the concept of 'non-citizens' distinguishing firstly between those with a lived experience of exclusion as asylum-seekers and those privileged with formal citizenship in a country in the Global North. Besides, it was used to distinguish further between those in a current situation of exclusion and those with a regularized status (such as recognized refugees). To underline their argument, they noted:

'The existing refugee self-organizations are partly run by persons who have got papers in the meantime. This is something entirely different to our struggle' (cited in Jakob 2013b, author's translation).

'Of course we make a difference between ourselves and recognized asylum-seekers, even if those recognized fight at our side. The recognized refugees can go home after the protest, we cannot, we do not have a home. On the contrary, we can be deported' (Jakob, 2013, author's translation).

This led to a fundamental alienation of the ‘Caravan’ activists, who considered this first and foremost as a strategy to silence opposition and secure their leadership in the emerging movement.

‘You cannot build trust like this, because you are suspicious. With these ‘non-citizens’ who were the leadership you were taken to the point that you were automatically excluded when you had obtained papers. Why are you discriminating against people who have been living the same shit here, it does not work like this. The point was not as much the willingness to learn, it is more the question of how much they were influenced by their mind-set of where they come from (...). At the end the caravan decided to pull out and let them do how they want to do. This is the reason why there was not deep interaction or cooperation with the caravan or similar other groups because it just does not work’ (Interview B11).

It is worth recalling, that the ‘O-Platz’ arena was arranged along ideological and strategic positions in a context of an overall positive contextual climate. The media reported positively, the district mayor from the Green party, Schulz, explicitly articulated toleration of the protest camp and even the occupation of the school. No external factors or opportunities shaped the first phase of the protest, but rather the internal dynamics within the movement, which was not a monolithic block, but consisted of various players.

Despite its early fragmentation, the protest camp at ‘Oranienplatz’ and the school managed to sustain a high level of visibility and protest activity throughout the winter and spring (Refugee Protest Camp Berlin, 2013; Refugee Strike Berlin, 2012a, 2012b). In a New Year’s message, the protesters recalled their achievements and noted:

‘Today we look back with pride on what we have achieved so far. We want to thank our fellow refugees and supporters and congratulate everybody for this incredible success! The future lies in our very hands! Yes, we know as well: much lies ahead of us!’ (Refugee Protest Camp Berlin, 2013)

In spring 2013, the situation changed gradually, but fundamentally, for various reasons:

Firstly, a new compound player entered the arena: a growing number of mostly Sub-Saharan forced migrants, who had escaped the Libyan civil war via the Italian island of Lampedusa. Amongst them there were many who had a temporary humanitarian protection status in Italy, without the right to work or social entitlements in Germany. Due to a lack of alternatives, many joined the school and the occupied square, contributing to an increasing degradation of the places caused by overpopulation (Interview B2, Interview B15, Interview B25). Many had never even filed an asylum claim in Germany and did not plan to do so. In consequence, the different legal status of forced migrants in the square led to a further fragmentation (Interview B15, Interview

B21, Interview B25) as it entailed fundamentally different political priorities:

‘The claims definitively changed. From the claims that were related to the situation of the first generation, such as no camps, no deportation, no Residenzpflicht and for those with Italian papers, who wanted access to the labour market – this was in fact the only claim. They did align with the other claims and did at the beginning support also demonstrations, but it was obvious that they were not directly affected. Many did not even know what a refugee camp was, because they had never lived in one. And deportation was also not a big issue for them, so they did support the protest against deportations of others but still, it did not affect them personally. They also did not know Residenzpflicht with their Italian papers. Hence, it was simply a totally different group. At the beginning it worked out well in parallel but then there was a cut’ (Interview B21).

Whereas the initiators of the march and the camp had strong claims against the German asylum system and some had been politically active in their country of origin prior to arriving in Germany, the ‘second generation’ found themselves in an entirely different legal situation, with an Italian humanitarian protection status, exhausted by long transmigration and a life on the streets in Italy and Germany. The first generation wanted to keep the square due to its relational qualities. The second generation rather longed to put an end to their precarious life.

‘Because those who did not have any other place to stay were those with Italian papers and many of the first generation with more political demands [against the asylum system] already had shared flats, girlfriends or whatever and did come to the square for political fights and could leave in the evening to sleep in their warm beds’ (Interview B21).

This not only introduced ruptures among the ‘generations’ of forced migrants occupying the square, but also, with the support base of the early days:

‘And then another problem emerged, the differences in what the supporters wanted and what those living in the square wanted. I think that was much stronger in the second generation. Because, I would say, those from the second generation wanted to become part of the system against which the supporters were fighting. Maybe that sounds strange but they did have sometimes this kind of fancy clothes, big watches, you know, status symbols, they wanted to achieve and this is somehow against what many supporters fight, who want to abolish the system, capitalism. And the people in the square in fact wanted to become part of this capitalism, of course this does not apply to all of them, but many did indeed ask why the supporters thought the system was so crap, they believed it was not that crap, they just had to get into it’ (Interview B21).

These internal fragmentations translated into fierce debates on how to spend the donations (for subsistence or political activity) and coincided with a general decrease of visibility

of protest, it had become a routine.

The fragmentation resulted even in a spatial separation in the camp. Increasingly, differentiation between countries of origin became more important and led to a fragmentation of the movement. During the negotiations on the dismantling of the protest camp at 'Oranienplatz', national subgroups competed for the limited number of individuals to be included in the deal (see section on the governance of precarious ties below).

'And then again, there was the issue of nationalities, this was new in the second generation – there was a Niger tent, a Nigerian tent and so on, this was not the case in the first phase of the protests. There was no Iranian tent or Afghan tent. Thinking along lines of nationality was much stronger in the second generation, which went of course totally against the ideas of the support scene and their criticism of nationalism (...)' (Interview B21).

Overall, time played against the movement and in favour of those who wanted to dismantle the disruptive sites of protest. In consequence, the gradual exhaustion of those living in the camp increased the inclination to accept even minor concessions.

In this phase the volatile and decentralized support base, which at the outset had contributed to its dynamic, showed its downside. The lack of cultivated ties with established groups and organizations backfired, when the 'hype' (Interview B2, Interview B4) around the camp faded and only a small and increasingly exhausted support base remained. In consequence, with the new generation of the Lampedusa group, also a new generation of supporters emerged on the scene. Given the core interest of the group in eventually settling and improving their living conditions, some of the new supporters did not necessarily prioritize the political fight against the German asylum system. The first generation of the march and bus tour observed these developments with suspicion:

'The support structure also had its own setback. Because (...) most of the people who came there, they did not have a real fight, they were coming there to pass some time, some had sexual adventures, some were experimenting (...). That is the only place where they could meet black people. So their interest was not the political movement, it was their own interest. (...) There was something happening, with the support structure, because it was not really a support structure but something else, it also pulled out, people did different things, it had an effect. And that's even up to these days that many people are still not comfortable with these support structures' (Interview B24).

### *Governing Social Ties*

The multiple lines of fragmentation within different groups of forced migrants and support milieus, combined with the increasingly precarious conditions in both school and square, accentuated in summer 2013. Internal conflicts regarding sexism and homophobia, acknowledged by the protesters themselves (Refugee Strike Berlin, 2013; Ünsal, 2015) as well as conflicts involving neighbours (Kubsova, 2013) were rapidly taken up by the media (Biewald, Köbker, & Wehmeyer, 2013; Litschko, 2013a). A forced migrant from the camp was stabbed by a Turkish migrant (Kopietz, 2013). In this highly chaotic and contentious climate, a delegate for the Green party in the district assembly decided to move into the tent camp to appease and moderate (see also Beyerlein, 2013):

‘And then there was this day in June, when H. almost died, when this knife attack happened. I live in the neighbourhood and I am that kind of person, I feel the mood of the neighbourhood. The Turks at the corner were upset, there was also disappointment. This is often the case here in Kreuzberg, it is densely populated, and we live with very scarce resources that need to be shared. Particularly for the poorer parts of society it was also a loss that half of the square was simply gone (...). And in my role as local representative I have also experiences that more and more neighbours came, saying it is too loud, we cannot work, we cannot sleep etc. and said they were just shouted at by supporters, saying, ‘why do you complain, these are refugees, they have real problems’, so people got upset’ (Interview B8).

While relations with the neighbourhood improved subsequently, the delegate was fundamentally rejected by the first generation and its surrounding supporters, who saw this intervention firstly as a return of paternalism with a white person representing the forced migrants and secondly as a clear move of co-optation by the district administration (Interview B4, Interview B25).

‘I definitely had the feeling that I was not welcome by some. Some people did not speak to me even once. It seems like some people did not like the idea at all that I moved into the camp. I did not even think about the possibility that someone might be against this. I thought they were happy!’ (Interview B8)

From summer onwards, a twofold dynamic developed. On the one side there was the regional level of government, which had for a long time delegated the responsibility to the Green district administration (van Bebber, 2013) but started to agitate fiercely against the camp. The district in turn remained supportive of the camp throughout the summer (Litschko, 2013b) and against the criticism of the regional government. Yet, the newly elected mayor of Kreuzberg departed from her predecessor’s *laissez-faire* approach regarding the camp (Interview B7) and aimed at a dissolution with other means. She recalled her initial impression in summer 2013:

‘My impression was that this was not really self-organized. There were, unlike at the beginning almost 100 per cent men. Yes, some of them from the Lampedusa group were also political, but the rest was not. They were first and foremost politically active with a view to leaving the camp and to getting a residence permit in Germany. But most of the protest originated from activists, or supporters, or however you want to call them. (...) A lot was projected on these struggles (...)’ (Interview B7).

For Herrmann, member of the Kreuzberg Greens, one of the most grassroots and left-wing factions of the party, a violent eviction was out of question, as she also supported the main demands of the protesters.

In the view of the first generation of protesters, the district opted instead for a softer version of governing ties and fragmenting the movement with selective incentives to the Lampedusa group to leave the camp.

‘But then this is where they used other techniques. Then someone came and knew everybody and she said, you are Lampedusa, you are different you can have more than the other people. You have to talk to these people because this is better. Until they believe they are special. So we started quarrelling together, you are demanding other things’ (Interview B4).

The presence of the green local delegate, to them, was part of this strategy. Actually, the division in the camp and movement further deepened as the Lampedusa group supported a housing solution for its members, whereas the first generation of forced migrant activists wanted to keep the camp as a space of political subjectivity to further pressure for the improvement of living conditions for forced migrants in Germany (Interview B4, Interview B2, see also Loy, Buntrock, & Dassler, 2013). The fragmentation was even spatialized with the tents of the Lampedusa group and the first generation being separated within the camp (Doppler & Vorwegk, 2014). A migrant rights activist, (himself recognized refugee) who did neither belong to the camp, nor to the immediate support circle, recalled:

‘Towards the end of the Oranienplatz, the movement was easy to attack, because it was easy to divide – this is what the Senator used in the end. Inviting only some factions of the camp, offering incentives and selling it as a solution for the entire Oranienplatz’ (Interview B19).

Within the first generation and some of the supporters, the expression ‘divide and rule’ (Interview B4, Interview B24, Interview B25) became the standard description of the final phase of the camp. Herrmann and the ‘Greens’ lost their credibility and from being an ally turned into one of their key opponents (see also Flüchtlingsrat Berlin e.V., 2014).

In this climate and following lengthy negotiations between protesters, the Senate and various observing associations, the so-called ‘Oranienplatz-Agreement’ was signed in April by some of the protesters (Amjahid, 2014). The agreement included a list of reportedly 462 (Amjahid, 2014) individuals in the school and in the square, who agreed to dismantle the protest camp *themselves* in exchange for an individual assessment of their cases, making use of ‘all legal possibilities’ (Senate of Berlin, 2014). Some of the protesting forced migrants and supporters, however, fiercely opposed the agreement. On the day of dissolution, an absurd scene unfolded, captured by Marcus Staiger’s video documentary and reportage for the Vice Magazine (Staiger, 2014): Forced migrants were tearing down tents and huts, at times shouted at by protesters of the first generation and supporters. The supporters on the scene found themselves in the strange situation that they did not confront the police, as expected, but the very individuals they had been supporting. While episodes of violence erupted between the two groups, representatives of the police, the Senate and the district were on the scene, but remained in the background.

In retrospect, the strategy of governing space and activism by governing social ties had been successful from a governmental point of view. The desperate attempts by some members of the first generation of protesters to keep the square, including a five-day hunger strike up a tree (Zöllner, 2014) was unsuccessful. The media had already produced the images of a ‘peaceful’ and voluntary dissolution. The detrimental effects for the forced migrants involved in the agreement – not a single residence permit was issued – and the movement became clear gradually. Yet, the fragmentation of social ties and spatial dispersion made re-convergence impossible. After various protests during the summer at various occasions, the movement entered a phase of abeyance, the protest faded.

## **6.5. Conclusion**

Adopting an arena perspective for analysing the ‘Oranienplatz’ protest wave enables us to shed light on the making and breaking of ties within specific spatial and relational configurations. This chapter, hence, contributes to the understanding of both the challenges for forced migrant activists to organize political protests and the (temporary) strategies to overcome them.

The spatial analysis of the ‘Oranienplatz’ arena suggests that the protesters raised public attention and were able to mobilize asylum-seekers and the media by moving from

socially and spatially isolated locations into urban centers. In organizing central protest camps, marches and bus tours, they literally left behind their excluded position and articulated a claim to urban and social centrality. The relocation from the periphery of the asylum camp to the inner-city space furthermore broke the routine of forced migrant invisibility through extensive media coverage and by this tapped the resources needed to sustain political mobilizations. The camps generated ‘magnetic fields’, attracting diverse support milieus from which forced migrants had been previously cut off in a disintegrating asylum system. Forced migrants gradually succeeded in compensating the lack of resources and even in altering established power relations between migrants and pro-beneficiaries. The latter were attracted to the prominent protesters, who had, hence, a degree of choice in deciding with whom to work and whom to ignore. In addition to constituting reservoirs for weak ties, the protest camps served also as spaces of encounter and trust-building among a previously scattered forced migrant community in which stories and opinions could be shared and a collective identity be developed - despite tremendous heterogeneity of the actors involved. Plenary assemblies were organized on a daily basis – as extensively deliberative *fora*, translated into various languages. In consequence, individuals from a wide range of social and geographical backgrounds joined the movement and organized for an extensive period of time dozens of protest events and constituted themselves as political subjects in a contentious arena around forced migration. This account clearly shows that the protesters did not react upon opening opportunity structures, as the traditional social movement theories would expect. Rather, their protest, emerging in the most restrictive regional context for asylum-seekers in Bavaria, actively opened opportunities which were subsequently incubated in the German capital.

The second part scrutinizes further the making and breaking of social ties in forced migrant activism. In resonance with previous work on migrant activism, it documented the crucial role of pro-beneficiary actors or movements in providing resources for marginalized communities. At the same time, the in-depth focusing on the micro-interactions unveils the contentious and precarious nature of such interactions, particularly along notions of strategy, autonomy and ‘critical whiteness’. Scrutinizing the trajectory of the protest through micro-interactions also points to the difficulties of uniting a highly heterogeneous compound actor. Individuals are situated within (immigration) categories determining their legal status and hence the eligibility for services, and the likelihood of detention and deportation. Such practices negotiate not only the status of



the individuals in question but also their relationships within the migrant community, civil-society organizations and the state. Macro-institutions such as (potential) legal status intervene in the making and breaking of social ties – not least in collective action – as they provide multiple incentives to defect from collective political campaigning and opt for individual niche openings. Such individual solutions are particularly appealing when individuals find themselves in extremely precarious conditions for an extensive period of time.

Forced migrant activism is, therefore, characterized by multiple fault lines, which can be temporarily overcome under certain conditions, yet which also constitute an Achilles' heel for the policing of activism. As the second part of the analysis shows, various administrative actors skilfully used the differences in status and claims to deepen already existing divisions within the movement. While representing a 'movement', an arena perspective avoids reifying and romanticizing these activities with a view to understanding the practical challenges to build up and sustain forced migrant subjectivity against the odds.

## **Chapter 7**

### **The ‘La Chapelle’-Arena: Paris 2015-2016**

#### **‘Bare Life’ & Political Subjectivity**

‘I made my way to have a better future and now we are stuck here. We have rights, too! It is not much what we demand but we are stuck. We are grateful to those who show solidarity today. Today is a first day of hope since I arrived in France. Today at this demonstration, I feel human again.’

(Field notes, 10/06/2017)

#### **7.1. Introduction**

In this chapter, I re-shift the focus from the contentious arena at ‘Oranienplatz’ in Berlin to the French capital. In summer 2015 a protest arena unfolded in the North-East of Paris, referred to as ‘the wave of tent camps’, or given its neighbourhood of emergence, the ‘La Chapelle’-arena. The protest erupted in the context of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’, when forced migrants, mainly from the Horn of Africa and Asia arrived in the city and sought, in absence of governmental assistance, protection underneath an aerial metro line. Dozens of tents, cardboard boxes and mattresses precariously accommodated eventually several hundreds of forced migrants. Initially considered as a ‘humanitarian emergency’, those living in the camp mainly received support from neighbours and professional care-workers. From the moment of evacuation by the police, the situation, previously perceived in humanitarian parameters, became increasingly contentious. A protest arena unfolded around the reception of forced migrants in Paris, involving highly distinct actors, such as the city of Paris, the police, grassroots neighbourhood collectives, political parties, forced migrants and various kinds of non-governmental organizations.

Compared to the other arenas scrutinized in this thesis so far, the ‘La Chapelle’ wave of contention differs greatly with regard to the particularly precarious conditions in

which these forced migrants found themselves: homeless in the streets of Paris, abandoned by the state and dependent on the empathy and solidarity of civil society actors. Against this background, the chapter scrutinizes processes of political mobilization in the most disadvantageous contexts.

The main argument I will be developing with regard to the spatial and relational patterns during this protest arena is the following: Building upon Giorgio Agamben's work on states of exception I argue that the forced migrants at 'La Chapelle' were stuck in a condition of 'bare life', in which the satisfaction of fundamental needs and survival constituted the main priority. Despite these fundamental obstacles for political activism, a closer scrutiny of the spatial and interactive patterns during the 'La Chapelle' arena sheds light on a range of 'visible' and 'invisible' practices of political mobilization. The contradictory spatialities of makeshift camps and squats unfolded (precariously) protective, relational and disruptive qualities, which contributed to transforming widespread feelings of indignation among forced migrants into sparks of political mobilization. Through interactions with established players in the social movement environment in Paris, forced migrants repeatedly appropriated spaces and resources to appear as political subjects in the public sphere. The case, hence, suggests that even the condition of 'bare life' is not static and, indeed, inherently ambivalent, as it dialectically entails its own contestation. I will also document that political mobilizations by forced migrants, and even more so by forced migrants in highly precarious conditions, are fundamentally shaped by the concrete micro-interactions with other players in contentious arenas. Concrete interactions with the police as well as relationships of trust built during repeated interaction with 'supporters' constituted the foundation for political mobilization. Yet, the social ties with pro-beneficiaries and within diverse migrant communities were also highly ambivalent, fragile and prone to fragmentation.

To empirically unpack this argument, the chapter is structured as follows: I begin with a brief contextualization of the arena (7.2.), followed by an investigation of processes from precarious 'bare life' in the streets of Paris to performances of political subjectivity, or as Isin would claim, to 'acts of citizenship' (7.3.). In this regard, section 7.4. scrutinizes the contradictory spatial and relational effects of street camps and squats, which serve, despite their precariousness, as spaces of encounter and incubators for the expression of marginalized voices. Finally, section 7.5. creates the link to Chapter 5 by investigating why mobilizations of sans-papiers and asylum-seekers remained by and large detached throughout the 'La Chapelle' arena.

In terms of data, the chapter triangulates the analysis of written texts with ethnographic research conducted in spring 2017 in Paris. The methodological approach could be described as a ‘retrospective immersion’: It draws from 25 qualitative interviews, dozens of informal conversations and participant observation in assemblies, protest events and ‘direct social actions’ (Bosi & Zamponi, 2015) organized by protagonists of the protest wave. It furthermore draws from numerous texts produced by the actors involved, the media and the (very few and exclusively Francophone) secondary sources<sup>69</sup> on the events. In combination, these sources aim at a reconstruction of the contentious processes through engagement with actors, texts and sites of a wave of contention.

## **7.2. Brief Contextualization of the Arena**

For the French capital, the ‘La Chapelle’ arena constitutes a novelty: contention around asylum beforehand was virtually absent. As an important transit country for asylum-seekers on their way to Great Britain, Paris used to be an important crossroads, where forced migrants rested for some days or weeks, but rarely settled for long.<sup>70</sup> Most eventually headed further north towards Calais, trying to cross the Canal, hidden in, underneath or on top of lorries and trains. Political mobilizations in support of and by forced migrants, hence, largely concentrated at French (internal) borders, including the Calais region (see e.g. Schwenken, 2014), Nice/Ventimiglia at the border with Italy (Projet Babels, 2017), and deportation facilities in various parts of the country (Clochard, 2016). Similarly to that found by Lorenzo Zamponi in his research on migrant solidarity activism in Italy (Zamponi, 2018), forced migrants and their supporters often mobilized in reaction to obstacles blocking the continuation of their journey, rather than demanding inclusion in France. Many forced migrants, hence, opted for ‘exit’ instead of ‘voice’, which is still a political act, yet rarely captured in traditional notions of mobilization (see also Ataç, Rygiel, & Stierl, 2016).

### *Structural Deficit in Forced Migrant Accommodation*

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<sup>69</sup> These are most notably the section on Paris in the booklet published by the research collective ‘Babels’ (Projet Babels, 2017) and the (still unpublished) manuscript by Isabelle Coutant on one of the squats, forthcoming in March with the publisher ‘Seuil’ (2017a).

<sup>70</sup> Despite this general pattern, forced migrants got also occasionally stranded in Paris for extended periods of time – particularly after the closure of the ‘Sangatte’ humanitarian camp (Kassa, 2011) and following the turmoil after the so-called Arab spring (Allen, 2011).

The situation fundamentally changed from summer 2014 onwards (Interview P10, Interview P11, Interview P7), when first dozens, later more than a hundred forced migrants - mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, and Sudan - sought refuge under a metro bridge at La Chapelle station in the North of Paris (La Chapelle En Lutte, 2015a). A makeshift camp, referred to as ‘Mini-Sangatte’ (Pouliquen, 2015) or ‘Jungle of Paris’ (Baumard, 2015)<sup>71</sup> emerged, consisting of over a hundred camping tents, neatly lined-up under the aerial metro line number 2. From spring 2015, when the camp further grew, neighbours and humanitarian organizations intervened to compensate for the vacuum left by an absent state and provided the basic needs such as shelter (tents), clothes and food (Interview P10, Interview P2).

As asylum-seekers, the vast majority of those gathering under the metro bridge was formally entitled to accommodation and basic assistance provided by the French state. Yet, the situation starting in autumn 2014 unveiled a structural deficit (Interview P8). Considering itself mainly as a transit country for asylums-seekers and deliberately intending to avoid a ‘pull effect’, France has been known for its undersized system of accommodation since the introduction of the reception centers for asylum-seekers, the so-called ‘Centre d’Accueil des Demandeurs d’Asile’ (CADA)<sup>72</sup> in the early 1990s. Without going into detail, some numbers help to illustrate the structural outline: By the end of 2015, 50,000 places in CADA existed in the entire country (Senate of France, 2015; see also Le Parisien Online, 2015b) compared to 80,000 asylum applications in 2015 alone and thousands of pending cases from previous years (OFPRA, 2016). Similar to other European capitals, the region around Paris (‘Ile de France’) has for many years been the hotspot for arrivals and asylum applications (40 per cent of all applications in France in 2016) (Projet Babels, 2017: 116). Nevertheless, in 2016, the entire ‘Ile de France’ held a capacity of 8,255 places in both CADA and emergency shelters. Just 483 places existed in CADA in the city of Paris (Préfecture de Police Ile de France, 2016b). Given the limited amount of places in CADA, asylum-seekers from countries with established networks in the French capital have thus been precariously taken care of by

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<sup>71</sup> These terms have circulated for over a decade in the French public sphere to describe the makeshift camps in the Calais region and have, since 2015, been applied to the situation in the North-East of Paris.

<sup>72</sup> Generally, the French system distinguishes between ‘CADA’, accommodation facilities allocated for the entire asylum procedure including some degree of social work to support migrants during the process, and ‘emergency shelters’, which provide only short-term housing without asylum-related advice. See also Chapter 4 for further details.

migrant communities or squats outside the official asylum system, moderating the structural shortage (Aguilera, 2013; Blanc-Chaléard, 2006; Interview P8).

In addition to the systematic deficits of accommodation provisions in France, the street camps unveiled the failure of the European asylum system, or more concretely, of the so-called Dublin regulation:<sup>73</sup> due to the incapacity and increasing unwillingness to unilaterally cope with a European problem – asylum-seekers arriving in Italy were pushed out of reception facilities without social benefits. Abandoned by the Italian state, and unsuccessful in finding employment in the crisis-affected local economy, many decided to travel North. Yet, due to the Dublin regulation, their finger prints were registered in Italy, which fundamentally complicated an asylum application elsewhere. In consequence, they found themselves in a ‘hyper-precarious situation of bureaucratic entrapment’ (Davies, Isakjee, & Dhesi, 2017: 11):

‘they are denied provision in one country (Italy), and simultaneously coerced to move into other EU states where they would no longer be eligible for either asylum or provision’ (Davies et al., 2017).

Despite the structural causes of the emerging makeshift migrant camps in the French capital from summer 2014 onwards, the situation was at the beginning mainly perceived as a ‘humanitarian emergency’. The actors involved were predominantly neighbours mobilized by the highly precarious conditions of forced migrants (including women and children) settling in front of their doorsteps and humanitarian professionals involved in care work. The traditional players in migrant rights activism were (still) largely absent.

Notwithstanding these increasingly visible challenges of forced migrant reception in Paris, political debates around forced migration, by the time, focused on other cases: Firstly, 18 hairdressers and stylists from various Sub-Saharan African countries had started a strike in July 2014 with the support of the trade union CGT to protest against their employers, who had taken advantage of their irregular status (France 24, 2015 see also Interview P7, Interview P27). The media, the CGT and the protesters called themselves ‘sans-papiers workers’, even though many of the mostly female protagonists were caught up in an ongoing asylum procedure and were ‘undocumented’ only with regard to the lack of a valid work permit, given the work ban for asylum-seekers in France (Interview P27). Furthermore, and despite their relatively recent arrival in France and

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<sup>73</sup> The Dublin regulation foresees that the country of first arrival of an asylum-seeker in Europe is in charge of processing the asylum claim. This rule has delegated disproportional responsibility to member states at the European periphery, some of them in an accentuated economic crisis (Picozza, 2017).

biographies of forced migration through Libya and Lampedusa, these mobilizations were framed as ‘sans-papiers’ struggles, rather than mobilizations by ‘asylum-seekers’ or ‘refugees’. In April 2015, after a 10-month occupation of their workplace, the majority of the strikers was regularized, on the condition of a proof of employment issued by their employers (France 24, 2015).

Secondly, in addition to the activities coordinated by the CGT, various autonomous collectives of sans-papiers organized regular, yet scattered protest events: The CSP75<sup>74</sup> marched on a weekly basis, the 9<sup>th</sup> collective, the CSP75/ Strasbourg, the CSP94<sup>75</sup> and CSP93 and the ‘Collectif Baras’ organized occasional protest events (Interview P22, Interview P10, Interview P7). The majority of the autonomous collectives’ members originate from (often francophone) Western- and Central African countries, and are usually (albeit precariously) integrated in existing ethnic communities in the city. Many have found jobs in the cleaning, construction and catering sectors – yet are at risk of extreme exploitation due to their irregular status. The collectives hence focus on the regularization of their constituents through proofs of employment, family ties or long-term presence in the territory in direct negotiation with the respective prefect’s office (Interview P22, Interview P27, Interview P30, Interview P3, Interview P21). Most members of the ‘Collectif Baras’, for instance, originate from Western and Central African countries, yet, had worked for various years in Libya until the outbreak of the civil war in 2011. Escaping the turmoil, they arrived in Italy and decided to move on to France to benefit from existing social networks (Le Parisien Online, 2015a; Interview P10; Interview P14; Field notes, 28/06/2017). Given the established (West-)African ethnic communities in the French capital, the long history of sans-papiers struggles and the extremely low likelihood of being granted asylum in France, the members of the collective did not apply for asylum and instead opted to autonomously obtain shelter (e.g. by squatting abandoned buildings) and *regularization of their status outside the asylum system* (Idrissa, Camara and Michel cited in Csp75, 2014). Their mobilizations were,

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<sup>74</sup> See also Chapter 5 for additional background on the CSP75 and its contentious interactions with the CGT trade union.

<sup>75</sup> Given that the respective prefect’s office is responsible for dealing with cases of regularization, the collectives are organized according to the place of residency of their members. The CSP94 coordinates sans-papiers in Vitry-sur-Seine, the CSP93 sans-papiers in Saint Denis. The CSP75/Strasbourg, in turn, is a result of the fractal process the CSP75 underwent during the ‘Bourse du Travail’ arena (see Chapter 5).

hence, also framed as ‘sans-papiers’ rather than ‘refugees’ despite a widespread biography of forced migration.<sup>76</sup>

In spring 2015, contention around forced migration in the French capital was thus characterized by two features: firstly, migrants identifying as asylum-seekers or refugees were largely not engaged in contentious politics and were mainly conceived as victims of a humanitarian emergency by the wider public. Secondly, an established, yet fragmented sans-papiers movement consisting of various autonomous collectives organized protests on a regular basis with a focus on regularization, yet were largely detached from the question of asylum.

#### *From Humanitarian Emergency to Contentious Arena*

The situation changed profoundly in early summer 2015. With increasing arrivals of asylum-seekers, the makeshift camp at La Chapelle grew further. Starting with mere cardboard boxes on the concrete, neighbours and associations subsequently assisted them with tents, blankets and mattresses, served food and donated basic necessities (Interview P10, Interview P2, Interview P13). Despite widespread support from the neighbourhood with its long tradition of immigration and dense associative networks, the conditions in the camp deteriorated – due to a lack of sanitary facilities and more generally, overpopulation in a strongly limited space, squeezed in between two busy streets. After a month-long absence, and following increasing media coverage, public authorities intervened on June 2, 2015 with an ‘evacuation’ (alternatively referred to as ‘eviction’) of the makeshift camp (Sabot, 2015), which had been justified by the prefect with both risks to public health and public order (Préfecture de Police Ile de France, 2015).

The first coordinated police intervention retrospectively constituted a ‘critical juncture’, which led to a shift of a purely humanitarian issue to a highly contentious arena, in which a plethora of players interacted with increasing frequency and intensity.<sup>77</sup> These actors included various national communities of forced migrants, neighbours, solidarity collectives, humanitarian organizations, politicians at various levels of government, journalists and the police.

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<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, forced migrants with highly similar biographies of forced migration were in Germany part of the ‘refugee movement’ during the ‘Oranienplatz’-arena (see Chapter 6) and also thereafter (see Chapter 8).

<sup>77</sup> A more exhaustive descriptive account of the developments can be found in the section on Paris included in the booklet published by the research project Babels (Projet Babels, 2017).



During the dismantling of the camp, police forces blocked the area and transferred all migrants that were present at that moment with buses to temporary emergency shelters throughout the entire region of 'Ile de France'. Two humanitarian organizations, involved in service provision for the government ('France Terre d'Asile' and 'Emmaüs Solidarité'), co-coordinated the process.<sup>78</sup> Over 300 migrants were relocated and the area subsequently cleaned and secured to avoid a reinstallation (Sabot, 2015). More than half of the migrants involved were officially registered as asylum-seekers in France, some had been already recognized as refugees under international law (ibid).

Numerous neighbours and activists who had been supporting the migrants during their precarious life in the camp observed the police intervention with suspicion, some tried to prevent the buses from departing (Association des Travailleurs Maghrebins de France, 2015; Sabot, 2015). Particularly the strategy of dispersal applied by the public authorities without offering a sustainable solution for those in need spurred increasing resistance. Only a few hours after the buses had departed, several dozens of forced migrants gathered again, because they had not been present at the moment of transfer. Yet others returned after some days because the emergency shelters had been located in remote areas without access to support networks, which most of the individuals desperately needed during their asylum procedure (Interview P9, Interview P10, Interview P2, Interview P20). Again others returned because the accommodation was offered to them only for a couple of days. For many of those assisting the migrants for months, the intervention by the state had only aimed at hiding a structural problem of reception systems for forced migrants from the public eye.

On the evening of the first eviction, several dozens of migrants and a handful of migrant solidarity activists wandered around the 18<sup>th</sup> district of Paris, with mattresses and plastic bags containing their few belongings, in search for a place to spend the night. Very basic food for several dozens was collected through donations from the various 'ethnic' restaurants and local grocery shops in the area (Interview P7). After two days, when the group had grown again to around one hundred persons, they attempted to occupy the St Bernard church, with a view to symbolically relating to the birth of the sans-papiers movement in the late 1990s. Yet, the migrants and a handful of supporters were forcefully removed by the police from the square outside the church and eventually settled down

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<sup>78</sup> While a cleavage between 'humanitarian' and 'political' organizations was already latent in the migrant rights movement in France prior to the 'La Chapelle' arena (see notably Monforte, 2014), the involvement in the evacuations by the state further (mutually) alienated those two organizations from the emerging grassroots movement.

around the corner at ‘Esplanade Pajol’ until another eviction by the police took place on June 8, 2015 (Interview P7, Interview P2).

This third eviction, during which a large crowd of neighbours and local politicians was present and which was described as particularly violent (Association des Travailleurs Maghrebins de France, 2015; Interview P13, Interview P2, Interview P7), triggered the emergence of a migrant solidarity movement, which perceived the precarious living conditions as a concrete failure of state response. In the aftermath of the eviction, a petition on migrant reception and police violence was published, signed by numerous public intellectuals, including Étienne Balibar, Michel Agier, Eric Fassin and Achille Mbembe (La Chapelle En Lutte, 2015a). The text finished with the lines:

‘We affirm our engagement and our profound solidarity with migrants. We will fight for them, but also we fight for defending our society against this aggression from the side of public authorities. We are determined to demand that this injustice against our migrant sisters and brothers will be repaired and that right to asylum and human dignity are respected in our country’ (ibid, author’s translation).

Equally in response to the third eviction, the collective ‘La Chapelle en Lutte’<sup>79</sup> was founded, involving a diverse mix of academics, radical-left activists and newly politicized neighbours (Jaoul & Makaremi, 2015; La Chapelle En Lutte, 2015a). Members of the collective noted in an op-ed in the daily newspaper ‘Le Monde’:

‘The refugees evicted from La Chapelle, evacuated from St. Bernard, who had been sleeping in front of Halle Pajol since June 5<sup>th</sup>, were arrested *en masse* three days later: more than 40 of them have been transferred to an immigrant detention centre [‘centre de rétention administrative’]. The raid at Rue Pajol was of an unprecedented violence, but the most shocking thing is that they have sent CRS units [French riot police] against around hundred refugees in the streets, who are in a total survival economy [‘économie de survie totale’] who even need to understand where they are, what rights they have and how an asylum application works’ (Jaoul & Makaremi, 2015, author's translation).

With the collective ‘La Chapelle En Lutte’, an influential player emerged on the scene. In the following months, a ‘cat-and-mouse-game’ (Interview P10) unfolded between the police, forced migrants and solidarity activists. The events followed always the same sequence: a critical number of migrants gathered in the absence of alternative accommodation, sleeping at times on layers of cardboard on the asphalt, at times on mattresses, at times in camping tents provided by neighbours and solidarity collectives. As soon as a camp became large enough to attract (media) visibility, and disrupt the ‘order

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<sup>79</sup> Translates into ‘La Chapelle fighting’

of things', government authorities, in collaboration with FTdA and Emmaüs Solidarité intervened, providing a temporary solution for the migrants in the camp through transfer to emergency shelters. Many of these interventions, termed depending on the political *couleur* alternatively as 'evacuations', 'evictions' or 'raids', were conducted with considerable amount of force by the police and a subsequent confiscation and destruction of its constituting infrastructure (tents, mattresses etc.) (Projet Babels, 2017: 116 f., Interview P2, Interview P7, Interview P10). The use of force against peaceful migrants and supporting citizens, combined with insufficient measures taken by the city of Paris and the central government to provide decent and long-term housing for forced migrants, in turn, fuelled contestation by migrants and citizens. Through contentious interactions with the state, the emerging movement in the Parisian North-East rapidly expanded (Interviews P2, Interview P7, Interview P10, see also La Chapelle En Lutte, 2015a).

Forced migrants, solidarity activist and public authorities subsequently held diametrically opposed interests with regard to the emergence of camps. The city of Paris and the police fundamentally opposed the establishment of makeshift camps as they publicly raised the question of governmental non-response. Thus, in order not to encourage their perpetuation, the municipal authorities refused to provide sanitary facilities or other basic infrastructure such as mattresses, blankets and the like. The result, in turn, was a neighbourhood solidarity movement, increasingly physically exhausted and outraged by the authorities' inactivity (Interview P9, Interview P2, Interview P13). For the migrants involved, the grouping in camps constituted a strategy of precarious protection and survival but increasingly also a strategy to pressure the government to take action (see also section 7.5.). Lastly, the increasingly contentious arena also attracted experienced antiracist and anti-fascist activist who had up to this moment been largely absent from the previously 'humanitarian' terrain.

### **7.3. 'Bare Life' and Political Subjectivity**

The North-East of Paris has a long history of immigration, economic precariousness, and social engagement. Particularly 'La Chapelle' and the 18<sup>th</sup> district more broadly used to be well known for its inclusive capacity despite limited means. Yet, the second half of 2014 foreshadowed important changes. Not only did numbers of asylum-seekers increase in France (and Paris), but equally importantly, 'new' migrant communities, previously numerically irrelevant in Paris, arrived: from the horn of Africa, mainly Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as from Sudan, Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. In the absence of

alternatives, these individuals found themselves in an extremely precarious situation and dependent on local assistance upon arrival in Paris. Other (forced) migrant communities instead, from Bangladesh, the Maghreb region, as well as Central, and Western African countries, continued to arrive, but were temporarily taken care of by existing social networks (Interview P3, Interview P11, Interview P5, Interview P25). The latter were hence less visible in the emerging makeshift camps (CSP75, 2014a, Interview P3, Interview P11).

The individual stories and backgrounds of the forced migrants living in the camps were highly diverse. Yet, many had spent long and tiresome periods of (trans)migration, some through the Balkan corridor, some through Libya and Italy before arriving in Paris. Most referred to widespread human rights violations, insecurity and war as the main reasons for leaving their country of origin (Baumard, 2015; Derveaux, 2015; Fofana, 2016; Merhaba No.1, 2015; Merhaba No.2, 2015; Merhaba No.3, 2015; Mouillard & Durupt, 2015).

One of those living in the camps was Hamid<sup>80</sup>, a Sudanese student of business administration, who had in the context of the so-called Arab spring organized dissent against the dictator Omar al-Bashir (sentenced by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity) and who eventually had to leave the country. He passed through Sudan, Libya, and finally made his way to Greece and took the Balkan route. In Calais, he paid 1,000 € to get smuggled across the Channel in a lorry as he expected better chances of integration given his fluency in English. However, he was detected and with all his money gone, he had to stay at the French-British border. He lived for months in the makeshift 'jungle' of Calais, fell sick and needed medicine. He came to the French capital in summer 2015 and ended up living in the streets. When I meet him, he concluded his story by saying: 'France was not my destination, but it became my destiny' (Field notes, 21/06/2016). Another person I met is Omar, from Darfur in Sudan, who crossed the Mediterranean in one of the overcrowded rubber dinghies. When he arrived in Italy, the reception system was miserable. He was, as he told me, even given money to continue travelling North. At the border between Italy and France, in Ventimiglia, he got stranded for a while as he was repeatedly detected during his attempts to cross the border. Eventually, he reached Nice and continued to Paris by train. Directly after his arrival in the French capital, he ended up in one of the street camps (Field notes, 19/06/2017). I

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<sup>80</sup> All names are changed to guarantee anonymity.

also met a young philosophy student from Eritrea who escaped the undetermined military service in his country (transcript from public talk<sup>81</sup>). There were also many young Afghans, who had escaped organized crime, ‘mafias’ as they call it, and the Taliban militias. Some had spent more than a year in Germany and continued to France when their asylum application was rejected and deportations to Afghanistan were increasing (Field notes, 08/06/2017).

As diverse as the individual stories prior to the arrival in Europe are, they are all alike from the moment of arrival in Paris. Most were stranded in the North-East of the city, for various reasons: firstly, with the two railway stations ‘Gare de L’Est’ and ‘Gare du Nord’, the North-East of Paris has ever since been the main logistical ‘gate to Paris’ (Interview P11) and exit point for those heading North towards Calais. Secondly, the main access point to the asylum system in Paris is located in this part of the city. In France, asylum-seekers are required to go to a so-called ‘Plateforme d’Accueil des Demandeurs d’Asile’ (PADA)<sup>82</sup>, run by the non-governmental organization FTdA, in order to make an appointment with the prefect’s office, where their asylum claim is officially processed. The PADA of Paris is located close to the metro station Jaurès, where the 10<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> districts meet (Interview P11). Thirdly, the neighbourhood has become well-known for the particular density of civil society organizations and a practical solidarity in providing basic needs. The names of the metro stations ‘La Chapelle’, ‘Stalingrad’, and ‘Jaurès’, hence, soon circulated within forced migrant communities (Interview P11, Interview P26, Field notes 22/06/2017). For logistic reasons, but also for its particular relational qualities, the contentious arena remained spatially concentrated in the North-East of the city, even though its centres moved within this area during the wave of mobilization.

Due to the undersized administration, from spring 2015 onwards, many asylum-seekers waited several weeks to be registered in the PADA and sometimes months for an appointment at the prefect’s office.<sup>83</sup> Others had already filed their asylum claim but were

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<sup>81</sup> Available at: <https://vimeo.com/159607077>.

<sup>82</sup> Translates into ‘reception platform’.

<sup>83</sup> The spokesperson for social issues in the 18<sup>th</sup> district, acknowledged in a personal interview the structural shortcomings: ‘The main problem is a lot of people arrive in Paris and the administrative system was completely full. (...) Before you go to the accommodation, you have to make an appointment at the prefect’s office to file your asylum application. The number of appointments per week was less than 50. But in 2015, there were at least 20 refugees arriving per day... At a certain point, people gathered and a camp started’ (Interview P11).

not provided with accommodation given the structural shortage outlined above. Some were even recognized as refugees but were not able to find housing given the lack of language competence and limited revenues.

### *'Bare Life' in the Streets of Paris*

In the absence of shelters provided by the state, forced migrants organized protection and survival in groups. Many gathered – often clustering in homogenous ethnic or linguistic communities - in the few public spaces providing minimal protection from both sun and rain (bridges, tunnels, but also parks.). With very scarce financial means, lack of information and minimal linguistic skills, the daily life for those (several thousands) living in the streets turned out to be extremely burdensome. Hundreds had to rely completely on charity soup kitchens or the goodwill of passers-by to provide them with food or money (Biseau, Maurice, & Le Gohébel, 2015). The shops and restaurants in the area, often run by migrants, contributed too (Interview P5, Interview P7). Many migrants I spoke to during my field work in spring 2017 who have been living in camps expressed the hardship, and frustration of living in extremely precarious circumstances:

‘After I came back from Calais, I was tired of the long journey. I decided to stay. And I ended up in the streets. I had nothing to lose. You have lost everything. You lose your basic human dignity’ (Interview P20).

Testimonies in newspaper and magazine articles reporting on the time of street camps are full of similar remarks, linking the experience of extreme precariousness with feelings of disappointment and dehumanization:

‘The people think we are homeless [‘clochards’], but this is not the case. Some stop with their cars to stare at us. I have studied, I have a degree. As soon as I have a work permit, I would like to learn a profession, to become a baker or confectioner’ (migrant cited in TV5 Monde, 2015, author's translation).

‘I took the train towards the country I’d dreamt of visiting ever since my childhood. But in reality it was a real shock to find myself utterly dispossessed in the rain, cold and hungry in the heart of the so-called “city of lights”. I’m sick and my health is not compatible with the suffering and the misery of the street camps’ (quoted in Merhaba 5).

These accounts resonate with the research of Thom Davies et al, who have argued that thousands of forced migrants have been pushed into makeshift camps by ‘violent inaction’, in Calais, Paris and elsewhere (Davies et al., 2017).

Due to the extremely precarious condition in the streets of Paris, for thousands of asylum-seekers from spring 2015 onwards, basic survival and a roof became the main

priorities. Reduced to being ‘human as such’, these forced migrants became what Agamben has referred to as a condition of ‘bare life’ in his seminal book ‘homo sacer’ (Agamben, 1998): stripped (or without access to rights) and in a state of exception, in which violence against them is rarely sanctioned. Numerous migration scholars have since built upon Agamben’s work in their analyses of forced migrant camps and the condition of asylum-seekers more broadly (Diken, 2004; Dines, Montagna, & Ruggiero, 2015; Edkins & Pin-Fat, 2005; D. Martin, 2015; Sanyal, 2014).

Findings from my field work illustrate the sense of reduction to biological needs. One of those forced migrants living in a makeshift camp in Paris noted:

‘In the streets you lose your basic human dignity; you lose the ability to express yourself’ (Interview P20).

In a follow-up interview, the same person reflected on his and his fellow migrants’ existence after arrival in the French capital:

‘These are the incredible real-life challenges, to leave the home land, to get stranded in the streets. To understand. ok - this is me now. I do not have a home. I do not have anywhere to go. What the hell? Many of us were thinking, ok - to commit suicide is also an attractive solution because it is not a life of a human being. No refugee centre to go and to occupy places by force to have a place to stay. So many questions are still pending or suspended. The only thing that saves our life is that you find supporters. French people, people who tell you: you are a human being, you have a right’ (Interview P30).

In spring 2017, during my field work in Paris, I not only had the opportunity to talk to many who had lived in or supported the camps and listen to their retrospective accounts. I also personally witnessed the precariousness of hundreds of asylum-seekers, still living in the streets of Paris. Occasionally, I assisted a local organization in serving breakfast. I quote here some impressions from my field notes to further illustrate the manifestation of ‘bare life’:

‘Upon our arrival at nine o’clock in the morning, immediately a long queue of several dozens of migrants emerges, despite Ramadan. Some quarrels in the line. The available food for the breakfast is bread (baguette) with jam. Many migrants articulate, some totally exhausted, some angry, that they are not used to bread and jam every day. Most take tea with countless pieces of sugar to satisfy the basic need of carbohydrates. Some volunteers from a humanitarian organization with professional vests indicating their affiliation, help out as the grass-roots neighbourhood initiative had not found enough persons to assist. I am irritated by the bossy reaction of some of the volunteers, slapping on the hands in case someone wants to grab a sandwich on his own. Some migrants react angrily in return.

According to the organizer of the shift, yet, it is an extremely relaxed day. Usually, conflicts over the scarce resources are much harsher' (Field notes, 08/06/2017).

Another day, I encounter the following scene:

'When I arrive at 'Porte de la Chapelle', I see countless people sleeping on cardboards in the exceptional heat of an afternoon in late May. All of a sudden, an impressive and dehumanizing scene unfolds. A car arrives and parks. Immediately, dozens of migrants jump up and queue within seconds, fighting for a good position. The volunteers of an association, apparently a faith-based association yell at them to keep in order while food packages are distributed. Amir, an undocumented migrant I had met various times before, who is now involved in one of the solidarity associations comments on the scene: "I was there [in such lines] too. Something happens to you when you are treated like that. The expected gratitude. You are educated as a slave'" (Field notes, 02/06/2017).

These personal observations resonate with the retrospective accounts of individuals living in the street camps and those providing assistance from summer 2015 onwards (Interview P7, Interview P13, Interview P2, Interview P10, Interview P30; Interview P26). On various occasions, conflicts among forced migrants, mostly between different communities of origin, erupted in the street camps, in the lines for food distribution, and at times at the office hours for legal and social counsel offered by civil society organizations (Interview P11, Interview P2, Interview P7).

#### *Political Subjectivity despite 'Bare Life'?*

As these brief excerpts illustrate, forced migrants living in the streets of Paris found and continue to find themselves in extremely harsh conditions. Nevertheless, the majority have remained quiet instead of protesting against their blatant exclusion and precariousness. Evidently, and in these terms social movement studies have provided important insights, grievances do not mechanically produce political mobilization. Those I have spoken to referred to the contradictory situation they encountered. On the one side, many felt outraged by the non-response of the state (Interview P10, Interview P7). At the same time, they were well aware of the ultimate dependence on the state with a view to obtaining shelter, assistance and ideally a regularized status:

'[The life in the streets] means a lot of stress, but you do not have a choice. People say: stay calm, there are many like you in France. Keep quiet, eventually it will work out, be patient' (Interview P26).

During my field work, I also met a former political refugee, now a French citizen, who has worked in various organizations in support of migrants for more than a decade. On the relationship between 'bare life' and political mobilization, he noted:



‘I have been a refugee two times in my life. Asylum-seekers are in a fragile situation, often it is your very skin that is in danger. (...). You are not a political subject; you are a political object. I was active before I came here and then here, there was this sense of not wanting to give a bad impression. This sense of: “I demanded protection from this state and I have to respect the state.” That is why it needs extremely severe circumstances until there is a claims-making movement. Evidently, this shows the gravity of the current situation.’ (Interview P18).

As these findings suggest, the particular condition of ‘bare life’, in which many forced migrants found themselves, living in the streets of the French capital, poses tremendous obstacles to ‘visible’ political mobilization. In the absence of established ethnic networks from the countries of predominant origin (Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Afghanistan), forced migrants were *de facto* fully dependent on the care work of neighbours and humanitarian professionals. As many previous studies have shown, and as some of my ethnographic vignettes suggest, humanitarianism has contradictory effects, as it both alleviates suffering and risks reproducing patterns of dependency, subordination, passivity and apathy (Barnett, 2016; Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011). Furthermore, asylum-seekers depend fundamentally on state action, both in providing them access to the asylum system and eventually, granting a right to stay.

It could hence be argued, that ‘bare life’ and political mobilization might be mutually exclusive concepts. Yet, more recent scholarship has expanded Agamben’s theory to capturing migrant agency despite a condition of ‘bare life’ (Huysmans, 2008; Ramadan, 2013; Rygiel, 2012; Sanyal, 2014; Sigona, 2015). Jef Huysman, for instance, has argued that the ‘jargon of exception’, key in Agamben’s conceptualization of the political, downplays ‘the societal as a realm of multi-faceted, historically structured political mediations and mobilisations’ (2008: 180). Critical migration studies have therefore urged to widen the perspective of the migrant’s political subjectivity to the every-day and ‘invisible’ acts of resistance, which form part of a specific repertoire of action in highly precarious contexts (Ataç et al., 2015). Milena Chimienti hence argues:

‘In such a precarious context, their claims are necessarily existential, by which we mean aspirations and actions that tend to be of an immediate, instrumental and individualistic nature (...). As long as refugees are in a situation of vulnerability, they will not be able to afford less-instrumental behaviour, and ambivalence will be part of the way in which they act and mobilize. (...). It is not a claim for structural changes but only an existential claim and yet it is subversive only by the presence of people who were not entitled to be there’ (2017: 5).

In the following sections, I will argue that a combination of the attention to ‘invisible’ acts of resistance, and the (fragile) role of incubating autonomous spaces, such as tent camps and squats, contributes to an understanding of political subjectivity and political mobilization in seemingly highly disadvantageous contexts. In line with the insights from critical migration studies, the forms of action presented are more instrumental and aim at alleviating immediate suffering. They resemble what Lorenzo Bosi and Lorenzo Zamponi have termed ‘direct social actions’ (2015). In most cases, visible mobilization in precarious contexts emerges when certain locations allow for a combination of place of survival and space of political articulation. Processes of claim-making by marginalized actors ‘may be messy and incomplete’ and the spaces in which they unfold contradictory, ‘but they mark the sites within which voice and agency can be recovered’ (Sanyal, 2014: 570).

#### **7.4. Relational and Spatial Effects of Camps and Squats**

Indeed, despite being exposed to highly precarious conditions of everyday life, sparks of resistance and political subjectivity by forced migrants have emerged during the protest wave, which have taken a plethora of forms. As I will elaborate below, street camps and squats have adopted a particular role in this process, as they served at times, despite their precariousness, as incubators where forced migrants could access resources and attract visibility to make claims in the public sphere.

##### *The Ambivalent Effects of Migrant ‘Camps’*

Research on migrant ‘camps’<sup>84</sup> has pointed to these inherent ambivalences. Nando Sigona, for instance, criticised that Agamben’s understanding of the camp as a space of exception

‘does not provide a satisfactory analytical tool neither to grasp the complexity of social relations within the camp, and between the camp and the city, nor to appreciate the strategies and tactics that those inhabiting such spaces adopt in their everyday lives to claim rights and membership’ (Sigona, 2015: 1).

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<sup>84</sup> In his seminal book ‘Managing the Undesirables’, Michel Agier has suggested various types of ‘camps’ ranging from closed deportation prisons or official asylum-seeker facilities to more open and improvised versions. The tent camps emerging in Paris belong to the type of camps ‘that are self-installed and self-organized. These represent the very basis of refuge, the shelter that we create in a hostile environment without a politics of welcome; these are established in the absence of hospitality. (...) Nevertheless, they remain under surveillance, either under the gaze of humanitarian organizations which help them occasionally, or under the control of territorial, international, or police organizations, which either monitor, destroy, or transfer these populations to other types of camps’ (Agier, 2010:36).

In order to illustrate these specific qualities, I recall the emergence of the series of street camps in summer 2015, particularly the phase after the third eviction, which gave rise to the ‘La Chapelle En Lutte’ collective. On the evening of the eviction, the community garden ‘Bois Dormoy’ around the corner from the previous street camp at ‘Esplanade Pajol’ opened its door to those migrants from the camp who had neither been evacuated, nor been taken to a deportation facility - and to a growing circle of supporters (Derveaux, 2015). Even though the association in charge of the garden asked the group to stay not longer than three or four nights, it provided temporary protection from the constant policing of the previous days (Interview P7). The garden quickly served as a *space of encounter* for forced migrants and supporters but also allowed some degree of political self-organization. First assemblies were held in which the different communities of migrants expressed their demands (Interview P7, Interview P2). In an interview, one of those activists supporting the migrants from the moment of the eviction recalled the (ambivalent) relational effects of these encounters:

‘Something emerged [there], links, legitimacy. We asked, ‘what do you want to achieve, shall we occupy a space? We are at your disposal, but it is not us who decide.’ They were super reluctant, strangely they did not want to do anything illegal. I told them: your very existence in France is illegal, all you do is illegal’ (Interview P7).

Outraged by the police intervention and the existence of a clearly identifiable location also rapidly expanded and diversified the supporting environment, attracting besides neighbours and those few activists who had accompanied the forced migrants since the first eviction also local political activists and politicians from radical left parties and the greens (Derveaux, 2015; Mouillard & Durupt, 2015). The heterogeneity of those in solidarity gave an initial strength, but soon led to conflict on the role of forced migrants in collective decisions and the repertoire of action.

Nevertheless, the members of the collective ‘La Chapelle en Lutte’, which was created at roughly the same time, pointed in their op-ed in ‘Le Monde’ to the empowering and incubating effect of these early experiences and autonomous spaces beyond the precarious life of the streets and the governmentality of the state:

‘These fights have shown the necessity of spaces, where migrants have access to associations and to the solidarity of the neighbours (...). It is paramount to get out of the miserable situation [‘galère’] in the streets on the one hand and the cold of an administrative governance, which categorises often arbitrarily and relegates the migrants out of our streets, out of our cities, out of our lives’ (Jaoul & Makaremi, 2015, author's translation).

As agreed with those running the garden, the migrants and their support eventually left the premises. On June 11, forced migrants and supporters occupied the abandoned fire fighter's barracks 'Château Landon' (Le Monde Online, 2015a), in close proximity to the previous sites of contention. According to the accounts of various persons involved, the situation was highly chaotic, with profound conflicts among the solidarity activists, particularly between those with an autonomous tradition and those affiliated with parties (Interview Godard, filed notes Blaise, J. Lamothe & Fischer, 2015). While some of the activists were first line in the occupation, others attempted to discourage forced migrants from participating in order not to take risks. This in turn, spurred fierce resistance by other fractions, who qualified such interventions as paternalistic and against the deliberate decisions taken by the migrants themselves (Interview P7).

Controversies over repertoires, the role of migrants, leadership and organizational priorities introduced deep trenches already in a very early phase of a movement 'in becoming' (Interview P7, Interview P28). Shortly after entering the barrack, riot police blocked the building. Subsequently, in negotiations between the occupants and the town hall of Paris, an agreement was made, which resulted in the transfer of 110 migrants to emergency shelters (Le Figaro Online, 2015a), where they were allowed to stay for a maximum of one week. Despite (and for some, because of) this agreement, the arena became further politicised thereafter. In a common press release, the Minister of the Interior Bernard Cazeneuve and the Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo (both from the ruling Socialist Party), accused solidarity activists of

'cynically exploiting the dramatic situation in which the migrants find themselves for purely political reasons' (Le Figaro Online, 2015a, author's translation).

Within a very short period of time, the camps and the presence of forced migrants had been transformed from a humanitarian emergency into a visible rupture of the political life in Paris. After the occupation of 'Château-Landon'

'there was a lot of pressure on the camps, they lasted two, three weeks and then there was an evacuation. And the conflicts in the solidarity movement started. I tell you this, because such moments do something ['ça crée des trucs'], after that it is very difficult to work together again' (Interview P7).

The specific interactions within this contentious arena, hence, were highly influential for the trajectory of the protest wave. During these interactions, the camps were transformed from being predominantly a space of survival to precarious sites for 'acts of citizenship' (Isin, 2008).

Immediately following the occupation, forced migrants started gathering again in the neighbourhood: individuals who had just arrived in the capital, those who had not been included in the agreement with the city hall and after a week, also some of those who had to leave the temporary shelter again. Due to the increased mediatization and social media channels recently established to coordinate the scattered solidarity scene, the subsequent street camps attracted a wide range of individuals and associations offering all kinds of services from food and tents, to language courses, legal assistance and rooms for political exchange (Interview P10, Interview P2). The initial self-help arrangements of makeshift camps, hence, started to become also pools for resources. Similarly to what Sigona has identified in his analysis of Roma camps, the tent camps

‘offered to newcomers who had limited resources and no rights, (...) access to (some kind of) protection and recognition, as well as some practical benefits’ (Sigona, 2015: 12).

The involvement of a wide range of actors criticising the governmental non-response and providing resources, altered the options for those forced migrants, which were pushed towards a highly precarious life in the streets. While being influenced by all actors involved in the arena, those individuals inhabiting the camps were never purely objects of care, political exploitation or governmental administration, as they were often presented. They were also agents, and regularly emerged as political subjects in the arena – at times more visible than in others. The makeshift camps served as important, yet, ambivalent spaces in this regard. As noted above, the conditions in makeshift camps importantly served as stigmatizing markers and reproduction of ‘bare life’. Many, I have spoken to, experienced a loss of dignity and a widespread sense of pity shown towards them by neighbours and often also the media (Interview P30, Field notes 06/06/2017, Field notes 10/06/2017). Furthermore, the tent camps also entailed regular exposure to the police (Fofana, 2016). Yet, the camps also opened niches for agency, by what I call protective, relational, strategic and disruptive qualities.<sup>85</sup>

For most, the initial rationale for gathering in makeshift camps was a temporary means *for basic protection*, to stay in groups and to share scarce resources. Indeed, individuals had all kinds of reasons for joining a makeshift camp, and even to avoid an evacuation. One illustration is Ahmed, who decided to not get on one of the buses evacuating a tent camp because he wanted to make sure not to miss the appointment with ‘France Terre d’Asile’ in Paris that he had awaited so long. To him, it appeared preferable

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<sup>85</sup> For a similar argument, see also Rygiel (2012).

to wait some more time in the makeshift camp, rather than being sent to one of the remote emergency shelters in the countryside, where he might be stuck and not be able to find the means to reach central Paris in time. Another case is Bilal - tired from walking three days to cross the border between Italy and France through the mountains – who simply needed some rest before continuing his travels to Calais and, hopefully, Great Britain (Baumard, 2016b).

Yet, the increasing politicization and visibility of the makeshift camps gradually added *a strategic element*. Publicly displaying a social problem, the camps *served as a disruption*, which became bothersome for the authorities and forced them to concede places in emergency shelters. Hence, the gathering of migrants, the presence of forced migrant bodies in the streets, attracted attention to the issue itself, it was – similar to Judith Butler’s ideas on the performativity of assemblies (Butler, 2015), fundamentally political. In this vein, Agier has argued, a forced migrant, ‘who will not play his assigned role, who no longer stays in his place, who does not keep silent’ (Agier, 2010: 42) creates a rupture in the established order and provokes questions of belonging and hence in Isin’s terms performances of a ‘right to have rights’ (Isin, 2017).<sup>86</sup> Many migrants certainly were not interested in the symbolic dimension of the disrupting effect of the camps, but were aware and willing to exploit it instrumentally:

‘The priority was to get a roof, so when the camp helps to achieve this, great – we do it!’ (Interview P24, similarly Interview P30, Interview P26).

Looking at the total number of those obtaining shelter through camps and evacuations, the strategy appears highly successful in hindsight: Between June 2015 and November 2016, the North of Paris witnessed the emergence of dozens of makeshift camps ranging in size from around a hundred to several thousands of ‘inhabitants’. According to official sources, 21,728 (often temporary) places in emergency shelters were offered following more than 30 ‘evacuations’ of makeshift camps (Préfecture de Police Ile de France, 2016a).

In addition to providing protection and exerting pressure on the government, the camps at times *had relational effects*, generating trust within the migrant communities and mobilizing resources through social ties with individuals and associations. At many street camps, language courses and legal advice was organized on the spot, providing in this regard more advantageous conditions than in most of the isolated emergency shelters

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<sup>86</sup> Isin argues: ‘Performative citizenship signifies both a struggle (making rights claims) and what that struggle performatively brings into being (the right to claim rights)’ (2017: 506).

offered by the state with usually poor access to advice (Field notes 19/06/2017, Interview P30). Many returned either regularly from remote shelters to the street camps to access these crucial resources or eventually opted to move back for good (Field notes 19/06/2017, Interview P30, Interview P26). Beyond providing resources, the camps became sites of encounter for various distinct actors, citizens and non-citizens, from which relations of solidarity and trust emerged.

Lastly, and for the reasons outlined above, the street camps also served as sparks and nuclei for public articulation of dissent by forced migrants. All instances in which forced migrants made claims in the public sphere using traditional means of protest during this wave of contention emanated from the street camps (or squats as will be discussed below). The camps as combinations of every-day survival and access to resources provided a space of potential incubation. For this purpose, in most street camps, assemblies translated into different languages were organized (Interview P10, Interview P7, Interview P30). Depending on the respective camps and their inhabitants, it was decided if patience or pressure was the preferred strategy to obtain (sustainable) shelter and access to rights more broadly:

‘Of course every camp was different, as heterogeneous as the migrant population. In some camps, the migrants wanted to do something politically. They are there and wait, and some want to use this time to do something. In fact, there is also the moment to discuss and organize’ (Interview P10).

In some camps, the inhabitants chose to use their ‘voice’, organizing rallies and sit-ins, drafting flyers, or putting up banners with claims around the camps. During these ‘traditional’ protest events, both general dissent and specific demands were articulated: Signs showed ‘we want human rights’, ‘there are no human rights in France’, ‘humans, not beast’, ‘stop Dublin’, ‘we demand asylum’, ‘we want dignity’, (Association des Travailleurs Maghrebins de France, 2015; Degeorges, 2016; La Chapelle En Lutte, 2015b; NPA, 2015; Paris Luttes, 2015). Public articulation of forced migrant voices took also another shape. Emanating from the camps and the exchange with activists who gave a hand in translating and printing, forced migrants regularly published claims online or distributed them in printed copies. One of these communiqués read:

‘We are a group of migrants and refugees. We demand our rights as they are provided by the law. We camp in a square, at the moment, we are on a sidewalk. This Friday, 4 September, at 6:30, an evacuation at square Jessaint (metro La Chapelle) took place. A selection has been made. Those who were in the square

in this very moment have been taken care of, the others had to remain there. We are now at Jules Joffrin Square in front of the town hall of the 18th District.

- We demand an acceleration and facilitation of the asylum process.
- That a sustainable and decent accommodation is found for refugees.

We stay here until a solution is found.’

(Un groupe de migrants et de réfugiés, 2015, author's translation).

Numerous such testimonies and claims of this kind were also printed in the movement magazine ‘Merhaba’, produced by forced migrants and solidarity activists, who met and built social ties during the street camps:

‘We are refugees in the city of Paris. We have left our numerous and different countries where catastrophic situations are taking place (wars, political conflicts, civil war ...), situations which have caused countless casualties and material losses. We have been pushed out, forced to migrate, to flee the horror of these conflicts’ (quoted in Merhaba No.1, 2016; see also Merhaba No.2, 2015; Merhaba No.3, 2015).

Indeed, the step from silence to voice was usually made while taking advantage of the relational qualities of the street camps. Cooperation in general and even more so in high-risk activities presupposed a relationship of at least basic trust. In the context of heavy policing, many forced migrants considered public articulation of dissent as an additional risk in an on-going or up-coming asylum procedure, or for those so-called ‘Dublin cases’<sup>87</sup> the danger of imminent deportation within the European Union. These social ties were created during repeated interactions in the camps, which usually combined care work, sharing of stories with discussions of potential ways ahead (Interview P23, Interview P10, Interview P7). The forced migrants living in the camps did by no means always welcome the diverse mix of pro-beneficiaries with open arms. One of the regular individual ‘supporters’ during the street camps recalled in a personal interview:

‘[t]o go to a camp, means also to be confronted with persons who tell you: ‘but why do you come here, if you cannot do anything for me’? And you are also confronted with the police and so on. It is really not comfortable to go to the camps. They [the people living in the camps] see so many people, the police, the OFI [foreigners’ office], FTdA [France Terre d’Asile], they do not know anymore, who is who, who does what. Some associations help us, others put us on a bus and take us to the middle of nowhere. Trust is difficult. In fact, it is only with a regular presence on the ground that you gain the trust of the people. If you do not come

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<sup>87</sup> The Dublin regulation attributes the responsibility for processing asylum claims to the country through which an asylum-seeker has first entered EU territory. Given the geographical location of France (and also Germany), most asylum-seekers are registered in countries at the European periphery, and hence, their cases can be immediately rejected for formal reasons in case the finger prints of an individual have been registered.



regularly, you do not have the trust, that's evident. It helped us also that we have a lot of migrants in our counselling sessions, who have been living in the camps, who work with us now, this is how trust is built faster' (Interview P10).

While in some camps, the inhabitants opted for 'voice', in others, they explicitly asked supporters to remain patient and quiet (Interview P10, Interview P13, Interview P23). Sometimes it depended on the subjective assessment of the advantages and risks of the respective strategy (Interview P10, Interview P24). One of the forced migrants living in the camp who joined various protest activities recalls:

'[P]eople [referring to fellow migrants] attacked me a lot saying, stop A., you will not get your case approved – they never give you papers if you are in an association or active, because in Europe they want people not to understand, they want people stupid. And if they meet me now, they say, "still no answer from OFPRA? We told you, it is because you are involved. If you are not involved, you will be accepted"' (Interview P24).

As soon as the contentious arena had emerged, both remaining silent and expressing voice were deliberated decisions, upon which forced migrants had a (novel) degree of choice.

These findings echo Adam Ramadan, who has argued that migrant camps are inherently ambivalent, ranging from being spaces of insecurity and violence to spaces of identity formation and precarious hospitality (Ramadan, 2013: 74). Most importantly, they are 'spaces of agency and struggle, not complete disempowerment and bare life' (ibid). Rygiel notes in a similar vein:

'Conditions of inequality and exploitation do not prevent people forced into these conditions from engaging as political subjects. On the contrary, as the numerous examples of political activism emerging in sporadic moments in and around camps illustrate, camps are places of survival, conflict, atrocities and continuance as well as places of resistance and of new forms of engagements, community and subjectivity, through which articulations of injustices and demands for recognition and rights are made' (Rygiel, 2012: 814 f.).

As my fieldwork suggests, these 'moments of being political' have at times lasting transformative effects for the persons involved. All asylum-seekers or recognized refugees I have met during my fieldwork in 2017, who were engaged in political activism, had started their political engagement in France in the camps and through the contacts they had established there. For some, the continuous engagement was initially a matter of solidarity with those still living in the camps and suffering the same situation they had been going through (Interview P26, Interview P30). For others, it was a way to stay in touch with the French contacts they had established during the time in the streets, with a

view to accelerating the acquisition of language skills and ‘integration’ in the French society more broadly (Field notes 19/06/2017, Interview P20). Some of those I met continued to travel almost on a daily basis from their shelter in the Parisian outskirts to the places where people were still living in the streets, to assist there or help out as translators during the office hours organized by a wide range of associations, which have either emerged in reaction to the camps or adapted their activities to the necessities of individuals living in the streets (TV5 Monde, 2015).

### *The Contested Squat (and Back to the Streets)*

Despite numerous tent camps and evacuations, the general situation remained unchanged. Only when larger camps emerged and attracted visibility, the administration reacted with the provision of (often temporary) accommodation. Due to the constant arrival of new forced migrants in the city and the return of those who had only obtained a temporary shelter, no sustainable solution appeared in sight (Interview P23). With a view to increasing the pressure, activists from the collective ‘La Chapelle En Lutte’, who had already advocated for squatting the fire fighter’s barracks ‘Château-Landon’, together with several dozen forced migrants from Afghanistan and Sudan decided to occupy an abandoned school building (‘Lycée Jean-Quarré’) in the 19<sup>th</sup> district (Interview P28, Interview P23, Interview P27, Interview P30). Besides providing shelter for migrants living in the streets, the squat was explicitly understood as a prefiguration of alternative accommodation schemes for forced migrants – self-organized and centrally located (Coutant, 2017: 5). The squat as a form of action to politicize (migrant) marginalization has a long tradition in France (Aguilera, 2013; Bouillon, 2003, 2017, Péchu, 1999, 2010).<sup>88</sup> According to Bouillon,

‘[s]quatting is a way of proclaiming one’s very existence directly, physically, and materially in order to become visible and gain a hearing, i.e., to take part in the life of the city’ (Bouillon, 2017: 72).

Immediately after the forced migrants and activists had occupied the school building of ‘Jean Quarré’, they re-baptized it to ‘Maison des Réfugiés’ (‘House of Refugees’). Accommodating around 150 individuals (all migrants) at the outset, the squat received initially overall supportive media coverage (J. Lamothe, 2015; J. L. Lamothe & Le

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<sup>88</sup> To underline the link of precarious migration and squatting, the non-representative research on the issue conducted between 2004 and 2008 by Florence Bouillon and Pascale Dietrich-Ragon in the ‘Îles de France’ region is indicative: they found that less than 5% of the occupants in the squats they analysed were born in France, and 83% originated from a sub-Saharan African country (2012: IV).

Gohébel, 2015; Le Figaro Online, 2015b; Le Journal du Dimanche Online, 2015). Also the city of Paris decided to grant a temporary tolerance of the squat (Le Figaro Online, 2015b).

Due to its visibility, the squat unfolded a tremendous *incubating effect* at the beginning. Given the lack of alternative housing options for forced migrants in Paris, the occupation grew rapidly in size. Initially, also the inflow of donations was immense. Usually, a simple post in social media channels or an information on the board displayed at the entrance sufficed to attract the material resources needed to sustain the place. The accumulation of resources, ranging from clothes to language courses, medical support and legal advice in addition to a solid roof in turn further increased its appeal for those forced migrants still living in the streets of Paris. Assembling a diverse mix of actors, similarly to the street camps, but initially with more advantageous spatial characteristics (large building, a courtyard), the squat turned into a vibrant hub of social encounters and at times political activity (Interview P28, Interview P30).

On the other hand, after a while, the building was bursting at the seams. Neither the built environment nor the internal organizational structures could ensure effective self-organization of the eventually more than a thousand migrants living in the place. Conflicts erupted repeatedly among its inhabitants when the building became increasingly overpopulated, the sanitary facilities overburdened and communal spaces scarce (Interview P23, Interview P30, Coutant, 2017). Both media reports and the public authorities at the local and regional level subsequently pointed to the degradation of the place and suspected its exploitation by the radical left. Its inhabitants, more than a thousand forced migrants, were largely portrayed as either victims of leftist activism or as a troubling mass.

Yet, for those inhabiting the squat, the situation was less clear-cut. Indeed, the occupation unveiled highly *contradictory relational and spatial* qualities for the emergence of political subjectivity.<sup>89</sup> I will subsequently outline both the dynamics of political mobilization and relational fragmentation that unfolded in the occupied building:

The very fact that the squat constantly grew in terms of numbers from the point of its establishment to the time it was evicted, illustrated - despite dominant negative media coverage - that many forced migrants considered it still as the best among very

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<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the trajectory of the squat resembled that of the Gerhard-Hauptmann School in Berlin (see Chapter 6).

poor alternatives. Even many forced migrants who had obtained accommodation in emergency shelters, spent the day in the squat, as they could access resources they could not find elsewhere – including French classes, basic medical care, legal support, company etc., which were strongly limited in most of the remotely located emergency shelters (Interview P30). Similarly to what Bouillon found in other squats involving migrants and native activists, many migrants became increasingly politicized:

‘[M]igrants who know little about the French political context, and even less about the practices of autonomy/liberation/direct democracy, often undergo politically socializing processes in joining meetings, debates and discussions. [Equally] these encounters bring militants face to face with harsh realities which they have rarely experienced themselves: the extreme poverty and exile which are the constant lot of these migrants, many of whom have recently fled the horrors of armed violence in Sudan, Syria and Eritrea’ (Bouillon, 2017: 74).

Accordingly, the space of the squat allowed for an intensified organizing compared to the tent camps. General assemblies were held with delegates from the various migrant communities. Two large demonstrations were organized from the squat. Inhabitants worked on a movement journal ‘Merhaba’, published in French, English, Arabic and Dari to share testimonies, experiences and demands (see Merhaba 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, also Interview P10). One of the migrants who became increasingly engaged during the occupation recalled the collective political spirit in the ‘House of Refugees’, despite the difficult living conditions:

‘The people I talked to in the squat about how to get together to take a stance or to do something to change the situation they were really enthusiastic to buy banners or write slogans. They were very responsive to the idea. They were eventually aware of their rights and wanted to take collective action to let people know that their rights were being abused’ (Interview P30).

Equally in the squat, the idea was born to create self-organized associations by forced migrants to ensure sustainability and self-representation (Interview P20, Interview P23):

‘When we started organizing in Jean Quarré, many wanted to build an association to participate but [after the evacuation] when they moved to the emergency shelters and they were separated, a lot of this spirit was gone. So it is more difficult. Now the first step is to find the activist. To speak to the people. You need the credibility. In the squat it was easier because everyone was on the same spot (Interview P23, similarly Interview P30).

Hence, the spatial configuration of the squat facilitated personal interaction, exchange and political organizing. It also led to the creation of trust among parts of its inhabitants

and to supporting activists. Some of these ties were even sustained after the evacuation of the place:

‘Afterwards it was difficult because only ten per cent were in Paris, the rest was sent out of Paris. Because we got their phone numbers and Facebook profiles, we succeeded in staying in touch with some of them, the Sudanese at least. When we organized a demonstration after the eviction people travelled from their little villages to Paris in order to participate in this demonstration (...). It was a demonstration against both the Sudanese government and the situation of migrants in France’ (Interview P30).

Given the heterogeneity of the squat, by far not all the migrants were interested in any kind of demonstrative activities. Similarly to the tent camps, given the condition of ‘bare life’, many regarded the precarious squat as an instrument for finding solutions for very concrete problems: a roof, access to the asylum system and legal and social support. Indeed, many inhabitants of the squat nurtured profound scepticism toward the politicised activists of the ‘La Chapelle Collective’ (Coutant, 2017a; J. Lamothe & Fischer, 2015). Some Afghans, for instance, thought that it was not in their interest to enter in confrontation with the state, as their chance to be granted asylum appeared (at that time) reasonably high. Once more, the delicate position of confronting the state while at the same time expecting (asylum) from the state, became evident, and was not always in line with the confrontational agenda of parts of some of the supporters (Coutant, 2017a).

As noted above, the relational effects of the squat were highly contradictory, leading to incubation and political activity on the one hand, and deep divisions on the other. Whereas the first phase of the squat was predominantly characterized by an incubating dynamics, towards the end, mutual alienation and exhaustion due to the precarious conditions dominated. With a growing number of migrants in the building, degradation and conflicts multiplied, which, in turn, accentuated divisions within the solidarity movement, among the migrant communities and between public authorities and (parts) of the solidarity movement. When the donations for the squat ebbed due to increasingly critical media coverage (see for instance the TV reportage FranceInfo, 2015; or Simon, 2015), the competition for increasingly scarce resources ever more frequently escalated in physical conflicts:

‘People were grouped according to nationalities. Rooms were divided and some did not let others enter. There was the Afghani room, the Eritrean room, the Syrian room, the Sudanese room, the Iraqi room - they were afraid of each other. It is true that there was no confidence. (...) It was not only the social background, but the situation there was also very stressful. People started to feel disgusted and they

could not take it anymore, that was the main reason. People were very violent. They fought with each other because there was not enough space to sleep, people started taking the belongings of others etc.’ (Interview P30).

Furthermore, the relations with the neighbourhood of the squat increasingly worsened over time. As Isabelle Coutant pointed out in her detailed analysis of the squat and its resonance in the neighbourhood, the arrival of a large number of migrants added to the already existing challenges in one of the most underprivileged areas of the French capital (Coutant, 2017a, 2017b). Indeed, the transformation of the abandoned school into a self-organized migrant shelter collided with plans to open a media lab for the local population in the facilities (Coutant, 2017a). Many neighbours considered it unfair, that precisely their area of the city was forced to carry additional burdens. The visible overpopulation and degradation of the place fuelled the opposition in the neighbourhood but also among the local administration and the city of Paris.

Less than one month after its establishment, the squat had become predominantly portrayed as the emblematic result of ill-guided migrant solidarity activism. Also the traditionally left-leaning newspaper ‘Libération’ published a highly critical article on the squat, mainly criticising the collective ‘La Chapelle En Lutte’ for its dominant role and its counterproductive self-isolation from both public authorities and the professional humanitarian organizations (J. Lamothe & Fischer, 2015). Many activists organized in the collective rejected professional care work in the squat in order to avoid a ‘dynamic of dominating-dominated’ (quoted in J. Lamothe & Fischer, 2015). In line with their general ambition to empower forced migrants, they fiercely rejected people ‘with uniforms (...) to serve food like in a charity situation. These are subjects, no objects’ (ibid). Not least due to their exposure to the horrendous deprivation of many forced migrants inhabiting the place, the supporters in the squat had become increasingly critical towards the ‘placebo’ response of the government and their role in creating the situation in the first place. In their view, media reports exclusively highlighting the existing and yet problematic conditions in the squat were merely reproducing governmental discourses aiming at discrediting migrant solidarity and hiding the underlying systematic failure of government response (Jaoul, 2015). Indeed, the absence of shelters had pushed more and more migrants into the squat, which contributed to a rapid degeneration of its conditions. Yet, while the street camps exposed a social problem and the failure of the state to a wider public, the spatiality of the precarious squat sealed-in the problems and allowed to shift the responsibility to the migrant solidarity movement.

Soon, the situation reached a stalemate. Relationships between the collective and the state were cut. Yet in the light of the proliferation of problems in the occupation, the migrant inhabitants increasingly demanded a sustainable solution. In reaction to the deadlock in negotiating the future of the squat, a new collective of neighbours emerged taking neither the side of the public authorities nor that of ‘La Chapelle En Lutte’. The new collective ‘Solidarité Migrants Place des Fêtes’<sup>90</sup> was mainly preoccupied with the social cohesion in the neighbourhood, but also expressed its solidarity with the migrants living in the squat (Coutant, 2017: 48). Various attempts at mediation involving representatives of the largest migrant communities in the squat and the local administration failed. Eventually, the city of Paris issued an evacuation warrant. Almost three months after its establishment, on October 23, the police evacuated the building, transferring more than 1,300 forced migrants to emergency shelters (Le Monde Online, 2015b). Eventually, for many migrants living in the squat but also most supporters, the evacuation was a relief. The conditions in the squat had become unbearable, external support had eroded and the external pressure on the squat had led to an internal fragmentation of the heterogeneous collective ‘La Chapelle En Lutte’ (Interview P23, Interview P30). One of those migrants involved in the occupation expressed his ambivalence regarding the squat in a retrospective reflection:

‘It was great that we occupied this place. We did not have an alternative. And we organized many things there (...). But I was really happy, when it was evacuated because it had become unbearable’ (Interview P30).

In the aftermath of the eviction, ‘La Chapelle En Lutte’ fell apart, fragmenting into various groups and associations, amongst them ‘United Migrants’, with the idea of establishing an asylum-seeker self-organization, ‘La Chapelle Debout’<sup>91</sup> the most anarchist fraction advocating for a confrontational approach (Interview P27, Interview P28, Interview P23, Interview P2) and the ‘Bureau d’Accueil et d’Accompagnement des Migrants’ (BAAM), which set up a solidary, yet pragmatic support association (Coutant, 2017a).

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<sup>90</sup> Translates into ‘Migrant Solidarity Place des Fêtes’.

<sup>91</sup> The local branch of the broader ‘Nuit Debout’ movement unfolding in France in spring 2016 heavily drew from the resources and links established during the mobilizations around migration. Many members of the collective ‘La Chapelle Debout’ previously involved in the camps and the squat stand for this personal continuity (Interview P23, Interview P28).

### *Back to the Streets*

The end of the squat meant by no means the end of the protest wave. As in previous evacuations, some forced migrants living in the occupied building had ‘missed the train’ and were not allocated a place in an emergency shelter. Others came back to Paris after a few days. Consequently, the ‘cat-and-mouse-game’ of tent camps picked up steam again, involving both former inhabitants of the squat and parts of the solidarity activists. To avoid the fragmentation of the group as a result of dispersal in scattered emergency shelters, a meeting point was displayed on a board during the evacuation and also published in the *Merhaba* journal:

‘So as not to become isolated and to continue to fight for papers and housing after the evacuation of the school (Lycée), our meeting point in the evening of the evacuation and on the following evenings is at 6pm, at Metro La Chapelle (line 2).’ (Merhaba No.2, 2015).

Building upon common memories of ‘eventful protest’, claims were even more loudly articulated during demonstrations and in the *Merhaba* journal (Degeorges, 2016; *Demandeurs d’asile du campement Stalingrad*, 2016; Merhaba No.3, 2015; Merhaba No.4, 2016; Merhaba No.5, 2016):

‘The Mayor’s office said it would accommodate us but it was a lie, some were taken but other refugees were left in the street. We need housing and documents. We’re here [in front of City Hall] to get it and to find a solution to our situation today. Our priority is to have a roof over our heads. This morning, some of us had appointments, others had procedures to attend, when we returned they told us there were no more places. They evacuated the others from the high school and as for us, we’re still outside. The Mayor’s office lied to us and broke its promise’ (Merhaba No.3, 2015).

After a series of tent camps, ‘La Chapelle Débout’ together with over three hundred forced migrants living in street camps, occupied another abandoned school building (‘Lycée Jean Jaurès’) (Baumard, 2016a; Pouliquen, 2016). Drawing from the lessons learned during ‘Jean Quarré’ and its undoubted mistakes (Interview P23, Interview P27), the rules in Jean Jaurès were much stricter: more self-organized involvement by the inhabitants was demanded, no alcohol, drugs or unaccompanied women were allowed in the place. And, the La Chapelle Débout intended to bridge the neat division between ‘refugees’ and ‘economic migrants’, which characterized the previous mobilizations (see section 7.5. below). Instead, undocumented migrants and their experienced collectives (such as the CSP75) were explicitly invited to join (Interview P28, Interview P27). This time, despite a much better organization, the squat was evicted by the police two weeks



after its establishment (Baumard, 2016a). In contrast to previous experiences during the wave, none of the inhabitants was transferred to emergency shelters, many were instead directly taken to deportation facilities. Jean-Jaurès remained the last squat of the protest wave.

In response to the increased visibility of migrants in central Paris and strong mobilisation in the camps, the public authorities adopted various means of intervening in the formation of social relations. In order to prevent new camps, the police confiscated tents, mattresses and cardboard boxes. From summer 2015, the police started gradually intervening in the built environment by setting up material obstacles: Open (public) spaces underneath the metro line 2 and various parks got fenced. One of the migrants observed:

‘They are about to set up barriers everywhere in the neighbourhood (...). Afraid of camps being set up again, they have closed the space under the aerial metro line at Stalingrad, they have fenced the Jardin d’Eole. They built a landscape of walls, like at the borders’ (cited in Baumard, 2016, author's translation).

During my fieldwork in spring 2017, the traces of spatial governance were visible throughout the Parisian North-East. Even large boulders had been placed at ‘Porte de La Chapelle’ to prevent migrants from setting up tents. In the absence of alternatives, migrants have since slept scattered on the walkways and parks (Interview P10, Interview P2, Interview P8, Interview P5). Even the established humanitarian organization ‘Medecins Sans Frontières’ publicly denounced the ‘systematic police violence targeted against migrants wandering through the city’ (Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2016). Despite the increasing intervention by the police to undermine the incubating effect of the street camps, forced migrants continued to gather. In many cases, the repeated contentious interaction with the police planted seeds of protest and encouraged forced migrants living in the camps to adopt a confrontational approach instead of remaining patient:

‘I arrived on September 16 in Paris, for two weeks I have been sleeping on pieces of cardboard. Very soon, the police arrived, at six o’clock in the morning, and confiscated my cardboard and my stuff. They do the same with our tents. I have enough of losing everything all the time. Today I will resist’ (cited in Fofana, 2016, author's translation).

In the light of the tightened policing, forced migrants and the fragmented solidarity scene encountered increasing difficulties to establish and maintain the street camps:

‘We are migrants, we are homeless. We are in Place de la République. We cannot sleep. It's raining. Every time we put up tents or even only baches [‘French word

for tarps'] the police push us and take these by force. So we are staying in the rain and the cold without cover all night. But it's still not enough for the authorities. Every early morning, the police attacks us and they take our staff by force. We are no criminals. We want respect. We want rights. We want humanity. We want homes today. We will never give up until you accept our requests. We call on the people to help the refugees. We are in Place de la République to articulate our demands. The authorities can't let us stay in the rain and the cold. They can't provide nothing and attack us whenever we try to have tents or baches. We call on the people to help the refugees. We need food. We need tents. So we need sleeping bags. We need blankets and clothes. We call on you to gather with us again on Friday evening at 20.00 o'clock to resist with us to put up the tents and [tarps] and to support our demands.' (Facebook page Merhaba).<sup>92</sup>

Nevertheless, the street camps continued until November 2016, when the city of Paris co-financed by the central government, opened an emergency shelter at 'Porte de La Chapelle' (Couvelaire, 2016; Interview P11, Interview P6). From this moment, the tent camps almost disappeared from the landscape. Most migrants started settling around the newly established center, hoping to get one of the 400 places. At the same time, the police even more fiercely controlled the outskirts of Paris, confiscating tents and putting massive boulders on the sides of the highway driveway. Subsequently, political associations withdrew from active engagement, due to exhaustion but also in order not to legitimize the center. The wave of contention cooled off in winter 2016, even though hundreds of forced migrants remained in the streets, and even though numerous initiatives continued providing legal advice and language courses.

### **7.5. One Issue, Two Struggles?**

In the introduction of this chapter, I referred to an accentuated division of political mobilizations by *sans-papiers* and asylum-seekers. And indeed, during the series of camps, there was close to no interaction between the established self-organized structures of *sans-papiers* collectives and the mobilizations in and around the camps. This is at first sight surprising as most members of *sans-papiers* collectives regularly referred to being forced out of their countries of origin due to war, widespread human rights abuses or extreme poverty (Voix des Sans Papiers, CISPM, 2014). During a *sans-papiers*

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<sup>92</sup> Another person referred to the broader landscape of obstacles: 'They are about to set up barriers everywhere in the neighbourhood (...). Afraid of camps being set up again, they have closed the space under the aerial metro line at Stalingrad, have fenced the Jardins d'Eole. They build a landscape of walls, like at the borders' (cited in Baumard, 2016).

demonstration I participated in, one of the undocumented organizers welcomed the newcomers with the words:

‘You, new brothers and sisters, who have left the misery, crossed the desert and the Mediterranean and have made it to Paris. You are very welcome here with us. We march every Friday. Because when we march, we disrupt, if we do not disrupt, no one cares about us, we are invisible but in danger’ (Field notes 16/06/2017).

To a considerable degree, the cleavage between sans-papier and asylum-seekers was rooted in previous interactions and laws intervening in the relations among migrants. When I asked a representative of one of the large sans-papiers collectives in Paris, he replied:

‘We were there at the beginning, but the supporters did not want us there. They said: “this is not your struggle. These are asylum-seekers and you are sans-papiers. This is something different”. I said: “but half of them will be rejected and they will become sans-papiers.” (...) [And] they said to the people there [forced migrants at La Chapelle]: “your situation is different; you have much better chances to get a residence permit!” (...) Anyhow. The thing is, we do not forget’ (Interview P14).

Indeed, many members of the sans-papiers collectives are rejected asylum-seekers, the very foundation of the movement in the early 1990s was strongly shaped by rejected asylum-seekers. Yet, the neat distinction was not only made by some of the supporters, but also by many forced migrants in the camps themselves. Those in or aiming at the asylum procedure hoped for this privileged access to protection. Mingling with the sans-papiers meant mingling with those who ‘failed’ (Interview P29, Interview P27, similarly Interview P22). The ‘Collectif Baras’ made similar experiences of how legal categories intervened in the social relations within contentious arenas around forced migration. Themselves in parts equipped with a humanitarian protection status from Italy, they had come to some of the demonstrations in support of the ‘refugees’ at ‘La Chapelle’ but realized that they were not ‘meant’ by the mobilizations (Interview P10).

The dynamics unfolding in Paris during the ‘La Chapelle’ arena, hence, mirror patterns I have already traced in Chapter 5. In exclusive migration regimes such as in France, rights and potential rights are stratified. Thus alliances are often made on similarities in terms of rights. The history of political mobilizations of undocumented migrants in France and the US shows that precarious migrants mobilize in niches. Students or families are more likely to be regularized than single males etc. Similarly, most of the forced migrants at ‘La Chapelle’ mobilized to get into the relatively privileged category. Indeed, the rights connected to asylum are superior to those guaranteed in

foreigner's law (Interview Maillary): The dispositive of accommodation related to the asylum system exists for some, but not for others. The same is true for all kinds of support services, public and private, which are much more developed for asylum-seekers. Whereas some of the forced migrants intended to get into the asylum system as asylum-seekers, the *sans-papiers* never had a chance or were expelled from this very system.

In the light of the precarious living conditions and scarce resources, the established *sans-papiers* collectives observed with suspicion a concentration of resources around the 'refugees' at 'La Chapelle' at the expense of a visibility and support of 'their' struggles (Interview P22, Interview P14). One activist involved in the tent camps and the two occupations recalled:

'We have good relations with the *sans-papiers*. We invited them to one of the occupations. But they were also a bit jealous, in the sense of: "We have been here for years and now they come and everyone gets mobilized all of a sudden"' (Interview P28).

This added to a deeply rooted suspicion of *sans-papiers* collectives seeing a tendency in both humanitarian actors and radical left activists to patronize and co-opt migrant mobilizations. In various occasions, representatives of the *sans-papiers* collectives expressed their astonishment of the widespread solidarity toward 'refugees' and very little support of undocumented collectives (Field notes 16/06/2017). In their analysis, this was related to the dominant role French 'supporters' obtain with-a-view to the precarious migrants and their unease with the emancipatory and autonomy-oriented struggles of the *sans-papiers* (Interview P14, Interview P7, Interview P29, Interview P10). The 'we do not forget' – indeed, did not only refer to the experience at 'La Chapelle'. Instead, the precarious (non-)relationship dated back much farther and was rooted in histories and memories of contentious interactions with French individual supporters, associations and trade unions (see e.g. Chapter 5). Such fragmented ties, that also the *sans-papiers* were well aware of, entailed specific drawbacks:

'Of course, with the migrants at La Chapelle there is also the language barrier. We only speak French, but no English and rarely Arabic. If we need translation, we again need the support of the French. We prefer being deficient but autonomous'. (Interview P14).

Beyond these interactionist dispositions, the *sans-papiers* found themselves at a strategic disadvantage: a public discourse increasingly differentiating between 'real refugees' and 'unwanted *sans-papiers*' reduced the niche for their mobilizations, which were based on a much more fundamental notion of 'freedom of movement'.

As a result of the cleavages introduced into the population of forced migrants by different categories of migrants as well as previous interactions with ‘supporters’ and sans-papiers collectives, the mobilizations remained by and large disconnected.

## **7.6. Conclusions**

In this chapter scrutinizing the contentious arena at ‘La Chapelle’, I have mapped out the emergence and trajectory of sparks of protest by forced migrants emanating from a condition of ‘bare life’. On the one hand, the case documents the countless obstacles for forced migrants to publicly voice dissent and become visible as political subjects rather than objects of migration governance and care. Indeed, the multiple objective grievances for various reasons do not necessarily translate into acts of resistance and dissent. Particularly asylum-seekers find themselves in a delicate role of demanding rights while at the same time depending on an open bureaucratic process. Besides, mobilizations by asylum-seekers in Paris have few precedents and hence, contentious networks to build upon. Due to a perceived competition within exclusive migration regimes as well as memories of contentious interactions with French pro-beneficiaries, the experienced self-organized sans-papiers collectives have largely mobilized outside the asylum system and abstained from the arena.

Despite these odds, a closer scrutiny of the spatial and interactive patterns during the ‘La Chapelle’ arena sheds light on the visible and invisible practices of political mobilization. Paradoxically, it is the highly precarious street camps, in which sparks of resistance emerge and incubate. The very visibilization of governmental neglect through gathering in groups, attracted a wide range of resources, from humanitarian subsistence to information, logistics and access to contentious networks, which in turn, facilitated the occasional public articulation of dissent. Through interactions with established players in the social movement environment in Paris, forced migrants repeatedly appropriated spaces and resources to appear as political subjects in the public sphere.

The case, hence, suggests that political mobilizations by forced migrants are fundamentally shaped by the concrete micro-interactions with other players in contentious arenas, rather than by broad opportunity structures or internal resources. Concrete interactions with the police as well as relationships of trust built during repeated interaction with ‘supporters’ constituted the foundation for political mobilization. Yet, the social ties with pro-beneficiaries were also highly ambivalent and fragile. Those migrants who wanted to express dissent and pressure for rights through engaging in

confrontation with public authorities found allies in the solidarity movement, including a wide range of activists from the libertarian and radical left. The latter, however, were engaged in their broader conflict with specific parties, or the state as such (also independently from the migrant's situation), which at times diverted the attention to 'supporters', and downplayed the 'acts of citizenship' by forced migrants.

## **Chapter 8**

### **A ‘Transnational Arena’: Berlin 2015-2016**

#### **Local Roots & Transnational Bonds**

‘We are living the same pain, the same difficulties, we understand each other better, because we share the same experience, the same suffering. If you interact with a European, this is always indirect, because he has never lived this and even if the European tries hard to imagine the suffering, it remains different from how it feels if you have lived it. This is this intuitive understanding.’ (Interview B28)

#### **8.1. Introduction**

In this last empirical chapter, I re-shift the focus back to Berlin and scrutinize contentious interactions around forced migration in Berlin between 2015 and 2016. While covering the same time frame as the previous chapter on the ‘La Chapelle’ arena in Paris, the relational and spatial context was highly distinct in the German capital at the time. Even though the ‘O-Platz’ wave had faded out by the end of 2014, a wide range of forced migrant groups self-identifying as ‘refugees’ mobilized on a regular basis. Yet, compared to previous periods, they were scarcely connected to each other and attracted limited visibility in the larger public. Due to the fragmentation and heterogeneity of the movement during the phase of investigation in Berlin, and, hence, no identifiable ‘24/7’ protest activity that could be compared to the ‘La Chapelle’ arena in Paris, the chapter focuses on the contentious practices of one forced migrant activist group. As the subsequent empirical illustrations will document, the group was characterized by an intense mobilization and a strong transnational orientation. Against this background, the chapter and the ‘protest arena’ differ somewhat from those investigated previously. With a view to keeping the focus both on relational and spatial dynamics, the chapter is not

only interested in investigating how the group made and unmade social ties in micro-interactions during mobilization, but also inquires why and how the protest group sustained an accentuated transnational orientation.

The central argument that I shall develop through analysis of the transnational dimension of the arena is the following: I suggest that the forced migrants in the group mobilized within two (interwoven) spaces: a transnational space connecting forced migrants with grievances rooted in similar migration histories at different locations in Europe and Africa, as well as the particular relational and spatial qualities in the place of arrival. Shared emotions of experienced inequality, exclusion and violence during the migration process have served as the basis of articulating grievances. In order to transform these grievances into (transnational) mobilization, the group had to gain access to social spaces breaking the isolation in the German asylum system in order to create and access common spaces for groups of forced migrants to draw upon local-level resources (advice, money, information, etc.). Once these local resources could be mobilized, the activist could reconnect to networks of forced migrants in different locations in Europe, which were knit during the migration process. These ties to individuals from the same region with similar experiences during (trans)migration could be ideal-typically described as ‘strong ties,’ whereas the support networks represented predominantly ‘weak ties’ that refugees nonetheless used deliberately in the mobilization process.

The chapter is structured as follows: Section (8.2.) provides a contextualization of the case study, a brief description of the group and their contentious protest practices. Subsequently, I reconstruct the relational patterns leading to this particular form of mobilization, being rooted in the transnational life worlds of the individuals (8.3.) and the relational and spatial configurations in Berlin (8.4.). Thereafter, I conclude the chapter by arguing how a dialogue between social movement studies and transnational migration studies contributes to the understanding of this particular kind of transnational activism by forced migrants (8.5).

In terms of data, the chapter draws from 11 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Berlin conducted between January 2016 and March 2017. I spent more than 100 hours with members of the group in assemblies, protest events, asylum shelters, in the administration and in private settings. During this time, I took extensive field notes and in addition conducted more than 20 interviews with members of the group and pro-beneficiary activists, who have been working with the group in solidarity. Lastly, the



chapter draws from dozens of written documents produced by or on the group, as well as messages exchanged in email-lists.<sup>93</sup>

## **8.2. Brief Contextualization of the Arena**

After two years of high visibility, the longest and largest wave of contention around forced migration in German history, the ‘O-Platz-movement’ (see Chapter 6), gradually ‘faded out’ (Jakob, 2016: 154 f.) from autumn 2014 onwards. For various reasons, the protest groups remained deeply divided after the dissolution of the ‘Oranienplatz’-camp and the occupied school. Nevertheless, the wave of contention had created new actors, awareness, contacts and resources, upon which various small groups of forced migrants continued to mobilize (Steinhilper & Ataç, 2018). Other activists involved in the ‘O-Platz’ wave alternatively or complementarily immersed themselves in mixed anti-racist groups (Danielzik & Bendix, 2016; Jakob, 2016).

### *Fragmented Activism and the Syria-Effect*

The following sketches intend to map the fragmented movement terrain in Berlin at the time of investigation: in February 2015, forced migrant activists from the group ‘Voix des Migrants’<sup>94</sup> organized a sit-in and conference in commemoration of the border deaths in the Mediterranean, involving several hundred asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants from various European countries (AEI, 2015, Interview B6, Interview B26). In April, activists previously involved in the ‘Oranienplatz’-camp mobilized for a ‘refugee bus tour’ to re-connect the scattered nodes of the movement in Germany and access isolated asylum-seekers in accommodation centres (Refugee Movement Berlin, 2015). The ‘International Women Space’, a group of female ‘migrants and refugees’ founded in the occupied Gerhard-Hauptmann-school, continued meeting and working on the publication of the book ‘In Our Own Words’, which was published a few months afterwards (International Women Space, 2015). Another faction of the ‘O-Platz’ camp worked on a ‘public memory’ of the protest wave, published a chronicle of events in a ‘Movement Magazine’ (International Refugee Center Berlin, 2015) and planned an exhibition which was eventually inaugurated in summer 2015 (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2015). The group ‘Lampedusa in Berlin’ continued to meet and politicize their precarious

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<sup>93</sup> The members of the group were informed of my role as a researcher at the beginning of the field work and on various occasions thereafter. During my participation I also actively contributed to the activities of the group, offering translation, administrative advice and the like.

<sup>94</sup> Translates into ‘The Voice of Migrants’.

living conditions after the dissolution of the camp and the squatted school (Fontanari, 2016).

As this outline suggests, in early 2015, the forced migrant movement in Berlin had not disappeared. However, while migrant activists mobilized politically on a regular basis, the groups were rarely connected as the ‘bruises’ of the previous contentious interactions had a lasting atomizing effect. These illustrations of the protest movement also point to key differences compared to Paris: firstly, even in a phase of decreasing mobilization by forced migrants in Berlin, asylum-seekers had appropriated an independent place both in the public sphere and in the broader migrant rights movement. Secondly, all actors mobilized under the collective identity of ‘refugees’. This included asylum-seekers, rejected asylum-seekers and those of the ‘Lampedusa’ group, who had obtained temporary humanitarian protection status in Italy, without a work permit in Germany. In fact, the latter group was – in terms of status and migration history - similar to the members of the ‘Collectif Baras’ in Paris, who mobilized as ‘sans-papiers’.

Despite this continuing protest activity of forced migrants in the German capital, public attention shifted in the first half of 2015 within the field of forced migration politics to the new generation of asylum-seekers, mostly from Syria. In a very short period of time, ‘refugee solidarity’ left its previous antiracist and faith-based niche and (temporarily) became a mass movement in Germany: Countless so-called ‘welcome initiatives’ emerged, providing all kinds of immediate assistance such as clothes, food and housing. In summer 2015, more and more politicians, trade unions, companies and media outlets joined in. On August 29, the traditionally right-leaning tabloid ‘BILD’ (with an infamously xenophobic record in reporting on the arrival of asylum-seekers in the early 1990s) launched a campaign under the label ‘Refugees Welcome’ to connect and inform volunteers (Die Bild, 2015). Only two days later, German Chancellor Merkel’s quote ‘Wir schaffen das’ (‘We can do this’) prepared a fundamental U-turn in governmental policy (Mushaben, 2017). On September 5<sup>th</sup>, the German government in a historical moment declared to open the borders and receive asylum-seekers that had been stranded in Hungary, which equalled a temporary suspension of the Dublin agreement. Following this decision, the already high numbers of daily arrivals further increased to several thousands (ibid). Pictures of self-organized welcome committees cheering at asylum-seekers at railway stations in Munich became emblematic for the rapid mainstreaming of supportive attitudes towards forced migrants in Germany during the so-

called ‘summer of welcome’ (Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Steinhilper & Karakayali, 2018).

While forced migration became the dominant political issue in summer 2015, both visibility of and support for forced migrant activists decreased substantially. The more predominantly German actors populated the contentious arena and spoke *about* ‘the refugees’, the more forced migrants were conceived as mute victims or indistinctive mass. Many activists from the ‘Oranienplatz’-movement observed that other actors had taken over the role of representing forced migrants (Interview B1, Interview B4, Interview B11). Due to the dominant framing of the ‘crisis’ as a humanitarian emergency, and the factual incapability of the state to provide services, the solidarity movement increasingly focused on ‘direct social actions’ (Bosi & Zamponi, 2015) and more broadly, a ‘dispositive of helping’ (Steinhilper & Fleischmann, 2016). Autonomous forced migrant activists repeatedly criticized the shift towards humanitarianism and the de-politicization of forced migration (glokal e.V., 2017; Omwenyike, 2016; Painemal & Bahar, 2017; Ulu et al., 2016).

In the light of the fragmented terrain of political mobilizations by forced migrants at the time of investigation and an increasing involvement of pro-beneficiaries since the ‘long summer of migration’ (Kasperek & Speer, 2015), the case study does not conceive ‘Berlin’ as the contentious arena to be studied, but homes in on micro-interactions of one specific group. Indeed, as the accounts will document, the protest group operated in a niche of the migrant movement field in Berlin and often reached beyond the capital (and Germany) in its activities. This points to the fundamental constructionist nature of ‘contentious arenas’. They are not pre-defined entities, but emerge in collective action and can thus take diverse sizes and shapes. In the following sections, I will first introduce the group and outline its activities. Subsequently, I will home in on the (transnational) relational and spatial patterns underlying their contentious practices.

#### *Transnational Contention by Forced Migrants in Berlin*

The activist group I focus on in this chapter consisted of forced migrants from various Western and Central African countries, all male in their mid-20s to mid-40s. All members spoke a common (colonial) language and multiple different local languages. While the size of the group was liable to change – the group involved around ten core members and another two dozen individuals joining concrete protest events. Their legal status was diverse, including ‘Geduldete’, asylum-seekers in an on-going procedure and legal

residents. Yet, all started their activism as asylum-seekers and the group referred to its activities as ‘refugee self-organization’ (Interview B1, Interview B27, Interview B30). Most of the group’s members arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2015. While their individual biographies of forced migration differed considerably, most shared a long phase of transmigration and the experience of exploitation and violence on their way to and within Europe (Interview B27, Interview B30, Interview B35). All described their decision to leave their country of origin to be rooted in violations of human rights, poverty and a fundamental lack of perspectives (Interview B27, Interview B30, Interview B35). As I will argue below, these specific migration histories are an important component in understanding the social relations these individuals developed and the form of political activism they practiced.

Not least with a view to illustrating the fundamentally different scale of activism by asylum-seekers in Berlin compared to the precarious sparks of protest sketched out in the context of the Parisian ‘La Chapelle’-arena (Chapter 7), I start with an empirical vignette:

‘It is one of the frequent grey and cold Berlin winter days in early February 2016. At an iconic former border post, once separating US-American and Soviet tanks, around 50 refugee and non-refugee activists gather for a sit-in. Banners read “Stop war on migrants”, and “Freedom not Frontex”. Photographs of dead bodies and mourning crowds at a sea shore are displayed on the sidewalk. It is a commemoration of the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 2014, when 9 migrants died in their attempt to reach Ceuta from Morocco swimming, the Spanish ‘Guardia Civil’ shooting at them with rubber bullets. The flyers distributed announce simultaneous events for the same day in Morocco, Spain and Berlin. Mamadou, a charismatic and experienced speaker weaves his own biography of forced migration through Morocco and Spain into a general narrative of migrants’ experience of violence and structural exclusion both at the external borders and after their arrival in Germany’ (Field notes, 06/02/2016).

The vignette above describes a protest event organized by forced migrants, which was inherently transnational: both in its framing and action in two national settings simultaneously. German solidarity activists were present, assisted with logistical support in the organization of the event, yet the clear protagonists and only speakers were forced migrants. My participant observation, interviews and document analyses in the upcoming months unveiled that this event was by no means an exceptional case of their activism. On the contrary, the frequency, intensity and transnationality of their political activism was striking: From 2014 to 2016, members of the group (co-)organized two international refugee conferences with a total of more than 2,000 participants in Berlin and Hamburg;

they participated in dozens of conferences and workshops all over Germany; they organized countless demonstrations, visits to asylum facilities to mobilize new activists and engaged in concrete acts of resistance against deportations (Interview B1, Interview B27, Interview B29, Interview B30). Among these activities, many occurred either outside Germany (including a protest March to Brussels, a protest against Frontex at its headquarters in Warsaw and numerous transnational networking events among forced migrants), involved participants from more than one European country, or explicitly targeted actors beyond the locality of reception. Group members were among the founders of three transnational migrant rights networks (yet no longer as active in all of them). During the time of my ethnographic research, members of the group organized a conference on migrant rights in two African cities, a transnational protest event against deportations in Brussels and participated in transnational protest events in the framework of various networks in which they were members.

This cursory overview demonstrates the frequency and transnationality of the group's protest activities. At first sight, this type of mobilization is puzzling in the light of the structural difficulties described in previous parts of this thesis, but also given the additional challenges of transnational mobilization (Mathers, 2007). In multiple conversations and participations in events, I scrutinized which relational and spatial dynamics contributed to their mobilization in the first place and the sustained organization of (transnational) protest against all odds.

### **8.3. Transnational Spaces of Exclusion and Solidarity**

In contrast to many other cases of political mobilizations of (forced) migrants (Pulido, 2006), including in Berlin (Ataç et al., 2015; Jakob, 2016), only one of the protest group's members had an explicit background as political activist in the country of origin. Most members became politicized in a long (up to 10 years) and burdensome process of transmigration in Africa and Europe. Through personal experiences and accounts of others, the members of the group developed a deep feeling of injustice with regard to European border politics and a sense of responsibility toward those who were left behind in the country of origin and at multiple locations in transit (Interview B1, Interview B27, Interview B30, Field notes 25/01/2017). Individual emotions of *grief* and *indignation* were deeply inscribed in their migration project. The biography of Mamadou gives an idea of these processes of migrating into grievances: he left his city of origin in 2003, forced away by widespread poverty, human rights violations, authoritarian government

and the expectations of his family. He took the common track through Mali to Algeria, towards the Mediterranean shores. It became a burdensome passage of exploitation, forced labour, deprivation and violence lasting for several years. During this time, he migrated within fragile networks of self-help. At various nodes, he had to rely on precarious solidarity structures, in which scarce resources and information were shared. The longer the transmigration lasted, the more personal experiences and stories of fellow migrants accumulated: all entailing imprisonment, deportation, exploitation, sexual abuse and death (Interview B3, Interview B6, Interview B30).

In many regards, up to this point, Mamadou's story is not exceptional. On the contrary, it resembles many illegalized African migrants' trajectories zigzagging the African continent to the Mediterranean shores (Andersson, 2016; Carling, 2007; Crawley, Düvell, Jones, McMahon, & Sigona, 2016). Other members of the activist group in Berlin had similar experiences on their way to Europe (Interview B27, Interview B28, Field notes, 26/07/2016). Consequently, all shared a collective memory of exclusion and violence and the sense of responsibility toward those left behind. Also, all group members were connected to other individuals in other locations in Europe and Africa, who had experienced or continued to experience similar deprivations. Indeed, even those group members who had found a route to Germany with fewer privations were politicised by the accounts of fellow forced migrants.

Accordingly, the members of the group were embedded in transnational social spaces connecting individuals with shared emotions, grief and grievances in various places in Europe and Africa. These ties were facilitated by cultural and linguistic proximity on the one side, but equally importantly by shared experiences and memories of violence and exclusion in transmigration and the locality of reception. The quote of one refugee activist I interviewed stands representative for a common sentiment I encountered multiple times during my research:

‘We are living the same pain, the same difficulties, we understand each other better, because we share the same experience, the same suffering. If you interact with a European, this is always indirect, because he has never lived this and even if the European tries hard to imagine the suffering, it remains different from how it feels if you have lived it. This is this intuitive understanding’ (Interview B28).

These findings echo and specify multiple contributions in transnational migration, which have amply demonstrated that individuals with a migration history are usually embedded in transnational social spaces (Vertovec 2009; Faist et al. 2013; Pries 2001). Through

shared memories, mobile individuals and communication technologies, resources and emotions circulate across borders, resulting – next to kinship networks – also in ‘transnational communities’ (Faist, 1998, 2006). The latter are

‘dense and continuous sets of social and symbolic ties, characterised by a high degree of intimacy, emotional depth, moral obligation and sometimes even social cohesion’ (Faist 2006: 5).

Such communities are often (but not necessarily) characterized by a common religion or country of origin (diaspora), however, most importantly by reservoirs of common experiences. At times, such social configurations can bring about

‘mechanisms creating this sense of moral responsibility, social cohesion, despite a lack of long patterns of personal interaction or kinship’ (Faist, 2006).

I argue that the members of the activist group in Berlin were embedded in a particular type of political community, which was not primarily rooted in a common homeland (diaspora) or kinship, but in shared experiences of exclusion. This specific kind of social space can be understood as ‘latent transnational contentious space’, which can be activated for political mobilizations in the case of advantageous relational qualities in the places of arrival.<sup>95</sup> I will argue subsequently that transnational practices in general, and contentious practices in particular, require a firm grounding at the local level, offering resources to politicize these transnational communities. Before discussing the relational and spatial patterns in which the activist group was embedded in Berlin, and which allowed to access the ‘latent transnational contentious spaces’ illustrated above, I add here another element of Mamadou’s experience of migrating into political activism.

According to his accounts, Mamadou’s awareness as a political activist starts with what he called an ‘epiphany’ (Interview B1, Interview B6) in an Algerian prison sometime in 2010. He had been arrested with many other illegalized migrants, without really understanding why at the time. After months of imprisonment, he was deported to the Malian desert, where he luckily met representatives of a self- organization of West African deportees to Mali, providing temporary shelter, food and contacts for those in need. The endless months in the Algerian prison after years of burdensome transmigration

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<sup>95</sup> Thomas Faist prepared a similar argument over a decade ago, however, without developing it further – neither theoretically nor empirically. He suggested: ‘It is plausible to argue that transnational political activists, for example, are not merely internationally oriented cosmopolitans, but rather need a firm grounding in local contexts. In other words, transnationalization is situated between a “space of flows” and a “space of places”’ (Faist 2006: 7).

had planted a seed of dissent. When he met various activists and journalists in Mali, he became increasingly politicized (Interview B3, Interview B6, Interview B30).

When he recalled his politicization on an extremely hot summer day during an African cultural event in central Berlin, he took out a piece of paper from his backpack and began to draw a detailed timeline of his activism, naming crucial persons and organizations he met. It started with the prison in Algeria. From the moment of encounter with Malian and European activists in Bamako, he continued his attempt to Europe once more alone, but he started collecting contacts to humanitarian organizations, fellow migrants and activists. Some he met repeatedly during his repeatedly intercepted paths North (Interview B6). Stuck for an extensive period of time in the makeshift camps outside the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta, he eventually succeeded in crossing to Spain in a rubber dinghy and continued to Germany, where he applied for asylum (Interview B30).

#### **8.4. Spatial Patterns and Fragile Solidarity in Berlin**

The multiple grievances accumulated on the way to Europe and through exchange with fellow migrants did not translate mechanically into political mobilization after their arrival in Europe. On the contrary, by filing an asylum claim, all members of the group entered the highly restrictive and disintegrating German asylum system, aptly described in Chapter 4. All members of the group had hoped that with entering the German asylum system, their exhausting journeys and experiences of exclusion were about to end. Yet – they encountered a different situation:

‘When I arrived in Germany it was a shock. The asylum camp. You are stuck there; you do not have the control of yourself anymore. It is a system that controls you. You cannot leave when you want, there are hours at which you have to be back, hours at which you have to eat, you cannot prepare your own food. (...) You do not know anyone; you do not understand the language; (...) for me it was a shock’ (Interview B30).

After the first reception, the members were transferred to various municipalities in Brandenburg, none of them located in an urban centre. While they had expected the German asylum to be a space of protection and tranquillity, they perceived the tightly regulated and at the same time uncertain life in the German asylum system as fundamentally ‘stressful’ (Field notes 24/07/2016, Interview B27). They repeatedly referred to the lack of privacy, uncertainty about the future, a lack of autonomy, a disintegration from society and felt lost in the complex bureaucratic procedure. The



members reported regular incidences of (auto-)aggression in the centres and remembered their own feelings of apathy, disillusion and isolation. In sum, life in the German asylum system was perceived as a fundamental injustice with highly negative emotional and physical effects. In these regards, the activist's experiences echoed the numerous reports and social scientific studies on the everyday life and emotional experiences of asylum-seekers in Germany (Dilger, Dohrn, & International Women Space, 2016; Johansson, 2016; Pieper, 2008; Täubig, 2009).

Accordingly, the members of the group found themselves in a highly disadvantageous context for political mobilization after arriving in Germany. Moreover, the asylum system provided also unfavourable conditions for sustaining the transnational social spaces they had established through their migration project. For these reasons, Janine Dahinden considers asylum-seekers as 'transnational outsiders' (Dahinden, 2010: 57):

'Typically, in Europe, asylum-seekers, recently arrived migrants from non-EU countries and sometimes even legal refugees represent this type. These migrants do not circulate between their country of origin and the immigration country, often because circulation is cut off due to persecution in the home country and, more generally, because they do not have the right to travel due to their legal status as asylum-seekers. Simultaneously – and again because of their legal status – their often limited access to jobs or other resources in the immigration country forms an obstacle to local embeddedness' (ibid).

Indeed, even though further experiences of exclusion and injustice added in the German asylum system to those grievances accumulated by the group members on the way to Europe (Interview B3, Interview B6, Interview B27), it required access to social networks in Berlin to translate grief, anger and feelings of injustice into political mobilization.

Given the disadvantageous relational qualities of asylum facilities in general, and particularly in their German variant, almost all group members' biographies of explicit political activism started with *mechanisms breaking the disintegration in the centres*. In this regard, the centralization of asylum-seekers in collective facilities proved to be paradoxically as an advantage, as it allowed for a targeted outreach of activists in solidarity. Various members of the activist group in Berlin found the way out of the rigid control in the asylum centres via an activist practice called 'camp visits', explicitly tailored to the specific context of isolation in the asylum system: Anti-racist and particularly self-organized forced migrant groups developed the strategy to visit asylum camps on a regular basis, with a view to sharing information on legal support, political

activities and inviting asylum-seekers to (temporarily) leave the facilities. Over many years, such visits have become a ‘fundamental element of the work of self-organized refugee groups to visit camps as often as possible’ (Watara, 2013).

The story of Saïd, one of the core members of the activist group, exemplifies this mechanism of engagement. It was told to me by another activist of the group:

‘We have this element of camp visits. One Sunday [we go] to one camp, then to another one. And this day it was the camp of Saïd. I did not know him, he was in his room, sleeping. He had severe problems, loss of memory, trauma. I spoke with him and invited him to an activist meeting. He did not have a place to sleep so he slept at my place. It was not only him, also many others became active in this way’ (Interview B28).

Saïd confirmed this first visit as the crucial moment in which he understood that there was hope and a way to transform indignation and grief into something productive (Interview B27). From that moment on, he gradually became involved in various activist groups and eventually started co-organizing himself camp visits on a regular basis in order to reach out to asylum-seekers in a similar state of apathy and despair as he had been.

A second example is the story of Eric. He arrived in Europe through the Balkan route in early 2015 and was transferred to a first reception centre, infamous for its conditions, located at the periphery of Brandenburg. Anxious about his future, he felt also stuck, abandoned and isolated due to the very little access to German society for spatial and linguistic reasons:

‘After a while, I met Aboubakar, a refugee who has become regularized. He works with refugees and explains how refugees have the capacity to fight for themselves. He invited me to one of his conferences. There, it was the first time I met refugee activists from Berlin. I was really motivated, I was galvanised. Now I am in 8 groups, but it started with the visit of Aboubakar’ (Interview B28).

These visits were for many the *sine qua non* for their political mobilization. Both Eric and Saïd described two aspects which were essential for them in order to get engaged. Firstly, the exchange (in a familiar language) with fellow migrants with similar biographies of forced migration, of suffering and feelings of exclusion; and secondly, an exchange with individuals who had managed to overcome the state of apathy and despair and had successfully left the asylum centres behind. The combination of these two elements constituted the basis for trust and the gradual establishment of ‘strong ties’, which were crucial for taking the risk and stepping out of the regulated routine in the

centres.

While being important mechanisms for breaking with the isolation, the ‘camp visits’ were not the only mechanisms through which trust could be built and eventually, local support structures accessed. Two members of the group, including Mamadou whose story has been described above, had a comparative advantage. They had come to know and then lost each other repeatedly during their long transmigration to Europe. In 2013 they met again in a first reception centre in Brandenburg after a long time of separation. Even though they were sent to different facilities subsequently, they were able to keep in touch and share information. Furthermore, both of them had kept the contacts of activists from various European countries they had met during their long transmigration. These contacts scattered all over Europe reconnected them to the ‘Oranienplatz’-camp in Berlin, which still existed at the time (see Chapter 6). Through the camp and the other contacts, they had built up while on the move, they were able to gain access to local support milieus, without being personally reached by a ‘camp visit’ (Interview B30, Field notes 05/04/2016). Another member of the group was one of those, who had left his asylum facility and joined the protest camp at ‘Oranienplatz’ shortly after its establishment in 2012. He joined the group after the ‘Oranienplatz’-community had fallen apart (Field notes 06/06/2016).

Following the first encounters with self-organized groups, individual forced migrant activists and support groups, the members of the group rapidly immersed in anti-racist and migrant rights movements in the city of Berlin. These alternative political milieus have for a long time been concentrated in the neighbourhoods of Kreuzberg and Neukölln with a long history of counterhegemonic movements and large migrant communities (Lang, 1998; Stehle, 2006), offering numerous initiatives and safe spaces for personal exchange and political organizing. Since the ‘Oranienplatz’-movement, however, additional meeting points, information platforms (such as oplatz.net) and networks have emerged from which the activists could benefit (Field notes 05/04/2016, 30/05/2017, Interview B6).

These networks embedded resources which were paramount for the group’s and individual activist’s political activity. Asked which individuals and associations they considered important for their work, all respondents referred to the membership in various anti-racist groups (involving persons with and without migration history), as well as contacts to NGOs and foundations with access to money, legal advice, logistics and

information. All members of the group acknowledged that such external resources were indispensable for compensating the resources lacking within the forced migrant community. One of the group members noted in an interview:

‘In the self-organization, we have limited means with regard to everything, in logistics, finance, even to understanding how the system works, not to speak about the language. We need them [the non-migrant supporters], it is impossible without them’ (Interview B28).

Indeed, during all meetings and protest events I participated in, the group had to a significant degree to rely on translation, the provision of rooms, and the know-how and associative status of German NGOs to tap funds. Most resources were mobilized *ad hoc*, using the multiple ties to supporting environments that the group members had accumulated. These relations were often of a relatively pragmatic, yet indispensable nature, and often dissolved due (amongst other reasons) to shifting priorities of the supporting actors or perceived lack of recognition. Given the often short-termed ties and the focus on (logistic) support, I consider these ties to be largely ‘weak ties’, with a limited degree of emotional depth. While small-scale protest events could be mobilized using the network of decentralized individual resources, larger campaigns or events, including those with transnational components, required the cooperation with associations recognized by German law as brokers to apply for funds.

It is of no surprise that marginalized actors are often forced to rely on the support of more individuals and groups, with more privileged access to resources and rights. Yet, both the access to such networks and their perpetuation was confronted with considerable obstacles. Accessing support networks came for the activists of the group with considerable investments. Even when basic trust was created, activism required for most a constant back-and-forth between their designated and strongly disciplined official residence and the meeting points and autonomous spaces of the anti-racist movements in the city of Berlin, predominantly in the neighbourhoods of Kreuzberg and Neukölln. Only two of the group members lived in central Berlin. Many others were registered in asylum camps in Brandenburg, travelling for several hours a day to participate in assemblies or meetings. According to the members of the group, these costs, and the risks of being involved in activism during an administrative procedure as well as strong dependence on the state discouraged many asylum-seekers from becoming involved. During the camp visit organized by the group in which I participated, many fellow asylum-seekers expressed gratitude for the visits and shared the demands, yet either preferred to remain

silent as a strategy or simply were not willing or capable to make the indispensable investments. Accordingly, one of the activists reflected in a personal interview:

‘We have a problem of distance and mobility. How can you be political activists without the possibility to be mobile? Some camps are very far away, the ticket is expensive and at night there are no buses to go back after a meeting for example. So you need a place to sleep in the city if you want to leave the camp. This is complicated’ (Interview B28).

In many cases, those (few) forced migrants living in the urban centres offered sleeping places for the others who could not get back home to their remote asylum centres after political meetings in the evening.

Even though the access to non-migrant support networks provided crucial resources for the organization of political protest, the resulting interactions between individuals with and without history of forced migration were characterized by breaking points, which were often – but not exclusively (Ünsal, 2015) rooted in asymmetrical power positions. The *de facto* and perceived dependence on domestic so-called ‘support’ constituted a constant challenge for cooperation throughout the period of my participation.<sup>96</sup> Whereas forced migrant supporters were mostly warmly and explicitly welcomed, many viewed the arrival of unknown supporters or representatives of groups with deep suspicion. During my participation, regularly irritation and open conflicts arose with supporters. Whereas representatives of established associations felt the need to clarify the scope and terms of cooperation, many members of the group suspected that paternalistic behaviour undermined autonomous organizing by forced migrants (e.g. Field notes 17/07/2016, 31/08/2016, 24/07/2017). In a personal interview one of the members, visibly outraged, explained:

‘We [self-organized refugees] have been exploited, we have been working for others and their projects. There is no need to set up projects for us or to take our ideas and develop them further! We believe there is a system of paternalism in the movement. We can work together, on the same level. But do not come to help us’ (Interview B30).

All members of the group considered their activities to be, as Monforte and Dufour have termed them, ‘acts of emancipation’ (2013). Beyond criticizing specificities of the asylum system, the members of the group constantly struggled to abandon their ascribed role as subalterns. Questioning deeply rooted and unequal power-relations, unmasking racism,

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<sup>96</sup> Similar experiences were encountered during the ‘refugee protest camp’ at ‘Oranienplatz’ in Berlin (Jakob, 2016; Ünsal, 2015) as well as in other regional contexts (for the USA see Nicholls, 2013; for Italy see Cappiali, 2016b).

and by this ‘decolonizing Europe’ (Interview B1), were hence considered explicitly as an inherent element of their activism. Due to this sensitivity, many ties with non-migrant supporters broke along the lines of alleged paternalism and racism (and resentful denial of such accusations) (Field notes, 17/17/2016, 24/07/2016). The fear of being patronized was deeply rooted and cooperation with native support viewed with scepticism and often preventively avoided if negative experiences had been encountered. In consequence, the range of allies was rather limited. Most of the so-called ‘welcome initiatives’, which had mushroomed in Berlin since 2015, were considered counterproductive to forced migrant organizing. Hence, only those actors with an explicit post-colonial and anti-racist identity were considered as potential allies.

Not least due to structural power asymmetries and the resulting tensions, most of the relations between forced migrants and pro-beneficiaries took the shape of ‘weak ties’, meaning ties providing access to social capital which was otherwise blocked and which were often characterized by pragmatism rather than emotional depth and intuitive understanding. Asked about the role of pro-beneficiary antiracist groups, one of the forced migrant activists responded: ‘No, no, this is not real solidarity, it is more networking’ (Field notes, 30/05/2017, similarly also Interview B1). In some cases, certainly, interactions with ‘supporters’ resulted in emotionally deep relationships. Without intending to provide a mechanical account, the qualitative difference between weak ties with the support scene and strong, empathetic, ties within the forced migrant community, was repeatedly stressed. Also in practice, crucial decisions and sensitive questions were discussed predominantly within the core group, without the involvement of supporters. This distinction of transparency and openness within the core group and scepticism and secrecy towards non-migrant outsiders, in turn, alienated numerous supporters, who subsequently withdrew from assisting the group. Certainly, the relations among the members of the group also were not without tension (see below). Yet, the breaking points were different. Perceived dependency, paternalism or racism were never the breaking points in these interactions.

### **8.5. Transnational Political Communities: Cohesion and Cleavages**

Referring to the different qualities of ties among supporters and forced migrants - which are to be understood as ideal types rather than neat distinctions in practice - does not mean in turn, that the forced migrant community is to be understood as a monolithic entity. On the contrary, and similar to the patterns of internal division identified in the previous

chapters, questions of (potential) legal status, origin and race played an important fragmenting role. Indeed, the group remained throughout the time of my participation limited to Sub-Saharan-African members. While originating from different countries, they shared a colonial language, specific migration histories and experiences of racism as Black persons in Germany. Even though attempts were made repeatedly to reach out to the large Syrian and Afghan forced migrant communities – often in response to explicit suggestions by supporters - the efforts systematically failed. At times, linguistic obstacles hindered a sustainable interaction. At times, however, cleavages between different migrant groups became evident. The members of the group felt structurally disadvantaged as Black Africans, not only by government authorities, but also by supporters (Interview B3, Interview B35) in comparison to ‘the Syrians’ (Interview B1, Interview B3, Interview B35). Given the specific experiences of racism, very low recognition rates and histories of European colonialism made an interaction with other African forced migrants that were more intuitive, and sustainable in practice. Thus, the transnational social spaces in which the activists were embedded, were not particularly multi-ethnic. Rather, they connected individuals in Berlin to others elsewhere in Germany, Europe and Africa with similarities in language, region of origin and experiences of exclusion.

With the resources mobilized through local support networks in Berlin, the activist group managed to activate the ‘latent transnational contentious spaces’ outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Accordingly, the group’s local protest events took on a specific shape: the events were heavily diffused transnationally through diverse email-lists and various social media channels. Activists from the same region of origin living in other cities in Germany (or even abroad) were invited to join. Parallel events in various countries were almost always considered or organized. Scarce resources (both in terms of money and time) were invested to foster these bonds, sometimes at the expense of mobilizing more intensely at the local level. The contacts used to organize transnational events were established on the move and during previous protest events. Through regular exchange via social media channels, the networks could be sustained even without regular face-to-face interaction. While many activists of the group travelled regularly within Germany and Europe, participation in protest events in Africa, were, for obvious reasons, limited to those with an official residence permit in Germany. However, others were constantly integrated in the activities via videos, what’s-app groups etc. And even without personal mobility, information and expressions of solidarity were regularly exchanged across borders.

The importance of the local embeddedness for accessing resources for political activism was also key in activating the ‘latent transnational contentious spaces’. As Dahinden has argued, ‘transnational practices and formations cannot develop separately but are linked to the constraints and opportunities imposed by specific contexts’ (Dahinden, 2010: 69). In the light of specific opportunities (resources mobilized in Berlin) and constraints (e.g. cleavages with other migrant communities), the transnational contentious practices of the group took this particular shape.

During my fieldwork, consequently, I witnessed a transnational contentious space around forced migration spanning various locations in Europe and connecting forced migrants with similar backgrounds. Interestingly, the counterparts in other European countries mobilized under the label ‘sans-papiers’ rather than ‘refugees’ as the group in Berlin. The transnational allies also included the CSP75 group in Paris (see Chapter 5), with which the activists in Berlin regularly interacted. This points to the fact that protest arenas, particularly in contentious migration politics are not separate entities, but embedded in transnational social spaces.

## **8.6. Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have investigated an inherently transnational arena of forced migrant activism between 2015 and 2016 in Berlin. As this close-up immersion with one group of forced migrant activists underlined, contentious arenas are, in Massey’s terms, ‘place-based’ (in Berlin), but not necessarily ‘place-bound’ (Massey, 1991: 279). The arena, in which the activist group engaged, involved local supporters, other forced migrant communities in Berlin, but also fellow migrant activists in other places in Europe and Africa.

Substantially, the case study reveals certain characteristics of forced migrant activism, which are partly related to the migration histories of the individuals involved, but which also point to the spatial and relational underpinnings of political activism by asylum-seekers in Germany. I argue that this group of forced migrants mobilized within two (connected) spaces: a transnational space connecting migrants with grievances rooted in similar migration histories at different locations in Europe and Africa as well as the particular relational and spatial qualities of the local space in Berlin.

The transnational orientation of the activist group is owed to their firm rootedness in transnational life worlds. These transnational social spaces, which connect almost all (forced) migrants to individuals with similar experiences in different locations on the



globe – even more so in a networked society – are also mirrored in practices of political activism. In the case of the group in Berlin, they have established social networks with a sense of solidarity based on shared reservoirs of experiences of suffering and exclusion as African migrants.

These transnational social spaces of migration can be politicized if resources, or ‘mobilizing capital’, is accessed through support networks at the locality of destination. In this regard, the chapter echoes key findings in Chapter 6 on specific geographies of exclusion (and contestation) in the German asylum system: engaging in political mobilizations as asylum-seekers in Germany presupposes overcoming specific spatial and relational obstacles which are inherent to the system of accommodation. Without specific mechanisms to break the exclusion in most of the asylum facilities, asylum-seekers were unable to access the resources needed to organize and sustain political protest and to activate the ‘latent transnational contentious spaces’ established during the migration project. Hence, a particular repertoire of contention including ‘camp visits’ has been tailored to overcome the specific obstacles of migrant agency in the German context. Often it is the stepping out of their allocated place, that allows asylum-seekers to access local support structures embedded in social movement milieus, which usually concentrate in urban areas.

The case study furthermore suggests qualitatively different (ideal-)types of social ties: strong ties are often built based on linguistic and cultural proximity, but also on similar reservoirs of experiences of exclusion in restrictive migration regimes. Relationships between forced migrants and non-migrants often unfold under the shadow of highly unequal positions of power and often result in highly fragile ties prone to breaking as a result of questions of paternalism, racism or allegations of these. In consequence, such ties often focus on accessing resources the individual would otherwise not have; they, thus, could be understood predominantly as ‘weak ties’. On the other hand, shared experiences of discrimination, violence and subordination facilitate the creation of ‘strong ties’ of trust and mutual understanding. Such relations are often paramount for forced migrants to dare to take the step out of the isolated asylum facilities and join contentious activities.

This ‘intuitive’ understanding based on shared experience, does, however, often not translate into sustainable cooperation among migrant communities from different regional origins. Similarly to the illustrations in other chapters of this thesis, differences

in (potential) legal status, recognition and rates and public discourses distinguishing ‘real refugees’ from ‘bogus asylum-seekers’, but also questions of leadership, introduced considerable obstacles to common organizing efforts. While being well connected within the local ‘refugee movement’ in Berlin, these ties were rarely translated into sustainable collective action with members of different origin and background. Transnational organization within communities interwoven on the move and drawing from similar experiences of forced migration, was, indeed, more intuitive (and successful) than bridging the multiple divides of diverse refugee communities (in terms of language, religion etc.) at the local level.

Once the group had accessed local resources, the transnational social spaces most migrants inhabit, were able to be transformed into particular transnational social formations – for which I suggest the term ‘transnational contentious communities’. Within such formations, marginalized migrants are able to organize and sustain transnational political protest against all evident odds. These transnational communities, which draw from shared experiences, link individuals in various countries in Europe, despite the fact that different legal attributes are given to the persons involved in different European countries. As a result, ‘refugees’ in Germany have mobilized alongside ‘sans-papiers’ in France.

In many regards, the transnational patterns described in this chapter are not exceptional. Even though the focus was placed more on local configurations, transnational patterns were also present in the other arenas under investigation: The CSP75 in Paris, has been likewise involved in transnational activism for many years. These included protest events at various EU-Africa summits, a transnational march in the context of the World Social Forum 2011 (Andersson, 2016: 245 ff.; Jakob, 2011) as well as the co-organization of two European marches in 2012 and 2014 (Swerts, 2017). The ‘Oranienplatz’-movement in turn, was key in organizing a transnational march to Brussels in 2014 (Langa, 2015; Mauer, 2014). Eventually, particularly the Sudanese forced migrants at ‘La Chapelle’ aimed at connecting a scattered transnational community to politicize both exclusion in various countries in Europe and the root causes of their forced migration. Given the conditions of ‘bare life’ and limited rootedness in Paris, however, these efforts did not reach the same degree of organization as in the case of the protest group in Berlin.

Broadly, the argument presented in this chapter points to the heuristic value of bridging insights from social movements and transnational migration literature with a view to understanding political protest of migrants. It urges to adapt established toolkits for the analysis of political mobilizations in the specific contexts and transnational life worlds of migrants, which provide certain specific opportunities and inclinations for transnational activism.

## **Part III: Patterns and Specificities**

### **Chapter 9**

#### **Comparing Contentious Arenas around Forced Migration**

#### **Patterns of Interaction & the Relational Qualities of Space**

##### **9.1. Introduction**

In her seminal study on the *sans-papiers* movement in France up to the 1990s, Siméant has pointed to an ‘almost typical characteristic and evolution of the protest by irregular migrants in terms of claims and repertoires of contention’ (1998: 17, author's translation from French), particularly with regard to the specific function of hunger strikes (see also Jasper, Siméant, & Traini, 2016). In this synthesizing chapter, I intend to follow her example. While the empirical chapters in Part II of this manuscript focused on specific arenas and constellations of players, Part III uses a macro lens to derive patterns from the four cases. In doing so, I intend to capitalize on the productive tension of ‘political ethnography’ (Schatz, 2009a), which combines focusing in on and moving away from single cases in order to capture both the specific and the systematic. The investigation of four arenas unfolding in two locations in different moments in time allows for a tentative identification of key characteristics of forced migrant activism. Such patterns shed light on the obstacles, ‘niche openings’ (Nicholls, 2014), and trajectories of these contentious practices. Eventually, they contribute to the existing knowledge of how marginalized individuals and groups become visible as political subjects and how they organize political protest against all the odds of exclusive migration regimes.

The chapter is structured as follows: it starts by highlighting the advantages of using an ‘arenas’ approach to the study of forced migrant mobilizations (9.2.), followed by a synthesis of the ‘relational qualities of space’, pointing to both spaces of exclusion and spaces of contestation (9.3.). The subsequent sections derive patterns of interactions and strategic dilemmas in forced migrant activism from the empirical cases. Whereas 9.4. points to the fragile relations between forced migrants and pro-beneficiaries, 9.5. focuses on the internal heterogeneity of forced migrant activists, mobilizing in highly narrow legal and socio-political ‘niches’. In addition to the common dynamics identified in all the arenas, this chapter also highlights facets of forced migrant mobilizations, which were not equally strong in all the arenas studied, yet which add to a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. These are, for instance, the obstacles of political mobilization in a condition of ‘bare life’, and the transnationality of forced migrant mobilizations (9.6).

## **9.2. The Merits of a ‘Contentious Arenas’ Approach**

Applying a ‘contentious arenas’ lens to the study of political mobilizations by forced migrants unveils the relational dynamics of incubation and fragmentation, which are crucial to understanding precarious activism. All four arenas underlined that

‘the main constraints on what protestors can accomplish are not determined directly by economic and political structures so much as they are imposed by other players with different goals and interests’ (Jasper 2014: 9).

The diverse contentious subjects scrutinized in these chapters were engaged in arenas in which a myriad of actors competed for influence and recognition. In consequence, the social relations developing during these waves of mobilization were characterized by volatility and fragility, rather than by a stable network structure. The players’ interests and options were shaped in the process rather than pre-given. Players emerged, split and changed sides during the mobilizations; some, conceived as part of the same compound player in one moment in time, were at a later point considered key opponents. In some occasions and spatial configurations, micro-interactions incubated sparks of dissent into larger mobilizations, often involving both forced migrants and pro-beneficiaries. In other spatial settings, diversity and precariousness favoured fragmentation and demobilization.

Stressing the role of micro-interactions in contentious arenas does not mean that macro institutions such as social, administrative and legal contexts do not matter. On the contrary, an arena approach precisely illustrates how, in the case of migrant mobilizations in Berlin and Paris, different legal status, accommodation systems and social movement

traditions intervene in concrete interactions. Indeed, in most of the cases studied, they proved to be important breaking points for the establishment or maintenance of social ties. Arenas are, thus, fundamentally ‘situated’ in spatial and temporal contexts. As an illustration, forced migrants mobilized in Paris and Berlin in distinct ‘borderline citizenship regimes’ (Monforte & Dufour, 2011) and relational contexts which made them mobilize mainly as ‘sans-papiers’ in France and as ‘refugees’ in Germany, despite at times equivalent biographical features. Yet institutional opportunities and constraints were not essential as such, but rather in their concrete effect on the making and breaking of social ties, which underlie all processes of political mobilization. Indeed, the accounts of the four arenas illustrate that the protesters did not react upon opening opportunity structures, and relied exclusively on ‘internal’ resources as traditional social movement theories would expect. Rather, resources were mobilized in spaces with specific relational qualities and through contentious interactions with other players. Demobilization, similarly, was shaped importantly by direct exchanges leading to alienations and fragmentations rather than fundamental changes at the macro level.

While being nested in specific locations and moments in time, the different arenas studied in Part II are also connected in various ways. Activists in Berlin are embedded in transnational social spaces, which also involve players in Paris and vice-versa. Thus an arena approach seems to open also paths to address the pitfalls of ‘methodological nationalism’ (see also section 9.6. below). Furthermore, the interactions unfolding in contentious arenas are often rooted in and relate to memories of previous interactions made during the migration project. This becomes particularly evident in the chapter on the CSP75 and the subsequent mobilizations from 2015 onwards in the Parisian North.

For these reasons, an arena approach, particularly in a comparative perspective, allows to grasp the complexity, volatility and fragility of political mobilizations of marginalized actors, which are incompatible with more structural models of contention (see also Chabanet & Royall, 2014).

### **9.3. The ‘Relational Qualities of Space’**

A spatial lens on forced migrant mobilizations unveils both spatial structures of exclusion and repertoires of contention to overcome them. Combined with an arena perspective, a spatial sensitivity facilitates the identification of the ‘relational qualities of space’ (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016); hence the scrutiny of the mobilizing and demobilizing effects of certain spatialities. This sensitivity is of particular pertinence, given the

disintegrating nature of spaces many migrants are forced into during the different stages of reception in the destination countries. As ‘non-places’ many asylum facilities in both Germany and France are located in peripheral areas, deliberately complicating mobility and access to social networks outside the centres. They are often ‘characterized by a sterilized, mono-functional enclosure: contact with the outer world is physically minimized behind the fences’ (Diken, 2004: 91), which signals exclusion and fosters feelings of isolation. In addition to formal migrant accommodation centres, makeshift camps of migrants have proliferated in Europe (Agier, 2011; Projeet Babels, 2017) due to governmental ‘violent inaction’ (Davies et al., 2017). Such camps, in turn, are spaces which inherently engender feelings of dehumanization and existential physical deprivation.

According to Scott (1990), ‘the practices and discourses of resistance’ cultivated by the marginalized cannot exist ‘without tacit or acknowledged coordination and communication within the subordinate group.’ Therefore, ‘the subordinate group must carve out for itself social spaces insulated from control and surveillance from above’ (Scott, 1990: 118). Grasping mobilizations of marginalized individuals and groups requires specific attention to these geographies of exclusion, which constitute important obstacles and require specific strategies to overcome them.

Applying a spatial perspective, all the chapters of this thesis suggest that marginalized protesters raised public attention and mobilized resources by moving from socially and spatially isolated locations into urban centres. In setting up camps, and organizing marches (in the case of Berlin and the CSP75), they literally left behind their excluded position and articulated a claim to urban and social centrality. Indeed, ‘due to their vulnerable status, refugees employ[ed] spatial strategies to create visibility against the exclusionary nature of policies’ (Ataç, 2016: 632).

The relocation from the periphery of the asylum camp (Germany), the migrant worker foyer (Paris) or the individualized life in the streets (Paris) to the inner city space broke the routine of forced migrant invisibility. Regrouping in central locations attracted media coverage, tapped resources that were needed in order to be recognized as political subjects, to perform ‘acts of citizenship’ and to organize political protest. While tent camps in both Berlin and Paris attracted resources, they differed fundamentally. Whereas in Paris, migrants gathered in a situation of ‘bare life’ as a combination of subsistence and strategy of visibility, the tent camps in Germany were deliberate autonomous spaces,

with comparatively less precarious living conditions. Despite these important differences, as autonomous spaces in contrast to regulated asylum facilities, the camps generated resources, attracting diverse support milieus from which forced migrants had been previously cut off. These insights resonate with a growing body of literature on the contradictory effects of migrant camps, reproducing both at times conditions of ‘bare life’ and constituting sites for encounter and resistance (Agier, 2011; D. Martin, 2015; Sanyal, 2014; Turner, 2016).

In Berlin, forced migrants gradually succeeded in compensating for the lack of resources and even in altering established power relations between migrants and pro-beneficiaries. The latter were attracted to the increasingly prominent protesters, who had thus a degree of choice in deciding with whom to work and whom to ignore. In addition to constituting ‘reservoirs for weak ties’, the protest camps served also as spaces of encounter and gradual trust-building among previously scattered forced migrant communities, in which stories and opinions could be shared and a collective identity developed – despite the tremendous heterogeneity of the actors involved. The condition of ‘bare life’ with extremely scarce resources in the tent camps and squats of Paris added obstacles to such rapprochements. Nevertheless, also in the ‘La Chapelle’-arena, almost all sparks of political mobilization emerged from the camps and the squats and their incubating qualities.

In both Berlin and Paris, the squats appropriated by forced migrants together with solidarity activists had highly ambivalent relational effects. At ‘Jean Quarré’ and ‘Gerhard-Hauptmann Schule’, particularly in their initial phases, these autonomous spaces provided a less precarious environment for interaction compared to the exposed street camps. Through the encounter of highly diverse actors, a wide range of political initiatives was able to develop, which also partly survived the eviction or evacuation of the places. This potential, however, increasingly faded when the spaces became overpopulated, conflicts proliferated and increasingly alienated the inhabitants from each other. Given the built-up environment, the proliferating tensions were sealed-in and, thus, accentuated in the building. Eventually, the spaces became projections of opposition to migrant solidarity movements as problems could be attributed to the occupants themselves and their internal organization, rather than serving as empowering catalysts of migrant visibility and political subjectivity. The squats organized by the forced migrants mobilizing as ‘sans-papiers’ in Paris constitute exceptions in this regard. Due to their comparative strength, given the large existing ethnic communities and established



structures of political organization, they succeeded in sustaining and effectively self-organizing the occupations at 'Bourse du Travail' and 'Baudelique' for extended periods of time with much fewer internal disputes. As a result, the autonomous squats in Paris could unfold more of their advantageous relational effects - attracting resources and facilitating exchange and encounter - compared to the other two cases of 'Jean Quarré' in Paris and 'Gerhard-Hauptmann-Schule' in Berlin.

#### **9.4. Interactionist Patterns I: Fragile Solidarity & Autonomy**

As various scholars have rightly pointed out, migrant mobilizations typically involve both migrants and a number of pro-beneficiary actors such as individual supporters and associations (Giugni & Passy, 2001; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016; Siméant, 1998). Such 'post-colonial encounters' of marginalized 'subalterns' and relatively privileged citizens often result in contentious interactions, in which questions of racism, paternalism and autonomy occupy a prominent place.

In all the cases presented in the empirical part of this thesis, forced migrants were very soon surrounded by a wide range of actors with highly diverse institutional agendas and *modi operandi*, including individual supporters without previous experience in activism, anarchist groups with radical repertoires of action and professionalized NGOs with established channels to the government. Conflicts arose regularly regarding the respective roles of migrants and non-migrants, both among pro-beneficiaries and between supporters and forced migrants.

While all the non-migrant associations and individuals involved in principle supported the cause of migrant rights, questions of leadership and strategies were heatedly contested. Many associations and individuals reacted with irritation to forced migrants actively claiming a position in the front row, or to their choice of strategies. They were profoundly uneasy about their role being limited to mere logistic support. Ties to established associations working on the issue of migration proved to be particularly fragile. Their traditional organizational identity of representing migrants and a focus on long-term 'strategies' regularly collided with the forced migrants' radical protest repertoire and their attempts to emancipate from a predominantly white migrant rights movement (and the society at large). These disputes could be in Jasper's terms understood as manifestations of the 'radicalism dilemma' and the 'universalism dilemma' combined.

'Radicalism Dilemma: In pushing ideas and actions to their extreme, radicals can gain publicity, recognition for a team, and often concessions. The moderate flank

might then present itself as a reasonable compromise partner, so that other players give it power in order to undercut the radicals (although the moderates must distance themselves from the radicals to garner these benefits)' (Jasper, 2008: 153).

'Universalism Dilemma: You are special in some way, different from other individuals or groups, and thus you deserve unusual protections, powers, authority, or respect' (Jasper, 2008: 126).

In the resulting interactions, activist forced migrants, in turn, felt their suspicion of ubiquitous paternalism and instrumentalization of their exclusion and suffering to be proven. In this context, it is key to recall that the sparks of protest at 'St. Ambroise' in 1996, at 'Bourse du Travail' in 2008 as well as in Wurzburg 2012 were ignited without the knowledge and initial support, and sometimes even despite the opposition, of a number of pro-migrant associations. At the same time, without the amplifying potential of a wider migrant rights movement, the episodes would have most likely remained scattered sparks.

Indeed, the forced migrant protesters found themselves repeatedly in a 'strategic dilemma': On the one hand, the migrant associations and individual supporters offered fundamental logistic support, as well as symbolic and social capital without which the mobilizations could have hardly been sustained. At the same time, they had to renegotiate their autonomy constantly - in 'acts of emancipation' also within the migrant rights movement. To outspokenly protect the autonomy vis-à-vis native associations at times came at the expense of losing important access to resources. The dependence on external resources, in turn, entailed being caught between opposing support interests. In numerous instances, associations, trade unions and grass-roots groups engaged in their own skirmishes accusing each other of exploiting forced migrants. Due to the structural asymmetry in terms of power, risks, and rights distinguishing those primarily concerned from those acting in solidarity, such social ties were characterized by a widespread and accentuated fragility. Certainly with important exceptions, but generally, relations kept a pragmatic, resource-oriented 'weak tie' nature, rather than being emotionally deep 'strong ties' of trust based on shared experiences of exclusion.

Yet, the arenas also showed that unequal power relations between migrants and native supporters were not necessarily static. Indeed, the relocation of protest to visible and autonomous public spaces (such as the tent camps in Wurzburg and Berlin, but also initially the squat 'Jean Quarré') developed at times a 'magnetic effect', attracting considerable resources from a broad range of individuals and groups, among which the

protesters could choose to a certain degree. While the forced migrants had to rely on external support in most cases (in terms of information, tents, rooms, donations, protection etc.), the protest itself and the contentious localities where it evolved, expanded their room of manoeuvre. Thus, in some spatial configurations, marginalized and weakly-resourced challengers could compensate an objective lack of internal resources without becoming dependent on specific actors.

In resonance with the ‘players and arenas’ approach, interactions do not unfold in a vacuum, but involve actors with certain dispositions. These dispositions, I argue, are deeply rooted in histories of mobilizations and hence in memories of previous contentious interactions. During my fieldwork in both Berlin and in Paris, actors referred to past interactions with certain players or types of players in previous waves of contention around forced migration. In Berlin, the ‘Oranienplatz’ arena left deep traces in the relations between supporters and forced migrants but also between different generations and ‘types’ of forced migrants. In Paris, the interactions around the occupation of the ‘Bourse du Travail’ lastingly alienated the most influential ‘sans papiers’ collectives from both trade unions and migrant rights associations, which partly explained their absence during the ‘La Chapelle’ arena. In other words, contentious interactions in previous arenas have proven to feed into dispositions for future interactions.

### **9.5. Interactionist Patterns II: Niches & Internal Heterogeneity**

Walter Nicholls has convincingly argued that even among undocumented migrants, chances for legal recognition and social inclusion are highly diverse. Given the absence of large political opportunities, illegalized migrants mobilize in small ‘niches’, which can only accommodate some at the expense of the exclusion of many others (Nicholls, 2014). The boundaries of inclusion, usually set by the state, introduce breaking points into the social relations among undocumented migrant protesters. As the empirical chapters in this manuscript suggest, these findings can be extended to forced migrants more broadly, including asylum-seekers.

The contentious subjects in the four arenas assembled a highly diverse group of individuals - in terms of origin, age, gender and most importantly, in terms of (potential) legal status. While in Berlin asylum-seekers mobilized mostly alongside rejected asylum-seekers and individuals with a regular status in Italy under the label ‘refugees’, the Parisian cases documented a focus on ‘sans papiers’ activism, including rejected asylum-seekers and political refugees turned undocumented migrants. The ‘La Chapelle’ arena

furthermore underlined an accentuated separation between mobilizations by and for asylum-seekers in an ongoing procedure and those self-identifying as ‘sans papiers’.

In all arenas, heterogeneity and different propensities of recognition introduced sensitive breaking points during these mobilizations – even in groups which had started mobilizing as a ‘compound player’. In the case of the ‘Bourse du Travail’ arena, different groups of forced migrants eventually competed for a limited number of regularizations dictated by the state, which eventually led to internal fragmentation and demobilization. At ‘Oranienplatz’, asylum-seekers and ‘Lampedusas’ were increasingly alienated and focused on their specific group interests. Within the movement, players repeatedly split along lines of origin and (perceived) chances to be granted rights and recognition in relation to others. For similar reasons, the activist group of African migrants in Berlin mobilizing from 2015 onwards failed to bridge to the large Syrian community, for linguistic reasons, but also because of a perceived (and in fact real) relative disadvantage in obtaining a regular status. At ‘La Chapelle’, the ‘sans-papiers’ largely abstained from the mobilizations of those referred to as ‘refugees’ because of negative memories of previous interactions with French supporters, but also because of a perceived competition with comparatively more privileged asylum-seekers. Also at ‘La Chapelle’, in the light of a heterogeneous set of asylum-seekers, conflicts regularly erupted between different (national) groups, about scarce resources and competition to find a place in the ‘niche’, be it a place in an accommodation centre or the support of associations.

As a matter of fact, particularly in Paris, associations with specific mandates often involuntarily contributed to deepening cleavages within the migrant communities. With their focus on either ‘asylum-seekers’ or ‘vulnerable populations’, many staff members found themselves in a fundamental dilemma of pragmatically exploiting a niche while at the same time reproducing or accentuating the systematic exclusion of others. This dilemma, in fact, dates back to the early phases of ‘sans-papiers’ mobilizations in the 1990s and has been aggravated in France since the ‘Circulaire Chèvenement’, which institutionalized specific (and hence exclusionary) criteria. Similarly to Jasper’s ‘rules dilemma’, dependent actors were trapped in the very rules they wanted to change in the first place:

‘The Rules Dilemma: Efforts to change an arena often end up following the rules of that same arena. Rather than ignoring it or using a different arena, an insurgent may end up embroiled in the arena’s rules for changing the rules’ (Jasper, 2008: 163).

Knowing the disruptive effects of certain spaces as well as the fragility of social ties, government officials have in all four arenas at times deliberately governed space and social relations, often combining the two.

In a structural variant, the German asylum system is deliberately designed to complicate the establishment of social relations between asylum-seekers and German citizens, with a view to minimizing empathy, and facilitating deportation in cases of rejected asylum claims. Both ‘Residenzpflicht’ and forced geographic dispersal in collective accommodation centers have been used as a tool by government officials during waves of political mobilization in order to discourage and sanction migrant participants. At ‘La Chapelle’, public authorities intervened in the built environment by fencing entire parks and public spaces under aerial metro lines, as well as by placing massive boulders in order to prevent forced migrants from regrouping and hence, from drawing attention to their condition of fundamental rights violation.

In both the ‘Oranienplatz’ arena and the occupations of the ‘Bourse du Travail’ and ‘Baudelique’ in Paris, the public authorities offered selective incentives which combined spatial and relational strategies. A limited number of individuals involved in the mobilizations was offered an exit option (reassessment of cases), on the condition that the disruptive camps and occupations were voluntarily dismantled. With such means, the state could avoid open repression against marginalized protesters, which had produced negative media coverage and also increased empathy and support for the actors involved. The heterogeneity of (potential) legal status among forced migrants and the dependency on the state introduced fissures within the mobilizing groups upon which the respective state officials could act.

Indeed, many forced migrants accepted in both Paris and Berlin selective incentives offered by the state at the expense of the collective long-term struggle. This is not least rooted in the specific context of mobilization. In contrast to many other mobilizations, forced migrants (both asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants) hold a massive individual stake in the conflict, with a lot to win and a lot to lose. This inherent characteristic of forced migrant mobilizations adds additional motivations for individuals to defect from collective action and for the state to intervene.

## **9.6. Every-Day Experiences, Transnationality and ‘Invisible’ Protest**

The practices of political mobilization portrayed in the four empirical chapters are deeply rooted in the concrete experiences and memories of the individuals involved. Sparks of

protest emanated often from tangible threats, while the subsequent trajectory of protest was fundamentally shaped by concrete interactions. In the ‘Bourse du Travail’ protest wave, the intervention of the CGT trade union posed a broad threat against their communities and identities, but also a direct threat to themselves and their personal interests. In the ‘La Chapelle’ wave, the highly precarious life in the streets posed a fundamental threat to physical integrity. The sparks of the ‘Oranienplatz’ wave arose from a suicide, which, for those joining the protest, was a direct effect of a highly burdensome life in uncertainty, forced immobility and isolation. Those engaging in political protest in Berlin since 2015 were mobilized by existential threats to their lives and those of friends and relatives on their way to Europe. Commemorations of border deaths scandalizing the externalization of European migration politics, have, hence, constituted a fundamental element of their activities.

The condition of ‘bare life’ in the ‘La Chapelle’ arena made the individuals involved instrumentally press for immediate alleviation of suffering rather than structural changes. In most cases, access to a roof, food and basic medical care was the first priority, even though also claims for recognition and dignity were present. Accordingly, direct social actions such as tent camps proliferated, which combined precarious subsistence with a strategy of visibility. At ‘La Chapelle’, asylum-seekers predominantly mobilized *to get into the asylum system*. In Germany, instead, with its rigid reception system, asylum-seekers in most cases *stepped out of the asylum system* in order to mobilize resources and expose the living conditions of asylum-seekers, which remained largely hidden and removed from the public eye.

Subsequently, the scrutiny of weakly resourced and less organized forms of protest thus profited from a ‘microscopic analysis’ (Lahusen, 2014) of the constituencies, their experiences, emotions and every-day practices. Such attention to detail of the concrete practices by forced migrants in exclusive migration regimes furthermore unveils that instead of (or at times in addition to) disruptive collective action, many forced migrants chose less ‘visible’ forms of dissent. Many opted for ‘exit’ instead of ‘voice’, trying to gain inclusion in the United Kingdom or elsewhere. Others stayed and focused on survival in illegality or engaged in legal struggles for a right to stay. Precarious conditions brought about a myriad of more instrumental, at times short-term and at times ‘invisible’ forms of resistance (see also Agier, 2010).

Importantly, targeting the diverse micro processes of political mobilizations of

forced migrants sheds light on the heterogeneity of the actors involved. It unveils the widespread dependence of individuals in a situation of ‘bare life’ but also the ‘*weapons of the (not so) weak*’.<sup>97</sup> Those mobilizing as ‘sans-papiers’ in Paris had the comparative advantage of established ethnic networks, in which various resources were embedded. These did not only contribute to partly buffering the precariousness of a life in illegality in Paris, but also allowed the self-constitution as an autonomous political subject with less dependence on pro-beneficiaries than those asylum-seekers from origins without established ethnic networks. Political mobilizations of forced migrants in Berlin from 2015 onwards in turn illustrate how individual (transnational) biographies shape protest by marginalized actors. Members of the group had accumulated social and emotional ties ‘on the move’, which they managed to translate into ‘transnational contentious communities’.

Indeed, forced migrants in all cases were embedded in transnational social spaces, which resulted in a dual target of protest. Protesters in both Paris and Berlin considered their activism as a struggle for rights and recognition in the locality of destination but also aimed at pushing for changes in the locality of origin or transit. They demanded both a ‘right to remain’, hence, life-worthy conditions at ‘home’, and ‘a right to leave’, meaning rights and recognition in Europe. Even though not all arenas mirrored the same degree of transnationality, references to the region of origin and a responsibility to mobilize also for those left behind was expressed regularly. Sudanese asylum-seekers at ‘La Chapelle’ mobilized against the regime of Omar al Bashir; many of those who entered Europe through Libya pointed to the horrific cases of human rights abuse in the country; the ‘sans-papiers’ protested against authoritarianism in Mali.

As these extracted patterns suggest, political mobilizations by forced migrants show a number of relational and spatial characteristics across time and space. Comparing contentious arenas in distinct locations and moments in time thus adds a more ‘macroscopic’ complement to the detailed descriptions with a focus on the important specificities of each arena. In the subsequent conclusive chapter, I will recall the main ambitions and achievements of this thesis, point to its remaining limitations and outline areas for future research.

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<sup>97</sup> Expression borrowed from Chris Zepeda-Millán (2016).

## Chapter 10

### From Silence to Voice: Concluding Remarks & Outlook

‘You, new brothers and sisters, who have left the misery, crossed the desert and the Mediterranean and have made it to Paris. You are very welcome with us. We march every Friday. Because when we march, we disrupt, if we do not disrupt, no one cares about us, we are invisible but always in danger.’

(Field notes 16/06/2017)

#### 10.1. Introduction

Numbers of forced migration have reached a historic peak (UNHCR, 2017), and are unlikely to decrease significantly any time soon. In the light of proliferating conflicts, the detrimental effects of climate change and materially speaking, ‘one of the most unequal worlds in all of human history, ever since the recording of income and wealth data’ (Faist, 2017: 19), large-scale migration will remain one of the key social questions in the decades to come. Therefore, according to Alessandro Monsutti,

‘the people knocking at the door of Europe tell something that needs to be listened to, they tell their moral fatigue towards the growing gap between the wealthiest and poorest segments of humanity. They are active participants in the global moral polity in showing how immoral it is’ (2017: 454).

In recent years, forced migrants have increasingly politicized their presence and exclusion in various locations in Europe. They have refused to remain silent and have decided to speak out. Agier has noted: ‘In order for injustice to exist, it must be able to be spoken’ (2010: 42). This thesis has scrutinized processes of political subjectivation and mobilization by forced migrants in two European capitals since 2008 – both with a view to contributing to the public debate on the complex and contested topic of migration, and to addressing a number of important gaps within the academic reflection on the issue.



In this final chapter, I intend to wind up the manuscript by recalling the ambition of the project, providing brief conclusions of the main substantive findings and pointing to the thesis' key contributions to both academic and public debates. For this purpose, the structure of the chapter's remainder is threefold: Section (10.2.) recalls the ambition and potential academic achievements of this research project, followed by a critical assessment of its limitations and starting points for further research (10.3). Finally, the thesis ends with an epilogue, linking the project back to broader public debates on (forced) migration, human rights, and 'subalternity' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (10.4.).

## **10.2. Ambition and Achievements**

Despite their quantitative proliferation and social relevance, political mobilizations by forced migrants have only recently received growing academic attention, particularly in critical migration and citizenship studies, and far less so in social movement studies (Ataç et al., 2016; Eggert & Giugni, 2015). The latter strand of literature has not engaged extensively with the phenomenon due to a widespread bias:

‘While protest has been defined as a resource of the powerless, researchers have given the most attention to those movements endowed with endogenous organisational resources and exogenous political opportunities, which were considered in explaining their emergence, strength, forms, and outcomes’ (della Porta, 2018a: 1).

In this vein, forced migrants as up-rooted, often weakly-resourced and ‘deportable’ actors have been considered unlikely candidates for political mobilization. In addition to theoretical objections, migrant mobilizations as elusive and volatile phenomena pose particular methodological challenges. Not least for these reasons, migration has been rarely studied from a social movement perspective. If the topic of migration was addressed at all, focus was mainly put on practices of solidarity with migrants, rather than precarious ‘acts of emancipation’ (Monforte & Dufour, 2013) by migrants. The recently published volume ‘Solidarity Mobilizations in the ‘Refugee Crisis’. Contentious Moves’, edited by Donatella della Porta (2018), constitutes a major step forward as it provides one of the first systematic analyses of migrant solidarity from a social movement perspective. Yet, also in this contribution, the role of migrant agency remains rather marginal.

In the light of these empirical and theoretical lacunae, this thesis has explored diverse processes of political subjectivation and mobilization by forced migrants with a view to providing both theoretical innovations and refinements as well as empirical complements to the body of literature in social movement studies. The former, I argue,

are needed in order to grasp contentious politics around forced migration, and particularly, forced migrant agency therein. To this end, I suggest bridging insights from critical migration studies with social movement studies. From migration studies, I have drawn from the notion of ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin & Nielsen, 2008), which conceives citizenship as a performative process. Such a perspective has proven to be more sensitive in capturing the political nature of the fragmented, volatile and at times even ‘invisible’ practices of resistance by migrants (Ataç et al., 2015). From social movement studies, in which this thesis is located, I share the general empirical focus and interest in the conditions, dynamics and forms of political mobilization (see also della Porta, 2018: 2). Specifically, I build upon recent innovations in the discipline, adopting a ‘microscopic’ (Lahusen, 2014) perspective, with particular attention to ‘contentious interactions’ (Jasper & Duyvendak, 2014) and spatial configurations (Nicholls et al., 2013b; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016).

Against this background, I have scrutinized four contentious arenas in two local settings (Berlin and Paris) at different moments in time, with a view to both capturing specific processes and to deriving relational and spatial patterns. Throughout the thesis I have asked *how protest by forced migrants emerges and unfolds through interactions among players in specific arenas*. Focusing on the making and breaking of ties, and the spatial underpinning of such processes, I have analysed the specific dynamics of contention under highly precarious conditions. Specifically, in the empirical chapters, I have explored the relations forced migrants establish, as well as the spaces they enact and embody. With such acts of ‘radical place-making’ (Mitchell & Sparke, 2017), forced migrants contest the processes which lead to their marginalization and the denial of their political subjectivity.

The contentious practices portrayed unveil both the multiple obstacles to mobilization in highly disadvantageous contexts and the empowering effects of spatialized repertoires of action. As an abductive endeavour, this research has been importantly informed by previous seminal contributions on the issue (Monforte & Dufour, 2011, 2013, Nicholls, 2013a, 2014; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016). While echoing and reinforcing some of their findings, the manuscript offers important complements, both theoretically and empirically. Without replicating the relational and spatial ‘essence’ of the four case studies synthesized in Chapter 9, I will subsequently point to some of the main contributions obtained through this research:

### *Empirical Complements*

Firstly, the scarce literature on migrant activism concentrates heavily on the specific context of irregularity. None of the existing contributions in social movement studies have scrutinized explicitly political activism by asylum-seekers. In addressing the phenomenon of forced migrant activism more broadly, my research thus sheds light on the particularities of asylum regimes and their impact on political activism, as well as the overlap (and at times non-overlap) with undocumented migrants' struggles.

Secondly, in contrast to Nicholls and Uitermark, my research is not so much interested in the historical perspective of developments of migrant rights movements, as rather in the contentious interactions unfolding within specific arenas. By homing in on shorter time frames, I believe to have added more nuanced insights into the spatial and relational patterns at play.

Lastly, my research scrutinized episodes of contention in time frames that have not been captured so far. Uitermark and Nicholls' (2016) section on migrant rights activism in France fades out in the mid-2000s and thereby misses two highly influential waves of contention – the occupation of the 'Bourse du Travail' 2008-2010 and the 'La Chapelle' arena unfolding from 2015 onwards. These two arenas introduced a new type of actor in migrant activism in France (asylum-seekers in an ongoing procedure) and contributed to highly consequential processes of fragmentation in the Parisian migrant rights movement. Monforte and Dufour's (2013) comparison of marches by undocumented migrants in Germany and France largely builds on document analysis without extensive fieldwork with the actors involved and does not cover the most disruptive and visible wave of contention in Germany, the 'Oranienplatz-movement'. In the light of these differences, my research serves as a significant empirical complement to previous contributions on (forced) migrant activism in the two countries. Moreover, and based on original empirical fieldwork, the research project echoes and refines theories on processes of political mobilization by marginalized actors in general and forced migrants in particular:

### *Grievances, Threats and Marginality*

Firstly, the empirical findings derived from the four protest arenas I investigated suggest the need for social movement studies to re-focus on everyday experiences of exclusion, when studying political mobilizations of marginalized actors. Rather than by opening opportunities, and pre-given resources, forced migrants have predominantly reacted to

existential threats to their own physical and psychological integrity and that of friends and acquaintances. Social movement studies have ‘tended to disregard the origins of discontent’ (della Porta, 2018: 1). Yet, it is these ‘embodied grievances’ that pushed most of the protagonists of this research to organize political protest against all odds. Indeed, as forced migrants, many individuals in this research are

‘both victims of human rights abuses because of being political subjects, as well as being political subjects because of having experienced grave violations of human dignity’ (Horst, 2018: 6).

In extremely hostile contexts and mostly with very few internal resources, individuals have resisted their marginalization, degradation to bureaucratic cases and at times their perceived ‘disposability’. Given the condition of marginality, the repertoire of action has taken a particular shape. In a condition of ‘bare life’ in Paris, protest took an instrumental form with a focus on immediate solutions to existential hardship, rather than structural change. Precarious camps and squats were both ‘direct social actions’ and means to pressurize the government into allocating places in public accommodation centres. In Berlin, in turn, forced migrants usually mobilized against the isolation in the restrictive accommodation centre and attracted visibility by leaving their allocated places.

### *Resources, Relations & Space*

Secondly, thus, the research suggests the value of a specific scrutiny of the relationship between the making and breaking of social ties and the respective spatial context in the study of marginalized actors (this strongly echoes the main argument by Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016). In most cases, protesters mobilized resources during action. This was usually only successful when they managed to leave behind their spatial isolation and politicized their presence by physically relocating to urban centres. In regrouping themselves and leaving behind their attributed places at the social and geographical margins of society, forced migrants broke the routine of invisibility. Through an active disruption, forced migrants constituted themselves as political subjects, claiming a ‘right to have rights’, independently from an authorization to do so. This in turn, repeatedly attracted media coverage and developed ‘magnetic effects’, through which essential external resources provided by local neighbours and politicised social movement milieus could be tapped. Camps and squats were important spaces of encounter for highly heterogeneous actors, which contributed regularly to the transformation of feelings of indignation rooted in everyday experiences into public articulation of dissent. At times, it was this exchange with others which triggered a change in consciousness and repertoire

from silence and patience to voice. Hence, all arenas furthermore underline that the interaction with powerful supporting actors at times incubates sparks of resistance, nurturing them into sustained mobilizations. At the same time, they remained highly fragile due to fundamentally asymmetrical power positions. Illustrating the fragility of social ties (strong and weak), which are made and unmade in concrete interactions, underlines that the analysis of protest (and particularly protest by weakly-resourced actors) profits, due to its volatility, from a relationally and spatially sensitive micro-lens. Given the heterogeneity of the actors involved, the initial empowering and incubating effect was usually followed by processes of fragmentation, in which key lines of fragmentation became apparent. These included not only the division between those primarily concerned and pro-beneficiaries, but also among forced migrants with different (potential) legal status. Aware of the incubating effects of certain spaces and the fragility of ties in such settings, government authorities have repeatedly intervened in the built environment with physical obstacles to regrouping and in social ties by offering selective incentives along latent lines of fragmentation.

#### *Arenas, Locations & Comparisons*

Thirdly, the research has shown the heuristic value of combining a ‘microscopic’ ‘arenas perspective’ with a comparative element. Homing in on specific arenas allows to identify also precarious forms of agency in highly disadvantageous contexts. The scrutiny of micro-interactions, hence, buffers the tendency of more structural accounts to ignore sparks or protest, ‘invisible’ manifestations of dissent and their interaction with visible protest. Furthermore, the arena framework introduces a prism, in which the artificial antagonism of agency and structure is mediated. Indeed, as my research suggests, macro-structures or ‘opportunities’ such as legal status, (‘borderline’) citizenship regimes, accommodation systems etc. penetrate in micro-interactions, and hence can be captured in an arena perspective. Adding a comparative element to such a perspective further sharpens the attention to differences across space. While showing important spatial and relational patterns (see Chapter 9 for details), the mobilizations in Berlin and Paris have also brought to light important differences, which are related to the distinct ‘borderline citizenship regimes’ (Monforte & Dufour, 2011), in which they are embedded. In Berlin, mobilizations by forced migrants have brought together rejected asylum-seekers, asylum-seekers in an ongoing procedure and recognized refugees. In Paris, in turn, the opportunities outside the asylum, the existence of a large Francophone (forced) migrant

community, as well as a historically grown distinction of irregularity and asylum, have introduced accentuated trenches. Furthermore, while asylum-seekers mobilized predominantly to get into a structurally undersized official accommodation system, their counterparts in Germany protested against rigid ‘encampment’ on a no-choice basis and claimed access to decentralized (even privately organized) alternatives. The comparison of arenas in Berlin and Paris unveils, moreover, that protest is in Doreen Massey’s terms ‘place-based’ but not ‘place-bound’ (Massey, 1991b: 279). In the light of Europeanized asylum politics (including the restrictive Dublin regulation) and transnational biographies, contentious arenas in both locations were in various ways related. Activists in Berlin, mobilizing as ‘refugees’ were embedded in a ‘transnational contentious community’, which also included ‘sans-papiers’ activists in Paris. This underlines an additional strength of multi-cited research in transnational settings, of which migrant mobilizations are a typical example (see also Sassen, 2001). Lastly, a diachronic perspective, comparing arenas in one location in two moments in time, furthermore shows that arenas importantly draw from memories and interactionist dispositions which are rooted in previous contentious interactions.

#### *Fostering Interdisciplinary Dialogue*

Accordingly, the project complements the body of social movement studies both empirically and theoretically. In addition, the research also points to the potential for dialogue with the burgeoning literatures on critical migration studies (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2013; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013), (critical) citizenship (Isin, 2008, 2012; Schachar, Bauböck, Bloemraad, & Vink, 2017), radical and post-national conceptions of democracy (Benhabib, 2004, 2009, Rancière, 1999, 2004), and transnationalism (Faist et al., 2013; Vertovec, 2009; Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2003). Beyond constituting concrete appropriations of the ‘right to have rights’ (Arendt, 1996), the invisible and visible practices of resistance employed by forced migrants as ‘outsiders’ in nationally defined polities constitute ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin & Nielsen, 2008) through which the established orders of belonging and rights are challenged from the margins in a transnational ‘age of migration’ (Castles et al., 2014).

Critical citizenship with its focus on transformative practices indeed opens fruitful perspectives for an intensified dialogue with social movement studies’ attention to the contexts, repertoires and trajectories of such ‘acts of citizenship’. Without explicitly referring to social movements, Isin highlights important similarities:

‘Crucially, what makes citizenship performative in this sense is not only that it involves iterating or exceeding conventions about what people may and may not do but also that people often resist these conventions and transform them by applying principles such as equality, justice, liberty, emancipation, and solidarity. These principles enable or motivate people to struggle over rights by traversing the boundaries of social groups and borders of polities. By so doing, citizens and non-citizens, with or without rights, assume responsibilities towards each other, across boundaries and borders’ (2017: 507).

Bridging social movement studies to insights from critical and transnational migration studies, is of value for both literatures. As far as social movement studies are concerned, I urged to (re)-stress the focus on grievances, on transnational life-worlds and everyday (often invisible) practices of subverting exclusive migration regimes. With regard to critical migration and citizenship studies, I have added an explicitly empirical micro-perspective on concrete moments of mobilization and demobilization. Such an approach has so far received less attention compared to the numerous contributions on the transformation of macro-institutions (e.g. notions of citizenship) and the ‘autonomy’ inherent in the very phenomenon of migration (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013).

### **10.3. Limitations & Future Research**

Despite these achievements, the study exhibits a number of both empirical and theoretical limitations that should be addressed in future research. A first limitation is inherent to the highly demanding ‘arenas approach’, and even more so in its application in a comparative design. To immerse in and reconstruct four contentious arenas in two local settings involving also vulnerable actors is a highly demanding and time-consuming task. While including the perspective of as many players as possible, I did not always succeed in equally acknowledging the interests and dilemmas of all the players involved. Given the limited time and resources of my study, and due to the explicit heuristic interest in forced migrant subjectivity, I decided to stress particularly the marginalized perspective, while still situating it in a relational context. Future research would thus require additional fieldwork in both settings to further enrich the thick descriptions of all players, strategies and dilemmas in the four arenas.

Secondly, as an abductive, theory-generating and -refining study, the research project does not allow for broad and definitive generalizations. While hypothesizing the existence of certain spatial and relational patterns in forced migrant activism, these ought

to be investigated in additional case studies including arenas in distinct ‘borderline citizenship regimes’.

Thirdly, I have focused my research on urban centres, in line with the research intersecting urban studies and social movements (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016). While the specific relational qualities of cities have proven to be advantageous for progressive movements of many kinds, political mobilizations of forced migrants – for obvious reasons – also unfold increasingly in border-zones, where practices of externalization and securitization of migration policies visibly manifest. Thus, future work on the issue would profit much from including border locations (such as Idomeni, Lampedusa, Calais, Ventimiglia, Brenner) in the analysis scrutinizing the distinct spatialities and players involved in such settings and furthermore, pointing to protests to continue the journey, rather than claiming rights, recognition and inclusion on the respective site (Zamponi, 2018).

#### **10.4. Epilogue**

(Forced) migration has structural roots, and thus is not likely to decrease in scale any time soon. In 2015, with the so-called ‘refugee crisis’, a decade-old reality of mass displacement became a European ‘problem’ and spurred both acts of compassion and resistance (della Porta, 2018b; Hess et al., 2016; Jäckle & König, 2016). In most public portrayals, forced migrants have been either represented as an indistinctive mass, as a threat to the ‘occidental order’ or as vulnerable and powerless victims. In some circles, idealized perceptions of a new revolutionary avant-garde have circulated. The protagonists in this manuscript are first and foremost human beings striving for recognition and rights. They emerge as contentious political subjects, breaking their silence and invisibility and raising their voices. Many of the resulting practices are precarious and contradictory. The fragmented nature and multiple internal conflicts indeed illustrate the difficulties of challenging established orders. Thus, following these ‘contentious subjects’ in greater depth sheds light on the obstacles of the most excluded to claim dignity and the ‘right to have rights’. Such radical and often irreconcilable ‘acts of emancipation’ and of ‘performative citizenship’ (Isin, 2017) highlight that (forced) migration is a highly contentious field in which fundamental rights and interests are (re-)distributed. As Bauman noted, ‘mobility has become the most powerful and most coveted stratifying factor’ (Bauman, 1998: 9, 74). Moreover, and in contrast to optimistic expectations,



‘the global expansion of capitalist modernity (intertwined with questions of race) did not produce a homogenisation or a levelling of world economy and labour, but rather a ceaseless proliferation of differences, heterogeneities and hierarchies’ (Mellino, 2016: 100).

Against this background, Faist has recently raised the important question: ‘How can we (de)construct political perceptions around forced migration which lead to categorizations that exclude migrants from living in safety?’ (2017: 2). He subsequently noted that most claims made by forced migrants and pro-beneficiaries are not transformative or subversive, as they merely ‘appeal to states and international organizations to live up to the norms they have declared themselves’ (ibid: 10) without demanding a change in norms. I would argue, instead, that the ‘acts of citizenship’ by forced migrants presented in this thesis constitute such impulses, which urge to reflect on the complex, structural questions necessary to achieve change towards a more ‘moral’ polity at the global scale in the long run. In this vein, I conclude with a quote by one of the leaders of the ‘sans-papiers’ movement in the 1990s in Paris, Ababacar Diop, who noted and asked almost two decades ago:

‘We are only just starting (...). The struggle of the sans-papiers has to go beyond obtaining our papers and must address the underlying questions, not only in France but also, especially, in our countries of origin (...). What is the purpose of migration policies? Should frontiers be open?’ (quoted in Cissé, 2003).

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## Annex A: List of Interviews

### A1: Berlin

ID	Date	Location	Actor Type	Language	Documentation
B1	12.03.16	Berlin	Forced Migrant	French	Notes
B2	19.04.16	Berlin	Forced Migrant	English	Notes
B3	20.04.16	Berlin	Forced Migrant	French	Notes
B4	31.05.16	Berlin	Forced Migrant	English	Transcript
B5	02.06.16	Berlin	Supporter	German	Notes
B6	05.06.16	Berlin	Forced Migrant	French	Notes
B7	08.06.16	Berlin	Local Mayor	German	Transcript
B8	19.06.16	Berlin	Supporter, Local Politician	German	Transcript
B9	21.06.16	Berlin	NGO staff, supporter	German	Transcript
B10	22.06.16	Berlin	Forced Migrant	English	Transcript
B11	01.07.16	Bremen	Forced Migrant	English	Transcript
B12	04.07.16	Berlin	Forced Migrant	French & English	Transcript, Notes
B13	08.07.16	Berlin	Politician	German	Notes
B14	17.07.16	Berlin	Meeting	French	Notes
B15	21.07.16	Berlin	Forced Migrant	German	Transcript
B16	24.07.16	Berlin	Forced Migrant	French, English	Notes
B17	26.07.16	Jena	Forced Migrant	English	Notes
B18	27.07.16	Potsdam	Forced Migrant	German	Transcript
B19	28.07.16	Berlin	Forced Migrant	German	Transcript
B20	29.07.16	Berlin	Supporter	German	Transcript
B21	24.08.16	Berlin	Supporter/ NGO	German	Transcript
B22	29.08.16	Berlin	Forced Migrant	English	Transcript
B23	31.08.16	Berlin	Supporter/ NGO	German	Notes,
B24	01.09.16	Berlin	Forced Migrant	English	Transcript
B25	05.09.16	Berlin	Supporter	German	Transcript
B26	06.09.16	Berlin	Supporter/ NGO	German	Transcript
B27	23.01.17	Berlin	Forced Migrant	French	Transcript
B28	25.01.17	Berlin	Forced Migrant	French	Transcript
B29	27.01.17	Berlin	Forced Migrant	French	Transcript
B30	29.01.17	Berlin	Forced Migrant	French	Transcript
B31	08.02.17	Berlin	Forced Migrant	German	Notes
B32	23.02.17	Berlin	NGO	German	Transcript
B33	23.03.17	Berlin	NGO	German	Transcript
B34	26.03.17	Berlin	Supporter	German	Transcript, Notes
B35		Online	Forced Migrant	English	Public Interview
B36		Online	Forced Migrant	German	Public Interview
B37		Online	Forced Migrant	German	Public Interview

## A2: Paris

<b>ID</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Actor Type</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Documentation</b>
P1	16.05.17	Paris	NGO	French	Notes
P2	17.05.17	Paris	Supporter	French	Notes
P3	30.05.17	Paris	Supporter	French	Transcript
P4	30.05.17	Brussels	Forced Migrant	French	Notes
P5	01.06.17	Paris	Forced Migrant, NGO	French	Transcript
P6	05.06.17	Paris	Supporter, NGO	French	Transcript
P7	08.06.17	Paris	Supporter	French	Transcript
P8	12.06.17	Paris	NGO	French	Transcript, Notes
P9	12.06.17	Paris	NGO, Supporter	French	Transcript, Notes
P10	13.06.17	Paris	NGO, Supporter	French	Transcript
P11	14.06.17	Paris	Local Administrator	English	Transcript
P12	14.06.17	Paris	NGO	French	Transcript
P13	15.06.17	Paris	Supporter	French	Notes
P14	16.06.17	Paris	Forced Migrant	French	Notes
P15	18.06.17	Paris	Forced Migrant	French	Notes
P16	19.06.17	Paris	Trade Union	French	Transcript
P17	19.06.17	Paris	Forced Migrant	English	Notes
P18	20.06.17	Paris	Forced Migrant, NGO	French	Transcript
P19	20.06.17	Paris	Supporter, NGO	French	Notes
P20	22.06.17	Paris	Forced Migrant	English	Notes
P21	23.06.17	Paris	Supporter	French	Transcript
P22	25.06.17	Paris	Forced Migrant	French	Notes
P23	25.06.17	Paris	Supporter	English	Transcript
P24	25.06.17	Paris	Forced Migrant	English	Transcript
P25	26.06.17	Paris	NGO	French	Transcript
P26	26.06.17	Paris	Forced Migrant	French	Notes
P27	26.06.17	Paris	Supporter	French	Notes
P28	27.06.17	Paris	Supporter	French	Notes
P29	27.06.17	Paris	Supporter, Trade Union	French	Transcript
P30	28.06.17	Paris	Supporter	French	Transcript
P31	13.01.17	Skype	Forced Migrant	English	Transcript

## Annex B: Graphs on Asylum and Irregularity in Germany and France

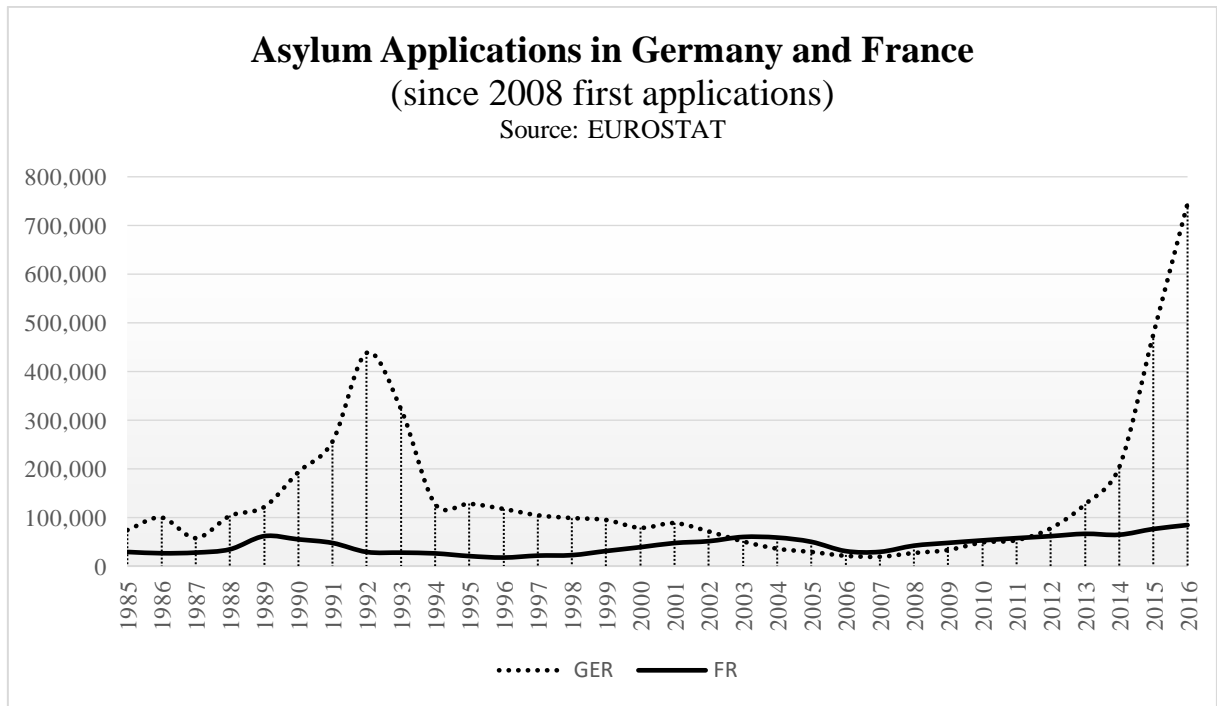


Figure 1. Asylum Applications in Germany and France, 1985-2016. Source: EUROSTAT.

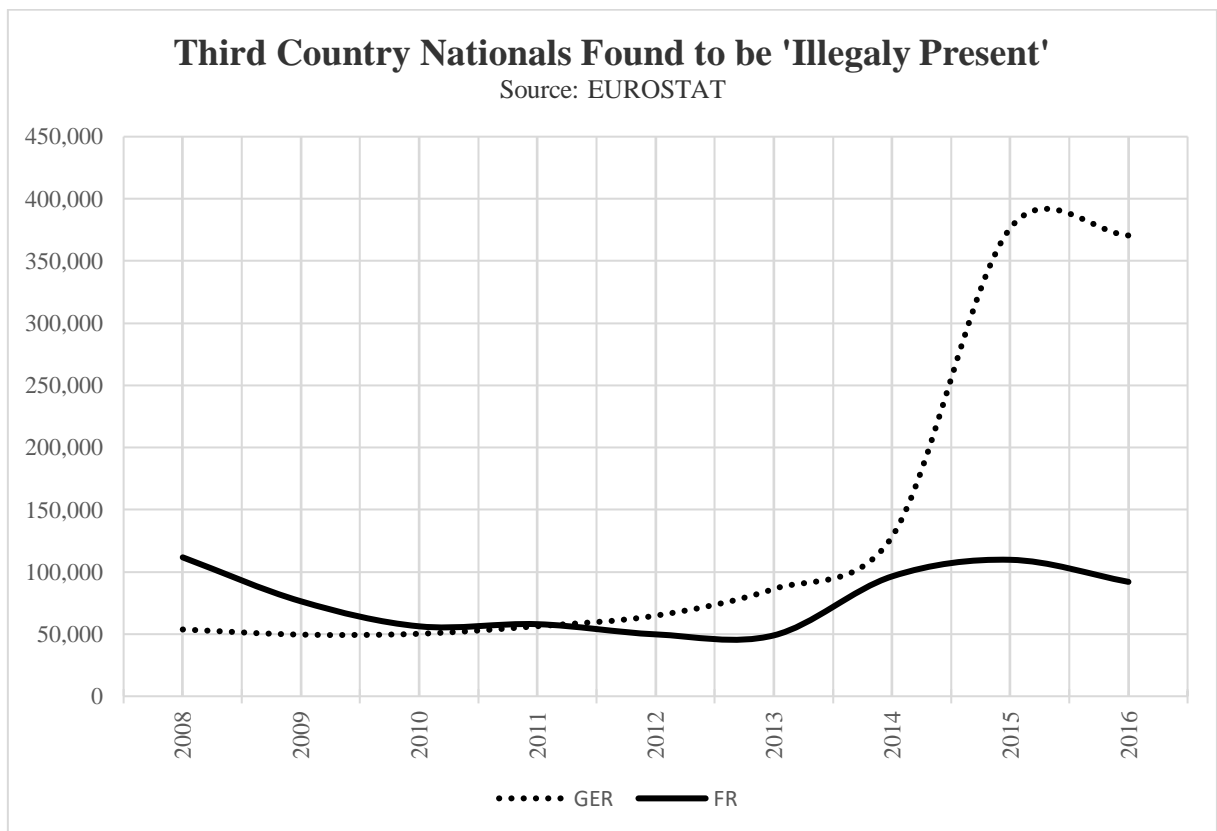


Figure 2. Detected Undocumented Migrants in France and Germany, 2008-2016. Source: EUROSTAT.