



**GERMAN AND FRENCH “SPATIAL MANAGEMENT” OF  
REFUGEES ILLUSTRATED BY SYRIANS’ URBAN  
EXPERIENCES IN BERLIN AND MARSEILLES**

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**ABSTRACT**

Whereas the recent Refugee Studies with geographical approach often focus on the state-refugees nexus and living conditions in refugee camps or accommodation centres, we propose an analysis of the refugees’ residential insecurity and institutional constraints, questioning how they generate and influence individual strategies of urban integration and resettlement. Hence, our approach is to compare the politically established, multi-scaled “spatial management” of refugees with the refugees’ individual actions and decisions within their spaces of arrival. For this, we compare Marseilles’ and Berlin’s accommodation systems and urban specificities that come within two different national and local settings in terms of politics and migration patterns. The core question we address is to understand if and how these two barely comparable political and administrative systems can still lead to similar refugee resettlement patterns within urban spaces. The studies are based on the authors’ intensive ethnographic fieldwork in both cities that helped carry out in-depth case studies on Syrian nationals.

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\* Makale Geliş Tarihi: 28.10.2017

Makale Kabul Tarihi: 18.02.2018

**Keywords: Refugee Accommodation, Residential Trajectory, Ordinary Urban Experience, Urban Inscription Patterns, European Comparison.**

## INTRODUCTION

This article aims to conduct a cross-sectional analysis of refugee resettlement processes in urban contexts, studying how individuals' usage of space within two European cities: Berlin (Germany) and Marseilles (France)<sup>1</sup>. Despite obvious differences in their roles as “spaces of arrival” for refugees in recent years –divergent absolute numbers of arrival<sup>2</sup>, asylum politics and their recurrence in public and political debates–, we argue that the so called “migration/ refugee crisis” has taken place/ takes place in both cities, although to different extents; yet, both urban contexts have been historically shaped by international migration influx. Hence, analysing and explaining contrasts in local patterns is central to our argumentation. These two cities of different size, national/ international range and political contexts will be object of the authors questioning on the entanglement and contradictions between administrative constraints and the ordinariness of urban life for refugees.

In fact, generally based on the analysis of national accommodation systems and considering the city as basic and homogeneous spatial support, a part of the literature dismisses the importance of urban specificities to understanding the refugees' urban integration and its conditions. More globally speaking, the transnational literature tends to underestimate the influence of national and local authorities, bureaucracy and borders on the refugees' resettlement process. Trying to avoid the pitfalls of these approaches, this article promotes an ethnographic analysis based on a comparison between refugees' experiences within two national and urban contexts. Furthermore, in discordance with the geographical focus of actual Refugee Studies on refugee camps or accommodation systems and the state-refugee nexus (Darling, 2016), it has only recently been admitted and considered that the majority of refugees all over the world live within ordinary urban spaces, apart from public or UNHCR accommodation systems (Crisp, 1999; Crisp et.al., 2012; UNHCR, 2009). Therefore, this article proposes an approach articulating urban refugees settlement processes and its social and geographical structures, based on multiple individual experiences of exile within the different urban contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> In this article we use the term “refugee” as generic for all legal statuses, basing the reflection on the motive of migration, i.e. persons who reached Europe under the regime of forced migration.

<sup>2</sup> Since 2015: more than 100 000 registrations in Berlin, around 12 000 in Marseilles.

As a result, our approach is original in four aspects: 1) it does not only focus on the state-refugees nexus, 2) the city is not considered as an inert support for human influx, 3) it takes into account the refugees' representations and usages of space, 4) it does not overlook the refugees' social networks and their connections to non-profit or political organizations, but views them as crucial on the individual paths.

Living in a refugee shelter does not only define a specific pattern of living, but affects the refugees' first contacts with their spaces of arrival and local society. Thus, integrating defined social groups, such as migrants or refugees, in specific established accommodation systems has been analysed as being part of a multi-scaled (international, national, local) "spatial management" of individuals (Bruslé, 2015: 248). In Berlin for instance, according to the regional law, all refugees are assigned to live in centres of accommodation (compulsory for at least the first six weeks of their stay). Indeed, (compulsory) accommodation measures have been discussed as paradoxical (Agier, 2008), providing temporary shelter as part of a humanitarian solution, but at the same time enabling institutional surveillance of the hosted population (Lassailly-Jacob, 2006).

On this point, the literature on refugees in European cities shows that the principal objectives of national policies are the control of this population and also the rebalancing of its distribution and the lightening of the "burden" for the biggest cities (Robinson, et.al., 2003). This literature also underlines the impact of national policies on the distribution of this population within urban areas, choosing in some cases peripheral and already poor sectors for settlement (Phillimore and Goodson, 2006). Nevertheless, the cases of Marseilles and Berlin are in certain aspects at odds with this argument. Indeed, on the one hand, accommodation structures are not systematically implemented in peripheral areas. On the other hand, considering the refugees' spatial relegation as the consequence of "spatial management" only hides the influence of urban structures and dynamics on the resettlement processes such as socio-economic patterns on residential paths.

Undeniably, the accommodation structures tend to create different types of discontinuities in urban space: newly built up (urban) refugee camps and accommodation structures are often easy to identify morphologically within their environment, and thus its occupants are easily recognized and classified as part of the "refugee group" (Jaber, 2016). For instance, new shelters can be built inside cities with their own specific architecture, like the recently erected accommodation structures out of prefabricated elements in Berlin (Dippel, 2017). In other cases, depending on political and urban context, such discontinuities are less visible because authorities use the formal and informal existing urban structures as an accommodation system like squats, furnished

hostels and social housing in the central district and in the outskirts of Marseilles (Dahdah et.al., 2017). In this article we will address the question if through different ways these situations generate a marginalization process and maintain the “newly-arrived” in a precarious relation to space and society.

In Berlin, asylum law prescribing compulsory accommodation and difficult access to the housing market forces thousands of refugees to live in public accommodation shelters. The latter often become middle- or long-term housing solutions that sometimes last beyond their asylum procedures. Thus, the system maintains a high dependency on the public accommodation program, even if asylum seekers do not have to wait long to get the right to work<sup>3</sup> and to afford personal housing. Meanwhile in Marseilles, hundreds of refugees, including minors, do not have access to the accommodation system and to the assistance program. As a consequence, they need to lean on informal solutions to avoid ending up on the streets. This generates high precariousness and dependence on the involvement of social, medical and humanitarian organizations and of activists in order to help the migrants and denounce the system failure. Hence, as result of those local and national specificities, individual difficulties might come up at different stages.

Therefore, individual experiences and strategies should be a central component of any analysis. Firstly, because “refugees” do not constitute a homogeneous group. Individuals come from different countries, have different skills and administrative status, unequal social and economic capitals. For that matter, being a man or a woman, a child or an adult, single or married with children can impart different relations to authorities and incidentally to urban space. Secondly, despite the strong obstacles previously mentioned, refugees remain actors of their mobility thanks to their skills, to their previous experiences and to available urban resources (Ma Mung, 2009). On this matter, refugees’ precariousness seems to be higher in Marseilles than in Berlin. Marseilles’ prevalent economy of undeclared labor and housing rental market gives rise to factors that are not as relevant when examining Berlin.

Finally, in order to understand the urban resettlement processes and their complexity the authors adopted a comprehensive approach based on a comparison between the two cities and an ethnographic approach based on intensive fieldwork. As part of a three-month field research for her Master’s Thesis in the spring of 2017, Annika Dippel frequented three charitable

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, the recent modifications of the German integration law strengthened asylum seekers’ and refugees’ rights concerning labor market participation. If they are not from one of the so-called “safe countries of origin”, asylum seekers are now allowed to work from the fourth month of their stay.

organizations in Berlin where she met with over 60 refugees (of all legal statuses), in different personal situations and from different origins (mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq), who had reached Berlin since 2015. Assaf Dahdah was involved in a research program<sup>4</sup> analysing Marseilles' central districts and its role as place in the residential trajectories of refugees. Through his research activities (2014-2017), he met Syrian, Sudanese, Somali, Algerian, Albanian and Kosovan nationals, of different administrative and of diverse marriage /family statuses, with whom he conducted several interviews at different stages of their resettlement process. Through their independent fieldwork, both authors reported dissimilar residential trajectories and social integration based on administrative obstacles and constraints, gender issues, resource inequalities (including personal social networks and non-profits), access to formal or informal housing, availability of formal or informal labour markets, and financial resources.

Currently representing the largest refugee group worldwide, it is impossible to consider Syrians as homogenous or as having experienced the same resettlement process. In this article the authors compare individual trajectories of Syrians in the two urban contexts in order to answer to the following questions: Do the particularities of the two refugee accommodation systems lead to specific spatial inscriptions of Syrian refugees in Berlin and Marseille? How do urban structures and dynamics influence the resettlement process and the refugees' individual residential plan? In extension, we address the question of how two very different local contexts and national administrative systems can still lead to similar driving out processes, from the city-centres to the outskirts.

The article is structured into three sections. Firstly, the authors will explain the functioning of French and German accommodation systems for refugees and the local management of the "migration/refugee crisis". Then they will compare the resettlement process of Syrian refugees through their residential trajectories, with the mapping of case studies. Finally, they will briefly analyse the Syrian urban integration in Marseilles and Berlin, urban polarities despite the residential instability generated by their accommodation systems.

## **1. FRENCH AND GERMAN NATIONAL ACCOMMODATION SYSTEMS, THE "REFUGEE CRISIS" OR "MIGRATION CRISIS", AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LOCAL CONTEXTS**

Berlin and Marseilles, Germany and France, the comparison between these two contexts of refugee reception considers multi-scaled differences not only in

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<sup>4</sup> PUCA program "Ville ordinaire, citoyens précaires" leads by Florence Bouillon (LAVUE, Paris).

terms of political systems (federal, decentralized system versus centralized system), refugee politics, and accommodation systems (compulsory in Germany versus highly underfunded in France), but also national and local migration patterns (historical and recent), as well as social structures and dynamics in urban space. Without a doubt, the two countries and urban contexts do not in the same way experience the contemporary migration movements. Correspondingly the public debates in both countries forge different idioms concerning the recent immigration: whereas in Germany the debates concentrate on the “refugee crisis”, in France there is talk of a “migration crisis”. These idioms may reflect the different migration patterns as well as they probably feed the debate of “legitimate” (forced migration) versus “illegitimate” (economic migration) migrants.

### **Berlin’s Accommodation System: Emergency Situations and Large Scaled “Spatial Management”**

Since the “long summer of migration” (Yurdakul, et.al., 2017) in 2015, more than 1.2 million refugees have reached Germany (website BAMF<sup>5</sup>, 2017), the majority of whom are fleeing (civil) wars in the Middle East and central Asia (Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan); Syrian nationals form the largest contingent, accounting for almost 30% of the registered refugees. Thus, Germany has become the most important host country for refugees in the European Union and has been in 2016 in the top 10 of host countries worldwide in absolute numbers. Berlin alone has received more than 100 000 asylum requests (website BAMF, 2017) during this time. Any analysis of Berlin’s accommodation system needs a reminder of the emergency situation it was facing in autumn 2015, when the city was receiving more than 1 000 refugees a day; tens of thousands of refugees were placed into emergency mass shelters, such as sports halls, some of which remained in use until spring 2017. Thousands of persons continue to live in emergency centres in Berlin, even though the number of arrivals has decreased largely as a result of the closure of the Balkan route, the UE-Turkey Refugee Deal, and a general closing of European borders. The crisis revealed obvious dysfunctions of the established political and administrative refugee support systems.

Within Germany’s federal political system, the support of refugees depends on an administrative “spatial management” that spreads the arrived individuals throughout the different federal states to divide institutional charges. The distribution and funding of refugees is organized through the *Königstein* key (calculated annually); based on the indicators of population and tax revenues

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<sup>5</sup> BAMF: Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

each federal state is designated responsible for the accommodation of a part of the registered refugees during one year, varying between 1% (Bremen) and 21% (North Rhine-Westphalia). On a more local level, the federal states apply a similar distribution system within their “borders”. As a consequence, refugee support has been established in every German commune, as much in rural communes as in urban ones. Historically, bigger cities are emblematic places of migration and potentially provide recently arrived individuals access to different networks (community, association, commercial, professional, etc.) facilitating their arrival and resettlement. However, the recent German spatial refugee management aims to smooth regional imbalances of migration patterns notably to avoid situations of refugee or ethnic groupings in major urban spaces. To do so, refugees registered in Germany are legally put under the “obligation of residence” and, since 2016, under the “obligation of home”. The “obligation of residence” reduces the individual’s freedom of movement during the first three months of his/her stay after registering with the local authorities; asylum seekers are not allowed to go beyond a defined perimeter, be it the city or the administrative district. For three years after the final decision on their protection status (as long as a person has neither a professional nor a training position in another federal state), the “obligation of home” forces refugees to live within the federal state responsible for their asylum procedure.

These national particularities show how much refugees are “objects” in a huge logistical process, that is mainly concerned with their geographical presence and needs to be analysed as a constraint for the individual resettlement process; as a consequence, being a refugee in one of the bigger cities in Germany, and notably in Berlin, appears to be an advantage. Indeed, the presence of diverse economies, job openings, social networks, migration networks, activities, etc., provide potentially more social and professional opportunities and, hence, that’s why the two laws restricting geographical freedom of movement are less of a constraint within the individual resettlement process for the refugees living in Berlin and other large cities.

In Berlin’s accommodation system, living in refugee shelters is compulsory for at least six weeks after arrival and first registration, if not for the whole of the asylum procedure for nationals from the so-called “safe countries of origin”. However, within Berlin’s urban context the difficulties for the resettlement process seem to have two components: the difficult access to housing and the temporarily long dependency on local accommodation systems that can neither provide proper housing conditions nor become support of personal orientation and durable settlement. At the time of writing, the refugee accommodation in Berlin is afforded through 100 centres (7 reception centres, 32 emergency

shelters, 61 shared accommodation facilities) with locations spread over the whole urban area (website LAF<sup>6</sup>, 09/2017). Berlin's accommodation centres hosted more than 28 000 persons in September 2017 and almost 45 000 persons back in June 2016. Many of those living in the centres are in the asylum procedure and waiting for the authorities' final response; for others, limited access to the housing market keeps them in the accommodation system for long periods, exceeding in some cases a year or two.

Moreover, Berlin's accommodation system means for the individuals to be rehoused from one centre to another. For many the urban accommodation trajectories start in emergency shelters or reception centres, widely criticized for the provided "mass accommodation" and the impossibility for refugees to lead an autonomous life. Occupants of these shelters often only receive social benefits in kind (daily meals are catered). From these centres, depending on availabilities, refugees are rehoused in shared accommodation facilities that often have higher living standards. These provide typically smaller units, with rooms for two or three persons or family rooms with shared kitchens and bathrooms.

Refugees tend to establish ties in the communities where they reside, and hence, as a consequence of repeated rehousing, if social connections are maintained, the refugees' daily urban patterns often appear as erratic.

### **The "Migration Crisis" Highlighting French and Marseilles Accommodation System Dysfunctions**

As a result of the rising influence of populist ideas and movements and the "criminalization" of international migration by public authorities, a growing proportion of the French population perceives there to be a tremendous threat of foreigners invading the country. Yet, France is no longer as an attractive country as it used to be<sup>7</sup> in a "globalized migrations" context (Simon, 2008). For instance, the net migration has remained low and stable (between +30 000 and +100 000 per year) since the middle of the 1970's (Mazuy et.al., 2015). As a matter of fact, compared to Germany, the so-called European "migration crisis" did not greatly influence French migration statistics. The French administrative authority for refugees' annual report (OFPRA, 2017) noted that the number of asylum applications increased by 24% (65 000 to 80 000 applications) between 2014 and 2015, and by 7% (80 000 to 85 000 applications) the following year; the large majority of the applications were filed in two urban areas: Paris (more than 21 000) and Lyon (around 6 600).

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<sup>6</sup> LAF: State Office for Refugee Affairs

<sup>7</sup> In 2015, with 148 500 non-EU immigrants France ranked 5<sup>th</sup> after Germany (967 000), Great Britain (278 600), Italy (186 500) and Spain (183 700) (Eurostat, 2017).



In Marseilles, *Hospitalité Pour les Femmes*, the organization in charge of asylum seekers' registration until December 2015, indexed 2 371 new applications in 2015, around 60% more than 2014 (Bonis, 2016). Syrians are in 3<sup>rd</sup> place with 10% of the new applications, below Iraqis 10,5% and Algerians 18% (Bonis, 2016: 15). Putting an appropriate accommodation system in place to respond to such a situation in a metropolitan area of 3 million inhabitants should not present the problem that it does, thus highlighting the dysfunctions of an already swamped system based on two main services: the HUDA (emergency accommodation for asylum seekers) and the CADA (reception centres for asylum seekers). The HUDA should be the first and short-term step before accessing the CADA, where asylum seekers await the decision to their demand.

In 2017 the HUDA was comprised of around 15 000 places nationally (about 2 800 more than in 2015). In Marseilles, the 463 HUDA places are mainly rooms in a dozen furnished hostels situated in the city's central district (Cimade, 2017), as well as other types of accommodations such as prefabricated elements, old converted buildings like schools, or homeless shelters. Like the CADA, the HUDA organization is managed under the direction of the OFII and, as a result, is charged with protecting asylum seekers by supplying basic accommodation needs according to rights set forth in the 1951 Refugee Convention. But in fact, due to a lack of places, as a result of budgetary constraints and of local politics, HUDA uses the hostels as a selection process to control the access to accommodation centres: adults without children and families with children over 10 years old have no access to hostels; "Dublin" and "dismissed" families, including pregnant women and mothers with new-born babies, are evicted by the hostel manager at the end of the administrative procedure. Moreover, because of the swamped CADA system and the long administrative procedure, a large part of asylum seekers accommodated in the hostels have to wait several months in small and insalubrious rooms without access to basic needs like kitchens and washing machines. In spite of these hardships, many migrants mention that during this period they established ties and built networks in the neighbourhoods with other Arab nationals (thanks to historical North African immigration in Marseilles) and in the schools where their children are registered. As a matter of fact, when they are forced to leave the hostel and the central area for a CADA apartment, typically situated in peripheral districts or outside of the city, their feelings are ambivalent.

The CADA is mostly made up of apartments within social housing buildings situated in the outskirts of the cities. French authorities delegate the management of this measure to several organizations, which have an ambivalent position as they provide social, legal and administrative support to asylum seekers as well as evict them if their asylum demand is rejected (Kobelinsky, 2008). According to the French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII,

2015), in 2015 the CADA was composed of around 28 000 places nationally, the occupation rate was about 91%, and the average of the time spent in a CADA was around 495 days for refugees (including 159 days after gaining the status) and 573 days for dismissed asylum seekers (including 123 days after receiving the final decision of the court). Because of the lack of CADA housing in Marseilles<sup>8</sup>, authorities and organizations give priority to families with minors. Consequently, several adults, mainly single men, are excluded from the system and have no other choice than living on the streets, squatting or renting insalubrious places from slumlords. The large scale demand on the national level has forced the French state to reform the asylum law with the main objective of reducing the asylum process costs. So, the law includes a reduction of the administrative processing period and of the accommodation occupation period, meanwhile creating new CADA places. As a result of this reform, according to the association Cimade (2017), the number of CADA places reached 38 000 units in 2017. However, the administrative processing period is still long and the number of CADA places remains insufficient. As a result, a large number of asylum seekers do not have access to the accommodation system.

Finally, Berlin's and Marseilles' accommodation systems seem to have an heavy impact on the refugees' place within urban space and local society, as consequence of being specifically for refugees (social isolation), often meaning socio-spatial instability and a lack of autonomy.

## **2. FROM THE CITY-CENTRE TO THE OUTSKIRTS: INDIVIDUAL RESIDENTIAL PATHS WITHIN THE ACCOMMODATION SYSTEMS**

In the following we will show the ambivalent links between a lack of autonomy on the residential path, personal ties, appropriated urban spaces and ordinary daily urban practices. Additionally, the comparison between Marseilles' and Berlin's contexts shows how different systems can lead to a comparable driving out process, from the city-centres to the outskirts.

### **Berlin: Moving to the Outskirts as Result from a Tense and Competitive Rental Housing Market**

To quit the accommodation system and to move into a proper personal flat, refugees in Berlin can receive public benefits to afford the rental costs, but they do not receive any public help to find apartments. However, many civic organizations propose help by accompanying refugees in their research. In the

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<sup>8</sup> According to the French organization Cimade, in 2017 there are less than 1 200 places in the CADA accommodation system in Marseilles and its suburbs, meanwhile according to the organization *Hospitalité Pour les Femmes* there are around 5 000 migrants who have applied for asylum demand in Marseilles between January and September 2017.

context of increasing rents and high demand in the local housing market, refugees seem to have several disadvantages: discrimination based on foreign sounding names or family status (particularly Turk and Arab sounding names and single men), the language barrier, and landlords' reservations concerning public administrations for rent reimbursement (Barwick, 2011; Hinz and Auspurg, 2017). Hence, many refugees are forced to move into flats in the outskirts of Berlin, where rents are lower than in the central areas.

This rehousing runs contrary to the wishes of many of the Syrians the author met in Berlin who want to live inside the "Ring" (a perimeter of around 100km<sup>2</sup> created by the suburban railway circumnavigating the central districts) to avoid long daily trips<sup>9</sup>. The city of Berlin has historically had a decentralized and poly-centric urban space with numerous centres and sub-centres and the areas inside the "Ring" are often defined as central Berlin. Whereas the accommodation centres in the best cases are located in central and attractive areas, close to commercial and/or migration centralities, the refugees' first places of residence outside the accommodation system are often located in the outskirts. However, in some cases, mainly young single men and women, are able to stay within the central districts living in flat-shares with German and/or international flatmates (sometimes Syrian friends). Fortunately, the whole urban area of Berlin is highly connected and accessible through its dense public transport system, highly subsidized and thus affordable for refugees<sup>10</sup>, enabling these individuals to maintain strong relationships in the centre even if they have moved to outlying areas. Thus, Syrian refugees met in Berlin seem to be very mobile within the urban space but can spend significant time daily in public transport.

### **Marseilles: Precariousness in City Centre and Displacement to Outskirts as Result of CADA System**

After a refugee's initial reception period, possibly in a furnished hostel or a long period of instability, Syrian residential trajectories in Marseilles depend on many factors: their personal networks and self-initiative, family status, access to the accommodation system, availability of social housing, and the rental market. In the city centre CADA apartments are typically small (studio or 2 rooms flat), preferable for one to two people without children. Another possibility for remaining in the city centre is the private rental market, refugees with administrative status can receive public benefits to afford the costs of small

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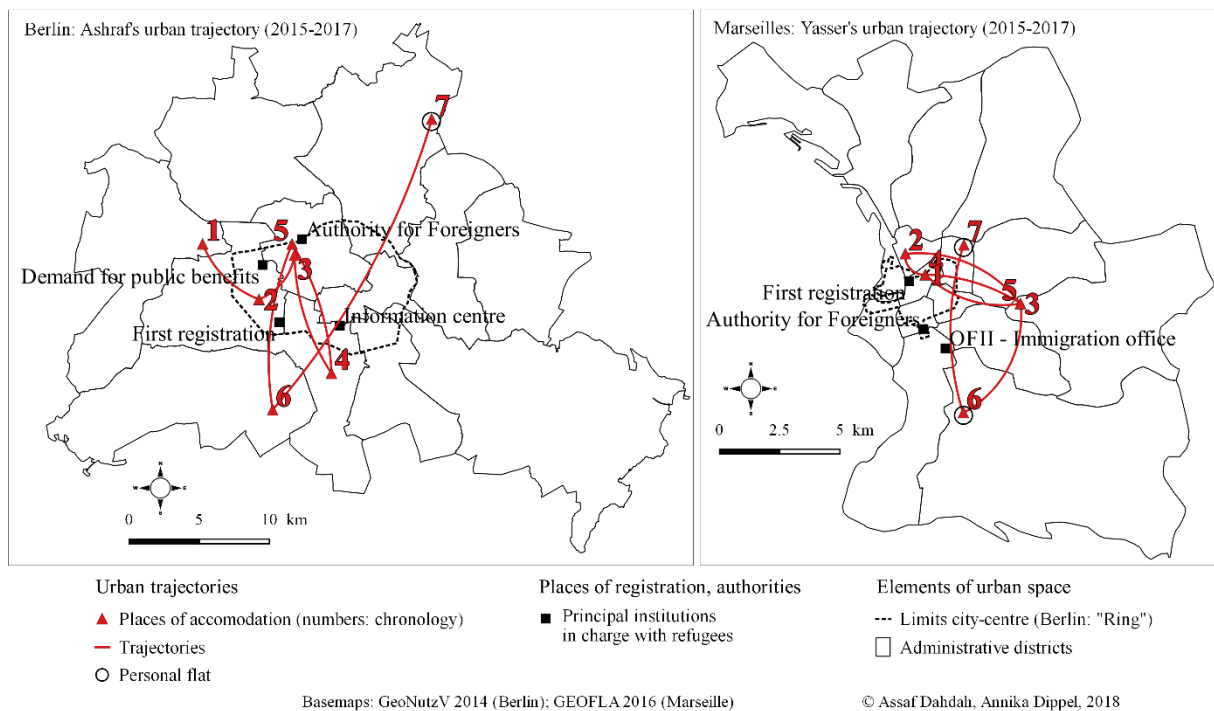
<sup>9</sup> Taking public transport across Berlin's urban space, an area of around 890 km<sup>2</sup>, easily takes more than one hour and a half or two in the N-S and W-E directions.

<sup>10</sup> The monthly charges for Berlin's public transport for refugees (as well as for all persons receiving public social benefits) amount to 27,50€ instead of around 80€ at full-price.

apartments in the central area. The CADA apartments designated for families (3 to 4 rooms flats) are mainly concentrated in peripheral social housing forcing families to move to the outskirts or even to leave Marseilles for smaller municipalities or for the countryside far away. This runs contrary to the preferences of the majority of Syrians interviewed who want to settle in Marseilles' central area in order to maintain networks and ties, to have access to professional opportunities, and to continue children's schooling. Single men, on the other hand, do not receive the same government protection as families and can face potential homelessness and instability; however, they have a greater chance to remain in the city centre and retain more freedom in respect to their residential trajectory. Finally, the accommodation system is kind of Sword of Damocles over families because if the refugees do not accept the CADA apartment proposition the organization in charge is able to exclude them of the accommodation system. As a matter of fact, on the short and medium-term, Syrian families are obliged to move to peripheral areas while single men might be able to settle in central or "peri-central" districts after several months of precariousness.

**Two Single Men's Individual Trajectories in Marseilles and Berlin: Residential Assignment and Wandering**

Individual trajectories within different accommodation systems: two single men's cases



Map 1: Two single men's individual residential paths

Yasser<sup>11</sup> is a 35-year-old man and accountant from Damascus. In September 2015, after two years of exile in Istanbul, he decided to leave the Turkish metropolis for Western Europe through the Balkans. Already settled in Marseilles, Yasser's cousin advised him to choose the city in southern France as his destination, where he finally applied for asylum upon his arrival in October 2015.

Ashraf, a 29-year-old Syrian lawyer from Qamishli (north-eastern Syria), has lived in exile for years, since the outbreak of the Syrian war. His migration path took him through several countries: Lebanon, Jordan, Algeria, Iraq, Turkey and Cameroon, before reaching Germany and Berlin in July 2015 also by the Balkan route. When he first arrived in Germany he decided to go to Schwerin in the north to apply for asylum (he had heard, in Schwerin Syrians' asylum requests would be treated within one week), but he was right away transferred to Berlin owing to the federal spatial management system for refugees.

Immediately upon his arrival in Marseilles Yasser was confronted with housing problems as his cousin, already living with his wife and sons in a small apartment, could not accommodate him more than a few nights. So, he resolved to apply for a place in *Foyer Forbin*, a well-known shelter for precarious and homeless persons in the central urban area (1). He had to quit the shelter every day at 8 o'clock a.m., and when we met Yasser he looked very tired and weary:

*"It's been 10 days now that I stay in the 'foyer' and it is a really difficult time for me. I did not expect that I would live so precariously in France... It is much harder than Istanbul. I stay with Syrian friends and other refugees from Afghanistan and Sudan, but every day we must leave the dormitory. During the day I stay outside, wandering around, waiting for my appointments with the 'Préfecture' [Authority for Foreigners], the OFII. I am still waiting for the asylum benefits and an accommodation proposition."* (personal translation from Arabic, December 2015)

In March 2016 OFPRA gave Yasser a subsidiary protection, meaning that he has to reapply every year to renew his status. This administrative status sustains him in a precarious situation meanwhile he is still not eligible for CADA accommodation. After weeks in *Foyer Forbin* Yasser decided to leave the shelter for a short stay in his friends' apartment in the city centre (2). While there, he enquired into accommodation systems organised by non-profit asylum organizations and contacted the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), supporter of the *Welcome Project*. Through this organization Yasser found housing with Marseilles inhabitants for two months in the eastern area of the city (3). However, during

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<sup>11</sup> All names in this text have been changed to guarantee our interlocutors' anonymity.

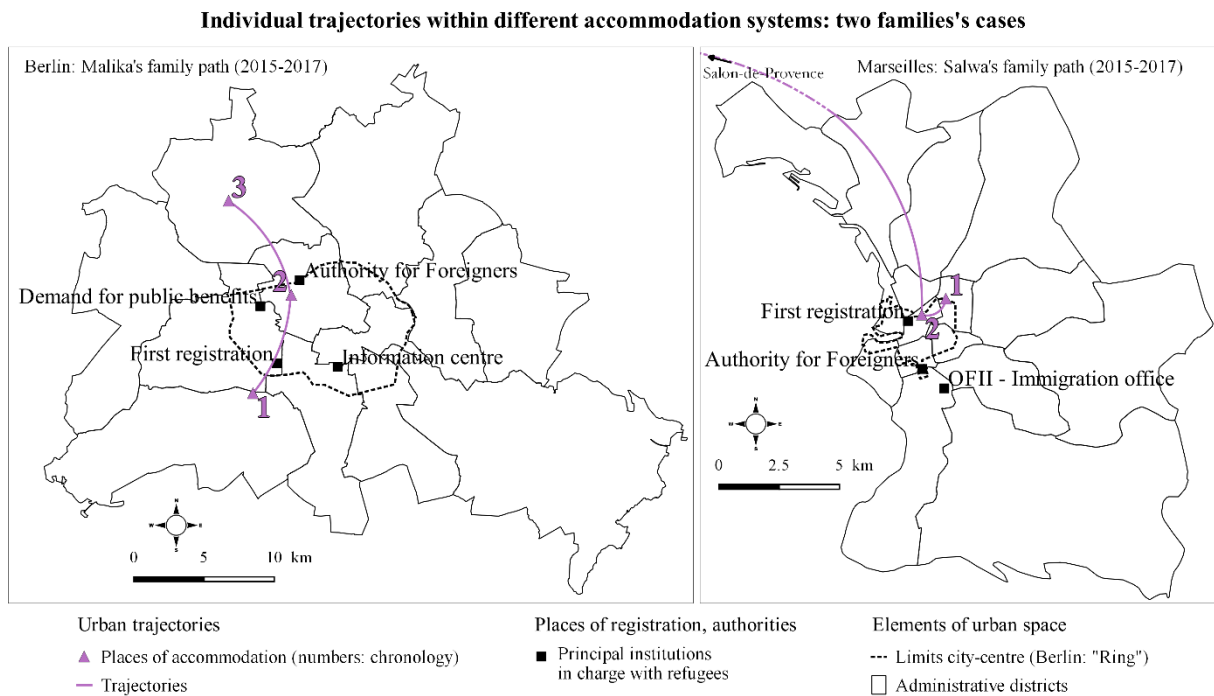
the summer there are less *Welcome Project* volunteers available to accommodate refugees and as a result, Yasser had to quit the apartment and return to his friends' (4).

Losing hope of accessing a CADA apartment, Yasser attempted to rent a private apartment but as an unemployed refugee he faced landlords' reluctances and discriminations, even in the central districts where small and relatively cheap apartments are available. In September 2016 he contacted JRS volunteers and found accommodation for two more months in the eastern area (5). Then, the volunteers informed Yasser of the possibility to circumvent the CADA system by contacting the organizations in charge of the post-CADA refugees' accommodation. Finally, Yasser found an accommodation system supported by the organization *Habitat et Humanisme*, which guarantees the tenants three years of housing as well as professional and language training courses. Because of the *Habitat et Humanisme* objectives of socio-spatial mixing, in 2017 Yasser lived in the southern area of Marseilles, which is generally accepted as the wealthiest part of the city (6). During the summer of 2017 the organization suggested he change apartments for one closer to the city-centre (7), a proposition accepted by Yasser who had found work in a pizzeria situated near the Marseilles train station.

By comparison in Berlin, Ashraf was transferred between five different accommodation centres and right from his arrival in the city he was integrated into the public accommodation system for refugees. After one month in a reception centre located in Berlin's western outskirts (1), the authorities offered him a room in a hotel in the western central area close to the Kurfürstendamm, a quite wealthy residential neighbourhood, where he stayed for three months (2). He reflects on those months like being on holiday in Berlin and which permitted him to get to know the city. As soon as there were new sheltered accommodation capacities (at his arrival in summer 2015 the whole accommodation system was highly overcharged), he was transferred to an emergency shelter for refugees, an air dome pitched on an abandoned green space in a quite central and busy urban area (3). After one month, he was transferred to a shared accommodation centre in southern Berlin (4), but he ran away from it because of its bad living conditions and stayed instead with a friend in central Berlin for several weeks waiting for another centre placement (5). From there, he got another place within a shared accommodation centre in the southwest, where he stayed for several months (6). Finally, after more than a year and a half of residential instability and limited autonomy, Ashraf moved into his own flat located in the north-eastern outskirts (Pankow) (7). As a result of his complex residential path he says he now knows the whole city, evidenced in his daily urban practices spread over a huge area, from the city centre to the outer boroughs.

Even if Ashraf’s trajectory is a bit exceptional, other (Syrian) refugees met in Berlin were often transferred between fewer centres (2-3), it shows how even within situations of extreme dependency on local authorities there is a possibility to use institutional gaps to avoid bad living situations but not without risking precariousness. In Ashraf’s case, residential insecurity was able to be absorbed by his social network and friends from his hometown in Syria living in Berlin. Other persons met in Berlin preferred to stay homeless for several nights rather than moving to one of the centres providing mass accommodation.

**Two Syrian Families’ Cases in Berlin and Marseilles: One-Way Trajectories to the Outskirts**



Basemaps: GeoNutzV 2014 (Berlin); GEOFLA 2016 (Marseille)

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Map 2: Two families’ individual residential paths

**A Family Experience of Exile in Berlin: Ambivalence towards the Proposed Accommodation**

Malika’s journey to Berlin started with neither her two children (a 15-year-old boy and an 11-year-old girl) nor her (ex-) husband, whom she left behind in Syria. The 35-year-old Syrian woman reached Berlin in summer 2015 through the Balkan route and claimed international asylum protection with the aim of her family joining her. The whole administrative procedure took her seven months, from her arrival to the arrival of her family.

During several months, before her family's arrival, Malika was accommodated in a centre located in southwestern Berlin, in the district of Dahlem, which is a quite wealthy, mainly residential area and centre for academic research (1). She really appreciated her stay within this part of Berlin because of its green spaces, its calmness and quietness, and the low presence of Arabic inhabitants. Then, as a result of trouble with the authorities, she left the accommodation centre and lived with a friend for some weeks in central Berlin (2). In order for her children to join her, the administrative procedure required her to prove she had enough living space for the three; the administrations granted her a "flat" within a hotel transformed into an emergency accommodation centre located in the north-western outskirts of Berlin, in the district of Reinickendorf (3). Since as a result of the difficult access to rental space in Berlin refugees often stay within the accommodation system even after their asylum procedure has come to an end, Malika and her children can keep their "flat" as long as they did not find anything else. Her family's case shows the cost of living within the accommodation system for the resettlement process: despite the very high quality of the shelters Malika says she cannot feel home as long as she does not live in a personal apartment.

### **From Homs to Salon-de-Provence, International and Local Experience of Residential Instability**

Salwa is an approximately 30-year old mother of two young children and her husband is around 40 years old, formerly a prosperous merchant in Homs. Salwa's husband had been kidnapped in July 2012 and disappeared for several months. This event deeply affected the man provoking psychiatric disorders. Consequently, Salwa decided to quit Homs for Damascus where she and her family settled for a few months in a hovel situated in the outskirts. Facing suspiciousness as displaced people from the "capital of the revolution" the family left Syria for Lebanon, where Salwa found housing and worked as a housekeeper in the Bekaa Valley (eastern Lebanon). The economical precariousness and the political instability forced them to quit Lebanon for Cairo (Egypt), where they faced discrimination and political insecurity. Because of such instability in the Middle East, Salwa decided to reach Europe. Late 2013 the family flew to Istanbul and then on to Algiers (where Syrians used to be accepted without visa) in order to cross the Moroccan border. There, Salwa's family waited almost one year nearby Melilla trying to enter the Spanish enclave. After several tries, Salwa finally succeeded to enter alone and had to wait three months for her husband and her children in a retention centre. A few weeks later Spanish authorities deported Salwa's family to Madrid, where Salwa did not want to seek asylum. However, her husband decided to stay and local authorities registered his fingerprints; thus, according to the Schengen system, he was to apply for asylum in Spain. After days of hesitation the family moved to France by train, were



arrested by French police in Perpignan, transported to Toulouse, and then released. Salwa's family finally moved to Marseilles, where they arrived in March 2015.

*"We come to Marseilles because in Toulouse a man told us that as Arabs it is easier to find help, accommodation and work. Now I can say that our relations to Arabs in Marseilles are very ambivalent. Some of them want to help us and some of them take advantage of us. I met one Arab woman who trapped me and thank God I met another Arab woman who saved me. And now we are friends."* (personal translation from Arabic, April 2016)

Salwa met a Moroccan woman met at the train station while seeking accommodation. The woman suggested to Salwa that she could house her and in the meanwhile she would help her to apply for asylum. Salwa accepted but after several weeks she realized that she had been tricked. The woman exploited her as housemaid and did not help her with the administrative procedure. Moreover, she lied to Salwa explaining that her husband has no asylum rights in France because of the so-called Dublin procedure. Consequently, the Syrian family stayed 8 months in Marseilles' central area without schooling the children and without medical care for the husband (1). Finally, Salwa met a Tunisian woman in the mosque who told her that they have the right to be registered as asylum seekers in France<sup>12</sup>. In December 2015 with new found asylum status the Syrian family were accommodated in a furnished hostel in the neighbourhood of Belsunce (2). There they met volunteers of the informal organization *Soutien et Solidarités avec les Réfugiés* who helped Salwa to register her children in public school and convinced her husband to see a psychologists' organization called *Osiris*.

Usually, because of insalubrity and lack of privacy, refugee families accommodated in hostels are in a hurry to quit the HUDA system even if they have to leave Marseilles' central area. After years of residential instability for Salwa, getting a room in the hostel was synonymous with stability despite the inconveniences; hence, Salwa decided to stay as long as she could in the hostel, not applying for a CADA apartment that would mean another residential move. As a consequence, Salwa's family stayed approximately 8 months in a 9m<sup>2</sup> room. But in July 2016 the OFII forced them to leave the hostel for a CADA apartment in Salon-de-Provence, a small city 50km from Marseilles (3). Despite her wishes to live in central Marseilles, where she has established friends and

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<sup>12</sup> According to Dublin Convention, a family cannot be separated and after 8 months out of the first registration country the Dublin deportation procedure is not relevant.

bearings, Salwa appreciates the CADA accommodation after almost 5 years of wandering.

### **Syrian Urban Experiences within the Two Different Contexts**

In all these cases the social network must be seen as a crucial component of the individuals' paths, possibly: offering short or medium-term accommodation in times of residential instability or helping to understand the rights and demands of the asylum procedure. Yet, Salwa's case shows how bad social encounters may also mislead individuals or families in times of residential and social instability or when public systems are lacking. Dysfunctions in both cities' accommodation systems lead to residential instability though in different ways: Marseilles' accommodation system destabilizes single men and women often left to their own devices putting them at risk for deception or abuse, even if charity organizations try to fill the system's dysfunctions; on the other hand, in Berlin residential instability is more often due to medium or long-term dependency on the accommodation system and its repeated rehousing procedures in which individuals are displaced (without consent) between different accommodation centres, partly due to the emergency situation and overfilled structures.

These individual cases highlight the major difficulty for (Syrian) refugees: to quickly find long-term housing in the common rental market especially in the central urban areas and as a result forcing them to move to the urban peripheries, where rents are lower. In Marseilles moving to the outskirts generally means moving to the northern areas characterised by few economic activities, social and physical isolation, and limited connection by public transport to the central area. Therefore, Syrian refugees living in the outskirts often feel isolated and most of them reported that it is the worst condition for fostering social and cultural integration. Even in Berlin, where the living conditions in the outskirts are barely comparable to those in northern Marseilles and are fairly well connected to the central areas, living in the outskirts may still create a feeling of social isolation and inhibit access to non-profit organizations such as neighbourhood collectives or *language cafés*<sup>13</sup>, which are more often located in the central areas. Observations in Berlin show that the family situation seems to be important in analysing daily urban mobility: young single men and women are often more flexible, having less constraints in their everyday life, and thus may be more mobile than those with families, especially parents of young children.

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<sup>13</sup> *Language cafés* are a kind of German conversation class organized by charitable organizations and members of the civil society in Berlin (and other German cities), that seem to be a significant place of interaction between refugees and the local society.

### 3. NEW SYRIAN GEOGRAPHIES BUILT ON PERSONAL TIES

Residential instability and repeated (forced) rehousing create constraints, which, at the same time, significantly influence the refugee's relationship to urban space. In some cases, as in Ashraf's or in Yasser's, the repeated rehousing aided their knowledge of their respective cities, since they needed to repeatedly readapt their daily practices to very different urban spaces and (re)appropriate them. In other cases, the repeated rehousing brings social instability and disorientation notably when social connections are interrupted as a result of poor access between places. However, despite the accommodation system's weight and the refugees' dependency on the system, some refugees still consider moving to the city-centre on their own devices. Additionally, because of the administrative asylum procedure, work opportunities, medical follow-up or even personal ties, Syrian refugees we have met in Berlin and Marseilles regularly go to central areas where they have established habits and bearings. As a consequence, despite their forced rehousing (either in the outskirts or within the city centre), through their everyday practices and urban representations Syrian refugees in these cities also participate to produce new Syrian geographies added to already "cosmopolitan situations" (Gastaut, 2002).

#### **The Emerging Syrian Economic and Cultural Geography of Marseilles**

Thanks to 20<sup>th</sup> century migration influx, and more specifically North African immigration (Témime, et.al., 2007), a large portion of Marseilles' inhabitants are Arabic-speaking, particularly in the central neighbourhoods of Belsunce and Noailles; these areas are located between the port and the central train station, both principal entry gates to the city, and are also the primary location of the majority of the furnished hostels (Baby-Collin, Dahdah, 2017). In Marseilles, because of social-spatial inequalities and centre-peripheral imbalances, most economic opportunities are also concentrated in the city centre where informal economy is still important. This historical and social geography must be taken into consideration when analysing the Syrian integration in the city.

When Yasser first arrived in Marseilles he met other Syrian refugees housed in the hostels surrounding the train station. Later, he met Syrians who had already found some work in bakeries, coffee shops and barbershops. These businesses are mostly situated around the train station and have become a hub of the newly arrived Syrians in Marseilles who are still frequently gathered on the Turkish-Kurdish restaurant's terrace drinking Arabic tea. A second area has begun to attract Syrian refugees, that of Cours Julien and La Plaine, known for previously established Lebanese-Armenian grocers who sell traditional Arabic bread and foodstuffs. This is also an area known for its nightlife and where a

Palestinian-Syrian refugee family from Yarmouk Palestinian camp (Damascus) has opened three pubs and restaurants since 2012. Their newest one is named *Yasmine* and has become, in a very short time, a trendy and busy place (Picture 1). Many Syrians had participated in the opening party, including Yasser who enjoys this place managed by like-minded opponents to the Assad regime. It is for the access to these social opportunities that Yasser appreciates the possibility to settle in an area close to the city centre.



Picture 1: Palestinian-Syrian restaurant *Yasmine* in Marseilles (© A. Dahdah, 2017)

### Individual Paths within Berlin's Diverse Urban Spaces

Regarding Ashraf's case enables us to observe the links between his residential history and his present daily urban practices. For example, during his stay in the southern parts he got into the habit of going to a public library located close to his accommodation centre where he learned German and even now that he lives in the northern part of the city he still frequents this library. Since the summer of 2017, Ashraf works as a waiter in a German-Arab restaurant whose manager he got to know during the months he lived in a hotel nearby. Now he lives in the outskirts and it takes him more than a 50-minute-ride by public transport to reach his working place. Everyday Ashraf travels throughout the city: he aids a local initiative close to the Turmstraße, where he helps “newly-

arrived” refugees to learn the German language by participating to the “language cafés” and he organizes a dance class. Through his professional and social activities he has raised an important and diverse social network mainly with Germans and other Syrians, but also with other European nationals and persons from Arab-speaking countries. Furthermore, in Berlin he met back up with several old school friends and neighbours from his hometown in Syria, who have proven to be important within his own urban experience.

More generally speaking, the analyses of daily urban movement and use of space by refugees in Berlin showed three tendencies: 1) their different places of both short and long-term residence tend to influence the spatial patterns in their present daily life, which means that personal ties to urban spaces (often in central areas) are preserved even if the persons have moved and live quite far away; 2) urban places with historically established Turkish or Arab shops, restaurants or cafés, often located in central areas (such as Sonnenallee/ Hermannplatz, Turmstraße, Frankfurter Allee, etc.), are important in the everyday practices of refugees and need to be analysed as an important resource for social networking, most notably during the period following the arrival when access to the local society may be difficult; 3) charitable organisations and local initiatives (counted in the hundreds in Berlin) often become places for the refugees’ regular or daily social and spatial practices and are a significant liaison between “locals” and “newcomers” (Han-Broich, 2015).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Even though the cities of Berlin and Marseilles are hardly comparable in terms of accommodation systems, urban contexts and administrative situations, the urban spatial integration of Syrian refugees exhibits similar dynamics in the resettlement process, such as residential instability and centre-peripheral trajectories. At the same time, these two situations underline the structural character of national systems’ constraints on individual paths, which in turn influence the refugees’ urban experience.

However, the article’s findings highlight the importance of urban context in other aspects. Firstly, the accommodation system’s functioning depends on urban structures and on socio-spatial organization. Additionally, if the accommodation system is managed on a national scale, local authorities also have manoeuvrability to adapt it, especially in Germany. Secondly, in both cities formal and informal charitable organisations are crucial to overcoming the systems’ dysfunctions, helping refugees aside from their official status, to access information concerning the asylum procedures and to access accommodation facilities. As a matter of fact, one need to consider these organizations and more widely individual social networks as main component of refugees’ individual

resources to minimize social and administrative precariousness and to strengthen their urban insertion.

In response to our initial questions we showed how within two different accommodation systems Syrian refugees built up personal ties within their appropriated urban spaces. It should be noted our observations are not specific for only Syrian refugees, since refugees in general are subjected to the same rules and constraints and differences observed may be based more on legal statuses than on national backgrounds. Nonetheless, the assortment of case studies within the Syrian group illustrates the diversity of urban trajectories and experiences of the larger refugee group in both urban contexts. We analysed established “Syrian” or “oriental” centralities (shops, restaurants, cafés) as crucial to understanding the spatial integration of Syrian refugees in both cities. Then, in Marseilles and Berlin we observed how under different circumstances refugees often end up living in the outskirts as the result of competitive private rental markets and in Marseilles as a result of most of the social housing being located outside the city centre. Finally, comparing a variety of experiences highlights the differences between single individuals and families on the one hand, and between men and women on the other, especially in Marseilles.

Having witnessed individual refugees’ experiences within the two European cities, we can state that they are placed under a specific administrative regime that rules and affects their everyday life and urban integration. According to Michel Agier and his Foucauldian approach, despite its national and local specific features this regime can be considered as part of a “biopower” or “technology of power” that transforms migrants into “a mass of dissocialized individuals” and in which they “become objects, being distributed, accounted, controlled, divided into different demographical categories leading to specific treatments” (personal translation from French, Agier, 2012: 5). All these aspects highlight the tensions and the contradictions between the “spatial management” of refugees and the principles of hospitality and diversity that (should) rule urbanity. Extending this statement, there is a contradiction between actual refugee policies and democratic political systems, which are supposed to guarantee rights to those who are asking for protection and looking for social integration.

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