Uneven geographies of asylum accommodation: Conceptualizing the impact of spatial, material, and institutional differences on (un)familiarity between asylum seekers and local residents

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Abstract

Asylum accommodation is held to isolate asylum seekers spatially and socially from the majority population in host societies. Little attention has been devoted to variation in asylum accommodation at the level of the everyday. Central to this paper is the argument that variation between localities, as well as variation on the level of the built environment creates 'uneven geographies of asylum accommodation'. The paper theorizes that more 'open' forms of asylum accommodation may foster familiarity between asylum seekers and local residents through the development of closer everyday social relations, and more 'closed' forms of asylum accommodation may enforce feelings of unfamiliarity by strengthening processes of categorization and everyday bordering. In so doing, we propose to differentiate between 'spatial', 'material' and 'institutional' dimensions of openness of asylum accommodation and aim to understand '(un)familiarity' as expression of people's experiences, knowledge and perceptions of social distance. We further argue that feelings of (un)familiarity are connected to processes of belonging and estrangement.

Keywords: asylum accommodation, spatial, material and institutional openness, everyday social relations, (un)familiarity

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1. Introduction

> We will create the alien nation, not outside our borders, but within our midst. And we will have only ourselves to blame for future generations of distance, distrust and disenchantment. (Goodwin-Gill 1997: 16)

The year 2015 was the year of the so-called refugee-crisis. Where this crisis was taking place was a matter of heated political debate. EU member states saw themselves overwhelmed by 'floods' of people seeking asylum, despite the fact that 86 per cent of the world's refugees are hosted by countries of the Global South (UNHCR 2018). In response to popular fears of being 'swamped' by increasing numbers of asylum seekers, reception regimes were tightened and restrictions imposed. Such approaches are in line with the 'securitization of migration' (Huysmans 2006), which broadly describes two trends: First, the 'reworking and spatial reconfiguration of borders' and second, 'the emergence of new 'migration management regimes' intended to deter those fleeing violence and war from reaching safe havens (in the Global North)' (Ehrkamp 2017: 3).

The spatial reconfiguration of borders implies both the externalization of asylum, that is, the location of border control practices *outside* of national space (Hyndman and Mountz 2008), as well as the shift of borders and intensified immigration control *into* everyday spaces (Coutin 2010). These trends have contributed to a global rise in immigration detention and restrictions on mobility (Mountz et al. 2012). The securitization of migration has not only increased migrants' vulnerability, it has also contributed to a growth in 'exclusionary practices [that] situate migrants ambiguously as *outside* of national territory even when, physically, they are within' (Coutin 2010: 201). Practices of confinement are therefore not limited to spaces of immigration detention. Kreichauf (2018: 2) identifies a European trend towards the 'campization' of asylum accommodation, which he describes as a 'process in which the recent tightening of asylum laws and reception regulations have resulted in the emergence and deepening of camp-like characteristics of refugee accommodation in European city-regions'.

However, other scholars have also warned against generalizations of 'refugee camps' and comparisons between asylum accommodation in the Global North and refugee camps in the Global South (Sanyal 2012). As Malkki (2002) points out, refugee camps do not exist in a 'social void', but are always dependent on their socio-spatial context, resulting in high degrees of variation in the Global South. Similarly, EU member states vary considerably in asylum seeker reception conditions (Brekke and Vevstad 2007; Brekke and Brochmann 2014). Moreover, scholars have also examined the local dimension of migration policies, identifying a wide range of practices in the field of local integration policies (Caponio and Borkert 2010; Ambrosini and Boccagni 2015). While it is a necessity to situate everyday practices within broader geopolitical trends, generalizations such as 'campization' also have a tendency to mask variation in asylum seeker and refugee reception, as these are all sites of territorial struggle between different individuals, groups and collectives.

Next to state-provided asylum accommodation, which is often found to supply asylum seekers with only the bare minimum (Rosenberger and König 2011), civil society responses to such minimal reception conditions have produced a number of housing alternatives which seek to improve living conditions. Examples range from private flat-sharing initiatives, to localities refusing to house asylum seekers in collective accommodation, to 'hotel'-like constructions

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(Stalinski 2014; Grandhotel Cosmopolis 2018; Takecarebnb 2018). These differences in local practices and reactions towards asylum accommodation accentuate the fact that asylum accommodation is far from 'isolated'; rather, the accommodation of asylum seekers signposts how local and contested this issue is. While asylum accommodation may have an 'isolating' effect on its inhabitants, this paper stresses that isolation is produced *within* society, not at its fringes.

The objective of this paper is to point towards two interrelated issues: Firstly, variation in local approaches produce 'uneven geographies' of asylum accommodation, which differ in their spatial, material and institutional 'degrees of open- and closedness'. Secondly, 'uneven geographies' not only impact asylum seekers, but society as a whole, as these can be understood as practices of 'everyday bordering'. Rather than measuring different degrees of integration of asylum seekers, this paper proposes to take a relational perspective and shine a light on how uneven geographies of asylum accommodation may impact everyday social relations between asylum seekers and local residents. The concept of (un)familiarity is proposed as a way to conceptualize the impact on social relations, as it understands feelings of familiarity or unfamiliarity as a relation between people's experiences, knowledge and social distance. The paper further argues that feelings of unfamiliarity are closely intertwined with processes of estrangement and the politics of belonging.

The paper is composed as follows: The second section will briefly outline the relation between national and local differences in asylum accommodation. The third section will introduce the concept of degrees of open- and closedness of asylum accommodation as a way to grasp the 'uneven geographies of asylum accommodation. This section will also distinguish between 'spatial', 'material' and 'institutional' openness of asylum accommodation as different dimensions of variation of asylum accommodation on the level of the built environment and institutional actors and conditions. The fourth section of the paper will introduce (un)familiarity and related processes of belonging and estrangement as a framework for understanding contact and social relations between asylum seekers and local residents. The paper's conclusion will provide suggestions for further research.

2. Uneven geographies of asylum accommodation: national and local migration regimes

Asylum reception policies in member states of the European Union display large differences in living standards, despite EU efforts towards the harmonization of reception systems. Not only do these differences prevent the coordination of policies across EU member states, but they also prompt secondary movement by migrants (Brekke and Brochmann 2014). These differences in reception conditions between EU member states are a reflection of different national migration regimes. Tsianos and Karakayali (2010: 375) define 'migration regime' as 'a multitude of actors whose practices relate to each other, without, however, being ordered in the form of a central logic or rationality. Rather, the concept of "regime" implies a space of negotiating practices.' The authors argue for a theoretical shift from systems of national 'control' to different 'actors' and 'practices', highlighting how different approaches to asylum seeker reception are not products of a 'central logic', but can be seen as 'the result of social conflicts, which end in institutionalized compromises that have to be renewed or abandoned over and over again'

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(376). Analyses of refugee reception and accommodation thus need to bear in mind variation between migration regimes, as well as the fact that this variation is not an outcome of a 'central logic' but of many local and regional societal conflicts and solutions.

Rather than assuming a top–down relationship between national asylum regimes and everyday social relations, this paper argues for analyses that take account of the specificity of local practices surrounding the production and politics of asylum accommodation and how this specificity affects social relations in the everyday. As emphasized by Agnew (1987) social structures and human practices are interrelated and mutually dependent. This mutual dependency between social structure and human practice is also evident with regard to the legal geographies of asylum. White (2002: 1071) analysed different local and institutional practices of asylum law and found not only that legal practices differed between sites and organizations, but that these differences impacted on the future success or failure of asylum claims. Differences in access to justice hence led to 'uneven geographies of asylum' (1062).

Scholars have also cautioned against essentialist concepts of the state, overlooking the multiplicity of other social agents involved in excluding and subjugating asylum seekers and refugees. Policy making and outcomes are often the effect and not the cause of social and cultural circumstances, as local pressures may be rapidly transformed into national policy (Gill 2010, 2016). Likewise, Mountz (2010) argues for a closer analysis of the roles of street-level bureaucrats in shaping immigration policy. Undertaking an 'ethnography of the state' in her analysis of immigration bureaucracy in Canada, Mountz highlights not only how policy was made on the spur of the moment, but also how bureaucrats are affected by their own emotions, as well as by media reporting.

In line with analyses of the local dimension of migration policy (Caponio and Borkert 2010; Ambrosini and Boccagni 2015), Hinger, Schäfer, and Pott (2016) introduce the concept of a 'local migration regime' to stress how asylum accommodation is produced as well as contested by different groups of actors. Based on a case study in eastern Germany, the authors demonstrate not only how rules and regulations on asylum accommodation are shaped by a number of actors on the local level, including asylum seekers themselves. Such local differentiation creates a unique 'local migration regime', with actors that 'not only produce interconnected localities, but also play out their different interests and social positions'. A 'local migration regime', the authors conclude, is hence characterized by a certain degree of specificity and diverges from the national migration regime. Taking variation between local migration regimes into account also points towards the importance of comparative analyses of local regimes, as cities have different approaches to migration and diversity (Glick-Schiller 2012). The following section will introduce the concept of spatial, material and institutional degrees of openness to take account of local and place-based variation of asylum accommodation and its relation with everyday bordering practices.

3. 'Spatial', 'material' and 'institutional openness' of asylum accommodation

3.1 'Spatial' openness and closedness

Previous research in the field of forced migration has established the centrality of space for understanding geographies of asylum (Hyndman and Mountz 2008; Coutin 2010; Mountz

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2010; Mountz et al. 2012; Gill 2016; Conlon, Hiemstra, and Mountz 2017). The range of spatial tactics state actors employ is diverse, yet more often than not, their goal is 'to prevent irregular migrants from accessing the legal rights conferred by territorial presence' (Coutin 2010: 200). Asylum accommodation is one among many spatial tactics of control. Yet, it is also described as a 'porous institution' or a 'half-open camp' (Pieper 2008: 351; Kreichauf 2018), thereby challenging images of absolute closure or the impenetrability of its borders. Importantly, what distinguishes asylum accommodation from spaces of immigration detention or prison spaces is its legal 'openness'. Here, legal openness is determined by whether or not an individual can 'leave at will or within reasonable confines' (Guild 2005: 3).

This section will expand current legal understandings of openness of asylum accommodation by outlining three additional dimensions—spatial, material and institutional—that shape how asylum accommodation is experienced in everyday life. As captured by the concept of the 'local migration regime', asylum seekers' actual degrees of inclusion or exclusion on a local level are a consequence of locally specific groups of actors. As a result, local reception and accommodation practices and policies are shaped and enacted differently across space. This geographical diversity in asylum accommodation affects the everyday experiences and social interaction of asylum seekers and the local population. The section draws on the concept of 'territoriality' to argue that variation of asylum accommodation is an outcome of 'territorial' struggle between different groups of actors. The section will further employ the concept of 'everyday bordering' as the key mechanism of territorial control. To further develop the spatial dimension of openness, the following will make use of two foundational understandings of 'space' within geography, namely, space as *relative* and space as produced through social *relations*.

Viewing asylum accommodation through the lens of relative space means taking relative spatial distance or proximity between people, objects or places into account. For instance, the legal designation as 'open' or 'closed' does not allow for an understanding of the degree to which asylum seekers and refugees actually have access to key areas of everyday life. A first step towards understanding the spatiality of asylum accommodation is thus to assess the *accessibility* and *affordances* of the spatial context. Asylum centres that are legally 'open' might in practice contribute to the confinement of their inhabitants due to a spatially remote location or due to limited access to public or other means of transportation (Kwan 2013). Likewise, asylum centres in urban areas might prevent interaction by being located in neighborhoods offering few opportunities to interact in the public realm (Basu and Fiedler 2017).

Variation in terms of place-based characteristics such as history, population composition, economic and political structure also influence the nature of social relations between 'newcomers', such as asylum seekers, and the 'established' population (Robinson 2010; Platts-Fowler and Robinson 2015). Although few studies have specifically compared contrasting locations of asylum accommodation (an exception is Pieper 2008), research within the UK found that asylum seekers were often dispersed to deprived and 'difficult to let' areas, with poor housing quality and high degrees of hostility and resentment towards asylum seekers (Phillips 2006; Dwyer and Brown 2008; Netto 2011). Participants of these studies often expressed feelings of social isolation. This finding was reflected in their

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preferred housing locations, which revealed that safety from criminal behaviour and racial harassment, as well as opportunities to form social connections are important factors (Netto 2011).

Yet relative spatial location can only partially explain how different groups of actors, including asylum seekers, perform or contest spaces of asylum, and how these spatial practices affect the structure of everyday life. Studies of immigration detention therefore employ the term 'spatial tactics' to refer to 'the use of space to control people, objects, and their movement' (Martin and Mitchelson 2009: 459). Conceptualizing asylum accommodation as spaces that both produce and are produced by social relations can shed further light on who determines the location of a centre, but also on the political, social and economic effects these spaces have on society as a whole. A concept that can help clarify the linkages between different degrees of accessibility of asylum accommodation as well as the intentional and unintentional effects of such spaces is 'territoriality' (Sack 1986). Following Sack (1986), this is 'the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area; this area will be called the territory' (19). According to Sack, not all places are territories; transforming a place or area into a territory requires the construction and maintenance of boundaries in order to control access.

Following Sack's (1986) theory of territoriality, boundaries are a tool for establishing control over a territory in order to limit accessibility, as well as a way to communicate both who belongs and who does not. Other scholars emphasize that borders not only demarcate the nation state but can be found in everyday life as 'sets of practices and discourses which "spread" into the whole of society' (Paasi 1999: 670). Moreover, borders are both material and immaterial and are considered to be processes as well as institutions, rather than 'static lines'. Understood as processes, borders and boundaries 'demarcate', they create separation or categorization; understood as institutions, borders are maintained through 'management', permitting 'legitimation, signification and domination' and thus a form of ordering (Newman 2006: 148). Borders may have varying degrees of 'porosity'; acting as a 'filter' against possible or perceived threat, borders can restrict mobility for some and not for others, depending on their societal position (Muller 2011). Yet, borders can also be seen as a bridge for contact between the self and other (Newman 2006). Borders and boundaries are both multi-scalar and multi-sited; as such they can range from the individual to the global level and be found in different 'sites', such as spaces of immigration detention and asylum accommodation (Mountz et al. 2012).

While the reception of asylum seekers is determined hierarchically by laws and regulations decided upon on the European and national level, this hierarchy is differently implemented on the local level, leading to 'uneven geographies' of asylum seeker reception practices. Different degrees of spatial openness or closedness of asylum accommodation then describe the extent to which boundaries are employed as a means to territorial control within everyday life. As these boundaries can take material and institutional form, 'material' and 'institutional openness' are nested within the spatial dimension of openness. The following two sections will further specify how asylum accommodation constructs material and institutional boundaries.

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3.2 'Material' openness and closedness

The most common form in which we encounter borders is as physical, material objects, such as walls, fences with barbed wire, check points, or security gates at the airport. This materiality of borders is not only found at the 'edge' of the nation-state, but also within the everyday. As immigration detention has been described as 'sites where the enforcement of national borders takes place' (Conlon, Hiemstra, and Mountz 2017: 8), what then is the role of materiality within spaces of asylum accommodation? In the following, this paper argues that 'material' openness or closedness is the second dimension that needs to be taken into account in analyses of asylum accommodation. It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in-depth with 'new materialism' as a philosophical influence on geography (but see Anderson and Wylie 2009; Kirsch 2013). Still, this section will bring together scholarship within the field of forced migration and human geography, which explicitly examines the roles of architecture and the built environment in the context of asylum accommodation.

Buildings, including asylum accommodation, are more than their usage. However, few studies so far explicitly engage with the architectural design of asylum accommodation. That this aspect is nevertheless important follows from Diken's (2004: 92) claim that the architectural design of refugee accommodation is a 'materialization of a "fear of touching"'. Scholars within the field of critical geographies of architecture claim that architecture can function as a symbolic 'referent' for social difference or status (Lees 2001; Kraftl 2010). According to Dixon (2001), group membership can be emphasized or played down within particular spatial settings: 'Decategorization is unlikely to occur in an environment where group differences remain visibly encoded within the built form or use of space or within the territorial meanings attributed to particular places' (598). The built environment and its usage thus convey the dominant ideological values and power-relations in place in society, as 'they enable political values to acquire material body, to become a concrete feature of everyday encounters' (600).

The symbolic function of architecture also implicitly explains and expands findings of studies of opposition against asylum accommodation in the Netherlands, which demonstrate that a centre's size influences the degree of opposition, with larger centres invoking higher degrees of opposition (Lubbers, Coenders, and Scheepers 2006). Similarly, Hauge, Støa, and Denizou (2017) compared centralized and decentralized asylum accommodation in Norway, with decentralized housing being similar or equal to ordinary homes in the area. The authors find that decentralized housing units are preferable to regular, centralized accommodation, as this provides more opportunities for empowerment and inclusion into the community. Conversely, accommodation that stands in stark contrast to its residential environment, either via aesthetic or technical standards, may act stigmatizing and excluding.

More recent work on the critical geographies of architecture has gone beyond a focus on representation and moved into the 'non-representational' realm of affect and emotion (Thrift 2004; Adey 2008; Lees and Baxter 2011). Buildings can trigger different affective and emotional states such as hope, fear or passivity. What this 'turn' points towards is that the 'meaning' of architecture is not interpreted by everyone in the same way. Rather, what people *think* and *feel* about a building and what they *do* can vary significantly between individuals (Kraftl 2010). An example of this growing line of scholarship is Lees and

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Baxter's (2011) study of fear in a London council tower block. Studies of asylum accommodation have much to gain from a more explicit focus on both their symbolic function, as well as on how they influence the affective and emotional states of asylum seekers, staff and local residents. In order to understand both the demarcation and management of borders in everyday life, it is thus necessary to integrate a 'material' perspective into analyses of asylum accommodation. The following section will further specify how borders, understood as institutional practices, contribute to varying degrees of openness of asylum accommodation.

3.3 'Institutional' openness and closedness

What is the connection between the demarcation and management of boundaries and what is referred to as 'institutions'? Two different, yet interrelated meanings can be made out: 'Institutional boundaries' and 'the institution as boundary'. Institutions' as *informal constraints* or *formal sets of rules* (North 1991) structure asylum seekers' social rights, such as access to housing, work, education or health services and therefore constitute practices of everyday bordering (Sales 2002; Squire 2009; Sainsbury 2012). In the second sense of the word, 'institutions' are understood as social establishments, which can also function as spaces of everyday bordering. Asylum accommodation is both situated within broader frameworks of formal rules and informal constraints, as well as a 'social establishment' with different sets of rules governing its inhabitants. Both meanings are therefore interrelated and relevant to understand different degrees of 'institutional openness' of asylum accommodation. As the second section has dealt with the influence of national and local migration regimes, this section will focus on 'the institution as boundary'.

Following Goffman (1961), examples of 'total institutions' can be divided into five categories: (1) Institutions of 'care', such as elderly care homes; (2) institutions of 'care and control', such as mental asylums; (3) institutions of control, such as prisons; (4) institutions for work-like tasks, such as army barracks; (5) religious institutions, such as monasteries. Scholarship in carceral geography has criticized Goffman's concept of the 'total institution' for its 'totality', thereby suggesting a space that is 'sealed-off' to the outside (Baer and Ravneberg 2008). Yet, as Schliehe (2016) argues, this criticism does not hold when engaging deeper with Goffman's work on 'Asylums'. Rather, Schliehe argues that the 'total institution' can be a useful starting point for analyses of spaces of 'care and control', due to its focus on everyday social interaction and the role of power and control therein. The importance of comparing between different forms of 'total institutions' is also stressed by Malkki (2002: 353): 'Refugee camps are devices of care and control in much the same way as are transit centres, internment camps, "reception centres" run by national immigration officials, and countless other social technologies that discipline space and the movement of people.'

The parallels between asylum accommodation, and characteristics of 'total institutions', can be drawn in several ways. The first of these are the differences between the 'home world' and 'institutional circumstances', amongst which are lack of privacy, physical contamination or sanctioning from staff (Goffman 1961). Conditions within asylum accommodation have been shown to vary considerably between locations and regions and oftentimes do not exceed the level of basic subsistence (Rosenberger and König 2011). Interrogating

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discourses of home and institution, van der Horst (2004) compares reception centres in the Netherlands with official discourses on residential care institutions. Despite a shift in official discourses towards evaluating residential care institutions in terms of 'home-like' spaces, official discourses around reception centres lacked any 'home-like' qualities and focused instead on cost efficiency and the provision of food, hygienic conditions and sleeping space. Residents of her case study also expressed a lack of personal space and autonomy and experienced restrictions in living according to cultural customs or cooking their own food.

Regarding the lack of agency and activity in institutions, Valenta and Berg (2010) studied the effect of the provision of organized activities on asylum seekers' empowerment within Norwegian reception centres. Their study shows that restrictive asylum policies, along with insecure futures, negatively affect asylum seekers' participation in the provided activities and in some cases even increased residents' feelings of powerlessness. Likewise, Pozzo and Evers (2015) analysed participation in a youth council in a Dutch asylum centre. Despite an official discourse of participation, youth councils did little in promoting actual participation or empowerment of young asylum seekers. By contrast, the authors conclude that the measures 'did nothing to resolve their issues and feelings of societal exclusion and marginalization and even reproduced and reinforced these' (479).

Studies have shown similarities between the physical and mental implications of living in total institutions or asylum accommodation. Among these are loss of perceived personal safety or self-mortification, which includes a disruption of the boundary of the self and its environment, either via physical or interpersonal contamination (Goffman 1961; Schliehe 2016). Ghorashi (2005) compared the situation of Iranian women seeking asylum in the Netherlands, before and after passing restrictions on asylum seeker reception in the 1990s. Without the possibility to engage in meaningful activities, interviewees not only felt trapped within the centre, but were also forced into a state of passivity, with dire consequences on their psychological health. In addition, living in a state of dependency for several years meant that interviewees found it difficult to live an independent life later on. This was not only due to a loss of motivation during years of waiting, but also due to the societal blame interviewees experienced due to these years of passivity; leading to a 'loss of self-image as independent and active people' (Ghorashi 2005: 191).

Spaces bearing characteristics of 'total institutions' not only have implications on their inhabitants, but also on the administrative staff. Gill (2016) analyses indifference and insensitivity towards asylum seekers in different contexts of the UK asylum system. Close ethnographic analysis of an immigration detention centre revealed that indifference towards the suffering of others was the result of several mechanisms within these spaces. As staff was over-exposed to suffering and trauma of detainees, indifference constituted a psychological mechanism of self-care to avoid secondary traumatization (110). Furthermore, over-exposure to suffering was intensified through the enforced mobility of detainees between detention centres. In addition, mistreatment of detainees was further normalized through the inequalities in status between detainees and staff. Gill concludes that immigration detention 'achieves [. . .] a sophisticated use of both the reality and risk of vicarious traumatization to generate an insensitive workforce' (130–1). It is important to stress that indifference to suffering is not a result of malevolent individuals, but a

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mechanism of psychological self-care related to over-exposure, which might be limited to staff of immigration detention.

There are two other ways in which scholarship on carceral spaces and other institutions can advance understandings of 'institutional open- or closedness' of asylum accommodation. The first is the notion that the boundaries between 'the inside' and 'the outside' of carceral spaces and other institutions is considered porous (Baer and Ravneberg 2008; Leddy-Owen 2015). This permeability refers not only to the mobility of people and objects that pass in and out of such spaces over time, but also to how such spaces influence their residential environment and the wider society as 'sites of estrangement' (Bosworth 2014). The second aspect, (im)mobility, refers to frequent transfers of inhabitants of immigration detention and prison population (Martin and Mitchelson, 2009; Mountz et al. 2012), mirroring systems of asylum seekers dispersal in Europe (Bloch and Schuster 2005).

A comparative view of asylum accommodation, immigration detention and carceral spaces thus illuminates how inhabitants of such spaces are located between fixity and forced mobility. Both the notion of porosity of boundaries and forced mobility, point towards different degrees and forms of institutional openness or closedness, rather than ideas of 'absolute closure'. Importantly, analyses of 'institutions as borders' point toward the fact of how institutions affect not only asylum seekers', but also different parts of the local society, be this members of staff acting as 'everyday border guards' or the residential environment (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018). The next section will focus on the impact of different degrees of openness of asylum accommodation on social relations between asylum seekers and local residents in spaces of the everyday.

4. Spaces of everyday bordering and (un)familiarity between asylum seekers and local residents

The previous section outlined ways in which asylum accommodation is an 'everyday bordering' practice for the enforcement of control and the limitation of access to and affordances of the spatial context. Asylum accommodation is a space that makes such bordering practices visible, but importantly, these practices are not confined to asylum accommodation but are performed 'everywhere' and by 'anyone'. The concept of spatial, material and institutional degrees of open- and closedness of asylum accommodation not only clarifies the mechanisms of everyday bordering in the context of geographies of asylum, but also stresses variation of these bordering practices across space. As a result, 'everyday "bordering and ordering" practices connive to create and recreate new social-cultural boundaries and divisions which are also spatial in nature' (Yuval-Davis 2013: 15). As borders are shifted into everyday life, social relations are transformed. This section introduces the concept of (un)familiarity as a way to assess the transformation of social relations between asylum seekers and local residents through processes of everyday bordering.

Basically, 'familiarity' can be defined as having close relations with someone or something (Szytniewski and Spierings 2014). In contrast to notions of 'integration' or 'inclusion', the concept of (un)familiarity is in itself relational in the sense that feelings of closeness or distance are seen to be produced through interaction between people, as a

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consequence of both personal and collective factors. More, the concept is processual in nature in that it expresses social relations as always in a state of 'becoming', rather than moving towards an end. Emerging from the fields of tourism and border studies, feelings of (un)familiarity are held to be defined by the dimensions 'experience', 'knowledge' and 'social distance' (Spierings and van der Velde 2008; Szytniewski and Spierings 2014).

'Experience' can relate both to individual and collective experiences of difference. In this sense, city dwellers are held to be more tolerant towards 'different others' than people of rural areas (Wirth 1938), as urban areas provide for more contact experiences and opportunities for 'inter-group' friendships (Dirksmeier 2014). At the same time, places have different histories with minority groups and overall levels of diversity, which then may influence contact on individual level (Robinson 2010; Piekut and Valentine 2016). On the individual level, 'experience' describes both an individual's past experiences with 'difference', which can include personal experiences of being regarded as 'different', as well as experiencing 'different' others. As Valentine and Sadgrove (2012) demonstrate, an individual's positive and negative experiences of difference and personal positioning in different social categories such as age, class or sexuality affects a person's encounters with others. The authors highlight, that individuals may not identify as belonging to only one particular community, but to several, in which an individuals' hierarchical positioning might shift. Given the different social positioning of individuals, Yuval-Davis (2013) therefore argues for an intersectional approach to everyday bordering.

'Knowledge' or 'informational (un)familiarity' is a second crucial dimension regarding the production of potentially close relations. This refers to indirect sources of information, such as family or friends, the media, governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as to direct sources of information, obtained through personal experience (Szytniewski and Spierings 2014). In relation to everyday interaction between individuals, Lofland (1973) argues for making a distinction between 'personal knowing' and 'categorical knowing'. Personal knowing is based on biographical information, which turns the individual in question into a 'unique historical event' (16). By contrast, knowing another person 'categorically' is about knowing her or him only through information based on role and status. The distinction between 'personal' and 'categoric' knowing is particularly salient in relation to asylum seekers. Not only is 'asylum seeker' a particularly value-laden category within the current migration debate, but the use of the category itself is an expression of political power (Lynn and Lea 2003; Goodman and Speer 2007). Recognizing how national discourses and everyday bordering are intertwined helps avoid romanticized ideas of everyday interactions and their potential for reducing prejudice, but it also highlights how national discourses are reshaped and understood differently in various places.

The third dimension of (un)familiarity is feelings of social distance, which reflects the claim that social relations 'always [involve] elements of 'nearness' and 'distance' (Karakayali 2016: 1). Previous work differentiates between 'affective', 'interactive' and 'normative' social distance. 'Affective' social distance refers to the idea that people who are similar to us are people we also *feel* close to (Karakayali 2009). As Valentine and Sadgrove (2012: 2060) argue, the creation of intimacy within an encounter may be equally important as spatial proximity in bridging between different social categories. Moreover, emotions can be a way in which 'diverse residents can discover each other as multifaceted and interdependent; as individuals with simultaneously different and potentially shared

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positions, practices and desires' (Askins 2016: 525). Such understandings then also point to the flexibility of feelings of social distance and the idea that emotions can be a vehicle for forming new perceptions of similarity and difference about each other. 'Interactive' social distance occurs when asylum seekers have to adjust their customs and daily routines in unfamiliar situations and settings. This implies potentially challenging 'cross-cultural code-switching' during encounters with local residents to accommodate different norms and values and comply with what is considered appropriate and acceptable by the 'host society' (Molinsky 2007).

Social distance can be understood as 'normative' when referring to feelings of proximity or distance based on shared norms or values. Formed by social groups, norms and values contribute to distinctions between 'us' and 'them', which then 'specify what kind of relations with what kind of people are "acceptable"' (Karakayali 2009: 541). A more prominent understanding of normative social distance is the notion of the 'familiar stranger' as someone who is 'spatially close, but socially remote' (Van Houtum and Strüver 2002: 143). As strangeness is produced relationally (Simmel and Wolff 1950), 'it is not necessarily "who" is strange, but what, where and how "strangeness" occurs' (Jackson, Harris, and Valentine 2017: 3). A crucial point is made by Ahmed (2000: 21), who posits the stranger as a figure that is already familiar: 'The figure of the stranger is far from simply being strange; it is a figure that is painfully familiar in that very strange(r)ness.' A stranger, according to Ahmed, is therefore someone we recognize 'as not belonging, as being out of place' (21).

Theories of belonging and non-belonging can enrich our understanding of feelings of (un)familiarity, as they highlight both the *spatial* as well as the *political* dimension of the concept. Belonging is related to the formation of 'the self', which is defined against what it is not and therefore relies on borders for its existence (Ahmed 2000). Belonging creates emotional attachment, senses of safety and being 'at home' (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018: 197). In this sense, belonging is closely related to familiarity—in order to belong, one has to feel familiar with one's spatial and social environment (Blokland and Nast 2014). Recognizing others as 'being out of place', or as not belonging, is therefore not only a social, but also a spatial process which is not fixed but dynamic in its nature. Consequently, feelings of belonging do not emerge in a vacuum, but are produced through place-based factors such as personal experiences, social relations, shared language, economic and legal security. While feelings of familiarity and belonging are closely related, as they are produced by similar factors, the notion of belonging implies both the *spatial* as well as the *political* dimension of feelings of (un)familiarity.

Processes of everyday bordering disrupt feelings of belonging, because they emphasize membership in a particular collectivity, such as nation, class or ethnicity, which are often spatially demarcated (Newman and Paasi 1998; Yuval-Davis et al. 2018). As such, 'belonging tends to be naturalized, and becomes articulated and politicized only when it is threatened in some way' (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018: 197). In other words, belonging is a natural part of everyday life until it is put into question through processes of estrangement, which define 'who or what does not belong' (Ahmed 2000: 99). Following Ahmed (2000: 101), 'we need to understand the process of negotiation between identity and strangerness as on-going, and as moving across different spatial formations'. Asylum accommodation can then be seen as a spatial tactic that contributes to processes of estrangement, which may not

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only communicate non-belonging, but possibly also result in generating *indifference* towards others (see Gill 2016).

The 'refugee crisis' is therefore not so much a crisis of *people* arriving in our societies, but, to use the words of Goodwin-Gill, a moral crisis of growing 'distance, distrust and disenchantment'. Is there a way out of this crisis of morality? Both openness and (un)familiarity are concepts that are dynamic in nature, but can higher degrees of openness of asylum accommodation lead to higher degrees in familiarity? In his work on 'geographies of exclusion', Sibley (1995) distinguished between 'strongly classified' and 'weakly classified spaces'. The former are internally homogenous and possess strong boundaries, difference is therefore a threat to the internal order. The latter type space is those of social mixing in which boundaries are porous or broken down. The way out of spatial tactics of control is thus by creating accessible, porous and 'weakly classified' spaces. Amin (2002: 970) suggests that these might be 'spaces of cultural displacement', that is, 'new settings' that momentarily destabilize ideas of the self and the other, 'where engagement with strangers in a common activity disrupts easy labelling of the stranger as enemy and initiates new attachments'. Our role as scholars is thus to devote as much empirical and theoretical attention to spaces that contribute to familiarization and to sites that lead not only to everyday bordering, but also to 'everyday border transgression'.

5. Conclusion

Asylum accommodation, and especially collective asylum centres, are often conceptualized as 'spaces of exception' or 'total institutions', glossing over national and local differences in asylum accommodation. Also, these conceptualizations treat asylum centres as isolated from the societies they are situated in. In addition, studies on asylum accommodation tend to focus either on 'the inside' or 'the outside' of such spaces, thereby neglecting to a large extent how social relations on the inside and the outside are constituted *relationally*. This paper provides an overview of different levels of variation in asylum accommodation, arguing that variations in national migration regimes, local variation, as well as variation on the level of the built environment, need to be taken into account in understanding the effects of asylum accommodation on asylum seekers' everyday lives and the possibilities for encounters with local residents.

In order to comprehend the uneven geographies of asylum accommodation and how asylum centres influence social relations between asylum seekers and local residents, this paper introduced the concept of 'spatial', 'material' and 'social openness' and points towards the local specificity of the spatial location and context, the type of building and social and institutional infrastructure that differentiate asylum centres. Highlighting such differences helps to explain differential experiences and opportunities in the everyday lives of asylum seekers and find entry points for both fostering familiarization processes between asylum seekers and local residents and overcoming detrimental effects of processes of categorization and symbolic borders between 'us' and 'them'.

Research on asylum accommodation should take the variation of asylum accommodation into account and move away from binary divisions of 'asylum seekers' and 'the host society' because it hampers our understanding of the everyday production of material and

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institutional borders. In this respect, it is vital to take the relational construction of 'strange(r)ness' into account in order to move away from positioning asylum seekers as inherently different to the recognition that their 'difference' or 'unfamiliarity' is produced through concrete encounters in various everyday spaces. In this paper we show how the interplay between experience, knowledge and social distance is crucial for understanding processes of (un)familiarization.

Analyses of asylum accommodation therefore need to recognize that these spaces do not exist 'in isolation', but are characterized by their relative degrees of access to public space, goods and services. They are also a spatial tactic of control that re-define everyday spaces as spaces of everyday bordering. From a relational point of view, asylum centres exist in close physical and symbolic proximity to the familiar spaces of the body, home, neighbourhood, city, region or nation and may disrupt a sense of safety and belonging by placing the border in their midst. It is therefore not only 'the stranger' that invades familiar space, but estrangement through everyday bordering. As Gupta and Ferguson argue (1992: 16), 'if we question a pre-given world of separate and discrete 'peoples and cultures', and see instead a difference-producing set of relations, we turn from a project of juxtaposing pre-existing differences to one of exploring the construction of differences in historical process'. Collective forms of asylum accommodation are one such mechanism of producing difference and reshaping social relations in everyday life. They impose (un)familiarity in a 'categorical' sense upon both asylum seekers and local residents, but at the same time it is within processes of familiarization in everyday spaces that the social construction of the asylum seeker can be challenged and familiarity in a 'personal' and 'human' sense can develop.

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