A politics of appearance

A theoretical exploration of private accommodation initiatives for refugees

Minor Thesis (RSO-80424)

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Abstract

Publicly organized asylum seeker accommodation in Germany often involves a strict spatial and social segregation of asylum seekers from the wider society, which contributes to turning individuals who seek asylum into an abstract, impersonal category. For the individual asylum seeker, this creates a situation of harmful visibility vis-à-vis the state and harmful invisibility vis-à-vis the receiving society. Against this background, this paper will theoretically discuss the socio-political implications of recently developed civil society initiatives that organize the accommodation of asylum seekers in private housing arrangements in which asylum seekers live side-by-side non-refugees. Drawing on the approach of autonomous migration, Rancière's disruptive politics and Butler's performative theory of appearance, I argue that these civil society initiatives can be understood as providing spaces of appearance for asylum seekers to become visible as individuals amongst non-refugees. This can be considered as a performative act of disruption, changing the spatial and social ordering of asylum (accommodation) policies. Far from glorifying the effects of private accommodation for asylum seekers, however, I argue that these do not affect the legal status of the asylum seeker, but that nevertheless living side-by-side non-refugees can change asylum seekers' invisibility vis-à-vis the civil society, and allows for personal encounters and individuation which might enhance their social emplacement.

Keywords: Germany, asylum seeker accommodation, ordering, civil society, dissensus, appearance

Introduction and Background

Civil society initiatives for refugee rights in Germany

Since about 2012, when the numbers of people arriving in Europe to apply for asylum started to rise (Eurostat, 2016), German newspapers comment with an increasing frequency on the 'alarming' numbers of refugees coming to Europe, the political discussions on the European level about how to achieve a fair distribution of these refugees, and on the big question of 'how many we can take in?'. Also anti-refugee, anti-immigrant and anti-Islam protests have filled many headlines. At the same time, however, although being far less visible in the media, large numbers of civil society initiatives have developed which are involved in supporting refugees coming to Germany. Volunteers are contributing significantly to the reception of refugees and are active for example as organizers in emergency shelters, as language teachers, as clothing donors or as advisors assisting with the bureaucracy of the asylum application and giving legal support (Asmuth, 2015).

This activism of volunteers needs to be considered in the context of the five decades long activism of civil society initiatives in Germany[1] that criticise and counter-act the often severe conditions under which irregular migrants, individuals in the asylum procedure and those who were denied asylum live (Dünnwald, 2006; Fekete, 2009). These initiatives include for example neighbourhood initiatives that in several cases have successfully prevented deportations (Pro Asyl, n.d.), private hosting of *sans papiers* or unregistered refugees (Fekete, 2009), as well as support for refugee protest movements such as the 'Refugee Strike' in Germany from 2012 to 2014 (Bahr, 2013; Refugee Struggle for Freedom, n.d.). As Dünnwald (2006) writes, most of such initiatives work on the local level and are concerned with the practicalities of enabling the day-to-day lives of the refugees involved. The mundaneness of many of these activities as well as their local focus often make them little known outside the circle of those involved. Unsurprisingly, media representations as well as academic research of the situation of refugees in Germany are hence biased towards the more symbolic anti-refugee protests and the (increasingly heated) political debates around migration and refugee policies. The important work done by the civil society with regard to refugees in Germany–has therefore been largely unnoticed for a long time (Dünnwald, 2006).

Private housing arrangements

One civil society initiative that has gained relatively more media attention in the past months, both through traditional and social media channels, is the project *Flüchtlinge Willkommen*[2]. This initiative is especially concerned with the situation of refugee housing facilities in Germany, which has often been criticised as being inadequate for accommodation of refugees during the some times lengthy asylum procedures (Darling, 2011; Refugee Struggle for Freedom, n.d.).

According to the German asylum law, the responsibility for asylum seekers' accommodation and application processing in Germany is distributed to the 16 Federal States, who in turn delegate it into the different administrative districts (Informationsverbund Asyl und Migration, 2016b). All refugees applying for asylum in Germany should first be allocated to one of the initial reception centres (*Erstaufnahmeeinrichtungen*), where they have to remain for a period of six weeks to six months (depending on the regulation of the responsible administrative district) before being transferred to

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[1] Also church-related organizations have been active in that field (cf. Chimienti, 2011), but as these might work differently from civil society initiatives, they are not the topic of this thesis.
[2] Accessible through their international website refugees-welcome.net.

collective accommodation centres (*Gemeinschaftsunterkünfte*). In these mass accommodation centres, the asylum applicants remain to await the decision on their procedure (Informationsverbund Asyl und Migration, 2016b).

The conditions in the initial reception centres vary significantly across Germany. As setting of standards is in the responsibility of the governments of the Federal States, the reception centres allocate between 4.5m² and 7m² for each of their often several hundred inhabitants. This means that in many centres, two to four asylum seekers have to share a room, and sanitary facilities are shared with even more inhabitants. Especially since 2012, many of these reception centres are overcrowded, which led to a situation in which there are no capacities to house individuals who deserve special protection (such as families or single women) separately. In many reception centres, asylum seekers need to register with security personnel when leaving the grounds of the centre and when returning (Informationsverbund Asyl und Migration, 2016a).

Overcrowding is increasingly also a problem in the collective accommodation centres, in which most asylum seekers are housed for a significantly longer period than in the initial reception centres, as it is here where they are awaiting a decision in their asylum process. Collective accommodation centres, especially the larger ones, have been criticised by refugee organizations and other NGOs for a number of severe shortcomings, such the frequent lack of cooking facilities to prepare own food in centres where food is provided by a caterer, and the poor quality the food provided in such centres; the fences surrounding the premise and the requirement to register with security personnel when leaving and returning to the accommodation centre; the limited visiting hours that in some cases even prevent spouses to stay overnight; limited space and equipment for recreation, especially for children; the lack of separate spaces for children where they can do their schoolwork; as well as a general lack of privacy and in some centres "problematic hygienic conditions" (Witteborn, 2011, p.1148; see also Informationsverbund Asyl und Migration, 2016a). Apart from the internal situation, collective accommodation centres are also criticized for their often remote geographical location, which leads to a segregation of their inhabitants from the German society and makes it very difficult for asylum applicants to get into contact with people who are not asylum seekers. For these reasons, the collective accommodation centres are sometimes referred to as 'camps' or 'lagers' by advocates for better treatment of asylum seekers, to highlight their insufficiency as long-term accommodation facilities for fled individuals (Refugee Struggle for Freedom, n.d.).

The initiative *Flüchtlinge Willkommen* is targeting the living conditions in such centralized accommodation centres by offering alternatives for refugees to live outside such mass accommodation facilities. This initiative facilitates private housing arrangements, in which asylum seekers share a household together with individuals who are not refugees themselves. According to the organization, these housing arrangements enable the asylum seeker not only to improve their situation by living outside of the publicly provided accommodation centres, but also improve their situation by bringing refugees together with civil society actors[3], as this supposedly promotes solidarity and de-stigmatizes the asylum seekers (Flüchtlinge Willkommen, n.d.). The organization itself works as a broker for these private housing arrangements by connecting flat shares and other private households with refugees who would like to live in a private room in a shared

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[3] 'Civil society actor' here denotes any individual who is legally residing in Germany and is part of the German civil society, independent of his or her actual citizenship. It is important to note that with civil society actors I do not mean family members of refugees who already have a legal status in Germany (although they can of course be members of the civil society in Germany), but individuals unrelated to the asylum applicant.

apartment/house instead of the collective accommodation centres for the duration of their procedure.

The Berlin-based initiative was set up in November 2014, and has so far expanded to numerous EU countries, among them Austria, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, Poland and Italy. As of April 13, 2016, the organizers claim to have matched in total 608 refugees from around 30 different countries to flat-shares, of whom 292 in Germany and 275 in Austria alone (Refugees Welcome, n.d.). It must be noted that according to the website, no difference is made regarding the legal status of the refugee, which means that participation is in principle open to all individuals who consider themselves as refugees. This includes thus individuals who are in the (sometimes very lengthy) asylum procedure, the so-called asylum seekers, as well as undocumented refugees whose presence in Germany is illegalized by the law, or those whose asylum application has been rejected but cannot be deported (either due to a lack of documents that would establish their nationality, or due to the risks for their health and security when returning to their country of origin) (Witteborn, 2011). However, as the website describes the project Refugees Welcome as an alternative to the "stigmatizing and excluding mass accommodation centres" (Flüchtlinge Willkommen, n.d.) provided by the German asylum system, it might be assumed that it is primarily targeted at individuals who are currently in the asylum procedure and therefore are generally housed in these mass accommodation centres.

The initiative *Flüchtlinge Willkommen* operates within the legal framework that, in most administrative districts, allows for decentralized accommodation as an alternative to housing in the collective accommodation centres for people in the asylum procedure. This regulation makes it theoretically possible that asylum applicants find decentralized accommodation, such as houses and apartments, if no additional costs occur to the responsible authorities. The use of decentralized accommodation varies significantly across the German administrative districts, and is also largely dependent on the availability of affordable apartments or houses (Informationsverbund Asyl und Migration, 2016b). These, however, are in many cases difficult to find. Available private accommodation is mostly offered to families, which means that single asylum applicants have very small chances of finding suitable accommodation outside of the collective accommodation centres (*ibid.*).

Offering individual asylum applicants rooms in flat shares or private households of members of the German society increases the availability of affordable accommodation outside the collective accommodation centre, and thus enables more asylum seekers to make use of the legal possibility of decentralized accommodation. Due to the obligation to reside within the assigned administrative district (Informationsverbund Asyl und Migration, 2016b), private accommodation arrangements for asylum seekers need to be found locally and are dependent on the local regulations as to the type of accommodation and maximum costs. It is important to note that each private accommodation arrangement needs to be permitted by the responsible authorities in the administrative district in order to ensure the legality of this arrangement. According to the statistics offered by *Flüchtlinge Willkommen*, around half of the rooms for asylum seekers in flat shares are currently financed by the authorities who have previously paid for the asylum seeker´s accommodation in the collective accommodation centre, around one third of the rooms is offered for free (and thus paid for by the other members of the household), one fifth is financed by micro-donations and the rest by a combination of these methods (Flüchtlinge Willlkommen, 2015).

The media-visibility of this initiative, as indicated above, is relatively high. The organization itself, apart from having websites available in several languages as well as an international blog, is represented in social media with their international accounts on platforms such as facebook, twitter, Instagram and tumblr (Flüchtlinge Willkommen, n.d.). Furthermore, several news articles and short documentaries about this initiative have appeared both in local, national and international newspapers (such as in Die Zeit, Der Tagesspiegel, die tageszeitung, le Parisien and International Business Times, to mention only a few) as well as on TV (for example on German public legal stations such as ZDF and Arte) (Flüchtlinge Willkommen, 2016).

Goal and outline of this research

In this thesis, the focus shall be on private accommodation arrangements for asylum seekers in households shared with individuals who are not refugees themselves, as for example those organized by the initiative *Flüchtlinge Willkommen*. Although such living arrangements can also be found for undocumented migrants (De Genova, 2002; Fekete, 2009), I argue that due to their scope and media visibility, which is a stark contrast to the clandestineness of the *de facto* illegal housing arrangements for undocumented migrants, the private accommodation arrangements brokered by *Flüchtlinge Willkommen* can be considered to be a novel phenomenon that deserves academic interest.

Unsurprisingly, considering the relative novelty of this phenomenon, no research has been published yet about these private housing arrangements for refugees. Apart from this specific case study, however, and with the noteworthy exceptions of scholars like Dünnwald (2006), Fekete (2009) and Bahr (2013), there has been generally little academic research about the interactions between civil society actors and refugees in the asylum procedure in Western Europe[4]. This gap in academic research seems to represent the major political discourse of strictly separating 'refugees' from 'society' (as will be further explained in Chapter 2).

This thesis attempts to make a start at filling this research gap by looking at the specific case of private accommodation arrangements in order to understand counter-actions to the discursively implied segregation and abstraction of people fleeing to Europe. The goal of this thesis is therefore to theoretically explore the meaning and effects of such housing arrangements, where refugees and civil society actors live together in a shared household. The research question guiding this thesis is: What is the consequence of private accommodation arrangements on the dominant theoretical conceptions of 'the refugee', and what alternative conceptualizations are more adequate to grasp the meaning of such housing arrangements? The theoretical analysis done in this thesis shall provide the basis of future empirical work on this topic.

Rather than constituting a systematic literature review of the vast field of refugee studies, however, this thesis is an exploration of the dominant conceptualizations of 'refugees' that shape much of the scholarship in this field. As to the methodology, various sampling strategies were employed for the research. The literature review started with defining a list of specific search terms (including for example 'asylum seeker accommodation', 'asylum debate', 'criminalization of refugees', 'social movements of refugees' in the titles or abstracts of journal articles), which was refined and complemented by more search terms as the research proceeded. Additionally, the articles found

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[4] Scholarship in this field has mostly focused on *sans papiers* and other illegalized individuals in Europe (cf. Chimienti, 2011; Willen, 2007), or on the interactions the asylum seeker and the state authorities (cf. De Genova, 2002; van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002), but very rarely on the meanings of the encounters and interactions between the civil society and asylum seekers.

through this method also gave access to other relevant literature, a sampling strategy called snowball sampling (Adler & Clark, 2011).

The lack of research done in the specific topic discussed in this thesis, namely the interaction between refugees and civil society actors, especially in forms of 'mundane politics' through private housing, required the combination of different bodies of literature. The search was continued until some saturation was found, or, as was the case with the comparatively recent alternative theories discussed in the second part of this thesis (which are not yet widely applied to conceptualizations of refugees), until the most influential works in this field had been covered. Rather than being very strict about which sources to include from the outset, the associative research methodology employed in this thesis allowed for an explorative search, and the precise form of this thesis took shape only as the research proceeded. The important writings of Hannah Arendt with regard to refugees (Arendt, 1943 and 1951) have been an underlying inspiration in this work, and has influenced many of the authors cited in this research.

As this thesis also aims to counter the abstraction of the term 'refugee' as much as possible in such a theoretical work, the terminology used in this thesis to describe individuals fleeing to Europe deserves specific attention: Although in legal terms the refugee status needs to be granted to the individual, I argue with Schuster "that it is not recognition that makes one a refugee, but the circumstances that caused one to flee" (2011, p. 1392). Hence, in this thesis the terms *refugee* and *asylum seeker/applicant* shall be used almost interchangeably, although they point towards different aspects in the conditions of the individuals described as such: By using the term *refugee*, I aim to highlight the legal uncertainty, the state of belonging-nowhere-in-the-world (cf. Oudejans, 2011). Writing the term in inverted commas ('refugee') is done to show the constructedness of the apparently fixed legal category of 'the refugee', which I aim to denaturalize in this thesis. The term *non-refugee* is used to denote individuals of the civil society who, independent their actual citizenship, reside legally in Germany and do not suffer from an insecurity regarding their legal status. Thereby, they constitute a contrasting category to the refugee. The terms *asylum seeker* or *asylum applicant* are used to point to the legal position of the refugee, namely the situation of being in the asylum procedure which is connected with a number of specific rights and restrictions.

The remainder of this thesis is structured into two parts. In the first part, I will explore dominant theories from the field of refugee studies, and on how 'the refugee' is classically conceptualized. Chapters One, Two and Three respectively deal with the legal, socio-political and spatial ordering of refugees. In Chapter 4, the processes described in the previous chapters will be analysed with the concept of in/visibility, and in Chapter 5 I will draw a conclusion from the explorations of the theoretical conceptions in Part 1. In the second part of this thesis, the insights gained in Part One as to how 'the refugee' is theorized will be applied to the case of private accommodation arrangements. In Chapter 6, I will analyse how these arrangements can be understood through the lens of in/visibility discussed in Chapter 4. As will be seen, this allows some insights into the social effects of private accommodation arrangements, but does not allow for analysing how these are politically significant. In order to achieve this, in Chapter 7 I will build an alternative theoretical framework of more agency-focused approaches, which will be applied to private accommodation arrangements in Chapter 8. This is followed by the conclusion chapter, in which I will summarize the argumentation and main conclusions of this thesis, reflect on the research and writing process and outline possible future research topic that arise from this work.

Part 1: An exploration of the conceptualization of 'the refugee'

1 | The legal ordering of 'refugees'

This first chapter of the first part of the thesis starts with the legal definition of the 'the refugee', which originates from the era after the Second World War. The development of this category and its application over the past six decades will be briefly explored in order to de-construct the apparent fixed-ness of the understanding of who is a refugee. Critiques from empirical research will underline the argument that this definition is far from being as precise and legitimate as often assumed. This deconstruction is necessary to understand the legal ordering of 'the refugee', which is closely interrelated with the socio-political ordering of refugees that will be the topic of the second chapter.

The legal definition, its origins and effects

According to Article 1(a)(2) of the 1951 Refugee Convention[5], a refugee is legally defined as an individual who, "[a]s a result of events […] and 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" (UNHCR, 1951, p. 14). The goal of the 1951 Refugee Convention was to establish a system of international protection for those who were forced to flee their state of origin in the context of the Second World War, and who therefore lost the protection by their state. This was considered to be the most troublesome aspect of being a refugee (Oudejans, 2011). Gill (2010) highlights how "[t]he notion of refugees [...] rests upon the Westphalian ideal of a system of interlocking nation states that traverse the globe, implying that the experience of not being under any state's authority and protection is both absurd in theory and unusual in practice" (p.626; see also Owens, 2009), and must therefore be remedied as efficiently as possible.

The Convention was initially designed only as a temporary instrument coping with the situation of refugees in the post-WW2 era. However, in its slightly adapted form of the 1967 Protocol (in which the initial geographical and chronological restrictions in the Convention as to who can qualify as a refugee deserving international protection were removed and the application was generalized to people of all countries), it has been signed by 146 countries. Since then, the Convention has become the pillar of the international refugee regime, whose text has been translated into the domestic law of the signatory states (Oudejans, 2011).

According to the current European system, the refugee status has to be granted to the individual, i.e. a person needs to be recognized as a refugee by the receiving state or the international body of the UNHCR (Karatani, 2005). In Europe, the recognition is commonly done through the national asylum procedures, which can hence be considered as an authentication process for refugee claims. Thus, even though in the common use of the term a 'refugee' is any person fleeing from his or her place of origin (either within or outside of the national borders), in legal terminology the title 'refugee' is only applicable to those who have left their country of origin and who have been granted the refugee status.

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[5] Hereafter also 'the Convention'

The creation of the category of the 'refugee' in the post-WW2 context was guided by the idea to distinguish 'refugees', i.e. individuals who were victims of persecution (or would be if remaining in their country of origin), from 'migrants' who could have chosen to stay at their place of origin (Karatani, 2005). The refugee regime is thus from the outset a fundamentally different system than the immigration control regime: offering protection for refugees was considered as a humanitarian imperative, whereas the immigration regime was largely focused on controlling and managing the "inflow of non-nationals with a view to preserving territorial, economic, political and cultural unity" (Oudejans, 2011, p. 23). Indeed, the very idea of refugee law constitutes an exception to state's sovereign right to decide about inclusion and exclusion, which is not always welcomed by the national governments (Nyers, 2003).

However, social realities are rarely as clearly demarcated as in these legal categories: The constructedness of the category of 'the refugee' vis-à-vis the category of 'the migrant' can best seen by analysing the changes and developments these categories have undergone throughout the years in the case of the EU: Whereas the refugee regime with its logic of protection was once strictly separated from the immigration control regime that was concerned with the control and management of foreigners wanting to enter the EU, these two systems have since about three decades become increasingly intermingled. As claiming of asylum in fact requires the presence of the applicant on the territory of the country where the application is made (Schuster, 2011), the functioning of the refugee regime is by its design very much dependent on the successful removal of rejected asylum seekers, in order to prevent them from staying illegally on that territory. However, in the past the majority of deportations could not be executed due to several reasons, most importantly because many asylum seekers did not carry identification documents and their nationality could thus not be established with full certainty. This led to a situation where large numbers of actually rejected asylum seekers remained within the EU, and consequently refugee law was increasingly incriminated for enabling irregular immigration into the EU (Oudejans, 2011).

Over time, this caused a turn in the refugee regime from the *logic of protection* of the vulnerable to the *logic of preventing abuse* (i.e. the exploitation of the refugee system by those who do not deserve protection). Asylum seekers were increasingly seen through a frame of securitization: "In order to address problems relating to nationality, identity and documentation, states resorted to the means of immigration control with the aim of managing (and preventing) the illegal entry of asylum seekers. The intersection between the asylum and immigration system at the end of the asylum track [i.e. the deportation] was thus shifted towards the beginning of it" (*ibid.*, p.25-26). In this process, the pillars of refugee protection were significantly weakened, especially the prohibition of their *refoulement* (forcible return) and of their punishment for entering the EU illegally (which is almost unavoidable considering the lack of legal means to enter the EU legally for people who want to apply for asylum in one of the EU member states, cf. Schuster, 2011).

This shift in strategies was legitimized by a new discourse of 'bogus' asylum seekers, casting a general suspicion over all asylum seekers as wanting to abuse the generosity of the European asylum system. Today, a differentiation is made between the political asylum seeker and the 'bogus' asylum seeker who is framed as an 'economic migrant', ostensibly seeking asylum merely for economic reasons, and who is cast as 'undeserving' of EU protection (see for example Dünnwald, 2006; Haas, 2012; Malkki, 1995; and van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). This evoked general distrust and even hostility towards all asylum seekers, and turned them into "objects of securitized fears and anxieties" (Nyers, 2003, p.1070; Oudejans, 2011). Over time, the asylum procedure has thus become an often

humiliating process in which the applicant has to convincingly prove that he or she belongs to the category of 'good' or 'genuine' asylum seekers, and not to that of 'bogus refugees' abusing the system (Nyers, 2003).

Critiques to the practice of legal categorization

As has been indicated in the paragraphs above, the legal definition of the refugee is rarely easily applicable in reality as it might seem. Critical scholarship on the categorization of refugees and migrants from the recent years has found many empirical proofs for the inadequacy, or even absurdity, of trying to sort individuals on the move into clearly demarcated legal categories. A first critique is that it has been found that political, economic, social and legal reasons for emigration are often highly interwoven into a complex set of motivations to leave the country of origin, and so the allocation into categories of 'economic migrant' or 'political refugees' is often neither simple nor representative for the individual story (Haas, 2012). Also migratory trajectories are often less clearly demarcated than the categories represent: on their route, individuals who apply for asylum in an EU member state might have embodied the category of trans-migrant (when crossing other countries), economic migrant (when remaining at some place along the route to earn money for continuing the move) and irregular migrant (when having to enter the EU clandestinely due to a lack of legal trajectories). Hence, regarding both their motives and their trajectories, the categorization and labels attached to people on the move can be considered as inadequate as they are often unfit to grasp social realities of individuals (*ibid.*).

A second critique, related to the first, is that these categories are considered as being too broad in themselves, combining and homogenizing within them a big variety of socio-economic statuses, histories, migratory pathways and situations (Malkki, 1995). This is claimed to render the categories too ambiguous to be of any use for describing individual situations. A large variety of life trajectories might be summarized in the category of the 'refugee', such as that of the homosexual from Russia, the political activist from Iran and the conscientious objector to military service from Eritrea – who all might have nothing in common except for losing their protection of their own state and having asked for asylum in the EU. Due to their homogenizing effect, one could argue that these categorizations are not helpful to decrease individual suffering (*ibid.*).

Thirdly, such labelling and categorizing practices assume the passivity of those being categorized, while their agency as human beings is usually denied. In her article about survival strategies of Afghani *sans papiers* in Paris, Schuster pointedly describes the absurdities of the EU asylum system: "EU Member States expect [individuals who want to claim asylum] to cross the external borders of the EU furnished with authoritative documentary evidence of their ages, of where they have lived, of the persecutions that they have suffered, to make themselves known to the authorities, to wait patiently, surviving without recourse to public funds, without being visible, to accept whatever decision is made about their future, and to go where they are told, including back to Afghanistan. They are emphatically not expected to make choices or decisions, but instead to present themselves as passive victims, grateful for whatever minimal tolerance they are shown" (Schuster, 2011, p. 1403).

This expectation from authorities, however, contradicts empirical research from the past years which has shown that the repertoire of categories and labels available to immigration authorities can shape the behaviour of people on the move, as they might be aware of the categorizations used by the EU immigration authorities. Since individuals can and do adapt to new regulations and laws, immigration

control and asylum policies might for example produce a new *gens sans papiers* when it is known that lack of identification documents might increase chances for political asylum in the EU, or at least for postponing deportation. "What is produced as a template of admission" will determine the behaviour of those who wish to enter, "making the arbitrary line between economic [migration] and political asylum even thinner" (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002, p.130). This is supported by the fact that from the 1990s onwards, next to family reunification migration, being an asylum seeker has become one of the few legal ways to enter the EU legally once the legal doors for economic and labour migrants were closed. Subsequently, this prompted more individuals to choose this route to enter the EU.

A case described by Szczepanikova (2013) illustrates this adaptability of migrant trajectories to EU immigration policies: A significant number of foreign nationals, who had legally resided in Czech Republic, decided to apply for asylum in Czech Republic when a new national immigration law came into force that increased the restrictions for these individuals and "rendered their stay illegal. Many saw no other way but to legalize their status by applying for asylum" (p.133). This is not to say that many individuals who claim asylum in the EU are not in fact (potential) victims of persecution, but rather to highlight that "the asylum-seeking population is not only an outcome of external socio-political developments in other countries, but also a product of domestic asylum and immigration policies and their interconnectedness" (*ibid.).* Such practices further confuse the artificial distinctions between different groups of migrants.

Lastly, a fourth criticism relates to how national authorities use these different categorizations for individuals on the move in applying them to suit their current political agendas, both at the borders and by the asylum authorities. As Iglesias Sánchez (2013) writes, "the very essence of immigration law is to regulate entry and status, and therefore, to establish lines of differentiation between individuals" (p.45). This results in de-individualization and abstraction, and those classified as unwanted, "threatening" migrants shall be filtered from the welcomed, "advantageous" ones (Darling, 2011, p.265). European immigration authorities are provided with a variety of legal and policy instruments that enable them to 'maximize' desired immigrant 'flows' and to 'minimize' the undesired immigrant 'flows', such as by granting visas selectively as well as employing biometrical measures to filter out those without a permission to enter the Schengen Area (van Houtum, 2010).

Based on the premise that "the speed and comfort of unrestricted mobility for the normalised majority of travellers [or migrants to and within the EU] hinges on the intensified control and possible *banishment* of those classified as 'risky'" at the outer border (Scheel, 2013, p. 592, emphasis in original), a policy to "select, eject and immobilize" is practiced towards unwelcomed migrants (Darling, 2011, p. 264). The changing definitions of who can be considered a 'refugee' eligible for asylum in the EU also allows the national governments to evade their international obligations to provide protection for people who flee their home countries (Schuster, 2011; Oudejans, 2011). By declaring EU neighbouring countries as safe third countries, for instance, potential asylum seekers entering the EU through these countries can be excluded at the EU borders, and for citizens from these countries it becomes almost impossible to apply for asylum in the EU. Another example is the policy to grant asylum applicants only temporary protection instead of asylum, which prevents them from applying for family reunification, and is thus a way to minimize the possibilities for the legal entry of more 'unwanted' immigrants into the EU. This shows that individuals with similar experiences of persecution might be sorted into different categories by the authorities according to

the current political agendas, which emphasises the sometimes arbitrary nature of the legal categories.

The produced-ness of legal categories

The four main critiques of the legal categorizations described above, i.e. the inadequacy of legal categories to describe the actual motives and trajectories of people on the move, the homogenizing effect of these categories which renders them ambiguous and not meaningful to the individual case, the assumed passivity of the classified individuals which disregards their human agency and abilities of adaptation, as well as the possibility for governments to evade their international humanitarian responsibilities by selectively applying these categorisations, all clearly show that the categories used by authorities to regulate who is entering the EU are not 'naturally given', despite being treated as such by both the official bodies and the media. Instead, these categories of 'political refugees' or 'economic migrants', which trigger such a differential treatment by the immigration authorities, are *produced*, are actively created through discursive practices. Their definitions are always directly dependent on the current immigration policies (De Genova, 2002; Samers, 2004). Samers (2004) has termed this producedness of categories 'virtualism' to underline their unfixed-ness and their non-representativeness of social realities. In the same vein (albeit originally targeting a different subject), Judith Butler writes that

> "the political construction of the subject proceeds with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims, and these political operations are effectively concealed and naturalized by a political analysis that takes juridical structures as their foundation. *Juridical power inevitably "produces" what it claims merely to represent*; hence, politics must be concerned with this dual function of power: the juridical and the productive. In effect, the law produces and then conceals the notion of a 'subject before the law' in order to invoke that discursive formation as a naturalized foundational premise that subsequently legitimates that law's own regulatory hegemony." (Butler, 2006, p.3, emphasis mine)

Butler claims here that the legal and political authorities effectively disguise their role in creating those very subjects that they claim to control with their laws and policies, by labelling them and sorting them into classified and hierarchized categories which are inevitably insufficient of representing the diverse social realities of those individuals assigned to them. These processes of classification and hierarchization of the categories are discursively legitimized, and hence "inequalities resulting from the application of the law [i.e. the legal categories] on people of different origins tend to be naturalized" (De Genova, 2002). This disguises the 'virtualism' and unfixed-ness of these categories, and their seeming 'truth' prevents a critical questioning of their legitimacy.

Categorizations like 'political refugee' thus create, shape and condition "particular forms of legality and illegality and subject those positioned within such a system to differential modes of power, authority and control" (Darling, 2011, p.265), implying a specific social, political and legal relation between the 'the refugee' and the state (De Genova, 2002). Butler highlights how language works to shape the effects of these 'virtual' categories when writing that language is "a set of facts, repeated over time, which produce reality-effects that are eventually misperceived as 'facts'" (Butler, 2006, p. 157). Quoting Monique Wittig to emphasize the particular importance of the labels used to describe individuals, she writes that "language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body" (*ibid.*, p. 151). This illustrates the power of terminology used for example in legal, political or media discourses:

Rather than representing reality, legal labels like 'refugee' thus create socio-political realities. This process shall be further explored in the second chapter.

To briefly summarize the previous paragraphs on the legal ordering of 'the refugee', we can conclude that this legal category, so clearly demarcated from that of the 'migrant' in international and national laws, is not representing social realities, as the critiques based on empirical research have clearly shown. Despite claiming to do so, the category is itself artificially produced by the legal system. It de-individualizes, passivizes, abstracts and classifies individuals labelled 'refugees', and determines their legal status and thereby their relation to the responsible authorities. Nevertheless, people on the move can also actively adapt to these categorisations in an attempt to influence their chances of being permitted inside the EU. Hence, these categories significantly shape the legal ordering of the categorized individuals.

2 | The socio-political ordering of 'refugees'

In this chapter, it will be shown how these 'virtual' categories (cf. Samers, 2004) have not only an effect on the legal position of the categorized, but also determine the socio-political realities of individuals in these categories (Haas, 2012; Willen, 2007). For understanding the theoretical conceptualizations of 'the refugee', it is thus important to grasp how the abstraction and de-individualization of the legal category influences 'the refugee' in his or her individual self-representation and his or her relation to the receiving society (or rather, that of the receiving society to 'the refugee'). These aspects shall be discussed in the following chapter.

If, as written above, the asylum procedure can be considered as an authentication process of the refugee claims to separate 'genuine' from 'bogus' refugees, the recognition of asylum seekers as deserving the refugee status depends on the their individual abilities to present a credible account of their motivations for the flight and need for international protection. The inability to do so leads to rejection. This observation led Lynn and Lea (2003) to the conclusion that it is the seeming "integrity of the asylum-seeker [which] thus becomes the quality or more specifically the lack of it which is used to justify and explain" the decisions made by the asylum authorities (in Darling, 2011, p. 266).

But what is it that makes a refugee claim credible to the authorities? Based on Bonnie Honig's work on democracies and the foreigner, Oudejans (2011) writes that one of the most decisive aspects is that the applicant frames her or his story in a way apprehensible to the responsible authority by confirming pre-held perceptions, especially with regard to ethnicity and gender. Receiving societies and especially the immigration authorities expect the foreigner - and even more so the refugee, as Oudejans claims - to "not upset or unsettle us, but [to affirm] what we want to see" (2011, p. 70). The 'genuine' refugee confirms preformed expectations, is not in a position to demand anything and does not oppose his or her marginalization. He or she is characterized by an 'anti-capitalistic purity' (cf. Bollman, 2015), as economic reasons do not qualify for the recognition as a 'true' refugee, and should, once in the country where the asylum application is filed, be docile and apolitical (Nyers, 2003). If he or she fails to convey these characteristics, the application will almost certainly be rejected.

By framing their personal story in the way the European asylum authorities expect to hear them, by highlighting some aspects of their experiences and giving less importance to others, asylum seekers can actively influence their chances of getting asylum. But instead of remaining purely 'virtual' (cf. Samers, 2004), these stories of asylum applicants, which are so significantly shaped by the

expectations of asylum authorities of what characteristics characterize a 'genuine' refugee, become internalized and embodied (Willen, 2007), fixing the subject in a specific form (Nyers, 2003). The expectations of the authorities in the receiving state regarding the experiences and behaviour of a 'genuine' asylum seeker have on the individual asylum seeker's life, especially regarding her or his victim-ness and apolitical-ness, can significantly shape the refugee in her or his self-perception (Willen, 2007).

'Refugees' as the abstract Other

However, despite the imperative to confirm to the preconceptions about what 'genuine' asylum seekers are like, 'refugees' are nevertheless cast as *Outsiders*, as the incongruous *Other*, as numerous scholars have emphasized (see for example Nyers, 2003 and 2006; Oudejans, 2011; also Agamben, 1998 and Bauman, 2004). Already in 1943, Hannah Arendt made an observation in her influential essay 'We Refugees' which is still applicable more than 70 years later: Refugees and asylum seekers are commonly seen not as 'prospective citizens', who deserve care and support as one day they will become part of 'Us', but as 'enemy aliens', the eternal *Other* (Arendt, 1943). As Barthes writes, "[r]efugees stop being specific persons and become pure victims in general: universal man, universal woman, universal child and, taken together, universal family" (in Malkki, 1996, p. 378). They are no longer considered as individual persons with individual stories, but become an "anonymous corporeality" (*ibid.,* p.388), an "undifferentiated and racialized Other with an invisible history" (Hubbard, 2005, p.63), which is mainly characterized by its status of being an 'asylum seeker' rather than by individual traits or stories.

As already shown a century ago in Simmel´s work on *The Stranger* (1908), the *Other* always serves to define the *Us*, to draw the line between the *Outsiders* and the *Insiders*. The category of 'the refugee', just as other social groups defined as different and not belonging, fulfils this function in the societies in the receiving states. Honig has referred to immigrants and refugees as the 'foreign founders', who contribute to the constant need of a political community (or 'the nation') to re-assure and re-found itself by providing 'the Other' against which the community can demarcate itself (Nyers, 2003). In this process, changing discourses are continuously accommodated into a "temporarily stabilized set of narratives and institutional practices that define the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in a society" (Evans, 2011, p.27). As Haas put it, by producing the Other, "'the citizen' is simultaneously produced" (2012, p.88). This exposes the dialogical manner in which the *Us* and the *Them* constitute each other. This relationship between refugees and the receiving society can be thus described by what Agamben (1998) has termed the 'inclusion by virtue of exclusion'.

This distinction between the own and the foreign is one of the fundamental aspects shaping today´s securitized refugee regime which, according to Soğuk, explains why "the 'incorporation' of refugees in our societies is at the same time a marginalization to keep refugees at a distance from the normal order of things and the possibilities it offers for a human life to flourish" (in Oudejans, 2011, p.72). This notion has led to the paradoxical situation in which the right to asylum is generally approved (as a sign of the strength and stability of the Western democracies), but individuals who make use of that rights are rejected (Dünnwald, 2006, p.9), and are to be either repelled before they enter the European territory, or are at least to be segregated from the rest of society once they are there. This attitude is clearly reflected in the current legal system described in the previous chapter.

This attitude also reflects the underlying assumption that, at the end of the day, refugees do not belong *here*, but *elsewhere*: In legal terms (but also in common understanding), there is a distinction

between *de jure* statelessness and *de facto* statelessness. Individuals without nationality fall under the category of *de jure* statelessness, which means that they in fact have no bond to any country in the world and are therefore in need of international protection. Refugees, on the other hand, fall under the second category, *de facto* statelessness. They have not lost their nationality, still have a bond to a specific country - only that this relation is *in effect* worthless because the refugee has to flee from this country to protect him- or herself. As Oudejans put it, the refugee "suffers from an ineffective bond of nationality" (2011, p.51). Nationality, she claims, *emplaces* the individual by providing a place where he or she lives legally and abides the law – the lack of nationality leads to a lack of this legal place, to *displacement*, to a situation where he or she is legally belonging nowhere.

Oudejans claims that seeing the refugee as 'only' *de facto* as opposed to *de jure* stateless veils the ineffectiveness of the bond between the individual and his or her country of nationality, and makes his or her stay seem only temporary, until the bond can be repaired. This justifies that the he or she is not 'given a place' in the country of asylum, is not integrated and *emplaced*. This observation has provoked Oudejans to state that "the very concept of the 'refugee' lodges the refugee in the 'country of origin' where he naturally and properly belongs and, ultimately, should return to. [P]aradoxically, the concept of the refugee holds the concept of asylum out of sight" (2011, p.6). Again referring to the topicality of Arendt´s analysis of the situations of refugees in the post-WWII period, she claims that the "chief characteristic of the plight of refugees is the desperate experience of belonging nowhere in this world" (*ibid*, p.63).

The social ordering of 'refugees' as the eternal Other, as the foreigner against whom the assumed coherency and homogeneity of the receiving society are defined, makes it thus impossible for him or her to become accepted in the country of asylum. Belonging elsewhere, not here, the 'refugee' is turned into an abstract, de-individualized category that is considered as the opposite of 'the citizen'. Paradoxically, however, the asylum applicant still has to conform to preformed conceptions of what 'a refugee' is like in order to be granted some protection in the country where he or she applies for asylum. These discourses about the socio-political position of 'the refugee' in European societies are also reflected and reinforced in the spatial ordering of refugees in the asylum procedure, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

3 | The spatial ordering of 'refugees'
Regarding the relation between social and political discourses about refugees and their geographical location, it has been argued that, in fact, "[s]ocial order relies upon and *recreates itself* through a spatial order" (Bancroft, 2001, p. 147, emphasis mine). Space is therefore also actively constituting social relations, rather than just providing a 'room' for them to happen in. Space is socially produced and constructed, unfixed and dynamic, and the specific use of space makes thus visible how a society is legally, socially and politically organized. In and through space, processes of exclusion and inclusion are maintained and reproduced (Kitchin, 1998; Mountz et al. , 2012).

As stated above, the discursive practice of labelling denotes the category of the 'refugee' as the Other, an undifferentiated mass outside the naturalized European order of things. He or she is thus cast as a target of "therapeutic interventions" (Foucault, 1979, in Malkki, 1992, p.34), and it is "not illogical in this cultural context that one of the first therapies routinely directed at refugees is a spatial one" (*ibid*.). In the EU asylum system, this entails the assignment into the so-called collective accommodation facilities for those individuals who are in the asylum procedure (see Introduction & Background chapter of this thesis). The discursive creation of the externalized Other through

practices of labelling thus justifies and legitimizes the assignment of asylum seekers into these mass accommodation centres, which are designated state-controlled spaces, often characterized by spatial remoteness and disconnectedness from urban infrastructure (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002).

The accommodation of refugees

These asylum seeker centres combine elements of ordering, disciplining and security concerns. Therefore, they are therefore the very spaces where the 'taming of mobility' is practiced through "the reterritorialization of asylum flows into particular, known and controllable, spaces" (Darling, 2011, p. 267). Through being assigned into such sharply defined spatial zones that enable almost total monitoring, the asylum seekers can be made 'legally knowable' (Bancroft, 2001; Borren, 2008; Mountz et al., 2012), which is a necessary precondition for separating the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving' (Haas, 2012). Interestingly, while in common public discourses asylum seeker centres are often stigmatized as places of disorder (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002), this image contradicts the strict organization and over-regulation of life in these spaces of filtering and control.

These policies of spatial segregation of asylum seekers from the rest of society do not "simply produce spaces of filtering [for asylum seekers], rather [their] logics of sorting are fed down into more prosaic practices and spaces. The governmental mechanisms of [these policies] actively produce positions, techniques and places of discomfort, spaces in which feelings of belonging are to be undermined, negated or challenged. The discomforts of accommodation become, in their own way, a mode of governing this population, a moment of affective governance and modulation, such that the image of the destitute asylum seeker and the deported 'illegal' immigrant cast regulatory shadows over the lives of those awaiting a decision" (Darling, 2011, p.269). As explained in the Introduction & Background chapter of this thesis, the discomfort in mass accommodation centres, be it initial reception centres or collective accommodation centres, is achieved by limited space and a lack of private sphere, poor quality food and insufficient kitchen and sanitary facilities, restrictions regarding leaving and entering the premises as well as the continuous presence of security personnel. These conditions prohibit any *emplacement* (cf. Oudejans, 2011), any feelings of belonging in the inhabitants.

Borrowing from the work of Foucault, Witteborn (2011) refers to asylum seeker centres as 'heterotopias', defined as spaces of Otherness (such as orphanages, prisons and psychiatric wards etc), which "are not only concrete and identifiable physical places of state surveillance, they are also representations of space as they reflect particular episteme in a society at a moment in time" (p. 1146; see also Mountz et al., 2012). Hence, the current paradigm about who is to be included into society and who not, and how to treat those who are considered as Outsiders, is reflected in the material form of today's asylum seeker centres. The securitization paradigm, which is very dominant in today's treatment of (non-Western) foreigners, is clearly visible in the segregation of individuals in the asylum procedure and their accommodation in specific facilities. Their remote location, surrounding fences and the continuous presence of security staff, as well as the detention of rejected asylum seekers clearly show how asylum seekers are considered as security threats to Europe and are thus to be kept segregated from the society and treated as (potential) criminals (Haas, 2012; Schuster, 2011; Willen, 2007).

Maybe less obviously, but nonetheless of equal importance, the capitalist episteme also contributes to legitimizing and naturalizing the social and spatial segregation of asylum seekers from the majority society. As Bancroft (2001) illustrates by referring to the spatialized political economy, asylum

seekers (who are in many European countries not granted a work permit while in the sometimes very lengthy asylum procedure, or at least not from the beginning) are also excluded because they are rendered economically unproductive. Through asylum law, which prohibits asylum seekers to fully participate in the European economy, asylum seekers are made fully economically dependent on the receiving state for accommodation, food and other needs. They are rendered unable to participate in the neoliberal accumulation of capital which is considered as a (or *the*) characteristic of our times. Unable to either produce or consume in a system directed by a neoliberal morality where everyone is responsible only for him- or herself, where "that responsibility is first and foremost a responsibility to become economically self-sufficient under conditions when self-sufficiency is structurally undermined" (Butler, 2015, p.25), asylum seekers are reinforced as outsiders, as an anomaly. Therefore, they are therefore spatially separated from the consumer society (Bauman, 2004). Bancroft argues that through the social ordering of asylum seekers, they are not only devalued in terms of individual identity and ideology (and become the abstract Other), but also in economic terms (Bancroft, 2001).

Refugees´ ability to use space
But it is not only the physical location of asylum seekers in centres of mass accommodation described above, which reflects and reinforces their social, political and legal position and thereby clearly demarcates them as outsiders of the receiving society, but also their "ability [or inability] to use and manage space, to move freely through it or to remain in it" (Bancroft, 2001, p. 147). These asylum seeker accommodation centres as places of Otherness also create a division between those who are mobile and those who are restricted in their physical mobility, between "those who wait and those who participate" (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002, p. 131). Instead of being able to enjoy free movement in the European Union, which is one of the fundamental freedoms for the legal residents of the Schengen Area, asylum seekers are often unable to move freely even within the EU member state where their application is being processed.

Not only the effects of the remote location of accommodation centres, which creates a dependency on often scarce and expensive public transport, prevents them to decide about their movements independently, but also the legal restrictions that are in place in some countries: For instance, until recently many of the Federal States in Germany required asylum seekers at all stages of the procedure to apply for permission before leaving the administrative district in which they were registered (Bahr, 2013; Refugee Struggle for Freedom, n.d.). Under the current law, this restriction of mobility within Germany is only applicable for the first three months, or as long as the asylum seeker is required to stay in the initial reception centre. After that period, the asylum applicant is theoretically free to move freely within Germany, unless one of the numerous exceptions specified in the German asylum law applies.

Such practical and legal restrictions limit asylum seekers' abilities to access spaces of encounters or spaces of information (Bancroft, 2001), which has a disempowering effect as it largely impedes contact to non-refugees and their ability to get information about their rights as asylum seekers, and prevents them from networking. As Butler claims, "[m]obility is itself [not only] a right of the body, but it is also a precondition for the exercise of other rights, including the right of assembly" (2015, p.138), and when that right is denied, it leaves the body powerless. This shows how through a myriad of direct and indirect restrains, the EU works to make mobility for restricted subjects such as asylum seekers highly difficult and uncomfortable. This creates a topology of exclusion (Bhabha, 1998, in

Bancroft, 2001), where those excluded are "subject to the greatest control over their subjectivity and physical movement" (Bancroft, 2001, p. 153).

Hence, refugees' social-political position as the abstract Other, as the opposite of the citizen is mirrored and reinforced both by the accommodation in uncomfortable and remote locations, justified by the dominant discourses that render 'refugees' both as 'threatening outsiders' and as 'economically unproductive' in a consumer society, as well as their inability to make use of the freedom of movement enjoyed by citizens (and other legal residents) in the European Union (van Houtum, 2010). In the next chapter, it will be discussed how this can be understood through the lens of in/visibility of asylum seekers.

4 | The effects of legal, social and spatial ordering: The in/visibility of 'the refugee'

The effects of the interrelated processes of the legal, socio-political and spatial ordering described above can be understood with the concept of the in/visibility of 'refugees'. This concept applies both to the relationship between 'the refugee' and the state authorities as well as to that between 'the refugee' and the civil society. In this chapter, it will be explained how the processes of ordering described above result in the very specific position of 'the refugee' as highly visible towards the authorities while remaining completely invisible as an individual towards the society, and how this position might be harmful for the individual person seeking asylum.

As Haas (2012) writes with regard to the relationship between 'the refugee' and the state authorities, there is an ambiguity, or even a "paradox of visibility" (p.84) for refugees relating to their relationship to the state in the country where they lodge the asylum claim: When leaving the clandestineness that often accompanies the flight from the country of origin (see Chapter 1) by filing an asylum application in one of the EU member states, the asylum seeker gives up her or his invisibility in order to legalize her or his presence in this country. Guided by the hope to eventually gain security and protection through the recognition as a refugee, becoming visible to the authorities is crucial as "visibility for asylum seekers [vis-à-vis the state] emerges as the only, or at least most promising, way (not to mention 'authentic' way given asylum seekers´ self-identification as 'true' refugees) to find existential security" (Haas, 2012, p.98).

However, by filing the asylum claim and entering into the asylum system, the individual also becomes visible through the modes of social and especially spatial ordering described in the previous chapters, which allows for almost complete surveillance of the individual´s life through state organs. This is reflected in surveillance and security measures that enter into the most private aspects of the asylum seekers and render them visible, or even hypervisible, to the state: Examples of an intrusion into the most private sphere of asylum seekers are the collection of biometric data (photos, fingerprints), humiliating methods of determining the age of young refugees (in order to determine whether they are entitled to the special protection for minors or not), but also the state-ordered allocation of geographical location and restriction of mobility, and the occasional provision of vouchers instead of cash that limit choice of consumption (Tazreiter, 2010), to mention only some aspects.

However, becoming visible vis-à-vis the state is also a potential threat of insecurity as it might eventually lead to refusal of the asylum application, and consequently deportation or becoming 'illegal' in the EU (*ibid.*). Hence, the paradox of visibility lies in its ambiguity as being potentially protective, but also potentially threatening, and the very act of putting oneself into the hands of

asylum authorities might in the end lead to one's deportation. By claiming asylum, the individual thus moves him- or herself into a status liminality between 'illegality' and 'legality', into a transition phase of 'existential limbo', cast as the immobilized structural and physical Other (Haas, 2012, p.184; Bancroft, 2001), and has to remain in this state until a decision is made by the authorities.

A third element might be added to the paradox of in/visibility – that of the persisting invisibility of the individual refugee vis-à-vis the receiving society, even when (hyper-)visible towards the state. The mutually reinforcing processes of social and spatial ordering, which, supported by the state-imposed processes of legal ordering, render 'refugees' as a de-individualized mass of outsiders who are legitimately separated from the civil society. By means of remote housing and limited mobility, the individual refugee is made invisible vis-à-vis the receiving society (Malkki, 1992; van Houtum, 2010). Even in the current situation, in which relatively larger numbers of individuals apply for asylum in the European Union (Eurostat, 2016; Informationsverbund Asyl und Migration, 2016a), and international, nationals as well as local newspapers are filled with articles about the so-called 'refugee crisis', it can be argued that while the anonymized, 'threatening' mass of refugees has become more present, the individual asylum seeker still remains largely invisible vis-à-vis the receiving society.

It is this invisibility vis-à-vis the society that Borren (2008), based on Hannah Arendt´s conception of what considers a political life, has termed 'public invisibility'. Public in/visibility is grounded in an Arendtian understanding of what constitutes good (political) life and citizenship. Arendt makes a distinction between the private and the public realm. In private realm the natural man, who is "without a profession, without a citizenship, without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify and specify himself" (Borren, 2008, p.218), can retreat, can hide his naturalness. It is in the public realm, on the other hand, where he as an individual, or rather as a citizen, appears to others as others appear to him (*ibid.*, Arendt, 1959). In this realm, it is political beings who encounter each other as equals, who can make meaningful speech and be heard, develop new ideas and can, in short, engage in what Arendt calls 'political action'. This legitimate participation in the public sphere is what Arendt considers as necessary for truly human life (Arendt, 1973; Borren, 2008).

Being publicly invisible then, according to Arendt, is a harmful political pathology as it is contrary to what is considered as politically healthy and enabling. It entails having no space for concealment of the private, no space for "retreating into invisibility and [for] wearing the mask of legal personality, [and hence] the disclosure of 'who' (political actor, citizen) gives way to the exposure of 'what' someone is to the public eye: natural man" (Borren, 2008, p. 225). The poor and the stateless (and due to their *de facto* statelessness, for Arendt this includes refugees) are denied the qualities as political beings by becoming publicly invisible, as illustrated in the following quote by John Adams from 1790:

> "The poor man feels himself out of the sight of others, groping in the dark. Mankind takes no notice of him. He rambles and wanders unheeded. In the midst of a crowd, at church, in the market [...] he is in as much obscurity as he would be in a garret or a cellar. He is not disapproved, censured, or reproached; he is only not seen" (in Beltrán, 2009, p. 605)

Even though asylum seekers today are certainly not able to 'wander around unheeded', and are additionally, as explained in Chapter 3, often spatially separated from the rest of 'mankind', the

general idea of invisibility of the individual vis-à-vis the society, and consequently the notions of being considered neither an individual nor having (political) agency, conveyed in this quote are certainly applicable to the contemporary situation of asylum seekers. This is because it is especially the private sphere that is targeted in the asylum procedure: The private or natural man, as Arendt (1959) writes, does not 'appear', as 'appearing' is done in the public realm – hence, it is as though private man does not exist as an individual. Being publicly invisible comes along with a denial of subjectivity, specifically political subjectivity (Haas, 2012). Individuals falling into the category of the 'asylum seeker' are homogenized, which leaves very little space for individual stories, opinions and desires. These individuals are thus systematically denied participation, distinction, individuation, recognition and individual dignity (Beltrán, 2009; Borren, 2008), and are seen by society only as a threatening abstract Other.

It can thus be concluded that the individual seeking asylum in Europe suffers simultaneously from a harmful (hyper-)visibility vis-à-vis the receiving state and from a harmful invisibility vis-à-vis the society, to which he/she is only known as an anonymized mass. This makes it impossible for the asylum seeking person to be recognized as an equal human being, who can speak and be heard by others (cf. Arendt, 1973; Borren, 2008). The 'refugee' is thus silenced.

5 | Part summary and conclusion

In this first part of the thesis, I have explored what might be considered the dominant conceptualizations of 'the refugee'. This was a necessary first step for answering the guiding question of this research, namely in what ways private accommodation arrangements challenge the dominant conceptions of who and what 'the refugee' is. The analysis of the refugee regime has shown that the legal category of 'the refugee' is far from representing the social realities of individuals fleeing their home countries, as the categorization is both simplifying, homogenizing, assuming the passivity of the categorized, and allowing national governments to interpret it in order to achieve their current political goals. Rather, then, the category of 'the refugee' is legally produced, is not representing realities, but is actively creating them.

Individuals assorted to this category or those defining themselves as belonging to it are abstracted, de-individualized and passivized. They are denied their subjectivity in the economic, political and every other sense of the word, being left with the categorization 'refugee' as the only permitted identifier. Through the means of spatial ordering, which reflects and reinforces the socio-political and legal ordering of 'refugees', individuals assigned to this category are being made legally knowable to the authorities in order to assess the authenticity of their refugee claims, while at the same time they are strictly separated from the society in the receiving country. The individual asylum seeker is rendered almost completely invisible vis-à-vis this society, which only knows the 'threatening' (and paradoxically, the simultaneously victimized) figure of the refugee from uncountable representations in the media and politics.

Remarkably, these dominant theoretical conceptualizations of 'the refugee', although recognizing and criticizing the produced-ness and inadequacy of the category (De Genova, 2002; Samers, 2004), largely consider the categorized individuals as *passive* beings, who are *subjected* to the processes of legal, socio-political and spatial ordering. These theories describe what is being done to 'the refugees', how the civil society and the state relates to them and how the image of 'the refugee' as the threatening Other is created – but not how refugees themselves are involved in these processes. Although critically analysing the current practices of the refugee regime, these dominant

conceptualizations thus contribute to creating the image of 'the refugee' as a passive victim who is structurally othered, ordered and excluded by the state the asylum seeker wants to (and needs to, considering the ineffective bond to their own state) belong to.

It seems that in these conceptualizations, there is little room for analysing how individuals in the asylum procedure can actively shape their lives and make use of their human agency, which is necessary to understand how they relate and react to the legal, socio-political and spatial processes of ordering they are subjected to. Although critically examining the abstraction of individuals seeking asylum into the category of 'the refugee', these dominant approaches themselves seem to neglect the subjectivity and agency of such persons, and might therefore be considered as a rather one-sided approach to theorizing who 'the refugee' actually is. Nevertheless, in the next part of this thesis I shall explore how these dominant theorizations can be a useful start in the analysis of private accommodation arrangements.

Part 2: The effects of private housing arrangements on 'the refugee'

In the second part of this thesis, I will analyse how the phenomenon of private housing arrangements, in which individuals in the asylum procedure share the household with individuals who are not refugees themselves, can be theoretically understood. Looking at these from the perspective of the dominant approaches discussed in Part 1 of this thesis, and especially through the lens of in/visibility, I will first analyse how such private accommodation arrangements affect refugees' harmful situation of simultaneous (hyper-)visibility vis-à-vis the state and invisibility vis-à-vis civil society. As will be seen, the approaches outlined in Part 1 prove not sufficient to fully grasp the social and political significance of such cooperation between civil society actors and refugees as they do not recognize refugees' agency and (political) subjectivity. Therefore, they do not allow to theorize the political significance of refugees and non-refugees living side-by-side. To overcome this inadequacy, the second half of this part will be dedicated to the exploration of an alternative conceptualization of 'refugees' that allows to understand the meaning and importance of the interactions of refugees and non-refugees in private accommodation arrangements.

6 | Changes in in/visibility

This section deals with the question of how the conceptualizations described in Part 1 allow us to make sense of initiatives like *Flüchtlinge Willkommen* that enable asylum seekers to move from the often spatially remote collective accommodation into the residential areas of towns and cities where the participating flat-shares are located, and thus to reverse the processes of spatial ordering. The most obvious consequence of private accommodation arrangements, it might be argued, is that they can enable the asylum seeker to become visible vis-à-vis the non-refugee(s) whom he or she is sharing the household with. By allowing for daily encounters and interactions between the members of the shared household, private housing arrangements can contribute to deconstructing the abstract categories of 'the refugee' as the Other, as the regular personal exchanges can reveal the individual behind the abstract categorization.

Through getting to know each other as persons rather than categories, asylum seekers in private housing arrangements can potentially become individuated, they can become recognized as a person rather than remaining the unknowable Other. Thereby, all the individual experiences, characteristics,

preferences, migration trajectories, plans and dreams, which were suppressed and made invisible to the civil society when the individual was seen only as 'an asylum seeker', can become relevant identifiers again. Ideally, in the private accommodation arrangement the refugee is allowed identifiers beyond his legal categorization that, by its very nature, always casts him or her as the opposite of 'citizens' (Haas, 2012; Nyers, 2006; van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002)**.** Overcoming abstraction and homogenization, therefore, the individual seeking asylum can become *human* again, which allows for finding commonalities and personal connections between him or her and the non-refugee housemates.

The physical presence of asylum seekers in the houses and homes of non-refugees, from whom they are generally separated by state policies, can also undermine what Borren (2008) has described as the harmful public invisibility of 'the refugee' as an individuals. It might thus be argued that sharing a household together with non-refugees, even though this is organized within the legal framework that allows for decentralized accommodation of asylum seekers (Informationsverbund Asyl und Migration, 2016b), directly contravenes state policies that aim to socially and spatially segregate citizens from asylum seekers while the refugee status of the latter, and hence also the legitimacy of their presence in the EU, are still being determined (Refugee Struggle for Freedom, n.d.; Willen, 2007).

Through the individuation of the asylum seeker, she or he is able to become more than the 'natural man' being that remains unseen and unheard: In the ideal case, all members of the household of the participating households meet as 'equals among equals', to use the Arendtian formulation (cf. Arendt, 1959), they are heard and seen as individuals whose individual legitimization of engaging with each other derives from the fact of living in this household, rather than from their legal statuses that define their relation with the state. However, it might be questionable in how far this ideal situation can be achieved in practice, due to inequalities in financial means and in the ability to find their way in the German bureaucratic system, which might easily lead to situations of dependency in the shared household and would make encounters as 'equals' less likely.

Nevertheless, even though complete equality between the members of a shared household might be utopian, private accommodation arrangements provide spaces where refugees and non-refugees can interact with each other as individuals, which allows to overcome the boundaries between the abstract *Us* and the abstract *Them*. This view also implies that even in private accommodation arrangements where sharing the household eventually does not last due to problems between the involved individuals, the 'failure' might be largely ascribed to nonmatching expectations or household habits (which might be influenced by personality and socialization) rather than to the generalized incompatibility of 'refugees' and 'non-refugees'.

But private accommodation arrangements might influence not only the small circle of non-refugees involved in the flat share, but through multiplier effects also their friends, families and neighbours and thus many more individuals who are not necessarily directly connected to the 608 particular flat-shares brokered by *Flüchtlinge Willkommen*. The media presence of this initiative, both on traditional and social media channels (see the Introduction & Background chapter of this thesis), is also an important means of spreading the knowledge of such private housing arrangements for people in the asylum procedure. Especially the coverage of 'successful' housing arrangements on various media channels gives easily accessible examples of how the participants live together as 'fellow humans' rather than as 'refugees' and 'non-refugees'. This might invoke a process of reflection in some

members of civil society, when they notice the discrepancies between the stories about the mundane practices of living together in private accommodation arrangements, and the depiction of 'the refugee' in dominant political and media discourses. All these ways of spreading the awareness about existing private housing arrangements implies that the participating asylum seekers might be getting known by more civil society actors than their housemates as human individuals rather than as 'refugees', and can engage in discussions and debates as participants rather than as the mere topics non-refugees talk about.

For two reasons, however, the effects of private accommodation arrangements should not be romanticized: Firstly, the number of asylum seekers living in private accommodation arrangements is still only a tiny fraction of the total number of asylum seekers (Eurostat, 2016), even if assuming that such living arrangements might be found apart from those brokered by the initiative *Flüchtlinge Willkommen* and their international branches. Despite the multiplier effects and media coverage, certainly only a small part of the civil society in Germany or other refugee-receiving countries becomes aware of such accommodation arrangements where asylum seekers live amidst non-refugees, and an even smaller circle might be willing and capable to take part in such an initiative. Hence, the effect on the overall situation of people in the asylum procedure might be very small. A second and perhaps more substantial reason for restraining enthusiasm is that private accommodation arrangements do not automatically affect the legal situation of the asylum seeker and her or his visibility vis-à-vis the state authorities. As living in private flat-shares does not change anything about the asylum procedures, the application can still be rejected or accepted by the responsible authorities, and the 'existential limbo' of the waiting period remains unchanged (Haas, 2012).

What can be argued, however, is that living outside the mass accommodation centres decreases the level of every-day control, the discomfort and the limitations enforced by the materiality of such accommodation centres, such as the spatial remoteness and limited possibilities for activities (Informationsverbund Asyl und Migration, 2016a; Malkki, 1992; Witteborn, 2011). Furthermore, the social pressure of living together in a very confined space with unknown people who are in the same legally insecure situation, and the constant awareness of other asylum applicants being rejected and deported to their countries of origins or forced into illegality, might be decreased by moving into private accommodation arrangements (Darling, 2011). This might significantly contribute to the physiological wellbeing of the persons seeking asylum by decreasing their discomfort, and therefore strengthen her or him for the often lengthy and mentally exhausting asylum procedure.

Apart from the psychological aspects, however, the private accommodation arrangements might also enable the asylum applicant to get into contact with a network of activists and refugee supporters that can support his or her case, which might eventually enhance the chances of being granted asylum. This support can be in the form of contact to a good asylum lawyer, which significantly increases the chances to be granted asylum in case of initial refusal and appeal (Haas, 2012), or through a social network that might help against deportation, as it has happened in various cases (Crolly et al., 2015; Pro Asyl, n.d.). These aspects might decrease the harmful (hyper-) visibility, and hence the controllability, of the asylum seeker vis-à-vis the state, even if the legal uncertainty remains (Oudejans, 2011).

We can hence conclude that private accommodation arrangements, by changing the spatial ordering of asylum seekers, have the potential to decrease the individual asylum seeker's suffering from

harmful (hyper-)visibility vis-à-vis the state and harmful invisibility vis-à-vis society actors. By changing from an abstract, threatening category to a member of a shared household, the subjectivity and individuality of the person seeking asylum can become relevant identifiers again, while at the same time the control and surveillance of the individual´s life through the state is reduced (though not eliminated, as it is still the authorities who make the final decision of whether the application for asylum was justified or not). It might be concluded that the change of the spatial ordering of refugees has the potential to change and reverse the processes of social ordering by overcoming the de-individuation, abstraction and othering of 'the refugee'.

However, the application of the dominant theorizations on the phenomenon of private accommodation arrangements has limits with regard to grasping the role the participating refugees play in this initiative, and its political significance. In order to understand these aspects of private housing arrangements, in the next chapter I shall turn to alternative theorizations of refugees which emphasize the human ability to exert agency and to act politically.

7 | Alternative approaches to refugees´ political actions

As the previous chapter has shown, theorizations of 'the refugee' as a suppressed, passive and apolitical being in the European asylum procedure only allow to understand private accommodation arrangements to a limited extend, as they prove insufficient to grasp how asylum seekers and the non-refugee population together can engage shaping their social realities by living together. Instead of relying on these largely state-focused theories, I argue that it is necessary to build a theoretical framework that allows for a more nuanced analysis of refugees' activities and which leaves room for their human agency, in order to be able to adequately analyse the effects of private accommodation arrangements have on the category of 'the refugee'. For achieving this, I shall turn to the autonomous mobilities approach, Jacques Rancière´s theory of radical democracy and disruption and Judith Butler´s performative theory of collective appearance in this chapter.

The Autonomous Mobilities Approach

As an alternative to the discourses about the ordering and othering of passive refugees (cf. Bauman, 2004; Agamben, 1998), a new body of migration and refugee literature has developed in recent years from the fields of anti-racism and critical citizenship studies as well as from migrant activism. This approach, called the 'autonomy of migration' or 'autonomous mobilities' approach, focuses on individuals´ subjectivity and agency, thereby opposing the 'control bias' that dominates much of the literature of (critical) migration and refugee studies (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013; Walters, 2008). 'Control bias' here refers to the disproportionality between the power and agency ascribed to migration control mechanisms and that to people on the move, who are considered as having no agency and political subjectivity vis-à-vis the overly powerful state authorities (Scheel, 2013). The strong critiques of this approach by autonomous mobilities scholars are based on the fundamental insight of Foucault that there are no relations of power without contestations (Nyers, 2015).

Although not constituting a unified body of literature and comprising varying interpretations of the degree of autonomy and its conceptualization (Nyers 2015; Scheel, 2013), there are a number of recurring and central features in this field of literature. Most importantly, this approach considers mobilities as a social fact: Rather than viewing migration as a reaction to political or economic circumstances, autonomous migration researchers consider it to be a constituent force in the formation of social and political life (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). Migration, Scheel (2013) writes, is a driving force behind social transformation rather than the outcome of it; it is in itself "an

articulation of political and social struggles" (p.580), rather than, as often argued by the political Left, "just one in a long line of catastrophes occasioned by neoliberalism" (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2003, unpaged).

Following from that, autonomous migration scholars have emphasized that migration and mobility come *before* control, rather than being merely reactionary, which is often the dominant representation in migration and securitization studies (Scheel, 2013). Hence, autonomous migration scholars demand an ontological shift, claiming that the focus in mobilities studies should not lay on state authorities and their exercises of disciplining power, but that instead migrants´ subjectivity should be in the centre of attention (Mezzadra, 2004). This means that human agency should be at the "conceptual, analytical and political forefront of this perspective on migration" (Nyers, 2015, p.24). Individuals, embedded in family and social networks, but nevertheless able to exert agency, make the decision to migrate, and where to migrate, based on a complex interplay between a variety of reasons (Mezzadra, 2004). Rather than focusing on push- and pull factors, autonomous mobilities research should focus on the complexities and ambiguities that drive the individual, both regarding the emigration from the country of origin, as well as regarding their behaviour in the country of immigration, in order to gain a deeper understanding of migrants´ social realities (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2003).

For this reason, research using the perspective of autonomous mobilities should be empirical (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013), with special focus on the everyday and often very mundane practices of migrants, that have "materiality in [their] concrete political and social living conditions" (Kanak Attak, n.d., unpaged). Focusing on moments of autonomy, in which people on the move actively shape their trajectories and contest state-imposed controls, is according to autonomous migrations scholars the only way migrant subjectivities can be understood and conceptualized adequately.

With regard to 'refugees', autonomous mobilities scholars have argued that the focus on subjectivity renders the victimization of migrants inappropriate. This contradicts the common portrayal of refugees "as a weak subject, hollowed by hunger and needing above all care and help", also and especially "among those who have regarded migrants with greater benevolence" and solidarity, such as the political Left (Mezzadra, 2004, p. 267). Mezzadra further highlights how this representation confirms and reproduces what he calls 'paternalistic' logics that deny refugees´ chance of being recognized as political subjects, and reinforce their inferior position.

Contradicting this image, he emphasizes that most individuals on the move set out for their journeys of their own will and with a purpose. Even wars, he argues, cause mobilities where the degree of agency might be low, but *not* non-existent (Mezzadra, 2004). For autonomous migration scholars, refugees are thus first and foremost also people on the move, and are also considered as 'migrants', which contradicts the artificial separation of the refugee regime from the migrant regime described in Chapter 1 of this thesis (Oudejans, 2011)**.** Autonomous mobilities scholars argue that the victim-agency binary, which is an important foundation of the dominant political discourse around asylum seekers that denies refugees' political subjectivity and casts them as apolitical beings, needs to be overcome: In order to be able to fully grasp the complex logics behind some practices, for example self-harming behaviour such as hunger strikes and self-immolation (cf. Owens, 2009), the state-control focused concept of refugees is insufficient, as these actions are the result of a complex interplay between a variety of factors rather than the simple expression of victimhood (Nyers, 2003).

Instead, he claims, asylum-seeker's actions should be studied through the frame of human agency and autonomy, which is here defined as the ability to actively create and initiate new situations and new social realities, even under the most deprived conditions (Nyers, 2015). Understanding these requires first of all to overcome the abstraction of categorizations, and the recognition of the individual beyond his or her label, with all the private motivations, experiences and expectations that drive that person. Autonomy of mobilities scholars argue that the inherent human creative potential leads to the development of novel logics, motivations and trajectories, to which state control mechanisms can do nothing but to react – rather than to anticipate and forestall (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013).

Indeed, the autonomous migration approach serves to highlight that migrants´ actions are often highly political (such as the act of leaving one place in order to create a better future for oneself and one´s family at another, however this improvement may be defined), but are often not recognized as such. This is because migrants, due to their status as outsiders of the civil society, are being denied their political subjectivity. While mainstream accounts of migrant movements often look through the lens of citizenship and consider migrants as wanting to become citizens, the autonomy of migration approach allows to study how migrants and asylum seekers may enact their belonging by simply behaving as citizens (cf. Mezzadra, 2011). This is not to assume that migrants or asylum seekers are some avant-garde or revolutionary subjects (Mezzadra, 2011), but rather that migration and the everyday struggles of mobilities and belonging "constitute a specific level of the political" (Kanak Attak, n.d., unpaged) and thus need to be understood in their own terms rather than in the established format of what constitutes political action.

Rancière´s politics of dissensus

The emphasis of the autonomous migrations approach on asylum seekers´ subjectivity and their limited, yet not completely absent individual agency and abilities to influence their situation resonates well with Jacques Rancière´s theory of radical democracy (Mezzadra, 2011). This casts the enactment of autonomy by those generally considered as being deprived of agency as the only true 'politics': For Rancière, political actions are not those enacted by individuals who are accepted as actors in the Arendtian public realm, who 'appear to others as others appear to them' (cf. Arendt, 1959), and who can legitimately make speech and be heard. Instead, he defines this realm as the *police*, a "configuration of the political community as a collective body with its places and functions allotted according to the competences specific to groups and individuals" (Rancière, 2011, p.3), which is governed by the norms and rules about who is to speak (the citizen), and who is to remain silent (the non-citizen).

Opposing the old Aristotelian (and Arendtian) conception that only 'the speaking animal is a political animal' (Schaap, 2011, cf. Arendt, 1959), Rancière defines *politics* instead as a form of disruptive act that challenges the rules of the *police*, when those who are usually excluded suddenly exercise power by appearing and claiming rights. He terms this *dissensus*, which "occurs precisely when the prevailing order is disrupted by those who have 'no part' – that is, by those who possess no agency according to the sovereigntist accounts of the political. [...] By challenging the prerogative of sovereignty to determine insiders and outsiders, they not only question the monopoly the state has over matters of protection, they also question the monopoly citizenship has over matters of political identity and agency" (Nyers, 2006, p.49).

This conception of politics is grounded on an understanding of the logic of equality as the central principle, or axiom, of all politics: Based on the moral imperative that everyone is – or should be – equal, for Rancière politics occurs when equality is enacted in situations of perceived inequality. This happens mainly in those moments when individuals who are excluded from the political community "articulate [their] grievance as an equal speaking being" (Nyers, 2003, p.1078) and simultaneously claim and enact their political subjectivity. These moments, when the *police* logic meets an egalitarian logic, are for Rancière radical political moments in which "the naturalness of the dominant virtues [of the *police*] is called into question and their arbitrariness [is] revealed" (Nyers, 2003, p.1078; see also Beltran, 2009; and Rancière, 2011). Unlike Arendt, who understood politics as happening within a framework in which the distinction between who is to be included and who excluded seems fixed, Rancière considers politics to happen exactly as those instances when the boundary between the Insiders and Outsiders is challenged, blurred and potentially redrawn. With this approach to politics, it is thus not surprising that Rancière criticizes Arendt´s framework as depoliticizing, as it merely confirms the rights of the already-included and the rightlessness of the already-excluded, while not contesting the political exclusion (Schaap, 2011).

In his work on how the excluded can enact politics, Rancière makes the somewhat complex argument that "the Rights of Man are the rights of those who have not the rights that they have and have the rights they have not" (Rancière, 2004). What he means with that can be illustrated by the protests of *sans papiers* in France: Schaap (2011) shows how these migrant activists demonstrate publicly in order to show that they are deprived of their rights which according to the Human Rights Convention they should have. But by demonstrating they also claim the rights they have not, namely the right to appear and to articulate their claims in public as speaking beings equal to citizens. "They enact their right by speaking *as if* they had the right" (*ibid.,* p.34) and thereby "actualize their political equality" (*ibid.,* p.39), a process which Rancière has termed 'subjectivization' to describe how the subjects of human rights emerge through political action. By this, *sans papiers* activists actively create a space of appearance for those who normally do not appear (Beltrán, 2009). As politics is considered a disruptive force in the police, there is no proper place for politics; by definition the "exceptionality of politics has no specific place. Politics 'takes place' in the space of the police, by rephrasing and restaging social issues, police problems, and so on" (Rancière, 2011, p.8). Also in this point Rancière diverts significantly from Arendt's political theory, as he does not make the distinction between the private and the public realm, whereas Arendt clearly defines the latter as the only legitimate space for politics (Arendt, 1959).

In the past years, and especially in the context of novel autonomy-focused approaches to migration and refugee studies, Rancière´s theories have been increasingly used to make sense of refugees´ political actions. Linking his politics with the autonomy of migration approach, Papadopoulos and Tsianos for example write that

> "[f]ollowing Rancière (1998), we rather see migrants' political practices not as acts of resistance but as attempts to create a new situation that allows those who have no part – to enter and change the conditions of social existence altogether. [...] These are politics which transform the political without ever addressing it in its own terms and practices. Migrants' politics develop their own codes, their own practices, their own logics which are almost imperceptible from the perspective of existing political action: firstly, because we are not trained to perceive them as 'proper' politics and, secondly, because they create an excess that cannot be addressed in the existing system of

political representation. But these politics are so powerful that they change the very conditions of a certain situation and the very conditions of existence of the participating actors. Migrants' politics are in this sense non-politics (that is non-representable in the dominant existing polity)." (2013, p. 188)

Understanding migrants' and especially refugees' actions thus requires a careful empirical analysis in order to grasp the mundane practices which are in Rancièrian terms contestations of the police, but which might be easily misrecognized or overlooked as they go beyond of what is traditionally defined as legitimate political action. Nevertheless, through their disruptive effects, they can have a significant impact on challenging the norms and rules of the *police.*

Another author who has emphasized the importance of often mundane acts of the deprived becoming visible is Judith Butler, whose approach to the political significance of the appearance of the invisible is explained in the following section.

Butler's performative theory of collective appearance
Judith Butler´s work on performativity has been widely used in refugee studies, such as her emphasis on the powers of policies and the law to create the very categories they only claim to describe. Performativity, as understood by her, is the realization that "an utterance brings what it states into being (illocutionary) or makes a set of events happen as a consequence of the utterance being made (perlocutionary)" (Butler, 2015, p.28), which is illustrated by the (often hidden) creating powers of legal categories (as described in the section on the 'virtualism' of legal categories, which nevertheless shape the lives of the categorized; see Chapter 1 of this thesis). Butler has written about the precarious life in refugee camps and detention centres, studied through the lens of Foucauldian biopower, which has been referred to in the work of refugee and migration scholars such as Darling (2011), Minca (2015), Mountz et al. (2012) and Rygiel (2011).

However, in recent years her work has turned more and more to acts of resistance and the performativity of deprived social groups such as migrants (cf. Beltrán, 2009; Mezzadra, 2011). In her 2015 book *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, she deals with the questions how the 'unspeakable population' (i.e. those normally rendered invisible by legal, socio-political and spatial processes of ordering) speaks out and makes claims, and what disruptions this causes within the field of power. This work is guided by the question that if performativity requires agency, how then can the deprived take action? In line with Rancière's approach (although without referring explicitly to him), she claims that "sometimes it is not a question of first having power and then being able to act; sometimes it is a question of acting, and in the acting, laying claim to the power it requires. This is performativity as I understand it, and it is also a way of acting from and against precarity" (2015, p. 58). Indeed, countering the Arendtian understanding that one first needs to have rights in order to act in the public realm (Arendt, 1959), she claims that due to the performativity of actions themselves, the deprived are able to claim the rights they are being denied.

Zylinksa (2004) refers to Butler's reading of the ancient Greek tragic play 'Antigone', in which the heroine is "'[p]rohibited from action, [but] nevertheless acts' [in a manner that] 'is hardly a simple assimilation to an existing norm.' [...] Antigone indicates the political possibility 'that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed'" (Butler, 2002, in Zylinska, 2004, p.526-527). This reading is very similar to Rancière´s claim that the excluded find ways to disrupt the norms by finding own modes of expressions, own forms of political actions that do not conform to the

practices of the police. These actions, such as the public claiming of space of those who are deemed invisible as well as hunger-strikes and lip-sewing of refugees in some mass accommodation centres that are meant to express strong criticism of the asylum system (Owens, 2009; Tazreiter, 2010), are tactics that cannot be understood in the language of forms of political expressions accepted by the police. Yet - or maybe therefore - they "call into question the legitimacy of a set of politics or actions, or the legitimacy of a specific form of rule. [...] All of them can by virtue of calling for a change in the police, state formation, or rule, be called 'destructive' since they do ask for a substantial alteration of the status quo" (Butler, 2015, p.189). Performative action thus comes before power, when the powerless question the legitimacy of the current set of politics by acting not only against, but also outside if it.

Butler claims that assemblies, i.e. the collective appearance of the deprived, can achieve such a disruption without having to resort to other means of expressing protests, and that the mere act of assembling is already performative in itself. This is based on an understanding that appearing is the precondition for the Arendtian act of speaking, that "politics not only requires a space of appearance, but [also] bodies that do appear" (*ibid*., p. 155). When these invisible, disposable bodies appear and assemble, they claim even without speaking the words that "we are still here, persisting, demanding greater justice, a release from precarity, a possibility of a livable life" (*ibid.,* p.25). Butler claims that it is the community symbolized by the collective appearance of bodies, or the collective 'We' enacted by the assembly of those who are excluded from the public space they now appear in, which due to the plurality of bodies "signifies quite differently from the way a single and unified subject declares its will through a vocalized proposition" (*ibid.*, p. 156). Hence, it is the collective appearance of those who normally do not appear which sends a strong political statement of persistence and claiming the right to be seen and heard.

'The refugee' as a political being

By way of conclusion, the more action-focused theories described above can be summarized as follows: The Autonomy of Mobilities approach claims that instead of studying migrants in general and refugees in particular from the perspective of the state, it is necessary to shift, or revert, the dominant ontology in order to understand migrants (i.e. also refugees) as human beings with the capacity of exerting agency and political subjectivity. Looking at mundane practices of migrants shaping their lives allows to see the state as reactionary to migrants` mobilities and actions, rather than vice versa (Nyers, 2003, 2006; Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). This recognition of migrants´ and refugees´ ability to act is a prerequisite for Rancière´s theory, which allows us to understand the political actions of those who are conventionally excluded from acting politically, thus including refugees. Rancière claims that those deemed invisible by the established norms and rules of the *police* can challenge these by simply acting politically, by enacting their ability to act politically, and thereby expressing dissensus with the current system and claiming their right of political subjectivity (cf. Schaap, 2011). Butler (2015) supports this approach by claiming that rather than waiting to be given power, the deprived can enact their claim for power by performing political action and thereby laying claim to their right to political expression. For her, appearance and visibility are central, and her theorization helps specifically to recognize the importance of collective appearance for challenging the established norms.

Together, these three approaches allow to build a theoretical framework with which individuals in deprived situations, such as those who have fled their country and apply for asylum in another state, can be conceptualized as subjective beings who are able to act politically. They are considered to

have the ability to actively shape the conditions under in which they live. Importantly, this does not refer to the 'freedom to act' that they are given by some higher authority, but on the opposite, it means that even deprived human beings can claim their right to act politically by simply enacting this right (Nyers, 2003). In the following chapter, I will apply this theoretical framework to the case of private accommodation arrangements in order to understand how these can be conceptualized as a political expression.

8 | Private accommodation arrangements as disruption

Studying private accommodation arrangements through the lens of the alternative theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter, a number of aspects become emphasized which remained unnoticed when applying the dominant conceptualizations of 'the refugee' as done in Chapter 6. Most importantly, it might be argued, is that the Autonomous Mobilities approach as well as the theories by Rancière and Butler help to recognize 'refugees' not as passive and unpolitical beings, but as human actors capable of exerting agency and able to act even if they are not formally given the powers to do so. Hence, this helps to overcome the 'control bias' of the dominant conceptions of 'refugees', and offers an alternative ontology that allows to understand refugees´ acts by their own terms, rather than through the normative lens of political actions accepted in Western societies (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). This approach to refugees' political subjectivity is the premise for Rancière´s and Butler´s theorizations of expressing dissensus through appearance.

The Autonomous Mobilities approach highlights the moments of autonomy asylum seekers make use of when taking the opportunity offered by civil society initiatives to leave the asylum seeker accommodation centre in order to live in a shared household together with non-refugees. This realization seems very obvious at first, but it is an important step to make in order to see the participating asylum seekers as proactively weighing the opportunities as well as the risks and uncertainties involved, and signing up for initiatives like *Flüchtlinge Willkommen*. The concrete act of reaching out to such initiatives can be considered as an individual act of agency, a moment of autonomy, in which the asylum seeker actively decides to leave the designated asylum seeker accommodation, an act which actively shapes his or her personal circumstances and living conditions.

The act of living in private housing arrangement side-by-side non-refugees might seem trivial and mundane, but it is the advantage of the Autonomous Mobilities approach and Rancière´s theory that highlights the importance of such mundane practices, and how these have "materiality in the concrete political and social living conditions" (Kanak Attak, n.d., unpaged; see also Rancière, 2011). Even if not intended as such, the decision to leave the publicly provided asylum seeker accommodation for a private housing arrangement is highly political, as it defies the structurally manifested social and spatial segregation of refugees and non-refugees. Private accommodation arrangements bring refugees and non-refugees together and allows for everyday encounters and interactions between them.

If seeking asylum can be analysed as a quest for social and spatial emplacement, as Oudejans (2011) writes, then this can be translated into Rancière´s terms as a quest for becoming part of the *police*, for reconstituting the established set of norms in a way it becomes possible for refugees to become legitimate members of the civil society, to become an included citizen. The nature of the European and German asylum system, however, makes exactly this inclusion impossible. Nevertheless, by moving into private housing arrangements, asylum seekers can start to enact their inclusion by utilizing the possibilities available to them, irrespective of the authorities´ later decision as to

whether the asylum will eventually be granted or not. Thereby they disrupt the social and spatial orders that draw a clear boundary between the legitimate Insiders and the Outsiders. A private accommodation arrangement for asylum seekers amongst non-refugees "shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard as discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise'" (Nyers, 2003, p. 1078). This makes it possible for asylum seekers to be potentially seen and heard as individuals, if not by the civil society as a whole, certainly by their more or less immediate environment, as has been argued above.

Participating in the everyday exchanges involved in living together, as banal and mundane as they might seem, can be understood with the Rancière´s approach to be highly political as a form of 'violence-through-presence' (Nyers, 2006), a disruption of long established norms of segregation: Such shared living arrangements can be considered as challenging very socio-political and spatial orders that determine who is to be included and who not. The presence of asylum seekers in the *police*, in the most private spheres of civil society actors is therefore truly political in Rancièrian terms. It is politics at the shared kitchen table, so to say; politics in a novel shape, as private accommodation arrangements do not fit into the normative patterns of what is accepted as legitimate political action.

The disruptive effect of private housing arrangements might come unintended, if the asylum seekers decide to move into a private accommodation arrangements merely in order to improve their own living conditions. Nevertheless, the mere presence of the asylum seeker in the homes, the private sphere of non-refugee civil society actors can be considered as an expression of the inadequacy of the mass accommodation centres, both regarding the living conditions and their remoteness. Therefore, it is therefore highly political. Indeed, as Honig has written, political actions do not need to be intentional. In fact, they might 'just happen' to people: "Action is self-surprising in [...] the sense that it happens to us; we do not decide to perform, then enter the public realm, and submit our performance to the contingency that characterizes that realm: *Often, political action comes to us, it involves us in ways that are not deliberate, wilful or intended*. Action produces its actors; episodically, temporarily, we are its agonistic achievement" (Honig, 1992, in Nyers, 2006, p.64, emphasis in the original). Hence, this unintendedness does not discount the political significance of the appearance of asylum seekers in private accommodation arrangements in any way.

In several points, however, Rancière´s theory is not able to explain the political significance of private accommodation arrangements for asylum seekers. Regarding the time frame, for example, Rancière claims that politics is done in a rupture, in the 'singularity of a political moment' rather than in prolonged campaigns (Mezzadra, 2011). The private accommodation arrangements, however, are designed as mid- to long-term living arrangements, depending on the duration of the asylum procedure. Opposing Rancière, however, it can be argued that these are highly political precisely due to the *prolonged* presence of asylum seekers in the private sphere of non-refugees. Only this extended time frame, in which everyday interactions between refugee and non-refugee housemates are possible, allows for getting to know each other, to establish interpersonal relationships. I contend that this, more than any short disruptive appearance, expresses a naturalness of interactions and emphasizes the shared human-ness of refugees and non-refugees, which challenges the legitimacy of the social and spatial segregation manifested in the asylum system.

Secondly, it must be noted that this presence is, at least for the initiative described in this thesis, not only prolonged but also organized within the framework of the German asylum law, and is hence not a breach of legal norms in itself[6]. Indeed, adhering to the law and asking permission for each asylum seeker who wants to live in a shared household rather than the collective accommodation centres is a prerequisite for the success of this initiative (see Introduction & Background chapter), as breaking the laws might have negative consequences for the participating asylum applicant. Despite the actual lawfulness, however, it can be argued that the creative utilization of the legal provisions which allow for decentralized accommodation of asylum seekers in some parts of Germany was not foreseen in the creation of that law. Thus, this practice contradicts the general practice of separating asylum seekers from the rest of society. Hence, I argue that by making use of the possibilities of this regulation in a way that challenges the established norms of how asylum seekers should be treated, private accommodation arrangements can still be said to be highly political in Rancière's terms.

There are two more aspects to private accommodation arrangements, however, that cannot be fully explained by Rancière's theory. One of them is that his theoretical approach seems to focus more on the actions conducted by the excluded themselves, rather than on the joined actions of them and their supporters (cf. Schaap, 2011). His approach alone would thus not allow to fully grasp the interaction between asylum seekers and non-refugee actors that is necessary for the establishment of private accommodation arrangements. Rancière's approach is certainly sufficient to study refugee protests marches, hunger strikes and the like, but is not enough to make sense of the political significance the mundane interactions between refugees and non-refugees have in private accommodation arrangements. The other aspect is that Rancière does not discuss the scope of the disruptive politics that is necessary to bring about change in the *police.* These two aspects can better be explained by turning to Judith Butler and her theorization of the performative power of collective appearance.

Originally developed to make sense of mass protests such as the Occupy movement and the protests at Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, Butler's performative theory of assembly highlights how the becoming visible of those who typically stay invisible signifies as a political act, even without verbalizing claims. As Butler has written about the undocumented migrants' movements in the US in 2005 and 2006, these migrants 'claim the rights they do not have' (to say it in Rancièrian terms) by gathering and speaking in public, demanding to be seen and heard. This, she claims, does not mean that they will eventually be granted the rights. But in fact it is not the outcome of the movement that should determine its success, but the exercise of the rights through the migrant movement (Butler and Spivak, 2007, in Mezzadra, 2011). Butler thus states that the immediate power of the protests is different from their legal efficacy, and is therefore a worthy object of analysis in itself irrespective of the long-term effects of the protests.

Butler's work can be interpreted as being more open towards who is to be included in the group of political actors than Rancière's. Whereas he can be understood as claiming that only those who are excluded, who have no part, can act politically (cf. Rancière, 2011; Schaap, 2011), Butler's theory seems less exclusive as it is focused on the significance of the collective, of the mass of people appearing together and thereby claiming recognition. It thus allows for an interpretation that values

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[6] Private housing arrangements for those migrants who do not have any status and whose presence in the European Union has become illegal might of course operate outside of the legal framework; however, these are not subject of this thesis.

the significance of the appearance of those deprived of their rights together with their supporters, independent of their legal status (Butler, 2015). This is crucial for this analysis of private accommodation arrangements in two ways:

Firstly, it allows to consider the civil society initiatives that enable the private accommodation arrangements for asylum seekers as providing a place where individuals who are typically unseen by the wider society can become visible. They thus *offer a space of appearance* for refugees. The disruptive effect the private accommodation arrangements have is only possible through the cooperation of both refugees and non-refugees. Indeed, it can be argued that it is precisely this visibility of the very cooperation between the two groups that has the disruptive effect, as it challenges the strict segregation of the categories of 'the society' and 'the refugees' that is legitimized through the legal, socio-political and spatial ordering of the latter group (Borren, 2008; Darling, 2011; Oudejans, 2011; van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). The act of living together, of sharing a household between refugees and non-refugees, of engaging in the mundane, everyday interactions involved in living together, can thus blur all the boundaries of spatial and social segregation that are made possible by the abstraction of these groups. This enables the participating asylum seekers to appear to non-refugees as individuals, as subjects, rather than as a de-individuated abstraction.

Secondly, Butler´s theory is also helpful in making sense of the scope of private accommodation arrangements. Even though every single private accommodation arrangement for asylum seekers in itself signifies a political disruption and the claim for changes in the asylum (accommodation) system, I argue that it is the increased visibility of the mass of such private accommodation arrangements (608 as of April 13, 2016 in nine European countries; Refugees Welcome, n.d.) which has attracted international media attention in form of interviews, short documentaries and discussions. These have raised the awareness about these initiatives beyond the circle of those directly involved (see also Introduction & Background chapter).

Hence, even though the conventional understanding of assembly, i.e. as people gathering and physically occupying public space together (Butler, 2015), might not be applicable to the private accommodation arrangements, it can be argued that the growing numbers of asylum seekers moving from public asylum seeker accommodation centres into private flat-shares together non-refugees can also be considered as an assembly. The difference is that the assembly, i.e. the signifying through the mere presence of a collective, is here not acted out in a physical space, but rather in a virtual space: through coverages and articles both in traditional and social media, private accommodation arrangements are made widely visible (relative to other civil society initiatives for refugee rights, as described in the Introduction and Background chapter). This, I claim, has an effect similar to bringing people together in physical assemblies: The high media visibility of the growing scope of private housing arrangements for refugees signifies political dissensus with and contestation of the current asylum system more strongly than any individual housing arrangement could achieve.

To conclude, the application of the theoretical framework consisting of the Autonomous Mobilities approach, Rancière´s theory on radical democracy and Butler´s approach to the performative significance of collective appearance have enabled us to conceptualize private housing arrangements in a way that the dominant 'control-biased' approaches to 'the refugee' could not: Private housing arrangements, it has been argued here, can be considered as performative acts in which civil society actors provide spaces for 'refugees' to appear as individuals. 'Refugees', who are rendered invisible

as individuals by legal, socio-political and spatial processes of ordering, can thereby overcome the abstractions and become individualized subjects. Private accommodation arrangements are thus highly political in that they challenge the dominant norms and rules of the refugee regime by actions that differ in shape from the generally accepted forms of political protest. Thereby, they might contribute (within a limited scope) to overcoming the discursively legitimized segregation of refugees and non-refugees in Western societies (Darling, 2011; van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). Through collective appearance of such private accommodation arrangements in virtual rather than physical space, these arrangements have a high visibility, which intensifies their disruptive effect.

All in all, this alternative theoretical framework of action- or agency-focused theorizations of refugees allows to understand how private housing arrangements for refugees in the asylum procedure can work to challenge, or disrupt, the externally imposed legal, socio-political and spatial orderings of refugees as an abstract, threatening Other which is defined as the opposite of 'the citizen', to whom he/she can thus never belong. They propose a conception in which belonging and emplacement (cf. Oudejans, 2011) do not have to be permitted by higher authorities, but can be claimed simply through enactment by those who are deprived of it. Private housing arrangements thus provide a possibility for such enactment of belonging.

Conclusion: Private housing arrangements as a politics of appearance

Summary and Conclusion

In this thesis, I have looked at civil society initiatives for refugee rights, and specifically at the initiative *Flüchtlinge Willkommen* which facilitates private housing arrangements in which refugees and non-refugees share a household together (Flüchtlinge Willkommen, n.d.). This initiative targets accommodation facilities for refugees in Germany that are accused of segregating, excluding and stigmatizing people in the asylum procedure (Darling, 2011; Mountz et al., 2012). The goal of this work was to understand the (political) significance of such private housing arrangements. The guiding question in this theoretical research was: What is the consequence of private accommodation arrangements on the dominant theoretical conceptions of 'the refugee', and how can the significance of such housing arrangements be grasped with alternative conceptualizations?

In order to answer this question, the first part of this thesis served to explore the dominant conceptualizations of 'the refugee' that underlie many of today´s discourses about this category. By means of a brief historical overview the changing nature of the application of the 1951 Refugee Convention, and by contrasting the presumable fixed-ness of the legal definition of 'the refugee' with empirical findings that show that the categorization of people is far from simple and apolitical, I have analysed how the category of 'the refugee' is actively produced (cf. Samers, 2004). Rather than representing social realities, the legal category actively creates social realities by abstracting and de-individualizing individuals and ordering them into the homogenized category of 'the refugee'.

The legal ordering of 'the refugee' is also reflected in the closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing processes of spatial and socio-political ordering. 'Refugees' are considered as the abstract, threatening Other, forever incompatible with the receiving society as they are defined by opposition to them. Although they have to comply with pre-formed expectations of who is a genuine refugee in order to eventually get protection, they are nevertheless considered as belonging *elsewhere* rather than here (Oudejans, 2011). This discourse legitimizes the spatial segregation of

refugees in remote accommodation facilities and the limitation of their mobility, which prevent any emplacement by creating feelings of discomfort and non-belonging.

The effects of these processes of legal, socio-political and spatial ordering can be understood through the lens of in/visibility, as they result in a situation in which the individual seeking asylum is harmfully visible, or even hypervisible, to the state authorities who can control and surveil him or her. Simultaneously, the individual asylum seeker remains invisible vis-à-vis the host society, hidden behind the abstract, 'threatening' category of 'the refugee'. This, according to the dominant theorizations of 'refugees', makes it impossible for him or her to interact with members of the civil society (cf. Borren, 2008; Haas, 2012). This view reflects the dominant conceptualizations of 'the refugee' from the field of refugee studies, which ultimately render individuals categorized as such as passive beings, who are being ordered, othered and excluded, unable to exert agency by themselves.

After exploring how 'the refugee' is commonly conceptualized in the first part of this thesis, the second part aimed to understand how the phenomenon of private accommodation arrangements can be understood with these approaches. In Chapter 6, I have thus studied how private housing, through changing the spatial order ordering of a refugee by moving him or her from remote mass accommodation centres into the private houses of citizens, affects the condition of harmful visibility vis-à-vis the state and harmful invisibility vis-à-vis the receiving society. I argued that thereby, the processes of abstraction and de-individuation of refugees, i.e. the social ordering, can potentially be reversed, while also the visibility towards the state authorities can be somewhat (but not completely) reduced.

However, it was found that the dominant conceptualizations of 'the refugee', although providing helpful insights into how private accommodation arrangements can challenge the paradox of in/visibility (Borren, 2008; Haas, 2012), are not sufficient to make sense also of the political significance of private accommodation arrangements in challenging the segregation of refugees and non-refugees. This is because they consider 'refugees' as being deprived of their political subjectivity, and therefore do not allow to understand refugees' act of moving into such private housing arrangements as political. For these reasons, I developed an alternative theoretical framework based on the Autonomy of Migration approach, Jacques Rancière´s theory of political dissensus and Judith Butler´s theory of the performative politics of appearance. These theories centre their attention on the (political) subjectivity of every individual, even those in the most precarious circumstances, as well as on their ability to act and shape the conditions of their social and political existence (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). This framework was subsequently used to make sense of the political significance of private accommodation arrangements.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this application is that such housing arrangements can be conceptualized as performative acts in which civil society actors provide a space of appearance for refugees. In these, refugees can become visible as individuals vis-à-vis (parts of) the civil society. This cooperation between non-refugees and refugees defies the segregation of asylum seekers and the receiving society, which is imposed and legitimized through the processes of legal, socio-political and spatial ordering. Hence, I argue that even if they are not necessarily intended as such by the participants, private accommodation arrangements are highly political as they disrupt the naturalized European order of the refugee regime. Especially the mundaneness and naturalness of encounters and interactions between members of a shared household contests and delegitimizes the practices

of othering. It also highlights the shared human-ness between refugees and non-refugees, rather than focusing on the differences between them.

Overcoming the harmful invisibility vis-à-vis the society (although still remaining in the asylum procedure) by appearing in the private homes of civil society actors can enable the asylum seeker to speak out as a political being, to be heard and seen as a person rather than a category. Within the private housing arrangements, the individual asylum seeker can enact his or her right to be visible and to belong, instead of waiting for this right to be granted to them by the authorities. Private housing arrangements as a form of contestation also challenge what is considered as legitimate forms of political action, it is politics in a novel shape. The significance of these private accommodation arrangements is intensified by their scope: the increasing numbers of asylum seekers moving into private accommodation arrangements might be said to signify like Butler´s (2015) collective appearances, although the 'assembly' being virtual rather than physical, and therefore constitutes a (relatively widely) visible contestation of the abstraction and segregation of asylum seekers.

Recommendations for future research

As for now, the number of participating refugees in the private housing arrangements might not be significant compared to the total number of individuals currently in the asylum procedure. However, considering that the initiative *Flüchtlinge Willkommen* is only one example of civil society initiatives that encourage and enable encounters between refugees and non-refugees, the strict division between refugees and non-refugees might be more openly contested in the future as the boundary between them gets slowly blurred through such initiatives (Schaap, 2011). In this process, I argue, also academic scholarship should play a crucial role in analysing how such initiatives challenge and contest the current refugee regime and enact new social realities. The first step, I claim, would be to overcome the research gap in the field of joined actions between refugees (also and especially those in the asylum procedure) and civil society initiatives, which mirrors the separation evoked through the means of legal, socio-political and spatial ordering rather than the actual lack of such cooperation.

Focusing on current civil society initiatives working for and with refugees in Germany and understanding their political significance could also be considered a strategy to counter the biased focus on the upsurge of xenophobic protest movements and right-wing parties that has been described in the introduction chapter. Giving equal representation to civil society initiatives for refugee rights, even though they might be focused more on mundane encounters rather than on symbolic protests, is necessary to grasp the full diversity of the current dynamics regarding the 'refugee question' in the German civil society. Future research in this field is therefore of high societal relevance.

A possible future research agenda deriving from the findings described in this thesis should in my opinion first of all focus on filling the theoretical framework developed in this thesis with empirical results. As the aspects described in this thesis are only the theoretical potentials of private accommodation arrangements, it requires empirical work to reveal the actual effects of these arrangements on the lives of those participating in them, as well as their wider influence. Only this will show whether private accommodation arrangements can realize the potential positive effects that the theoretical analysis has found, or whether practical difficulties confirm the scepticism expressed for example by the Dutch Refugee Council regarding such housing arrangements

(VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, 2015). Aspects that could be of interest for such empirical work are how belonging and emplacement are enacted in accommodation arrangements, or whether and how abstract categories like 'us' and 'them' are actually challenged and overcome by the experiences of sharing a household together. Another interesting question relates to power relations and dynamics within the household, which are also connected to the specific expectations both non-refugees and refugees have about each other and their shared living arrangement. These cannot be analysed by theoretical exploration, but require research among those who actually live in private accommodation arrangements.

Private accommodation arrangements could also be studied in the light of alternative conceptions of local or activist citizenship (cf. Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Isin, 2009; Sassen, 2002) or of new policy developments that have moved beyond the traditional paradigm of strict separation and allow for more interaction and so-called 'integration measures' while the asylum applications of refugees might still be determined (see for example Schotanius, 2015). Alternatively, such housing arrangements could also be analysed in the context of increasing numbers of bottom-up civil society initiatives that challenge the legitimacy and adequacy of national top-down party politics, or even in the context of the sharing economy (cf. EU Policy Lab, 2016). Considering that joined actions between society actors and refugees in general, and private housing arrangements in particular, have hardly been covered by scientific research, there are many aspects that are in my opinion of academic relevance and worthy of scientific exploration. The theoretical framework developed in this thesis, based on the approach of autonomous migration, Rancière's disruptive politics and Butler's performative theory of appearance, can serve as an inspiration for such endeavours, but should also be refined and elaborated by future studies.

Reflections

By means of reflection, I first have to note that this thesis was motivated by a personal fascination with the large number of civil society initiatives showing and enacting solidarity with refugees coming to Germany, and the wish to gain a deeper understanding thereof. I have written from a specific political and moral perspective that considers the abstraction, segregation and othering of refugees as ethically wrong. This view has inspired the choice of the topic, the research question as well as the choice of theories used to explore the phenomenon of private accommodation arrangements, and has thus indirectly guided the whole research and writing process.

While writing this thesis, in which I so explicitly want to challenge the categorization and abstraction of 'the refugee', one important question came up several times: Would this purely theoretical work not reinforce the categorization and abstraction of 'refugee' which I aim to counteract? Would not such a theoretical work as this (based solely on literature research and not on empirical material) confirm and underline exactly this process of abstraction, this de-individuation of people who have fled to Europe, simply by writing about 'them' in general? Considering that the Autonomy of Migration approaches claims the need for empirical research (cf. Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013), is not this work disregarding the very same message it wants to bring across?

I have answered this question for myself by considering this minor thesis as part of a bigger research project that includes also my major thesis, in which I plan to conduct empirical research based on one of the research suggestions developed above. Due to the lack of previous research in this specific field, I considered it necessary to first explore the possible theoretical conceptualizations of private accommodation arrangements. This, I claim, provided me with some helpful insights into the

phenomenon that hopefully enable me to conduct future empirical research of higher quality than I could have done without these prior theoretical explorations. As for the present thesis, I have been very careful about the terminology used to denote people in the asylum procedure in order to avoid a reinforcement of the processes of abstraction and categorization that I have criticized in this thesis. Thereby, I hope to have made my own position clear to the reader.

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