

PROTEST AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS



Elias Steinhilper

# Migrant Protest

Interactive Dynamics in  
Precarious Mobilizations

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

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# Protest and Social Movements

Recent years have seen an explosion of protest movements around the world, and academic theories are racing to catch up with them. This series aims to further our understanding of the origins, dealings, decisions, and outcomes of social movements by fostering dialogue among many traditions of thought, across European nations and across continents. All theoretical perspectives are welcome. Books in the series typically combine theory with empirical research, dealing with various types of mobilization, from neighborhood groups to revolutions. We especially welcome work that synthesizes or compares different approaches to social movements, such as cultural and structural traditions, micro- and macro-social, economic and ideal, or qualitative and quantitative. Books in the series will be published in English. One goal is to encourage nonnative speakers to introduce their work to Anglophone audiences. Another is to maximize accessibility: all books will be available in open access within a year after printed publication.

## *Series Editors*

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# Migrant Protest

*Interactive Dynamics in Precarious Mobilizations*

*Elias Steinhilper*

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# List of Abbreviations

ATF	Association des tunisiens de France, the association of Tunisians in France
ATMF	Association des travailleurs maghrébins de France, the association of workers from the Maghreb in France
BBgAA	Berliner Bündnis gegen Abschiebungen nach Afghanistan, the Berlin-based alliance against deportations to Afghanistan
BBZ	Beratungs und Betreuunszentrum für junge Geflüchtete und Migrant*innen, a center for counseling and support for young refugees and migrants in Berlin
CADA	Centre d'accueil de demandeurs d'asile, the public reception centers for asylum seekers in France
CFDT	Confédération française démocratique du travail, a trade union in France
CGT	Confédération générale du travail, a trade union in France
CRS	Compagnies republicaines de securite, the French police unit for riot control
CSP75	Coordination 75 des sans papiers, the umbrella organization of various collectives of undocumented migrants in Paris
FASTI	Fédération des associations de solidarité avec tous-tes les immigré-e-s, an umbrella organization of migrant solidarity groups in France
FTdA	France terre d'asile, a French humanitarian organization focusing on refugees and asylum seekers
GISTI	Groupe d'information et de soutien des immigrés, a migrant support association in France
KuB	Kontakt- und Beratungsstelle für Flüchtlinge und Migrant_innen, a migrant support association in Berlin
MSF	Médecins sans frontières, a humanitarian organization in France
OFII	Office français de l'immigration et de l'intégration, the French public agency in charge of migration and integration
OFPPRA	Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides, the French public agency in charge of refugee status determination



- PADA Plateforme d'accueil des demandeurs d'asile, the first  
reception centers for asylum seekers in France
- RESF Réseau education sans frontières, a support association  
for young migrants in France

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# Introduction

## Precarious Migrant Protest in Europe

“You, new brothers and sisters, who have left the misery, crossed the desert and the Mediterranean and have made it to Paris. You are very welcome to us. We march every Friday. Because when we march, we disrupt. If we do not disrupt, no one cares about us – we are invisible but always in danger.”

### Abstract

Migrant protest has proliferated worldwide in the last two decades, explicitly posing questions of identity, rights, and equality in a globalized world. Nonetheless, such mobilizations are considered anomalies in social movement studies, and political sociology more broadly, due to “weak interests” and a particularly disadvantageous position of “outsiders” to claim rights connected to citizenship. In an attempt to address this seeming paradox, this book explores the interactions and spaces shaping the emergence, trajectory, and fragmentation of migrant protest in unfavorable contexts of marginalization. Such a perspective unveils both the odds of precarious mobilizations, and the ways they can be temporarily overcome. While adopting the encompassing terminology of “migrant,” the book focuses on precarious migrants, including both asylum seekers and “illegalized” migrants.

**Keywords:** political sociology; migration; contentious politics; protest; asylum

Migrant protest has proliferated worldwide in the last two decades, explicitly posing questions of identity, rights, and equality in a globalized world. Nonetheless, such mobilizations are considered anomalies in social movement studies, and political sociology more broadly, due to “weak interests”

1 Field notes, Paris, 16 June 2017.

and a particularly disadvantageous position of “outsiders” to claim rights connected to citizenship. In an attempt to address this seeming paradox, this book explores the interactions and spaces shaping the emergence, trajectory, and fragmentation of migrant protest in unfavorable contexts of marginalization. Such a perspective unveils both the odds of precarious mobilizations, and the ways they can be temporarily overcome. While adopting the encompassing terminology of “migrant” (Carling 2015; Scheel and Squire 2014), the book focuses on precarious migrants, including both asylum seekers and “illegalized” migrants (Bauder 2013).

### **Borders and Protest in an “Age of Migration”**

Cross-border human mobility of all kinds has reached a historic peak in the “age of migration” (Castles, De Haas, and Miller 2014). Such patterns of migration include a wide range of individuals leaving their countries of origin for reasons of war, individual or group-based persecution, and poverty (Betts 2013; Carling 2015). This has led to mixed responses in migration policy. Countries in the so-called Global North have partly liberalized their entry policies to attract selected foreign labor (De Haas, Natter, and Vezzoli 2016), yet, particularly since the 1980s, have also reacted with tightened immigration policies, including stricter border controls, increased deportations, and widespread encampment of those deemed “unwanted” (Agier 2011; De Genova 2017; Boswell 2003; De Haas, Natter, and Vezzoli 2016). Recent years have furthermore witnessed an intensified selection and differentiation of migrants into “deserving” and “undeserving,” “good” and “bad,” “legitimate” and “illegitimate,” and ultimately “legal” and “illegal” (Gibney 2014; Neumayer 2005; de Haas, Natter, and Vezzoli 2016). In this process of securitization and differentiation of migration, the international norm of asylum has also been curtailed in various European countries (Fassin 2012; Crépeau 1995; Noiriel 1999; Bade and Oltmer 2005a, 2005b).

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

Yet, the last two decades were a turning point, insofar as precarious migrants themselves have systematically engaged in struggles over rights and recognition. Political mobilizations by migrants have proliferated on all continents in the last two decades (Tyler and Marciniak 2013; Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016; Anderson 2010; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016). Imogen Tyler and Katarzyna Marciniak speak of “an explosion” (Tyler and Marciniak 2013: 143) of migrant and migrant solidarity activism in this period; Ilker Ataç et al. observe a “new era of protest” (Ataç et al. 2015).<sup>2</sup> Precarious migrants’ claims range from respect for human rights, freedom of movement, access to labor markets, a liberalized asylum process to critiques of deportation migrant death at borders.

The forms of mobilization, and the characteristics of individuals involved, are contingent in space and time. In Europe, the geographical focus of this book, widespread migrant protest sparked in the 1990s, when undocumented migrants, self-identifying as “*sans-papiers*”,<sup>3</sup> engaged in occupations, hunger strikes, and marches. Their political protests brought questions of migrant political subjectivity to the attention of a wider public for the first time (Cissé 2002; Freedman 2004; McNevin 2006; Siméant 1998). The undocumented migrant movement quickly diffused to other big cities in France. Subsequently, it inspired protests and activist networks in various other European countries, including Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Germany, and Greece (Tyler and Marciniak 2013: 143). Restrictive asylum policies have furthermore fueled protest against them, the detention of asylum seekers, mandatory residence requirements, exclusion from the job market, encampment in remote areas, the suspension of family reunification, and deportations.

With radical actions such as sit-ins, hunger strikes, lip sewing, occupations,<sup>4</sup> squats, and street camps as well as long-distance marches, migrants have left their attributed place at the margins of society and voiced claims for rights and recognition (Monforte and Dufour 2011, 2013). Despite their increasing frequency and the use of a predominantly disruptive

2 Despite this general tendency, multiple forms of migrant mobilizations such as migrant self-help organizations and migrant worker strikes (Però and Solomos 2010) have a far longer history (for France, see, e.g., GISTI 2014).

3 *Sans-papiers*, French for “without papers,” is the self-identification adopted by the illegalized migrants’ movement in France. The term has rapidly proliferated and is still widely used in the Francophone world (Siméant 1998).

4 In this book, two terms are used to denote the appropriation of buildings by contentious actors. “Occupation” is used when the purpose of action is primarily protest oriented and disruptive, whereas it is referred to as a “squat” when the action also includes an element of providing shelter for precarious residents.

and radical repertoire of action, such political mobilizations have only occasionally received resonance in both public discourse and academia. In addition to the proven disproportionately low representation of migrant voices in the mass media (Bleich, Bloemraad, and De Graauw 2015),<sup>5</sup> migrant mobilizations also hardly correspond with the dominant public portrayal of migrants and established theories of political mobilization. Discursively, the figure of the precarious migrant is either constructed as a passive victim and needy object of (non)governmental humanitarianism (Malkki 1996; Fassin 2012) or as a stigmatized outsider and intruder in a national “order of things” (Bigo 2003; Nicholls 2013a). This results in migrants being both “casualties of care” (Ticktin 2011) and casualties of “excessive governance” (Stierl 2017). Precarious migrants’ claims in the public sphere are, hence, considered to be disturbing “noise” rather than legitimate “voice” (Nicholls 2013a, 2013b).

## A Fragmented Academic Landscape

Migrant agency has also received only limited attention in the social sciences. Systematic reflection on the issue has only recently started to grow, and remains scattered across disciplines. While an extensive *philosophical literature* exists on citizenship and the exclusion from rights (Agamben 1998; Nussbaum 1998; Sassen 2014; Benhabib 2004), empirically oriented contributions with an explicit focus on migrant protest continue to be scarce. In political science, the issue of migration has predominantly been addressed from a top-down perspective concentrating on the question of how migration could be “effectively” governed (Moravcsik and Nicolaidis 1999; Truong and Maas 2011; Boswell 2003)<sup>6</sup> or, in its critical turn, how governmentality impacts the lives of migrants (Balzacq 2008; Bigo 2003). Yet, few contributions exist on acts of contention against “excessive governance” (Stierl 2018), or “migration governance from below” (Rother 2013b) by both migrants and promigrant groups.

Bottom-up perspectives on politics have been developed extensively in *political sociology*, and the issue of migration has obtained a key role in studies of political conflict and contention (Cinalli 2016; Kriesi et al. 2012; Koopmans et al. 2005). However, mostly, migrants have been studied as

5 The issue of migration is, indeed overrepresented, while migrant perspectives and voices are underrepresented in relation to the migrant population.

6 For an excellent overview on the specific research strand of global migration governance, see Rother (2013a).

“the object of claims of other actors, including political parties looking for votes, interest groups, policymakers, social movements, as well as a large volume of other allies and opponents within civil society” (Cinalli 2016: 86). Contributions on contentious acts by migrants, have with notable exceptions (Zepeda-Millán 2017; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016; Siméant 1998) remained scarce.<sup>7</sup> Despite recognizing protest as a means of the disenfranchised, “researchers have given the most attention to those movements endowed with endogenous organisational resources and exogenous political opportunities, which were considered in explaining their emergence, strength, forms, and outcomes” (della Porta 2018a: 1).<sup>8</sup> In this vein, migrants as uprooted, often weakly resourced and “deportable” actors have been considered unlikely candidates for political mobilization (Cinalli 2016). Even compared to other disadvantaged social groups, such as the unemployed, the disabled, and the mentally ill, migrants were expected to be less inclined to mobilize, as the public discourse on membership in a society organized as a nation-state is strongly biased toward formal citizens of a polity: “The nation state may proclaim equality for all, but equality of rights is only reserved for its core members” (Nicholls 2013a: 171).<sup>9</sup>

The sociological variant of *migration studies* has ever since been sensitive to migrant experiences (Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer 2013; Vertovec 2009; Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2003), but largely neglected the contentious side of transnational migration (Steinhilper 2018). A growing body of literature, commonly referred to as “autonomy of migration” (Mezzadra 2010; Transit Migration 2008; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010), has stressed the inherent subversion in cross-border migration, yet has largely avoided an empirical analysis of the conditions and trajectories of migrant protest. The most explicit contribution in this regard was made in *critical citizenship studies*, where Engin Isin introduced the notion of “acts of citizenship” (2008). He conceptualizes citizenship as a social practice, also performed by marginalized migrants acting “as if” they were entitled to citizenship rights (Isin and Nielsen 2008). Along these lines, a burgeoning literature has emerged, which aims at thinking migration politics “from the margins” (Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2017). The seminal edited volume *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement* by Peter Nyers and Kim Rygiel (Nyers and Rygiel

7 For a more comprehensive discussion of the literature on migrant and pro-migrant protest, see Chapter 1.

8 Notable exceptions are Piven and Cloward (1979) and Chabanet and Royall (2014).

9 Manlio Cinalli has even argued that asylum seekers and undocumented migrants as “weak immigrants” are “passive protagonists” and “incapable of speaking on their own behalf” (2008: 300).



2012), but also subsequent contributions from the same theoretical angle (Stierl 2012; Ataç et al. 2015; Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016; Stierl 2018), have provided most of the insightful analyses of migrant agency in contexts of marginalization. However, this community of scholars has partly maintained a certain skepticism toward theories of mobilization and rarely quotes any social movement literature on the issue (Stierl 2018).

As this cursory overview shows, academic reflections on migrant protest remain scattered across various disciplines and are poorly integrated. In the same vein, Nina Eggert and Marco Giugni note in their chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements* that “[w]ork on migrants’ movements is particularly necessary, as this represents one of the main blind spots in the extant literature” (Eggert and Giugni 2015). The “long summer of migration” of 2015 in Europe has dynamized the field, yet recent contributions on the issue tend to either perpetuate a focus on relatively strong migrant support activists (della Porta 2018b) at the expense of a closer look into the dynamics of precarious protest, or address the issue of migrant resistance in the distinct theoretical tradition of critical migration studies without an explicit engagement with theories of political protest (Stierl 2018). My hope is that this book contributes to fostering a dialogue between those two strands of literature, which complement each other in important ways.

## Research Approach

In an abductive research tradition, the book draws from and complements existing work on migrant activism and theories of political mobilization more broadly, to explore how niches for political mobilization are appropriated, expanded, contested and lost. This entails a scrutiny of the spaces and interactions, through which precarious actors (temporarily) break invisibility, gain access to resources and allies against all evident obstacles of mobilizing in contexts of marginalization. Predominantly rooted in the theoretical universe of social movement studies, the book aims for opening this body of literature to precarious and volatile forms of protest and to suggest bridges to migration studies. With social movement studies, this analysis shares the general empirical focus and interest in the conditions, dynamics and forms of political mobilization (see also della Porta 2018a: 2) and approaches migrant activism from a “players and arenas” perspective (Jasper and Duyvendak 2014). In light of the structural obstacles to precarious migrant mobilizations, it shifts the attention to the microinteractions of

precarious migrants with other individual and compound players at the local level. Secondly, the research adopts an explicitly spatial perspective to contentious politics (Nicholls, Miller, and Beaumont 2013; Martin and Miller 2003), which allows scrutinizing the patterns of spatial and social exclusion of precarious migrants, and the spatialities of both protest emergence and fragmentation. Lastly, it bridges social movement theories to migration and citizenship studies. As this literature has broadened the conceptualization of migrant agency to the everyday practices or “invisible” resistances by migrants in almost all contexts of restrictive border regimes (Ataç et al. 2015; Stierl 2018). With critical citizenship studies, it shares the perspective of citizenship as being performative (Isin 2017), and hence, subject to constant transformations. This concept of citizenship, in turn, brings migrant mobilizations closer to a longstanding interest of social movement studies: mobilizations for citizenship rights. Given this analytical focus, the interest in the interactive dynamics of precarious migrant protest in Europe, or, in other words, in protest emergence, incubation, and fragmentation in contexts of marginalization is specified in the following main guiding question: *How do interactions among players in spatial and regulatory settings (arenas) shape the emergence and trajectory of precarious migrant protest?*

Given this focus on interactions in concrete spatial settings (arenas), the analysis is situated at the local level. According to Kathleen Blee, “[m]uch of the salient context of grassroots activism is local” (Blee 2012: 15). This is especially true for migrant mobilizations, which have particularly proliferated in large urban centers with more favorable conditions for creating social ties, both within migrant communities and with migrant support organizations, such as human rights NGOs, faith-based groups, the radical left and trade unions (Nicholls and Vermeulen 2012; Plöger 2014; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016; McNevin 2006).

The book compares migrant protests in two urban settings, Berlin and Paris. This selection builds upon previous research on the two countries, which has identified a number of important spatial and relational differences in the issue area of migration. According to Rogers Brubaker’s seminal work, France and Germany represent two ideal types of modern citizenship regimes – the German *ius sanguinis* and the French *ius solis* (Brubaker 1992). Koopmans et al. have found that such seemingly abstract differences indeed have an impact on political mobilizations by migrants (Koopmans et al. 2005). Furthermore, the countries represent distinct “borderline citizenship regimes” (Monforte and Dufour 2011), in which daily lives for undocumented migrants and asylum seekers differ strongly. Whereas the German asylum system

is characterized by accentuated isolation and illegalized migrants often remain strongly controlled by the state (*Duldung*), the daily life of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants in Paris has been less constrained due to fewer controls and larger ethnic networks, as well as access to the job market in a larger informal economy (Monforte and Dufour 2011). Monforte has furthermore shown that not only political opportunity structures differ, but also the availability of promigrant allies. Whereas in France, social movement organizations involved in migration and asylum issues are deeply entrenched in society, and highly concentrated in Paris, the German case (at least until the “summer of migration” in 2015) is much more fragmented, since contention related with migration issues is dispersed throughout the federal polity (Monforte 2014). Despite these contextual differences, both cities have witnessed periods of heightened migrant protest.<sup>10</sup> Paris is a crucial case in this regard, as it constitutes the cradle of the *sans-papiers* movement in Europe, with regular episodes of contention since more than two decades. Berlin, on the other hand, has been the nucleus of the most prominent and visible asylum seekers protests in recent years in Europe (Plöger 2014), and has witnessed the largest arrival of asylum seekers in Europe in the course of the crisis of the European border regime.

Upholding the virtue of cumulative knowledge production, the research is strongly informed by existing scholarship on migrant protest in Europe, particularly the work of Siméant (1998), Monforte and Dufour (2011, 2013), and Nicholls and Uitermark (2016). Yet, it complements these contributions in various regards: Firstly, none of the previous contributions explicitly addressed protest of asylum seekers.<sup>11</sup> This book intends to shed light on the particularities of asylum regimes and their impact on political protest, as well as the overlap illegalized migrants’ mobilizations. Secondly, in contrast to Nicholls and Uitermark, the analysis does adopt a historical perspective on transformations in migrant rights movements, but rather in the contentious interactions unfolding within specific arenas. By focusing on shorter time frames, it adds more specific insights into the interactionist and spatial patterns and dynamics at play. Lastly, the empirical chapters of the book studies recent episodes of contention in time periods that have not been scrutinized so far.

10 The expression “periods of heightened migrant protest” underlines that precarious migrant protests are also often clustered in space and time, yet they are not sufficiently structured to qualify as protest “waves” or “cycles” (Koopmans 2006).

11 Monforte and Dufour include German “refugee” activists in their analysis, yet treat them as “undocumented” migrants.

In addition to shedding light on both specificities and patterns of precarious migrant protest in the tradition of “political ethnography”, the book informs social movement studies more broadly. It documents the potential of interactive and cultural theories of social movements to study precarious and volatile forms of protest. Where structural models lack the sensitivity for detail and dynamism, the more recent “cultural” theories combined with an openness to the precious knowledge produced in neighboring disciplines offer alternatives to address forms of contention, which have received less attention and only fit awkwardly in the dominant theoretical toolkit. An “arena” perspective moves toward a middle ground, combining the effects of macrostructures and microprocesses. Underlining how actors perceive, strategize and act upon regulatory and discursive contexts, it contributes to the moderation of old disciplinary turf wars between structure and agency.

The research scrutinizes and thickly describes the dynamics of migrant protest in two locations. In line with an arena approach to contentious politics (Jasper 2014), however, the unit of analysis is the protest arena, not the city. The case-oriented comparison in my research consists of a total of four arenas, two in each location. From a comparison of dynamics in highly distinct contexts, as well as comparing arenas within one location, the research generates insights on the patterns of interactions and strategic dilemmas typical to such kinds of political activism while, at the same time, pointing to the respective specificities of the cases studied.

Both the subject of migrant protest and theoretical angle adopted in this research require particular methodological choices, taking at least two aspects into account: the dynamic, interactive nature of precarious protest (“volatility”), and the involvement of stigmatized and disenfranchised actors (“subalternity”). Blee indeed argues that the inherent conceptual and practical challenges of studying precarious activism have prevented most scholars from investigating them in the first place (Blee 2012). Those few working on small-scale and emerging activism (Blee 2012), weakly resourced groups (Chabanet and Royall 2014) or migrant protest (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016; Zepeda-Millán 2017) have all advocated for a range of flexible qualitative approaches. Furthermore, in contexts of marginalization, stigmatization or repression, trust building and negotiation is part of research reality for both ethical and practical reasons. Elusive information and valid data can often only be gathered if research resembles more “normal communication”, and, even more importantly, if it can be adapted to the respective interlocutors. For these reasons, this research applied a variant of “political ethnography” (Schatz 2009b), which is characterized by a particularizing impulse and attention to details on the one hand (“ethnography”), and to

aim at (some degree) of deduction and comparison (“political”) on the other. This “creative tension” (Schatz 2009a) poses specific challenges since political ethnographers seek to study several cases and broader political processes. Hence, they tend to spend much shorter periods (months, rather than years) in one setting, and triangulate insights generated through participant observation, with a range of other data. At times, political ethnographers also immerse themselves in a specific context retrospectively through historical reconstruction, adding as much information as possible through archival work and interviews (Schatz 2009c). This book is based on fieldwork in Berlin (January-August 2016; July-December 2018) and Paris (April-July 2017).<sup>12</sup>

### **Ethics of an Engaged Social Science**

A growing community of scholars highlight academia's duty to contribute to the understanding of key social problems and an intervention in public debates (Burawoy 2005). From this perspective, the proliferation of migrant protest points to one of these crucial questions of our time. In many ways, the precarious migrant protagonists of this book embody the contradiction of a global situation: poverty, war, exploitation, environmental degradation due to climate change, among others, remain unequally distributed at a global scale. Vastly disparate life and survival chances are importantly determined by the “lottery of birthplace” (Betts 2009; Gibney 2014). While root causes of migration are multifaceted, many have argued that they are importantly coproduced and reproduced by particular modes of production in a globalized capitalist economy with an unequal distribution of gains and losses (Brand and Wissen 2012; Žižek 2015), postcolonial continuities, and geopolitical patterns of domination and dependency (see, e.g., Hardt and Negri 2000). In current times, according to Zygmunt Bauman, “mobility has become the most powerful and most coveted stratifying factor.” The global elites are able to cross borders at will, while the poor are meant to stay at home: “the riches are global, the misery is local” (Bauman 1998: 9, 74). Consequently, the very presence of precarious migrants in the Global North is fundamentally political, as it highlights a global reality of social inequalities combined with widespread politics of closure. Such contexts produce friction, in which the idea of a smooth “migration governance” is illusionary (Geiger and Pécoud 2010). Against this background, protest by precarious “noncitizens” constitutes a “rupture” of the political order, urging

12 For details on the methodological approach, see the Appendix.

renegotiations of rights and belonging (May 2008; Rancière 2010; Schwiertz 2016). For these reasons, Angela Davis, the eminent figure of the US civil rights movement, has called the “refugee movement [...] the movement of the twenty-first century”, as it is “the movement that is challenging the effects of global capitalism, it is the movement that is calling for civil rights for all human beings.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite these fundamental political and moral questions, the true protagonists of this book are human beings, predominantly striving for a life in economic and physical security for themselves and their families. Many of their practices are precarious and contradictory and indeed, the fragmented nature of migrant protest, the multiple internal conflicts, illustrate the countless challenges of precarious and “unwanted” (Agier 2011) human beings to organize and be recognized as political actors. Following these groups and individuals is one part in the mosaic of understanding the contradictory realities of a globalized twenty-first century, in which both precarious migration and migrant protest are likely to proliferate.

## Outline of the Book

The seven chapters that follow this introduction scrutinize how precarious migrant protest emerges against all evident odds, how it at times incubates through interactions in certain spatial settings, and how it fragments as a result of hostile contexts, internal disputes, or exhaustion. Chapter 1 elaborates on a theoretical perspective, which integrates interactionist and spatial theories of protest, and provides a bridge to migration and citizenship studies. Chapter 2 introduces comparatively the two “borderline citizenship” (Monforte and Dufour 2011) regimes in Germany and France, carving out the grievances as well as discursive and political opportunities they entail. The following four chapters present empirical evidence on the interactive dynamics in four periods of heightened migrant protest in Paris and Berlin. Chapter 3 analyzes the Bourse du Travail protests by undocumented migrants from 2008 to 2010 in Paris, paying particular attention to the fragility of alliances in episodes of precarious migrant protest. Chapter 4 traces interactive dynamics during protests by asylum seekers at La Chapelle from 2015 to 2016. It shows how precarious resistance sparks and incubates even in the most disadvantageous contexts of marginalization. Chapter 5

13 Angela Davis, during a meeting with migrant activists in Berlin on 14 May 2015. Statement recorded and accessible on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/127986504>.

shifts the focus to Berlin, following the most disruptive series of precarious migrant protest in Germany so far, the Oranienplatz protests from 2012 to 2014. The chapter carves out the role of particular spaces of contention, which temporarily allow the amplification of precarious protest into larger mobilization. Chapter 6 traces protests by (rejected) Afghan asylum seekers against deportations between 2016 and 2017 in Berlin, documenting the role of established exile communities in amplifying marginalized voices.

The final chapter of the book moves away from the close-up analyses of interactive dynamics in the four case studies to identify both commonalities and particularities, capitalizing on the twofold potential of “political ethnography” (Schatz 2009b). It singles out patterns of interaction, strategic dilemmas, and spatial configurations influential for migrant protest across space and time. It also lays out the core differences rooted in distinct regulatory and discursive contexts.

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# 1. Theorizing Migrant Protest

## A Microinteractionist and Spatial Perspective

“The study of weakly resourced and less organized forms of protest [...] requires that we pay more attention to the sociological analysis of constituencies, the patterns of their immediate social environment and the disruptive activities embedded within them. The macroscopic pictures of political contentions need thus to be complemented by a microscopic analysis of the social fabric of disruptive practices.”<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Despite their precarious legal status, largely hostile contexts, and limited social and cultural capital as newcomers in “host” societies, precarious migrants have (temporarily) appropriated niches to organize collectively, against all the odds. However, restrictive contexts and contentious interactions of players with competing interests have kept mobilizations precarious and prone to fragmentation. To scrutinize such dynamics of protest in contexts of marginalization, this chapter draws from and integrates insights from theories of political mobilization, migration, and (performative) citizenship. Building upon these literatures, the chapter develops a microinteractionist framework for analyzing precarious migrant protest. Such a perspective draws particular attention to the lived experiences of the actors involved, their concrete interactive practices, and the spatial settings of these encounters.

**Keywords:** migrant protest; interactions; space; arenas

Many migrants have opted against hiding in the shadows and have articulated political claims using disruptive means such as hunger strikes,

<sup>1</sup> Lahusen (2014: 157).

marches, inner-city protest camps, lip sewing, and squatting. Despite their precarious legal status, largely hostile contexts, and limited social and cultural capital as newcomers in “host” societies, precarious migrants have (temporarily) appropriated niches to organize collectively, against all the odds. However, restrictive contexts and contentious interactions of players with competing interests have kept mobilizations precarious and prone to fragmentation. To scrutinize such dynamics of protest in contexts of marginalization, this book draws on and integrates insights from theories of political mobilization, migration, and (performative) citizenship. Building upon these literatures, the book develops a microinteractionist framework for analyzing precarious migrant protest. Such a perspective draws particular attention to the lived experiences of the actors involved, their concrete interactive practices, and the spatial settings of these encounters. In combining various strands of theory, the book capitalizes on a historical strength of social movement research, where interdisciplinary cross-fertilization has proven to be particularly valuable for shedding light on understudied phenomena (della Porta 2014).

### **Microinteractive Dynamics in Precarious Migrant Protest**

At the core of social movement theory lies the expectation that grievances alone do not suffice to explain political mobilization. Social actors need to control certain resources such as knowledge, money, and logistics to transform eruptions of dissent into sustained mobilizations.<sup>2</sup> In consequence, social movement studies have intuitively concentrated on “strong” movements (della Porta 2018) and only occasionally addressed protest of the marginalized, since, in these terms, they were considered unlikely contentious subjects. Following the same line of reasoning, precarious migrants are seen as the least likely subjects of mobilization. In addition to scarce resources, constructed as “others,” they encounter closed political and discursive opportunities in nationally defined polities (Eggert and Giugni 2015).

Notwithstanding, protests also unfold in highly hostile contexts, where threats to the identity or even the very survival of the individuals involved are serious: mobilizations of the unemployed have emerged in times of economic recession (Chabanet 2001; Lahusen 2013), the civil rights movement sparked in the most racist setting of the US South (Morris 1984), peasants

2 For an overview, see della Porta and Diani (2009) and Jasper (2014b).

organized uprisings during famines (Piven and Cloward 1979), and migrants have often organized protests upon concrete threats (Zepeda-Millán 2017; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016). This, however, does not suggest that political opportunities and resources are irrelevant for the explanation of precarious protest. On the contrary, they matter most to those who lack them. It is, therefore, essential to provide detailed accounts of how resources can be accessed despite disadvantageous contexts, and how they are often lost again.

Assertions such as “contentious politics is nothing if it is not relational” (Tarrow 2011: 14), and “networks matter” (Passy 2003) are unequivocal proof of the relevance of networks and interactions for political mobilizations. While the literature on the issue has considerably diversified in the last decade, adding cultural perspectives to the dominant structuralist core (Diani and Misce 2015; Jasper and Duyvendak 2014), the roots of a relational approach to social movements date back decades. In the 1970s, proponents of “resource mobilization theory” to social movements (McCarthy and Zald 1977) had already argued that networks provide important resources for social movement actors. Social movement literature has since then widely demonstrated that certain resources such as recruits, money, and trust are indispensable for transforming sparks of resistance into sustained mobilizations (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; della Porta and Diani 2009). Mark Granovetter’s work on “weak ties” (Granovetter 1973) has been a strong inspiration for research on the role of brokers, and the diffusion of material and cognitive resources within a movement space. Building upon Granovetter, Alessandro Pizzorno (1986), and also Florence Passy (2003), have demonstrated that not only weak ties but particularly “strong ties” are also important for the participation in social movements under situations of uncertainty, as they provide individuals with trust. Trust is, for evident reasons, even more critical for high-risk activism, in which heavy repression is likely (McAdam 1986). Networks, including weak and strong ties, are of particular importance for resource-poor actors that structurally depend on the support of more established players to compensate their lack of economic, social, and cultural capital (Chabanet and Royall 2014; Passy 2001; Chabanet 2001; Nicholls 2013). Cinalli has shown in his contributions on pro-beneficiary activism that resources can travel from the more to the less resourceful (2016).

While relational perspectives have hence become orthodox in social movement studies, the bulk of scholarship operationalizes relations as networks, and thus, adopts a structuralist perspective (Diani 2000; Diani and McAdam 2003; Cinalli and Fuglister 2008; Caiani and Parenti 2013). Therefore, a blind spot of most relational approaches, among others, is their widespread



ignorance of the meanings actors attach to social relations, and how they change over time: hence a temporal (or dynamic) and cultural perspective (Diani and Mische 2015). James M. Jasper has pioneered a relatively recent trend in theories of protest “toward the micro rather than the macro” (2014a: 9). Both in his single-authored monographs (1997, 2008) and collaborations (Goodwin, Jasper, and Poletta 2009; Jasper and Duyvendak 2014), Jasper has observed a fundamental misfit between the relatively static theories and the highly fluid, amorphous and elusive social phenomena they intend to capture. In particular, the volume *Players and Arenas*, coedited with Jan Willem Duyvendak (Jasper and Duyvendak 2014), outlined the contours of an interactionist perspective on protest. The seminal book is informed by a relational perspective, yet, it also differs in significant ways. It describes social movements as foremost being shaped by complex microinteractions of various actors (“players”) within material and social spaces (“arenas”) (Jasper 2014b).

Jasper, therefore, argues that calling this perspective “relational” is somewhat misleading. It “takes the choice and dynamism out of it,” since interactions are not predetermined by existing relations, but often aim to “challenge or reinforce prior relations” (Jasper 2010: 973). Jasper argues for breaking down networks into the interactions they are composed of “to see a variety of exchanges and influences that occur through these interactions, including the emotions felt by the players in the networks – part of the ‘historical contingency’ of networks” (Jasper 2019a: 132). While relational approaches stress structure, interactionist approaches stress agency, and thus, strategy (Jasper 2014c, 2008). This strategic notion is captured in the language of the “player,” which includes both individual and compound actors.

Bringing forward the agency of protesters requires scrutiny of their lived experiences, cultural work, and strategic decisions during contentious episodes. Such an approach unveils that “the goals of compound players are especially unstable because factions and individuals are forever competing to make their own goals into the official goals of the team” (Jasper 2014a: 10). It also allows us to capture the fact that individuals and collectives are constantly confronted with “strategic dilemmas” on which way to go forward (Jasper 2008), even more so when they are highly heterogeneous. While dominant social movement theories tend to reify homogeneity despite their internal heterogeneity, an interactive perspective explicitly accounts for their inherent friction and interactive dynamics. This makes an interactionist perspective particularly valuable for understanding the mobilizations of precarious migrants. If political protest even by comparatively privileged

actors, such as most protagonists of the so-called new social movements, struggle to sustain organizational structures and continuity, the additional hurdles to leave the shadows and organize collectively in public are evident for marginalized challengers.

Migrants, in particular, are a highly heterogeneous group, diverse in terms of origin, religion, gender, age, class, and origin, to name but a few (Sigona 2014). This provides additional obstacles to collective identity formation, and even more so, for sustained mobilizations (Mokre 2018). Furthermore, precarious migrant protest usually involves both migrants and promigrant supporters. The latter is considered to be – indeed – indispensable to access resources (Voss and Bloemraad 2011; Cappiali 2016; Giugni and Passy 2001), even though such diverse alliances entail both opportunities and constraints (Cappiali 2017; Nicholls 2013). At times, many pro-beneficiary NGOs' organizational identity of representing migrants, and a focus on long-term "strategies," fundamentally collide with some migrants' radical protest repertoire, and their attempts to emancipate from a predominantly white migrant rights movement, and the society at large (Nicholls 2013). Such disputes can be systematized as strategic dilemmas, which are common in contentious politics (Jasper 2008: 126, 153).

Relatedly, migration scholars scrutinizing agency in contexts of marginalization have argued that resistance often takes contradictory or less visible forms:

In such a precarious context, their claims are necessarily existential, by which we mean aspirations and actions that tend to be of an immediate, instrumental and individualistic nature. [...] As long as refugees are in a situation of vulnerability, they will not be able to afford less-instrumental behavior, and ambivalence will be part of the way in which they act and mobilize. [...] It is not a claim for structural changes but only an existential claim and yet it is subversive only by the presence of people who were not entitled to be there. (Chimienti 2017: 5)

Indeed, an extensive literature on migrant resistance in contexts of marginalization has emerged in the tradition of critical migration and citizenship studies, with relatively few references to explicit theories of protest (Stierl 2018; Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2017; Nyers and Rygiel 2012). In a nutshell, they trace, "how resistant subjects enact and appropriate (citizenship) rights they may not officially hold *and* escape regimes of control through (excessive and imperceptible) movement" (Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016: 531, italics in original). Sharing "a strong normative concern with reimagining political

life from the margins, particularly in relation to those inhabiting mobile and precarious lives” (Moulin and Thomaz 2016: 599), these scholars have criticized the social movement community for exclusively addressing visible acts of protest, and as such, downplaying “invisible” forms of everyday resistance, which are not captured by “common regimes of visibility [but] rather attempt to elude their gaze and seek to remain imperceptible” (Ataç et al. 2015: 7).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in this vein, taking migrant struggles seriously entails considering overtly articulated political claims to be just the tip of the iceberg. Agier argues, in contexts of extreme precariousness and marginality, “the only revolt that is logically possible, [is] embodying a politics of resistant life” (Agier 2011: 155). The everyday practices of organizing life in contexts of exclusion and repression can, accordingly, be understood as continuous political acts. Networks of self-help are, in many cases, a prerequisite for survival on the way to Europe, and within the context of destination. These latent ties can, at times, be activated for high-risk public protest (Steinhilper 2018). Often, “strong ties” of trust are established in everyday struggles. Ataç et al. even argue: “It is precisely through these less spectacular, often invisible everyday struggles, for example for employment, housing, and the freedom of movement that the status quo is called into question” (2015: 7). These “acts of resistance” dismantle existing power relations and make fundamental antagonisms visible, and by this, accessible to contentious scrutiny. Critical migration studies, thus, suggest that scrutiny of migrant agency requires a shift from a somewhat narrow focus on disruptive social movements, to a broader conceptualization of resistance. The embodiment of resistance in the specific context of precarious migrants is not only mirrored in practices of everyday struggle, but also in an embodied repertoire of protest, including hunger strikes, lip sewing, self-harm, and, indeed, suicide to avoid deportation. If other means are absent, what remains as a tool of protest is the body itself (Clochard 2016; Edkins and Pin-Fat 2005).

A microinteractionist perspective on precarious migrant protest looking at (inter)acting human beings, allows for embracing and integrating these insights from migration studies to provide nuanced accounts of the complex protest dynamics at play. Jasper argues: “to understand why and how people organize themselves to protest against things they dislike, we need to know what they care about, how they see their place in the world, what language they use to describe [social or material] entities” (Jasper 1997: 11).

3 According to Uday Chandra, “[t]o resist is, in ordinary parlance, to oppose or fight off what is pernicious or threatening to one’s existence” (2015: 563).

Particularly for the understanding of precarious migrant protest, this entails novel attention to grievances. Yet, even though considered a core ingredient of social movements, for a long time, the root causes for mobilization – human suffering – have been largely downplayed by theories of social movements. They were considered ubiquitous, of little variation, and hence of little explanatory power for political action, which is why theories have instead focused on endogenous resources, and exogenous opportunities (della Porta 2018).

The context of migration, however, seems to require a readjustment of this dominant perspective. As many migration scholars recall, the tightening of border controls, the expansion of deportation regimes, and the increased categorizing into “wanted” and “unwanted” migrants has led to a proliferation of resistance by migrants on all continents (Ataç et al. 2015, 2016; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016; Zepeda-Millán 2014, 2016). Ataç et al. hence argue: “In particular during the past three years, the border regime itself produced new migratory actors, subjectivities and forms of political articulation that are at once a manifestation and a consequence of the crisis” (Ataç et al. 2015: 3). Similar to other recent contributions on mobilizations in times of crisis, it is hence argued that not only opportunities but also threats can trigger protest (della Porta 2015; Zepeda-Millán 2016). Indeed, the numerous restrictions against migrants, particularly the “deportation regime” enacted against those deemed unwanted, has planted multiple “seeds of resistance” (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016: 9).

An interactionist perspective deviates strongly from previous analytic lenses, arguing that “the main constraints on what protestors can accomplish are not determined directly by economic and political structures so much as they are imposed by other players with different goals and interests” (Jasper 2014a: 9). Despite their contingency in space and time, interactions of players in arenas do not unfold in a social or spatial vacuum. On the contrary, “dispositionalist interactionism” (Duyvendak and Fillieule 2014: 295) conceives interactions as being rooted in established social norms, histories of interactions, and identities of the players involved (Duyvendak and Fillieule 2014: 299). In turn, interactions also shape future encounters since they evoke certain emotions, and feed into players’ biographies: “Each person carries a complex biography, developed through past interactions, strategic and communicative, with other individuals. [...] We cannot even imagine such a thing, individuals as non-social and lacking any history” (McGarry et al. 2016: 639). Compound players also regularly mobilize memories of past interactions for present contentious encounters.

Accordingly, while highlighting the role of agency, an interactionist perspective is not structureless; it equally acknowledges structural limitations on agency. Resources or political opportunities do still matter, yet, they need to be acted upon by proponents or opponents as they are dynamic and are partly reconfigured *through* interaction. In a similar vein, Nicholls has underlined the importance of temporary “niche openings” (2014) and small fissures in structurally hermetic environments, upon which migrants act politically. By definition, such niches can only be occupied by small groups, which is why conflicts and divisions on strategies, within compound players of challengers, are at the core of such precarious mobilizations. Nicholls’s niche openings is part of a broader shift in political opportunity theory. Also, Joshua Bloom has illustrated that opportunities differ across groups, and eventually, that they are rather microinteractional than structural (Bloom 2015).

A microinteractionist perspective necessarily includes a spatial component, which takes into account the material conditions in which contentious players act. Jasper suggests the terminology of “arena” defined as “physical places where players interact to generate decisions and other outcomes; they may contain objects ranging from doors and seats to quotes chiseled into marble walls to illumination and amplification devices, but they also have formal rules and informal expectations, as well as something at stake in the decisions made” (Jasper 2019b: 2).

Interactive approaches to protest, thus, entail an important spatial component. However, other contributions both in social movement and migration studies have been even more specific in fleshing out the relationship between spatial conditions and political agency.

### **Ambivalent Spatialities of Precarious Mobilizations**

Almost simultaneously with the relational turn, social movement studies have undergone a spatial turn (Sewell 2001; Tilly 2000; Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto 2008; Martin and Miller 2003; Nicholls, Miller, and Beaumont 2013b). In 2003 Martin and Miller argued:

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

Since then, significant progress has been made. Most importantly, the volume *Spaces of Contention*, edited by Walter Nicholls, Byron Miller, and Justin Beaumont (2013b), provided the first systematic overview of the multiple spatialities and their coimplications for contentious politics.

Most spatial analyses build upon the work of Henri Lefebvre, who has revolutionized the reflection on space with his claim of space being socially produced and constantly re-enacted in everyday life (Lefebvre 1992, 2003). Informed by these insights, social movement scholars have looked into the interaction of geography and social relations in processes of political mobilization. In a nutshell, “[s]pace matters because it is relational. It is the medium through which all social relations are made or broken – and making and breaking relationships is at the core of all questions of collective action” (Miller 2013: 286).

It has been extensively shown that certain environments are more favorable for providing resources for political protest than others (Nicholls, Miller, and Beaumont 2013b; Sewell 2001; Uitermark, Nicholls, and Loopmans 2012). Geography enables or constrains the visibility of actors, and the interactions of individuals. Spatial proximity provides more opportunities for new connections and relationships to establish: “it reduces the costs and risks associated with making these links happen” (Nicholls 2009: 83). As banal as it might sound: place sets the base for collective action to evolve. Face-to-face interactions are favorable for creating affective feelings and “strong ties” among protesters. Furthermore, William Sewell and many others have shown that safe places as a “sine qua non of social movements” (Sewell 2001: 69), in which challengers can form and reinforce a collective identity, organize activities, mobilize resources, and recruit activists. Place is relevant not only in material, physical terms but also in its symbolic dimension. For theorists such as Iris Marion Young (1990), Doreen Massey (1991), Tim Cresswell (2006), and Sewell (2001), places are an active medium through which identities are created and contested. Sewell emphasizes that by occupying symbolic locations,

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

Protesters regularly use symbolic places such as public spaces, including central streets and squares and government buildings, to underline

their claims. Protest events organized in capital cities convey explicitly or implicitly a claim to centrality.

Most social movements are formed around place-based hubs, and comparisons show that spaces have distinct “relational qualities,” with some being more likely to incubate protest than others (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016). To scrutinize these relational qualities requires specific attention to the local scale, even more so if mobilizations of marginalized groups are to be studied (Lahusen 2014; Blee 2012; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016). In this vein, Nicholls and his colleagues have amply demonstrated how the urban environment “breeds” contention. Cities both produce grievances for a right to the city (Castells 1983) and serve as an incubator for the realization of “rights through the city” (Nicholls and Vermeulen 2012), that are not limited to the urban structure, such as migrant and LGBTQI rights.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Chris Zepeda-Millán has demonstrated that dense local migrant networks connecting individuals in certain neighborhoods serve as the “weapons of the (not) so weak” (2016: 269). Even if they have previously not been politicized, they embed social capital and relationships of trust, which can be activated in contentious episodes. Meindert Fennema and Jean Tillie equally found that the level of migrant communities’ political engagement is largely affected by the density of ethnic organizational networks (1999, 2001).

Nicholls has argued that social movements are “uneven” terrains, being asymmetrically structured around some people and places, such as cities or neighborhoods (2011). The resulting movement “hubs” often become magnetic, attracting activists based in other places to join hubs, and by this, reinforcing their importance and allowing for the sustainability of contentious activity. Understanding social movements hence requires not only an explicit analysis of concrete places but also of how distant locations are connected into social spaces, and how mobility is used in creating and sustaining social networks. Leitner et al. have accordingly demonstrated for the case of migrant activism in the US, that mobile protests such as bus tours have proven to be effective tools for networking of isolated, often forcefully immobilized actors, as well as for accessing unevenly distributed and scarce “safe spaces” and advantageous political opportunity structures (Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto 2008).

Evidently, not all sparks of protest grow into visible disruptions. “Seeds of resistance” (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016), which are regularly planted

4 See also Miller and Nicholls (2013), Nicholls et al. (2013b), and Nicholls (2009).

when states exclude human beings, are expected to only grow into disruptive mobilizations if certain spatial conditions are met:

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

Migration scholars have made similar observations in their investigation of the relationship between precarious spatial settings, including informal migrant camps or “slums,” and political subjectivity (Sanyal 2014; Ramadan 2013; Rygiel 2012; Sigona 2015; Huysmans 2008). In contrast to Giorgio Agamben’s pessimistic view (1998), even in a “state of exception” in which individuals are stripped off rights and are dehumanized as “bare life,” individuals do resist (Sanyal 2014; Ramadan 2013; Rygiel 2012; Sigona 2015; Huysmans 2008). Informal migrant camps were shown to have ambivalent effects on producing and reproducing precariousness but also at times offering “to newcomers who had limited resources and no rights, [...] access to (some kind of) protection and recognition, as well as some practical benefits” (Sigona 2015: 12). Camps literally assemble bodies in the streets, which at times produce visibility, and draw attention and resources to previously disenfranchised individuals and groups.

Yet, the incubating effects of proximity and encounter in certain spaces are also known to movement opponents. The state has usually concentrated means in urban centers to challenge the protesters and intervene in the fragile relations they develop with allies. Governments and bureaucracies regularly enacts laws that disperse subversive actors and isolate unwanted populations from social support (Minca 2015; Agamben 1998): “While place can enhance the mobilization powers of activists by strengthening relations and building common mobilizing frames and identities, states may attempt to short-circuit and disrupt movements by enacting a range of place-based strategies” (Nicholls, Miller, and Beaumont 2013a: 5). Miller, therefore, argues that space should be understood in a Foucauldian perspective, foremost as a technology of power: “Spatial technologies of power are particular



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

In addition to a scrutiny of the local level, migration scholars have urged the social sciences to reflect on a widespread “methodological nationalism” and take into account the “transnational social spaces” most migrants are embedded (Pries 2001; Vertovec 2009; Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer 2013). These “pluri-local, durable and dense configurations of social practices, systems of symbols and artifacts that span places in different countries” (Pries 2001: i) are “constituted by the various forms of resources or capital of spatially mobile and immobile persons, on the one hand, and the regulations imposed by nation-states and various other opportunities and constraints, on the other” (Faist 1998: 217).

For many migrants, the nation-state is a real but rather artificial container, as their lifeworlds span different localities in their everyday life, through contact with their families at home or in other countries, through identification with their country of origin or opposition with the government in power. Even though they are located in a specific country or city of destination, their life worlds are never purely local. In Doreen Massey’s terms, their lives are place based but not place bound (Massey 1991). Social spaces that connect individuals in at times geographically distant places also shape practices of protest. While relations to natives in localities of destination are inherently complicated by cultural, legal, and linguistic differences, it is often the relationships among migrants with shared experiences and memories of violence and exclusion in transmigration, and the locality of reception, which provide trust and set the basis for political mobilization. Many migrants also create social ties to activist environments, and to fellow migrants on the move, which are often kept and can be activated for political protest in “transnational contentious spaces” (Steinhilper 2018).

## Conclusion

Scrutinizing precarious and often volatile protest in contexts of marginalization profits from a cross-fertilization of spatial and interactionist approaches, which have been developed in both migration and social movement studies. Hence, this book intends to provide a microscopic account of the complex dynamics of precarious protest, paying particular attention to

the biographies and cultural work of the individuals involved, their strategic decisions, their interactions with other activists, allies and opponents, and the (transnational) spatial and regulatory contexts in which they act. Such an approach is certainly ambitious as it intends to integrate various individual, relational and contextual elements. Yet, it promises a way forward to bring light to the dynamics of precarious protest, which received less attention, precisely because they complicate an analysis with the traditional (strongly structural) theoretic toolkit.

The four case studies on dynamics of precarious migrant protest in Berlin and Paris have documented instances in which unlikely challengers have appeared as political subjects through the interaction, with a range of other actors, allies, and opponents in protest “arenas.” According to Duyvendak and Fillieule, such “arenas do not exist at the time the problem appears. It is the emergence of a problem that generates its contours as a function of individuals and groups which intervene in the situation, and mobilize a specific part of the social world, or field, either openly or discreetly” (2014: 306). Accordingly, the arenas take different shapes and are populated by different actors in the four case studies.

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## 2. Contentious Migration in Context

### Law, Discourse and Mobilization in Germany and France

“In an asylum accommodation system [like the French one], which leaves the vast majority without any accommodation, there is no way for those few who have received accommodation to express dissent. No matter how difficult the circumstances are.”<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

Protest never emerges in a vacuum, but is strongly shaped by sociopolitical contexts. Situating episodes of precariousness therefore requires scrutinizing the respective regulatory, discursive and social movement contexts in which marginalized actors mobilize. They influence both the arenas of migrant protest and the players acting therein. This chapter maps the context of precarious migrant protest in Germany and France, tracing the history of politicization of migration, the regulatory context of irregularity and asylum and the histories of migration-related protest in the two countries.

**Keywords:** Germany; France; asylum; irregular migration; protest

Protest never emerges in a vacuum, but is strongly shaped by sociopolitical contexts. Situating episodes of precarious migrant protest in Germany and France therefore requires a scrutiny of the respective regulatory, discursive and social movement contexts, in which marginalized actors mobilize. They influence both the arenas of migrant protest and the players acting therein.

<sup>1</sup> Interview P18.

## The Politicization of Precarious Migration

In most European countries, including France and Germany, migration was hardly considered a contested topic in the first two decades after World War II (Wangen 2016; Fassin 2016a). The two relevant groups in this regard, the survivors of the war camps and those escaping from Eastern European communist regimes, were both by and large welcomed (Fassin 2016b). In the time of economic upturn in the 1950s and 1960s, these positive attitudes resonated with the thirst of growing national economies for cheap labor (Fassin 2016a). Both France and Germany in this period actively attracted hundreds of thousands of migrants as a foreign workforce. In Germany foreign labor was recruited predominantly from Italy, Spain and Greece, later from Yugoslavia and Turkey (Bade and Oltmer 2004). In France mainly from Francophone colonies in Africa, including Senegal and Mali but mostly Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria. The foreign population grew rapidly in the 1960s but this type of economic migration remained hardly politicized (Blanc-Chaléard 2006; Herbert 2001) since it was erroneously considered a temporary phenomenon. In such a context of liberal migration policies, many migrants, who would have formally been eligible for international protection relinquished the asylum application, and never appeared in any official asylum statistics. The comparatively low number of political refugees from the communist East were furthermore considered as proof of Western capitalist superiority (Bade and Oltmer 2005). Economic migration was welcomed and the legal norm of asylum was numerically irrelevant and morally appealing (Bade 2015). Until 1963, in Germany, asylum applications only once surpassed 3,000 a year. Even in the year of the oil crisis in 1973 and the consequential end of active foreign workforce recruitment, asylum applications remained marginal (BAMF 2016). In France, too, the number of asylum applications remained below 3,000 until 1973 and consisted mainly of Europeans, particularly from Spain, and migrants from a range of Soviet republics.

The economic downturn in the early 1970s introduced fundamental changes in both countries. France was increasingly confronted with rising unemployment due to the restructuring of the industrial sector and increasing automation (Crépeau 1995). With an economy in recession, the need for foreign labor rapidly decreased and translated into profound restrictions on migration. The so-called *circulaire* Marcellin-Fontanet Law of 1972 modified the regulations on the renewal of residence permits. From this moment on, a person's right to stay in France was conditional not only on their having a work contract but also their being able to prove they

had access to “decent housing,” which many precarious workers could not afford. Overnight, a large share of migrant workers was rendered irregular through legal reform (Abdallah 2000). The oil crisis of 1973 also added to this economic transformation and for the first time irregular migration became widely problematized and contested, particularly migration from the Maghreb (GISTI 2014). Following restrictions on labor migration, the number of asylum applications rose, because other channels of migration were blocked. Nevertheless, asylum migration remained relatively insignificant and hardly contested throughout the 1970s. In France, the main groups of asylum seekers at the time, Chilean dissidents escaping the military dictatorship of Pinochet and the so-called “boat people” from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, mostly fleeing communist regimes, received widespread sympathy both in public and government discourse (Fassin 2016a). Asylum migration maintained a positive image (GISTI 2014) and asylum law was even liberalized. From 1977 onward, asylum seekers obtained the right to work from the moment the asylum claim was filed (Wangen 2016). In Germany, instead, the economic downturn translated into an increasing politicization of asylum. In the year of the oil crisis, 1973, asylum applications were just above 5,000, however, the number exponentially rose in the second half of the 1970s, exceeding 100,000 in 1980 (Bade and Oltmer 2004: 87). Firstly, this was due to the restrictive migration policies introduced to fight the economic recession. In consequence, the asylum procedure had become the only remaining bottleneck of legal migration, including cases of family reunification of the “guest workers.” Secondly, changing patterns of migration at a global scale, including the consequences of decolonization and economic globalization, increased migration from the Global South to Europe. Given the rapid rise in the number and an alarming public discourse, for the first time, asylum became a highly contentious issue during the national election campaign in 1980 (Bade and Oltmer 2004). The notion of the “bogus asylum seeker,” and the criminalization of migration, were established in public discourse. What followed was the implementation of stricter rules for asylum seekers (Bade and Oltmer 2005). Understood as explicit means of deterrence, obligatory accommodation in collective asylum facilities, restrictions to mobility and a work ban were introduced in the 1980s.

Migration had become a core issue of political conflict in Germany and, in contrast to France, the issue of asylum was at its core. Despite successive restrictions, the number only temporarily decreased, and rose again to over 250,000 in 1991 (BAMF 2016). The largest share of applications, then, constituted ethnic minorities from the Balkans, fleeing the violent implosion

of Yugoslavia. In the meantime, however, “refugees” had lost their symbolic relevance in the Cold War confrontation. The objective situation of victims of violence and prosecution had not changed, but rather the “affects and values, mobilized in the determination of their situation” (Fassin 2016b: 62, author’s translation). During the early 1990s, public controversies further sharpened. Germany witnessed an interplay of xenophobic discourses in both the media and parts of the established political parties, preparing the ground for racist riots and murders in various cities, including Hoyerswerda, Rostock-Lichtenhagen, and Mölln (Herbert 2001: 308). In this climate of strong politicization of asylum, in late 1992 the two largest parties, the CDU<sup>2</sup> and the SPD,<sup>3</sup> agreed on the so-called “asylum compromise,” which strongly curtailed the right to asylum enshrined in the German constitution (Bade and Oltmer 2004: 112). The insertion of concepts such as “safe third country” and “safe country of origin” combined with the so-called “airport procedure” made it almost impossible to apply for asylum in Germany. This constitutional reform had an immediate effect. The number of asylum applications nosedived from the temporary peak of 438,000 in 1993 to 127,000 in 1995 (BAMF 2016) and deportations increased to over 100,000 in 1993 (Kirchhoff and Lorenz 2017: 52).

In France, also, from the 1980s onward, the public perception and the attitudes of political elites regarding migration changed drastically. Under the socialist president François Mitterrand, elected in 1980, migration policies first seemed to shift toward a more liberal and rights-based approach. The new government regularized around 130,000 undocumented migrants between 1981 and 1982 (Abdallah 2000: 17). Furthermore, migrants were given the right to form interest organizations (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016: 144ff.). When the far-right Front National won in popularity in the early 1980s, however, the socialist government soon reverted to a tougher stance on migration. Following the victory of the conservatives in the parliamentary elections in 1986 and a subsequent “cohabitation,”<sup>4</sup> the so-called Pasqua Law package was introduced. The package curtailed the right to asylum, introduced stricter rules for acquiring citizenship and facilitated deportations (Noiriel 1999). In this time of heightened political conflict around migration, asylum applications increased to a peak of 62,000 in 1989 (OFPRA 2013). However, they remained low in comparison to the

2 Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union of Germany).

3 Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany).

4 This French particularity describes the situation when a president of one party is obliged to share power with a prime minister from another party.

German peak of more than 430,000 in 1993 (BAMF 2016). Nevertheless, due to increasing unemployment and the rise of the far right, migration became central to an increasingly hostile public debate. Both in public discourse and administrative decisions, African boat people received far less compassion than those from Southeast Asia had a decade before (Fassin 2016a). Similar to Germany, the figure of the previously “welcome refugee” was gradually replaced by the “unwanted asylum seeker” or the “real refugee” by the “bogus asylum seeker” (Julien-Laferrière 2016; Crépeau 1995). In 1991, a widespread antimigrant sentiment culminated in the “*Circulaire Cresson*” migration law reform, which explicitly aimed at eliminating a “pull effect” for asylum migration by inserting far-reaching restrictions. Among others, work permits for asylum seekers were made subject to a priority clause for French citizens. Dropping recognition rates and rising rejections<sup>5</sup> triggered the first widespread protests initiated by rejected asylum seekers in 1991, involving Kurds, Angolans and Chileans among others, who had been in France for years waiting for decisions on their cases (Delahaye 1991). Instead of mobilizing against an asylum system considered unjust, they demanded regularization through other legal channels. These protests marked the beginning of an era of contention around undocumented migration in France, in which migrants themselves played a prominent role throughout the 1990s (Siméant 1998).

In Germany, instead, the major asylum law reforms in 1993 and the subsequent decreases in applications initiated a time of stasis and the salience of migration temporarily faded. In 2000 the first Social Democrat-Green government introduced a citizenship reform, complementing the restrictive German *ius sanguinis* with elements of a birthplace, *ius solis*. This was the first time a federal government publicly acknowledged the German reality as a country of immigration (Bade and Oltmer 2004). Despite this critical novelty in migration legislation, in asylum law the government contributed to an ongoing process of securitization of migration at the European level. It was the German Minister of the Interior at the time, Otto Schily (SPD), who pressed for the continuation of the Dublin regulation in 2003 (Baumann 2008) that attributed the responsibility to process asylum applications to the country where asylum seekers first entered European territory and helped Germany to keep applications decreasing to reach the levels of the early 1980s by 2008 (BAMF 2016).

The salience and politicization of migration started to increase again from 2012 in response to the rising number of asylum applications due to

5 An estimated 100,000 asylum seekers were rejected in France in 1991 (Abdallah 2000: 40).

the escalation of the Libyan and Syrian crises. The rising number reintroduced debates on “asylum abuse” and culminated in a major asylum law reform with contradictory effects in 2014. The new law introduced restrictions for asylum seekers from Balkan countries, but it also entailed liberalizing steps, including a partial lifting of an extensive work ban for asylum seekers. The increasing polarization in attitudes toward migration (Decker, Kiess, and Brähler 2014) were illustrated by two contradictory, yet interrelated trends accentuating in 2014 (Weisskircher and Berntzen 2019). On the one hand, the xenophobic movement PEGIDA<sup>6</sup> started marching on a weekly basis in Dresden in October 2014 (Rucht 2014), and rapidly spread to other cities. Furthermore, from 2014 onward, the originally anti-Euro party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) gradually shifted toward an explicit xenophobic and antimigration profile and started to enter regional parliaments. On the other hand, simultaneously, a citizens’ mobilization in support of migrants gained in strength (Karakayali and Kleist 2015).

These developments foreshadowed the critical juncture for migration politics in Germany, in the summer of 2015. The number of asylum applications in Germany rose, due to the escalating war in Syria, and a shortage of funding for refugee camps in the neighboring countries. In contrast to the 1990s, the rising number did not provoke a hegemonic rejection of asylum seekers, but led to a gradual (and temporary) proliferation of supportive attitudes referred to as a new German “welcome culture” (Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017; Hamann and Karakayali 2017). Chancellor Merkel’s statement “*Wir schaffen das*” (“We can do this”) became emblematic for a liberal German approach to forced displacement (Mushaben 2017). However, society became further polarized. The right-wing party AfD subsequently entered numerous regional parliaments, while 2015 witnessed the highest number of violent attacks on asylum seekers and asylum facilities ever counted in a single year (Pro Asyl 2016c). In this climate, the grand coalition of CDU and SPD in autumn 2015 enacted the most rigid asylum laws since 1993, which facilitated deportations and limited family reunification (Bundesregierung 2016; Pro Asyl 2016b). In 2015, migration and particularly asylum had become the dominant issue of public debate in Germany.

In France, meanwhile, the issue of precarious migration remained long dominated by debates on undocumented migration, since thousands of undocumented individuals without a regular status built the backbone of

6 Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident, which roughly translates to “Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident.”

certain sectors of the French economy, including construction, restaurants, and cleaning, repeatedly politicizing their presence and exploitation. The far-right Front National continued to mobilize opposition to immigration with Jean-Marie Le Pen ending second in the presidential elections of 2002. Asylum, yet, remained marginal, since many precarious migrants refrained from applying for asylum in France due to the comparatively low recognition rates (Neumayer 2005; Bendel 2013). Instead, they attempted to reach the United Kingdom. This temporarily changed in the early 2000s when in Calais thousands of precarious migrants got stranded and, in the absence of public accommodation, they built makeshift camps and squats soon to be referred to as the “Jungle of Calais.” Yet, this remained one of the few explicitly asylum-related controversies since, in general, the number of asylum applications in France remained comparatively low, reaching just below 60,000 in 2015 (OFPRA 2016) and around 80,000 in 2016. Consequently, the notion of a “summer of migration” applied to Germany, but far less so to France. Whereas the EU witnessed the largest arrival of asylum seekers in its history – with 745,000 applications in Germany in 2016 alone (BAMF 2016), while France remained, despite an increase, relatively little affected in quantitative terms.

This cursory overview suggests that following similar dynamics in the two decades after World War II, the issue has been distinctly politicized in these two countries. In Germany, the issue of asylum was at the core of heated contention around migration, whereas in France the issue of undocumented migration has been central. The diverging patterns can only be partly explained by the number of asylum applications, and point at differences in an “irregularity-asylum” nexus, which is discussed in further detail below.

## Regulatory Contexts of Asylum and Undocumented Migration

The notion of precarious migration, understood in this book as a “form of life” (Fassin, Wilhelm-Solomon, and Segatti 2017) induced by an insecure legal status applies to asylum seekers, undocumented migrants and individuals with a temporary suspension of deportation.<sup>7</sup> These statuses are both intimately related in empirical and analytical terms. In contexts of increasing restrictions on legal migration, including asylum, undocumented migration is a widespread side effect (Stobbe 2004; Nicholls and

7 See below for the German particularity of *Duldung*, which roughly translates as “tolerance.”



Uitermark 2016). Many asylum seekers turn undocumented, when their cases are rejected. Others never apply for international protection, aware that their complex biographies of forced migration do not fulfill the strict criteria required for them to be granted refugee status. While precarious migration exists both in France and Germany, the underlying regulatory contexts differ, with far-reaching effects on the everyday life of precarious migrants, but also the grievances, opportunities and resources for political mobilization.

### **Irregularity in Germany and France**

Even though no robust estimations exist, at least 200,000 individuals without a right to stay are estimated to reside in both Germany and France (Vogel 2015; Courau 2009). Despite being an empirical fact, the public perception and regulatory context of this social phenomenon differ. Comparing “borderline citizenship” regimes in Germany and France, Monforte and Dufour have identified highly distinct levels of exclusion of undocumented migrants (Monforte and Dufour 2011). In France, vivid public debates around irregular migration date back to the early 1970s. This is partly related to a large share of undocumented migrants originating from former French colonies, adding a layer of historical or moral responsibility to the debate. While restrictions on irregular migration proliferated, a wide range of newly founded associations and established human rights NGOs started to support the rights of undocumented migrants. Given the linguistic advantage and a large informal job market particularly in the catering sector, care work, construction and cleaning, many undocumented migrants remained de facto relatively well included in the society and contributed significantly to the French economy, despite their irregular status (Brun 2006; Monforte and Dufour 2011; Abdallah 2000; Courau 2009).

Furthermore, as a “civic” type of citizenship regime, France had always been more open to migration compared to Germany, which for a long time denied its reality as a country of immigration (Bade and Oltmer 2004). Accordingly, France witnessed various waves of large-scale regularization of undocumented migrants, including around 130,000 in 1981 and around 90,000 in 1997/98 (Courau 2009). Moreover, in France, the vast majority of precarious migrants from countries with a relatively low recognition rate, including many Sub-Saharan African countries, opt against filing an asylum case. Following the vast mobilizations of undocumented migrants supporting associations and citizens in the second half of the 1990s, even a process of automatic regularization was introduced in 1999. The procedure

entailed that if an irregular migrant could prove a permanence of ten years on French territory, the person could apply for a right to stay. This resulted in the regularization of around 25,000 individuals annually. Even though the automatic procedure of regularization was abolished in May 2006 (Courau 2009), its previous existence documents a degree of normalization of irregular migration in French public debates and administration. Strikingly, however, the issue was largely discussed separately from the asylum system.

In Germany, in turn, undocumented migration has never witnessed this degree of politicization, and has been treated differently in administrative terms (Cyrus 2009) due to its intimate relation to the asylum system. The German particularity of *Duldung*, which roughly translates to “tolerance,” plays an important role in this regard. It describes a precarious situation, in which individuals are denied a right to stay, yet their deportation is temporarily suspended for medical or practical reasons (Kirchhoff and Lorenz 2017). The latter applies, for instance, when countries of origin fail to cooperate and do not issue the documents necessary for international transport. The status is usually renewed on a monthly basis. However, it expires immediately the moment when a deportation notice is sent. Neither regularized nor undocumented, individuals with a *Duldung* are locked into a status of limbo and precariousness. Originally, this legal status was understood as an exception, yet, its prevalence has reached an enormous scale, applying to 94,000 persons in 2013 (Deutscher Bundestag 2014: 24) and as many as 159,678 individuals in 2016 (Deutscher Bundestag 2017: 29). In most cases, the individuals initially apply for asylum, no matter how unlikely a positive decision is and remain tolerated, once their case is rejected. Consequently, persons with a *Duldung* are usually accommodated in the same centralized structures as asylum seekers and many rules apply to both groups, including a partial work ban and mobility restrictions. Despite these restrictions, in Germany, many rejected asylum seekers tend to remain in the situation of *Duldung* rather than opting for complete irregularity as it at least guarantees precarious accommodation and monetary transfers (Cyrus 2009). Similarly, many precarious migrants apply for asylum, even if their biographies of migration make refugee status determination unlikely. This is also related to much more regular policing of public space, as well as largely inaccessible job and housing markets for individuals without papers, which add additional burdens to a life in irregularity in Germany (Monforte and Dufour 2011; Stobbe 2004). In contrast to France, furthermore, an undocumented status constitutes a dead end in Germany, since regularizations are rare, and only apply to individuals with a long-term status of *Duldung* (AutorInnenkollektiv 2000; Kirchhoff and Lorenz 2017)

combined with a higher likelihood of deportation in case of apprehension (Kirchhoff and Lorenz 2017).

Given these differences in the two “borderline citizenship” regimes, for individuals with an irregular status, the room for maneuver, both with regard to discursive opportunities and everyday life realities, is larger in France compared to Germany. Besides, considerable differences between the countries exist in the regulatory context of the asylum system.

### The Asylum Systems in Germany and France

Despite repeated attempts to harmonize asylum systems in the European Union, the respective traditions, legal frameworks and administrative implementations differ sharply between countries. The German asylum system is characterized by three features: the dispersal of asylum seekers throughout the country, centralized accommodation, and *Residenzpflicht*<sup>8</sup> (restrictions on mobility). For reasons of both “burden sharing” and deterrence, directly after applying for asylum, individuals are geographically distributed on a no-choice basis, according to the so-called Königstein quota that takes into account the tax revenue and number of inhabitants in each state (Hinger 2016; Boswell 2003).<sup>9</sup> As the first step, asylum seekers are sent to “first reception centers” (*Erstaufnahmeeinrichtung*) run by the states in cooperation with private companies or welfare organizations. In these often large centers, hosting hundreds or at times thousands of people, asylum seekers are required to stay up to six months before being either deported or transferred to a subsequent accommodation (*Anschlussunterbringung*) organized by the municipalities. The dispersal of asylum seekers was introduced as part of a series of restrictive asylum laws in the late 1970s and 1980s, which also entailed obligatory centralized accommodation (Bade and Oltmer 2005). The initial obligation to live in collective accommodation centers introduced in 1982 originally was, and still is, meant to deter (potential) asylum seekers. Lothar Späth, the CDU governor of Baden-Württemberg, was quoted in 1982: “The number of asylum seekers only decreased when the bush drums signaled – don’t go to Baden-Württemberg, there you have to live in a camp” (quoted in Müller 2010: 197, author’s translation). Based on the same rationale, until

8 A major asylum law reform, which entered into force in 2015, limited the applicability of *Residenzpflicht*, yet it has not abolished the law as such (Kirchhoff and Lorenz 2017).

9 Unlike in other domains, the “burden sharing” between the states (*Länder*) does not consist of a financial compensation mechanism but of a physical dispersal of asylum seekers.

2013 the Bavarian Ordinance on the Implementation of Asylum (Asyldurchführungsverordnung) explicitly stated that conditions during the asylum procedure should “encourage” asylum seekers to return to their countries of origin (Bayrische Staatsregierung 2013). Justified with both budgetary constraints and deterrence, centralized accommodation is often highly precarious and entails a number of hardships (Johansson 2016; Wendel 2014). Usually various adults share bedrooms, and entire corridors share bathrooms and kitchens. The location of collective accommodation varies, yet mostly, they are concentrated in peripheral urban industrial or rural areas (Pieper 2008; Selders 2009).<sup>10</sup> As a result of peripheral location, limited private space and many people sharing the few kitchens and bathrooms, life in collective accommodation has been proven to be highly precarious and conflict laden (Wendel 2014; Johansson 2016). The other side of this rigid system is that, in contrast to France, no asylum seeker is left to the streets and has a place allocated in a facility.<sup>11</sup> Geographical dispersal and centralized accommodation were complemented in Germany until 2015 by the *Residenzpflicht*. This law does not only determine the locality of residence of asylum seekers (and individuals with *Duldung*), but prohibits individuals from leaving certain administrative boundaries (Jakob 2016). The administrative boundaries in which mobility was allowed varied (Selders 2009), yet predominantly referred to the municipal and in some cases state boundaries (Jakob 2016). Exemptions had to be formally requested and violations could be sanctioned with fines of up to €2,500 (Jakob 2016). Since 2015, the scope of the mobility restriction has been limited for asylum seekers, but it continues to apply to most individuals with *Duldung*. Both centralized accommodation and the mobility restriction have amounted to a system of “organized disintegration” (Täubig 2009), which served as means to discipline asylum seekers, minimize contact with the local population and facilitate potential deportation (Jakob 2016).

In France, the administrative organization of asylum procedures differs significantly. In contrast to Germany, asylum cases are usually processed

10 This passage refers to ordinary collective accommodation centers. From summer 2015 onward, numerous emergency shelters have been opened with much more precarious living conditions. In one of these centers, Berlin Tempelhof Airport (which had ceased operating as an airport in 2008), various thousands of asylum seekers were hosted for months with extremely limited privacy (Berliner Morgenpost 2015).

11 While these general characteristics distinguish Germany’s asylum accommodation system from other countries, differences exist within the federal country. Whereas some municipalities have also allowed for decentralized accommodation in private flats, others adhere to centralized accommodation (Steinhilper and Hinger 2017).

in the *préfecture* (administration of the region), in which the asylum application was initially filed. As the administrative system does not foresee a systematic dispersal on a no-choice basis similar to Germany, mandatory residence or mobility restrictions have never been in place. This has resulted in a particularly high concentration of asylum applications in urban areas, especially in the capital region of Paris. Until the late 1980s, asylum seekers could furthermore, choose to live in accommodation offered by the state or opt for a private solution (Noiriel 1999). Also, until the early 1990s, no restrictions to the right to work applied. The turning point in 1991 marked the separation of accommodation facilities for asylum seekers (CADAs<sup>12</sup>) and recognized refugees (Kobelinski 2014). Subsequently, the option to obtain housing allowances for asylum seekers was replaced by compulsory and centralized housing offered by the state, yet still in the region, in which the asylum application was filed. Compared to Germany, France has opted for an opposite stance in discouraging asylum seekers. Considering itself mainly as a transit country, and deliberately intending to avoid a “pull effect,” the French system of asylum accommodation has been purposefully undersized (Projet Babels 2017). In the 1990s, only 10% of asylum seekers were accommodated in CADAs, mainly women, children and elderly people. The rest were left with the choice of staying in temporary emergency shelters, or without accommodation offer by the state at all (Julien-Laferrière 2016). The degree of this shortage became particularly evident in the course of 2015. By the end that year, there were 50,000 places in CADAs or emergency shelters for the entire country (Senate of France 2016; see also Le Parisien Online 2015) in spite of the fact that there were 80,000 asylum applications in 2015 alone and thousands of cases still pending from previous years (OFPRA 2016). This shortage, which is also recognized by public institutions (Senate of France 2016: 5), has contributed to the emergence of makeshift street camps of thousands of asylum seekers, particularly in Paris and the Calais region (Projet Babels 2017). As a self-organized alternative to temporary emergency shelters and makeshift street camps, particularly in Paris, squatting has become a common practice for precarious migrants to obtain shelter (Bouillon 2017; Aguilera 2013; Péchu 2010). Given the limited number of places in CADAs, they are considered as a “privilege” within the French asylum system, compared to the short-term solutions in emergency shelters and life in the streets, even though as semi-closed structures, they entail considerable socio-psychological hardships (Kobelinski 2010, 2014).

12 Centres d'accueil pour demandeurs d'asile, or reception centers for asylum seekers.

These distinct features of the asylum systems in the two countries have an influence on the everyday life experiences of asylum seekers, tolerated individuals and undocumented migrants. As the following section shows, this has produced distinct grievances and mobilizations for liberal migration policies in Germany and France. For instance, migrant support organizations in France have usually advocated for the establishment of more asylum reception centers rather than their abolition as in the case of Germany. The limited availability of long-term housing for asylum seekers, has also discouraged migrants from protesting against precarious conditions in CADA. As the former director of a large migrant rights organization in France noted in an interview: “In a system which leaves the vast majority without any accommodation, there is no way for those few who have received accommodation to express dissent. No matter how difficult the circumstances are” (Interview P18).

### **Mobilizations for and by Precarious Migrants**

Country-specific migration histories, regulatory contexts and public discourses have influenced the grievances, resources and networks of those mobilizing for migrant rights.<sup>13</sup> In France, a migrant rights movement emerged in the early 1970s during the first severe restrictions of migration law, which rendered numerous migrant workers illegal and led to a rise in deportations and acts of contestation against them (Abdallah 2000; GISTI 2014). In this period, well-established human rights associations such as LDH and Cimade worked alongside the more recently founded migrant support groups, including GISTI and FASTI (Monforte 2014).<sup>14</sup> Given the low salience of asylum in the public sphere until the late 1970s, the organizations mainly focused on the human rights of undocumented migrants and migrant workers, as well as antiracism and anticolonialism. Colonialism was a particularly highly contentious issue in France due to the violent decolonization struggles in Algeria at the time (Abdallah 2000). Due to the high number of migrant workers who had become illegalized following the immigration law reforms from the mid-1970s onward, various trade unions

13 More extensive historical accounts of the migrant rights movements up to the mid-2000s can be found in Monforte (2014) and Nicholls and Uitermark (2016).

14 LDH stands for La ligue des droits de l'homme; GISTI for Groupe d'information et de soutien des immigrés; and FASTI for Fédération des associations de solidarité avec tous-tes les immigré-e-s.

had also become engaged in migrant (worker) solidarity, among them were also the large unions CGT and CFDT.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in contrast to Germany, since its emergence, the migrant rights movement in France has been closely related to mobilizations by migrants themselves, who had organized hunger strikes and strikes in the workplaces from the early 1970s onward (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016). The large-scale regularization of undocumented migrants by the socialist government in the 1980s was also a result of civil society pressure by human rights organizations, trade unions and newly established migrant associations, including ATMF and ATF (Abdallah 2000).<sup>16</sup> In 1983, when the far-right Front national gained electoral success, second-generation migrants, the so-called *beurs*, sparked the Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme to which 100,000 demonstrators showed up in Paris (Willems 1999: 185).

In the late 1980s, when both undocumented migration and asylum became more contested in public debates, the most influential human rights and migrant support associations founded the Réseau d'information et de solidarité (Information and Solidarity Network) to improve their coordination and contest deportations of undocumented migrants, including rejected asylum seekers (Monforte 2014). The associations involved argued that restrictive laws in the realms of both asylum and irregular migration led to disenfranchised individuals with precarious residence status and advocated for a broad alliance in support of migrant rights. Consequently, when the French central administration in charge of the examination of asylum claims, the Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides (OFPRA), was reformed in the early 1990s, resulting in increasing rejection rates and subsequent hunger strikes by rejected asylum seekers, a broad alliance of human rights associations, antiracist groups and trade unions was mobilized (Siméant 1998). These associations also joined forces against the subsequent migration law restrictions, including the Pasqua Law (1993) and the Debré Law (1996) (Monforte 2014). In March 1996, precarious migrants initiated the most disruptive migration-related protests in French history (Blin 2008; Siméant 1998). Around 300 undocumented migrants left the shadows, launched hunger

15 CGT stands for Confédération générale du travail (General Confederation of Labor); CFDT for the Confédération française démocratique du travail (French Democratic Confederation of Labor).

16 A number of migrant self-organizations emerged in the early 1980s, when the socialist government allowed the establishment of such associations. ATMF stands for the Association des travailleurs maghrébins en France (Association of Workers from the Maghreb in France) and ATF for Association des tunisiens de France (Association of Tunisians in France).

strikes and eventually occupied the St. Bernard church in northeast Paris. Numerous human rights associations, trade unions, celebrities and public intellectuals supported the protest (Diop 1997; Terray 2006). With the eviction of the occupiers from the church in August 1996, protests by precarious migrants self-identifying as “*sans-papiers*” (without papers) continued in various migrant “collectives” (Abdallah 2000; Terray 2006). Despite multiple conflicts among the supporting associations and between the self-organized *sans-papiers* and supporters, the events in summer 1996 resonated strongly among members of the French left. By early 1997, the combination of increasing electoral success of the far-right Front national, the passage of the restrictive Debré Law and the self-organized protests of *sans-papiers* fueled an unprecedented solidarity, mirrored in a turnout of more than 100,000 participants at a demonstration in February 1997 (Libération 1997). The socialist government that entered into office soon after these incidents issued the *circulaire* Chevènement, which introduced specific criteria for the regularization of undocumented migrants (Courau 2009). This period of heightened conflict around migration, consequently, initiated and consolidated regular interaction within a highly active and centralized migrant rights movement in France, addressing both issues of asylum and immigration more broadly (Monforte 2014).<sup>17</sup> Yet, the role of the *sans-papiers* collectives gradually diminished in controversies over representation, autonomy and leadership (Cissé 2003; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016). In the 2000s, the increasing Europeanization of migration policies and the desolate situation for asylum seekers in the Calais region became core issues of mobilization for French migrant-support associations (Monforte 2014). This focus intensified during the “long summer of migration” in 2015 (Pette 2019; Colombeau 2019; Projet Babels 2017). However, in contrast to Germany, it did not lead to a fundamental restructuring of the migrant rights movement. In France, a well-connected movement had already existed long before, which continued mobilizing. Furthermore, France was far less and only locally affected by the so-called Syrian crisis and the related increase in forced migration to Europe.

In Germany, political mobilizations by and in support of migrants also date back various decades. Nevertheless, these have long remained far more localized, more focused on asylum and less integrated into a broader movement compared to France. When asylum became a highly contested

17 Important exceptions are France terre d’asile (FTdA) and the Forum réfugiés, which have concentrated on the issue of asylum and have opted out from a politicized movement engaged in service provision with a more consensual relationship with the French state (Monforte 2014).



issue in the late 1970s and early 1980s and a series of restrictive laws were enacted, various groups and associations in support of precarious migrants, in Germany mainly asylum seekers, started to form. Regional “refugee councils”<sup>18</sup> emerged as well as the Germany-wide network *Asyl in der Kirche*,<sup>19</sup> which aimed at protecting migrants from deportation through church asylum (Flüchtlingsrat Berlin 2011). In 1986 the umbrella organization *Pro Asyl* was formed by a broad alliance of trade unions, welfare associations, human rights organizations, faith-based associations and the regional refugee councils (*Pro Asyl* 2016a). With increasing restrictions and a hostile public discourse, the set of actors involved in protest in support of migrants diversified. The series of racist riots in various towns in the early 1990s spurred antiracist mass protests and the so-called “chains of lights” with tens of thousands of participants in various German cities (Herbert 2001: 317f.). Largely independent from the activities of the refugee councils and *Pro Asyl*, various antiracist groups also emerged.<sup>20</sup> Yet, neither in the professionalized associations nor in the grassroots movement did migrants hold a prominent role. In consequence, the first self-organized political groups of precarious migrants in Germany started their protest without the support of powerful allies.<sup>21</sup> In the midst of a hostile discourse, in 1996, mostly Nigerian asylum seekers founded *The Voice Africa Forum* (later renamed *The Voice Refugee Forum*) in an isolated asylum facility in Thuringia, in the eastern part of Germany, where conditions for asylum seekers were particularly harsh (Jakob 2016: 21). The group organized protest activities against the hardships of the asylum system they experienced on a daily basis, like the *Residenzpflicht* (restrictions on mobility) and deportations (Jakob 2016). Almost simultaneously, although independent from the protest of mostly African asylum seekers in Thuringia, 250 asylum seekers accommodated in miserable conditions on a ship in the coal harbor of Bremen went on hunger strike (Gerling 2015; Siekmeier 1995). In early 1998, a group of eventually 300 Kurdish asylum seekers under threat of imminent

18 Refugee councils are regional networks for the coordination of proasylum activities.

19 “Church Asylum”.

20 In this period, various influential antiracist organizations were founded, such as the Antirassistische Initiative Berlin (Antiracist Initiative Berlin) in 1988, the Antirassismusbüro Bremen (Antiracism Office Bremen) in 1991, the Berlin-based Forschungsstelle Flucht und Migration (Flight and Migration Research Center) in 1994, and the Internationaler Menschenrechtsverein Bremen (International Human Rights Association Bremen) in 1996.

21 Practices of resistance by precarious migrants, such as hunger strikes and self-mutilation, can be traced throughout the history of migration and restrictive politics enacted against asylum seekers in Germany. However, scattered, episodic acts of resistance were not knit together in organized groups or networks until the mid-1990s.

deportation sought protection in churches in the German region of North Rhine-Westphalia (Morgengrauen 1998; Joch-Joisten 1999). The campaign received support from various prominent figures, including German novelist Günter Grass (Joch-Joisten 1999). Nevertheless, the mobilizations resonated far less than its French counterpart at the St. Bernard church. Also in 1998, antiracist groups in Bremen were among the key organizers of the first Caravan for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants, which for the first time connected the previously scattered nodes of precarious migrant activism with long-distance marches and bus tours (Karawane 1998). The migrant support groups in 1997 formed the national network *Kein Mensch ist illegal* (No Human Is Illegal) to bridge a highly diverse spectrum of groups and individuals, from private volunteers, to anarchist groups and priests (Cross the Border 1999). In 1999, German activists were vital in the foundation of the transnational No Border Network to counter the increasing Europeanization and securitization of border politics in Europe (Anderson, Sharma, and Wright 2012; No Border Network 2004). A diverse set of actors continued mobilizing in the early 2000s, with new self-organized groups by precarious migrants (Odugbesan and Schwiertz 2018). However, and despite a proliferation of migrant support and self-organized migrant protest in Germany since the late 1990s, activism has remained fragmented and mostly localized. Grassroots groups have rarely interacted with more professionalized organizations and migrant collectives never attracted national attention until the 2012 Oranienplatz mobilizations (Jakob 2016).<sup>22</sup> From the second half of 2014, the situation profoundly changed, when Germany witnessed the nationwide proliferation of volunteering for asylum seekers (Karakayali and Kleist 2015: 19), which further picked up steam during the “long summer of migration” in 2015 (Hess et al. 2017). Widespread media attention to the humanitarian crisis in Syria as well as the challenges of municipalities in the reception of asylum seekers mobilized a large share of Germans who had formerly neither been active in volunteering nor politically engaged (Speth and Becker 2016; Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017). At a surprising pace, support of migrants diffused from a marginalized faith-based and radical left niche to the mainstream. Hundreds of support initiatives were founded, tens of thousands collected and distributed clothes, food and organized German-language courses. While engagement in support of migrants has rapidly proliferated during

22 Given its importance in the recent history of precarious migrant protest in Germany, Chapter 5 is dedicated to the so-called Oranienplatz protests in Berlin-Kreuzberg between 2012 and 2014.

the “summer of migration” in Germany, the antiracist and highly politicized tone as well as the mobilizations by precarious migrants have lost visibility.

As this overview of patterns of contention around migration in Germany and France suggests, the two countries differ in at least two important regards. Firstly, in France the issue of migration has been politicized more holistically, framing precarious migration as a combination of asylum and undocumented migration, whereas in Germany, mobilizations have strongly focused on asylum. Relatedly, in Germany both asylum seekers and migrant support associations have problematized the hardships in the asylum system, whereas contentious actors in France have predominantly mobilized for the regularization of precarious migrants outside the asylum system. Secondly, for a long time, the French migrant support movement has been much stronger and more cohesive compared to its German counterpart, connecting a wide range of professionalized human rights NGOs, grassroots organizations and trade unions. In Germany, in turn, mobilizations have long remained more scattered and localized until the “summer of migration” reorganized the promigrant civil society profoundly, which caught up to or even surpassed the French movement in both density and activity.

## Conclusion

The historical, discursive and regulatory contexts of precarious migration in France and Germany have significantly shaped and have been shaped by contentious episodes. Distinct administrative procedures regarding irregularity and asylum have also produced distinct grievances, on which individuals and groups have mobilized. In France, with its structurally undersized asylum accommodation system, as well as large established Francophone migrant communities and a more open job market, many precarious migrants have remained and mobilized outside the asylum system. Life in irregularity has been more complicated in the light of stricter controls in public spaces and on production sites in Germany. Therefore, the vast majority of precarious migrants opted for or was forced into the asylum system instead. Many also remained as individuals with *Duldung* in Germany when their asylum claim got rejected. Given the specific hardships of the German asylum system, numerous precarious migrants have protested against the asylum system with its detrimental effect on their (mental) health and social inclusion. In contrast to France, no large mobilizations by individuals self-identifying as undocumented

migrants have occurred. Public debates on both irregularity and asylum in France and, with a strong focus on the latter in Germany, have opened distinct discursive opportunities. These facilitated mobilizations for the regularization of precarious migrants outside the restrictive criteria of international protection. In France, interactions with and among trade unions and a diverse migrant rights movement have created a relational context in which the protests of undocumented migrants resonated. In Germany, in turn, the tight regulation of migration has contributed to the emergence of a migrant rights movement, which has strongly focused on asylum and has only in the course of the “long summer of migration” in 2015 reached a similar density and visibility to its French counterpart.

The four comparative case studies of precarious migrant protest scrutinized in the subsequent chapters mirror these two distinct national contexts, which influence on the opportunities, resources and strategies of contentious actors. Yet, the chapters also document that dynamics of protest are as much influenced by these contexts, as they are by concrete interactions of players in the complex protest arena.

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### 3. Fragile Alliances

#### The Bourse du Travail Protests, Paris, 2008-2010

“The *sans-papiers* are in the front row. The *sans-papiers* are the first victims. The supporters and the associations must not leave us aside; this is our struggle. We are the ones who know our difficulties, our situation. The *sans-papiers* must understand that the struggle of the *sans-papiers* is their own struggle.”

#### Abstract

In May 2008, three *sans-papiers* collectives occupied the Bourse de Travail in Paris, the headquarters of the CGT trade union. This was the start of one of the largest precarious migrant protests in recent French history. The *sans-papiers* protested against the trade union push for leadership in a movement previously self-organized by migrants. Analyzing the interactive dynamics in these protests, the chapter carves out a key aspect of such precarious mobilizations: the fragility of ties both between migrants and allies as well as within heterogeneous precarious migrant collectives.

**Keywords:** Paris; *sans-papiers*; alliances; migrant protest; trade unions

After the highly contentious St. Bernard church protests by undocumented migrants starting in 1996 and lasting roughly until 2002, the visibility of self-organized protest by migrants in Paris temporarily faded (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016). The so-called *circulaire* Chevènement of 1997 had formalized a “case-by-case” approach of regularization. Various *sans-papiers* collectives had organized protest events but they increasingly focused on direct and often secret negotiations with the respective prefect’s office to obtain regularization for their members.

1 Quoted in CSP75 (2008b), author’s translation.

This relatively routinized arrangement was shaken up profoundly in early 2008, when the second-largest trade union at the time, CGT,<sup>2</sup> launched a coordinated strike of *sans-papiers*. Aiming at a regularization of *sans-papiers* via proofs of employment, the trade union had since 2006 organized scattered strikes to pressure employers into issuing contracts for their illegalized work force. While being welcomed by many migrant support organizations, the intervention of the CGT spurred fierce opposition by *sans-papiers* collectives. Three of these collectives, including the Coordination 75 des sans papiers (CSP75),<sup>3</sup> which claimed the legacy of the St. Bernard church protests, occupied the Bourse de Travail, the headquarter of the CGT trade union, in May 2008. It sparked one of the largest precarious migrant protests in recent French history, which lasted for two years.<sup>4</sup>

Analyzing the interactive dynamics in these protests, the chapter carves out two key aspects of precarious migrant mobilizations: the fragility of alliances and the importance of autonomy. This constellation of actors, antagonizing a leftist trade union and the autonomous *sans-papiers* collectives, questions the “fiction” (Jasper 2014: 14) of a homogenous migrant rights movement. Targeting an increasingly influential player *within* a broader movement, the migrants involved aimed at underlining that their struggle was as much a struggle for rights including regularization as it was one for autonomy and recognition as autonomous political subjects. The chapter furthermore unveils the fragile nature of alliances within protesting migrant communities. Mobilizing within small “niche openings” (Nicholls 2014) to a regular status, precarious migrants often internally compete for rights and recognition. This leads to fissures within compound players, whose unity is difficult to sustain.

### Protest Emergence: An Ally Turns Opponent

Within the isolated and internally heterogeneous field of autonomous *sans-papiers* collectives, the CSP75 has held a central role since its official creation in 2002. Claiming the heritage of the St. Bernard collective, this umbrella organization of three collectives held something like a “monopoly”

2 Confédération générale du travail (General Confederation of Labor).

3 Coordination 75 des sans papiers is an umbrella organization of three *sans-papiers* collectives. The number 75 refers to the administrative department number of Paris.

4 Despite its longevity and numerical strength, the protests received comparatively little (academic) attention, not least because it unfolded parallel to the highly visible trade union-organized strike movement (Barron et al. 2011).

(Interview P29)<sup>5</sup> in the self-representation of migrant claims in the public sphere, at least in Paris. Weekly rallies and occasional occupations of public buildings combined with regular meetings with the prefect's office to discuss potential regularizations had introduced a mix, almost a routine, of disruptive and nondisruptive actions into migrant activism. The usual procedure of the collectives was that they created *dossiers* (files) on their members, collecting proof of presence on French territory, employment and family ties, to be submitted to the prefect's office. The order of submission usually privileged those who were regularly present during demonstrations. For this purpose, the members of the collective signed a list after every protest, which both added proofs to the files and guaranteed constant presence in the public sphere. The demonstrations and particularly the occupations – more than 30 between 2002 and 2008 (Laske 2009a) – were meant to render a structurally marginalized population visible continuously and to remind the prefect's office of the mobilizing capacity of a large undocumented population in Paris (Interviews P14, P22): “We march every Friday. Because when we march, we disrupt, if we do not disrupt, no one cares about us. We are invisible but always in danger” (field notes, 16 June 2017).

When the CGT launched a coordinated strike of *sans-papiers*, the situation fundamentally changed. Aiming at a regularization of *sans-papiers* via proofs of employment, the trade union had since 2006 organized scattered strikes to pressure employers into issuing contracts for their illegalized work force – mostly in the sectors of catering services, construction and cleaning. The 2007 Hortefeux Law on immigration reform opened an additional opportunity in this regard, as it introduced the employer as a key component in the process of case-by-case admissions based on economic utility (Kahmann 2015: 421).

Acting upon this opening opportunity, from early 2008 onward, the CGT and the migrant rights association Droits devant!! strategically targeted emblematic locations to attract the broadest visibility possible (Kahmann 2015). Among them was La Grande Armée, a luxurious restaurant in the heart of Paris, which was regularly frequented by the political elites, including members of the ruling government (Le Monde Online 2008). Most of the established players in the migrant protest arena in Paris, such as GISTI, LDH and Cimade, predominantly welcomed the involvement of the CGT and particularly the new dynamic as a “turning point” in mobilizations for the rights of undocumented migrants.<sup>6</sup> They had even created a working

5 A list of interviews can be found in the Appendix.

6 See Carrère (2009); Interviews P8, P21, P29, P30.

group on “trade unions and *sans-papiers*” (Carrère 2009) to coordinate their cooperation. During the mobilization, a new compound player referred to as Les Onze<sup>7</sup> (The Eleven) emerged, comprising of both migrant rights associations and trade unions.

Encouraged by the substantial media coverage and positive responses received in April 2008, a coordinated strike movement was initiated by the CGT, particularly its Parisian branch, the Union départementale de Paris. Rapidly, the strike movement introduced the notion of the “*sans-papier* worker,” framing undocumented migrants as a productive and well-integrated part of French society. This association with labor struggles also had a strategic component, as it naturally strengthened the role of trade unions in contentious migration politics around migration,<sup>8</sup> who had previously mainly operated as logistic support for autonomous *sans-papiers* collectives (Kahmann 2015).

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

The CGT and also Droits devant!! had provided logistical and ideational support for the *sans-papiers* collectives, at least since the St. Bernard protests in the second half of the 1990s (Cissé 2002; Diop 1997; CSP75 2008a). Consequently, the CSP75 had at the beginning enthusiastically welcomed the initiative by the two organizations and hoped for a concerted pressure

7 The group consisted of the trade unions CGT, CFTD (Confédération française démocratique du travail, French Democratic Confederation of Labor), FSU (Fédération syndicale unitaire, Unitary Trade Union Federation), Solidaires, UNSA (Union nationale des syndicats autonomes, National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions), and the human rights associations Autre monde, Cimade, Droits devant!!, Femmes égalité, RESF (Réseau éducation sans frontières, Network for Education without Borders) and LDH (Veron 2011).

8 For a detailed analysis of the strike movement, see Barron et al. (2011).

for the benefit of all *sans-papiers* (Barron et al. 2011; CSP75 2008a). The *sans-papiers* collectives, hence, joined the strike pickets of the CGT, yet, they were encouraged by the trade union to organize their own, independent strikes. However, as they routinely submitted files to the prefect's office, they were rejected on the premise that the prefect's office was busy dealing with CGT files. Encouraged by the prefect to join the activities of the CGT, the CSP75 envisaged not only the endangerment of migrant autonomy and leadership in *sans-papiers* mobilizations, but also feared losing their bargaining power with the state altogether (Interviews P22, P29, P30). The CSP75 felt deliberately sidelined and noted: "They think we are kids. We have understood that there was an agreement to block our movement. We were betrayed" (CSP75 2008a, author's translation).

Outraged, more than 200 *sans-papiers* deviated from their traditional weekly demonstration route on 2 May 2008, and occupied the court and staircases of the historical labor house Bourse du Travail, the headquarter of the Paris branch of the CGT, which had initiated the strike movement (Remande 2008; Le Monde Online 2008). The occupation soon involved more than a thousand *sans-papiers* from various origins, mostly West and North African. Among them were men, women and children with diverse migration histories united by precarious lives. Some had arrived in France as political refugees and became undocumented later, and others were rejected asylum seekers or overstayers of a tourist or student visa (CSP75 2008a, 2008f, 2008g). Targeting and exerting pressure on one of its long-term allies, the CSP75 demanded the CGT to either include them in their activities or leave the protest arena of undocumented migrant activism.

### **Protest Incubation: Interactive Dynamics at the Bourse du Travail**

The protest arena initially consisted of four main compound players: the trade union CGT, the various "associations" (mostly referred to as one compound player), the CSP75, and the French executive, mainly represented by the prefect's office. Various players split in the course of the mobilizations, and others entered the arena at a later stage. During the occupation, immediately, an agitated atmosphere unfolded between the *sans-papiers* and the CGT, resulting in a highly antagonistic rhetoric: "The CGT has taken our movement hostage. We've taken the Bourse du Travail hostage" (*sans-papiers* spokesperson cited in Remande 2008, author's translation). In a public statement, the CSP75 further clarified: "Among our conditions is that, once and for all, the orchestrated infantilization of an autonomous



movement has to stop. We are upright men and women, responsible and capable of taking our movement into our own hands. We have our dignity” (CSP75 2008a, author’s translation).

For the CSP75, the involvement of the CGT in contentious migration politics was not only a question of leadership, but an assault on their proud tradition of autonomy since the St. Bernard protests. The CSP75’s view that the CGT tried to strategically undermine the collectives’ leadership was well-founded. With the strike movement, the CGT had explicitly aimed at gaining control of the *sans-papiers* movement, which they considered to be dominated by inefficient autonomous collectives with a focus on hunger strikes and the occupation of public spaces. The organizers of the CGT viewed particularly the hunger strikes critically as a “sordid, individual mode of action, based on an apolitical human rights discourse” (Kahmann 2015: 420). Instead, following its mandate, the CGT aimed at redirecting the movement toward a focus on labor. This also allowed for limiting the engagement to those migrants already present on French territory without engaging in highly contested claims on less restrictive immigration policies. To mark its difference compared to previous mobilizations, the CGT used the term “*sans-papiers*” only in combination with the qualifier “worker” (“*travailleurs sans papiers*”). One of the trade union organizers at the time recalled:

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

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

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

To justify their recognition and newly acquired privileged status in negotiating with the state, the CGT pushed for effective leadership. Unlike in preceding mobilizations, migrants were gradually excluded from the decisions and the process was steered by a small core of white and male trade union organizers (Kahmann 2015: 420; Interview P29): “Well, [in the CGT] there are many who are socialized in a political tradition – very Marxist, centralist, a bit Stalinist you could say. They really wanted to be in control of the strike movement” (Interview P29).

Kahmann highlights the socialization of the main organizer, too, who “was an ex-public transport mechanic in his 60s with a marked background in revolutionary Communism” (2015: 417). Accordingly, the CGT organized the strikes their way: hierarchically, outcome oriented and with profound skepticism toward self-organized migrant collectives. Particularly, they showed little sensitivity regarding racism, emancipation and the lengthy struggles fought by *sans-papiers* for autonomy from nonmigrant French supporters of all kinds:

The CGT organized this movement [...] secretly. [...] Hence, it is true that the collectives at the time felt left aside. But it was also them who had a bit the monopoly in the struggles and I think an actor like the CGT, who enters the movement, could be also seen as a rival. [...] I think there is this entire discussion, that unfolded in the movement of *sans-papiers* – the question as to whether the struggles should be totally autonomous [from the French supporter community]. And it is true that the fact that the trade union entering the movement could be perceived positively by many, but regarding the idea of autonomy, it shakes up the idea of autonomy. (Interview P29)<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, the CGT and the CSP75 – two compound players with highly distinct visions of the movement regarding strategy and leadership – entered into a contentious interaction. While the CGT had an institutional interest in the leadership of the movement and an output-oriented strategy, the CSP75 viewed their mobilization as an emancipatory process to gain recognition as political subjects and at modifying the power relations vis-à-vis nonmigrant pro-beneficiaries. Additionally, the CGT’s focus on collective strikes at the work places de facto meant the exclusion of large parts of the constituency of the CSP75, including all “isolated workers” without the option to pressurize collectively, as well as the women, the elderly and the sick without a job.

9 See also Kahmann (2015: 422).

When the CSP75 demanded from the CGT to recognize their role, and also include nonworking and isolated *sans-papiers* in their negotiations (CSP75 2008a, 2008b), the CGT responded: “Our job is not to file applications based on family life or medical condition, etc. We are a labor union” (cited in Barron et al. 2016). While the CGT reiterated its strategic focus on the positive category “worker,” the CSP75 leadership and its members saw their “niche” toward regularization shrinking. The CGT intervention, hence, constituted a broad threat for their communities and identities, but also a direct threat to themselves and their personal interests.

In addition to the trade union and the CSP75, there was a third type of compound player involved: the myriad of “associations” engaged in migrant support with a historically ambivalent relationship to the *sans-papiers* collectives. Due to the success of the strike movement in terms of visibility and the first successful regularizations, most associations reacted with irritation to the occupation, noting that the CSP75 had chosen the “wrong target.” Instead they recommended dissolving the nonstop picket (Barron et al. 2014; CSP75 2008a) in order to prevent the fragmentation of what they considered the broader “migrant rights movement.” A representative of RESF stated: “They should target the Ministries of the Interior or Integration, not the CGT. Those really responsible [for the misery of undocumented migrants] are inside the government, not outside. An occupation is a hostile action. While we are dividing ourselves, the government is rubbing their hands with glee” (cited in Fouteau 2009, author’s translation).

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

The *sans-papiers* are in the front row. The *sans-papiers* are the first victims. The supporters and the associations must not leave us aside; this is our struggle. It is we who know our difficulties, our situation. The *sans-papiers*

must understand that the struggle of the *sans-papiers* is their struggle. (Public statement at a meeting of various collectives in the occupied Bourse du Travail: CSP75 2008b, author's translation)

Given also the long history of conflicts on questions of representation in the French migrant rights movement (Cissé 2003), the intervention of the CGT touched upon a highly sensitive point. Accordingly, the tone, at times, became extremely hostile:

We have had enough of the trade union's colonialism! [...] The *sans-papiers* of the CSP75 have the impression that they have been constantly exploited and got nothing in return. Nowadays in France, with the trade unions we thought of as our friends, it is just like in Africa in colonial times – it is like what our parents told us about. (CSP75 2008f, author's translation)

The longer the occupation and the stalemate lasted, the more the migrant associations felt irritated by the CSP75's irreconcilability (Fouteau 2009; Interviews P7, P21, P29). None of the numerous mediations were successful, as the occupants wanted to prove a more fundamental point, an "act of emancipation" against what they perceived an outrageous assault on their dignity. One of the activists involved at the time recalled: "The CSP75 has a very proud if not jealous tradition of their autonomy, which was also something that produced a lot of conflict. The CSP75 decides to do something. If you do not follow, they do it alone. There was not much compromise" (Interview P7).

Even though many associations rejected the strategy of the CSP75 and criticized what they considered an unwillingness to find "pragmatic solutions" (Interviews P29, P30), they found themselves in an extremely awkward position. While they appreciated the efforts by the CGT, they refrained from outspoken criticism against the CSP75 (Interview P21). While the CGT and the CSP75 blamed each other, the prefect's office remained almost entirely out of focus: "For the prefect's office, it was a dream. It was the self-destruction of a movement. Everyone blaming each other. It was an inferno!" (Interview P7).

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

In summer 2008, the Bourse du Travail occupation had around 1,300 participants, including various families (Bonal 2008; Ginésy-Galano

2009). To sustain the occupation for months, efficient structures of self-organization were set up. Mattresses and cardboard were used in shifts, money decentrally collected and food prepared for all occupants, mostly by the women involved in the occupation (CSP75 2008c; Ginésy-Galano 2009). As one of the CSP75 organizers at the time noted in an informal conversation, the protestors sustained the occupation “à la Africaine” (“in the African way”) in the absence of external support (field notes, 16 June 2017). Through the use of this expression, he was referring to the experience of organizing subsistence and also political activism under precarious conditions with scarce resources. He also pointed at the existing internal resources of the *sans-papiers*, including the cultural capital of the CSP75’s leading figures.

Firstly, some of the CSP75 organizers had been living in France for many years. One activist was even involved in the St. Bernard mobilizations in 1996 and was regularized in 2006 (after thirteen years in France) but decided to stay involved in the *sans-papiers* collectives, “to provide a connection” to previous mobilizations and experiences (Halissat 2016, author’s translation). Others had spent several years in France as legal residents, including as political refugees, and had subsequently become undocumented through legal reforms. Accordingly, they had accumulated crucial knowledge on political activism, legal and administrative processes and social capital. These figures served as “entrepreneurs” or “brokers” for the movement, crucial for compensating or buffering the structural obstacles of political mobilization in a condition of illegality.<sup>10</sup> The memories of disappointments were the other side of the coin in this regard, since many of those with a more extensive history of activism in France transmitted frustrations from previous interactions with various compound players in the migrant rights movement. Secondly, the occupants could rely on a strong sense of solidarity, particularly within the Sub-Saharan and North African migrant communities in Paris. These social networks had ever since buffered some of the hardships experienced by those living a life in irregularity in the French capital (France Inter 2015). The migrant workers’ *foyers*, social housing complexes mostly located in the Parisian periphery, had for a long time become essential nodes in these social nets; as access points for newcomers, as reservoirs of information and social capital but also for the provision of basic needs such as precarious shelter and

10 See also the chapter by Freedman, who has equally pointed to the role of “brokers” with specific resources in undocumented migrant activism in France (Freedman 2008). Zepeda-Millán (2016) traces similar patterns in the United States.

food (France Inter 2015; Laske 2009a; Halissat 2016). Due to these internal resources, individuals within these networks, and to a certain degree also the *sans-papiers* collectives, have been less dependent on external support.<sup>11</sup> The embeddedness in the migrant networks and particularly the *foyers* were important spaces to mobilize participants and resources for the occupation of the Bourse du Travail, necessary to guarantee its continuation (CSP75 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008e). Thirdly, and related to the two previous types of resources, the occupying *sans-papiers* originated from a wide range of countries. Yet, including the spokesperson, they were Francophone, by majority, which allowed them to communicate with the local media and supporting citizens directly. Consequently, despite a continuous and at times deepening alienation of the CSP75 with both the associations and the CGT (Fouteau 2009), the protesters succeeded in sustaining the occupation and reaching out to external players. In the so-called “*débats sur matelas*” (“mattress debates”) – referring to practice of placing all the sleeping mattresses for the occupants in one room of the occupied building – the protesters shared experiences of a life in irregularity, discussed the strategy of the struggle, but also met potential supporters and allies. Every Wednesday a protest march was organized from the occupied building to the prefect’s office, and every Friday a demonstration took place in front of the occupied Bourse du Travail (CSP75 2008b 2008; Ginésy-Galano 2009; Interview P15). With the “exits,” as they called it, the protesters aimed at sustaining visibility and disruption. As the organizers noted, “If you plant a tree, you have to water it. The demonstrations are our water” (CSP75 2008d, author’s translation).

### Interactive Dynamics at Rue Baudelique

In June 2009, after fourteen months of occupation, during which the CGT had no functioning headquarters and accepting that no significant rapprochement was taking place between the competing compound players, the CGT ordered the eviction of the premises. When the majority of the occupants had left for one of their regular demonstrations, the security services of the CGT entered the Bourse du Travail with batons and tear gas and, according to

11 This has importantly distinguished members of the West African migrant community from the newly arriving migrants coming from other regions, who were without established networks and therefore remained entirely dependent on French supporters in the La Chapelle protests scrutinized in Chapter 4.

the newspaper *Le Monde*, “brutally” evicted the *sans-papiers* (Van Eeckhout 2009). In a press release, the CGT Paris remarked:

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

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

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

In the media, the CGT reiterated its position, justifying the eviction with a need to re-establish order, and focused on the strike movement “in the front row for the regularization of *sans-papiers*” (cited in *Le Monde Online* 2009). While the CGT had succeeded achieving the regularization of more than 2,000 *sans-papiers* since the initiation of strikes (CGT Paris 2009a), it was exactly its position “in the front row,” and the authoritarian push for leadership, that caused the protest in the first place. An activist involved at the time as a representative of an association, who later became a CGT trade union organizer, recalled:

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

The eviction left the migrant rights movement in Paris more fragmented than ever (Fouteau 2009). Hundreds of precarious migrants, including entire families, found themselves stranded on the sidewalks of the Rue du Temple in central Paris. With plastic tarps and mattresses, a makeshift camp took

form within sight of the CGT headquarters (CSP75 2009). By being expelled from the Bourse du Travail, and hence by disrupting the public with an (improvised) protest camp, the former occupants re-emerged as a contentious issue on the agenda of the prefect's office, which had deliberately kept a low profile in the previous months. Moreover, the violent intervention had temporarily reattracted widespread media coverage (Laske 2009b; Fouteau 2009). Troubled by this new politicization, and to avoid the perpetuation of the makeshift camp in the streets of Paris, the prefect's office offered the CSP75 to treat 300 cases "benevolently" under the condition that the group dismantled the camp (Fouteau 2009; Laske 2009b).

The offer fundamentally deepened internal divisions, which had already started within the occupied Bourse du Travail (CSP75 2016; Interviews P7, P29). Given the fixed number of cases referred to by the prefect's office, immediately conflicts emerged on the selection of the 300 files out of the roughly 1,300 protesters, all exhausted by months of protest in precarious conditions and deeply afraid of missing this opportunity for regularization. One of the dissidents, criticizing the CSP75 leadership, noted:

The delegates of the CSP75 have secretly created a list of names [of individuals to receive regularization] and when the first meetings at the prefect's office started, we realized that there were names [on that list of people whom] we did not even know, who had never been present during the occupation, the demonstrations and now on the sidewalk. (Quoted in Van Eeckhout 2009, author's translation)

In addition to those who did not appear on the list, there were also those who knew they would never qualify under the official criteria of regularization on economic grounds and had therefore chosen to participate in the occupation as a last resort (CSP75 2009, 2010). As a result, the protesting group experienced its first split into various competing players, when about a hundred protesters rejected the offer and decided to stay at the Boulevard du Temple. They rebaptized their group as the Collectif sans-papiers solidaire de Paris<sup>12</sup> (Van Eeckhout 2009).

Alongside some of the *sans-papiers*, various individual supporters looked for a way out from the impasse (Fouteau 2009; Laske 2009b). For many, a rapprochement between the *sans-papiers* collectives, the CGT and the migrant support associations was only possible on the condition that the former occupants cleared the sidewalks outside the Bourse du Travail. It

12 *Sans-Papiers* Solidarity Collective of Paris.



was believed that the immediate spatial confrontation with the CGT needed to be overcome in order to enable the antagonists to approach each other (Fouteau 2009). Consequently, in late July 2009, those former occupants who were willing to leave the sidewalks at the Bourse du Travail and who remained loyal to the CSP75 joined supporters of different backgrounds to occupy a large empty building complex in the north of Paris (NPA 2009; Laske 2009b). The supporters included factions of the CGT who had opposed the eviction of the Bourse du Travail and demanded to “find a place for [the protesting migrants], where they can breathe, gather resources and continue to make themselves heard, and to exchange with all the others in the same situation” (CGT organizer, quoted in Van Eeckhout 2009, author’s translation).

The protest arena, hence, was complemented with an additional location, which gradually led to a reordering of the main compound players involved, since some split, or left the arena, while others emerged on the scene. During the first moments of the new occupation of the former health insurance administration located on Rue Baudelique, these factional dynamics became evident. When some of the *sans-papiers* recognized a CGT badge on one of the supporting activists, they inquired: “Are you from the CGT? [...] Is the CGT finally willing to align with us? The militant answered: “The CGT is not a block from the basis to Thibault [secretary general, at the time], it consists of very different people” (cited in Laske 2009b).

Indeed, while the eviction had fragmented the occupants, it had also profoundly affected some of the trade unionists and associations, who criticized the CGT’s reaction (Interviews P7, P29). On the blog “Ou va la CGT?”<sup>13</sup> rank and file members of the trade union who deviated from the CGT position expressed fundamental criticism of the CGT leadership and declared their solidarity with the *sans-papiers* collectives (Ou va la CGT? 2009b, 2009a): “There is this contempt, flavored with paternalism toward our *sans-papiers* comrades, who demand to organize themselves; who want to lead their struggle themselves, without putting their destiny in the hands of trade union experts, of the CGT or whomever” (Ou va la CGT? 2009a, author’s translation).

The official position of the CGT, yet, remained irreconcilable. On several occasions, the trade union leadership reiterated that the eviction was without alternative and attributed the stalemate and conflict entirely to the CSP75:

After fourteen months of unfriendly occupation to say the least, and an avalanche of fierce accusations from the CSP75, it is difficult to re-establish

13 Translates as “Where is the CGT going?”

a normal relationship with those responsible until they have recognized that the occupation of the Bourse du Travail and the pressure on the trade union movement was not a good choice. They have to clarify their relationship with the CGT first. (CGT Paris 2009b, author's translation)

Directly after occupying the abandoned building in the north of Paris, the CSP75 activists baptized it the "Ministry for the Regularization of All *Sans-Papiers*," deliberately deviating from the CGT's focus on the "*sans-papiers* workers" (Barron et al. 2016). The enormous spatial capacity of the new protest headquarters of *sans-papiers* activism initially allowed for protest incubation. The occupation rapidly numbered several thousand members. A total of sixteen collectives (CSP75 2010) joined the movement, including 1,300 members of a collective of Turkish and Kurdish *sans-papiers*. Most of them had left Turkey for political reasons; however, they were never granted asylum and ended up undocumented (Bell and Dilber 2009). The weekly demonstrations and "mattress debates" continued in addition to a wide range of other activities, from political organizing to adult literacy programs and media workshops (Bell and Dilber 2009; Interview P30). During a national *sans-papiers* demonstration in October 2009, organized from the Rue Baudelique headquarters, more than 10,000 *sans-papiers* gathered (Libération Online 2009), which made it the largest demonstration by undocumented migrants in French history up to that point.

Yet, despite a high level of protest activity and positive experiences in organizing sixteen collectives made up of a total of 25 nationalities, the protests attracted very little public attention (CSP75 2010; Bell and Dilber 2009). The rupture with the CGT and the network of migrant rights associations had left the autonomous movement without their public voices. While proving their capacity to mobilize several thousands of precarious migrants and to organize an occupation without major internal conflicts for extended periods, they experienced a reduction in leverage vis-à-vis the state. In parallel with the occupation at Rue Baudelique, the CGT strike movement expanded further and eventually succeeded in achieving the regularization of several thousand *sans-papiers* (Barron et al. 2011). Both public attention and the priority of the prefect's office had shifted toward the CGT-led strike movement and the violent eviction had not lastingly damaged their reputation among influential players. Aware of this impasse and invisibility in comparison to the CGT-coordinated strikes of undocumented workers, the occupants of the building on Rue Baudelique announced a spectacular protest event in order to regain leverage: On 1 May 2010, protesters departed on a march from Paris to Nice, where the French-African Summit was to

be held at the end of the month (Maudet 2010). In choosing a long-distance march of almost 1,000 kilometers, the protesters symbolically aligned with previous marches by *sans-papiers* activists such as the march in 1997 from Angoulême to Paris (Siméant 1998). Furthermore, they intended to capitalize on the relational and demonstrative effects of eventful protest.<sup>14</sup> One of the organizers noted: “Since St. Bernard, we have needed to have a disruptive event every two or three years to maintain the visibility of our movement” (CSP75 2010: 12, author’s translation).

Various migrant rights associations took the opportunity to declare their solidarity with the march and by this, also intended to send a signal of reconciliation to the CSP75 (GISTI 2010; FTCR 2010; Médecins du Monde 2012). Despite this tentative rapprochement, the march did not result in increasing pressure on the prefect’s office. Some of the participants even argued that the direction of the march was strategically wrong, as it relocated the protest arena and deviated attention and pressure from the nucleus of contention from Paris to the French periphery (Interview P15).

### Dynamics of Fragmentation: Niches of Regularization

The tangible outcome of the Rue Baudelique occupation in terms of regularizations remained low, even after the eventful march. Indeed, the subsequent month unveiled the fundamental dilemma of *sans-papiers* activism: the prefect’s office had blocked the treatment of files by *sans-papiers* organized in Rue Baudelique until they had left the building. While protesting against the government, the *sans-papiers* depended on the state’s recognition. Under pressure to secure regularizations for their constituents, the CSP75 organizers signaled a willingness to make concessions. In their explanation of the envisaged end of the occupation, the CSP75 spokespersons noted:

The prefect’s office told us that they did not want its [constructive] relationship with the CSP75, established over the last ten years, to suffer or come to an end as a result of the occupation. They assured us that, if the CSP75 left on its own, the relationship would be reinforced and our files would be treated in a timelier way and benevolently. If not, the relationship would end. The CSP75 didn’t want this, since it would have undermined the work of ten years. (CSP75 2010, author’s translation)

14 For a more extensive analysis of the expressive and relational effects of the march, see the comparative research by Monforte and Dufour (2013).

Similar to what Jasper termed as the “rules dilemma,” the protesters found themselves trapped in rules they had aimed at changing in the first place: “Efforts to change an arena often end up following the rules of that same arena. Rather than ignoring it or using a different arena, an insurgent may end up embroiled in the arena’s rules for changing the rules” (Jasper 2008: 163).

Despite spectacular protests, the CSP75 still remained with the fixed number of 300 cases offered by the prefect’s office directly after the eviction from the Bourse du Travail. The CSP75 organizers were well aware that the decision regarding whom to include in the list of 300 individuals would once more introduce fissures in the movement. Nevertheless, their adherents also demanded tangible outcomes from the long and burdensome protest:

They [the prefect’s office] know in advance what they will obtain: the division and weakening of the struggle. This is because, on the one hand, the *sans-papiers* have been waiting for many years now. It is very human [to succumb to this kind of pressure], and they are not able to resist the illusory prospect of being regularized. On the other hand, those who know they will not qualify under the “criteria” [decided by the state] are not willing to end the occupation. (CSP75 2010, author’s translation)

As expected, the question led to fierce internal divisions and fragmentation inside the occupying group about whether the conditions set by the prefect should be accepted at all, and on how to select the 300 files. These conflicts resulted in another split when more than 700 *sans-papiers* joined a newly established collective named Les oubliés de Baudelique<sup>15</sup> (CSP75 2010; Interviews P15, P30). Many of the other collectives involved in the occupation criticized the unilateral decision of the CSP75 to end the occupation and to accept the deal offered by the prefect’s office. The formerly strong and well-organized compound player, which had sustained a highly diverse occupation for months, quickly disintegrated into its constituting subplayers. Their interests became fundamentally adversarial in the light of a small niche to regularization. One of those who opposed the agreement with the authorities and joined the new collective explained: “I don’t prefer the CSP75, nor the new collective. All I want is to know what happens with my case. It is important that the prefect’s office knows why others like me do not want to leave the building. It is because we do not know what is going to happen with our cases” (quoted in CSP75 2010, author’s translation).

15 The Forgotten Ones of Rue Baudelique.

The very logic of individual case assessment, the regulatory context, permeated into the microinteractions within the contentious arena. In the context of a closing window of opportunity, the CSP75 had an interest to at least secure some success for its own adherents. Others suddenly realized their marginal role within the protests and desperately tried to find an alternative. The government authorities, well aware of the delicate unity of individuals in highly precarious conditions, from which they want to escape at all cost, strategically exploited these fragile alliances. Even though *sans-papiers* had for years chanted during demonstrations “*le cas par cas, on n'en veut pas*,”<sup>16</sup> it was exactly this logic which fragmented the protests. Despite opposing the individual logic of regularization, the CSP75 and many other *sans-papiers* collectives were repeatedly forced into temporary cooperation with the state to obtain concrete results. On 7 August 2010, all the occupants left the building, bringing a two-year-long series of protests by migrants to a “painful” end (Interview P15).<sup>17</sup>

The termination of the series of protests at the Bourse du Travail and the Rue Baudelique left a deep mark on future mobilizations of precarious migrants in Paris. Interviewed seven years later, protagonists noted that it “left deep bruises” (Interview P22), and they described the effects as being “extremely painful” (Interview P15) and “profoundly damaging” (Interview P30). Some even referred to “the dirty memory of migrant struggles” (Interview P7). Directly after the eviction of the Bourse du Travail, the CSP75 had even spoken of a “black moment in migrant rights mobilizations in France” (CSP75 2009). These bruises had long-lasting effects. While tensions had been inherent in the migrant rights movement and particularly in the relations between migrants and “supporters” since the 1990s, the Bourse du Travail protests left the movement deeply divided: with rifts between the autonomous collectives in the St. Bernard tradition and the trade union-organized movement, between migrant support associations and *sans-papiers* collectives and within the *sans-papiers* communities. One former spokesperson of a collective involved in the Rue Baudelique occupation noted: “The Bourse du Travail episode was like the Paris Commune. There is no revolution after such moments. [...] Now, I have more contact with *sans-papiers* in Italy than in Paris” (Interview P15).

Disappointed by the role of the wider migrant rights movement, the CSP75 has even further cultivated the conviction that they could not rely on nonmigrant support groups: “We prefer being autonomous. We know that

16 Translates to “We do not want the ‘case by case’ logic of regularization.”

17 See also CSP75 (2010) and SUD Éducation (2010).

we are deficient, we make mistakes. But we prefer this to being dependent” (Interview P22). Another organizer noted: “Cooperation with the CGT? No way, they evicted us! We do not forget easily” (field notes, 30 May 2017). Aware of the counter-productivity of these conflicts, which eventually benefitted the state as their common adversary, various attempts of rapprochements were made. However, the interactionist memories sat deep, as the following account illustrates: “There was a meeting to organize the twentieth anniversary of the St. Bernard protests in summer 2016. [...] There were some, willing to move forward, but the old stories of the Bourse du Travail came up again. The stories of autonomy, of the CGT” (Interview P29).

Within the migrant community, the contentious interactions had lasting detrimental effects on unity as well. Distrust has prevailed, leaving the collectives highly fragmented. Since the end of the Rue Baudelique occupation, three different groups with the same name of CSP75 (CSP75 2016) have come into existence in Paris. A powerful mobilization involving several thousand persons splintered into different, much smaller groups, allowing prefects to continue their strategy of divide and rule, thus cultivating competition between the different groups (Interviews P7, P29).

## Conclusion

The interactive dynamics unfolding during the series of protest in Paris between 2008 and 2010 underline various aspects of relational fragility in precarious activism. Firstly, the very constellation of actors in the protests points to the fact that a “movement for the rights of migrants,” neatly connecting migrant rights associations, leftist trade unions and autonomous *sans-papiers* collectives, reifies a questionable homogeneity. These mobilizations are best understood as contentious arenas, in which a wide range of players with highly distinct interests interacted: the hierarchic and outcome-oriented tradition of CGT with an interest in placing the trade union in the limelight; the conviction of self-organized groups to be the only ones to speak for themselves; the unease of many associations with either of the two positions; and the prefect’s office, on which, eventually, all actors depended but who governed the fragile ties, predominantly from a distance. In such processes of precarious contention, players emerge, split and change sides. As this account documents, the CGT as well as several other associations, all considered to be allies of the *sans-papiers* collectives at least since the St. Bernard movement (Cissé 1998), lost their credibility and became temporarily perceived as key opponents.

Secondly, the analysis suggests that migrant mobilizations are often as much a struggle for rights as one for recognition as political subjects. Even if the intervention of the CGT might have favored a path to regularization, it was detrimental to the process of emancipation of precarious migrants. The series of strikes coordinated by the CGT and Droits devant! achieved the regularization of several thousand *sans-papiers* (Barron et al. 2011). Yet, de facto, the intervention of the CGT introduced trade unions as a powerful intermediary between the state and the *sans-papiers* communities. By those *sans-papiers* with a years-long background in political organizing, this was perceived as a fundamental assault and a threat to the struggle for autonomy. Asymmetric positions of power, hence, introduced a sensitive breaking point in such fragile alliances. Alliances between *sans-papiers* collectives and pro-beneficiaries have been historically fragile, and have been repeatedly broken due to disputes regarding whom to focus on in campaigns. Hence, the experience of the Bourse du Travail and the Rue Baudelique arena fed into a tradition of widespread distrust for the CSP75 (CSP75 2008a).

Thirdly, as Nicholls has also convincingly argued, political activism of precarious migrants faces the structural dilemma of mobilizing within small “niche openings,” rather than political opportunities (Nicholls 2014). Such bottlenecks to regularization only allow for the passage of few, at the expense of the exclusion of others (Nicholls 2013, 2014). This poses particular challenges for internal unity, as despite a shared nonstatus, precarious migrants are highly heterogeneous in terms of their potential recognition by the state.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, parts of the protest movement split from the rest on two occasions, arguing that they had been “forgotten” and left behind. In sum, this chapter carves out the interactive dynamics in precarious mobilization, which are echoed and complemented in the three cases to follow.

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## 4. Precarious Resistance

### The La Chapelle Protests, Paris, 2015-2016

“I made my way [to France] to have a better future, and now we are stuck here. We have rights, too! It is not much what we demand. We are grateful to those who show solidarity today. Today is the first day of hope since I arrived in France. Today at this demonstration, I feel human again.”<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

In summer 2015, precarious migrants, mainly from the Horn of Africa and Asia, sought protection underneath an elevated metro line at La Chapelle, in the northeast of Paris. Dozens of tents, cardboard boxes and mattresses precariously accommodated several hundreds of protesters. From the moment the government intervened and broke up the makeshift camp, the situation, previously perceived as a humanitarian emergency, became increasingly contentious. This chapter scrutinizes the processes of political mobilization in the most disadvantageous contexts. It traces the visible and invisible acts of resistance by precarious migrants, incubated in autonomous spaces, such as makeshift camps and squats, where the interaction of migrants and supporters mobilized resources and temporarily created visible sites of contention.

**Keywords:** protest; asylum seekers; Paris; “bare life”; camps; squats

As an important transit hub for asylum seekers on their way to Great Britain, the French capital Paris used to be an important crossroads, where migrants seeking asylum rested for some days or weeks, but rarely settled for long. Most, eventually, headed further north toward Calais, trying to cross the English Channel, hidden in trucks or trains. Political mobilizations in support

<sup>1</sup> Field notes, 10 June 2017, author’s translation.

of and by asylum seekers, hence, primarily concentrated at the French border zones such as Calais and Nice. In many cases, migrants and their supporters mobilized in reaction to obstacles blocking the continuation of their journey, rather than demanding inclusion in France. In other words, most opted for “exit” instead of “voice.”

The situation fundamentally changed in the context of the crisis of European migration politics in 2015, when precarious migrants, mainly from the Horn of Africa and Asia, arrived in the city. In the absence of governmental assistance, they sought protection underneath an elevated metro line at La Chapelle, in the northeast of Paris. Dozens of tents, cardboard boxes and mattresses precariously accommodated several hundreds, eventually. From the moment the government intervened and broke up the makeshift camp, the situation, previously perceived as a humanitarian emergency, became increasingly politicized. A series of protests unfolded with and around individuals in highly precarious situations: homeless in the streets, abandoned by the state and dependent on the support of civil society actors. Against this background, the chapter scrutinizes the processes of political mobilization in the most disadvantageous contexts. It traces the visible and invisible acts of resistance, incubated in autonomous spaces, such as makeshift camps and squats,<sup>2</sup> where the interaction of precarious migrants and supporters mobilized resources and created visible sites of contention.

### **Protest Emergence: Politicization of a Humanitarian Crisis**

From the second half of 2014 onward asylum seekers – mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, and Sudan – started to gather underneath a metro bridge at La Chapelle station. In spring 2015 a makeshift camp had emerged, precariously accommodating more than a hundred individuals (Baumard 2015). Neighbors and humanitarian organizations jumped in to compensate for the vacuum left by an absent state and provided basic needs such as tents, mattresses, clothes and food (Interview P2, P10). As asylum seekers, many of those gathering under the metro bridge were formally entitled to public services by the French state. Yet, the situation unveiled a structural deficit. Considering itself mainly as a transit country for asylums seekers and deliberately intending

2 This book uses the term “squat” when the subversive appropriation of a building includes an element of providing shelter for precarious residents. If the purpose is mainly disruptive and protest oriented, it is referred to as an “occupation” (see Chapter 3 on the occupation of the Bourse du Travail).

to avoid creating a “pull effect,” France has been known for its chronically undersized system of asylum accommodation. A couple of numbers suffice to underline this fact: similar to other European capitals, the capital region of Île de France has for many years been a hotspot for arrivals and asylum applications. Nevertheless, in 2016, the entire region held a capacity of fewer than 9,000 places<sup>3</sup> for asylum seekers (Préfecture de Police Île de France 2016) for more than 18,000 asylum applications in 2015 alone (OFPRA 2016). Despite the structural causes of the makeshift migrant camps emerging in the French capital from summer 2014 onward, in the beginning, the situation was mainly perceived as a humanitarian emergency. Neighbors, shocked by these precarious existences at their doorsteps, organized the provision of basic needs and reached out to humanitarian professionals involved in care work.

The summer of 2015 initiated fundamental changes. With increasing arrivals of asylum seekers, the makeshift camp at La Chapelle grew further. Despite widespread support from the neighborhood with its dense associative networks, the conditions in the camp deteriorated – due to a lack of sanitary facilities and, more generally, overpopulation in an extremely limited space, squeezed in between two busy streets. After a months-long absence, and following increasing media coverage, public authorities intervened on 2 June 2015, with an evacuation of the makeshift camp (Sabot 2015), pointing at risks to public health and order (Préfecture de Police Île de France 2015). This first coordinated police intervention constituted a critical juncture, transforming a situation formerly perceived as a humanitarian emergency into a protest arena, in which a plethora of players interacted.<sup>4</sup> During the dismantling of the camp, police forces blocked the area and transferred all migrants who were present at that moment with buses to temporary emergency shelters throughout the entire region of Île de France. Two humanitarian organizations involved in service provision for the government, France terre d’asile and Emmaüs Solidarité, co-coordinated the process.<sup>5</sup> Over 300 migrants were relocated and the area was subsequently secured to avoid reinstallation. More than half of the

3 This number includes those in CADAs (reception centers for asylum seekers used for the entire asylum procedure) and emergency shelters, which provide only short-term housing. See also Chapter 2 for further details.

4 A more exhaustive descriptive account of the developments can be found in the section on Paris included in the booklet published by the research project Babels (Projet Babels 2017).

5 While a cleavage between “humanitarian” and “political” organizations was already latent in the migrant rights movement in France prior to the La Chapelle arena (Monforte 2014), the involvement in the evacuations by the state further (mutually) alienated those two organizations from the grassroots movement.

evacuated persons were officially registered as asylum seekers in France and some had been already recognized as refugees under international law (Sabot 2015). Neighbors and activists who had been supporting the migrants during their precarious life in the camp observed the police intervention with suspicion, while some even tried to prevent the buses from departing (ATMF 2015; Sabot 2015). Particularly the strategy of dispersal applied by the public authorities without offering a sustainable solution for those in need of a roof spurred increasing resistance (Jaoul 2019).

Only a few hours after the buses had departed, precarious migrants started to gather again because they had missed the moment of transfer. On the evening of the first eviction, several dozen migrants and a handful of solidarity activists wandered around the eighteenth arrondissement of Paris, with mattresses and plastic bags containing their few belongings, in search of a place to spend the night. Food was collected through donations from various migrant-run restaurants and local grocery shops in the area (Interview P7). After two days, the group again counted around a hundred persons. Some had just arrived in Paris, others had returned to La Chapelle after a couple of days because their emergency accommodation had been only temporary or it was located remotely and cut them off from legal advice for their asylum procedure (Interviews P2, P9, P10, P20). For many of those providing support for the migrants in the camp for months, the intervention by the state had only aimed at hiding a structural shortage of asylum accommodation from the public eye (Sabot 2015; Jaoul 2019). Without a place to stay, migrants and a small group of supporters attempted to occupy the St. Bernard church, in an attempt to symbolically relate to the birth of the *sans-papiers* movement in the late 1990s.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, the attempt was prevented by the police and the migrant group eventually settled down around the corner at Esplanade Pajol, until the police intervened again on 8 June 2015 (Jaoul 2019). This time, the state displayed its force and sent the riot police, the *Compagnies républicaines de sécurité* (CRS), to carry out the evacuation (Jaoul 2019; Interviews P2, P13). The use of force against peaceful asylum seekers fueled a deep indignation among neighbors and supporters. It contributed to the emergence of an increasingly politicized network, which perceived the precarious living conditions as a concrete failure of state response. In the aftermath of the police intervention at Esplanade Pajol, the collective *La Chapelle en lutte*<sup>7</sup> was founded, involving a diverse mix of academics, radical left activists

6 See Chapter 2 for details.

7 Roughly translates as “La Chapelle in Struggle.”

and newly politicized neighbors (Jaoul and Makaremi 2015; La Chapelle en lutte 2015). Members of the collective noted in an op-ed in the daily newspaper *Le Monde*:

The refugees [...] were arrested en masse: more than 40 have been transferred to an immigrant detention center.<sup>8</sup> The eviction at Rue Pajol was of unprecedented violence, but the most shocking thing is that they have sent CRS units against around a hundred refugees in the streets, who are trying to survive, who need to understand where they are, what rights they have and how an asylum application works. (Jaoul and Makaremi 2015, author's translation)

With the collective La Chapelle en lutte, a heterogeneous and influential compound player emerged on the scene. In the following months, a cat-and-mouse game unfolded between the police on the one side, and migrants and supporters on the other (Projet Babels 2017; Jaoul 2019). The events always followed the same sequence: a critical number of migrants gathered in the absence of alternative accommodation, sleeping at times on layers of cardboard on the asphalt, at times on mattresses, at times in camping tents provided by neighbors and supporters. As soon as a camp became large enough to attract (media) visibility and cause a disruption to the "order of things," government authorities, in cooperation with France terre d'asile (FTdA) and Emmaüs Solidarité, intervened to provide a temporary solution for the inhabitants of the camp by transferring them to emergency shelters. Many of these interventions – called "evacuations," "evictions" or "raids," depending on the political leaning – were conducted with a considerable amount of force by the police and a subsequent confiscation and destruction of its constituting infrastructure (Interviews P2, P7, P10).<sup>9</sup> These contentious interactions with the state incubated the contention further, which rapidly expanded and also attracted experienced antiracist activists and leftist party representatives who had been largely absent as long as the situation was perceived as a humanitarian emergency.

Precarious migrants, supporters and public authorities subsequently held diametrically opposed interests concerning the emergence of the camps: the city of Paris and the police fundamentally resisted the establishment of makeshift camps as they opened up a visible protest arena in the public space, which raised the question of governmental nonresponse. Thus, in

8 Literally "*centre de rétention administrative*."

9 See also Jaoul (2019).



order to discourage their perpetuation, the municipal authorities refused to provide sanitary facilities or other basic infrastructure, such as mattresses, blankets, and the like. For precarious migrants, in turn, the grouping in camps constituted a strategy of protection and survival but increasingly also a strategy to pressure the government to take action.

The individual stories and backgrounds of the migrants living in the camps were highly diverse. Yet, many had spent long and tiresome periods of (trans)migration: some through the Balkan corridor, some through Libya and Italy before arriving in Paris. Among them a Sudanese student of business administration, who had in the context of the so-called Arab Spring organized protests against the former dictator of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir. Terrified by the repression in Sudan, he escaped to Libya, and finally made his way to Greece via the Balkan route. Arriving in Calais, he paid €1,000 to be smuggled across the English Channel in a truck, as he expected to find better chances of social inclusion in the United Kingdom, given his fluency in English. However, he was detected and prevented from crossing. With all his money gone, he was stranded in the makeshift “jungle” of Calais, where he fell sick and came to require medical assistance. In summer 2015, he returned to the French capital and ended up living in the streets. He concluded his story by saying: “France was not my destination, but it became my destiny” (field notes, 21 June 2016). Another example is a young man from Darfur, who crossed the Mediterranean in an overcrowded rubber dinghy. When he arrived in Italy, he encountered an overburdened reception system and the Italian authorities gave him money to continue traveling north. At the border between Italy and France, in Ventimiglia, he got stuck for weeks as he was repeatedly detected and sent back during his attempts to cross the border. Eventually, he reached Nice and moved on to Paris. Directly after he arrived in the French capital, he ended up in one of the makeshift camps (field notes, 19 June 2017). There were also many Eritreans escaping the indeterminate military service in the country and many young Afghans,<sup>10</sup> who had escaped organized crime, “mafias” as they called it, and the Taliban militias (field notes, 8 June 2017).

As diverse the individual stories prior to their arrival in Europe were, they became much more alike from the moment of arrival in Paris. Most were stranded in the northeast of the city, for various reasons. Firstly, with the two railway stations (Gare de l’Est and Gare du Nord), the northeast of Paris is the main “gateway to Paris” (Interview P11) and an exit point for

10 On the context of violence in Afghanistan, see Chapter 6 on protests in Berlin against deportations of refugees to Afghanistan.

those heading north toward Calais. Secondly, the main access point to the asylum system in Paris is located in this part of the city. In France, asylum seekers were until 2015 required to go to a so-called Plateforme d'accueil des demandeurs d'asile (PADA),<sup>11</sup> run by the nongovernmental organization FTdA, in order to make an appointment with the prefect's office where their asylum claims are officially processed. The PADA of Paris is located within walking distance of the two railway stations. Thirdly, the neighborhood has become well-known for having a large number of civil society organizations as well as exhibiting solidarity with refugees by providing for their basic needs. The names of the La Chapelle, Stalingrad, and Jaurès metro stations, hence, soon circulated within migrant communities. From spring 2015 onward, many asylum seekers waited several weeks to be registered in the PADA and sometimes several months for an appointment at the prefect's office. Others had already filed their asylum claim but were not provided with accommodation, given the structural shortage outlined above. Some were even recognized as refugees but were not able to find housing, given the lack of language competence and limited revenues.

### **Makeshift Camps as Spaces of Survival and Precarious Resistance**

In the absence of shelters provided by the state, migrants organized protection and survival in groups. Many gathered – often clustering along nationality and language – in the few public spaces providing minimal protection from both sun and rain, predominantly bridges, tunnels, and parks. With very scarce financial means, lack of information, and minimal French linguistic skills, the daily life for those (several thousand) living in the streets turned out to be extremely burdensome. “After I came back from Calais, I was tired of the long journey. I decided to stay. And I ended up in the streets. You have nothing more to lose. You have lost everything. You lose your basic human dignity” (Interview P20). Many had to rely completely on charity soup kitchens or the goodwill of French citizens. The hardship and frustration of living in extremely precarious circumstances is mirrored in countless testimonies:

I took the train toward the country I'd dreamed of visiting ever since my childhood. But in reality it was a real shock to find myself utterly dispossessed in the rain, cold and hungry in the heart of the so-called

11 Translates as “reception platform.”

“city of lights.” I’m sick and my health is not compatible with the suffering and the misery of the street camps. (Merhaba 2016b)

For thousands of asylum seekers from spring 2015 onward, basic survival and shelter became the main priorities. Reduced to being “human as such,” these individuals found themselves in a condition of “bare life” (Agamben 1998), stripped off or without access to rights, and in a state of exception, in which violence was rarely sanctioned.<sup>12</sup> The camps became a dehumanizing marker and sites of despair. Despite these dire conditions, the majority remained quiet, instead of protesting against their blatant exclusion and precariousness. They were trapped in a paradox. “[The life in the streets] means a lot of stress, but you do not have a choice. People say: stay calm, there are many like you in France. Keep quiet, eventually it will work out, be patient” (Interview P26).

On the one hand, many felt outraged by the nonresponse of the state (Interviews P7, P10). Yet, on the other hand, they were well aware of the ultimate dependence on the state to obtain shelter, assistance and ideally a regularized status. This legal and moral reliance is intrinsic in the system of international protection:

I have been a refugee two times in my life. Asylum seekers are in a fragile situation; often it is your very skin that is in danger. [...] You are not a political subject; you are a political object. I was active before I came here, and then here, there was this sense of not wanting to give a bad impression. This sense of: “I demanded protection from this state and I have to respect the state.” That is why there need to be extremely severe circumstances for a claims-making movement to come into being. (Interview P18)

The combination of “bare life” and the ultimate dependency on the state made the makeshift camps precarious spaces of survival. In the absence of established migrant networks from the countries of origin, including Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, and Afghanistan, migrants were de facto entirely dependent on the care work of neighbors and humanitarian professionals. Humanitarianism, in turn, clearly has contradictory effects on agency, as it both alleviates suffering and risks reproducing patterns of dependency, subordination, passivity, and apathy (Ticktin 2011; Fassin 2012).

Yet, as the trajectory of protests at La Chapelle documents, the makeshift camps gradually became more than spaces of survival. They transformed into

12 See Chapter 2 for details on the relationship between precarious migration and contention.

protest arenas, in which visibility could be generated and scarce resources mobilized. On the evening of the second large evacuation at Esplanade Pajol, the local community garden, Bois Dormoy, in the same neighborhood opened its door to the migrants from the camp who had neither been evacuated, nor been taken to a deportation facility (Derveaux 2015). Even though the association in charge of the garden underlined that they could only host the migrants for a couple of days, the space provided temporary protection from the constant policing of the previous days (Interview P7). In this moment of recovery, the garden served as a space of encounter and politicization for migrants and supporters. First general assemblies were held in which the different communities of migrants expressed their demands (Jaoul 2019; Interviews P2, P7). The violent police intervention had also expanded the set of supporting actors. Besides neighbors and those few activists who had accompanied the migrants since the first governmental intervention, political activists and politicians from left and radical left parties entered the protest arena as additional players (Mouillard and Durupt 2015; Derveaux 2015). In their op-ed in *Le Monde*, two supporters underlined the empowering and incubating effect of these early experiences in autonomous spaces:

These fights have shown the necessity of spaces, where migrants have access to associations and to the solidarity of the neighbors. [...] It is paramount to get out of the miserable situation in the streets [...] and the cold of administrative governance, which often categorizes arbitrarily and bans migrants from our streets, from our cities, from our lives. (Jaoul and Makaremi 2015)

After leaving the premises of the garden the diverse group occupied the abandoned firefighters' barracks at Château-Landon (Le Monde Online 2015), in close proximity to the previous sites of contention. During this action, profound conflicts emerged among the supporting factions, particularly between those with an autonomous tradition and those affiliated with parties (Interview P7; Jaoul 2019; Lamothe and Fischer 2015). While some of the supporters were the first line in the occupation, others attempted to discourage migrants from participating in order not to take risks. This in turn, spurred fierce resistance by other fractions, who qualified such interventions as paternalistic and against the deliberate decisions taken by the migrants themselves (Interview P7). The growing heterogeneity of the supporting players incubated the protest, yet, soon also resulted in conflicts on strategy, forms of action, and the role of migrants in collective decision making (Interviews P7, P28). Shortly after entering the barracks,

riot police blocked the building. Subsequently, in negotiations between the occupants and the town hall of Paris, an agreement was made. This resulted in the transfer of over a hundred migrants to emergency shelters (Le Figaro Online 2015a), where they were allowed to stay for a maximum of one week. The issue became further politicized thereafter, attracting the attention of high-ranking politicians. In a joint press release, Minister of the Interior Bernard Cazeneuve and Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo (both of the Socialist Party), accused supporters of “cynically exploiting for purely political reasons the dramatic situation of migrants” (Le Figaro Online 2015a, author’s translation).

Within a very short period of time, the camps and the presence of migrants had been transformed from a humanitarian emergency into a visible rupture of the political life in Paris. In this protest arena, a multitude of individual and compound actors with distinct, often opposing, interests and stakes interacted. Accordingly, after the occupation of the firefighters’ barracks at Château-Landon: “There was a lot of pressure on the camps. They lasted two, three weeks and then there was an evacuation. Then the conflicts in the solidarity movement started. I tell you this, because such moments mean something.<sup>13</sup> After that, it is very difficult [for participants] to work together again” (Interview P7).

Through these contentious interactions involving migrants, supporters, and government authorities, the camps were transformed from spaces of mere survival to sites in which precarious resistance sparked. Immediately following the occupation, migrants started gathering again in the neighborhood: individuals who had just arrived in the capital, those who had not been included in the agreement with the city hall and, after a week, some of those who had to leave the temporary shelter as well. Due to the increased media coverage and social media channels recently established to coordinate the scattered migrant support groups, the subsequent camps attracted a wide range of individuals and associations offering all kinds of services from food and tents, to language courses, legal assistance, and spaces for political exchange (Interviews P2, P10). The initial self-help arrangements of makeshift camps, hence, started to become also spaces of precarious protection, pools for resources and sites of recognition. The involvement of a wide range of actors criticizing the governmental nonresponse and providing resources altered the options for those precarious migrants, who were pushed toward a burdensome life in the streets. While interacting with all actors involved in the arena, the inhabitants of the camps were

13 Literally, “ça crée des trucs.”

never purely objects of care, political exploitation or governmental administration, as they were often presented. The makeshift camps constituted ambivalent spaces in this regard. On the one hand, the conditions in the makeshift camps served as important stigmatizing markers and reproduced marginalization. On the other hand, the camps opened niches for agency, through their protective, relational, and disruptive qualities. For most, the initial rationale for gathering in makeshift camps was a temporary means for basic protection, to stay in groups and to share scarce resources. Indeed, the individuals had all kinds of reasons for joining a makeshift camp, and even to avoid evacuation. Some saw it as a place for temporary recovery before moving on. Others expected better chances to access legal advice in central Paris compared to the remote emergency shelters (Baumard 2016c).

Nevertheless, the increasing politicization and the visibility of the camps gradually added a strategic element. Publicly displaying a social problem, the camps transformed protest arenas with a large audience, which became bothersome for the authorities and forced them to concede places in emergency shelters. Hence, the gathering of migrants, the presence of migrant bodies in the streets, attracted attention to the issue itself. It was in line with Butler's ideas on the performativity of assemblies (2015) being fundamentally political. In this vein, a migrant "who will not play his assigned role, who no longer stays in his place, who does not keep silent" (Agier 2010: 42) creates a rupture in the established order, and performs a "right to have rights." Indeed, many inhabitants of the camps certainly were not interested in the symbolic dimension of their disrupting effect. However, they were aware and willing to exploit it instrumentally: "The priority was to get a roof, so when the camp helps to achieve this, great – we do it!" (Interview P24).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in quantitative terms, the strategy to obtain shelter through camps and evacuations was highly successful: between June 2015 and November 2016, the north of Paris witnessed the emergence of dozens of makeshift camps, accommodating between a hundred to at times several thousands of persons. According to official sources, 21,728 (often temporary) places in emergency shelters were offered, following more than 30 evacuations of makeshift camps (Préfecture de Police Île de France 2016).

In addition to providing protection and exerting pressure on the government, the camps at times unfolded relational effects, generating trust among the diverse migrant communities, and mobilizing resources through social ties with individual supporters and associations (Jaoul 2015b, 2019). At many makeshift camps, language courses and legal advice were organized on the

14 Similar statements were made in Interviews P26 and P30.

spot, in this regard, providing more advantageous conditions than in most of the isolated emergency shelters offered by the state with usually poor access to services (Interview P30). Many returned regularly from remote shelters to the camps to access these crucial resources or eventually opted to move back for good (field notes, 19 June 2017; Interviews P26, P30).

As combinations of everyday survival and spaces of encounter the camps were sites in which public articulation of dissent by disenfranchised migrants sparked. In most camps, assemblies were held, often with translations into multiple languages (Interviews P7, P10, P30). Depending on the respective camps and their inhabitants, it was decided whether “silence” or “voice” was the preferred strategy to obtain accommodation and access to rights more broadly. The camps became arenas of internal debate and strategizing themselves: “Of course every camp was different, as heterogeneous as the migrant population. In some camps, the migrants wanted to do something politically. They are there and wait, and some want to use this time to do something. This offers a moment to discuss and organize” (Interview P10).

In the context of heavy policing, others considered public articulation of dissent as an additional risk in an ongoing or upcoming asylum procedure, or for the “Dublin cases,” increasing the danger of imminent deportation to another EU country (Interviews P10, P13, P23). In some camps, instead, the inhabitants chose to make their voices heard, organizing rallies and sit-ins, drafting flyers, or putting up banners with claims around the camps (Jaoul 2019). During these traditional protest events, both general dissent and specific demands were articulated (Jaoul 2019): signs showed slogans such as “we want human rights,” “there are no human rights in France,” “humans, not beast,” “stop Dublin,” “we demand asylum,” “we want dignity” (NPA 2015; Degeorges 2016; ATMF 2015; La Chapelle en lutte 2015). While the decision to act and the specific claims were developed by the inhabitants of the camps, the infrastructure, such as material for banners and megaphones, were provided by supporting individuals and groups. Public demands were not only articulated during demonstrations but also in print and online publications emanating from the camps. One of these communiqués read: “We are a group of migrants and refugees. We demand our rights as they are provided by the law. We camp in a square, at the moment, we are on a sidewalk. [...] We demand an acceleration and facilitation of the asylum process. That a sustainable and decent accommodation is found for refugees. We stay here until a solution is found.”<sup>15</sup> Testimonies and demands of this kind were either published on social media, the alternative media platform

15 Leaflet compiled during fieldwork.

*Mediapart*, or printed in the five issues of the grassroots magazine *Merhaba*, which had been created by migrants and supporters in the camps.

The temporary shift from silence to voice resulted from the interactions among a heterogeneous set of migrants as well as migrants and supporters in the makeshift camps. Over time basic trust, empowering emotions (of indignation rather than fear) and access to minimal resources could be achieved. Yet, these interaction involving highly diverse actors did not always unfold empowering effects. Not least due to the precarious living conditions, and a consequential instrumental reasoning. Accordingly, those inhabiting the camps did by no means always welcome the diverse mix of supporters with open arms, suspicious by the countless negative experience made.

[T]hey asked “but why do you come here, if you cannot do anything for me?” [...] [The migrants] see so many people, the police, the OFII,<sup>16</sup> FTdA, they do not know anymore, who is who, who does what. Some associations help us, others put us on a bus and take us to the middle of nowhere. Trust is difficult. In fact, it is only with a regular presence on the ground that you gain the trust of the people. [...] It helped us also that we have a lot of migrants in our group, who have been living in the camps, who work with us now. This facilitates trust building. (Interview P10)

While in some camps, the inhabitants opted for overt protest, in others, they explicitly asked supporters to remain patient and quiet. Often it depended on the subjective assessment of the advantages and risks of the respective strategy (Interviews P10, P24). Both remaining silent and expressing voice had become strategies, upon which migrants had a novel degree of choice. A young woman who lived in various camps and decided to join protest activities reflected:

[P]eople [referring to fellow migrants] attacked me a lot, saying, “Stop it, you will not get your case approved – they never give you papers if you are in an association or active, because in Europe they want people quiet. And if they meet me now, they say, “Still no answer from OFPRA? We told you, it is because you are involved.” (Interview P24)

The makeshift camps, hence, remained ambivalent spaces of both survival and precarious resistance. Due to their function as a space for civil society

<sup>16</sup> Office français de l’immigration et l’intégration (French Office for Immigration and Integration).



engagement, migrant agency and governmental critique, the camps encountered increased policing to prevent their emergence or were rapidly dismantled (Jaoul 2019). As protest arenas in public, space, the state attempted to impose its rules to break up contention.

### **A Migrant Squat as a Space of Incubation and Alienation**

Despite its strategic value, the cycle of makeshift camps and evacuations reached a deadlock. Only when larger camps emerged and attracted visibility, did the administration react with the provision of (often temporary) accommodation. Due to the continuing arrival of more migrants in the city and the return of those who had only obtained temporary shelter, no sustainable solution appeared in sight (Interview P23). To increase the pressure, by the end of July 2015, activists from the collective *La Chapelle en lutte*, who had already advocated for squatting in the firefighters' barracks at Château-Landon, together with several dozen asylum seekers, mostly from Afghanistan and Sudan, decided to squat in an abandoned school building (the Lycée Jean Quarré) in the nineteenth arrondissement (Interviews P23, P27, P28, P30). Besides providing shelter for migrants living in the streets, the squat was explicitly understood as a prefiguration of alternative migrant accommodation schemes – self-organized and centrally located (Coutant 2017).<sup>17</sup> Immediately after squatting in the Lycée Jean Quarré building, it was rebaptized as “*La Maison des Réfugiés*” (The House of Refugees). Accommodating around 150 migrants at the outset, the squat initially received overall supportive media coverage (Lamothe and Le Gohébel 2015; Lamothe 2015; *Le Figaro Online* 2015b). The city of Paris also declared it would temporarily allow the squat.

Due to its visibility, the squatted building initially had an incubating effect. Given the lack of alternative housing options for precarious migrants, the squat grew rapidly in size. In addition, the inflow of donations was immense at first. This was also due to the simultaneous diffusion of images of a deceased Syrian boy, Aylan Kurdi, which fueled widespread solidarity with migrants in Paris. For a moment, the squatted school absorbed this indignation and support by parts of French society. Usually, a simple post in social media channels or an information board displayed at the entrance sufficed to attract the material resources needed to sustain the place. The

17 The squat as a form of action to politicize (migrant) marginalization has a long tradition in France (Péchu 1999; Aguilera 2013; Bouillon 2017).

accumulation of resources, ranging from clothes to language courses, medical support and legal advice in addition to a solid roof further increased the squat's appeal for those migrants still living in the streets of Paris. Assembling a diverse mix of actors, similarly to the makeshift camps, but initially with more advantageous spatial characteristics (large building, a courtyard), the squat turned into a vibrant hub of social encounters and precarious resistance (Interviews P28, P30).

On the other hand, after a while, the building was bursting at the seams. Both overpopulation and a lack of internal organization of the temporary gathering of more than a thousand migrants increasingly spurred conflicts over sanitary facilities or the use of communal spaces (Interviews P23, P30; Coutant 2018). The building became a protest arena on its own, in which players tried to pursue their individual and group interest observed by an increasingly critical audience. Both media reports and the public authorities at the local and regional level subsequently shifted and predominantly pointed to the degradation of the place and suspected its exploitation by the radical left. Its inhabitants, more than a thousand migrants, were mainly portrayed as either victims of leftist activism or as a troubling mass. Yet, for those inhabiting the squat, the situation was highly ambivalent. Indeed, the squat unfolded highly contradictory relational and spatial qualities for the emergence and incubation of migratory dissent.

The very fact that the number of inhabitants in the squat steadily grew from the point of its establishment to the time they were evicted, illustrated – despite the dominant negative media coverage – that many migrants still considered it as the best among very poor alternatives. Many asylum seekers who had been assigned accommodation in emergency shelters spent the day in the squat anyway, often because that was where they could access resources they could not find elsewhere – including French classes, primary medical care, legal support and others' company. Such benefits were often hard to find in the remotely located provisional accommodation facilities offered by the state (Interview P30). Many migrants found space to develop a collective identity and engage in political organizing. Supporters, in turn, even those with a primarily humanitarian impetus, were confronted with the tremendous hardship of exile, disenfranchisement and poverty, experiences which they were unlikely to have experienced themselves. Accordingly, the space of the squat allowed for an intensified organizing compared to the makeshift camps in the streets. General assemblies were held with delegates from various migrant communities. Two large demonstrations were organized in the squat. Inhabitants worked on *Merhaba*, a movement

journal published in French, English, Arabic, and Dari in five issues in 2015 and 2016 to share testimonies, experiences, and demands (Interview P10). One of the young Sudanese who became increasingly engaged politically in the squat noted: “The people [...] were really enthusiastic to buy banners or write slogans. They were very responsive to the idea. They were eventually aware of their rights and wanted to take collective action to let people know that their rights were being abused” (Interview P30).

For those who wanted to express “voice” publicly, the interactions unfolding in the squat were initially beneficial. Given the heterogeneity of the squat, by far not all inhabitants were interested in any kind of visible protest activities. Similar to the makeshift camps, many regarded the precarious squat as a pragmatic solution for very concrete problems: access to shelter, to the asylum system and legal and social support. Indeed, many inhabitants of the squat maintained a profoundly skeptical attitude toward the politicized activists of the *La Chapelle en lutte* group (Coutant 2018; Lamothe and Fischer 2015). Some Afghans, for instance, thought that it was not in their interest to enter into confrontation with the state, as their chances of being granted asylum appeared at that time reasonably high. Once more, the delicate position of simultaneously challenging and claiming the right to asylum from the state became evident and led to conflicts over the confrontational agenda of parts of the supporters (Coutant 2018).

Whereas the first phase of the squat was predominantly characterized by an incubating dynamic, over time mutual alienation and exhaustion due to the precarious conditions prevailed. With a growing number of inhabitants, degradation and conflicts multiplied, which, in turn, accentuated divisions among the different factions of supporters, among the migrant communities and between public authorities and supporters. When the donations for the squat ebbed due to increasingly critical media coverage (France Info 2015; Simon 2015), the competition for scarce resources ever more frequently escalated to physical conflicts:

People were grouped according to nationalities. Rooms were divided and some did not let others enter. There was the Afghani room, the Eritrean room, the Syrian room, the Sudanese room, the Iraqi room – they were afraid of each other. It is true that there was no trust. [...] The situation there was also very stressful. People started to feel exhausted and they could not take it anymore. [...] They fought with each other because there was not enough space to sleep. People started taking the belongings of others. (Interview P30)

Furthermore, the relations with the neighborhood of the squat increasingly deteriorated over time. As Isabelle Coutant pointed out in her detailed analysis of the squat and its resonance in the neighborhood, the arrival of a large number of migrants added to the already existing challenges in one of the most underprivileged areas of the French capital (Coutant 2018). Indeed, the transformation of the abandoned school into a self-organized migrant shelter collided with plans to open a media lab for the local population in the facilities. Many neighbors considered it unfair that their area of the city was unwillingly dragged into bearing additional burdens. The visible overpopulation and degradation of the place fueled the opposition in the neighborhood but also among the local administration and the city of Paris.

Less than a month after its establishment, the squat had become predominantly portrayed as the emblematic result of ill-guided migrant support activism. Including the traditionally left-leaning newspaper *Libération*, which published a highly critical article on the squat, mainly criticizing the group La Chapelle en lutte for its dominant role and its “self-isolation” from both public authorities and the professional humanitarian organizations (Lamothe and Fischer 2015). Not least due to their exposure to the horrendous deprivation of many individuals inhabiting the place, the supporters in the squat had become increasingly critical toward the “placebo” response of the government and their role in creating the situation in the first place. In their view, media reports exclusively highlighting the existing and yet problematic conditions in the squat were merely reproducing governmental discourses aiming at discrediting migrant solidarity and hiding the underlying systematic failure of the government response (Jaoul 2015a). Indeed, the absence of shelters had pushed more and more migrants into the squat, which contributed to its accelerated degeneration. The spatial qualities and rules of the protest arena at the Lycée Jean Quarré differed from the makeshift camps in important ways: while the camps exposed a social problem and the failure of the state to a broader public, the spatiality of the precarious squat sealed in the problems and allowed the shifting of the responsibility to the migrant support groups.

Soon, the situation reached a stalemate. Relationships between La Chapelle en lutte and the state were cut. Notwithstanding, given the proliferation of problems in the squatted building, the migrant inhabitants increasingly demanded a sustainable solution. In reaction to the deadlock in negotiating a way out of the impasse, neighbors formed a new group, taking neither the side of the public authorities nor that of La Chapelle en lutte. The emerging new actor, Solidarité migrants place des Fêtes, was

mainly preoccupied with the social cohesion in the neighborhood, but also expressed its solidarity with the migrants living in the squat (Coutant 2018). Various attempts at mediation, involving representatives of the largest migrant communities in the squat and the local administration, failed. Eventually, the city of Paris issued an evacuation warrant. Almost three months after its establishment, on 23 October, the police evacuated the building, transferring more than 1,300 inhabitants to emergency shelters (Le Monde Online 2015). For many migrants living in the squat, but also for most of the supporters, the evacuation was a relief. The conditions in the squat had become untenable, external support had eroded and the external pressure on the squat had led to an internal fragmentation of the heterogeneous group *La Chapelle en lutte* (Interviews P23, P30). One of the squatting migrants summarized the dynamic as follows: “It was great that we occupied this place. We did not have an alternative. And we organized many things there. [...] But I was really happy when it was evacuated because it had become unbearable” (Interview P30).

On the one hand, the absence of the culminating place underlined its importance in hindsight. During the squat, the idea was born to create a self-organized migrant association, to ensure sustainability and self-representation (Interviews P20, P23). While the accentuating conflicts and everyday challenges in the overpopulated squat in the end absorbed everyone’s energy, the period after the evacuation proved to be even more challenging: “Afterward it was difficult because only 10 percent were in Paris and the rest was sent out of Paris. [...] When they moved to the emergency shelters and they were separated, a lot of this spirit was gone. [...] In the squat it was easier because everyone was in the same place” (Interviews P23).<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, the profound dynamics of alienation resulting from the contentious interactions in the squat left lasting ruptures. In the aftermath of the evacuation, *La Chapelle en lutte* fell apart, fragmenting into various groups and associations. Among them were the United Migrants, focusing on the asylum seeker self-organization *La Chapelle debout*,<sup>19</sup> which advocated a confrontational approach, and BAAM (Bureau d’accueil et d’accompagnement des migrants), which set up a political, yet pragmatic support association (Interviews P2, P23, P27, P28).

18 A similar point was made in Interview P30.

19 The Paris chapter of the nationwide *Nuit debout* movement unfolding in France in spring 2016 drew heavily from the resources and links established during the mobilizations around migration. Many members of the *La Chapelle debout* collective previously involved in the camps and the squat document this personal continuity (Interviews P23, P28).

## Fading Contention: Internal Division and the Humanitarian Governance

The end of the squat meant by no means the end of the protests. As in previous evacuations, some inhabitants had missed the moment and were not allocated a place in emergency accommodation. Others came back to Paris after a few days. Consequently, the cat-and-mouse game of street camps picked up steam again, involving both former inhabitants of the squat and parts of the supporters. Not least due to the experience in the politicized squat, the subsequent makeshift camps were explicitly understood as sites of contention (Degeorges 2016; Merhaba 2015c, 2016a, 2016b):

The mayor's office said it would accommodate us but it was a lie; some were taken but other refugees were left in the street. We need housing and documents. We're here [in front of the city hall] to find a solution to our situation today. Our priority is to have a roof above our heads. [...] They evacuated the others from the high school but we're still outside. The mayor's office lied to us. They broke their promise. (Merhaba 2015c)

Following yet another series of makeshift camps, La Chapelle debout together, with over 300 migrants, occupied another abandoned school building: the Lycée Jean Jaurès (Pouliquen 2016). Drawing from the lessons learned during the squatting in the Lycée Jean Quarré and its undoubted mistakes (Interviews P23, P27), the rules in the Lycée Jean Jaurès were much stricter and more self-organized involvement by the inhabitants was demanded. Moreover, La Chapelle debout intended to bridge the neat division between "refugees" and "*sans-papiers*" that had characterized the mobilizations at La Chapelle. Indeed, the well-organized *sans-papiers* collectives had, so far, kept their distance from the unfolding protests. One of the protagonists of the Bourse de Travail protests<sup>20</sup> noted:

We were there at the beginning, but the supporters did not want us there. They said: "This is not your struggle. These are asylum seekers and you are *sans-papiers*. This is something different." I said: "But half of them will be rejected and they will become *sans-papiers*." [...] [And] they said to the people there [precarious migrants at La Chapelle]: "Your situation is different; you have much better chances to get a residence permit!" [...] Anyhow. The thing is, we do not forget. (Interview P14)

20 See Chapter 3.

The distinction in asylum seekers and undocumented migrants was not only made by some of the supporters, but also by many migrants in the camps themselves. For those who aimed at refugee protection, mingling with the *sans-papiers* meant mingling with those who “failed” (Interviews P27, P29). While some of the precarious migrants intended to get into the asylum system as asylum seekers, the *sans-papiers* never had a chance or were expelled from this very system. In the light of their precarious living conditions and scarce resources, the established *sans-papiers* collectives observed with suspicion a concentration of resources around the “refugees” at La Chapelle at the expense of a visibility and support for “their” struggles (Interviews P14, P22).

Aware of these divisions, the La Chapelle debout group, whose members shared the criticism of categorizing precarious migrants, proactively invited the experienced collectives of undocumented migrants (including the CSP75) to join the squat (Interviews P28, P27). This time, the squat was not evacuated, but evicted by the police two weeks after (Baumard 2016b). In contrast to previous experiences during the series of protests, none of the inhabitants were transferred to emergency shelters, and instead many were directly taken to deportation facilities. The state showed its muscle, presumably because the squat risked becoming a site of even greater contention, given its attempt to bridge two networks of activists that were, so far, largely disconnected. Disillusioned by the heavy repression, the activists refrained from squatting afterward and the Lycée Jean Jaurès remained the last squat of the series of protests.

In order to prevent new camps, the government intensified the policing of emerging agglomerations of migrants in the streets, confiscating tents, mattresses and cardboard boxes but also setting up material obstacles. Open public spaces underneath metro lines, and various parks got fenced (Jaoul 2019). One of the migrants living in one of the camps observed: “They are about to set up barriers everywhere in the neighborhood. [...] Afraid of camps being set up again, they have closed the space under the elevated metro line at Stalingrad and they have fenced the Jardins d’Eole [metro stop]. They built a landscape of walls, like at the borders” (Baumard 2016a, author’s translation).

In the absence of alternatives, migrants continued to gather and they slept scattered on the walkways and parks with even less protection against heat, rain and cold (Interviews P2, P5, P8, P10). Including the established Médecins sans frontières (MSF), humanitarian organizations publicly denounced the “systematic police violence targeted against migrants wandering through the city” (MSF 2016). Given the tightened policing, migrants and the exhausted

and fragmented supporters encountered increasing difficulties to establish and maintain the street camps:

We are migrants. We are homeless. We are in the Place de la République. We cannot sleep. It's raining. Every time we put up tents [...] the police push us and take the tents by force. So we are staying in the rain and in the cold without cover all night. [...] We are not criminals. We want respect. We want rights. We want humanity. We want accommodation today. We will never give up until you accept our requests. We call on the people to help the refugees.<sup>21</sup>

In November 2016, the cycle of makeshift camps stopped abruptly. The city of Paris had adopted a new strategy in addition to policing to address the issue of both accommodation and contention. A large center of first reception for asylum seekers at Porte de la Chapelle was opened (Couvellaire 2016). From this moment onward, the center became the bottleneck into public services. Most migrants started settling around the center, hoping to get one of the 400 places. At the same time, the police controlled the outskirts of Paris even more fiercely, confiscating tents and putting massive boulders on the sides of the road where camps could be erected. Combining humanitarian governance and policing the state had taken over. Frustrated and exhausted, many supporters left the terrain, and the protests cooled off in the winter of 2016, even though hundreds of precarious migrants still remained without shelter and access to rights in the streets of Paris.

## Conclusion

The La Chapelle protests unveil dynamics of migratory dissent in most disadvantageous contexts. Reduced to a condition of “bare life,” precarious migrants got stranded in the streets of Paris, destitute and dependent on governmental and civil society assistance. Due to the precarious lives and dependence on the state, the forms of resistance that unfolded differ from other protests portrayed in this book. These precarious acts of resistance were rather instrumental, aiming at solving immediate individual problems such as access to accommodation and legal advice during the asylum procedure. Notwithstanding, in the contradictory spatialities of makeshift camps and squats, the contentious interactions with the police

21 Leaflet collected during fieldwork.



as well as a heterogeneous set of supporters allowed transforming feelings of indignation and dehumanization to be temporarily transformed into political mobilization. Despite the relational and disruptive qualities these precarious autonomous spaces unfolded, social ties with pro-beneficiaries and within diverse migrant communities were also highly fragile and prone to fragmentation in a context in which resistance is a mode of survival that necessarily prioritizes basic needs over long-term mobilization.

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## 5. Contested Spaces

### The Oranienplatz Protests, Berlin, 2012-2014

“In the morning, when asylum seekers wake up, they are scared of being deported. If they want to meet friends, the *Residenzpflicht*<sup>1</sup> prevents them from doing so. Everywhere in their life, hurdles exist, built by the state, because we are not meant to be part of society.”<sup>2</sup>

#### Abstract

In early 2012, the suicide of an Iranian asylum seeker in Würzburg initiated the most disruptive precarious migrant protests in German history. Starting as a spark of protest against the living conditions in one specific asylum facility in southern Germany, the dissent soon spread. Tent camps emerged in other cities and in September 2012, the scattered camps joined forces and organized a bus tour as well as a 600 km protest march to Berlin. This chapter analyzes how precarious migrants were able to raise public attention and mobilize asylum seekers and the media by moving from socially and spatially isolated locations into urban centers. In organizing central protest camps, marches and bus tours, they broke the routine of precarious migrant invisibility or victimization. In and through contested spaces, they temporarily succeeded in tapping the resources needed to sustain political mobilizations.

**Keywords:** migrant protest; space; protest camps; interactions; alliances; Berlin

Despite countless protest events, and more or less sustained organizational structures since the 1990s, precarious migrant protest remained at the margins of German society. National newspapers rarely reported on the activities and

1 Mobility restriction in German foreigners' law. See Chapter 2 for details.

2 Cited in Jakob (2013), author's translation.

solidarity was limited to the radical left and some faith-based associations. This changed fundamentally in early 2012, when the suicide of an Iranian asylum seeker in Würzburg initiated the most disruptive precarious migrant protests in German history. In reaction to their friend's death, fellow Iranians started to politicize the suicide, boycotted their food packages, and demonstrated in front of the city hall, demanding the improvement of living conditions during the asylum process, accelerated procedures, and an end to all deportations. To increase the pressure, the protesters left their assigned accommodation, set up very basic tents in the city center, displayed photographs of human rights abuses in Iran and declared they were going on hunger strike. Starting as a spark of protest against the living conditions in one specific asylum facility in southern Germany, the dissent soon spread. Tent camps<sup>3</sup> emerged in other cities, loosely knit together in the "Refugee Tent Action" campaign (International Refugee Center Berlin 2015). In September 2012, the scattered camps joined forces and organized a bus tour as well as a 600 km protest march to Berlin. In the upcoming months, until its dissolution in April 2014, the camp constituted the center of self-organized precarious migrant protest in Germany.

The trajectory of the protests furthermore clearly shows that the protesters did not react upon opening opportunity structures, as the traditional social movement theories would expect. Instead, their protest, emerging in the most restrictive regional context for asylum seekers in Bavaria, actively opened up opportunities. Yet, the account also illustrates the dynamics of fragmentation related to internal heterogeneity, volatile external support and precarious life conditions, which make protest hard to sustain.

### **Resisting Spatial Exclusion: Protest Emergence in Würzburg**

On 29 January 2012, the young Iranian Mohammad Rahsepar committed suicide in his room in a facility for asylum seekers in Würzburg, in the German state of Bavaria. According to fellow asylum seekers and Rahsepar's doctor, the miserable accommodation, lack of adequate medical assistance, and the insecurity and waiting in an isolated facility had gradually pushed him into depression (Jungbauer 2012). In reaction to their friend's death, fellow Iranians accommodated in the same facility started to politicize the suicide, associating it with the precarious conditions, structural disintegration, lack

3 The camps differ markedly from the makeshift camps described in Chapter 4, since they were primarily set up for disruptive purposes and not to provide precarious shelter as in the case of the La Chapelle protests.

of autonomy and limited mobility in the German asylum system. Indeed, an investigation following the suicide of Rahsepar in 2012 concluded that “the fact that someone commits suicide does not say anything. However, it is a system, exercising structural violence” (cited in Jakob 2016: 108, author’s translation). The respective collective accommodation center in Würzburg was, like many others at the time (Wendel 2014), a repurposed army barracks, located in an industrial area at the outskirts of the city, surrounded by highways and production sites, separated from ordinary social life.

While the spark of protest emerged within this restrictive and isolated environment, its continuation was strongly shaped by a relocation of the protest from the urban periphery to the city center. After a first protest outside the asylum facility, the protesters left their assigned accommodation, set up a very basic tent in the city center and displayed photographs of human rights abuses in Iran, to underline the legitimacy of their presence in Germany and the indignity of their treatment. Soon, the protesters were surrounded by a heterogeneous mix of actors declaring their support, ranging from members of the regional and national parliament from the Greens and the Left, anarchist and communist groups, the Iranian diaspora in Germany and local antiracist and faith-based associations (Grünberg 2013; Jungbauer 2012). The involvement of a radical supporting milieu from the outset, in addition to the local migrant rights scene, was not coincidental, given the biographies of several members of the core group of Iranians. Many had been engaged as students in the Iranian “Green Movement” against authoritarian Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009 and were prosecuted subsequently. Due to this background, they had some links to the Iranian exile community, and as Marxist students, an affinity to radical left-wing groups (Interviews B11, B22, B26). After a couple of weeks, the protesters increased the pressure and declared they were going on hunger strike:

We suffer from the extremely long asylum process that sometimes takes even years and we hope every day that the torture of uncertainty will change for the better. [...] This uncertainty, the fact that no autonomy is allowed to us in our daily lives, and that we are treated like prisoners, exhausts us and gradually – step by step – pushes us toward death. [...] Now, we are forced to use the last of all means available and go on hunger strike on 19 March 2012, to finally make our voices heard, and to be allowed a human life. (Hosinazadeh and Maorattab 2012, author’s translation)

Due to its central location and the radical tactic of a hunger strike, the unfolding protest arena immediately attracted the attention of the local



population, the media and asylum seekers from other cities in the region (Litschko 2012b; Przybilla 2012b; Jungbauer 2012). Set up in one of the central streets in Würzburg, the very presence of the asylum seekers in the public space constituted a rupture of the exclusive routine, leading to both open opposition of the protest and expressions of solidarity (Grünberg 2013).

The Bavarian minister of social affairs, Christine Haderthauer (CSU<sup>4</sup>), refused to meet the protesters – arguing that the state would not be “blackmailed” (Main Post 2012a) – yet the deputy director of the German asylum agency, in charge of refugee status determination (BMBF<sup>5</sup>), came for a meeting. The public exposure attracted visibility and resources for the continuation of the protest. Increasingly aware of this incubating effect, the municipality of Würzburg employed various tactics to get rid of the camp by imposing bizarre rules: First, the administration limited the amounts of chairs and beds allowed in the camp (Jakob 2016: 109). The administrative court annulled this prohibition shortly after. Furthermore, the municipality increased the control of those individuals who joined the camp in Würzburg but were officially registered in other districts and thereby subject to *Residenzpflicht* (restrictions on mobility) (Refugee Tent Action 2012).

The socialization of the core group of Iranian protesters in an authoritarian regime soon became both the force of their determination and an irritation to some of those acting in support. At the outset, many actors, including local politicians, supported both the forms of action and the demands of the protesters. Yet, this changed in early summer 2012, when the protesters further escalated the conflict. In an open letter, they reiterated their demands, which they concluded with the line “There is nothing more to say; everything has been said” (cited in Grünberg 2013: 166). After that, two protesters sewed their lips to underline their voicelessness and determination. Five other Iranian asylum seekers followed their example during the upcoming week. This choice of strategy had an ambivalent effect. On the one hand, the images of sewed mouths were diffused heavily in the German media, and the visibility of the protests expanded even further on a national scale (Augsburger Allgemeine 2012; Die Welt 2012; Przybilla 2012a, 2012c). On the other hand, the self-destructive means alienated parts of the players acting in support. The vice-director of the largest asylum-related NGO in Germany, Pro Asyl, criticized the timing of the escalation of protest

4 Christlich-Soziale Union (Christian Social Union).

5 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (Federal Office for Migrants and Refugees).

and noted that his organization had “immense problems with any kind of protest, which is directed against one’s health” (cited in Die Welt 2012, author’s translation). Also the Refugee Council of Bavaria, which was usually strongly supportive of the group, criticized these actions (Przybilla 2012c). Mathias Grünberg, a local politician for the Greens who had supported the protests for weeks, remarked in an open letter:

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

Simone Tolle, a member of the regional parliament for the Green Party, also distanced herself. She noted that the protest repertoire had not only alienated her but “a lot of persons have contacted me [to say that] they have problems with this kind of protest” (Grünberg 2013: 106, author’s translation). Indeed, the leading local newspaper commented:

You do not make friends like this, no matter how good and just the cause is for which the Iranian refugees are protesting. This “new rigidity” [a quote from the protesters] will backfire on them. Until now, they have built their protest on the sympathies in sections of society, [...] but by doing things like this, needy refugees quickly become incalculable radicals. (Main Post 2012b, author’s translation)

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

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

This change in the repertoire marked a critical shift as it restructured the supporting milieu. The more institutionalized actors (most party

representatives, NGOs) became somehow alienated after a strong initial support, whereas decentralized antiracist groups stepped in:

We declare our unconditional solidarity with the demands of the refugees. With consternation, however, we have realized that some groups and individuals defame their protest. [...] The questions is: Are those expressing criticism overwhelmed by this freely chosen form of protest or do they feel threatened in their role as paternalistic pro-beneficiaries? (Cited in Grünberg 2013: 165, author's translation)

What started as a debate about “adequate” repertoires of action eventually broadened into a general debate about the legitimacy of nonmigrants to evaluate protest by precarious migrants:

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

The protesting migrants, in turn, disqualified criticism as “desolidarization” (Refugee Tent Action 2012). By the end of June, one of the protesters pushed even further and stopped drinking water. The protesters ended their hunger strike and removed the threads in their lips when the majority of protesters were granted refugee status (Przybilla 2012b, 2012c). Due to their determination, the Iranians quickly earned a reputation for being extremely resolute and less inclined to engage in lengthy debates with supporting environments (Interviews B11, B15, B22, B34). This led to a tension-prone interaction with the established players of the precarious migrant self-organization such as The Voice and the Caravan network. Even though the Caravan had supported the tent actions, by offering the use of their bank account to receive donations and by visiting the camp in Würzburg repeatedly (Grünberg 2013: 246), conflicts over representation and strategy emerged early on (Interviews B11, B25, B34). Moreover, the old generation was not given credit for their share in the new generations' success – the knitting of networks, mobilization in camps and the gradual establishment of a refugee subjectivity within the German left.

The dynamics of 2012 was not something that just fell from heaven. The solidarity, the power of 2012, had been built up over 20 years. When I first

came to Germany, the relationship between the antiracist movement and the self-organized groups was different. They ignored you. If the old activists [...] had not started to push the idea that refugees should be actors, very particular actors in their own struggle, the protest march would have been crushed. Otherwise, you would have seen refugees standing behind white activists in the front line. (Interview B22)

Thirdly, the sensitive relationship was furthermore rooted in partly antagonistic supporting milieus and ideologies: among the early supporters of the Iranian core group were also adherents of the so-called “anti-German” faction in the German radical left (Interview B34), whose members deduce a strongly pro-Israel and pro-US (as the main guarantor of the state of Israel) position from the German fascist past and a fear of rising German nationalism since the early 1990s (Ullrich 2013). As opponents to the strongly anti-Semitic former president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranians who were involved in the Green Movement in 2009 were considered natural allies. Yet, other support milieus, and particularly the Caravan, are rooted in an anti-imperialist and pro-Palestinian tradition. Conflicts accentuated when in late August, the new generation of protesters, still predominantly led by the Iranian core group from Würzburg, was invited to the “Break Isolation Summer Camp” in Erfurt, organized by the Caravan and the Voice:

In October 2011, when we started organizing the summer camp for August 2012, we thought it would be the first and only refugee camp in Germany that year. But when the Iranian refugees started their protest tent in March, and the hunger strike of refugees spread to other cities and towns, we realized that many camps were on the way to the refugee summer camp in Erfurt. (The Voice 2012, author’s translation)

Questions over representation, leadership, and the role of the former asylum seekers, who had gained a regularized status in the meanwhile, were fought out rigorously from the beginning. Nevertheless, in a moment of collective euphoria about the very fact that precarious migrant protest had come into the limelight, cooperation continued. But “the bruises from Erfurt” were remembered and resurfaced later (Interview B25).<sup>6</sup>

6 Similar expressions were used in Interviews B17 and B34.

## Centralizing Dissent: The Protest March to Berlin

When the protest had spread in the loosely connected “tent action campaign,” but temporarily appeared to stagnate, the core group employed another spatial strategy to revitalize the emerging movement: a march and a bus tour to Berlin. Relocating their dissent from the geographical and social margins of society to the German capital was explicitly meant as a claim to centrality: “We are going to the center where everything is close – the authorities, the parliament. We are going to bring the action there. If it was in other places, they can say, ‘This is Bavaria, this is local,’ so we have to bring it to the center” (Interview B4). Despite the disputes in Würzburg and Erfurt, the Caravan and many other groups supported the march to Berlin logistically since the Iranians could point at their strategy of escalation being successful. At least in the short run, they had politicized the topic of asylum in Germany in an unprecedented way.

The decentralized activist nodes of the Caravan organized accommodation and food on the stops of both the march and the bus tour, building upon local promigrant grassroots infrastructures, including associations as diverse as radical left social centers, sports clubs and faith-based youth organizations (Loschert 2012; Interviews B15, B34). As one participant of the bus tour recalled: “We went to the Caravan, to the Voice [and said], you have been here for a long time: we need connections. First of all, we need a place to meet people. We connected to antifa[scist] and antiracist [organizations] because they are everywhere. They also are in contact with the refugees. They know where the refugees are – we don’t” (Interview B4).

Similarly, while criticizing the timing of the escalation by the Würzburg group, Pro Asyl and the refugee councils (*Landesflüchtlingsräte*) of Bavaria and Berlin raised money and public awareness for the march (Landesflüchtlingsräte and Pro Asyl 2012; Pro Asyl 2012; Pro Asyl and Flüchtlingsrat Berlin 2012). “The regional refugee councils and Pro Asyl align with the demands of the refugees and call for support of the protest march. The refugees urgently depend on donations for food, logistics, and publicity materials” (Landesflüchtlingsräte and Pro Asyl, 2012, author’s translation). Without this support, the march and the bus tour to Berlin could not have been organized in such a short time.

The march and the bus tours turned out to have an important relational effect in connecting a geographically dispersed population of asylum seekers in the German periphery. The mobile protest to Berlin was planned to pass deliberately by numerous asylum facilities in order to “pick up noncitizens wherever they are. In every camp, in every room. The movement needs

to stay in motion” (Houmer Hedayatzadeh, cited in Jakob 2013, author’s translation). Every stop during the month-long march added nodes to a growing protest network.

The mobile repertoire, moreover, had an expressive element, since activists intended, symbolically and practically, to appropriate and enact rights. Moving forward, in a literal sense, disrupted the feeling of “being stuck,” forcefully immobilized by a lengthy and burdensome administrative procedure. One of the protagonists hence noted: “We did not ask for rights; we did [practiced] our rights” (Interview B4). Underlining their determination to resist forced immobility during the asylum procedure in Germany, the activists tore up their identity documents for asylum seekers (*Aufenthaltsgestattung*) on the march from Würzburg to Berlin at the former inner German border (Guyton 2012), symbolically relating to a continuity of borders within Germany for those considered unwanted. The internal effect of this “eventful” (della Porta 2008) protest was a deepening of strong emotional ties among those participating.

After four weeks and 600 kilometers of marching, the protesters reached Berlin. By this action, they relocated the spatial center of the protest arena around precarious migration to the German capital. This shift resulted in a continuity of some players, the fade-out of the local involvement by the groups and institutionalized politics in Würzburg and, most importantly, the addition of multiple new players in a much more complex, multilayered and heavily mediatized environment in Berlin.

## OPlatz as a Space of Protest Incubation

Upon arrival in Berlin, the marchers set up a protest camp at Oranienplatz (also referred to as OPlatz), a square in Kreuzberg, which soon became a complex protest arena, in which multiple individual and compound players interacted. Thousands of supporters from a wide range of backgrounds – radical left groups, migrant associations, neighbors, faith-based groups – either welcomed the marchers on their arrival or offered their support over the following days. Media coverage was mainly supportive (Guyton 2012; Lindner 2012; Markus 2012) and even the primetime edition of *Tagesschau*, Germany’s most important public television news outlet, reported on the protest (ARD Tagesschau 2012). Kreuzberg’s district mayor from the Green Party, Franz Schulz, who had been informed about the camp beforehand, publicly articulated his support for the protest (Rogalla 2012). Even though a small “tent action” protest camp had existed before in the neighborhood, the

arrival of the march sparked an atmosphere of collective euphoria: “During the [tent action camp] at Heinrichplatz, we, from [the tenant initiative] Kotti & Co, were in close contact, we also did some night shifts, if support was needed. But when the march arrived in Berlin, at the beginning there were five supporters for every refugee” (Interview B8).

Even more than in Würzburg, the central location and visibility of the protest resulted in a magnetic effect that attracted hundreds of individual supporters and groups as well as migrants from remote asylum facilities to join the protest. During the first months of the camp at Oranienplatz, the support from the local population was immense. Tens of thousands of euros were donated, but also food, clothes, and tents; local residents and owners of shops surrounding the camp offered their sanitary facilities for use. In most cases, it was enough to post an item on the “We Need” billboard at the entrance of the camp and it was organized shortly after. “When we arrived in Berlin [...] there was a lot of attention because 600 kilometers marching is something special. And when people [who wanted to support us] came, we said: it is good that you are here, and we need this and that” (Interview B4). Resources needed to sustain the protest could be mobilized on the spot, as the camp bundled multiple “weak ties” to civil society organizations, individual supporters and the media.

Immediately the Oranienplatz camp became a vibrant hub of political activity. Shortly after its establishment, the protesters called for a demonstration, to which around 6,000 people attended. It was by the time one of the largest demonstrations led by precarious migrants in German history (Schreiter and Jakob 2012). Activist from the OPlatz joined forces with the Voice and occupied the Nigerian embassy in Berlin to draw attention to the African governments’ role in deportations (Wendt 2012). Members of the Iranian core group, who had initiated the march in Würzburg, led a fourteen-day hunger strike at the Brandenburger Tor (Schreiter 2012), creating another protest arena with additional players, rules and audiences. The photos of hunger strikers in front of the famous landmark became iconic and attracted further attention to the protesters’ demands. Warned by the incubating effects of inner-city hunger strikes in Würzburg, the conservative Senator for the Interior and Sport of Berlin, Frank Henkel (CDU), consequently tried to avoid the establishment of a protest camp in the political heart of the city and ordered harsh policing, including the confiscation of sleeping bags, sleeping pads and tents. This, in turn, generated further visibility of the protests, which culminated in a meeting of the striking migrant activists with members of the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid and the Committee on Internal Affairs of the

German parliament, the Bundestag (Spiegel Online 2012). In a very short period of time, the protesters had with their choice of sites and forms of protest both literally and metaphorically moved from the periphery to the very center of German politics. By this, the new generation of protesters achieved what previous self-organized migrant protests and the German promigrant movement had failed to do.

Simultaneously, in the midst of an icy Berlin winter, migrants and supporters from the second protest camp at Oranienplatz squatted an abandoned school building (the Gerhart-Hauptmann-Schule) within walking distance of the tent camp (Litschko 2012a). Imagined as a safe space for the winter, one floor of the building was transformed into an International Women's Space – a self-organized political space for migrant women (Interviews B4, B24).

Via online communication and word of mouth, many precarious migrants, both asylum seekers living in asylum facilities outside the urban centers and illegalized migrants, learned of the existence of the autonomous space and left their assigned location in asylum facilities (Interviews B4, B12). Dozens of precarious migrants had experienced the sheer existence of the OPlatz and its satellite (the occupied school) as a motivation to leave their designated asylum facilities in different parts of Germany to join the protests in Berlin or to engage in local refugee activism (Interviews B3, B12, B24). The camp was a docking station to meet other politically engaged people, to tap resources and to develop new ideas for political opposition. While many of the founders of the movement had previous experiences in political activism in their countries of origin, such as the Iranian core group in the Green Movement, the existence of the camp also attracted many for whom the camp was a space of politicization and socialization into activism. Indeed, the protesters actively encouraged asylum seekers from all over the country to join the protest: "We ask all of you, refugees and asylum seekers, around Germany to break the isolation and to break the silence and join your brothers and sisters at the protest camp at Oranienplatz to take what is your right" (Refugee Revolution 2013).

Hence, the camp, due to its magnetic effect on resources and activists, was not only a space of protest incubation, but also a space of encounter for an extremely heterogeneous group of precarious migrants and supporters with a plethora of legal status, social backgrounds, and ideologies. While "safe spaces" beyond the crippling control of the state have been considered key for all kinds of oppositional movements (Sewell 2001: 69), asylum seekers and undocumented migrants are situated in an even more restrained system of control and precariousness, from which autonomous camps can provide



(temporary) relief: “When we came here, it was reducing and healing the trauma. Because I got to know people here not by force. [...] In the *Lagers* [asylum facilities] [...] you have to be in this place whether you like or not. You are not allowed to move about. But here we can move freely. Nobody can say, ‘Do not go there’”.<sup>7</sup>

This experience of autonomy and hope led various activists to (re)develop a sense of agency, which had gradually been replaced by apathy and despair during the asylum process. Asked by journalists why the protesters did not accept the deal offered by the local administration of Kreuzberg, to move back into asylum camps and get individual reviews of their asylum claims, an activist answered: “We are alone there; we cannot fight together. The authorities can take and deport us easily” (cited in International Refugee Center Berlin 2015: 77).

Assemblies were organized, translating interventions into multiple languages and, indeed, the process of developing and negotiating a collective identity did not evolve without frictions. Nevertheless, both camps created the very basis for developing “strong ties” among migrants and between migrants and supporters. The “eventful” character of the camp and the collective actions deepened a sense of collectivity despite diversity. Precarious migrants had, at least temporarily, resisted their social and spatial marginalization and articulated their political claims center stage: “They want to put us out of the city where nobody knows that we are existing. [...] Right here where we are is the right place” (International Refugee Center Berlin 2015: 8).

As this account underlines, precarious migrants had rapidly transformed themselves from “weakly resourced,” isolated and dispersed individuals into an emerging movement with astonishing resources and means to organize and sustain the protest. The precarious migrants did not need to beg for scarce support but could even choose among various kinds of assistance offered by a multitude of actors. Due to this magnetic effect and the shift in power relations between migrants and supporters, at the beginning little energy was needed to sustain the protest activity.

## **OPlatz as a Space of Protest Fragmentation**

As a result of the tremendous popularity, the supporters also partly changed, compared both to Würzburg and previous episodes of migrant activism. The dominant actors supporting the protesting migrants were individuals, referred to as “supporters,” not the grassroots organizations forming

7 Transcript of public interview, anonymized.

the migrant rights movement at the time. For the protesting activists, the volatile and decentralized “support” base was convenient at the outset. Negotiations or compromises with established groups with explicit agendas were simply not necessary, and deliberately denied to guarantee autonomy: “We say it is self-organized because we ourselves will not connect to any big organizations. We don’t want money from big organization. We get money from the population. We get support from the population” (Interview B4).

Grassroots organizations and NGOs active in the field of migrant support remained in the background or entirely absent. They either felt superfluous in light of the widespread individual support or had difficulties finding their role vis-à-vis the protesting migrant protagonists. Decisions were taken and information was shared with those present in the camp. This did not fit for those who had a representative role and only joined occasionally. Others were furthermore alienated by the spontaneous and action-oriented protest.

Sometimes, it was overwhelming to occupy an embassy, having a demo or being on a hunger strike every day. [...] In some moments, there was a lot of action and little coordination. I think those who conceived themselves to be more settled, both in terms of age and organizational experience, were overwhelmed by the spontaneity. (Interview B9)

What prevailed in the first phase of the protest was a dedicated group of supporters with an orthodox reading of “critical whiteness,” which presupposed an articulately neutral role for the supporters. While decisions were taken by a migrant-only plenary, supporters sustained the infrastructure of the camp, engaged in care work, such as cooking, translation, organizing lawyers, and providing counseling and legal aid, organized PR activities such as press conferences and press releases (Langa 2015):

[Critical whiteness] has definitely led to a change of perspective, how racism is addressed, whose voice should be considered more important because of racism, and has pointed to the problems in the politics of representation. [...] My position, for instance, in the plenary, was to stay in the background. I really do not want to take up a lot of space, as a white guy with long experience in political activism. (Interview B25)

Nevertheless, this rigid distinction between the roles of “refugees” and “supporters” was also profoundly contested within the German antiracist left at the time (Karakayali et al. 2012; Jakob 2012). The conflicts had escalated at a “no border” camp in Cologne only a few months before the Oranienplatz

camp started and left their marks: “German activists became messengers. This is how it developed. The refugees make decisions; the nonrefugee activist can build the tent, clean the tent, cook, collect money, but no discussion. [...] This stigma came out of the ‘no border’ camp [in Cologne]. It made them [German activists] feel: ‘Do not speak’” (Interview B22).

Accordingly, many German supporters took a loyal and predominantly supporting role. The inner circle of regular encounter was also populated by members of the older generations of precarious migrant activism, such as the Caravan. Even though these interactions were crucial to access networks established in past mobilizations, the questions of representation and leadership that had emerged even before the march in Erfurt continued to be a constant source of conflict at Oranienplatz. This became particularly visible when the Iranian core group explicitly introduced the concept of “noncitizens,” explaining: “Of course, we make a distinction between ourselves and recognized asylum seekers, even if they fight at our side. The recognized refugees can go home after the protest – we cannot. We do not have a home. On the contrary, we can be deported” (Jakob 2013, author’s translation).

The result was a fundamental alienation of the Caravan activists, who considered this first and foremost as a strategy to silence opposition and secure their leadership in the emerging movement.

You cannot build trust like this, because you are suspicious. With these “noncitizens” who were the leadership you were taken to the point that you were automatically excluded when you had obtained papers. [...] The point was not so much the willingness to learn, it is more the question of how much they were influenced by their mindset of where they come from. [...] At the end the Caravan decided to pull out and let them do what they wanted. (Interview B11)

The debates had an impact on the trajectory of the protests early on. Indeed, the Iranian core group’s decision to go on hunger strike at the Brandenburger Tor reflected these early dynamics of fragmentation. After the hunger strike, some of the protest protagonists did not even return to the Oranienplatz camp but split apart and opted for a continuation of their independent protest in Bavaria. While these internal divisions were present from the beginning, initially they could be compensated, given the incubating effect of a protest camp, attracting visibility, people, and resources.

In spring 2013, the situation changed gradually, but fundamentally, for various reasons. Firstly, a new compound player entered the arena: a growing

number of mostly Sub-Saharan migrants, who had escaped the Libyan civil war via the Italian island of Lampedusa. Among those who eventually formed the Lampedusa group in Berlin were many who had temporary humanitarian protection status in Italy, without the right to work or social entitlements in Germany. Due to a lack of alternatives, many joined the squatted school and the occupied square, contributing to an increasing degradation of the places caused by overpopulation (Interviews B2, B15, B25). Many had never even filed an asylum claim in Germany and did not plan to do so. In consequence, the different legal status of precarious migrants in the square left their mark (Interviews B15, B21, B25) as it entailed fundamentally different political priorities.

The claims definitively changed. From the claims that were related to the situation of the “first generation,” such as no camps, no deportation, no *Residenzpflicht* to those with Italian papers, who wanted access to the labor market – this was, in fact, their only claim. At the beginning they did align with the other claims and supported demonstrations as well, but it was obvious that they were not directly affected. Many did not even know what a refugee camp was, because they had never lived in one. [...] They also did not have experience of *Residenzpflicht* with their Italian papers. Hence, it was simply a totally different group. (Interview B21)

Whereas the initiators of the march and the camp had strong claims against the German asylum system and some had been politically active in their country of origin prior to arriving in Germany, the “new generation” faced a different legal situation, with an Italian humanitarian protection status, exhausted by long transmigration and time living on the streets in Italy and Germany. The “old generation” wanted to keep the square due to its incubating effect for protest. This “new generation” needed it as a space of subsistence and longed to put an end to their precarious life on the square: “Those who did not have any other place to stay were those with Italian papers and many of the first generation with more political demands [against the asylum system] already had shared flats, girlfriends or whatever and did come to the square for political fights and could leave in the evening to sleep in their warm beds” (Interview B21).

Hence, differences in status and levels of precariousness introduced divisions between the “generations” of precarious migrants occupying the square, with the tents of the Lampedusa group and the old generation starting to be deliberately separated within the camp (Doppler and Vorwergk 2014). The protest arena at Oranienplatz increasingly became a

site in which internal actors competed for influence. These conflicts also involved the supporters of the early protest days with an articulate political and anticapitalist ideology:

I would say, those from the second generation wanted to become part of the system against which the supporters were fighting. [...] The people in the square, in fact, wanted to become part of the capitalist [world]. Of course, this does not apply to all of them, but many did, indeed, ask why the supporters thought the system was so terrible. They believed it was not so terrible – they just wanted to get into it. (Interview B21)

The combination of the camp as a space of subsistence and political activism in the same location had its downside. Initially, it mitigated the obstacle of mobilizing dispersed and financially precarious communities to participate in the protest and encouraged many to join. Yet, the longer the protest lasted, the more difficult and precarious the daily life in the tent camp became, gradually exhausting its inhabitants. This translated into fierce debates on how to spend the donations (for subsistence or political activity) in a moment when resources had stopped flowing in and the political context had shifted.

The same developments unfolded in the occupied school, a protest arena with its own specificities in terms of players, interests and rules. The place over time became predominantly a shelter, a place of subsistence rather than a space for political organization. The availability of shelter also attracted hundreds of individuals who were in need and only partially affiliated to the political struggle for rights and recognition. With an increasing population and unclear rules, conflicts multiplied. While this was also the case at OPlatz (Ünsal 2015), the material features of the occupied building posed specific challenges with regard to assuring the security and basic functioning of the place, including internal debates on access restrictions: “To squat the school was maybe our biggest mistake. We built our own *Lager* [camp]. We locked ourselves in again. With less visibility than in the public space and more controversies” (Interview B34).

The place became overcrowded and increasingly contested, receiving predominantly negative media coverage following outbursts of violence (Der Tagesspiegel 2013; rbb-online 2013; Soos 2014). These developments played into the hands of those who wanted to dismantle the disruptive sites of protest even long before, most prominently the conservative Senator of the Interior Henkel, who took the occasion to intensify his agitation against the protesters and the laissez-faire approach of the Green district government.

In this phase the volatile and decentralized support base, which at the outset had contributed to the protest momentum, showed its downside. The lack of cultivated ties with established groups and organizations backfired, when the “hype” (Interviews B2, B4) around the camp faded and only a small and increasingly exhausted support base remained. In consequence, with the new generation of the Lampedusa group, a new generation of supporters emerged on the scene. Given the core interest of the group in eventually settling and improving their living conditions, some of the new supporters did not necessarily prioritize the political fight against the German asylum system. The multiple lines of internal divisions of both migrants and support groups, combined with the increasingly precarious conditions in both the school and the square, accentuated in the summer of 2013. Internal conflicts regarding sexism and homophobia (Refugee Strike Berlin 2013; Ünsal 2015) as well as conflicts involving neighbors (Kubsova 2013) were rapidly taken up by the media (Litschko 2013a; Biewald, Löbker, and Wehmeyer 2013). An inhabitant of the camp was stabbed by a Turkish migrant (Kopietz 2013). In this highly chaotic and contentious climate, a delegate for the Green Party in the district assembly decided to move into the tent camp to appease and moderate:

And then there was the day in June [...] when the knife attack happened. I lived in the neighborhood. [...] I felt the mood of the neighborhood. The Turks in the corner were upset. There was disappointment as well. This is often the case here in Kreuzberg. It is densely populated, and we live with very few resources that need to be shared. Particularly for the poorer parts of society, it was also a loss that half of the square was simply gone. [...] And in my role as local representative, I saw that more and more locals came by, saying, “It is too loud – we cannot work, we cannot sleep,” etc., and they were just shouted at by the supporters, who said, “Why do you complain? These are refugees – they have real problems.” So people got upset. (Interview B8)

While relations with the neighborhood improved subsequently, the delegate was fundamentally rejected by the older generation of migrant activists, and their surrounding supporters. They saw this intervention firstly as a return of paternalism with a white person representing the migrants and, secondly, as a clear move of co-optation by the district administration (Interviews B4, B25). “I definitely had the feeling that I was not welcome by some. Some people did not speak to me even once. It seems like some people did not like the idea at all that I moved into the camp. I did not even

think about the possibility that someone might be against this. I thought they were happy!" (Interview B8).

Increasing mutual suspicion and a change in leadership of the Green Party in Kreuzberg finally introduced another major change. While the Green district administration had remained supportive of the camp for a long time (Litschko 2013b), and against the criticism of the Senator of the Interior of Berlin, the newly elected mayor of Kreuzberg, Monika Herrmann (still from the Greens), departed from her predecessor's laissez-faire strategy regarding the camp (Interview B7) and aimed at its dissolution, arguing:

My impression was that this was not really self-organized. [...] Yes, some of them from the Lampedusa group were also political, but the rest were not. They were first and foremost politically active with a view to leaving the camp and to getting a residence permit in Germany. But most of the protest originated from [...] supporters. A lot was projected onto these struggles. (Interview B7)

For Herrmann, a member of one of the more grassroots and left-wing factions of the Green Party, a violent eviction of the camp was no option. Instead, she insisted on a negotiated solution even though the Senate strongly advocated for an eviction by force. The protesters who had set up the camp and experienced its incubating role strongly opposed all attempts aiming at a dissolution of this space of contention: "[T]his is where they used other techniques. Someone came who knew everybody and said, "You are [in the] Lampedusa [group]. You are different – you can have more than the other people. [...] Until then they believed they were special. So we started fighting with each other" (Interview B4).

The strategy of selective incentives was effective, with the Lampedusa group in Berlin starting to show an interest in securing the housing solution for its members offered by the Senate. Whereas the first generation of migrant activists wanted to keep the camp as a space of political protest for the rights of asylum seekers in Germany (Interviews B2, B4; Loy, Buntrock, and Dassler 2013). In autumn and winter 2013, lengthy negotiations unfolded between the protesters, the Senate and various observing associations, culminating in the so-called Oranienplatz Agreement signed in April 2014 by some factions of the protesters (Amjahid 2014). The agreement included a list of reportedly 462 (Amjahid 2014) individuals in the school and in the square, who agreed to dismantle the protest camp themselves in exchange for an individual (re)assessment of their legal status (Senate of Berlin 2014).

Some of the protesting migrants and supporters, however, fiercely opposed the agreement.

On the day of dissolution, a bizarre scene unfolded (Staiger 2014): migrants were tearing down tents and huts, at times shouted at by other protesters of the first generation and supporters. The supporters on the scene found themselves in the confusing situation where they were not mainly confronting the police, as expected, but instead were facing some of the very individuals they had been protesting with previously. While episodes of violence erupted between the two groups, the heavy police presence remained mainly in the background. A migrant rights activist recalled, disillusioned: “Toward the end of Oranienplatz, the movement was easy to attack, because it was easy to divide – this is what the Senator used in the end. Inviting only some factions of the camp, offering incentives and selling it as a solution for the entire Oranienplatz” (Interview B19).

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

The dissolution of the camp wiped out the material and symbolic center of the protest arena. In its absence, the spatial importance of the camp for the movement became even more evident. Difficulties for refugees to meet and organize grew substantially:

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

Two months after the dismantling of the protest camp at Oranienplatz, the district intended to proceed similarly with the occupied school. Due to the symbolic value the school had obtained after the end of the OPlatz camp, as well as the resistance of some of its inhabitants on the roof, thousands of political activists and neighbors prevented an eviction of the place in summer 2014 (Danielzik and Bendix 2016). Despite this highly mediatized dissent of around two dozen activists, the majority accepted the offer,



including most of the women who had been settled in the International Women's Space. Particularly for the Women's Space, which was, in the end, one of the few groups with an explicit activist focus in the school, the loss of this site was a hard blow.

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

The alternative accommodation which was offered in exchange for leaving the autonomous protest spaces were provided for six months. As it turned out, by the time the former occupants of the OPlatz camp were sent out of the reception centers and became homeless, the supporters network had also been notably weakened. Many had abandoned the movement because they did not want the Oranienplatz Agreement. Those few who remained now struggled to secure their basic needs and support the ongoing precarious protests, which had by now fragmented into many protests across the city. Public interest in the migrants and their claims had in the meanwhile diminished. The eradication of the main spaces of contention resulting in the dispersal of precarious migrants had effectively fragmented the protest.

Migrant protest continued throughout the summer and autumn of 2014 at various locations in and around Berlin. They intensified particularly when those evacuated from the camp and school were ordered to leave the temporary shelters and return to their allocated district, where their asylum claim had been registered, or to go back to Italy for those with humanitarian protection status (Kögel et al. 2014; Berliner Zeitung 2014). In early 2015, the protests faded out, even though some of the migrant activists involved remain engaged in various antiracist groups until today.

## Conclusion

The Oranienplatz protests unveiled that precarious migrants were able to raise public attention and mobilize asylum seekers and the media by moving from socially and spatially isolated locations into urban centers. In organizing central protest camps, marches and bus tours, they literally

left behind their excluded position and articulated a claim to urban and social centrality. The relocation from the periphery of their designated asylum facilities to the inner-city space furthermore broke the routine of precarious migrant invisibility or victimization through extensive media coverage, and by this tapped the resources needed to sustain political mobilizations. The camps generated “magnetic fields,” attracting diverse support milieus from which asylum seekers had been previously cut off. The protesters gradually succeeded in compensating the lack of resources and even in altering established power relations between migrants and pro-beneficiaries. The latter were attracted to the prominent protesters, who had, hence, a degree of choice in deciding with whom to work and whom to ignore. In addition to constituting reservoirs for weak ties, the protest camps also served as spaces of encounter and trust building among a previously scattered precarious migrant community. Stories and opinions could be shared and a collective identity was developed, despite the tremendous heterogeneity of the actors involved. In consequence, individuals from a wide range of social and geographical backgrounds joined the movement and organized for an extensive period of time dozens of protest events and constituted themselves as political subjects in the public sphere. This account clearly shows that the protesters did not react upon opening opportunity structures, as the traditional social movement theories would expect. Rather, their protest, emerging in the most restrictive regional context for asylum seekers in Bavaria, actively opened opportunities that were subsequently incubated in the German capital.

Nevertheless, the trajectory of the OPlatz protests also unveil the contentious nature of interactions in precarious activism. It points to the difficulties of uniting a highly heterogeneous compound actor, with distinct legal statuses and hence the eligibility for services, and the likelihood of detention and deportation. Such practices influence not only the status of the individuals in question but also their relationships within the migrant community, civil-society organizations and the state. Macroinstitutions such as legal systems (and hence, potential legal statuses) intervene in the making and breaking of social ties – not least in collective action – as they provide multiple incentives to defect from collective political campaigning and opt for individual niche openings. Such individual solutions are particularly appealing when individuals find themselves in extremely precarious conditions for an extensive period of time. Precarious migrant activism is, therefore, characterized by multiple fault lines, which can be temporarily overcome under certain conditions, yet, remain a permanent Achilles’ heel for sustained contention.

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## 6. Threatened Lives

### Afghan Protests against Deportations, Berlin, 2016-2017

“[T]he readmission agreement between Afghanistan and the German government – it’s a shame! Everyday people get killed there – innocent people, children, women, men, every day. [...] It disgusts me. When I’m thinking about it I’m full of anger, full of anger.”<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

The decision by the German government in 2016 to resume summary deportations to Afghanistan sparked a series of protests in which thousands of Afghans, mostly asylum seekers with a precarious legal status, organized marches, sit-ins and petitions in the German capital. This chapter traces the interactive dynamics leading to temporary mass protests despite contexts of marginalization of a group which has previously mostly abstained from contentious action. The chapter documents the role of Afghan diaspora and migrant support groups in Berlin in providing spaces of encounter and trust building. In these spaces, and in the context of an existential threat for precarious migrants at risk of deportation, a deeply ingrained fear and internal cleavages within the Afghan exile community could be temporarily overcome.

**Keywords:** migrant protest; deportations; threats; interactions; Afghanistan; Berlin

The summer of 2015 marked important changes in the salience and politicization of migration in Germany (Grande 2018). While the country witnessed the emergence of an unprecedented citizens’ mobilization in support of migrants (Hamann and Karakayali 2017) and liberal turns in

<sup>1</sup> Interview B39.



Chancellor Merkel's position on refugees (Laubenthal 2019), the "long summer of migration" was also followed by a series of asylum law restrictions and an increasingly hostile public debate (Rea et al. 2019). Afghans, one of the largest groups of asylum seekers in Germany, have been particularly affected by this turning tide (Fischer 2019). In October 2015, government officials declared the goal to reduce asylum applications from Afghanistan and introduced a series of restrictions. In autumn 2016, this culminated in the decision to resume summary deportations to the conflict-ridden country (Bundesinnenministerium 2016).

The readmission agreement between the German and Afghan governments sparked a series of protests, in which thousands of Afghans, mostly asylum seekers with a precarious legal status, organized marches, sit-ins and petitions in the German capital. This chapter traces the interactive dynamics leading to temporary mass protests despite contexts of marginalization of a group, which has previously mostly abstained from contentious action.<sup>2</sup> It documents the role of Afghan diaspora and migrant support groups in Berlin in providing spaces of encounter and trust building. In these spaces, and in the context of an existential threat for precarious migrants at risk of deportation, a deeply ingrained fear and internal cleavages within the Afghan exile community could be temporarily overcome. The protest trajectory furthermore illustrates how actors shift from strategic "silence" to "voice" (and back) in precarious mobilizations.

## Politicizing Differentiated Treatment

Despite objective indicators of prosecution and systematic violence in Afghanistan,<sup>3</sup> in the second half of 2015, top government officials accentuated a discursive and practical distinction between a small group of "welcome refugees" and those collectively deemed unwanted. In

2 This chapter focuses on Berlin, yet, protests against deportations to Afghanistan were not limited to Berlin. Large-scale demonstrations were also organized in Frankfurt (Handelsblatt 2017), Munich (Kaminski 2017) and Hamburg (Hamburger Abendblatt 2017). Yet, they were mainly rooted in local communities rather than tied together in a national network.

3 These are mirrored in corrected protection rates of 68% in 2014 and 79% in 2015, respectively (author's calculations based on BAMF data (BAMF 2015, 2016)). In contrast to the uncorrected number, the corrected protection rate counts only those cases that have been decided materially, hence deduces from the total number of decisions all those that have been rejected on formal grounds, e.g., for the reason of a Dublin transfer. This corrected number more accurately captures the risk of prosecution and violence in a respective country of origin (Mediendienst Integration 2018).

October 2015, the Asylpaket I (Asylum Package I) law entered into force. This entailed a liberal move granting asylum seekers from countries with a “good perspective to remain”<sup>4</sup> access to “integration courses” with a strong language course component (Lochner 2018; Laubenthal 2019). While five countries fell into this criterion – Syria, Eritrea, Somalia, Iraq and Iran – it collectively excluded Afghans, although they constituted one of the largest asylum-seeking communities, given their uncorrected recognition rate of just below the threshold in 2015 (BAMF 2016). Less than a week later, the public opposition against Afghan migrants was made explicit. On October 28, then Minister of Interior Thomas de Maizière declared the high number of asylum applications from Afghanistan to be “unacceptable” noting that “the Afghan youth and the middle-class families should remain in Afghanistan and rebuild their country” (Die Bundesregierung 2015, author’s translation). This discursive turn foreshadowed targeted policy restrictions on migration from Afghanistan. In December 2015, Chancellor Merkel publicly warned Afghans from migrating to Europe, underlining that “a hope for better life is no reason to be granted asylum or a right to stay in Germany,” and offered the Afghan government money and logistics to prevent departures (Zeit Online 2015, author’s translation). In an overall context in which political conflicts over migration to Germany multiplied, the Merkel government continued a process of increasing differentiation of precarious migrants in Germany. Therefore, Afghans became the most prominent example of “second class asylum seekers” (Ruttig 2017). A second major asylum law restriction in early 2016 (Asylpaket II) further aggravated the situation for Afghans, as it entailed the two-year suspension of family reunification for individuals with a subsidiary protection status (Pichl 2016). This hit the Afghan community particularly hard. Despite an unabated continuation of conflicts with a record number of civilian casualties in the Central Asian country (UN OHCHR 2016), the rejection rates of asylum seekers from Afghanistan increased drastically from 22.3% in 2015 to 39.4% in 2016 (BAMF 2017, 2016b).<sup>5</sup> However, as the objective danger for civilians in Afghanistan remained high, less generous protection status such as subsidiary protection or protection on humanitarian grounds proliferated among Afghans (BAMF 2017). Also in 2016, advocates for further asylum

4 This criterion is operationalized by a protection rate of above 50% for individuals of the respective country in the previous year.

5 The office in charge (BAMF) justified rejections by pointing at the possibility to internally relocate Afghans to areas less affected by violence (Pro Asyl 2018).

law restrictions mobilized acts of violence perpetrated by asylum seekers and other migrants. Thus, highly mediatized felonies by young Afghans further spurred an increasingly widespread position to collectively limit the arrival of asylum seekers from Afghanistan and their presence in Germany (Ruttig 2017; Fischer 2019).

In this general climate, the German government intensified the negotiations with their Afghan counterparts. Following up on previously negotiated financial benefits in exchange for controlling emigration, a focus was now put on readmission agreements for deportations (Reuters 2016). In October 2016, both the German government and the EU signed agreements with the Afghan government (EEAS 2016; Bundesinnenministerium 2016), with “the objective to establish a rapid, effective and manageable process for a smooth, dignified and orderly return of Afghan nationals who do not fulfil the conditions in force for entry to, presence in, or residence on the territory of the EU” (EEAS 2016).<sup>6</sup> According to public sources (Deutscher Bundestag 2016), more than 12,000 Afghans with a rejected asylum claim were at immediate risk of being deported, and potentially thousands more with a pending asylum case, considering the decreasing recognition rates (Gerner 2016). In December 2016, for the first time in twelve years, Germany resumed summary deportation flights to Afghanistan (ARD Tagesschau 2016).

### **Protest Emergence: A Mobilized Diaspora**

This rapid shift for Afghans did not remain unnoticed by the Afghan exile community in Berlin. While the overall perception of a German “welcome culture” prevailed (Laubenthal 2019), Afghans continuously accumulated countless experiences of their differentiated treatment, and the negative repercussions it had on their lives. A young Afghan who arrived in 2015 in Germany together with his family, recalled the concrete effects of these discursive and policy changes: “My wife is from Iran, I am Afghan. We went to the language school, and they said, ‘Your wife can come to the integration course. She is more than welcome. But you cannot.’ I was shocked. Why?” (Interview B41).

Yet, at the beginning, the Afghan diaspora community intended to deal with the situation with noncontentious means. Those in an ongoing asylum procedure felt the discrimination, but chose to remain silent, considering this be the best strategy to obtain a right to stay. Those parts of the more

6 Both agreements were almost identical in scope.

established Afghan community who were willing to engage in the support of their compatriots with a precarious legal status joined in to the proliferating movement of asylum seekers support in Germany. Given their skills but also due to their knowledge of the complicate situation for Afghans, they tailored their services to the specific needs of Afghans, offering language courses and translation and legal advice during the asylum process (Interviews B38, B40). However, they increasingly realized that their engagement was futile and unable to balance the proliferating discursive and administrative restrictions. The frustration turned into indignation, when they learned about the governmental goal to prepare the legal ground for summary deportations to a war-torn country. One of them, a young Afghan journalist, expressed a widespread sentiment: “We Afghan refugees are discriminated against in Germany. Compared to Syrian refugees, for instance. No doubt, the situation in Syria is horrendous. But in Afghanistan, we experience a war for 40 years. [...] Afghanistan is extremely insecure but nevertheless we are not welcome” (Interview B36).<sup>7</sup>

The signature of the readmission agreements constituted a crucial turning point, since it posed an existential threat for asylum seekers and a source of fundamental indignation for all those familiar with the security situation in conflict-ridden Afghanistan: “Within less than one year, the ‘welcome culture’ has been transformed for Afghans into a deportation culture” (Interview B35). This external event triggered a politicization of various individuals and groups, which engaged in organizing the heterogeneous Afghan community to actively converge, and to create a contentious compound player powerful enough to be listened to. Up to this point, the Berlin-based Afghan diaspora had remained fragmented along the lines of religion, ethnicity, language and ideology. As a result of a four-decade-long conflict in Afghanistan, with shifting power constellations, distinct parts of the Afghan society were forced to leave the country. These divisions and memories of oppression have been kept alive in exile, which was why Afghans have rarely mobilized based on a collective national identity, in Berlin (Romeo 2001; Daxner and Nicola 2017).<sup>8</sup>

The decision by the German government to resume summary deportations to Afghanistan constituted a “moral shock” (Jasper 2014) among parts of the Afghan exile community. While Afghans with a pending asylum

7 Similar expressions were used in Interviews B37, B39.

8 In previous episodes of precarious migrant protest in Germany, Afghans had also not played a major role despite their numerical size (Jakob 2016).

case were immediately affected by the successive restrictions and, it was particularly a diverse group of more established Afghans in exile who were rapidly politicized. No matter if they had previously organized language courses, cultural festivities or sports for Afghans, all of a sudden they became involved in a fight for a right to remain (Interviews B37, B38, B40): “We had already been involved in direct support – language courses, legal advice, translation, and the like. Our explicit political work started after the agreement between the German and Afghan government. [...] We couldn’t believe it; [...] that anyone could be so presumptuous to deport people to Afghanistan. We were shocked” (Interview B38).

While a pending asylum case or a temporary suspension from deportation (*Duldung*) had been a source of uncertainty and worry for many Afghans even before, the possibility of large-scale deportations planted an existential threat for all asylum seekers with a precarious legal status. Despite the fact that those initiating the mobilization were the “lucky ones” with a right to stay, they had developed a sense of responsibility vis-à-vis their compatriots under an increasing threat of deportation: “I managed to leave the asylum facility and get a right to stay. But it is not about myself. Having gone through this and knowing what it means urges me to assist my fellow compatriots now” (Interview B39).

Given their own biography of forced displacement, those Afghans who had already obtained a secure status not only empathized with the panic felt by those who had not but were also outraged by the German government denying a reality of insecurity. One of them, an Afghan TV journalist who had herself escaped from Kabul to Germany after a thwarted acid attack in 2014, noted: “The readmission agreement between Afghanistan and the German government – it’s a shame, everyday people get killed – innocent people, children, women, men, every day. [...] It disgusts me. When I’m thinking about it, I’m full of anger, full of anger” (Interview B39).

Precisely because they were familiar with the precarious and demobilizing effects of an ongoing asylum procedure or even more so, with the anxiety related to a risk of imminent deportation, the organizers felt they had to play a central role in the mobilization. Initially fragmented in various groups with limited or no interaction, associations run by Afghans or Germans of Afghan descent (such as Yaar e.V., Itihad e.V., Newsgroup Afghanistan, Afghanisches Kommunikations- und Kulturzentrum e.V.<sup>9</sup> and Hazara World Council) and also individuals, realized that they had to join forces against what they considered an outrageous injustice (Gürgen 2017;

9 Afghan Center for Communication and Culture.

Weissenborn 2016). Despite their diversity in terms of age, ethnicity, religiosity, permanence in Germany, and experience of activism, the readmission agreement brought up a common cause. Interactions multiplied to open spaces for exchange, and strategizing. From summer 2016 onward, when information of a readmission agreement first spread, and even more so after its signing, associations and individuals started to get in touch with Afghans living in the asylum facilities to make it clear: "In case you want to stay in Germany, you have to become active. We have to raise awareness for our problems and the situation in Afghanistan. If you stay silent, you will have no chance" (Interview B43).

The spark of protest was set, but it needed to be incubated and find resonance in the large population of directly affected Afghans with a precarious legal status. Simultaneous to increased networking within the Afghan diaspora in Berlin, exchanges also intensified with larger migrant support associations, such as Flüchtlingsrat Berlin,<sup>10</sup> BBZ Berlin,<sup>11</sup> KuB,<sup>12</sup> and Verein Iranischer Flüchtlinge,<sup>13</sup> which were already in contact with Afghans in their counseling sessions, as well. These associations with a long tradition of precarious migrant support were surprised by this unprecedented interaction with a range of diaspora groups and the involvement of individuals with an influential role in the various Afghan communities. This novel set of actors eventually joined forces and founded a new compound player, the Berlin Alliance against Deportations to Afghanistan (Interviews B35, B36, B38). Before this collective actor mobilized thousands to the streets of Berlin and became visible as a public player, an intense process of organizing was necessary. Networks were knit and spaces were created to cut through the deeply engrained emotion of fear and to temporarily bridge the internal cleavages within the Afghan exile population. The core aim was to act as and be recognized as a compound political and contentious player.

Given their familiarity with the demobilizing effects of the asylum process and particularly the accommodation in collective facilities in remote areas, the core set of initial protest organizers, were aware of the need to reach out to the precarious Afghan population and built trust. The main challenge

10 Refugee Council Berlin.

11 Beratungs und Betreuunszentrum für junge Geflüchtete und Migrant\*innen, a center for the counseling and support of young refugees and migrants in Berlin.

12 Kontakt- und Beratungsstelle für Flüchtlinge und Migrant\_innen (Contact and Counseling Office for Refugees and Migrants).

13 Association of Iranian Refugees.

was to gradually cut through a deeply rooted fear and intuition to remain silent instead of speaking out:

The first step for every refugee [in the German asylum system] is to live in a first reception center. It is the first institution where you learn basic information about Germany. And what do they do there? They silence you. From the very beginning, everyone urges you: If you want to stay in Germany, be silent, be a good refugee, integrate into society. Plus, they isolate you physically. You are far away and surrounded by fences. They separate you from the rest of society as if they wanted to deny your existence. (Interview B39)

From their own experience and through exchanges in counseling, they knew the widespread state of fear and disillusion among the asylum seekers (Schleiermacher 2017; Starzmann 2017). Instead of protesting against exclusion, in these contexts of marginalization, many individuals become apathetic and gradually lose their sense of agency (Täubig 2009; Pieper 2008). When rumors spread in the asylum facilities that Germany will resume deportations to Afghanistan, the omnipresent fear (Starzmann 2017) and uncertainty became an existential threat. One of the Afghan organizers, who has been granted subsidiary protection but continued living in an emergency shelter, recalled:

Since Germany deports, all Afghans are terrified. Everyone who does not have a residence permit is constantly afraid. I personally witnessed the situation when a young Afghan jumped out of the second floor of the asylum facility, when he saw a police car parking in front of the building. They did not come for him, but he was panicking. (Interview B43)

This constant anxiety had intensified, since the German government started to allow deportations without prior notice in October 2015 (Pichl 2016). From then on, rejected asylum seekers had to expect a deportation at any time, day or night. Given this internalization of fear, when organizers started reaching out to Afghans with a precarious legal status and proposed organizing a protest, they encountered reluctance. Despite sharing a sense of injustice and anxiety about a potential deportation, the strategy of confronting the state was considered counterproductive. Due to the dependence on the state in obtaining the right to stay, many initially opted for “silence” instead of “voice”: “At the beginning, many Afghans were afraid to attend demonstrations. They said: if we go to a protest, perhaps the German politicians

and administrators will see this and we will get our cases rejected or even deported. We will stay at home instead and try to stay as silent and invisible as possible” (Interview B43).

The fact that many of the core organizers were Afghan, or Germans with a personal migration history from Afghanistan, facilitated outreach, as information could be shared and doubts be discussed in the main Afghan languages, Dari and Pashtu. On the other hand, the deep cleavages within the Afghan exile community also posed, at times, additional obstacles that had to be overcome. Some asylum seekers in the collective accommodation facilities were immediately suspicious when an Afghan broker from a distinct ethnicity than their own got in touch to inform them and offer spaces of encounter and strategizing (Interview B38).

In this climate, the diverse activities offered by Afghan community associations, but also other migrant support organizations working with Afghans, became the spaces for encounter, mutual trust building, empowerment and politicization. *Itehad e.V.*, the first Afghan soccer club, originally founded to provide moments of relief from a burdensome life in exile, became a space to discuss possibilities to counter the turning tide against Afghan asylum seekers (Weissenborn 2016; Interview B37). Newsgroup Afghanistan organized platforms for young Afghans to meet and exchange views (Borkowsky 2019; Interview B45). The magazine *KulturTür* by and for persons with a history of forced displacement brought together individuals to share stories of their life in exile, which also included stories of exclusion and resistance (Interviews B36, B45).<sup>14</sup> *Yaar e.V.* and *Afghanisches Kommunikations- und Kulturzentrum* served as “bridges of communication between Afghan refugees and other Berliners” (Rezaie 2018a, author’s translation). These associations both facilitated the convergence of different actors within the Afghan population in Berlin and brokered ties to larger migrant support organizations, such as *Verein Iranischer Flüchtlinge*, *BBZ*, and *Flüchtlingsrat Berlin*, which also contributed to (self-)organization with the provision of rooms and expertise. These social spaces organized by and for migrants, which were often not political in their original purpose, became spaces of empowerment and encounter for a previously fragmented and politically demobilized Afghan exile community in Berlin.

While these spaces of encounter were initially almost exclusively created by individuals with a secure legal status, asylum seekers with pending cases soon became actively involved as well. They played an important role, since they served as additional and credible relays to precarious migrants, who

14 See also Rahimi (2018), Rasuoli and Yaghobi (2017), and Rezaie (2018b).



still considered “silence” an effective strategy to achieve a right to stay. One of the young Afghans who became an active organizer serves as an illustration of the interactive dynamics, which contributed to the incubation of precarious protests in Berlin: In summer 2016, he was still anxiously waiting for the decision on his asylum case. Accommodated in the city’s largest emergency shelter, Berlin Tempelhof Airport,<sup>15</sup> with thousands of other asylum seekers, he heard about an Afghan cultural event and hoped for a moment of relief (Interview B45). At the event, Newsgroup Afghanistan had set up “Afghan Memory,” a space in which Afghans could share their stories from a life before exile. The contacts he made there, and the feeling of empowerment prompted him to stay engaged and become a member of the group himself, even after his asylum claim got rejected and the risk of deportation grew:

I was afraid at the beginning, too. If I go to the demo, if I show my face publicly, on television, this would be bad for my asylum case. [...] But then I thought, “Germany is a free country and a democracy,” and I realized, if you are afraid and stay at home, they can do whatever they want with you. I knew a lot of people, talked with others in our [newsgroup about politics. [...] If I am afraid, the others are afraid, too, I thought I have to do something to give energy to others to do the same. (Interview B45)

During regular interactions with other Afghans at various events organized by different diaspora groups, he realized that patience and silence was the wrong strategy in light of an imminent threat: “If I do not fight, they will send me back. [...] I have to fight for my life” (Interview B45). When the first summary deportation flights were scheduled, the Berlin Alliance against Deportations to Afghanistan announced a demonstration. While established migrant rights organizations formed a part of the alliance and contributed with their resources and expertise, the news about a protest of Afghans was also diffused in the newly created networks of the Afghan exile community. Calls for protest in Dari and Pashtu rapidly circulated in Afghan social media groups, during cultural and sports events, and as leaflets in collective asylum facilities (Interview B36). The spaces of encounter created before had produced decentralized messengers within

15 Berlin Tempelhof Airport (which had ceased operating as an airport in 2008) temporarily hosted thousands of asylum seekers in highly precarious conditions (Berliner Morgenpost 2015).

the precarious migrant community: “By the time I still lived in ‘the hangar.’<sup>16</sup> I knew a lot of people there and in other facilities. When a demonstration was planned, I called all my contacts and posted it on Facebook to let the [Afghan] people know” (Interview B45).

### **Protest Incubation: From “Silence” to “Voice”**

The call for action for the first demonstration of the Berlin Alliance documented the combination of an existential threat inducing constant emotional stress and the indignation to be deported to a country with one of the most fragile security situations worldwide: “We demand [...] the immediate EU-wide halt of deportations to Afghanistan; the immediate stop of psycho terror by both the media and public institutions with their constant threat of deportation to human beings who have been on the run from war and terror for almost four decades” (cited in KuB 2016, author’s translation).

On protest day, 10 December 2016, days before the first summary deportation to Afghanistan was executed (ARD Tagesschau 2016), 1,500 demonstrators marched to Brandenburg Gate in central Berlin, despite freezing temperatures (Die Welt Online 2016). As an emblematic case of transnational migrant activism (Steinhilper 2018), the protesters carried signs with slogans such as “Afghanistan is not safe” and “We are human beings, not numbers,” but also photographs of human rights abuses in the Central Asian country, articulating claims against the German government and the insecurity in Afghanistan. In contrast to other promigrant or antiracist demonstrations in Berlin, German protesters remained a minority. It was mostly the Afghan community itself that took to the streets, and among them, many at immediate risk of deportation (Ehrich 2016). They expressed:

What will happen in case I am deported? It is obvious. Today, three hours ago, in the Afghan province of Helmand in the city of Lashkar Gah, fourteen persons were killed and eight injured. In case we get deported, what will happen? Thousands of young Afghans died in 2015 and 2016 in suicide attacks. The same will happen to all of us. (Newsgroup Afghanistan 2017, author’s translation)

The desperate situation and an existential threat to their lives, mobilized a community, which had long hoped to be granted a right to stay by silent

16 Refers to the emergency accommodation in the former airport.

“integration.” Among the protesters were many young males with a particularly high risk of deportation and many members of the ethnic group of the Hazara,<sup>17</sup> who faced particular risks upon return:

If they decide I have to go back to Afghanistan, they sign my death sentence, because I am Hazara. The so-called Islamic State and the Taliban said that they do not care if we have the same religion or culture. If you are Hazara, they will kill you. Perhaps it will take one or two months, or maybe a year or two. But if I return to Afghanistan, I will die. (Newsgroup Afghanistan 2017, author's translation)

Aware of the precarious conditions of asylum seekers and their unlikely attendance at demonstrations, the Berlin Alliance organizers had expected a larger turnout of Germans acting in solidarity, yet the Afghan participation exceeded their hopes (Interview B38). The combination of an existential threat, as well as their efforts to provide spaces of empowerment and access to resources, had contributed in overcoming the odds of mobilization in contexts of marginalization.

The first demonstration was just the kickoff for a series of protest events. In February 2017, the Berlin Alliance again mobilized more than thousand people to the streets (Berliner Morgenpost 2017). Also in this second protest event, the majority of the participants were Afghans, again, many with a precarious legal status (Newsgroup Afghanistan 2017; Berliner Morgenpost 2017). Using the momentum of the first two demonstrations with large turnouts, regular protests followed, targeting the various actors involved in the precarious situation of Afghans. These included the German refugee agency (BAMF) and its practice of increasingly issuing rejections on asylum claims by Afghans (BBgAA 2017b), the Ministry of the Interior (Hillebrand 2017), the Afghan embassy for its cooperation in the readmission agreement (BBgAA 2017c; Schleiermacher 2017) and the office of the state of Bavaria in Berlin, from where the first summary deportations to Afghanistan were effectuated (BBgAA 2017a). The Berlin Alliance invented the hashtag #Bleibistan,<sup>18</sup> launched a large Twitter campaign and joined in broader campaigns for migrant rights in Germany (Interviews B36, B45, B38). Picketing took place when terrorist attacks occurred in Afghanistan in order to draw attention to the argument that Afghanistan was anything but safe and German

17 The Hazara are an ethnic minority in Afghanistan, which has experienced discrimination and violence for decades (Fischer 2019).

18 A German wordplay fusing the terms “*bleiben*” (remain) and Afghanistan.

politicians claiming the opposite were hiding the truth (Rasuoli and Yaghobi 2017): “We escaped from war, from lies and incompetent power holders in Afghanistan. Now we are exposed to the lies of some German politicians” (Rasuoli and Yaghobi 2017, author’s translation). Previously absent from the contentious arena around asylum and migration in Berlin, the series of protests and its supporting networks introduced Afghans as a visible compound player and connected it to the resources of larger migrant rights organizations in the German capital.

The case of protests against deportations to Afghanistan thereby echoes previous research on patterns of activism in contexts of marginalization. Firstly, it documents the ambivalent effect of fear on political mobilization. While on the one hand, fear tends to discourage protest, it can have the opposite effect once it is perceived as a collective threat, to which a collective response is needed (Zepeda-Millán 2014). Secondly, precarious mobilizations are often organized around a few influential personalities with organizational and linguistic skills and experiences in activism (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016) serving as brokers to these disenfranchised communities. Also in undocumented migrant protest, associations and groups without an explicit political agenda, such as sports and cultural clubs, have obtained a crucial function in resource mobilization and trust building in times of threats.

## Dynamics of Demobilization

Despite the continuation of protest activity of the Berlin Alliance throughout the summer and autumn of 2017, also including a long-term picket with a hundred participants, directly before the German national elections in September (BZ Online 2017), the visibility and size of protests decreased markedly, and abruptly, three months after the first demonstration. This was the reaction to the shifting position of another player: in response to public pressure to which the protests contributed and internal debates, the center-left regional government of Berlin, which had only shortly before the protests taken office, declared on 22 February 2017 to temporarily suspend summary deportations to Afghanistan with the exception of convicted criminals and individuals labeled as “potentially dangerous terrorist offenders”<sup>19</sup> (Die Welt Online 2017). Even though other German states continued with the summary deportations of Afghans, this public statement reduced the

19 In German: “Gefährder” (Die Welt Online 2017).

imminent threat for precarious migrants in Berlin. The relieving news rapidly spread within the same networks, which had previously led to the large turnouts during demonstrations. Participation in subsequent protests visibly dropped:

[W]hen the Afghan migrants were relatively sure that they will not be deported [...] many did not participate in the subsequent protest activities with the same urgency. For instance, when we organized a demonstration in front of the Representation of the State of Bavaria<sup>20</sup> in Berlin after a deportation flight of Afghans from Munich, many fewer people showed up. (Interview B38)

As soon as the acute threat of imminent deportation decreased, three dynamics set in. Firstly, many Afghans drew their attention toward addressing other pressing questions of a life in exile. Since a suspension of deportation reduced the imminent threat, but did not solve the hardships of a life with the nonstatus of *Duldung*: “[W]e would get more attention if our fellow Afghans would not rest on the highly fragile and temporary commitment that Berlin does not deport ‘ordinary’ Afghans. But they have tons of other problems and often still internalize the position: the more discrete we are, the more merciful the German society will act toward us” (Interview B38).

Accordingly, with a decreasing threat, many precarious migrants shifted back to a repertoire of silent inclusion, which they considered more effective to address their urgent needs like finding a housing alternative to the precarious emergency shelters, getting access to language courses, and finding a job to sustain their families (Interview B35). Considering the alternatives, many opted against a long-term sociopolitical engagement and for finding individual solutions to their immediate problems.

Secondly, after a moment of resistance without alternatives, many Afghans were drawn back again into a state of apathy, typical for a life in legal limbo. One of those precarious migrants who stayed engaged referred to his Afghan roommate to underline this demobilizing dynamic:

I have a roommate. He is Afghan, too. We both got our asylum claims rejected. When I try to motivate him to get engaged, he says, “No, I will not do anything until I get a right to stay. I cannot. Even when I go to school, I forget everything. I think too much about what will happen if I get rejected again.” (Interview B45)

20 Every state (Land) is represented with an office in the capital city Berlin.

And lastly, with the fading threat, the fragile unity of a highly heterogeneous player with multiple internal cleavages collapsed. The alliances built during mobilization were strong enough during an exceptional time, yet, soon, the old conflicts and divides became dominant, and distinct players within the diverse Afghan community pursued distinct and often opposite interests:

The division and distrust resulting from 40 years of interethnic and religious violence is also present within the Afghan exile community. In Berlin, the debates between religious and secular Afghans have been going on for decades. The religious faction obviously has an interest in advocating for a conservative lifestyle. [...] It is easy to discredit the protest movement from a conservative perspective. They argue, for instance, that if you go to a demonstration, there will be homosexuals there, and people fighting for women's rights, and this is not in line with the religious values. (Interview B38)

The temporary success in bridging between various religious and ethnic groups, was replaced again by prevailing distrust and reluctance: one of the organizers noted with disillusioned realism that “the Afghan community [did not] exit” (Interview B37) but consisted of competing subplayers: “[People] argued increasingly, this association is religious, this one is not, they are more ‘Afghan’ than these, this group only caters to this ethnic group. [...] This fragmentation, which has always existed, is now an obstacle to sustainable mobilization” (Interview B38).

Despite the dynamics of visible demobilization in terms of numbers, the core of Afghan individuals and associations, who had converged for the first time in preparation of the protest, remained connected afterward. They had also gained new members willing to keep the recently emerged contentious Afghan diaspora “in abeyance” (Taylor and Crossley 2013); to be prepared to organize mass protest in case of a resumption of deportations to Afghanistan from Berlin. Aware that a united Afghan voice would be necessary to move beyond the protest against deportations and press for inclusive policies in Germany, they continue, against all the odds: “Personally, I don’t agree with most of them [Afghan refugees]. I’m not a Muslim; I am an atheist and a Marxist. Yet, we are all human beings” (Interview B39). “We continue working on bridging these divides. But perhaps we need to wait one generation, until the bruises of 40 years of conflict start to heal” (field notes, 12 December 2018).

## Conclusion

The interactive dynamics unfolding during the series of protests against deportations to Afghanistan between 2016 and 2017 in Berlin carve out two key aspects of precarious migrant mobilizations: the mobilizing effect of threats, and the important role of mobilized diasporas. Firstly, the chapter underlines that threats, rather than opportunities, are crucial for understanding protest dynamics in contexts of marginalization (Zepeda-Millán 2017). Confronted with various challenges of a life without secure legal status, the strategy of protest is chosen in moments of existential hardship. Whereas in most situations of precariousness, individuals concentrate on getting by through silent adaptation. The decision by the German government to resume deportations to the conflict-ridden country posed such an existential threat among precarious migrants from Afghanistan. Individuals and groups in regular contact with Afghan asylum seekers, from both the diaspora and migrant support groups, immediately sensed the seeds of panic the readmission agreement had planted. This confrontation with anxiety, but also with their own familiarity with the context of violence in Afghanistan, sparked deep indignation among a small set of Afghans and Germans with a biography of forced displacement from Afghanistan. A “moral shock” prompted them to take action and work on the convergence of an exile community, strongly divided along the lines of ethnicity, religion and ideology. Those asylum seekers directly at risk of deportation first tended to react with a strategy of silent adaptation, and they hoped invisibility rather than “voice” would allow them to stay in Germany. In this ambiguous context, individuals and groups from the Afghan diaspora played a crucial role in the dynamics of mobilization. Through repeated encounters in settings, which did not have a political purpose, such as sports and cultural events, they facilitated both an empowerment of disenfranchised individuals, and they built a temporary bridge between different factions of the Afghan diaspora. The combination of an existential threat and a space provided by the more established Afghans and migrant support associations allowed the creation of a large compound player with an Afghan identity. It eventually encouraged thousands of precarious migrants to overcome their fear and take the streets.

Besides these dynamics of protest emergence and incubation through interaction, the case study also documents the fragile unity in precarious activism, which complicates long-term mobilization. The convergence into a collective compound player, as well as large turnouts for demonstrations, were strongly dependent on the perception of an acute and direct threat for

the persons involved. When the regional government in Berlin declared a de facto deportation ban, many Afghans shifted back to “silence,” invisibly trying to cope with the multiple challenges of a life in continuous uncertainty. When the uniting threat decreased, the internal fragmentation of the Afghan exile community resurfaced and decomposed the compound player into ethnic, religious, and ideological factions, with competing individual and group interests.

Notwithstanding this demobilization, for the first time, both individual Afghans and exile associations have knit dense networks within and among migrant support groups in Berlin, which might be remobilized in case the threat of deportation intensifies. Indeed, the temporary suspension of deportations from Berlin could be revoked at any time, since the removal of rejected asylum seekers has remained a core priority for high-ranking politicians and many regional governments have continued with forced returns after the regional suspension of deportations to Afghanistan from Berlin. Minister of the Interior Horst Seehofer (CSU<sup>21</sup>) proudly announced in summer 2018: “Coincidentally, on my 69<sup>th</sup> birthday, 69 persons have been deported to Afghanistan” (Spiegel Online 2018). One of the deportees committed suicide right upon arrival in Kabul (Zeit Online 2018), underlining the severity of the grievances on which Afghans had engaged in acts of resistance, against all the odds.

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# Conclusion

## Interactive Dynamics, Ambivalent Spatialities and Regulatory Contexts

“I was [politically] active in Sudan – this is the reason I had to leave. When I came to France, I did not want to be political. When I understood the situation here, though, that was not possible. I realized that I had to continue fighting to get back my dignity, at least, my basic rights. Wherever you go, no one can guarantee your basic rights unless you stand up for them yourself. I found that it works to let people know that our rights are abused in Europe and also, of course, in Africa and elsewhere.”<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Episodes of precarious migrant protest are characterized by volatility and fragility, rather than by stability or structure. In the four case studies scrutinized in this book, the players' interests, resources and options were shaped in the process. Players emerged, split and changed sides during the mobilizations. In some occasions and spatial configurations, microinteractions incubated sparks of dissent into large and powerful mobilizations. In other socio-spatial settings, diversity and precariousness favored fragmentation and demobilization. Against this background, the concluding chapter suggests an microinteractionist argument to the study of precarious protest. Such a perspective, which stresses agency despite contexts of marginalization, does not suggest that macroinstitutions do not matter. On the contrary, a “players and arena” approach precisely illustrates how different legal statuses, accommodation systems, and social movement traditions intervene in concrete contentious interactions shaping the complex dynamics of precarious mobilizations.

**Keywords:** migrant protest; interactions; alliances; space; arenas

<sup>1</sup> Interview P30.

In her seminal study on the *sans-papiers* movement in France, Siméant identified an “almost typical characteristic and evolution of illegalized migrant protest in terms of claims and repertoires of contention” (1998: 17, author’s translation). This resonates with a core ambition of the “players and arenas” approach to focus on both the particularity of specific periods of contention and “[grasping] the types of strategic interactions that can be considered ‘characteristic’” (Duyvendak and Fillieule 2014: 312). Comparative case studies thereby allow tentative propositions for dynamics of contention in certain issue areas more broadly. In this tradition, the final chapter of this book derives patterns from the four case studies of precarious migrant protest. Such patterns shed light on the grievances, emergence, and trajectories of mobilizations in contexts of marginalization. In conjunction, they stimulate theory building on both the odds of precarious protest and ways to temporarily overcome them.

### **Contentious Arenas and Contested Spaces**

The diverse contentious subjects scrutinized in the previous chapters were engaged in arenas in which a myriad of actors competed for influence and recognition. In consequence, the social relations that developed during these series of protests were characterized by volatility and fragility, rather than by stability or structure. The players’ interests and options were shaped in the process rather than being predetermined. Players emerged, split and changed sides during the mobilizations; players conceiving themselves to be part of the same compound player in one moment in time, were at a later point considered to be key opponents. On some occasions and in certain spatial configurations, microinteractions incubated sparks of dissent into larger mobilizations, often involving both migrants and pro-beneficiaries. In other spatial settings, diversity and precariousness favored fragmentation and demobilization. Stressing the role of microinteractions in contentious arenas does not mean that macroinstitutions such as social, administrative and legal contexts do not matter. On the contrary, an arena approach precisely illustrates how, in the case of migrant mobilizations in Berlin and Paris, different legal statuses, accommodation systems, and social movement traditions intervene in concrete contentious interactions. Indeed, in most of the cases studied, these proved to be important breaking points for the establishment or maintenance of social ties. Arenas are, thus, fundamentally “situated” in spatial and temporal contexts. As an illustration, migrants mobilized in Paris and Berlin in distinct “borderline citizenship regimes”

(Monforte and Dufour 2011) and relational contexts which made them mobilize mainly as “*sans-papiers*” in France and as “refugees” in Germany, despite at times having equivalent biographical features. However, institutional opportunities and constraints were not essential as such, but rather in their effect on the making and breaking of social ties, which underlie all processes of political mobilization. Indeed, the accounts of the four arenas illustrate that the protesters did not react upon opening opportunity structures, and did not rely exclusively on internal resources as traditional social movement theories would expect. Instead, resources were mobilized in spaces with specific “relational qualities” (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016) and through contentious interactions with other players. Demobilization, similarly, was shaped importantly by direct exchanges leading to alienations and fragmentations rather than fundamental changes at the macrolevel. In some cases, certainly the action of other players, such as the decision by the Senate of Berlin to suspend deportations to Afghanistan, impacted the mobilization dynamics profoundly. Yet, these opportunities and threats were highly issue specific and microinteractionist, rather than structural.

An arena perspective combines a focus on interaction with an explicit integration of spatial and regulatory contexts. This spatial sensitivity is of particular pertinence given the disintegrating nature of many spaces migrants are forced to inhabit at various stages of their migrant trajectory. As “non-places” (Augé 2009) many asylum facilities in both Germany and France are located in peripheral areas, deliberately complicating mobility and access to social networks outside the centers. In addition to formal migrant accommodation centers, makeshift camps of migrants have proliferated in Europe (Projet Babels 2017). Such camps, in turn, are spaces that engender feelings of dehumanization and existential physical deprivation. Grasping mobilizations of marginalized individuals and groups requires specific attention to these geographies of exclusion, which constitute important obstacles and require specific strategies to overcome them. All chapters in this book suggest that marginalized protesters raised public attention and mobilized resources by moving from socially and spatially isolated locations into urban centers. In setting up camps, and organizing marches (in the case of Berlin and the CSP75), they literally left behind their excluded position and articulated a claim to urban and social centrality. The relocation from the periphery of the asylum camp (Germany), the migrant worker *foyer* (Paris) or the individualized life in the streets (Paris) to the inner city space broke the routine of migrant invisibility. Regrouping in central locations attracted media coverage, tapped resources that were needed in order to be recognized as political subjects, to perform “acts of citizenship”



and to organize political protest. While street camps in both Berlin and Paris attracted resources, they differed fundamentally. In Paris, migrants gathered in a situation of “bare life” as a combination of subsistence and strategy of visibility, whereas the tent camps in Germany were deliberate autonomous spaces, with comparatively less precarious living conditions. Despite these significant differences, as autonomous spaces in contrast to regulated asylum facilities, both types of camps generated resources, attracting a diverse set of supporters from which precarious migrants had been previously cut off. In Berlin, precarious migrants gradually succeeded in compensating for the lack of resources and even in altering established power relations between migrants and supporters. The latter were attracted to the increasingly prominent protesters, who had, thus, a degree of choice in deciding with whom to work and whom to ignore. In addition to developing magnetic effects for external resources, the protest camps also served as spaces of encounter and gradual trust building among previously scattered migrant communities, in which stories and opinions could be shared and a collective identity developed – despite the tremendous heterogeneity of the actors involved. While these socio-spatial dynamics unfolded and sparked protests in both cities, the condition of “bare life” with extremely scarce resources in the makeshift camps and squats of Paris added obstacles to such rapprochements.

In both Berlin and Paris, protesters appropriated buildings, which proved to be settings with ambivalent relational effects. At the Lycée Jean Quarré in Paris and the Gerhart-Hauptmann-Schule in Berlin, particularly in their initial phases, these autonomous spaces provided a less precarious environment for interaction compared to the exposed street camps. Through the encounter of highly diverse actors, a range of political activities developed, which also partly survived the eviction or evacuation of these places. The potential, however, increasingly faded when the spaces became overpopulated, conflicts proliferated and the inhabitants became alienated from each other. Given the built environment of the arenas, the proliferating tensions were sealed in and, thus, accentuated in the building. Eventually, the spaces became instrumentalized by the opponents, since problems could be attributed to the occupants themselves and their internal organization, rather than serving as empowering catalysts of migrant visibility and political subjectivity. The squats organized by migrants mobilizing as *sans-papiers* in Paris constitute exceptions in this regard. Due to their comparative strength, given the existing vast (Francophone) migrant communities and established structures of political organization, they succeeded in sustaining and effectively self-organizing the occupations at the Bourse

du Travail and the Rue Baudelique for extended periods of time with much fewer internal disputes.

### Contentious Interactions and Fragile Alliances

Migrant mobilizations typically involve both migrants and a number of migrant support actors (Siméant 1998; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016; Giugni and Passy 2001). Such encounters of marginalized noncitizens and relatively privileged citizens often result in contentious interactions, in which questions of racism, paternalism and autonomy occupy a prominent place. In all the cases presented in the empirical part of this book, migrants were very soon surrounded by a wide range of actors with highly diverse institutional agendas and *modi operandi*, including individual supporters without previous experience in activism, anarchist groups with radical repertoires of action and professionalized NGOs with established channels to the government. Conflicts regularly arose concerning the roles of migrants and supporters. While all the nonmigrant associations and individuals involved, in principle, supported the cause of migrant rights, questions of leadership and strategies were heatedly contested. Many associations and individuals reacted with irritation to migrants actively claiming a position in the front row, or to their choice of strategies. They were profoundly uneasy about their role being limited to mere logistic support. Ties to established associations working on the issue of migration proved to be particularly fragile. Their traditional organizational identity of representing migrants and a focus on long-term “strategies” regularly collided with some migrants’ radical protest repertoire and their attempts to emancipate from a predominantly white migrant rights movement and the society at large. These disputes represent in Jasper’s language the “radicalism” and “universalism” dilemmas combined (Jasper 2008: 126, 153). In the resulting interactions, activist migrants felt their suspicions of ubiquitous paternalism and instrumentalization of their exclusion and suffering to be proven. In this context, it is key to recall that the sparks of protest at the St. Bernard church in 1996, at the Bourse du Travail in 2008 as well as in Würzburg in 2012 were ignited without the knowledge and initial support, and sometimes even despite the opposition, of a number of promigrant associations. At the same time, without the amplifying potential of a broader migrant rights movement, the episodes would have most likely remained scattered sparks.

Indeed, the migrant protesters found themselves repeatedly in a “strategic dilemma”: On the one hand, the migrant associations and

individual supporters offered fundamental logistic support, as well as symbolic and social capital without which the mobilizations could have hardly been sustained. At the same time, they had to renegotiate their autonomy constantly – in “acts of emancipation” also within the migrant rights movement. Confidently protecting the autonomy vis-à-vis native associations at times came at the expense of losing important access to resources. The dependence on external resources, in turn, entailed being caught between opposing support interests. In numerous instances, associations, trade unions and grassroots groups engaged in their own skirmishes accusing each other of exploiting precarious migrants. Due to the structural asymmetry in terms of power, risks, and rights distinguishing those primarily concerned from those acting in solidarity, such social ties were characterized by an accentuated fragility. Certainly, with notable exceptions, but generally, relations kept a pragmatic, resource-oriented “weak tie” nature, rather than being emotionally deep “strong ties” of trust based on shared experiences of exclusion. Yet, the arenas also showed that unequal power relations between migrants and native supporters were not necessarily static. Indeed, the relocation of protest to visible and autonomous public spaces (such as the tent camps in Würzburg and Berlin, but also initially the squat at the Lycée Jean Quarré and some of the street camps in Paris) developed at times a magnetic effect, attracting considerable resources from a broad range of individuals and groups, among which the protesters could choose to a certain degree. While precarious migrants had to rely on external support in most cases to get access to information, tents, rooms, and money, the protest itself and the contentious localities where it evolved, expanded their room for maneuver. Thus, in some spatial settings, marginalized and weakly resourced challengers could compensate for an objective lack of internal resources without becoming dependent on specific actors.

As some of the cases clearly document, contentious interactions do not unfold in a vacuum, but involve actors with certain dispositions. These dispositions are rooted in histories of mobilizations and hence in memories of previous contentious interactions. In both Berlin and Paris, actors regularly referred to past interactions with certain players or types of players in previous episodes of migrant protest. In Berlin, the Oranienplatz arena left deep traces in the relations between supporters and migrants but also between different generations and “types” of precarious migrants. In Paris, the interactions around the occupation of the Bourse du Travail lastingly alienated the most influential *sans-papiers* collectives from both trade unions and some migrant support associations, which partly explained

their reluctance during the La Chapelle protests. In other words, contentious interactions in previous arenas have proven to feed into dispositions for future interactions.

Despite their shared nonstatus, among undocumented migrants, chances for legal recognition and social inclusion are highly diverse (Nicholls 2014). Given the absence of large political opportunities, illegalized migrants mobilize in small “niches,” which can only accommodate some at the expense of the exclusion of others. The boundaries of inclusion, usually set by the state, introduce breaking points in the social relations among undocumented migrant protesters. Similar to Jasper’s “rules dilemma,” dependent actors were trapped in the very rules they wanted to change in the first place (Jasper 2008: 163). As the empirical chapters in this book suggest, these findings can be extended to precarious migrants more broadly, including asylum seekers.

The contentious subjects in the four arenas assembled a highly diverse group of individuals – in terms of origin, age, gender and, most importantly, in terms of (potential) legal status. While in Berlin asylum seekers mobilized mostly alongside rejected asylum seekers and individuals with a regular status in Italy under the label “refugees,” the two cases in Paris document a focus on *sans-papiers* activism, including rejected asylum seekers and political refugees turned undocumented migrants. The La Chapelle arena furthermore underlined an accentuated separation between mobilizations by and for asylum seekers in an ongoing procedure and those self-identifying as “*sans-papiers*.” In all four cases, heterogeneity and different propensities of regularization introduced sensitive breaking points during the mobilizations – even in groups that had started mobilizing as a “compound player.” In the case of the Bourse du Travail arena, different groups of precarious migrants eventually competed for a limited number of regularizations dictated by the state, which eventually led to internal fragmentation and demobilization. At Oranienplatz, asylum seekers and members of the Lampedusa group were increasingly alienated and focused on their specific group interests. Within the movement, players repeatedly split along the lines of origin and (perceived) chances to be granted rights and recognition compared to others. At La Chapelle, the *sans-papiers* largely abstained from the mobilizations of those referred to as “refugees,” not only because of negative memories of previous interactions with French supporters, but also because of perceived competition with comparatively more privileged asylum seekers. Furthermore, at La Chapelle, in the light of a heterogeneous set of asylum seekers, conflicts regularly erupted between different (national)

groups over scarce resources and competition to find a place in the “niche,” be it a place in an accommodation center or the support of associations. In Berlin, the internal cleavages among Afghan migrants along lines of ethnicity and ideology were an important factor for demobilization once a uniting existential threat of deportation faded.

Aware of the disruptive effects of certain spaces as well as the fragility of social ties, government officials have in all four arenas at times deliberately governed space and social relations, often combining the two. In a structural variant, the German asylum system is deliberately designed to complicate the establishment of social relations between asylum seekers and German citizens, with a view to minimizing empathy, and facilitating deportation in cases of rejected asylum claims. Both *Residenzpflicht* and geographic dispersal in collective accommodation centers have been used as a tool by government officials during episodes of political mobilization in order to discourage and sanction migrant participants. At La Chapelle, public authorities intervened in the built environment by fencing entire parks and public spaces under elevated metro lines, as well as by placing massive boulders in potential gathering spaces order to prevent migrants from regrouping and, hence, from drawing attention to their condition of continuous violation of fundamental rights. In both the Oranienplatz arena and the occupations of the Bourse du Travail and the Rue Baudelique in Paris, the public authorities offered selective incentives which combined spatial and relational strategies of control. A limited number of individuals involved in the mobilizations was offered an exit option (reassessment of individual cases) on the condition that the disruptive camps and occupations were voluntarily dismantled. With such means, the state could avoid open repression against marginalized protesters, which would potentially produce negative media coverage and increased empathy and support for the actors involved. The heterogeneity of (potential) legal status among migrants and the dependency on the state introduced fissures within the mobilizing groups upon which the respective state officials could act. In both Paris and Berlin selective incentives were offered by the state which increased the likelihood for precarious actors to defect from collective long-term group interests. Accordingly, in contrast to many other mobilizations, precarious migrants (both asylum seekers and undocumented migrants) hold a massive individual stake in the conflict, with a lot to win and a lot to lose. This inherent characteristic of precarious migrant mobilizations adds additional motivations for individuals to defect from collective action and options for opponents to intervene.

## **Precarious Lives and Resistances**

The empirical findings in this book suggest the need for social movement studies to refocus on everyday experiences of exclusion, when studying political mobilizations of marginalized actors. Rather than by opening opportunities and pre-given resources, migrants have predominantly reacted to existential threats to their own physical and psychological integrity and that of friends and acquaintances. While social movement studies have “tended to disregard the origins of discontent” (della Porta 2018a: 1), it is these “embodied grievances” that pushed most of the protagonists of this book to organize political protest against all the odds. Sparks of protest often emanated from tangible threats, while the subsequent trajectory of protest was fundamentally shaped by concrete interactions. In the Bourse du Travail protests, the intervention of the CGT trade union posed a broad threat against their communities and identities, but also a direct threat to themselves and their personal interests. In the La Chapelle protests, the highly precarious life in the streets posed a fundamental threat to physical integrity. The sparks of the Oranienplatz protests arose from a suicide, which, for those joining the protest, was a direct effect of a highly burdensome life in uncertainty, forced immobility and isolation. The Afghans taking to the streets in Berlin considered a potential deportation to their conflict-torn home country as a death sentence, which left no other choice than to resist.

Given the context of marginality, the cases studied show the contours of a particular repertoire of action employed by precarious migrants. In a condition of “bare life” in Paris, the protest took an instrumental form with a focus on immediate solutions to existential hardship, rather than structural change. In most cases, access to shelter, food and basic medical care was the priority, even though claims for recognition and dignity were also articulated. Accordingly, direct social actions at such camps proliferated, which combined precarious subsistence with a strategy of visibility. At La Chapelle, asylum seekers predominantly mobilized to get into the asylum system. In Germany, instead, with its rigid reception system, asylum seekers in most cases stepped out of the asylum system in order to mobilize resources and expose the living conditions of asylum seekers, which remained mostly hidden from the public eye.

The microscopic perspective adopted in this book with attention to the constituencies, their experiences, strategies and everyday practices by precarious migrants in exclusive migration regimes furthermore unveils that instead of, or at times in addition to, disruptive collective action, many migrants chose less “visible” forms of dissent. Many opted for “exit” instead

of “voice,” trying to gain inclusion in the United Kingdom or elsewhere. Others stayed and focused on survival in illegality or engaged in legal struggles for a right to stay. Precarious conditions brought about a myriad of more instrumental, at times short-term and at times “invisible” forms of resistance (Stierl 2018). Attention to the diverse microprocesses of political mobilization by precarious migrants sheds light on the heterogeneity of the actors involved. It unveils the widespread dependence of individuals in a situation of “bare life” but also the “weapons of the (not so) weak” (Zepeda-Millán 2016). Those mobilizing as “*sans-papiers*” in Paris had the comparative advantage of established ethnic networks in which various resources were embedded. These did not only contribute to partly buffering the precariousness of a life in illegality in Paris, but also allowed self-constitution as an autonomous political subject with less dependence on pro-beneficiaries than those asylum seekers from origins without established ethnic networks. All cases, some more explicit than others, furthermore illustrate how individual (transnational) biographies shape protest by marginalized actors. Indeed, migrants in all cases were embedded in transnational social spaces, which resulted in a dual target of protest. Protesters in both Paris and Berlin considered their activism as a struggle for rights and recognition in the locality of destination but also aimed at pushing for changes in the locality of origin or transit. They demanded both a “right to remain,” hence, life-worthy conditions at “home,” and “a right to leave,” meaning rights and recognition in Europe. Even though not all arenas mirrored the same degree of transnationality, references to the region of origin and a responsibility to mobilize also for those left behind were expressed regularly.

### **Epilogue: Precarious Migration as a Form of Life**

In the “long summer of migration” in 2015, a decade-old reality of mass displacement became a European “problem” and spurred both acts of compassion and resistance (Jäckle and König 2016; Hess et al. 2016; della Porta 2018b). In most public portrayals, migrants have been either represented as an indistinctive mass, as a threat to the “occidental order” or as vulnerable and powerless victims. In some circles, idealized perceptions of a new revolutionary avant-garde have circulated. The protagonists of this book are first and foremost human beings striving for recognition and rights. They emerge as contentious political subjects, and break their silence and invisibility. Many of the resulting practices are precarious and contradictory.

Such radical and often irreconcilable “acts of emancipation” and “acts of citizenship” constitute ruptures and highlight that migration is a highly contentious field in which fundamental rights and interests are (re)distributed. According to Bauman, “mobility has become the most powerful and most coveted stratifying factor” (Bauman 1998: 9, 74). Moreover, and in contrast to optimistic expectations, “the global expansion of capitalist modernity (intertwined with questions of race) did not produce a homogenization or a leveling of world economy and labor, but rather a ceaseless proliferation of differences, heterogeneities and hierarchies” (Mellino 2016: 100).

Purposefully, this book uses the broad notion of precarious migration, referring to specific legal categories only if necessary, to underline specific opportunities or constraints. All precarious migrant protagonists in this book had reasons relevant enough to take the tremendous risks of perilous journeys. Beyond an illusionary neat distinction between “forced” and “voluntary” migration (Scheel and Squire 2014), projects of precarious migration are, in most cases, a “combination of danger, poverty and hope” (Fassin 2018: 42). Independent from their official identification, the protagonists in this book shared in Fassin’s terms a specific “form of life” (Fassin 2018), characterized by both social and legal uncertainty. This form of life has structural roots, and thus is not likely to decrease in scale any time soon.

In the light of proliferating conflicts, the detrimental effects of climate change and materially speaking “one of the most unequal worlds in all of human history, ever since the recording of income and wealth data” (Faist 2017: 19), large-scale precarious migration will remain one of the key social questions in the decades to come. Accordingly, “the people knocking at the door of Europe tell something that needs to be listened to, they tell their moral fatigue toward the growing gap between the wealthiest and poorest segments of humanity” (Monsutti 2017: 454). This book on mobilizations in contexts of marginalization, therefore, serves as a document of the contradictory global realities, since “in order for injustice to exist, it must be able to be spoken” (Agier 2010: 42).

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# Appendix

## Research Design, Methods, and Ethics

The study on which this book is based was designed as a “case oriented” (della Porta 2008) comparison of precarious migrant protest in Berlin and Paris. In such an approach, “a few cases are analyzed based on a large number of characteristics” in thick descriptions (della Porta 2008: 207), striking a balance between attention to detail and the potential of contrasting cases. This resembles the idea of “political ethnography,” in which “*ethnography* [...] implies attention to detail, to contextual factors, and to configurational thinking,” while “*political*” adds a perspective more open to cross-case comparison and deduction (Schatz 2009). Such an approach resonates furthermore with a core ambition of the “players and arenas” approach to focus on both the particularity of specific periods of contention and “[grasping] the types of strategic interactions that can be considered ‘characteristic’” (Duyvendak and Fillieule 2014: 312). Comparative case studies thereby allow tentative propositions for the dynamics of contention in certain issue areas more broadly.

The decision to study four cases in two settings (Berlin and Paris) followed the rationale to capitalize upon the potential of both cross-spatial and diachronic comparison (della Porta 2008). Since, existing research has shown the distinct citizenship and “borderline citizenship” regimes in Germany and France (Brubaker 1992; Monforte and Dufour 2011), they constitute contrasting settings for precarious migrant protest. With a view to capture similarities, differences and continuities within settings, the study investigates two cases in each city. In this tradition, the book both provides detailed accounts and derives patterns from four cases of precarious migrant protest, shedding light on the grievances, emergence, and trajectories of mobilizations in contexts of marginalization. In conjunction, they stimulate theory building on both the odds of precarious protest and ways to temporarily overcome them in distinct settings.

A “case oriented” comparison poses specific challenges for the research process. In contrast to the traditionally extensive fieldwork conducted in case study (for anthropologists usually one year or more in one locality), in case comparisons, researchers usually spend much shorter periods (months, rather than years) in a certain setting and combine various techniques of data collection, including interviews, observation and archival work (Schatz 2009). The analytic narratives in the empirical chapters of the book are

based on fieldwork in Berlin and Paris and, more specifically, on insights gained through interviewing individuals, participating and observing practices, and identifying and compiling textual sources produced by protesters, allies, opponents and the media. Participant observation was used in both locations, Paris and Berlin, to access the field and identify interlocutors, but also to immerse with a group, in order to observe (political) practices and perceptions. In Berlin, “non-continuous” (Balsiger and Lambelet 2014: 153) fieldwork was conducted between January 2016 and January 2019, and in Paris between April and July 2017. Observation has been complemented with qualitative interviews for various conceptual and normative reasons: it is evidently only feasible to follow some activists for some time. For contextualization it is indispensable to ask for past experiences. Conceptually, furthermore, in studying perceptions and subjective attribution of meaning to certain practices, it is useful to triangulate observed practices with interviewed explication. Very fundamentally, also, “people generally don’t talk about what they take for granted” (Blee 2012: 12). This requires unveiling practices and attitudes that are not explicitly addressed. Finally, interviews have a strong normative component. They “generate representations that embody the subject’s voice, minimizing, at least as far as possible, the voice of the researcher” (Blee and Taylor 2002: 96). This is particularly key in research with subaltern individuals and groups. This book draws from a total of 76 interviews,<sup>1</sup> which lasted between 20 and 150 minutes and had different degrees of structuration. Due to the research interest in interactions among various actors engaged in the four arenas, interlocutors included not only migrant activists, but also key informants from the migrant support movement, trade unions and politicians. The interviews were organized around four main areas of interest, which were raised in a changing order depending on the flow of the conversation: the personal motivation and path into protest; the mobilization of resources during protest; the quality and dynamics of social relations; and the role of certain spaces. Most interviews were recorded. When interlocutors did not consent to be recorded, extensive notes were taken directly after the conversation. Interviews were conducted in English, German and French and subsequently translated. In addition to participant observation and interviews, the empirical section draws from textual resources that have been produced independently from the research project. Such texts include interviews, comments and self-representations by migrant protesters in leaflets, (online) texts and videos, but also by allies and opponents and

1 See list of interviews below.

the media. These sources served to complement and cross-validate data, obtained firsthand. Indeed, during the research process, in various occasions, the interlocutors referred to statements made by influential actors in the media, or to other written sources. Often, these more extensive reports and self-reflections were as valuable as the face-to-face interviews. The flexibility in the phase of data collection necessary in studying volatile and precarious forms of contention (Malthaner 2014; Blee 2012a; Schatz 2009; Chabanet and Royall 2014) poses a challenge for data analysis. The “steaming mass” of data (Katz 2002), consisting of interview transcripts, field notes, and documents, was analyzed in various loops of reading, assigning codes, and identifying patterns. Eventually, the analytical narratives were “punctuated by illustrative vignettes. [...] In these descriptions, the researcher must mention all those details that are revealing. Superfluous details must be left out” (Bray 2008: 313). In order to facilitate the reading flow, interview passages were slightly smoothed in language and, at times, transparently marked, in order to omit passages not relevant to the core argument.

Research on precarious migrant protest requires specific ethical reflections, since it combines risks related to a precarious legal and social situation and an engagement in contention with state actors (Milan 2014; Krause 2017). During the research, most interlocutors were aware of the risks and first tended to be skeptical toward any kind of research. Particular reluctance was met during initial piloting attempts to gather standardized (network) data, which interlocutors associated negatively bureaucratic control procedures. In turn, “to talk to heal the trauma” (field notes, 20 April 2016), was accepted in most occasions. Accordingly, a flexible approach to data collection turned out to be both a practical need and an ethical obligation. In line with ethical standards in research with vulnerable individuals, all results have been anonymized. This entails omitting the names, but also the country of origin and other characteristic features to avoid possible identification. Evidently, anonymization stands in strong tension with the normative ambition not to speak “on behalf” of others. The book privileges the security of the individuals involved but simultaneously extensively quotes marginalized voices. Ethical concerns were regularly raised by interlocutors during the research process. Since many considered their practices as “acts of emancipation,” the terms of the research had to be constantly negotiated. One of the key homepages resulting from the Oranienplatz protests even explicitly states: “If you want to interview refugee activists for a research project, please consider your position in relation to people categorized as refugees and being active politically, and how refugee protests and the activists themselves

can benefit from your project.”<sup>2</sup> Building and keeping trust also meant, at times, to accept and respect the limits of research.

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# List of Interviews

## Interviews in Berlin

ID	Date	Location	Actor Type	Language
B1	12.03.16	Berlin	Migrant	French
B2	19.04.16	Berlin	Migrant	English
B3	20.04.16	Berlin	Migrant	French
B4	31.05.16	Berlin	Migrant	English
B5	02.06.16	Berlin	Supporter	German
B6	05.06.16	Berlin	Migrant	French
B7	08.06.16	Berlin	Politician	German
B8	19.06.16	Berlin	Supporter, Politician	German
B9	21.06.16	Berlin	NGO/Supporter	German
B10	22.06.16	Berlin	Migrant	English
B11	01.07.16	Bremen	Migrant	English
B12	04.07.16	Berlin	Migrant	French, English
B13	08.07.16	Berlin	Politician	German
B14	17.07.16	Berlin	Migrant	French
B15	21.07.16	Berlin	Migrant	German
B16	24.07.16	Berlin	Migrant	French, English
B17	26.07.16	Jena	Migrant	English
B18	27.07.16	Potsdam	Migrant	German
B19	28.07.16	Berlin	Migrant	German
B20	29.07.16	Berlin	Supporter	German
B21	24.08.16	Berlin	Supporter/NGO	German
B22	29.08.16	Berlin	Migrant	English
B23	31.08.16	Berlin	Supporter/NGO	German
B24	01.09.16	Berlin	Migrant	English
B25	05.09.16	Berlin	Supporter	German
B26	06.09.16	Berlin	Supporter/NGO	German
B27	23.01.17	Berlin	Migrant	French
B28	25.01.17	Berlin	Migrant	French
B29	27.01.17	Berlin	Migrant	French
B30	29.01.17	Berlin	Migrant	French
B31	08.02.17	Berlin	Migrant	German
B32	23.02.17	Berlin	NGO	German
B33	23.03.17	Berlin	NGO	German
B34	26.03.17	Berlin	Supporter	German
B35	11.04.18	Berlin	NGO	German
B36	13.04.18	Berlin	Migrant	German
B37	15.04.18	Berlin	Migrant	German
B38	25.07.18	Berlin	NGO/Migrant	German

<b>ID</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Actor Type</b>	<b>Language</b>
B39	03.07.18	Berlin	Migrant	English
B40	29.06.18	Berlin	NGO/Migrant	Deutsch
B41	29.06.18	Berlin	Migrant	Deutsch
B42	18.05.17	Berlin	NGO/Migrant	Deutsch
B43	28.08.18	Potsdam	Migrant	Deutsch
B44	28.08.18	Potsdam	Migrant	Deutsch
B45	14.01.19	Berlin	Migrant	Deutsch

## Interviews in Paris

<b>ID</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Actor Type</b>	<b>Language</b>
P1	16.05.17	Paris	NGO	French
P2	17.05.17	Paris	Supporter	French
P3	30.05.17	Paris	Supporter	French
P4	30.05.17	Brussels	Migrant	French
P5	01.06.17	Paris	Migrant, NGO	French
P6	05.06.17	Paris	Supporter, NGO	French
P7	08.06.17	Paris	Supporter	French
P8	12.06.17	Paris	NGO	French
P9	12.06.17	Paris	NGO, Supporter	French
P10	13.06.17	Paris	NGO, Supporter	French
P11	14.06.17	Paris	Politician	English
P12	14.06.17	Paris	NGO	French
P13	15.06.17	Paris	Supporter	French
P14	16.06.17	Paris	Migrant	French
P15	18.06.17	Paris	Migrant	French
P16	19.06.17	Paris	NGO	French
P17	19.06.17	Paris	Migrant	English
P18	20.06.17	Paris	Migrant, NGO	French
P19	20.06.17	Paris	NGO	French
P20	22.06.17	Paris	Migrant	English
P21	23.06.17	Paris	Supporter	French
P22	25.06.17	Paris	Migrant	French
P23	25.06.17	Paris	Supporter	English
P24	25.06.17	Paris	Migrant	English
P25	26.06.17	Paris	NGO	French
P26	26.06.17	Paris	Migrant	French
P27	26.06.17	Paris	Supporter	French
P28	27.06.17	Paris	Supporter	French
P29	27.06.17	Paris	Supporter, NGO	French
P30	28.06.17	Paris	Supporter	French
P31	13.01.17	Online	Migrant	English

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