

Resisting the System: The Role of Self-Organised Refugee and Migrant Groups in Berlin. A Case Study of The Voice Forum Berlin

Authors: Brenda Rodriguez Serrano & Maddalena Tartarini

A chapter from: Schmiz, A., & Lehmann, S. (Eds.) (2025). Geographies of the European Border Regime. How borders shape the everyday lives of refugees and asylum-seekers. Berlin Geographical Papers, 56. <https://doi.org/10.17169/refubium-48773>

56

Berlin Geographical Papers



Geographies of the European Border Regime

How borders shape the everyday lives of refugees
and asylum-seekers

Edited by

ANTONIE SCHMIZ and SOFIA LEHMANN

Institute of Geographical Sciences
Freie Universität Berlin

2025

Institute of Geographical Sciences
Freie Universität Berlin

2025

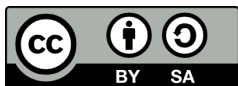
Contact

Freie Universität Berlin
Department of Earth Sciences

Working Group 'Society, Space and Gender'

Malteserstr. 74-100
D-12249 Berlin

<https://www.geo.fu-berlin.de/geog/fachrichtungen/anthrogeog/index.html>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17466532>

Citation suggestion: Rodriguez Serrano, B., & Tartarini, M. (2025). Resisting the System: The Role of Self-Organised Refugee and Migrant Groups in Berlin. A Case Study of The Voice Forum Berlin. *Berlin Geographical Papers*, 56, 62–76. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17466532>

Published in: Schmiz, A., & Lehmann, S. (Eds.) (2025). Geographies of the European Border Regime. How borders shape the everyday lives of refugees and asylum-seekers. *Berlin Geographical Papers*, 56. <https://doi.org/10.17169/refubium-48773>

Resisting the System: The Role of Self-Organised Refugee and Migrant Groups in Berlin. A Case Study of The Voice Forum Berlin

Abstract:

The German border regime has established a range of border mechanisms that restrict the freedom of movement of refugees and migrants. In response, self-organised groups in major cities like Berlin, where a large number of refugees and migrants are concentrated, have emerged to challenge and confront these movement restrictions. This research aims to explore how a self-organised group can resist the limitations imposed by the German asylum system. Based on a case study, we seek to apply a methodology that prioritises the narratives of the participants, in order to better understand their socio-spatial positioning, the framing of their struggles and their collective forms of action. Some of our findings suggest that among group members there is a strong identification with past struggles, a commitment of solidarity with the current situation of migrants and refugees, as well as a varied use of tactics ranging from protest to digital activism. This research highlights the role that self-organised groups can play in shaping resistance to restrictive migration policies in Germany.

1 Introduction

European migration policies are significantly shaped by securitisation processes and governance strategies that restrict migration and selectively permit entry, often at the expense of migrants' rights. Those who manage to cross the EU's fortified external borders face further challenges due to internal border controls (Odugbesan/Schwartz 2018). In Germany, the asylum system has followed a restrictive pattern since the late 1970s. The introduction of policies such as the Asylum Procedure Act (1982), which allows state governments to regulate the distribution of asylum seekers through statutory orders (Asylverfahrensgesetz 1982, §22), reflects a perceived need to 'protect' the social order. This has led to contested rights, precarious legal positions and limited social inclusion for non-citizens (Bosswick 2000).

These restrictive policies have subjected migrants to limitations across three main domains: the freedom of movement, the right to remain and settle and the right to decent work (Oliveri 2016, 265). This study focuses on the first: freedom of movement. In Germany, internal border mechanisms such as the informally named residence requirement (*Residenzpflicht*) (Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung n.d.), also referred to as the regulation of 'geographical limitation' (*räumliche Beschränkung*) (Asylverfahrensgesetz 1993, §56), prohibit asylum seekers from leaving designated areas.

In response to these constraints, self-organised groups of refugees and migrants have emerged in various German cities to contest these restrictions. Berlin, in particular, offers a

valuable context for studying such resistance due to its role as a key site for migrant activism. These groups engage in various forms of activism, including grassroots organising, advocacy campaigns, public demonstrations and other forms of protest, which aim to challenge legal and social limitations while demanding improved living conditions and rights (Toğral Koca 2024).

Based on these insights, this research investigates the question: How do self-organised groups of refugees and migrants in Berlin resist the movement restrictions imposed by the German asylum system? This project focuses on the case of The Voice Forum, exploring its methods, motivations and broader implications for migration politics in Germany. The structure of the paper is as follows: It proceeds with the context of the research, then introduces the theoretical framework, research design and ethical considerations. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of findings and concludes with final reflections.

2 Research context

This chapter explores the context surrounding self-organised groups of refugees and migrants who seek to challenge and confront various mechanisms of border control. Drawing on a review of the relevant literature, we examine how these collectives emerge and operate across different geographical scales of continental, national and local levels, in responding to increasingly restrictive migration policies. This analysis helps to identify patterns and strategies that resist the logics of exclusion and control imposed by border regimes.

At the continental level, the European Union's migration policy has become progressively more exclusionary, resulting in the deaths of thousands of people at its borders and subjecting asylum seekers and refugees to institutionalised detention (Ruiz-Gimenez Arrieta 2017; Perocco 2023; Webber 2014). In response to these policies and measures, refugees and migrants have initiated mass mobilisations to protest arbitrary detention and inhumane treatment in countries such as Germany, Austria, France, Hungary, Italy and Greece. These protests have been articulated transnationally in reaction to the repressive conditions of asylum systems (Kirchhoff 2018; McGuaran/Hudig 2014; Mokre 2018).

At the national level, in the case of Germany, scholars such as Jakob (2016) have shown how self-organised groups of refugees and migrants have resisted state migration policies for over two decades. These groups stand out not only for their active opposition, but also for their contributions to the country's cultural and labour diversity. From a historical perspective, the literature identifies the 1990s as a turning point, as mobilisations shifted from focusing on refugees and migrants' countries of origin to forms of resistance directed at host countries (Odugbesan/Schwartz 2018, 190). Groups such as The Voice Forum, Karawane and Refugees Emancipation emerged as new forms of solidarity and collective action, opposing the residence requirement, collective refugee camps and deportations. Slogans such as 'We don't have the right to vote, but we have a voice' and 'We are here because you are destroying our countries' encapsulated their political stance (Jakob 2016, pp. 18-21).

At the local level, cities such as Berlin have become key sites for the self-organisation of refugees and migrants (Fadaee 2015). In this city, significant movements have taken place, such as the 2012 Refugee Protest March at Oranienplatz, which called for the abolition of the *Residenzpflicht*, the closure of refugee detention centres (*Lager*) and an end to deportations (Ünsal 2015). Recent literature has also highlighted the emergence of new forms of migrant activism that combine symbolic protests, occupations, hunger strikes and public campaigns, and that employ increasingly collaborative strategies among self-organised collectives and non-governmental organisations (Toğral Koca 2024).

In summary, the literature we have reviewed reveals that research on smaller-scale self-organised groups of refugees and migrants remains limited, as it tends to focus more on large-scale movements and mass protests. However, it is important to highlight the sustained resistance of these collectives in Germany, as well as the spatial significance of Berlin, which has become a key meeting point for various migrant movements and groups.

3 Theoretical framework

The principal motivation behind the epistemological framework of this research lies in the respectful acquisition of knowledge from perspectives that have historically been marginalised or overlooked. This motivation responds to the need to question hegemonic frameworks of knowledge production and to bring visibility to approaches that destabilise dominant narratives surrounding issues such as migration and asylum. In this context, we consider it essential to incorporate postcolonial perspectives as a starting point for the development of our theoretical framework, as they enable us to identify and problematise the persistent power structures that continue to shape our societies.

One of the central contributions of postcolonial studies is the notion that these power structures are historically rooted in colonial processes and continue to manifest systematically in the present. In this regard, Aníbal Quijano (2000) argues that colonialism established a power structure based on a hierarchical social classification determined by racial criteria. He refers to this classificatory logic as the coloniality of power, which he argues did not disappear with the formal independence of the colonies but rather was transformed and continues to operate in new forms (Quijano 2000).

This concept is central to understanding how power relations are configured in the field of migration and how policies that discriminate against and exclude the racialised other are legitimised. In line with this perspective, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2018) extends the analysis of coloniality to the field of migration by proposing the concept of the coloniality of migration. According to the author, asylum and migration regimes are shaped by a mode of governance rooted in economic interests and cultural dynamics that are deeply embedded in the historical production of the racialised other (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018, 20). Within this colonial logic, individuals are transformed into objects of management that are then regulated through restrictions, control devices and administrative categories such as 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker' (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018, 24). In this way, the coloniality of migration

enables us to understand how contemporary migration policies reiterate the racialised objectification reminiscent of colonial times (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018, 24).

This pattern of power can be observed in the various disputes and obstacles faced by asylum seekers and refugees throughout their migratory journeys. In this regard, Federico Oliveri (2016) identifies at least three major areas of conflict, one of which is the freedom of movement against border mechanisms. These mechanisms are identified as involving not only a set of rules and practices but also extending the function of borders to the entire society (Oliveri 2016). Their purpose is twofold: on the one hand, to deter those considered to be 'undesirable' from undertaking unauthorised mobility; and on the other, to establish criteria for selection, classification and control in accordance with the political and economic needs of host states (Oliveri 2016). Moreover, these mechanisms are not limited to immobilisation and expulsion, but also operate temporally, slowing down or suspending migration processes in order to rank migrants according to shifting criteria of usefulness and belonging (Oliveri 2016).

In this context, self-organised groups of refugees and migrants play a crucial role in resisting border mechanisms and restrictions on freedom of movement imposed by migration policies. Following Odugbesan and Schwiertz (2018), this self-organisation is understood as the process by which social groups affected by specific structures of power and domination build resistance through political acts and initiatives. Self-organisation involves the direct participation of affected people, who create groups that establish collective structures of support, empowerment and political visibility. In this process, group members identify and prioritise the issues they consider essential, deciding for themselves how to structure and articulate their demands. Self-organisation is practised by those who take the risk to organise and resist, including through every day and political forms of resistance that often remain invisible (Odugbesan/Schwiertz 2018, 186).

Building upon this understanding of self-organisation and resistance, Odugbesan and Schwiertz (2018) propose a three-category interpretive framework that we find particularly suitable for our case study. The first category on socio-spatial positionality examines how refugees' social identities and physical locations influence their experiences of resistance, which in turn shapes both power dynamics and internal tensions in this context. The second category, focused on the framing and narratives of initiatives, highlights how social movements use storytelling to articulate their goals, mobilise resources and challenge dominant power structures. The third category addresses forms of collective action and protest, encompassing a range of tactics from visible demonstrations and civil disobedience to digital interventions. This framework will guide our analysis of the specific strategies and dynamics of resistance employed by a self-organised refugee and migrant group in Germany.

4 Research design and ethical considerations

4.1 Research design

For the design of our research, we drew inspiration from scholars like Dina Taha (2018) and Clelia O. Rodriguez (2017), who emphasise prioritising participants' narratives over predetermined agendas. We also considered Thambinathan and Kinsella's (2021) work on decolonising methodologies, which highlights the importance of centring non-Western perspectives and respectfully engaging with marginalised viewpoints.

Our initial ideas envisioned a collaboration with other organisations. However, our interactions with The Voice Forum highlighted the need to choose between a decolonising approach, which recognises the value of their 'shared realities' and aims for the 'co-production of knowledge' (Barnett 2014), and a more traditional research model. Opting for the former implied a direct engagement with the group, valuing their perspective and their work as crucial. This process required adapting the initial research idea and exercising the flexibility necessary to research *with* the group, rather than simply researching *about* it, an approach that reflects the importance of involving diverse perspectives in the production of knowledge (Barnett 2014; Radcliffe/Radhuber 2020)

Our methodology went beyond merely extracting information; it involved establishing a reciprocal research relationship with The Voice Forum. We collected empirical data through narrative interviews and participatory observation, while also supporting the group during their 30 Years Commemoration Event. Online materials of the group, such as videos, blog entries and podcasts, were also essential for understanding the self-organised group's activities and perspectives.

Implementing this approach was challenging due to time constraints that limited our engagement with the group. Building trust throughout this process was slow and conflicted with research deadlines. Our efforts to challenge traditional academic practices frequently collided with institutional constraints, such as rigid deadlines and prescribed requirements for the number of findings or data to be presented within specific timeframes. Navigating power dynamics with the self-organised group also proved challenging, as we were concerned that our actions as researchers might inadvertently undermine the trust we had established. Communication was unclear at times, with the group initially supportive but later expressing resistance towards academic involvement. Moreover, the group's expectations for our ongoing participation conflicted with our intention to remain non-active members, creating further tension around our roles. These challenges highlight the complexities of applying decolonising methodologies in academic settings. However, we believe that academia needs to decolonise its approaches, and for this reason, we are glad to contribute to this process.

4.2 Ethical considerations

Our research was guided by the principles of critical reflexivity, reciprocity, respect for self-determination and transformative praxis, as proposed by Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021).

Critical reflexivity involved examining our epistemological assumptions and addressing power dynamics throughout the research process. Establishing reciprocity in this context led us to emphasise trust and mutual respect to ensure ongoing consent and participants' self-determination.

Respecting diverse ways of knowing required our engagement with different cultures while unlearning dominant discourses to reimagine knowledge construction (Thambinathan/Kinsella 2021). To establish a transformative praxis, we pursued decolonising academic practices by listening to those who have experienced colonial oppression. Implementing these principles was challenging due to complexities within existing academic structures, such as rigid deadlines or prescribed requirements such as a specific number of interviews and amount of data. Carrying out our research as students from Southern Europe and Central America, our positionalities introduced specific biases that required constant reflection. Indeed, we experienced that participants' perceptions of us and our project varied based on our identities as migrants in Germany. Navigating these dynamics demanded ongoing ethical reflexivity to maintain our own respectful accountability.

Throughout this approach in working with The Voice Forum, we aimed to foster a transformative praxis by reimagining researcher-participant relationships. Our data collection resulted from investing time in building trustful relationships and listening to those who have experienced colonial oppression.

5 Presentation of findings

5.1 Socio-spatial positionality

The Voice African Forum, founded in 1994 by African refugees in a transit camp in Mühlhausen, emerged with the aim to combat discrimination, racism and inhumane conditions in Germany (The VOICE Forum 2003a). Initially an ethnically specific group, it soon broadened its scope in recognition of the fact that these laws affected all refugees equally, changing its name to The Voice Forum and mobilising people from various regions (The VOICE Forum 2014a). Members shared not only similar situations of living in Germany but also a common history of colonialism and European exploitation (The VOICE Forum 2003b; 2014a; 2014b). Thus, the organisation grew into a national network with branches in cities such as Jena, Berlin, Hamburg and Munich, united by challenges such as restrictions on movement. One of the founders emphasised: 'The *Residenzpflicht* criminalises refugees by allowing racial profiling of black and brown bodies, while isolation denies them community ties' (I#1). Collective action transformed personal struggles into a movement for social justice.

Currently, active members have regularised their status and are no longer asylum seekers, with only a small number of original founders and new members maintaining regular contact. Internal differences make consensus difficult, and the organisations' main activities are concentrated in Berlin. Digital activism has been key to overcoming physical and legal isolation in documenting struggles and coordinating actions on a national scale (The VOICE Forum 2003a; 2003b; 2004a; 2004b; 2005b; 2006a; 2006b; 2007; 2014a; 2014b; 2024a; 2024b). The

spatial trajectory of The Voice Forum, as it transitioned from specific actions against marginalised refugee accommodation to a decentralised yet digitally connected network, highlights how activism is shaped by and responds to both geographical and legal constraints. While its physical presence has become concentrated and individuals' participation more spatially fragmented, the Voice Forum's continued mobilisation across spaces indicates a resilient form of political engagement that transcends physical borders and legal categories.

5.2 Framing and narratives of The Voice Forum's initiative

The narrative of The Voice Forum is based on an anticolonial perspective that challenges the racialised power structures of the postcolonial world. One example includes their campaign against the residence obligation in Germany, which they view as a colonial legacy used to control and criminalise refugees and migrants (The VOICE Forum 2004a; 2004b; 2006a; 2006b). Their central motto, 'We are here because you destroy our countries' (I#2), criticises Europe's historical role in global political and socioeconomic destabilisation.

The principle of self-determination is fundamental for this initiative: The Voice Forum is not a traditional NGO, but a self-organised collective that empowers its members to defend their rights. Unlike other initiatives that have become institutionalised (Toğral Koca 2024), this group has endured for 30 years thanks to individual donations, allowing it to maintain a more critical and independent stance. In other words, by not relying on public funding to support its activism, the collective enjoys greater freedom to express its opinions and political positions.

The group advocates for the commemoration, not the celebration, of refugees' and migrants' struggles, emphasising a critique of global power dynamics that perpetuate marginalisation. As one member said in a recent podcast episode: 'I'm glad to be here today, remembering the last 30 years... It helps me analyse and see more clearly what I face every day' (The VOICE Forum 2024a). The 30th anniversary of the initiative was marked with a commemorative event highlighting the ongoing fight for existence and organisation (I#1). Focusing on collective memory turns commemoration into a tool for political education, contextualising current struggles within a history of oppression and resistance.

5.3 Forms of collective action and protest

Over 30 years of activism, The Voice Forum has combined direct and indirect strategies to challenge the German asylum system. Their campaigns address racism, exclusion, discrimination and criminalisation in Germany and refugees' countries of origin, highlighting colonial injustices. Examples include the closure of refugee camps, the commemoration of the murder of Oury Jahlloh (The VOICE Forum 2024b) and opposition to the residence obligation (The VOICE Forum 2004a; 2004b; 2006a; 2006b). The group participated in the Oranienplatz (O-Platz) Movement, which demanded the abolition of the residence obligation (O-Platz, n.d.), and brought the issue before the European Court (The VOICE Forum 2005c).

Some activists have chosen to employ civil disobedience and face legal consequences such as trials and imprisonment as a result. For example, Cornelius Yufanyi was prosecuted for resisting the residence obligation and received legal support from the group (The VOICE Forum 2006a). Akubuo Chukwudi was nearly deported for opposing refugee camps (The VOICE Forum 2004c), and Ahmed Sameer was imprisoned for 90 days for defying the residence obligation. In response, The Voice Forum assisted with legal fees and the payment of fines (The VOICE Forum 2004d). Such acts of solidarity are not isolated interventions, but rather part of a broader, long-standing practice of mutual support and political resistance. The Voice Forum's commitment to grassroots self-organisation is reflected in how it mobilises collective resources to support members who are facing legal and institutional barriers. As they state: 'For three decades, The Voice Refugee Forum has been a powerful testament to self-organisation among marginalised communities. Our resistance shows that real change can only come from within these communities' (The VOICE Forum, 2024a).

Although the groups' dynamics have changed in recent years, their initiative remains active through digital activism and radio. To this end, they have used their website as a platform for activism and information, with the aim of making the experiences of refugees and migrants visible, organising collective events and fostering political autonomy. This site serves as their main channel for sharing up-to-date information, in contrast to social media platforms such as Facebook, where they do not maintain an active presence. Radio has been a vital space for their activism, particularly through the programme *The Voices*, (The Voice Forum 2025) which is broadcast on Reboot FM. The programme features interviews, discussions, and reflections on topics such as racism, migration, and post-coloniality. Each recorded episode is available on the platform Mixcloud. As one founder noted, radio remains vital for 'documentation, community and space' (I#2).

These digital tools have expanded the initiatives' campaigns against deportation and racism, allowing activism to continue even when members relocate. As one member emphasised: 'Information is also an instrument... the radio must be our instrument to continue our activities... It does not always have to be in the streets' (I#2). Thus, The Voice Forum demonstrates how marginalised communities can mobilise beyond physical protest.

6 Discussion of findings

The research has demonstrated how the interpretive analysis framework proposed by Odugbesan and Schwiertz (2018) applies effectively to the case study of The Voice Forum in order to answer our main question: How do self-organised groups of refugees and migrants in Berlin resist the movement restrictions imposed by the German asylum system? Through the three categories, focused on socio-spatial positionality, the framings and narratives of initiatives as well as forms of collective action and protest, we have gained insight into the internal and external dynamics that have influenced their activism. Our key findings reveal that The Voice Forum's resistance is built upon connecting historical anti-colonial struggles with contemporary refugee experiences. They also leverage digital activism and self-determination to challenge the German asylum system

The resistance strategies of The Voice Forum, when viewed through the theoretical lens of the coloniality of power, the coloniality of migration and border mechanisms, reveal a profound decolonial praxis that challenges systemic structures of racialised oppression embedded in migration governance. The German asylum system's restrictions on movement, such as the *Residenzpflicht*, exemplify Quijano's (2000) concept of coloniality of power, where racialised social classifications continue to function as instruments of subordination and exclusion that are employed in the governance of racialised subjects. The Voice Forum's explicit linking of their present struggles to historical colonial exploitation, which is captured in their assertion 'We are here because you destroy our countries', exposes how contemporary migration policies reproduce and extend colonial logics of domination (Jakob 2016). This is consistent with Gutiérrez Rodríguez's (2018) framework of the coloniality of migration, which highlights how asylum systems are racialised mechanisms that differentiate between 'wanted' and 'not wanted' mobilities, thereby perpetuating global inequalities that are deeply rooted in colonial histories. The group's anti-colonial solidarity and framing of refugeehood as a structural outcome of neocolonial exploitation reposition migration struggles beyond humanitarian narratives, situating them within a broader critique of ongoing colonial power relations (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018; Quijano 2000).

Oliveri's (2016) concept of border mechanisms further elucidates how The Voice Forum's activism confronts both the spatial and temporal dimensions of control which are imposed by the state. The confinement of refugees in camps, for example, functions as a strategy to immobilise and hierarchise migrants according to shifting political and economic interests. The Voice Forum's protests residency requirements, and their innovative use of digital activism disrupt these mechanisms by reclaiming control over movement and time. Their digital platforms, such as their website or radio station, serve not only as tools for information dissemination but also as spaces of counter-memory and political visibility, exemplified by their commemorations of events such as the murder of Oury Jalloh or the 30 Years Commemoration of The Voice Forum (The VOICE Forum 2024a). This digital resistance challenges the state's attempts to erase migrant narratives and highlights the adaptability of self-organised groups in navigating and contesting border regimes (Oliveri 2016; Tufekci 2017).

Central to The Voice Forum's praxis is the principle of self-organisation as a form of political empowerment, as theorised by Odugbesan and Schwiertz (2018). By prioritising self-determination and rejecting institutional co-optation, the group resists the paternalistic humanitarian frameworks that often reproduce colonial power dynamics. Their sustained independence, maintained through grassroots donations rather than state funding, reflects a conscious effort to preserve critical positioning and autonomy (Toğral Koca 2024). The group's critique of whiteness and the call to 'decentralise whiteness in Germany' challenge the Eurocentric universalism underpinning asylum policies and expose the racialised foundations of the German state's migration regime. This stance highlights the ways in which coloniality persists not only in overt policies, but also in the cultural and symbolic orders that shape societal inclusion and exclusion (The VOICE Forum 2024a; Quijano 2000).

Through their multifaceted activism, The Voice Forum not only contests the immediate restrictions imposed by the German asylum system but also interrogates the broader structures that underpin contemporary migration governance (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018; Oliveri 2016).

In summary, The Voice Forum exemplifies how a self-organised refugee group enacts a praxis that destabilises the coloniality of migration by centring anti-colonial memory, leveraging digital tools for solidarity and maintaining political autonomy. Their resistance illuminates the interconnectedness of border regimes, racialised classifications, and historical colonial power, underscoring the necessity for dismantling these systems as part of a global project of decolonisation. By reimagining mobility as a collective right rather than a privilege conditioned by race and geography, The Voice Forum's activism points towards a decolonial horizon where freedom of movement and political self-determination are reclaimed by those most affected by the legacies of colonialism and exclusion.

7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research confirms the effectiveness of Odugbesan and Schwiertz's (2018) interpretive framework in analysing how The Voice Forum, a self-organised refugee group in Berlin, resists German asylum system restrictions. Through the lenses of coloniality of power (Quijano 2000), the coloniality of migration (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018; Jakob 2016) and border mechanisms (Oliveri 2016), the Voice Forum's activism emerges as a decolonial praxis. It links historical anti-colonial struggles with current refugee realities, employs digital activism (The VOICE Forum 2024a) to overcome spatial limits, and centres self-determination (Toğral Koca 2024) to challenge racialised oppression in migration governance. By opposing state controls like the *Residenzpflicht* and critiquing Eurocentric norms (The VOICE Forum 2024a), The Voice Forum reimagines mobility as a fundamental right, exemplifying grassroots resistance toward political autonomy and free movement for those affected by colonialism and exclusion.

Our ability to engage with and interpret these dynamics was also shaped by our own position within the research process. In terms of our research experience, we faced significant challenges from the outset in establishing contact and building trust with The Voice Forum, as well as in gaining a clear understanding of how the group operates. This was partly due to a lack of accessible information and guidance from their side, which made it difficult for us to navigate the group's internal dynamics. The ambiguity of our roles – as both researchers and migrants yet potentially seen as future members of the group – complicated interactions. We were mindful of not wanting to engage merely as extractive researchers, yet our personal and academic commitments limited our ability to offer long-term participation.

Finally, as a single case study, our findings may not be applicable to or relevant for all refugee groups, given Berlin's unique political and social context and The Voice Forum's distinct history. We believe that research should be conducted with an awareness of historical and ongoing power imbalances, and this includes reflecting on the researcher's role within these

dynamics. This is why we call for the future decolonisation of research, emphasising the need to move beyond traditional academic structures that often marginalise the voices of those we study.

References

- Amelina, A., Horvath, K., & Meeus, B. (Eds.). (2016). *An Anthology of Migration and Social Transformation: European Perspectives*. Springer International Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23666-7>
- Asylverfahrensgesetz (Asylum Procedure Act), Pub. L. No. Nr.25 (1982). Retrieved 25 January 2025, from www.bundesgesetzblatt.de
- Asylverfahrensgesetz (Asylum Procedure Act), Pub. L. No. Nr. 41 (1993). Retrieved 25 January 2025, from www.bundesgesetzblatt.de
- Barnett, C. (2014). Chapter 12: Postcolonialism: Powers of Representation. In S. Aitken & G. Valentine (Eds.), *Approaches to Human Geography: Philosophies, Theories, People and Practices* (pp. 147–159). Sage.
- Bauböck, R., & Cassee, A. (Eds.). (2014). *Menschenrechte und Migration*. Wochenschau-Verlag.
- Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, (n.d.). *Residenzpflicht*. bpb.de. Retrieved 25 January 2025, from <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/lexika/glossar-migration-integration/270622/residenzpflicht/>
- Bojadžijev, M. (2012). *Die windige Internationale: Rassismus und Kämpfe der Migration* (2nd ed.). Westfälisches Dampfboot.
- Bosswick, W. (2000). Development of Asylum Policy in Germany. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/13.1.43>
- Brochmann, G., & Hammar, T. (Eds.). (2020). *Mechanisms of immigration control: A comparative analysis of European regulation policies*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Düperthal, G. (2010). *Residenzpflicht »Ein zynisches Spiel mit unseren Rechten« Ein Gespräch mit Osaren Igbinoba*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany.
<https://thevoiceforum.org/node/1695>
- Fachinger, T., Stiller, M., & Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, P. (2023). *Country Report: Germany*. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE).
- Fadaee, S. (2015). The Immigrant Rights Struggle, and the Paradoxes of Radical Activism in Europe. *Social Movement Studies*, 14(6), Article 6.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2015.1070336>
- Fontanari, E. (2022). Germany, year 2020. The tension between asylum right, border control, and economy, through the imperative of deservingness. *Migration Studies*, 10(4), Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnac019>
- From the Struggles Collective. (2015). Lessons from the Struggles movements. *Journal Für Kritische Migrations- Und Grenzregimeforschung*.
- Gesetz über den Aufenthalt, die Erwerbstätigkeit und die Integration von Ausländern im Bundesgebiet 1) (Aufenthaltsgesetz - AufenthG) § 61 Räumliche Beschränkung, Wohnsitzauflage, Ausreiseeinrichtungen (2015)
- Gutiérrez Rodríguez, E. (2018). The Coloniality of Migration and the “Refugee Crisis”: On the Asylum-Migration Nexus, the Transatlantic White European Settler Colonialism-Migration and Racial Capitalism. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 34(1), 16–28. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050851ar>
- Hilbig, H., & Riaz, S. (2022). Freedom of Movement Restrictions Inhibit the Psychological Integration of Refugees. *The Journal of Politics*, 84(4), 2288–2293.
- Jakob, C. (2016). *Die Bleibenden: Wie Flüchtlinge Deutschland seit 20 Jahren verändern*. Ch. Links Verlag.

- Jasso, G. (2021). Analyzing Migration Restriction Regimes. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2021.610432>
- Kirchhoff, M. (2018). Worth the effort: protesting successfully against deportations. In S. Rosenberger, V. Stern, & N. Merhaut (Eds.), *Protest movements in asylum and deportation* (pp. 117–140). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74696-8>
- McGuaran, K. & Hudig, K. (2014). Refugee protests in Europe: fighting the right to stay. *Statewatch journal*, 23. <https://www.statewatch.org/publications/journal/vol-23-3-4-borders-deaths-and-resistance/>
- Menjívar, C. (2014). Immigration Law Beyond Borders: Externalizing and Internalizing Border Controls in an Era of Securitization. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 10(1), 353–369. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-110413-030842>
- Mokre, M. (2018). We demand our rights! The refugee protest camp Vienna. In S. Rosenberger, V. Stern, & N. Merhaut (Eds.), *Protest movements in asylum and deportation* (pp. 205–221). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74696-8>
- Morris, L. (2000). Rights and Controls in the Management of Migration: The Case of Germany. *The Sociological Review*, 48(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.00213>
- Odugbesan, A., & Schwiertz, H. (2018). “We are here to stay” – refugee struggles in Germany between unity and division. In S. Rosenberger, V. Stern, & N. Merhaut (Eds.), *Protest movements in asylum and deportation* (pp. 185–203). Springer.
- Oliveri, F. (2016). Struggles at the Boundaries of Neoliberal Citizenship: Theorizing Immigrant-Led Movements in Contemporary Europe. In A. Amelina, K. Horvath, & B. Meeus (Eds.), *An Anthology of Migration and Social Transformation* (pp. 263–279). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23666-7_17
- OPlatz (n.d.). *About – OPlatz Refugee Movement*. Retrieved 25 April 2025, from <https://www.oplatz.net/about/>
- Perocco, F. (2023). Reflexiones sobre la relación entre el racismo del bienestar, las políticas migratorias y las políticas sociales. *Revista de Estudios Migratorios*, 10, 26–51. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=9107434>
- Polletta, F., & Jasper, J. M. (2001). Collective Identity and Social Movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27(1), 283–305. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.283>
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 15(2), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>
- Radcliffe, S. A., & Radhuber, I. M. (2020). The political geographies of D/decolonization: Variegation and decolonial challenges of/in geography. *Political Geography*, 78.
- Ramji-Nogales, J., & Goldner Lang, I. (2020). Freedom of movement, migration, and borders. *Journal of Human Rights*, 19(5). <https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2020.1830045>
- Rodríguez, C. O. (2017). *How academia uses poverty, oppression, and pain for intellectual masturbation*. RaceBaitr. <https://racebaitr.com/2017/04/06/how-academia-uses-poverty-oppression/>
- Rosenberger, S., Stern, V., & Merhaut, N. (Eds.). (2018). *Protest Movements in Asylum and Deportation*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74696-8>
- Ruiz-Gimenez Arrieta, I. (2017). El naufragio de Europa: reflexiones feministas en torno a la crisis de las políticas migratorias y de asilo. *Revista europea de derechos fundamentales*, 29, 143–164. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6144004>
- Taha, D. (2018). *Methodology, reflexivity and decolonizing refugee research: Reflections from the field*. Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.

- Thambinathan, V., & Kinsella, E. A. (2021). Decolonizing Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Creating Spaces for Transformative Praxis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211014766>
- The VOICE Forum. (2003a). *Kriminalisierung wegen Residenzpflicht beginnt in Jena*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 14 September 2024, from <https://thevoiceforum.org/node/24>
- The VOICE Forum. (2003b). *Was ist Residenzpflicht für Flüchtlingen? Von Anke Schwarz*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 14 September 2024, from <https://thevoiceforum.org/anke>
- The VOICE Forum. (2004a). *Kampagne zur Abschaffung der Residenzpflicht—Den Apartheidgesetzen in Deutschland*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 14 September 2024, from <https://thevoiceforum.org/Apartheidgesetzen>
- The VOICE Forum. (2004b). *Pressinfo: Refugee does not accept restriction of movement*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 7 February 2025, from <https://www.thevoiceforum.org/ahmedpress-eng>
- The VOICE Forum. (2004c). *Bleiberecht für Akubuo!*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 14 April 2025, from <https://thevoiceforum.org/akubuo>
- The VOICE Forum. (2004d). *Pressinfo:(in deutsch, English) Palästinischer Flüchtling akzeptiert Einschränkung der Bewegungsfreiheit in Deutschland nicht*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 14 April 2025, from <https://thevoiceforum.org/ahmedpress>
- The VOICE Forum. (2005a). *Residential Obligation law “Residenzpflichtgesetz” Before the European Human Rights Court*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 7 February 2025, from <https://www.thevoiceforum.org/ahmedpress-eng>
- The VOICE Forum. (2005b). *The VOICE Online Links on Residenzpflicht und Asylbewerber-Isolationslager in Thuringen und Deutschland*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 14 September 2024, from <https://thevoiceforum.org/node/312>
- The VOICE Forum. (2005c). *Residential Obligation law “Residenzpflichtgesetz” Before the European Human Rights Court*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 7 February 2025, from https://thevoiceforum.org/Euhr_court.08.2005
- The VOICE Forum. (2006a). *FAX Campaign against ‘Residenzpflicht’—For Cornelius Yufanyi! - Imprisoned for the right for free movement?*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 14 September 2024, from <https://thevoiceforum.org/node/319>
- The VOICE Forum. (2006b). *Reviews: Residenzpflicht ‘Residence Obligation’—In Protest to Resistance in Germany*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 7 February 2025, from https://www.thevoiceforum.org/cornelius_residenzpflicht
- The VOICE Forum. (2007). *Residenzpflicht und Flüchtlingen: Die Einschränkung der Bewegungsfreiheit von Flüchtlingen*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 14 September 2024, from <https://thevoiceforum.org/node/534>
- The VOICE Forum. (2014a). *Everyone20€ -- Your Birthday Present for the 20 Years of the VOICE Refugee Forum*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 20 January 2025, from <https://www.thevoiceforum.org/node/3746>
- The VOICE Forum. (2014b). *The Refugee: Base on our History of the VOICE Refugee Forum Network 1994-2014*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 20 January 2025, from <https://www.thevoiceforum.org/node/3730>
- The VOICE Forum. (2024a, October 12). *81st edition of the voices: Existence is resistance – 30 years self-organized refugee networking*. The VOICES podcast [Audio podcast episode]. Mixcloud. Retrieved 7 February 2025,

- from <https://www.mixcloud.com/TheVOICES/81st-edition-of-the-voices-existence-is-resistance-30-years-self-organized-refugee-networking/>
- The VOICE Forum. (2024b). *Mobilisierung zur Demo am 07.01.2025 Gedenkdemonstaktion*. The VOICE Refugee Forum Germany. Retrieved 7 February 2025, from <https://www.thevoiceforum.org/node/4873>
- The VOICE Forum. (2025). *The VOICES podcast* [Audio podcast]. Mixcloud. Retrieved 19 July 2025, from <https://www.mixcloud.com/TheVOICES/>
- Toğral Koca, B. (2024). Refugee Rights Movements in Berlin as “New Social Movements”? A Theoretical and Empirical Intervention. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-024-09496-z>
- Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. Yale University Press.
- Ünsal, N. (2015). Challenging ‘Refugees’ and ‘Supporters’. Intersectional Power Structures in the Refugee Movement in Berlin. *movements. Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies*, 1(2). <http://movements-journal.org/issues/02.kaempfe/09.ünsal--refugees-supporters-opplatz-intersectionality.html>.
- Webber, F. (2014). The cradle or the grave? EU migration policy and human rights. *Statewatch journal*, 23. <https://www.statewatch.org/publications/journal/vol-23-3-4-borders-deaths-and-resistance/>
- Zincone, G., Borkert, M., & Penninx, R. (Eds.). (2012). *Migration Policymaking in Europe: The Dynamics of Actors and Contexts in Past and Present*. Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048515165>