

CHAPTER

4

A Place in the Making Sheltering Unaccompanied Minors and the Limits of a “Safe Haven”

Friederike Eichner

On a summer day in 2017, the local youth welfare office announced the transfer to the shelter of three adolescent minors whom the police had arrested at the city’s main station. In the shelter’s cafeteria, a crowd of employees and residents gathered around the new arrivals. Staff were excited to welcome them but found it difficult to overcome the language barrier, being only able to exchange a few words. Therefore, the three young people mainly talked among themselves while quickly eating the fried chicken they were provided with. As they became restless and jumped up from their seats, Kurt, the shelter manager in his thirties, proceeded to show them around the facility.¹ However, that only worked for a short time, because they quickly ran out of the building again. In a creative modification of their ordinary welcoming routines, some staff gave them residents’ bicycles as a distraction. The boys did one lap of the yard before riding off down the driveway and out onto the street. The staff stood in amazement as they disappeared around the corner, happy to see them having fun. After they were gone, they began to wonder if the boys even knew the way back. As the minutes passed, their faces began to take on a worried expression. It slowly began to dawn on them that the three would not be coming back. They were gone, as were the bikes.

This was an exceptional moment in my research at a reception center for young migrants in East Germany. The staff, slightly surprised by the spontaneous transfer during a period when the shelter maintained a relatively

stable resident group, were even more taken aback as the newly arrived individuals seemed noticeably younger than the average shelter resident, claiming to be eleven and twelve years old. Perhaps due to their particularly young age, staff promptly tapped into the core identity of the place to facilitate their immediate arrival. Above all, they intended to shape the environment so that it elicited and intensified affective experiences associated with protected youthfulness. The decision to provide them with bicycles mere minutes after their arrival stemmed from this intention to provide the shelter's residents with a sense of a protected and fun place. However, what was initially meant to cultivate youthful joy was instead seized by the young individuals as a means to swiftly escape it.

Exploring this distinctive moment, this chapter delves into the dynamics through which both staff and residents shaped the shelter as either a prolonged residence or, conversely, a mere point along their way. This was linked to how they attributed meaning to the place, categorizing it as either a destination or a stopover. To achieve this, I draw a comparison between these two conceptualizations of place evident in my research: "place as destination" and "place as stepping stone."² The former envisions place as the final destination of a journey, where individuals are welcomed and establish long-term residency. This type of place embodies identity and community, epitomized by the caretaker's concept of a "safe haven." On the other hand, "place as stepping stone" depicts a location as a means to access something beyond itself. It serves as a facilitator of movement, transition, and progress for young people and is related to a transnational context.

Complementing literature that engages with shelters mainly by starting from their position in the migration regime (Altin and Minca 2017; Bhimji 2019; Merlín-Escorza, Davids, and Schapendonk 2021; Turner and Whyte 2022), I describe the making of a shelter as place as a particular kind of activity that is shaped by contentious negotiations between staff and residents and the different meanings that they ascribe to it. While a central function of the shelter is predetermined by political regulations, fixing people in place, the staff did not consistently adhere to this policy of confinement but were primarily motivated by the intention to create a good place. To some extent, their aspiration aligned with the residents' desires, such as when they collaborated on long-term objectives like obtaining residency papers. However, in other respects, there were substantial differences, particularly in their evaluation of the place's potentials and constraints. Contributing to the discussion in this volume about the relation between the inherently open and unstable nature of places, their harnessing as a spatial fix within contemporary politics and practices of migration, and their protecting function, my chapter shows the tensions that arise from this for a single place.

This chapter is based on extended fieldwork that I conducted for my PhD thesis, occurring in a single shelter over the course of two years, from 2017 to 2019. It was a small facility located on the outskirts of an East German city, providing sixteen places for male “unaccompanied refugee minors.” Most residents were between, roughly, fifteen and eighteen years old. It can be considered an out-of-the-way place (see introduction, Drotbohm and Winters, this volume) in the regard that it is located on the periphery of Germany, an undesirable location in a desired country. East Germany’s “disempowered cities” (Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018: 13), particularly the smaller ones, grapple with processes of structural transformation and a relative absence of migration history compared to the urban centers, mostly in the western and southern parts of Germany, that typically attract people. This contributes to the transitional nature of the place, as young people might find fewer reasons to stay in the long term.

I focused on one shelter to gain a deeper understanding of the migration processes and relationships of people in this place. During my research, I dove into the microcosmos of the shelter, where I learned that larger migration processes are as important as the details of everyday life (Guevara González 2022: 337–39) in shaping this place. While migration is a mobile phenomenon, I stayed put in this place, interested in the multifaceted phenomena that emerged there. I particularly investigated the instability of the place, which I and others experienced through unstable relationships, sudden shifts in atmosphere, or gaps in understanding. I learned that I had to engage with these highly tangible and yet diffuse shelter dynamics to understand the larger outcome for migration processes. Therefore, methodologically I relied primarily on participant observation. I conducted interviews with professionals in the field, to include perspectives from the outside of the shelter, and with a few staff members. But rather than following the structures of the migration regime, as I had originally planned, being present and part of the everyday life became my main research strategy.

Minors and the Management of Place

The facility opened in 2016 and is thus intrinsically linked to the so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015–16. In critique of the term, De Genova and other scholars have pointed out that what is often depicted as a crisis of control (2017: 9) is in fact a racial crisis (2018) that lays open the postcolonial histories on which Europe is built. Managing migration as a policy problem (Feldman 2012), as done in the European Union, masks the structural roots and the differential mobilities these policies produce. In the vein of policy solutions for unruly mobility, differentiations between wanted and un-

wanted, deserving and underserving migrants have become crucial (Holmes and Castañeda 2016). In this context, the category of the minor is often cast as privileged and beneficial, both by people in my research and by researchers, mostly because it offers close support from social workers and a period of temporary nondeportability, during which paths to legalization can be explored—for which, in turn, the more intensive support can be helpful.

Among those changes triggered by the crisis in 2015 that the German government pursued, which targeted mainly the tightening of asylum and immigration law, was a law that was supposed to “improve the situation” for unaccompanied minors. The “Act for Improvement of Accommodation, Care, and Support of Foreign Children and Adolescents” (*Gesetz zur Verbesserung der Unterbringung, Versorgung und Betreuung ausländischer Kinder und Jugendlicher*) became effective in November 2015. It is part of the German Social Code (SGB VIII). This law aligned with international and EU harmonization, adhering to the legal implementation of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and accommodation standards (Lems, Oester, and Strasser 2020). While the political and legal situation for many asylum seekers got more uncertain, the situation for underage refugees was supposed to become better. Since the enactment of this law, there has indeed been a gradual shift in the situation. The age for asylum and residency law capacity for foreign minors has been raised from sixteen to eighteen, granting them the right to receive longer support, for instance in legal matters, which helped many in obtaining their residency papers. The act also entitles them to access benefits outlined in the social code, such as better health services compared to adult asylum seekers and admission to regular schools. Furthermore, the prioritization of youth welfare over foreign law, while not legally prohibited, practically resulted in minimal deportations. Additionally, there has been an increase in facilities with trained staff, contributing to a more supportive environment.

However, a crucial aspect of the new law for minors was that it introduced new constraints regarding the fixation on a location. It not only focused on improving the situation for minors but also benefited the state. Previously it was the norm that unaccompanied minors would be taken into custody by the local youth welfare office at the location where they first arrived. With the new act, which faced widespread criticism from children’s rights organizations, the nationwide obligation for reception and distribution based on statistical measures, specifically the *Königsteiner Schlüssel*, was introduced for unaccompanied minors, too, who were now “transferred” nationwide. This approach restricts refugee youth classified as minors from choosing where they want to live, a similar restriction applied to adult refugees.

The new act changed the local housing provision for welfare purposes in my research context. Most residents of the shelter were assigned to this

place from large cities in the western parts of Germany where they had been taken into custody by other youth welfare offices. Thus, in the municipality where I worked, numbers went from “almost zero” unaccompanied minors (meaning around ten minors a year) to “one hundred percent” (meaning shelters reaching their capacity limits) within a short stretch of time in 2015, according to Mr. Fischer, a manager from the local youth welfare office. Due to its previous status as an out-of-the-way destination for migrants, it lacked infrastructural support from both the city and the federal state in which it was located. But within a year, a dozen facilities opened for unaccompanied minors in the city. The shelter where I worked, which was run by a large German welfare organization, was one of two so-called clearing centers for minors in the city. If young people were new to the city, they would initially be sheltered at these places before being transferred to facilities where they resided until they reached at least eighteen years old. When the numbers of arriving minors dropped to “almost zero” in the beginning of 2017 because the city had met its statistical quota, the shelter where I worked also began offering long-term assistance.

While living under temporary security, residents still faced the threat of “deportability” (De Genova 2002; Drotbohm and Hasselberg 2015). To obtain their residency papers, they had two options: either apply for asylum or not. Many of those undergoing asylum processes received subsidiary protection—a status where the asylum application is formally rejected but deportation, due to mostly humanitarian reasons, is temporarily impossible, granting them access to residency papers. Some residents received a rejection of their case and, along with their caretakers, filed lawsuits. A few residents never applied for asylum. For them, staff relied on a new law that grants papers for professional training, introduced during the refugee crisis. Overall, their legal situation was difficult and highly stressful, but almost everyone eventually succeeded in overcoming it through one of these paths. It is important to note that the German case contrasts considerably with the US asylum system, as discussed in this volume by Gutiérrez Rivera. In Germany, staying put at one place over a longer period is considered crucial for gaining access to residency papers.

I already mentioned that a central function of shelters is to fix people in place and prevent their onward movement. The shelter staff held the responsibility of ensuring that the young residents stayed within their registered location. However, they lacked the authority to compel residents to stay if they did not want to. To make them stay, they primarily relied on persuasion to encourage them, explained the law to them, and simultaneously worked on enhancing the overall appeal of the facility. Disappearing from the shelter was a quite common phenomenon though, called *Abgängigkeit* (being absent without leave) in German. In the years 2015 and 2016 this

was frequent, as many young people were not content with the places they had been transferred to and took advantage of a registration system still being set up by registering at other shelters. Later, these acts of “spatial disobedience” (Tazzioli 2018) decreased in the shelter, but they sometimes still occurred. While *Abgängigkeit* had many causes and destinations, it was difficult to understand from the perspective of people who stayed put. They had a limited understanding of the motives behind it, the journeys and places young people went to, the “outside” and the networks they relied on. Those who were supposed to stop movement struggled to understand it in the first place, being barely able to work against it.

Shelters as Dynamic Places of Encounter and Constraint

My chapter adds to a growing body of literature on shelters and camps that acknowledges the ambivalent nature of these places (Agier 2002; Feldman 2015; Turner 2015; Kreichauf 2018; Otto 2020; Martin, Minca, and Katz 2020; Merlín-Escorza, Davids, and Schapendonk 2021). In current debates on shelters, authors increasingly perceive them to be multifaceted places where different elements and actors feed into the constant evolution of place (Kreichauf 2018: 4; Turner 2015). As threshold places (Fontanari 2015) where people navigate the complex terrain of being physically in place but not necessarily secure in terms of rights and belonging, shelters combine multiple and contradictory features. First and foremost, they sit uneasily between different “junctures” (Turner and Whyte 2022) of mobility and immobility, serving as blocking points in a mobility regime that engenders differential mobilities, and points of connectivity, facilitating existential movement of people in search of places to stay (Lems 2016; Otto 2020: 85). In the everyday life of shelters, these locating and dislocating elements are closely related (Merlín-Escorza, Davids, and Schapendonk 2021: 116).

Despite this prevalent understanding of shelters as shaped by diverse elements and actors, a notion of a bounded, coherent place lurks behind many approaches. Studies on shelters often approach them as an intrinsic part of the migration regime, even as a “spatial political technology aimed at governing, disciplining, and qualifying the ‘migrants’” (Altin and Minca 2017: 31). However, most studies also attest to the limits and contestations of these unified power apparatuses. Yet, framed as places of attempted confinement where residents can face an “exclusionary order” (Gueguen-Teil and Katz 2018: 96–97), many studies tend to establish that shelters are institutions with a consistent infrastructure, design, and purpose of governing migrants, which are then confounded by the creativity of their residents (Gueguen-Teil and Katz 2018: 97), who challenge fixed

meanings and create new ones (Otto 2020: 91). Such approaches have offered detailed analysis of the exclusionary aspects of shelters and their creative reappropriation. But often these studies implicitly perceive the shelter itself as a stable institution that residents then work with or against. My approach builds on these approaches but also offers another angle by showing that the restrictive aspects of shelters are not always dominant, and when they are, then they do not only come a priori but can also be the result of painful processes of collaborative and contested place-making. There are significant differences between shelters that I do not want to negate. However, a focus on the disciplinary tendencies tends to overlook everyday attempts to create a sanctuary inside the shelter in which people can dwell. Topics such as solidarity or intimacy (Vogt 2018) are largely absent from approaches to state-run or state-funded shelters in Europe, being almost exclusively ascribed to the self-organization of refugees (Gueguen-Teil and Katz 2018: 96).

Therefore, I go beyond the notion of shelter as a place shaped predominantly by the migration regime. To do so, I bring Augé's "anthropological place" (1995) and Massey's "global sense of place" (1993: 65) into dialogue. Augé frames anthropological places as "places of identity, of relations, and of history" (Augé 1995: 52). While Augé stresses the work people do to invest in place by giving it meaning and identity, and by creating community, Massey puts strong emphasis on the open character of place that has no single or fixed identity. She conceptualizes places as being shaped by multiple local and global relations. According to her, places are "articulated moments in networks of social relations" and, as such, not the source of being but of becoming (1993: 66, 63). Massey criticizes the assumption that places simply mean attachment, stability, or fixed identity and stresses their constantly evolving character. "The identities of place are always unfixed, contested, and multiple," she states (1994: 5). Applying both notions to the shelter draws attention to the ways in which staff want to fix the meaning of the shelter to establish a small counterworld against a global condition that produces displacement, while acknowledging that its global positioning thwarts a singular identity.

My angle draws from this notion of place made up of encounters and social relationships, global dynamics, and structural inequalities. As dynamic places of encounter, shelters are settled and unsettled by these diverse processes, relations, and forces (introduction, Drotbohm and Winters this volume). I focus on two main aspects in this chapter, acknowledging that there are many others too. Shelters are places that have the potential to create relationships, community, and well-being. Legal precarity and related experiences of displacement and exclusion can generate a feeling of being out of place for young people (Lems 2022: 24). From this angle, young people

need a stable sense of place for their well-being (Chase 2013). Social relationships can be stabilizing factors, as staff can help residents to literally put their feet on the ground in helping them to obtain papers, education, or work. On the other hand, anthropologists have traced the ways in which youth migration is driven by collective fantasies of the West and the complex dynamics that go along with these fantasies. Searching for “possibilities of becoming” (De Boeck and Honwana 2005: 7) and oriented to a globalized (digital) space, young people can experience shelters and other places as limiting and representing the precarity they want to leave behind (2005: 7). In this regard, instability of place can even be a form of freedom, in which people’s desires are not impeded by the limiting possibilities of place (2005: 15). Both aspects, the need for places and the constraints of place, shape the shelter.

Crafting Infrastructures for Unaccompanied Minors: Making a Good Place

Staff members were determined to turn the place into a welcoming and hospitable place, providing the arriving youth with care and comfort so that they were able to process the hardship of their flight. In the guidelines of the shelter as well as in the interviews and narrations of staff, I encountered a vision of the shelter as a peaceful, restful place that they wanted to realize. Working with concepts of unaccompanied minors being vulnerable and traumatized, they approached shaping the place in the following way—I quote from the shelter’s performance description of 2017: “They should feel accepted and safe in our house, be given a lasting sense of security and comfort for the first time after their flight.” The authors conceived of a place where people can arrive in conditions created by caretakers sensitive to their needs. Since they imagined the young people’s past as very stressful, caretakers focused on making the shelter peaceful and stabilizing from the moment of arrival. As the description evinces, the shelter should be more than just a physical retreat, a place where residents should also feel well and protected.

In an interview, Kurt used the term “safe haven” (*sicherer Hafen*) to capture how he imagined the place. Deploying the metaphor of a haven, he drew attention to the process of arriving and anchoring. In this safe haven—“as safe as it can be”—residents should feel that they belong without fear, he stressed. Comparing the shelter to a family home, Kurt spoke of the sense of strong feelings of belonging, safety, and trust he associated with this kind of home. He hoped that residents feel that they can express themselves freely, that they do not need to act immaculately but have the

freedom to transgress, and express anger. Fostering this kind of trust in residents and cultivating a feeling of belonging was one aim of the work, according to Kurt. However, he also strove to remain grounded in reality, pragmatically acknowledging the differences between the shelter and a family home. For instance, although he recognized that it was impossible to fully re-create the feeling of homely security in the shelter, he understood his task, and that of the other staff, as at least “providing the framework” for its realization. Perceiving the shelter through a lens of protection, staff wanted to “nurture in them [residents] a sense of place, belonging and security” (Chase 2013: 858). Kurt emphasized the possibility that conflict could take place in this “safe haven” without endangering residents’ sense of belonging. Thus, caretakers sought to invest the place with feelings of home and ascribed, especially to relationships, the power to settle peoples’ lives by enabling their well-being.

I want to highlight here Augé’s positive approach to the identity and, thereby, stability of anthropological places that people actively create, especially in contrast to the solitary, anonymous, and transitory nature of non-places (see Missbach and Hoffstaedter’s discussion about non-places in this volume). Applied to the context of my research, this helps in understanding the making of the shelter, where staff strived to imbue it with identity, community, and history. To create community, they placed a high value on casual interaction and fun activities. The facility was equipped with two large recreation rooms, a TV room, and a ping-pong room. Kurt, who is an accomplished ping-pong player, often announced competitions in the afternoon after work, which residents and other staff members joined. The mood was often very boisterous, marked by jokes and teasing among the residents. Over time, the residents found their own mixed language, in which they conversed. Table tennis was a good way for everyone to socialize. In the ping-pong room and during many other free-time activities organized by staff, such as visits to the gym, football tournaments, or races, a sense of community indeed emerged.

Staff also gave the shelter a history—for example, through commemorating and decorating together with residents. In the kitchen, for instance, handprints and names on the wall served to memorialize former residents. Every year, they celebrated the anniversary of the shelter’s opening with a party to which residents who still lived in the city were invited. Staff also documented every activity, decorating the walls of the common rooms with photos from the shelter’s short history. Later, they encouraged residents to imprint themselves into the place by painting the common rooms with street art and pictures and symbols of their homes. Thus, the identity they gave the shelter was primarily that of a protected place, materialized as a

space where young people could engage in youth-related activities—including transgression and conflict.

Place as Destination

So far, I have described that staff perceived place as a rather stable, positive resource, and associated values like home and family, emotional stability, and durable relationships with it. It is this sense of “place as destination” that they mobilized when working with the residents. Not long after I started my research, I was asked to help translate a conversation between Boubakar and Lisa. Like everybody else, Lisa, who was in her forties, had been new to the job when the shelter opened. She had already worked for the welfare organization and perceived this new job as an exciting new opportunity. She was an energetic person, very communicative and caring, and clearly dedicated to the cause of helping the young people feel at home. Shortly after moving in, Boubakar had expressed the wish to move to another shelter because he was annoyed that he had waited for an extended period, which was caused by delays from the local authorities, to enter school, and Lisa was eager to convince him to stay. During the conversation, she resolutely emphasized that this place was in no way inferior to others. She listed the things they were going to do for him: “Here you can go to school. We will organize an internship for you. Everybody will help you here.” But for that, she said, he must work with her and be patient. At the end of the conversation, Boubakar agreed to reconsider his decision to immediately insist on a transfer. Afterward, she explained to me that staff at previous shelters would try to smoothen the transition to this out-of-the-way place by making promises of what would happen there. This meant that young people would arrive with high expectations, hoping, for example, to start school immediately. She felt they had to work through the resulting frustration. Her message to the new residents was that the arrival process takes time, but patience pays off.

Pointing out the possibilities of access and the amount of time it often takes to get there was an important aspect of her persuasive speech. In many ways, staff followed good practice guidelines of social work, such as trying to be an ally, acknowledging the difficulties of obtaining refugee or residency status, and trying to maintain the safety of people against this backdrop (Nelson, Price, and Zubrzycki 2017: 606, 608). They were acknowledging the insecurity of residents and how the political situation made it difficult for them to feel safe, and accordingly staff put much time and effort into the regularization of residents’ status. Part of the identity of

a safe space was the work of turning the shelter into a place offering future possibilities, such as education and residency, by emphasizing a relational understanding of place-making with the message “we work together” to achieve these goals. Lisa’s persuasive efforts were certainly not the only reason, but Boubakar did become a long-term resident and received residency papers supported by his caretakers through the path of education and formation years later, something he had strongly desired. Back in the beginning, when I talked to him on another day about his transfer, he told me about the home where he had briefly lived before somewhere in the South of Germany. He had really liked it because it was small and calm. When I asked him how he felt about this transfer, he responded to my surprise: “Now I am here, then that is also good.” Even though he didn’t want to go there, he got involved with the new place. Despite having experienced a forceful dislocation from another shelter, he demonstrated a flexibility toward place that I often encountered among residents, many of whom were showing a willingness to engage with the new location.

The localizing tendencies of the shelter become evident. It was no longer just a place of transition but allowed for forms of dwelling. The connections of people were not solely linked to onward movement but contributed to more permanent forms of place-making (see Merlín-Escorza, Davids, and Schapendonk 2021: 116). The idea of giving residents the semblance of a typical teenage life matched their desire to have a positive place to stay. Once I walked through the nearby forest with a group of residents. Everyone was in a jolly mood, listening to music and taking pictures with their phones, using an app that drew funny cat faces. The photos grasped a moment of joy and ease on everybody’s face, framed with whiskers and cat ears. Carried by the mood of the moment, one of them declared that he liked staying here because he had found friends.

Picking up on my argument that the locating and dislocating, blocking and enabling elements of the shelter are closely related, it is noteworthy that the place itself also presented challenges that the young people had to contend with in their place-making efforts if they intended to stay longer. The clear identity of the shelter as a protected space for youthfulness, which the staff aimed to establish, was supplemented by specific intervention strategies (see also Engebriksen 2011; Vanderhurst 2022) of German youth welfare that also influenced the shaping of the place. The shelter served as a space where young people were prepared for their future in a new society, and the primary means through which staff could implement this was the daily life within the facility. Within these interventions, dissonances emerged in the way the place was imbued with various projects.

The kitchen was the shelter’s central room. In this large, functional room with a tiled floor, white multipurpose tables had been pushed together to

create one large dining table with many chairs. Large windows looked out onto the patio, flooding the room with light. The room was often crowded, buzzing with multiple languages. One day in April 2018, the kitchen was filled with the fragrant aroma of apple pie. Mamadou was busy in the kitchen. He was a funny, communicative person and well-versed in English, which made it easier for him to talk to staff from the beginning. He would turn eighteen shortly after this day. As part of the shelter's program for becoming self-reliant, he had had to bake the cake together with Jessica, the shelter's cook. She, a warm, maternal person and avid cake-baker, showed him the individual procedure. He did as she said with good humor. Together, they created a delicious apple pie that a few roommates and I were invited to try. Sitting at the dining table, we had coffee and enjoyed the pie. When I complimented Mamadou on his baking skills, he told me that according to the staff he still had to learn cooking. In response to my asking whether this was really the case, he said: "Of course I know how to cook—I did this a lot in the past. But now I am on a break."

The shelter had a program that prepared residents for an independent life. This was part of larger welfare discourses mediated by the youth welfare office that implemented these politics by predefining goals the young people had to reach, which were then realized by staff through educational programs such as cooking with the shelter chef. Through these measures, residents were supposed to learn life-planning skills and individual responsibility. The breaking down of this discourse into everyday activities such as baking a cake was somehow at odds with the reality of residents, as Mamadou pointed out, but it nonetheless had the potential to create moments of relational place-making. The baking of the cake created a cozy moment, and Mamadou bore the task with humor. The open nature of the place meant that many residents utilized it as a stepping stone for their own ambitions while also complying with the efforts to create a protective environment. Many residents adapted to their surroundings, forming connections in less-than-ideal locations with mismatched intervention policies. To accomplish this, they occasionally relied on humor and flexibility. However, other residents more clearly expressed their discontent, refusing to commit themselves to these programs and pursuing their own projects. This posed particular challenges for the project of creating a safe haven.

Place as Stepping Stone

I will now dive into the problem that place-making, figured as collaborative work (as in Lisa's message "we work together"), turned into conflict when residents showed a lack of cooperation. I want to illustrate this with

the story of Hamza, who had often been away from the shelter for days or sometimes weeks. A small and slender teenager, he was around fifteen at that time and transgressed many shelter rules. Hamza's recurring disappearance irritated staff. Perceiving *Abgängigkeit* mainly from the perspective of protection, they still understood their responsibility in enacting a stable, reliable place to facilitate his and others' well-being. But it became more and more difficult for them to maintain this idea in some cases. Kurt had said that young people should be protected, even when transgressing, to give them security in the knowledge that they would not be expelled from the shelter. Although he meant it earnestly, it was not entirely true, because Hamza was expelled in the end, and so were a few others. In these cases, the wish to enact a stable place for the young people turned into a struggle against them.

Once I witnessed an informal conversation between staff members where they discussed Hamza's situation, his constant refusal to follow house rules, and his disappearance from the shelter. They shared their impression that he doesn't want to stay and that he doesn't fit into this place. One caretaker asserted that he was gambling with his life, because disappearing from the shelter for a longer period resulted in dropping out of the system, like losing a school place. Another staff member said that Hamza could not articulate at all why he was there: "There's a hole opening." Someone even suggested that maybe he should go back to his country because he has such big problems here, a remark well outside the realm of how staff usually spoke about residents' futures, which they saw in Germany. Their argument betrayed a sense of puzzlement surrounding Hamza's rejected place-making. It also shows that they were hurt that he did not reciprocate their efforts to make it a comfortable stay for him. Another important aspect of place-making came up in their discussion, too.

The shelter followed a so-called participatory approach. In the guidelines, this was mapped out as an ideal. It states: "The young people take responsibility for their living spaces and the community of the facility as a whole: They design cleaning schedules and stick to them, articulate wants, needs and interests, manage sub-areas themselves (e.g., care and maintenance of their own bicycles)." Residents were supposed to take over responsibilities, and staff encouraged, assisted, and expected them to attach to place on this everyday level. In their discussion, staff alluded to this expectation that residents display attachment to the place by performing tasks and showing commitment to make it nice, which Hamza did not do. As an example of such transgressions, I return to the point of bike maintenance mentioned in the guidelines: One day he turned up at the shelter without the bike he had received. When I read a note about the incident, it said: "To everyone's surprise, he took the bicycle saddle out of his backpack." He was

asked to fetch the rest of the bike but refused. This upset the staff so much that they stopped giving him tickets or other bikes as a penalty. But where did their strong reaction come from?

The shelter's identity as a protected space was challenged when young people voluntarily disengaged from it and staff faced a predicament in trying to comprehend why young people chose to leave or neglected the collaborative place-making. While they were angry, they were also worried because Hamza's escape from the shelter was a point of concern for them. In their imagination, he probably had experienced bad things while being away, like sleeping rough and maybe even being abused. They experienced his spatial disobedience as unsettling. Likewise, after the incident with the three young people who fled the shelter with the bikes, tension erupted within the team, sparking a controversy over the assessment of the situation. While some viewed it as an incident of youthful disobedience, others considered the flight a potential threat to the young people's well-being—referring to them as “endangered children.” The case managers of the youth welfare office, who assign minors to the facilities and formally commission the assistance, took a similar stance. For them, the shelter was a place where these young and—as they understood them—deviant people should have been fixed. The predicament for the shelter staff was whether they should work toward fixing young people for their protection, for example, by adopting a more disciplinarian approach in their daily care, thereby aligning more with an administration that aimed to prevent them from moving on, or not. Their lack of insight into the desires of young people, coupled with the notion that a stable place is beneficial for their well-being, led them to lean in this direction.

This contrasted with the ways young people used places as facilitators of movement. I do not focus on their desires per se, as they often remained opaque or fragmented. Staff and residents speculated about the allure of larger cities and urban metropolises when others left. Many residents spoke about their hope for career opportunities and quicker access to residency papers at other places. However, in a few instances there may have been a lack of concrete ideas, as staff speculated with Hamza. Instead, there seemed to be an adventurous desire to let oneself drift through places. This indicates that in residents' imagination, place held the dimension of potentiality as a means to access careers, opportunities, and capital. As numerous scholars have shown, youth cultures in the Global South are deeply shaped by the desire to leave places where people feel disconnected from a global standard of living (Graw and Schielke 2021), made visible globally through social media. When young people are searching for “possibilities of becoming” (De Boeck and Honwana 2005: 7), today they are predominantly oriented toward consumerism and capitalist dreamscapes. As a re-

sult, some of the young people seemed as if they were on the verge, as if they had not properly arrived, which appeared to staff as a “hole” where attachment to the place should be. The “transitory emplacement” (Drotbohm and Winters 2021: 4) of residents was thus fraught with complicated feelings for staff, as they desired stable lives for young people at this place but struggled to relate to residents’ practice to “routinely imagine a life elsewhere” (2021: 9), which stood in contrast to their own experiences. However, this does not necessarily mean that they were incorrect, as the attempt to give the place an identity is indeed important to transform it into a destination. But the desire to create a counterplace against the condition of displacement is thwarted specifically by its global relations (Massey 1994). Shelters produce this specific form of unsettledness also because they heavily interact with other places (1994: 121), they are junctures of movement, while people working there lack knowledge about these connections.

Most directly through their *Abgängigkeit*, Hamza and other residents rendered the shelter tangible as an along-the-way place. In response to this spatial disobedience, staff increasingly tried to enforce their own notion of place with recourse to rules and discipline, which led to an increase of fights between them and him. One day, Hamza came to the kitchen and demanded chocolate. Tom, an athletic, middle-aged staff member who was on duty, said that he should clean his room first. Hamza made an annoyed impression and indicated his unwillingness. Tom and other staff members started to tease him about his room, which had not been cleaned in a while, what they understood as neglect of the place. A few moments later, with Hamza still in the kitchen, staff started to discuss the forthcoming week. Hamza asked about an upcoming event, and Tom replied: “You’re gone again then anyway.” Hamza countered with “Inshallah,” to which Tom replied in kind.

Tom’s sarcasm hinted at the frustration that had grown in him. The relationships that were an elementary part of place-making had become charged with tension. Negative emotions circulated between the staff and Hamza, affecting the relational undertaking of nurturing the place. At this point, place-making as collaborative work was no longer possible. I later heard Tom complaining, “I am annoyed that the young person behaves here as if it were a hotel,” something I overheard staff mumbling occasionally, by which they meant that residents came only to eat and sleep and were the rest of the time absent from the shelter. Their hope for residents to actively engage in the community and embrace the identity of the place as destination remained unfulfilled. In the case of Hamza, they started to sanction transgression in a more coordinated way after a series of conflicts with the hope that more guidance would facilitate Hamza’s place-making. Notwithstanding the conflicts, they still wanted to provide him a home, as

Kurt said. But things escalated quickly. After yet another fight with staff members, Hamza jumped against a car belonging to the shelter, leaving a dent, for which they filed a complaint against him for damage to property and, shortly thereafter, expelled him from the shelter. They unwittingly found themselves entangled in the broader dynamics of upheaval inherent to the migration regime, a circumstance diametrically opposed to their envisioned sanctuary.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the shelter as an inherently open place to which people ascribe different meanings, emphasizing its role less as a coherent space of governance and confinement. My primary focus was on the staff who face challenges in their attempts to create a place with a singular identity and to establish a safe haven for young people on the move. I was particularly interested in the tension between a protected and a transitory place, on the one hand, and place as a spatial fix in the migration regime, on the other, which was placing caretakers in a challenging position. Consequently, even though their enactments of place produced moments of arrival and security, these moments were frequently disrupted. I demonstrated that this attests to the inherently open nature of the place, especially in its role as a stepping stone within a transnational context. The different meanings that people ascribe to it can eventually lead to further displacement when the tensions between them become too intense.

If young people fail to establish long-term residency at one place, they become more susceptible to the risks generated by governance processes that differentiate between wanted and unwanted migrants. They may encounter difficulties in receiving substantial support and obtaining residency papers. My research indicates that the supposed privilege of being a minor in the migration regime, leading to successful legalization, is more evident when individuals adhere to the out-of-the-way places and demonstrate flexibility toward them. Relationships formed at these places can support their place-making and challenge the condition of deportability inherent in the migration regime. In some instances, young people who might otherwise be categorized as unwanted can achieve legal stability through these places. But they can also contribute to further displacement. From my immobile position it is challenging to say, but their high mobility might provide young people opportunities for access that remaining in one place would not offer. Moreover, further research on the desire to avoid becoming too attached to one place could also provide insightful perspectives (see, e.g., Bialas and Sohail 2022). As I learned later from a case manager at the youth welfare

office, the three young people that fled the shelter so swiftly had no desire at all to stay at this place, or for that matter at any other place, for longer. It transpired that they already had a record in Germany for fleeing youth welfare offices. It appeared that they, too, drifted through places, an action conceptually hard to grasp for the administrations.

Friederike Eichner is a social anthropologist currently affiliated with the Department of Anthropology at Leipzig University, Germany. She conducted long-term ethnographic fieldwork in a shelter for underage refugees in Germany. Her dissertation project examines the refugee shelter as a symptom of an ongoing global migration crisis and asks how the shelter staff and residents cope and adjust to this predicament. She is interested in how people perceive complex migration processes and how they negotiate mobility and displacement along the boundaries of language and through affect.

NOTES

1. All names are pseudonyms. Moreover, the depiction of people and situations that I present below are partly (but not all) composite images of different situations and people in the shelter. They are exemplary for certain moments, tendencies, and recurring events in the place. For reasons of anonymization, I do not state the countries individual residents hail from.
2. Thank you to Heike Drotbohm for coming up with these conceptual terms after reading a previous draft.

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