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Contested Boundaries: Refugee Centers as Spaces of the Political

Abstract

This article examines refugee accommodation centers in Germany as constitutive elements of deterritorialized borders. It is argued that in the refugee experience, borders reveal themselves as ubiquitous rather than as mere separation lines between nation states. Before that backdrop, it is shown that the social production of refugee centers and camps rests on powerful processes of boundary drawings that replicate the b/ordering mechanisms of the nationalist order of our allegedly globalized world. Yet, this paper also employs a reversion of perspectives and exposes that manifold practices by refugees and their supporters challenge or (re-)negotiate these boundaries on various spatial levels. A special focus is put on the dimension of the everyday and everyday spatial practices. Rather than fixed once and for all, refugee centers, and boundaries more generally, are therefore understood as inherently unstable *sites of struggles,* as spaces of the articulation of *the Political.*

Keywords: refugee centers, camps, boundaries, border struggles, space, the political, everyday practices, Henri Lefebvre

Herausgeforderte Grenzen: Unterkünfte für Geflüchtete als Räume des Politischen

Zusammenfassung

Der Aufsatz untersucht Unterkünfte für Geflüchtete in Deutschland als konstitutive Elemente deterritorialisierter Grenzen. Letztere sind dabei nicht lediglich als Trennlinien zwischen Nationalstaaten zu verstehen, vielmehr erscheinen sie für Menschen auf der Flucht als allgegenwärtig. Vor diesem Hintergrund wird argumentiert, dass auch die soziale Produktion von Unterkünften für Geflüchtete auf machtvollen Abgrenzungsprozessen basiert, die die nationalstaatlichen Ordnungsmechanismen unserer angeblich globalisierten Welt beständig wiederholen. Mittels Perspektivenumkehr wird jedoch gleichermaßen aufgezeigt, dass vielfältige

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Praktiken von Geflüchteten und ihrer Unterstützer*innen diese Grenzziehungen auf verschiedenen räumlichen Ebenen herausfordern und neu verhandeln. Der Fokus der Untersuchung liegt dabei vor allem auf räumlichen Praktiken im Alltag. Unterkünfte für Geflüchtete und damit einhergehende Grenzsetzungen werden somit nicht als endgültige Ergebnisse betrachtet, sondern als Orte der Aus- und Neuverhandlung, als Artikulationsräume des Politischen.

Schlagworte: Gemeinschaftsunterkünfte, Lager, Grenzen, Raum, das Politische, Alltagspraktiken, Henri Lefebvre

1. Introduction

In the fall of 2016, residents of Munich were successful in their request for the city to build a four-meter wall between an accommodation center for refugees and a housing area close by, for alleged reasons of noise protection (Böhm 2016).[1] The wall is an outstanding example of processes of boundary-setting, which are so powerful in the context of (forced) migration, as it represents and consolidates the creation of differences: it materializes the division of a previously commonly used city space into *our* place and *their* place – the separation of *us* from *them* – while being a constant reaffirmation of these very categorizations. Therefore, alongside other spatial entities, such as deportation centers, camps, hotspots etc., the wall may serve as local evidence of the global division of space that sustains the nationalistic order at large. It may be read as evidence of the proliferation and »›delocalization‹ of the border« (Walters 2006: 193), a component of the »ubiquity of borders«, which transcend even the individual herself as »inner realities« and are »situated everywhere and nowhere« (Balibar 2002: 82, 78).

Nonetheless, boundaries in general and borders, as particular manifestations of the former, are not permanently fixed results, grounded in a single act of boundary drawing. They are, in fact, reiterative practices that are subject to constant (re-)negotiation and contest. Although this might seem counter-intuitive at first, borders are in fact porous rather than impermeable lines and are characterized by significantly more complex procedures than simply warding off people altogether. They are engaged in continuous processes of ordering and *othering* as they are

1 Research for this article was made possible by a Ph.D. scholarship from the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at the University of Giessen/Germany. Unlike most fellowships, it provides extra funding for babysitter costs which allowed me to participate in events and research situations that take place after the closing time of my son's Kindergarten. I am also grateful for the very constructive and helpful remarks by anonymous reviewers and editors on earlier versions of this article.

forming »regimes of access« or »border machines« (van Houtum 2010: 960, 962) which engage in the separation and construction of »the wanted from the unwanted, the barbarians from the civilized and the global rich from the global poor in the territorial society« (van Houtum 2010: 958).

This article argues that both facets of boundaries and borders are relevant when exploring (forced) migration: the proliferation of borders and boundaries *and* their contestation, as well as the struggles against them. Concretely, this paper raises the question not only of how boundaries and borders are manifested in the spatio-political orders of refugee centers but also how these boundaries are challenged on various spatial levels. To this end, the paper uses the empirical case study of refugee centers in Germany to identify processes of boundary settings that are understood to be constitutive in the social production of these spaces. Moreover, it provides an analysis of the interaction of people with these very boundaries through an examination of their individual and collective struggles to creatively challenge, to circumvent or to (silently) resist these boundaries by contesting, appropriating or (re-)negotiating the spatial orders of the centers.

To begin, the article gives a brief overview of the concepts of ›border‹ and ›boundary‹ in order to conceptualize refugee centers as functional elements of borders. It will be shown that *boundary* is a much wider concept than *border*, including various forms of social or symbolic boundaries, which people who are referred to in this text as ›refugees‹[2] are confronted with. However, in the context of refugee centers and (forced) migration more generally, it will be revealed that many of these are directly related to a particularly powerful variant of boundary, that is the (nation-state) border. Employing Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory, the paper will then continue by looking at the spatial production of refugee centers and practices of boundary drawing that are constitutive for the installation of the centers. In light of Mezzadra and Neilson's (2013) conceptualization of *border struggles*, and by means of contextualizing this in the theoretical discussion of *the Political*, the remainder of the article will be dedicated to examining examples of (re)negotiations of these very boundaries on different spatial levels.

2 The term ›refugee‹ is used here as an overall category for people who seek refuge in Germany, for all reasons possible. Hence, it comprises asylum seekers, persons who have not yet made a claim for asylum, persons with subsidiary protection, illegalized persons without protection, persons whose deportation has been suspended, etc. In so doing, I avoid making a purely legalistic distinction between migrants who no not fulfill the official criteria for asylum and those whose reasons for fleeing are classified as worthy of protection. At the same time, I am aware, that the term is not unproblematic in that the label ›refugee‹ is often used to establish and consolidate a distinction between ›us‹ and the ›other‹, not uncommonly transporting a pejorative, racist, or even demonizing connotation (see Castro Varela/Mecheril 2016).

2. Refugee Centers as Functional Elements of the Ubiquitous Border

This part will lay out why borders, as particular spatial manifestations of boundaries, constitute far more than solely demarcation lines between nation states. The following paragraphs refer to refugee centers as a key functional element of borders and argue that for refugees, borders may appear to be ubiquitous rather than clearly locatable phenomena.

Defining the concepts of boundaries and borders is undertaken not without acknowledging that any attempt to define and reduce the complexity of these concepts of borders and boundaries entails in itself processes of demarcating, ordering and simplifying that are neither non-political nor necessarily without consequences (see Balibar 2002). Moreover, due to the complexity of the concepts and their historical, societal and political heterogeneity, as well as the different foci of the academic disciplines dealing with them, the creation of an ultimate definition is very problematic. The vast variety of meanings and the ambiguity of the concepts within and across academic disciplines is further confusing, as within scholarly literature, borders or boundaries are often used interchangeably or left undefined altogether. However, it is argued in this article that it is important to uphold a conceptual differentiation between borders and boundaries in the context of forced migration in order to expose the interrelatedness of both concepts. In this way, one can demonstrate that many of the boundaries which refugees are facing, even long after having crossed the territorial lines into their host countries, are immediate consequences of the productive force of one particularly powerful form of boundary, i.e. the border.

Let me begin with a brief introduction – and demarcation – of the terms. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a boundary is »a real or imagined line that marks the edge or limit of something« (CUP 2017). It is therefore not necessarily a material entity but may also indicate the limit of something more abstract, for example »the limit of a subject or principle« (CUP 2017). In their article *The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences*, Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár (2002) give an insightful overview of the usage of the concept of a boundary across various social sciences and distill a key distinction between social and symbolic boundaries:

> »Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space. […] Examining them allows us to capture the dynamic dimensions of social relations, as groups compete in the production, diffusion, and institutionalization of alternative systems and principles of classifications. Symbolic boundaries also separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership« (Lamont/Molnár 2002: 168).

If they are widely agreed upon within a society, symbolic boundaries can obtain a constraining character in organizing social interactions and may translate into more manifest forms of social boundaries, like racial segregation, social exclusion, etc. (see Lamont/Molnár 2002: 168–169). Social boundaries, hence, are viewed to be »objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities« (Lamont/Molnár 2002: 168). Therefore, the study of boundaries becomes also an important theme in the study of all forms of social relation, be it within communities or societies, related to gender, class or ethnic relations, the organization of professions, knowledge and so on.

In contrast to such a broad understanding of boundaries and manifold usage across disciplines and subjects, borders are here understood to refer to a specific spatial, i.e. territorial, manifestation of boundaries. In other words, they constitute a »form of boundary associated with the rise of the modern nation-state and the establishment of an inter-state geographical order, founded – most famously with the foundation myths of the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia« (Sparke 2009: 52).

This distinction becomes clearer when borders are viewed in relation to boundaries. The conceptualization of this relationship as it informs this article are summarized as follows: first, borders as demarcation lines between nation states are seen to form a subcategory of the more complex concept of ›boundaries‹ in that they constitute a particular spatial, i.e. territorial form of boundaries (see Lamont/Molnár 2002: 184). Second, because borders are understood as processes rather than results, they are viewed as being based on, inducing and stabilizing various other social, as well as symbolic, boundaries with which refugees are then confronted and with which they engage.[3]

It seems that some of the confusion in the usage of the terms in migration studies stems from the fact that both *borders* and *boundaries* are used synonymously only because the concept of boundary is perhaps mistakenly narrowed down to be equated exactly with its geopolitical manifestation of the border. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), in using Anssi Paasi's (1999: 670) definition of border as »a set of practices and discourses that ›spread‹ into the whole of society«, look at the border beyond its capacity to exclude and point to its dynamic character (Mezzadra/Neilson 2013: 13). Interestingly, this definition was originally used by Paarsi to define the very concept of *boundaries*. As a matter of fact, Mezzadra

3 At the same time, the stability of the ›bordered‹ world, a world ordered in nation states based on geopolitical borders, can, of course, only be maintained if the social and symbolic boundaries underlying it are widely agreed upon by the members of the respective national societies.

and Neilson state that they »use with a certain degree of freedom the words *border* and *boundary* as interchangeable« (Mezzadra/Neilson 2013:15).[4]

By contrast, when using the term *borders* in this paper, I keep its meaning distinct from the broader concept of *boundaries* because only then is it possible to keep in mind the demarcating effect that borders have on other forms of social and symbolic boundaries. This is apparently also what Paasi (1999) had in mind, as his definition continues as follows:

> »boundaries will be understood not merely as static lines but as sets of practices and discourses which ›spread‹ into the whole of society and are not restricted to the border area. The production and reproduction of boundaries is part of the institutionalization of territories […]. Therefore, boundaries manifest themselves in numerous social (economic, cultural, administrative and political) practices and discourses that may be simultaneous and overlapping. Power and governance are part and parcel of the construction of boundaries, and this is particularly obvious in the case of state borders […]. Boundaries exist and gain meanings on different spatial scales, not merely at the state level, and these meanings are ultimately reproduced in local everyday life« (Paasi 1999: 670–671).

Therefore, what I will take from Paarsi's definition for the topic of refugee centers, is his distinctively spatial approach to boundaries. Moreover, although his conceptualization of boundaries – as related to borders – does not exhaust the concept of symbolic and social boundaries as outlined above, these forms of spatial boundaries are exactly those of interest for this article. This is especially so, as Paarsi (1999) acknowledges there are effects of (border-induced) boundaries on many aspects of social life, including the everyday.

Let us now look in more detail at borders and their far-reaching impact on refugees' lives. Far from living in a »borderless world« (Ohmae 1990), what we witness in today's globalizing world is a sophistication of governmental processes of border management and control, »facilitating fast crossing for business travelers and increasing punitive policing of working class ›others‹ deemed dangerous to the neo-liberal free market order« (Sparke 2009: 52). This results in a proliferation, as well as what Balibar calls the »polysemic nature of borders«, that is »the fact that borders do not have the same meaning for everyone« (Balibar 2002: 81). Moreover, bordering always goes along with ordering processes, or »process[es] of making and remaking a sociospatial order« (van Houtum 2010: 959). These

4 In a similar vein, David Newman, in his overview of the evolvement of the terminology of ›boundary studies‹, delineates boundaries *and* borders from the concept of the frontier: »First, there is the distinction that has traditionally been made between the notion of ›boundary‹ or ›border‹ and that of ›frontier‹. The former is the line, demarcated and implemented by a government, while the latter is the area or region in close proximity to the line and within which development patterns are clearly influenced by its proximity to the boundary« (Newman 2003: 126).

b/ordering processes are not limited to the border areas of the nation states alone. Especially in the context of (forced) migration to the European Union, b/ordering processes are either externalized well beyond the territory of the Union, of which the latest EU-Turkey deal or so-called migration partnerships with African states like Niger or Mali are prime examples, or continued within its very territories, creating »viscous spatio-temporal zones […] in which to live a life which is a waiting-to-live, a non-life« (Balibar 2002: 83).

In a similar fashion, Michel Agier (2016), in his book *Borderlands*, describes the spread and expansion of the border as »one of the general characteristics of our time« (Agier 2016: 52) and demands that »in order to grasp the human (and not just political) dimension of the border, it is necessary to expand considerably the sample of places and moments taken into account, beyond the boundaries of nation-states alone – to what I shall call *border situations*« (Agier 2016: 17). Hot spots, detention centers, camps, refugee accommodation centers or transit zones are cases in point for such border situations. Moreover, they are functional elements of borders. They are effects but also prerequisites of the ubiquity of the border, in that they objectify spatial exclusion. It is evident that these elements, which separate refugees or asylum seekers from citizens, are erected and managed mostly by one side, i.e. political and administrative authorities representing the latter.[5] However, taking a closer look at the spatiality of refugee centers will also reveal a multiplicity of struggles on the part of the excluded. I will return to the spatial dimensions of this in more detail below.

Everyday life of refugees in border situations, in *bordered* places like refugee centers, is indeed often characterized by a »waiting-to-live«, as Balibar (2002: 83) frames it, by an existence in »waiting zones, […] where time stretches as periods of indeterminate status are prolonged for ever more people« (Agier 2016: 7) and in which people are confronted with manifold social and symbolic boundaries. To me, this was very apparent as my interview partners many times pointed to the burden of being reduced to an existence of waiting: waiting for an appointment for an asylum interview, waiting for a decision of the authorities over their request, waiting for an acceptance to German classes, for a work permit, a travel permit etc. – the length of the wait for these things again being significantly contingent on which nation state they come from, i.e. within which borders they were born.

5 So, I am also not engaging here with the social or symbolic boundaries refugees may draw themselves in the process of identity-preservation or self-definition, nor will I look at processes of transnationalism, hybridization, or creolization, which also infer the (re-)negotiation of boundaries in the context of migration.

> »There is, for instance, Martin[6], a young man from Eritrea. He has arrived in Germany almost two years ago, all by himself, unaccompanied by family or friends. We sit in his tidy room and I am offered tea. At some point, he takes a word list of German/Tigrinya from his backpack and puts his finger on the word ›Anerkennung als Flüchtling‹ (refugee protection status) explaining to me, that this was what he needed. He has still received no answer from the BAMF.[7] Furthermore, he has been waiting here for almost two years. Martin continues telling me that it was only in January when he, with the engaged support of an asylum counselor from the Protestant Church, finally received official approval to participate in an ›Integration Course‹, where he will be able to obtain German language certificates. He recalls with a vacant expression that before that, for more than one-and-a-half years, he had been doing nothing but eating and sleeping and occasionally talking to Laura. He gets up and plays a German language audio course on his stereo, a cheerful sounding announcer introducing herself as ›Laura‹«.[8]

Located in the midst of Germany, Martin's encounter with the ubiquitous border seems to continue as he finds himself in the spatio-temporal border zone of a refugee accommodation center, waiting for years for his life to continue. Tobias Pieper (2010: 224), views the »semi-open, decentralized camps system« of refugee accommodation in Germany[9] as forming a functional and flexible element of the European border regime. It materializes the boundary-setting between refugees and the society of the host-country and allows for a continuation of control, in that it, for example, enables the authorities to arrange deportations whenever they choose to do so (see Pieper 2010: 225). Consequently, Martin's journey of border-crossing was not over when he, during a trip of several months, crossed from Eritrea into Sudan, then into Libya; traversed the Mediterranean on a boat; transited several European countries by train, foot and bus; and finally arrived at

6 All names of dialog and interview partners are anonymized. I use names common in the ›global North‹, as the audience seems to be mostly located here and I do not aim to re-produce differences by my choice of names. I use first names only, again for matters of anonymity and as an expression of our relationship in the research situation, where everybody would always use first names only. This practice is not meant to establish a hierarchy of expertise between quoted authors and dialogue partners as experts of the very situations that are examined here.

7 The German ›Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge‹, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), is responsible for proceeding and deciding over asylum requests.

8 Description based on and translated from Field Notes 3.4.2017 (participatory observation, refugee accommodation center).

9 Pieper (2010) describes the camp system in Germany as *semi-open*, in that people can leave the camps at least during the day and may even find irregular work while residing in the camps. The camp system in Germany is described as *decentralized,* as refugee accommodation is at the responsibility of the sixteen German states and the accommodation of refugees follows certain allocation formulae. Moreover, residence obligations prevent people from moving freely within Germany. Hence, Pieper's analysis that territorial space reveals itself to refugees as highly parceled and controlled.

his destination of Germany. In a way, rather than leaving these borders behind, he continues to carry the border with him. Being born within the national boundaries that make the state of Eritrea not only renders him trapped in the b/ordering process of the European border regime for many years, but determines several other aspects of it as well. The fact, for instance, that he was eventually permitted to attend an Integration Class, was only possible from »1 January 2017 onwards, as the new Integration Act (Integrationsgesetz) (of 6 August 2016) permits asylum applicants from countries with good prospects to remain« (BAMF 2016) to participate in these – and Eritrea happens to be among the few countries listed.

The situation comes out differently again for people from Afghanistan, for example, for whom the Integration Act in Germany does not hold these possibilities. Anna[10], who has fled Afghanistan, also describes the situation of her and her family as desperate while they are anxiously waiting for their asylum request to be processed, being kept awake many nights by the fear of the request being turned down and consequently facing deportation back to Afghanistan. In one of our conversations, she also spoke about the issue of the language classes that she would very much like to attend. Coming from Afghanistan, however, she and her husband face the effects of the border in the form of social boundaries once again, as they are, solely based on their nationality, not permitted access to these courses during the asylum process. Anna concluded with the assessment that »people from Afghanistan are really treated as second-class humans.«[11] Therefore, and to summarize this overview, we may very well follow Balibar (2002) again, who in giving psychoanalysis André Green's quote a materialist connotation, stresses that »it is difficult enough to live *on* a border, but that is as [sic] nothing compared with *being* a border oneself« (Balibar 2002: 83).

3. The Spatiality of the Refugee Centers

In their work on the ethnography of the European border regime, or what they call *ethnographic border regime analysis*, Sabine Hess, Vassilis Tsianos and others reflect on the methodology and methods of how to study the border, its actors and contestations in its various locales (Hess/Tsianos 2010; Tsianos/Karakayali 2010; Tsianos et al. 2009; Hess et al. 2017a). They claim to include the perspective of the movement of migration and its agency in the theorization of the border and to

10 See footnote 6.

11 Memorandum of Conversation (Memcon), translated from Field Notes 3.4.2017 (participatory observation, refugee accommodation center).

analyze the border in situ as a dynamic site of meaningful practice, of conflict and (re-)negotiation processes of diverse local, national, regional and transnational actors (see Hess/Tsianos 2010: 245, 248, 255). They argue that in so doing, it was possible to go beyond the exclusion paradigm of the border and a container interpretation of the society in social sciences and look at the dynamic and porous logic of the border regime instead – a logic that does not aim towards the hermetic sealing of a territory but rather towards the management of migration and the control of its circulation (see Hess/Tsianos 2010: 248). Such an approach towards the »Border as Method« (Mezzadra/Neilson 2013) would then also enable us to grasp the constitutive power of migration, i.e. migrants and refugees (Hess et al. 2017b). In the view of Sabine Hess and Vassilis Tsianos (2010: 252–253), research of the border can only be conducted as a situated analysis that studies the effects of borders at specific locales, thus, calling for a multi-method ethnographic approach, including participatory observation, various forms of ethnographic conversations, and focused interviews, as well as a symptomatic discourse analysis.

This approach seems very insightful for the topic at hand, and it is argued here that taking a distinctively spatial approach to refugee centers further strengthens this method in that it allows for exactly that: an analysis of powerful processes of boundary settings that are enacted in and via processes of creating and maintaining these spaces on various scales; and creative practices, or articulations of *the Political*, that – intendedly or unintendedly – challenge, (re-)negotiate, and contest the spatiality of these boundaries.

This implies that processes of material and non-material boundary-drawing are seen to be constitutive of the social production of space(s), as any defined space necessarily needs to rest on a distinction between inside/outside, between those who partake in its constitutions and those who do not, or between those who form its constitutive elements and those who do not. Likewise, the drawing of boundaries in the context of forced migration cannot be determined without its spatial dimensions; in other words, inclusion or exclusion, and access or rejection, are realized via concrete spatial entities such as nation states, borders, hotspots, transit zones, camps, deportation centers, or in this case, refugee centers. At the same time, these spaces are ultimately porous and underlie processes of continuous negotiation and renegotiation on various levels.

The work of French philosopher Henry Lefebvre is particularly well suited for pursuing this further. In his seminal work, *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) laid out a relational conception of space that entails three dialectically interconnected dimensions of the production of space(s): *spatial practice,*

representations of space and representational spaces. Providing an in-depth analysis of these dimensions and the actors involved in their social (re-)construction is well beyond the scope of this paper.[12] However, in adapting his work for the purpose at hand, Lefebvre's three-dimensional approach to space draws our attention to the variety of boundaries that are enacted in the social production of refugee centers.

His first dimension of the social production of space, *spatial practice*, refers to the daily performance of space, to everyday routines, routes and networks, which link up places to individual spaces (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 33). Spatial practice includes the relations and interaction of people with concrete spatial materiality, as well as with other persons in these spaces. It also entails a temporal dimension, as it points to the very way in which people experience space, i.e. how space is *perceived*, which, of course, may change over time (Elden 2004: 185). In their daily operation, spatial practices produce and reproduce the spatiality of the centers, a spatiality which then also determines the actions and *lifeworlds* of its inhabitants. This ranges from the facility manager's practice of locking the washing rooms after six pm, to the transfer of persons from one center to another carried out repeatedly by the authorities on to the self-organization of people's daily spatial routines in line with the spatial limitations of the center, e.g. when to use the bathroom, the kitchen, where and how they pray, where to let the children play.

These examples reveal that the everyday spatiality of the centers is influenced by a continuous drawing and installing of physical boundaries, such as walls, fences, locked doors or even physical density caused by overcrowding. However, as Martin and Anna's examples have shown, there are also non-material, symbolic and social boundaries, which emerge as immediate effects of borders that regulate people's daily spatial routines, e.g. the exclusion of certain groups of people from integration classes based on their country of origin. While the day-to-day life of those who attend the language classes may include walking the muddy path to the bus-stop and commuting to the city center, or going to the bakery next to the school with friends during breaks (Carl from Iraq once walked me along on this route), the daily spatial routines of people who are excluded from these classes usually imply that much more time is spent in the dreariness of the centers. Moreover, there are other forms of boundaries, such as those based on language or gender, which may have similar effects. Language proficiency might, for

12 I have done this in more detail, analyzing gender inequalities in refugee accommodation centers in a recent contribution (see Hartmann 2017).

instance, foster or hinder access to information or communication with relevant personnel at the centers, while gender inequalities and gendered roles might prevent women from sojourning in communal areas (if there are any) or from attending language classes since accompanying childcare is rarely ever the case.

Lefebvre's second dimension, the *representation of space*, refers to the realm of knowledge and concrete power, or the *conceived*, i.e. conceptualized spaces of scientists, planners, technocrats and social engineers. In line with his Marxist social critique, Lefebvre argues that in modern capitalist societies, this dimension basically colonizes the spatial practices of its members. Applied to the spaces of refugee centers, this would be the dimension of the planning and installation of the centers by the decision-making of local, national or supranational stakeholders. The conceived production of the centers spans from local decisions to repurpose an old warehouse as a refugee center to the national or supra-national issuance of legal and political frameworks that determine the relational and spatial conceptualization of the centers, e.g. the latest tightening of asylum laws in Germany, which rules that persons from so-called safe countries of origin must not be transferred to accommodation centers but have to stay in the initial reception centers more or less until their deportation is carried out.

Therefore, as with the dimension of spatial practices, the drawing of boundaries is a *constitutive aspect* of the social creation of refugee spaces on the dimension of conceived space. The localization and spatial marginalization of these centers (and, therefore, their inhabitants) is a prime example, as refugee centers are frequently planned and built at the margins of cities or in deprived areas with poor public transport and few possibilities for integration with neighboring areas. And with residency obligations applying, people are not permitted to live where they have easy access to social networks or friends but instead must stay where they are placed. To recap, when looking at the social production of spaces on both of these levels suggested by Lefebvre, spatial practices, as well as representations of space and processes of boundary-drawing, reveal themselves as being constitutive for the planning, installment, governance, operation and spatial practice of the refugee centers.

However, Lefebvre does not stop at this rather pessimistic evaluation of the social constitution of space, as he introduces a third dimension of thought (and practice): the level of *representational spaces or lived space*. It is through this dimension that he pictures the dominated spaces to be changed and appropriated via material as well as ideal processes, and where he sees the promise that alternative spaces may be imagined but also lived. This is not to say that the turning of spaces that are grounded in mechanisms of subordination, exclusion and inequal-

ity, like refugee centers, into *lived* and lively spaces is always an actual existent possibility. However, it is suggested here that Lefebvre's notion of *lived space*, as a challenge as well as an alternative to dominated spaces, becomes more pellucid when rephrased as a contestation of the very boundaries that constitute these spaces.

4. Contested Boundaries – Refugee Centers as Spaces of the Political

In this part, I will explore how the contestation of boundaries in and through spatial practices in the refugee centers can be conceptualized on an analytical level and be approached empirically. I depart from Mezzadra and Neilson's (2013) approach of *border as method* but underpin it with some more theoretical clarification as to how *border struggle* is understood in this paper.

4.1. The Struggles Against Boundaries as expressions of the Political

Following Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), boundaries and borders are here approached as *methods*, or as *sites of struggles*. In this regard, boundaries themselves do not so much become a research object than an »epistemological viewpoint that allows an acute critical analysis not only of how relations of domination, dispossession, and exploitation are being redefined presently, but also of the struggles that take shape around these changing relations« (Mezzadra/Neilson 2013: 18). My aim is, therefore, not to paint a comprehensive picture but rather to provide an exemplification of the struggles against boundaries, i.e. »struggles that take shape around the ever more unstable line between the ›inside‹ and ›outside‹, between inclusion and exclusion« (Mezzadra/Neilson 2013: 13).[13]

To further clarify how these struggles are to be understood here, let us take a brief excurse to political philosophy: Post-structural political theory and philosophy of the past decades introduced the conceptual pair of *politics* vs. *the Political* to point to the political difference between an established order of a body politic and its contestation by those excluded, who have no voice in it, by »the part of

13 Unless stated otherwise, empirical examples of the micro-level of spatial practices are based on my own ethnography in a very limited number of camps. Therefore, I have no way of doing justice to the huge variety of struggles, demonstrations, occupations, hunger-strikes, etc. that refugees (and a number of solidarity movements) carry out in many other locales (see for an overview: From the Struggles Collective 2015).

those who have no part« (Rancière 1999: 30).[14] *The Political* is, hence, conceptualized to be the discord, the disagreement, and the insoluble antagonism to » [w]hat is at a given moment considered to be the ›natural‹ order« (Mouffe 2005: 18).

So, if we look at the spatial(izing) orders in the context of (forced) migration and the boundary drawings that become active, for example, in refugee centers from the here-suggested perspective of *border as method* or the *political difference*, this order will emerge as always being susceptible to contestations by the articulative practices of *border struggles* or *the Political*. Or to summarize it in the words of Chantal Mouffe:

> »[E]very order is political and based on some form of exclusion. There are always other possibilities that have been repressed and that can be reactivated. The articulatory practices through which a certain order is established and the meaning of social institutions are fixed are ›hegemonic practices‹. Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices« (Mouffe 2005: 18).

In the struggles of refugees (and their solidary partners) against the boundaries that are constitutive but also manifested via refugee centers, their articulatory practice takes a variety of forms. Among these are concerted actions such as demonstrations, the formation of collective movements (in Germany, there are, for instance, Refugees for Change, The Voice, Women in Exile, Lampedusa Hamburg, just to name a few), the occupation of urban places (most prominent in Germany certainly the occupation of Oranienplatz in Berlin in 2014), or collective hunger strikes.

However, it is important to note that in addition to these more visible practices of contestation, there exists an even bigger variety of small-scale everyday practices by which ›refugees‹ challenge, re-negotiate or maneuver around the boundaries that constrain their *lifeworlds* (see 4.3). Some of these practices may fizzle out before they reach their goal; others may have never even been grounded in any intentional attempt to challenge any boundary in the first place. Nonetheless, all of these practices, intentional or not, lead to a contestation of the boundaries that constitute the centers. And although they might not be part of established *politics*, they are articulations of ›the Political‹, no matter how limited their scope or outcome. The understanding of the Political, which underlies this work, hence, explicitly turns against localizing it exclusively in big revolutionary

14 Slightly confusing, Rancière (1999) labels these conceptual terms differently as ›police‹ vs. ›politics‹. In order not to complicate matters, I will continue to use the terms politics vs. the Political as the antagonistic pair in the ›political difference‹ (for an overview see Marchart 2007).

moments or large-scale historical upheavals (see Bedorf 2010: 34). Rather, this work looks at the Political as practices of individual or collective contestation, which are often located and enacted in the everyday lifeworlds of people. Hence, it is argued here not to evaluate refugees' *border struggles* based on intentionality, their induced changes or effect.[15] After looking at some of the collective struggles against the boundaries on the level of representations of space in the following paragraphs, I will, therefore, put a special focus on the everyday practices on the level of spatial practices.

4.2. The Struggle Against Boundaries of Representations of Space

With Lefebvre, it was argued that the social production of refugee centers at the level of representations of space includes the conception and planning of these centers by politicians, planners and other authorities. Likewise, interventions to challenge boundaries installed at this level often involve higher degrees of strategic planning, intentional acting, coordination and concerted actions, as well as cognitive examination of the mechanisms of the working of these boundaries, than at the level of the everyday. Practices within this dimension are macro- or meso-level struggles, directed to disarticulate, contest, and (re-)negotiate the boundaries that stem from how refugee centers are planned and conceived. They often involve alternative visions of how accommodation of refugees might be conceptualized. Moreover, these often go hand in hand with a more fundamental contestation of exclusion processes that differentiate between us and them, between the inside and outside of an (imagined) territorial and cultural unity called a nation and its affirmation through *the border*, which brought about the category of ›refugee‹ in the first place.

In some German cities, for example, local initiatives put into practice (mostly based on hundreds of hours of solidarity work) alternative housing projects. They

15 Interestingly, even some scholars explicitly pointing to the importance and power of the everyday or ordinary as articulatory practice (and many others do not even take this micro-perspective into consideration) still refer to these in light of their contribution to huge scale transformations such as the change of the Middle East (Bayat 2012) or the interruption of the Schengen border regime (Hess et al. 2017b). Likewise, Chantal Mouffe (2005), in her work ›On The Political‹, concludes the above-quoted paragraph by defining these practices as attempts to »install another form of hegemony«. All of these approaches provide much inspiration for a different epistemology on the subject. However, I would like to stress here again that one should take the everyday practices to stand for themselves as moments of disarticulation, of interruption or events, disregarding whether they bring about large-scale change, or whether they attempted this change or installation of a different hegemony in the first place.

explicitly attempt to de-marginalize the people labeled as refugees and to re-create refugee centers as spaces that do away with several of the spatial and cultural boundaries that usually accompany their installation. One of the earliest and most far-reaching examples is certainly the *Grandhotel Cosmopolis* in the city of Augsburg. Since 2013, it has been providing hotel rooms for people ›with‹ and ›without‹. Besides accommodating around 65 refugees, it rents out 16 hotel and hostel rooms for paying guests. A huge variety of activities, festivities, open spaces, joint meals, etc. extend the idea of creating a shared and cosmopolitan place to the relational aspects of this space as well. Moreover, to do justice to the idea of forming a »*Negotiation Zone* for the recognition of a cosmopolitan reality in our society« (emphasis and transl. by author, Grandhotel Cosmopolis n.d.), activists also actively support refugees in finding a permanent home, once the residence obligations are removed, and people have been allowed to move out of the accommodation center. The activists around the NGO Grandhotel Cosmopolis e.V. clearly view their project as an intervention into the boundary settings (which in so many other places underlie the accommodation of refugees) and look at their hotel as a »concrete utopia – realizing a cosmopolitan everyday culture *without limits* where refugees, travelers, guests, artists and neighbors meet and are welcome« (emphasis and transl. by author, Grandhotel Cosmopolis 2014).

Other examples include refugee and solidarity movements demanding the abolition of camps and requesting a strictly decentralized accommodation for refugees. One of the core activities of *Women in Exile e.V.*, an initiative founded by refugee women in Brandenburg in 2002, for example, is directed at a fundamental critique of the living conditions in the German reception and accommodation centers (in German sometimes called ›Lager‹), revolving around their campaign »No Lager for Women! Abolish all Lagers!« (Women in Exile 2013).[16] Besides providing support for women in camps and helping them to improve their current living situation, Women in Exile's broader political goals can be framed as a more fundamental struggle against the boundaries which refugee women face within society, especially due to their double determination as refugees *and* women: »Our political goal is the utopia of a just society without exclusion and discrimination, with equal rights for all, irrespective of where they come from and

16 The German word ›Lager‹ means ›camps‹ and is often used by activists and critical scholars to include both forms of collective accommodation, i.e. reception and accommodation centers. While the wording chosen in this article at times departs from that critical terminology, mostly for reasons of clarification, it is important to bear in mind that the employment of words such as center vs. camp is not seen to be neutral, nor innocent. Clearly, the phrase ›reception center‹ instantly evokes quite different associations as the word ›camp‹.

where they go to.« (Women in Exile 2017a). The interconnection between their framing of ›Lager‹ in terms of borders and their struggle against these becomes even more explicit in their description of their 2017 conference ›Women* Breaking Borders‹, where ›Lager‹ are explicitly framed as borders. Hence, the aim of the conference is to problematize the confrontation of refugee women with »multiple inner and outer borders during and after the flight« and to »find strategies together on how to dismantle all borders, e.g. deportations, lagers, etc.« (Women in Exile 2017b).

Beyond the examples given, there are a variety of other initiatives, NGOs, refugee councils etc., who aim to intervene in the planning processes of the centers and demand the improvement of living conditions, the implementation of minimum standards in the centers (see for example Liga der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege Hessen 2014) or the abolition of camps in favor of a strictly decentralized accommodation practice. However, a closer elaboration of the variety of efforts would be beyond the scope of this paper.

4.3. The Struggle Against Boundaries of Spatial Practices

Boundary struggles on the level of everyday spatial practices are often less visible and more compartmentalized than concerted or collective practices on the level of conceived spaces. Moreover, transitions between both levels are always a possibility. At the time of writing this article, an initial individual uprising against the living conditions in the camp on Brienner Straße in Berlin, e.g. against the denial of access to kitchens and showers and against recurrent violent practices of security personnel, gradually mounted in collective action and in concerted advances, including the occupation of an urban place by refugees, solidarity concerts, linking up with other movements and claims, commonly asking for an accommodation of people in »normal residence and to close all refugee lagers and camps« (The Voice 2017).[17]

Many practices, however, remain on a much less visible level and play out solely on the micro-level of the everyday.[18] Many of my interview partners, for example, describe how they are trying to overcome the individual exclusion of

17 For further information see https://twitter.com/hashtag/BriennerStr?src=hash&lang=de; http://oplatz.net/what-you-should-know-about-the-briennerstr-protest-close-this-camp/; 13.9.2017.

18 The examples given here are derived from my participatory observation at a reception center (October 2013 – February 2014), an accommodation center for women (Spring 2016), a mixed-sex accommodation center and an accommodation center for women and families (both August 2016 – Mai 2017). Findings from participatory observation entail many non-formal, so-

living in the centers by regaining some control over when to be able to move out of the shared accommodation centers into a private apartment. Whether this is legally allowed is determined by their asylum status (which again is influenced largely by their country of origin), but even if it is granted, finding a private place requires a lot of perseverance as spatial and legal boundaries are often complemented by racist or xenophobic boundaries, e.g. when landlords refuse to rent out to persons born in a Muslim country.

> »John[19], after weeks of negotiating with the facility manager, a lawyer, the social welfare office and continuous research, finally succeeded in finding a privately rented apartment for his family in another area of the city. He was particularly happy that his family was able to turn their back on the original placement in a space distinctly marked for ›refugees‹.[20] When driving from the accommodation center to the apartment to move his family's belongings, John (who, when I had asked him how he thought about the label, ›refugee‹, had immediately responded by saying ›I hate it‹) looked out of the window, breathed a sigh of relief and stated: ›The best thing about this area is, there are no refugees here!‹«[21]

This quote emphasizes that John's struggle is not only directed at the spatial and social boundaries of the refugee centers, but by transgressing the boundaries of these spaces he is at the same time contesting the symbolic boundaries that assign him and his family the identity of *being* a refugee and, in so doing, he is clearly refusing to internalize these boundaries as an inner reality, as an »inner border« that becomes »a condition, an essential reference of […] [his] identity« (Balibar 2002: 78).

In a similar vein, many of the spatial practices of people in the centers may be interpreted as a re-appropriation of these spaces, not as a ›refugee‹ but as a human being who tries to connect with parts of her*his identity which defy that very label. Again, Lefebvre is helpful in illuminating spatial practices of re-appropriation as he distinguishes dominated from (re-)appropriated space. While he views dominated space as »a space transformed – and mediated – by technology«, and also »[t]he realization of a master's project« and as »closed, sterilized, emptied out«, he identifies appropriated space as one which essentially serves the needs of

called ›ero-epic conversations‹ (see Girtler 2001: 147) with refugees, social workers and volunteers and occasionally more formalized interviews with social workers and refugees.

19 See footnote 6.

20 In an earlier interview, he had, for example, explained to me how he felt stigmatized and stared at by other passengers on the bus line that connects the city center with the area where a lot of ›refugees‹ are accommodated (recorded interview conducted 23.11.2016 in a refugee accommodation center in Germany).

21 Memorandum of conversation, translated from Field Notes November 2017 (participatory observation, refugee accommodation center).

the people: »It may be said of a natural space modified in order to serve the needs and possibilities of a group that it has been appropriated by that group.« He acknowledges that in the interplay between public and private space, both types of space – dominated and appropriated – may exist side by side, or be combined in a fruitful manner: »In the best of circumstances, the outside space of the community is dominated, while the indoor space of family life is appropriated« (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 164–166). In the history of capital accumulation, however, he diagnoses a growing separation and antagonism between these two types of spaces, a conflicting tendency resulting in the subjugation of appropriated spaces in favor of dominated spaces. Independent of its Marxist tradition, this approach describes with insight the situation in the refugee centers, which, generally speaking, can hardly be denoted as spaces which serve the needs of their inhabitants. On the contrary, domination reaches into almost every aspect of private life, for example interfering with people's rhythms of sleep, cooking, eating or body hygiene.[22] Peter aptly describes his everyday life in the dominated space of an accommodation center in the following interview passage:

> »But there is also kind of law. In our countries, we don't have law for our life. Especially for the home, where you sleep, where you live. So, but this place has law. There is old man [the housekeeper], he's like the boss in this place and he say: ›eleven ò clock I make the lamp all off in the kitchen‹. There is one kitchen for all the group. […]. And the water hot in the night, there is no water hot after eleven ò clock […]. So, anything you have it, you need to shower or something, you have to finish it before eleven ò clock. That's bad, I mean. […] We think, it's so hard for us, because you cannot tell me […] first, I'm not *Kinder* […] I'm not a baby […] if you tell me I have to sleep at eleven ò clock, I cannot sleep at eleven ò clock. I'm not a baby. It does not work.«[23]

Merging the above-outlined ideas of the contestation of boundaries with Lefebvre's distinction of dominated and (re-)appropriated spaces, we can therefore infer that the re-appropriation of space requires a working around and a (re-)negotiation of the boundaries which restrict social practices and human needs in refugee centers. Moreover, in light of the above-discussed concept of *the Political*, this does not necessarily imply that entirely new spaces are hereby created or produced, rather that an interruption or diversion occurs which puts »a temporary halt to domination« (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 168).

22 It is beyond the scope of this paper to integrate the conceptualization of refugee centers in the broader discussion on (the spatiality of) refugee camps. For an introduction to related examinations of refugee camps as sites of control and/or resistance, domination and/or agency, see for example Agamben (2005), Agier (2002), Diken/Lausten (2005), Grbac (2013), Hyndman (2002), Ramadan (2013), Krause (2016), and Kaiser (2008).

23 Literal transcription of a recorded interview, conducted 4.8.2017 in my office.

Let me illustrate this point with two examples. One interview partner, Helen, repeatedly told me how much she misses the orchards of her former home. When we came back from a visit to the local branch of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees one day, she proudly showed me two small trees she had planted on the green area in front of the accommodation center. Another interview partner, Olivia[24] introduced me to her ceremony of coffee brewing:

> »Olivia, a woman in her early twenties and I have been to the local office for subsidized housing. She had placed herself on the waiting list, as she is eagerly looking for a private home for her and her baby boy. She says that the accommodation center was just not the right place for a baby. On the way back to the center, she asks me if I would like some coffee, but that it would take some time to make it. I have some spare time so I willingly agree. […]
>
> We sit in her room, in the corner above the baby bed are two big colorful pictures, the one showing Jesus, the other her younger brother who did not survive their shared passage over the Mediterranean. I am surprised that when she removes a blanket from one of the piles of what I had thought were storage boxes, a nicely decorated little cupboard and a little table with a hotplate, both on rollers, appear. She moves them to the middle of the room, takes a seat on a little stool beside them. The little cupboard releases a pan, a packet with coffee beans, a clay coffee pot, a coffee grinder, a number of pretty little cups, spoons, etc. Olivia starts roasting the coffee beans on the hotplate, I can smell the sweet fragrance of coffee when she lays out the beans to dry before grinding them. It is not until after an hour that we begin sipping beautifully strong coffee from our little cups. She tells me that she got the appliances from a countryman of hers and that she really needed them. That this was the way she and her mom used to do coffee. Roast, dry and grind the beans, pour water in the pot, boil, sit and chat for hours. She says that she missed her a lot.«[25]

To be sure, people are not allowed to have their own hotplates in their rooms, and I recall various conversations with the facility manager, where he complained in incomprehension why residents are not simply using the community kitchens as is expected from them. Needless to say, it is hard to imagine such a ceremony taking place in a room where strangers walk in and out, interrupting and disturbing the ritual at any moment. Olivia therefore pushes the boundaries of the spatial order by finding ways of creatively (re-)appropriating her space; (re-)appropriation is understood here in line with Lefebvre's above outlined conceptualization. Another aspect of it follows from Roberta Feldman and Susan Stall (1994: 172) who encapsulate processes of space appropriation as

24 See footnote 6. I refrain from naming her country of origin as I do not want to jeopardize her anonymity.

25 Description based on and translated from Field Notes 15.2.2017 (participatory observation, refugee accommodation center).

> »individuals' and groups' creation, choice, possession, modification, enhancement of, care for, and/or simply intentional use of a space to make it [their] own […]. Space appropriation is conceptualized as an interactive process through which individuals purposefully transform the physical environment into a meaningful place, while in turn transforming themselves« (Feldman/Stall 1994: 172).

In the process of transforming her physical environment into an (albeit temporary) meaningful place and in creating a space that gives room for a ritual that is essentially important to her, Olivia challenges the material and relational boundaries that predetermine the spatial practice in the accommodation center. Moreover, she also refuses to be reduced to a life-on-hold and struggles to hold tight to a part of her identity and memory, that defies her interpellation solely as a ›refugee‹.

However, before I conclude, and so as to come full circle with Balibar's notion of »a life which is waiting-to-live, a non-life« (Balibar 2002: 83), let me draw attention again to people's perceptions of their lives in refugee centers. Although this paper suggests that people engage in manifold practices to (re-)negotiate the limitations and boundaries set by the spatial orders of the refugee centers, this is not to say that these practices and perceptions dominate the everyday life in a refugee camp or Heim or the people's perceptions of it. Therefore, to prevent the risk of romanticizing *the Political* or practices of border struggles, it is important to take note of the fact that people's experiencing of these spaces and their own role within them seems for a large part to be characterized by passivity, by the sense of a life on hold that is constantly threatened by the dark cloud of the rejection of their asylum claims. This, for example, becomes very explicit when Anna tells me how the extended period of time, which she and her family had to spend in several different camps[26] in Germany resulted in severe health problems as well as a sense of loss of power and agency:

> »That time [in Afghanistan], I was thinking, okay, we come now, now will be no problem, no war, no *Angst*. But I see much *Angst* here also in Deutschland in the different camps. That make me this mind-problem. That now I cannot sleep. I cannot sleep without medicine. And many *Angst* and many thinking […]. It was not in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan I have much problem, but I was fighting with the problems. And when you are fighting you have the power. But now I don't know. In the passage of time, I losing strongness.«[27]

26 In an earlier passage of the interview, Anna makes an explicit distinction between life in first reception centers, or what she calls ›camps‹ and accommodation centers, i.e. ›Heim‹, as the latter regained her some sense of ›safety‹ when her family no longer had to share their room with complete strangers.

27 Literal transcription of a recorded interview conducted 25.5.2017 in a refugee accommodation center in Germany.

Importantly, Anna, in the various conversations I had with her, was at no point saying that staying in or returning to Afghanistan was a viable option for her or her family, as she and her husband had suffered incredible losses of close family members, and anticipate a life-threatening situation were they to return to their home country. Rather, it is the passivity of waiting, her subjection to repeated transfers from one ›camp‹ to another, as well as the ever-present threat of their asylum request being turned down, i.e. her constant encounters with the material and ideational aspects of boundaries and borders, that render impossible a feeling of finally being safe.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined refugee accommodation centers as constitutive elements of delocalized borders that spread far beyond being merely separation lines between nation states. It was argued that the social production of refugee centers rests on powerful processes of boundary drawings that replicate the b/ordering mechanisms of the nationalist order of our allegedly ›globalized‹ world. Yet, it was also shown that manifold practices of ›refugees‹ on various spatial levels challenge the boundaries. Disregarding their intent or effect, these practices were read in the light of the discussion of *border struggles* and *the Political* as an active part in the contestation and interruption of the spatio-political order of the centers.

Although this contribution has placed a strong focus on the antagonism between the powerful mechanisms of the drawings of boundaries and borders and the struggles against these by those mostly affected, there is another dimension which is related to the »polysemic nature« of borders, i.e. »the fact that borders do not have the same meaning for everyone« (Balibar 2002: 81). The fact that some are more negatively affected by b/ordering processes and the ›ubiquity‹ of borders than others especially calls on the latter to critically examine, to de-naturalize and to challenge the structural and cultural inequalities that very often benefit them. What is needed is a form of solidarity and understanding of shared fate, moving beyond humanitarian reason and transcending the very boundaries which manifest and consolidate these inequalities.

Again, the example mentioned at the outset, the massive wall built between a housing area and a refugee accommodation center in Munich-Neuperlach, may serve as an illustration: on November 9, 2016, the day of the 27th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the coalition for action *Bellevue di Monaco* installed a so-called *Checkpoint Ali*, ironically resembling Berlin's *Checkpoint Charlie*

between the Eastern and Western sectors during the Cold War. The satirical checkpoint was opened with the mocking announcement to »ensure unrestricted border crossing to the other side of Neuperlach« (transl. Bellevue di Monaco 2016) and the action drew great resonance across various news outlets. In solidarity with those placed behind it, the activists ironically called into question the political, discursive and material formations of the ubiquitous border, manifested in a wall in their very locale. At the same time, the example also highlights the difficulty and complexity of the matter, in that whether the name *Checkpoint Ali* may be read as an ironic challenge to, or a reproduction of, racialized boundaries is yet another question.

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