

# What Makes It a Home? A Conversation on Syrian Refugees, Neighbourhoods, and the Right to Be a Host in Istanbul and Berlin

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Hilal Alkan and Anna Steigemann separately worked with Syrian refugees in Istanbul and Berlin. In this conversation, they ask each other questions about the processes of arrival in the place of asylum, new neighbourhoods, homemaking practices, and feeling at home. Benefiting from interdisciplinarity, due both to their own multidisciplinary approaches and to this encounter of an anthropologist and an urban researcher, their conversation revolves around the material, social, and affective aspects of home and homemaking.

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This exchange has two focal points: first, it delves into neighbourhood characteristics and how they actually affect homemaking and settlement processes. Hilal Alkan and Anna Steigemann approach the neighbourhood as a (potential) place of home, with significations and senses of belonging, attachment, safety, and, eventually, wellbeing. They explore the processes that turn a newly settled neighbourhood into a home, the desired place of a dignified life. Their analysis also involves hostilities and material hindrances to belonging and homemaking. Second, they bring together hospitality and homemaking by approaching hospitality as a catalyst of intimacy and as a right to claim sovereignty over a place, hence making it one's home.

ANNA: How I ended up doing research with and on Syrian refugees in Germany is a long story. Originally, my main research focus was on local economies in ethnically mixed neighbourhoods in Berlin, and I was interested in the place-making and contributions of shopkeepers with a so-called migration background (which I find a very othering term, but it's still the official statistical term) and how they socially influence life in the neighbourhood.<sup>31</sup> After 2015, this research brought me to work on the municipal 'integration strategies', i.e., housing, provision, asylum policies. We examined how local governments (that sometimes didn't 'want' the refugees

31 Steigemann, Anna. 2019. *The Places Where Community Is Practiced*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

either) actually negotiated and manoeuvred between growing strong racism and nationalism on the one hand, and the humanitarian task to provide the newcomers with housing, food, and all kinds of other services and infrastructures needed for survival on the other.

So, with these two bigger projects in the background from around 2012 until 2016, I then gradually turned away from the analysis of city governments and their governance and towards refugees' spatial politics and spatial production through the conceptual lens of homemaking. When I started my postdoctoral projects at TU Berlin, this praxeological focus became the centre of my research. Our team focused on the material dimensions of homemaking and the spatial practices of Syrian refugees in Jordan (in the UNHCR-operated refugee camps Zaatari and Azraq and in the capital city of Aman) and in five different refugee accommodations in the city of Berlin. As an urban and community researcher, I have assumed from the beginning that the spatial practices and homemaking within the accommodations and camps as 'temporary' accommodation represent only a small part of the longer story of how people actually settle into a city. However, since all newcomers strive to normalise their life at a new place of arrival, the camps are turned into long-term accommodations despite the fact that they are officially planned for temporary use only (e. g. the name "Tempohome" in Berlin) and sometimes become urbanised settlements. However, if they can, refugees also withdraw or escape from the strictly controlled and surveilled camps and accommodations and turn to the wider city and surrounding neighbourhoods for their survival, provision, social life, and everyday mobility. Particularly in Berlin, from the first observations onwards, I realised that refugees prefer not to meet friends, acquaintances, and other people in the camps—for obvious reasons, since they are strictly controlled and provide only very few private spaces. So this is where the neighbourhood context comes in. Neighbourhood matters as a scale, as a context, as an infrastructure, where refugees can get rid of their refugee status and label and act, behave, and move just as a 'regular Berlin person', as one interview partner mentioned. So, long story short, this was the research project context that brought me to collaborative research with refugees on a neighbourhood level.

HILAL: The questions concerning the neighbourhoods are also very pertinent to my research. For my Ph.D., I worked in a provincial medium-sized town in Turkey on poverty alleviation schemes by local organisations. It is possible to call them religious organisations although they are not necessarily connected to religious groups but motivated mostly by religious sentiments. They used to provide various kinds of aid, from food to cash, to the neighbourhoods they were functioning in. I looked into the mundane but significant care and gift relationships that developed between the workers and volunteers of these organisations and their registered beneficiaries. I figured that the highly pertinent disciplinary aspects of these relations were intrinsically tied to the care and gifts given. The beneficiaries and the workers/volunteers

established relations that went far beyond the one-off institutional encounter. By giving each other gifts and being obliged to reciprocate, they had expanded their connections over time, kicked off relations of mutual (but not equal) care. However, on the flip side, these reciprocal relations created the conditions of docility for many of the beneficiaries and increased the workers'/volunteers' capacity to discipline them.

I later transferred this framework of reciprocal exchange to two neighbourhood settings in Istanbul, which are home to Syrian migrants. The neighbourhood initiatives in Istanbul did similar work to those in Kayseri. They came together and created some resources, contacted the people who would need them, and eventually tried to meet those needs. They distributed stoves, they found furniture, they helped with school registrations. At certain times of the year, like at Ramadan or before religious feasts, they distributed food or supermarket vouchers.

While doing this, they also had to develop networks with the Syrians themselves, because they needed people who spoke the language. They also needed people who would help them connect others and vouch for them. Hence, certain Syrian migrants became gatekeepers in these networks. Moreover, through these interactions, some of these migrants eventually became real neighbours to the members of these initiatives. They established neighbourly relations, as anybody in the neighbourhood would have. They became friendly and started getting involved in the reciprocal exchange of gifts with those who are part of the initiative. So, the hostilities, aggression, and xenophobia notwithstanding, the neighbourhoods became place where homemaking became possible. For homemaking does not happen within the walls of one's home; it is socially situated. And especially in Turkey, as in Syria, a house or flat becomes a home only if there are good neighbours. As the Arabic saying goes, '*Al-jar qabla'l-dar*', meaning the neighbour is more important than the house, or as the Turkish saying goes, '*Ev alma, komşu al*', don't get a house, get neighbours.

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ANNA: This is actually where our two research interests come together very nicely, combining the social with the physical. What I see in your articles<sup>32</sup> is that a lot of attention is paid to how neighbourhoods are defined as conglomerations of certain kinds of social relationships based on trust and reciprocity. You also describe neighbourliness as, on the one hand, care work and, on the other hand, as based on reciprocal gift giving,<sup>33</sup> as always involving certain expectations with regard to the behaviour of the other person. When we look at your text regarding the reciprocal practice and expectations about neighbourly relationships, it becomes clear that

32 Alkan, Hilal. 2020. "Syrian Migration and Logics of Alterity in an Istanbul Neighbourhood". *Urban Neighbourhood Formations: Boundaries, Narrations, Intimacies*, edited by Hilal Alkan and Nazan Maksudyan, London: Routledge, 180–99; Alkan, Hilal. 2021a. "The gift of hospitality and (un)welcoming Syrian migrants in Turkey". *American Ethnologist* 48: 180–91.

33 Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. "The Work of Time". *The Logic of Practice*, translated by Richard Nice, Cambridge: Polity Press, 98–111; Mauss, Marcel. 1990. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, translated by W. D. Halls. New York: W. W. Norton. First published in 1925.

we need to define neighbourhood as something social and spatial. The supportive relationships that eventually help you make yourself at home and that eventually become an integral element of what is defined as home always require a concrete spatial context, a concrete space to interact. The physicality, the design of the neighbourhood opens up opportunities for interaction or it doesn't. What I also find interesting in your articles is that you point out that neighbourhoods are made up of ambivalent and ambiguous socio-spatial relationships. They are places with a certain level or that enable certain kinds of encounters that move along a spectrum rather than being binary, as inclusion/hospitality or exclusion/hostility. However, my question in regard to these interactions and social relationships is if you can spatialise them a bit more? What are the concrete places and spaces where these kinds of relationships develop, where are they broken or torn down, where are they irritated, where exactly are they fostered, where can social interactions be localised and spatialised in general?

HILAL: I think your research is much stronger in terms of spatiality. That is something I really liked reading your papers. Nevertheless, in my Istanbul research,<sup>34</sup> I noticed that for women, neighbourliness usually took place at homes. Migrant women and longer-time residents demonstrated neighbourliness by visiting each other. However, men's neighbourly relations, I mean the positive neighbourly relations, took place either in shops, in the mosque, and sometimes on the main shopping streets. Therefore, men's neighbourliness has a more public orientation. The more competitive or hostile relations that developed between different residences of the neighbourhoods generally took place in public places, too—mostly coming from strangers. But there is certainly a fine line here. For although the relationships women developed involved intimacy and care, they cannot be seen as simply nice and cosy. They also make women vulnerable to the gaze and disciplinary interventions of others. And this comes with the care package. So for women, the subtly or overtly insulting but also caring interventions again happened at home. These interventions often relate to a particular homemaking activity, like housework, cleaning, home decoration, the state of furniture, parenting, and the languages spoken at home. 'Well-meaning', caring neighbours consider it their task to discipline their Syrian neighbours in order to make them adhere to the hegemonic ideal of good Turkish motherhood (dubbed always as womanhood). These expectations are obviously highly gendered, but they also sometimes border on racism.

ANNA: Public spaces are often male-dominated. They are designed, coded, governed, and dominated by men, and thus they are often very hostile to and exclude women, regardless of the geographical context. The private domain is more often assigned or allocated to women. But what the private is and

if it is safer for women are still empirical questions. Often, there is no clear distinction between private and public spaces and this differentiation is also very 'western'. In addition, for refugee accommodations, what is private and what is public is often blurred, because in some cases there is no 'privacy' or private space at all. The spaces in camps are much more surveilled, controlled, and thus differently coded than the spaces outside of camps. Even though more women claim access to and visibility in public space in general,<sup>35</sup> we find that women are frequently confined to the so-called private spaces (often meaning indoors)—as also shown in your research—, and even more so in refugee camps. Women often retreat more to private spaces for numerous reasons, but mostly because of patriarchal spatial politics. This is why subjective understandings of and an intersectional approach to what makes a public or private space a safe or inclusive space respectively which spaces help generate a feeling of home are key for the research design. Consequently, how much somebody can make themselves feel at home strongly depends on class and gender and previous social and spatial experiences. And both our works further show that home spaces, the private spaces, are not necessarily safe spaces. When the homes as private spaces are also prone to harassment, to sexual abuse, and all kinds of violence and aggression, women retreat to public spaces. Yet, your work and mine so far reveal that women's neighbourly interactions take place more in private or semi-private spaces, in the 'homes', whereas men practice neighbourly interactions mostly in public or semi-public places. Homemaking thus depends on different mobility patterns and spatial politics.

But let's turn to homemaking in the Tempohomes and *Modulare Unterkünfte für Flüchtlinge* (MUFs), as container or modular accommodations for refugees in Berlin are called. The container complexes in the Tempohomes mostly consist of two-bedroom containers, connected by a kitchen and bathroom container in the middle. Sometimes, these three containers house people, who don't know each other at all, but usually families are allowed to stay together or have to live with another family. Because of the lack of infrastructure in the public spaces outside the containers and the lack of privacy and space, most everyday activities are carried out in places outside the camp, in the city, or the surrounding neighbourhoods, e.g. meeting friends in the park or in stores, reading a book or a newspaper on a bench in the neighbourhood, or just wandering the streets to kill time or exercise.

In the camps, all public space is controlled, as is partly also the scarce private space in the containers. There are strict orders and so-called house rules and other regulations

35 Crawford, Margaret. 2021. "1.2 Blurring the Boundaries: Public Space and Private Life". *Public Space Reader*, edited by Miodrag Mitrašinić and Vikas Mehta. 1st edition. New York: Routledge; Torre, Suzanna. 2021. "4.5 Claiming the Public Space: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo". *Public Space Reader*.

imposed by the operators of the accommodations and the security guards. There are many conflicts resulting from the surveillance and high level of social control in the camps. Actually, it's almost impossible to do anything without being seen by other family members or camp residents, such as doing care work, reproduction work, or self-care such as cleaning the containers, doing laundry, cooking for the family, watching TV. Kids and teenagers can almost never escape adult control, which, of course, results in a lot of conflicts within the families or with the group of people with whom one is forced to share the space.

Again, this example emphasises that the distinction between private and public space is a very exclusive idea, a middle-class privilege, linked to the possession of enough space in one's own home and power over space. However, what we find in the accommodations are what Michel De Certeau calls subversive spatial tactics in homemaking and managing everyday life that blur the spatial order of what is designed to be public and private space.<sup>36</sup> This is, on the one hand, the mere result of or reaction to the very high level of ordering, surveillance, and sanctions and, on the other hand, because there the dichotomous distinction between what is public and what is private does not correspond to the everyday needs and mobility and spatial requirements of the residents in the camps. But the practices that blur what is private and public, together with the general lack of space, lead to another set of conflicts, which in turn lead to many new practices of manoeuvring through and managing life in the camps. This includes the development of very smart techniques and tactics to then counter the high level of control and surveillance, trying to escape, trying to hide activities, or finding unsurveilled spots—and finally to create a home corresponding to the personal needs and means. In terms of neighbourly interaction, if you are forced to share a location and space with somebody you don't know and that you eventually don't like and if you are forced to move to a place involuntarily, previous sociological studies have proved that people are not very willing to invest in the neighbourhood and the relationships there.<sup>37</sup> Nor will people easily develop a sense of belonging or attachment to the place, or an interest in the neighbourhood at all. But if people decide for a place voluntarily, because, for instance, the neighbourhood has certain characteristics or because they already know somebody, they open up and eventually identify with the neighbourhood.

36 Certeau de, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

37 See, for example: Cuba, Lee, and David M. Hummon. 1993. "Constructing a Sense of Home: Place Affiliation and Migration across the Life Cycle". *Sociological Forum* 8 (4): 547–72. *JSTOR*. [www.jstor.org/stable/684963](http://www.jstor.org/stable/684963). Accessed 10 May 2021; Desmond, Matthew, Carl Gershenson, and Barbara Kiviat. 2015. "Forced relocation and residential instability among urban renters". *Social Service Review* 89 (2): 227–62; Gans, Herbert J. 2008. "Involuntary segregation and the ghetto: Disconnecting process and place". *City & Community* 7 (4): 353–57.

So, in the situation of Syrian refugees, who are allocated to these accommodations according to a top-down distribution scheme, never knowing how long they can stay there and sometimes only with a temporary residence permit, this and the insecure and unstable status and housing prevent them from really making themselves at home, from building relationships, from identifying with the space. Nonetheless, we found that refugees build up relationships with the people and the surrounding neighbourhoods in Berlin, which are key for feeling at home. But for this, refugees withdraw from the camps and turn to the bigger city, because there are the people and infrastructures that help them feel more at home, freer, and more welcome than in the accommodations themselves.

HILAL: We can also unravel this notion of voluntariness a bit. I perfectly see how you use voluntary as opposed to top down, and it makes good sense. However, we also need to consider the structural conditions. Market conditions very much limit the housing available to migrants. For most new migrants, it is very hard to find a landlord who will rent a place to them in the neighbourhoods they would love to live in. This is due to both the extremely high rents and discrimination, racism, and xenophobia. In Istanbul, it is gradually improving for families who managed to find jobs or establish themselves in the city, but many others still live in the worst of apartments, often paying extraordinarily high rents. I mean, often they have to pay much more than Turkish citizens. This puts them in competition with their fellow neighbours because they are accused of raising the rents in these neighbourhoods. They are the ones to blame in the eyes of lower-income families who also want to move there. It is like a double trap: they are given the worst apartments—leaking, cold, damp, insecure—, but at the same time they are scapegoated for making rents and housing less accessible for the lower-income strata of society.

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In Berlin, too, the chronic housing crisis is accompanied by racism.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the Syrian refugees who want to move out of the Tempohomes have to resort to informal strategies, to black markets. They have to turn to ‘simsars’ (brokers) who help them in return for crazy commissions ranging between 2,000–10,000 euros just to find a flat and get a contract.<sup>39</sup> So ‘voluntary’ is often a bit of a euphemism.

ANNA: True. The camps in Berlin are an emergency solution, leaving the residents with a very restricted agency inside the camps. They are a reaction to the tight housing market and the housing crisis. And the financialisation of the city of Berlin along with the highly racist and discriminatory practices in the housing market and the general lack of public housing

38 Hamann, Ulrike, and Nihad El-Kayed. 2018. “Refugees’ access to housing and residency in German cities: internal border regimes and their local variations”. *Social Inclusion* 6 (1): 135–46.

39 Alkan, Hilal. 2021b. “Temporal intersections of mobility and informality: Simsars as (im)moral agents in the trajectories of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Germany”. *Migration Letters* 18 (2): 201–13.

results in a situation where the temporary accommodations become rather permanent lodgings. If refugees can afford to move out of the camps with often very restricted financial means, this is mostly achieved through their own social networks and not through official administrative support. I am very much interested in where and how these networks are formed. These spaces and people represent an important infrastructure for making oneself feel at home. My questions here are: how and where is the new local knowledge formed in order to make oneself at home; what are the relationships like with other migrants who have been living here for a longer period of time and who eventually helps refugees to move out of the camps and to private apartments; and in what spaces do these relationships take place? Looking for the spatial context where this information is shared brought me to Sonnenallee and Neukölln. Sonnenallee is a main shopping street with a cluster of store owners from Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and increasingly from Syria since the 1980s. Many of the supportive informal networks with the newcomers are established while shopping, eating, or having a drink there. The relationships evolving from this everyday interaction bring refugees into jobs or into housing. I call this neighbourly interaction, even if people don't live in the same area. However, many of those networks were also exploitative, capitalising on the vulnerable Syrian refugees, who don't have a lot of local knowledge. So, many neighbourly interactions, as you also mention in your research, are not necessarily fair and just relationships, and sometimes they also come at a price. And they often also enforce a certain level of social control about the other party involved.

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HILAL: We both work with Cathrine Brun and Anita Fábos's approach to homemaking.<sup>40</sup> Brun and Fábos claim that "homemaking for refugees and displaced persons is rather like a dialogue that spans place and time, incorporating ideal concepts of home and the homeland, and aspirations to return 'home' and hopes 'to achieve a more stable exile'"<sup>41</sup>. Their research show that all these shifting concepts of home exist simultaneously. Hence they suggest the concept of constellations of home, to explore the multiplicity of meanings homes attain at any given point in time and space in a person's lifetime. With 'home' they refer to daily practices. 'Home', on the other hand, refers to the values, traditions, memories of what makes a home. 'Home' as such brings together the past homes, future homes, and lost homes. Finally, 'home' refers to geopolitics and the notion of the homeland, as well as the regulations and jurisdictions that define and shape who belongs where. These three meanings become very tangible in your research, and one of them is very much about control and surveillance. You say that the guidelines regulating the use of Tempohomes also define a certain Germanness, and they materially enact it.

40 Brun, Cathrine, and Anita Fábos. 2015. "Making homes in limbo? A conceptual framework". *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 31 (1): 5–17.

41 Ibid., 12.



ANNA: Yes, these distinct and very normative ideas about Germanness and how to live and behave in Germany affect rules, regulations, decoration, provision, the type of furniture and services provided, as well as sanctions if somebody dares to change or challenge any of the aforementioned. The accommodation operators' and administration's entire notion of a home is deeply entangled with ideas about Germanness, socially and spatially. I mean, it is very hard to define what a home is, it depends on who you ask, and even among scholars there's no agreement on how to define home, alas this also depends on what social groups and geographical context you're looking at. In our research, we most often leave it to our interview partners to define what a home is or what it takes to make oneself at home. And we worked out that the previous spatial and social experiences pretty much determine what somebody considers a home. The camp operators and the bureaucratic actors control and order the camps. Hence their ideas about what is enough or what is a home also pretty much predefines or limits homemaking for the residents.

Sometimes it can mean having four walls and a roof over your head, sometimes homemaking requires something else and is much more complex. The different subjective and objective understandings of what makes a home and the ideas and rationalities around it clash quite often, particularly in camp contexts. What constitutes a home is complex and requires much more self-autonomy than the operators of camps and accommodations think or allow for. There is a certain emotional attachment, a relationship with a place but also with the people. Consequently, spatial researchers often consider home as a limited fixed space, while sociologists and anthropologists consider it as something affective or social. We tried to combine these two and to follow refugees in their everyday routines, e.g., from having breakfast to taking their kids to kindergarten and school, walking them to integration classes or all kinds of courses and bureaucratic appointments they have to keep, from cleaning or how they tried to keep the containers clean to preparing food, spending their leisure time, if they have such thing, and, most of all, how they negotiate them in view of the aforementioned control and surveillance strategies. With this research design, we found that in the camps, home seems to be something highly conflicting, always involving social encounters of different kinds inside and outside the camps, with people you have a close relationship with but also with people that are strangers or that are not really good for you.

HILAL: That does not sound very much like a home anybody would long for. How do refugees change these places to turn them into something at least resembling a home?

ANNA: That was the most fascinating part of our ethnographic work. In the Tempohomes, many of the decoration and furnishing practices are officially forbidden. The operators and LAF (Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten / State Office

for Refugee Matters) point out that rugs are not allowed in the accommodation because of fire protection regulations. But the rug has a main function in many households. It's the place where you receive guests, where you eat dinner, particularly during religious festivities, it's the place where many activities are carried out. What we found is that the lack thereof irritates and prevents families and single travelling refugees from performing their everyday routines that makes a home for them. So what they do is, for instance, they put the preinstalled table away, turn it in all possible ways, they put it in this corner, in that corner. Since the rooms and containers are very small, the table takes up a lot of precious space. Residents need to navigate around this always annoying table. Quite often the table was only used by the kids to do their homework; but even this and most playing was also done on the rug or the self-installed couches, or on the bunk beds. However, bringing a rug or an additional couch was heavily criminalised at first, when we talked to the security guards and camp operators. In the early days of the camps, it was completely forbidden for fire safety reasons, as they say; but also because, as a temporary emergency accommodation, they didn't want people to make themselves too much at home, assuming that people would soon leave. As the name Tempohome indicates, it is designed as a very temporary accommodation; at some point, people are supposed to go elsewhere or "back home", as a security guard put it, or to find a flat elsewhere in the city. But for reasons mentioned before, refugees end up spending much more time in these camps.

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Knowing this, or anticipating this quite quickly, refugees start on the first day they move into a container or a MUF room to turn it into a home, in as much as the spatial design, the order, their restricted financial means allow. For instance, we found informal trading of furniture, of tools, or things that can be used as tools. In order to hang curtains on the sheet metal walls of the container, we came across all kinds of knowledge exchange on how to decorate them, how to become a craftsperson. Many residents have become quite skilled architects of their containers, others have acquired renown for being skilful with their hands. There is a lot of neighbourly help from residents who were trained in their previous places of residence and who helped each other to install everything needed for daily routines.

There are also many fascinating examples of people who kind of hybridise their rooms, trying to make them look more similar to their homes they once had in Syria. Hybridising here means combining decorations, techniques, and materialities from different geographical contexts. We compared their previous homes and how they now decorated and furnished their container homes. It's a very interesting process because those practices and stocks of knowledge that people apply to make themselves feel more at home in terms of the space, often originated in different places. So spatial practices and the underlying knowledge migrated with people to Berlin. And this transforms the city, its appearance, the social and spatial relations there. An example outside the

camps is again Sonnenallee, which was pretty vacant and run down (also due to disinvestment) before the arrival of refugees and new migrants. Right now, Sonnenallee is developing into a very cosmopolitan place, where you can actually observe new phases of migration and inclusion on a day-to-day basis—with new signs, symbols, materials, spaces, and products that contribute to the existing diversities in Berlin.

Exploring how refugees thereby negotiate and defend their small spaces for manoeuvre given the very high level of control and surveillance and the many rules that forbid most of the things you would do when you move into a new flat, such as furnishing, decorating, painting, reveals another difficulty in that the containers are only borrowed by the Senate, the LAF. Hence they are supposed to be given back in their original state at a certain point. There are not supposed to be any holes in the walls, any lamps on the ceiling, they should be super clean, by contract and law they need to be returned some time in the future. So the materiality itself does not allow to be fully appropriated to make it a home. Nonetheless, the residents prove to be very skilled in making room for manoeuvre and interpreting the rules and regulations in ways that they can't really be sanctioned by the security guards or the operators.

What is also very important here is the refugees' retreat to non-verbal communication through spatial appropriations. All involved actors communicate with each other through the spaces and spatial orders and elements, e.g., refugees claim their right to stay put, to stay to be considered regular Berliners, as long-term residents, through installing more permanent details and furniture, planting vegetables or a garden in front of the container. Making themselves at home is therefore also a political move, namely claiming the right to be accepted as regular residents of Berlin. This results from long discussions with the camp operators about why they need a sofa or a rug to feel at home. Finally, in some of the accommodations, the refugees convinced the guards and the operators that their spatial practices are not necessarily breaking fire regulations or any kind of law but rather help them to "integrate", which is still the declared aim of the LAF and the Senate. So the local authorities should actually be happy about the refugees' spatial appropriation, because it is proof, a symbol, and a sign of what the Senate and the camp operators are working for in the end: "integration, integration, integration..."

I think the part where you deconstruct and reconstruct hospitality is very interesting here, because what we found in both our observations is that having rugs and couches provides the possibility to host or offer tea and sweets, and that seems to be a key element to feeling at home. Being able to host people is very essential to feel at home, because this is what people would do in their homes in Syria. A home is where you can host guests, period. Being able to host also helps to overcome this ascribed 'guest status' as a refugee. Aside from always being reduced to your temporary status, to being only 'tolerated'. Being able to be a host, to entertain

guests turns these power relationships around: having the spatial setup to host enables you to get rid of the guest status. Being the person who welcomes guests, you gain a lot of dignity and empowerment, and I would be very much interested to hear more about how hosting neighbours actually affects homemaking in your cases.

HILAL: In migration literature, hospitality is often discussed at the level of the hospitality extended by the societies/states that are the receiving part of migration. Thus, the acts of hospitality on site and especially the hospitality of migrants and refugees is little explored. I approach hospitality as a gift, which immediately evokes feelings of obligation to give something back. In the context I worked in, hospitality necessarily creates these gift relationships where gifts entail a return. It is not a calculated equivalent or a return of the same kind but always something reciprocated. In contractual relations, the return is predetermined and the exchange ends exactly when it is fulfilled. In gift relations, it is the contrary. Once you give something back in reciprocity to a gift, you give a gift that expects something back. So it goes on like a spiral and creates lasting relationships. As I explored in depth elsewhere,<sup>42</sup> hospitality actually opens room for that. If the person who is given something is also given the chance to give something back, it has the potential to pull people into relationships. Your examples support that very well. The initial giver of a gift can be the guard of the camp, a neighbour who gave a helping hand with finding the furniture, or a complete stranger who brings a food package to the house. If the person receiving something can actually invite the giver in to offer something in return, whether it is coffee, tea, snacks, or just a nice chat, the relationship becomes more balanced, though certainly not equal. These two parties have discrepant access to resources and occupy differential positions of power, but as you just said, it creates the possibility to be at eye level with each other. On the other hand, it is important to recognise the dangers of the notion of hospitality used as a state discourse. Being the host and having the power to open the door to somebody also carries with it the position of the master. The master of the house sets the rules. Framing the state or the citizenry of a country as the host and the migrants as the guests is a hugely unequal and problematic conception. All we can expect from that are control and discipline. But if we start looking into the micro level, into the everyday, we notice that so-called guests become hosts by inviting somebody to dinner. The tables are turned around, and I think this is promising in terms of healthier social relations.

Therefore, what you have said perfectly resonates with my observations: home is the place where you can host people. This is the case for my Syrian research participants here and in general in Turkey, too. Hosting is one of the foundational elements of homemaking. In a recent article, Susan Rotmann and Maissam Nimer also explored this phenomenon for Syrian refugee women

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42 Alkan, "The gift of hospitality and (un)welcoming Syrian migrants in Turkey", 180–91.

in Turkey.<sup>43</sup> They argue that through hospitality women create the occasions for reversing the guest-host dichotomy in the migration setting—quite in parallel to my own argument. However, they also say that by showing hospitality, women also valorise their status in the family and community.

ANNA: True. Hosting holds a lot of power in terms of empowering people that are marginalised in many ways—it's a powerful practice. Following Brun and Fábos' conceptualisation of homemaking as a day-to-day practice, or as memories of traditions and subjective feelings of home, but also as an institutionalised set of norms and regulations that in the end determines how refugees are governed and disciplined,<sup>44</sup> I think we could also apply this threefold definition to hospitality. It is a day-to-day practice, it is, as you said, gift giving and gift exchange, it's a means to build up relationships, and it is a set of everyday routines. But hospitality also comes at a price, following certain traditions and rules that might be conflicting with one's own traditions. It's raising expectations that might lead to conflict. And it's also about norms and values regarding who is hosting how and what we expect from hospitality. But it is also based on a set of norms and regulations that determine who is in and who is out and who is offered what; and often with inter-cultural exchange, the behaviour of guests and the hospitality practices, just as the host or guest themselves, get significantly 'othered'. Othering in the sense that they are perceived and excluded from the imagined group of 'we' by exoticising their behaviour and looking for the slightest differences in the other person's behaviour. That's why I find it very interesting how these two concepts of home and hospitality are linked, but also how they have different meanings depending on the spaces and scales they are applied to (micro, meso, macro), in the private or public realm. However, as a practice on the individual level, on the neighbourhood scale, or within the accommodations, hospitality and hosting can potentially be a very powerful practice. Hosting contributes to the relationships that are crucial to build a home. I was hugely inspired by your article about hospitality through the lens of the Maussian gift. It really helped me to think further about how hospitality is an incremental element of homemaking.

But, in the case of refugee accommodation, it is in terms of hosting sometimes also very difficult to maintain a certain level of cleanliness because of the limited space available. What if you're ashamed of how you live, what if you can't live up to the standards that you have been used to in your previous homes or to the standards of the visitor? As a result, you don't want to invite people or you become very selective. Most refugees had much more means and space before they

43 Rottman, Susan B., and Maïssam Nimer. 2021. "We always open our doors for visitors"—Hospitality as Home-making Strategy for Refugee Women in Istanbul". *Migration Studies* 9 (3): 1380–98.

44 Brun and Fábos, "Making homes in limbo? A conceptual framework", 5–17.

moved to Turkey or Germany. With limited means to buy furniture or a nice set of tea cups—all the kinds of things you want to show and use when you invite somebody to your home—hosting becomes even more challenging and complex. And even if some camp residents might be physically and materially able to host, because they do have a couch or a rug, they still don't feel or dare to invite somebody over because they feel so ashamed and guilty about being forced to live under these circumstances. I find the part in your article very interesting where you talk about imposing social control on one another when visiting each other. One woman, if I remember correctly, was not able to live up to her own standards of cleanliness but even less to the standards of her neighbour, right? Think about somebody living in a Tempohome or a MUF; they do their best to keep their home clean, but consider the limited amount of space and the high number of people sharing this small space. It's a Sisyphus job to keep it clean and tidy.

HILAL: This is true. I remember the example you gave about following a girl to her home in a Berlin Tempohome complex, where she was looking for a place to plant her tomato plant.<sup>45</sup> As soon as you entered their unit, the mother of the house quickly tried to cover the things that were cluttered by the wall because they did not have any place to put them as she would have wanted. A stranger came in and the first thing she did was to tidy up the space for the eyes of that stranger. It is not just that though, it is also the embarrassment of not living up to one's own standards. This is projected through the eyes of the other person, but it is also like a double projection: the projection of her former standards of living, which are now unattainable.

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ANNA: Previous homes work as a reference point. You always compare what you do and how you live with previous home(s), where you had all the things you miss so much now. But this comparison is also an incentive to achieve more. This is a new topic in our research recently, and we have to explore it much more—these ambitions and future aspirations and how they are based on previous home experiences, and the constant comparison between different past, present, and eventually future homes and ideas about a home. These comparisons either push you and fuel your homemaking or they prevent you from fully making yourself at home in the new place, and certainly more so, if it's a camp context.

HILAL: So here too we see that the affective and material aspects of home are interlinked. Previous homes may have emotional significance in people's lives in that they long for them and remember them fondly. But the material conditions, as you have mentioned, are so drastically different that these previous homes also haunt the present ones. This also creates communication problems. In

45 Steigemann, Anna Marie, and Philipp Misselwitz. 2020. "Architectures of asylum: Making home in a state of permanent temporariness." *Current Sociology* 68 (5): 628–65.

Istanbul, I heard the people who had helped the new arrivals complain very often that Syrians did not know how to use coal/wood stoves. They were really surprised about that. Because in Turkey, people from the middle class often live in flats with central heating or gas heating. So stoves are used either in villages or by the urban poor, who know very well how to use them. In the imagination of the middle class, being poor and using a stove always go together. When they figured that impoverished and displaced Syrian migrants didn't know how to use stoves, this was something they really didn't understand: how can you be so poor and not know how to handle a stove? This is based on two presumptions, both of which are wrong: first, Syrian migrants must have always been poor, that they could never have had middle-class domestic comforts. Second, stoves are for burning coal or wood. When I asked one of my Syrian interlocutors about the stove, she told me how much she hated the beast. She was not at all used to handling coal, because back then on the outskirts of Aleppo, they only used fuel oil. Coal brought with it many difficulties: it was messy, it required a dry storage space, it was expensive, its transport was a hassle (and again expensive), and it worked with a different technology. Yet, in the eyes of the Turkish benefactors who gave them the stoves, their hardship in dealing with coal stoves was interpreted as neglect, as they also did not know how stoves were used in Syria. Syrian migrants' ways of doing things are very hard to communicate through practice because the other party does not speak the same language. It is not only a linguistic issue. It is, as you say, communication through spatial practices. These spatial-practical languages have a very specific vocabulary and also need to be translated.

ANNA: People often lack the systems to decode, decipher, and interpret, which depend on their respective and highly varying stocks of spatial and local knowledge. It leads to constant misunderstandings, not because certain materialities entail certain cultural values in different contexts but because of the lack of communication about the value and meaning of things, of why people behave this way, of what they do, or why people do certain things they do. There is no or a lack of communication, and there is misinterpretation and a huge misunderstanding about homemaking, also between the longer-established population and the newcomers, as long as they don't talk to each other and explain why they do what they do. These misunderstandings tell us so much about the class differences, the lack of intercultural communication, the lack of curiosity and respect for the newcomers, the different interpretational frameworks.

In this context, another example from our work was not being able to hang up curtains, because, as I mentioned before, the containers made of sheet metal were supposed to be given back to the donors in a clean and original state. But some of the containers didn't have shutters. So there were no pre-installed devices to hang curtains, to cover the windows, to hide the inside from the view of outsiders, passers-by. For practicing Muslim women, for instance, but also for all residents, this meant an impairment of their privacy. If you wear

a headscarf, without a curtain, it is almost impossible to take it down as long as anybody walking past these containers can have a clear view of what is happening inside. So the residents acquired skills in developing tools and techniques and invented ways to cover the windows. In my previous studies in Thuringia, they used newspapers for the windows due to the lack of financial means. But newspapers on the windows evoke the impression that a drug addict lives in the flat, because they prefer gloomy lighting, as the social workers told me. So landlords, operators, and neighbours weren't happy about these shading practices, also because in their eyes it deteriorated and impaired the appearance of the building, resulting in a lot of conflicts. It took a very long time until refugees finally dared to raise the issue, also because nobody ever asked why they put a privacy screen on the windows. They kept bringing it up, until finally the social workers and the housing company installed shutters. The same issue arose in the Tempohomes years later, because there was no possibility to cover the windows either. So refugees squeezed a spoon into the corners of the containers, which could then be used to hang the curtains. This spoon technique became a common solution for hanging curtains in the camps. It is very interesting to see how these kinds of spatial practices and spatial techniques work for decorating your home, but also for protecting your privacy. It became a very widespread practice that supported homemaking and helped women in particular to feel safer inside the containers. However, it was only because of constant fights and appeals for these things that the operators of those accommodations very gradually and very slowly learned their lesson, and only after a long time started to provide such things as shutters.

**HILAL:** I am really glad that we had the chance to have this exchange. It is definitely useful to see how contextual differences unfold between Germany and Turkey. However, it is even more enlightening to see the patterns and the systematic problems pertaining to the intimate (but essential) details of migrants' homemaking and settlement in both countries.