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– IMAGINARIES AND EXPULSION: How 1,000 Temporary Accommodation Units for Refugees in the City of Gothenburg Became 57

KRISTINA GRANGE

Abstract

From September to November 2015, more than 100,000 people applied for asylum in Sweden. Societal solidarity was unmistakable during this period, but six months later, when the refugees were to be accommodated, the situation had changed. In this analysis of imaginaries of migrants as strangers I scrutinize the city of Gothenburg's plan to build 1,000 temporary housing units to accommodate refugees. The project failed, resulting in only 57 units being built. In this article I analyse the societal imaginations the project revealed, including those embedded in political and public conflicts of opinion. In an attempt to understand why people sometimes refuse to share social space, I draw on a combination of Sara Ahmed's theories on the figure of 'the stranger' and Julia Kristeva's theories on how the stranger emanates from an ontological lack. I also outline in the article how different techniques of expulsion can be used to create spatial and temporal estrangement. In the subsequent analysis I demonstrate how practices of exclusion worked to expel migrants from urban development plans in the city of Gothenburg. The conclusion emphasizes the urgent need to scrutinize imaginaries among majority populations, and draws attention to the fact that the 'foreigner is within us'.

Introduction

'The day is gray as a face,
and my sin
clear as the hoofmarks
in the carmine.
What is God to me
but an open-mouthed
stranger?'
Erika L. Sánchez, *Lessons on Expulsion* (2017)

From September to November of 2015, large numbers of refugees fled to Europe to seek asylum. Altogether 65 million people were displaced that year, a figure which has since increased (UNHCR, 2019). No one knows how many refugees lost their lives during their travels. In 2016 alone, almost 8,000 people were reported missing or dead. Of these, more than 60% lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea, while heading to Europe (IOM, 2017). This means that the border to Europe is the most difficult and deadly border to cross in the world (Jones, 2017: 62).

Regardless of these deadly risks, from September to November 2015 more than 100,000 refugees succeeded in making their way to Sweden to apply for asylum. The solidarity in Swedish society was unmistakable during this period, and many Swedes participated in civil movements such as 'Refugees Welcome'. But six months later, when the refugees were to be accommodated, the societal situation had changed. In the meantime, Sweden had implemented tougher restrictions on granting asylum, introduced ID controls at its borders with Denmark and Germany in November 2015, and begun issuing temporary permits for refugees in July 2016 (Righard and Öberg, 2019). An inquiry conducted by public opinion specialist Ipsos showed that the number of Swedes who wanted to receive 'considerably fewer refugees' increased dramatically between 2015 and 2018, from 20% to 41% (Rosén, 2018). In parallel, the Sweden Democrats, a national-conservative populist political party, saw an increase in popularity in Sweden (Svensson and Karlsson, 2019).

Societal opinion clearly shifted in the whole of Europe during this time. De Genova (2018: 1776) describes how a refortification of Europe took place, during which geographical borders as well as 'the entire fabric of the European social order' were strengthened. He cites a few pivotal violent events that took place during this time and concludes that 'the figure of the refugee—so recently fashioned as an object of European compassion, pity, and protection—was refashioned with astounding speed, first as the potential terrorist who surreptitiously infiltrates the space of Europe, and then as the potential criminal or rapist who corrodes the social and moral fabric of Europe from within' (*ibid.*: 1775; for a similar analysis of the situation in the USA, see Roy, 2019). Just a few months after what has been described as 'the migrant crisis', it was obvious that migrants had again become strangers, threatening the societal order by their sheer proximity.

In this analysis of imaginaries of migrants as strangers, I use as a case the city of Gothenburg's plan to build 1,000 temporary housing units to accommodate refugees who had been assigned to the municipality. The project failed, resulting in only 57 units being built. The societal imaginations the project revealed, including those embedded in political and public conflicts of opinion, provide important insights into how cities are being planned, and for whom. Hence, in this study I analyse how the city of Gothenburg handled the task of accommodating refugees assigned to it in accordance with the 2016 Settlement Act, the difficulties encountered during the process, and why the project eventually failed.

I also present a theoretical framework for analysing imaginaries of migrants as strangers, and how these shape spatial logics. Taylor (2002) emphasizes that underneath the social imaginaries that shape societies is a moral order that structures how we relate to others in the public sphere. To understand why people sometimes refuse to share social space, I draw on Ahmed's (2000) theories on the figure of 'the stranger', together with Kristeva's (1991) theories on how the stranger emanates from an ontological lack. In my examination of how different 'techniques of expulsion' (Ahmed, 2000: 21, 53, 93) are activated and used to create spatial and temporal estrangement, i.e. to suppress the feelings that the stranger reminds us of, I apply three analytical concepts—'belonging', 'borders' and 'waiting'—as examples of current techniques of expulsion.

In the sections that follow, I first introduce the figure of the stranger and the concept's relationships with an ontological lack. Then I flesh out the analytical concepts 'belonging', 'borders' and 'waiting', and explain their roles as focal points for techniques of expulsion. Next, I provide a rich empirical narrative on the failure of the political project to build 1,000 temporary housing units for refugees in the city of Gothenburg. In the subsequent analysis, I demonstrate how practices of exclusion worked to expel migrants from urban development plans in the city of Gothenburg. Finally, in the concluding section, I return to Kristeva and identify some consequences of the theory that the 'foreigner is within us'.

The stranger—a figure stemming from an ontological lack

It has been said that 'the capacity to live with difference is ... the coming question of the twenty first century' (Hall, 1993: 361). Lack of capacity to accept difference is often rooted in fear of the stranger. Ahmed (see, for example, Ahmed, 1999; 2000; 2006) has written extensively about how the figure of the stranger or the other is produced as someone who is recognized as out of place. The stranger, according to Ahmed (2000: 21, emphasis in original) is '*somebody* whom we have *already recognized* in the very moment in which they are "seen" or "faced" as a stranger'.

The starting point for Ahmed is the perception that the stranger can be understood as stemming from an 'ontological lack' (*ibid*.: 60). Ahmed grounds these thoughts in theories by Kristeva (1991), who in turn refers to Freud. Kristeva shows how our struggle with desires and fears that we consider inappropriate, or that we are not even aware of, makes us project them away from ourselves and on to the figure of the stranger. As Kristeva (*ibid*.: 191) puts it, 'when we flee from our struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious—that "improper" facet of our impossible "own and proper"'.

This ontological lack, which we all try to flee from, is what makes us want to expel that which we do not want to be associated with. It is also what creates our desires. Ahmed (2000: 14) shows how the self thus becomes 'a site of differentiation'. We develop techniques to differentiate between inside and outside, between those who belong and those who don't, between those who are in place and out of place, and so on. These techniques, which can be both spatial and temporal, emanate from what Kristeva (1991: 191) describes as 'the fascinated rejection that the foreigner arouses in us'. According to Ahmed (2000: 22, 26, 37), these techniques aim to create a 'purified space' in which the self, as well as the community, can reside. Hence, a 'refusal to share social space' develops (*ibid*.: 54). This leads Ahmed (*ibid*.: 6) to conclude that the stranger should be viewed as 'an effect of processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that constitutes the boundaries of bodies and communities'.

Such processes, which project 'all that is unknowable' onto the figure of the stranger (*ibid*.: 22), do not take place in a vacuum, but in a space of contestation. Ahmed (2006: 111) emphasizes how such processes can be understood as 'processes of racialization'. Shaped by histories of colonialism, these processes have produced 'the familiar world' as 'a world of whiteness', that is, as 'a world "ready" for certain kinds of bodies' (*ibid*.: 111).

Over the years, several seminal contributions to this postcolonial field of research have shown how 'the other' has been produced through histories of colonialism, and pointed out the devastating consequences of this racialized history. For example, Fanon (1963: 33) draws on psychoanalysis to describe how the colonial world is imbued with imperial power and violence by which 'the supremacy of white values is affirmed'. According to Fanon, colonialism thus 'forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: "In reality, who am I?"' (*ibid*.: 200). He points to a mental pathology as a direct product of oppression, and argues for a radical transformation of society. Said (1978) shows how dominant Western perceptions of knowledge constructed the Orient as the unknown, the strange and the mysterious—a world which could be penetrated and represented by the discipline of Orientalism. Said therefore regards Orientalism as a form of psychological paranoia. Spivak (1993: 75), too, emphasizes the impossibility of representing 'the unnamed subject of the Other of Europe', as all attempts to do so will be 'caught within the debate of the production of that Other'. This leads her to pose the much-cited question: 'Can the subaltern speak?' (*ibid*.: 78). Her response is that in the context of colonial production, the subaltern have no voice and cannot be heard.

Many others have emphasized the need for radical change. For example, Valentine (2008: 323) points out that the city has come to be understood as a site for difference, but also that this idea has transformed into a 'naïve assumption that contact with "others" necessarily translates into respect for difference'. Her research on white majority prejudice shows how a focus on everyday civil encounters can 'obscure or

leave untouched' the more fundamental questions of how a dominant or privileged group 'has the power to extend to, or withhold from, others' (*ibid*.: 327). Valentine also emphasizes that ordinary everyday encounters 'do not necessarily change people's general prejudices', especially if they 'do not destabilize white majority community-based narratives' (*ibid*.: 331). This resonates with the argument by Koefoed and Simonsen (2011: 346, emphasis in original) that embodied encounters 'involve *spatial negotiations* around the constitution of spaces of familiarity and strangeness and the boundaries and bridges involved in this constitution'. In line with Ahmed's arguments, Koefoed and Simonsen (*ibid*.: 346) state that the stranger should be understood as 'a relational figure constituted in a spatial ambivalence between proximity and distance'.

Jackson *et al*. (2017) show that the concept of the stranger is also associated with temporal negotiations. They claim that the current perception of the stranger as territorially defined can be traced back to the era of empire and the establishment of national identities (*ibid*.: 4). Koefoed and Simonsen conclude that the nation-state needs its opposites to create a sense of belonging within the nation. This need for opposites in order to create a sense of belonging is similar to the conclusions Ahmed and Kristeva draw on the level of the self and the community. This leads to a constant struggle for recognition among those who are produced as strangers within the nation, as out of place. In much the same vein, Dikeç (2002: 243) concludes that there is no way to 'avoid the production of others'. Yet, he points to the need to reconsider attitudes among the receiving population, to open up 'spaces where recognition as well as contestation and conflict can take place' (*ibid*.: 244). Dikeç's argument emphasizes the urgent need to scrutinize imaginaries among majority populations.

Hence, several of the aforementioned studies stress the need to further explore how spatial and temporal estrangement among majority populations works to expel the figure of the stranger. As indicated earlier, such expulsions can be understood to operate at different scales: the stranger is constituted through processes of expulsion both at the scale of the self, the community and the nation. In the sections that follow, three focal points for such techniques of expulsion are applied: 'belonging', 'borders' and 'waiting'. These analytical concepts were retrieved from a broad literature survey of research on migration in urban contexts, and are not new perspectives. They are used here as examples of how techniques of expulsion play out and how the self thus becomes 'a site of differentiation'.

Belonging, but not here?

The relationship between migration and identity, and how it relates to issues of belonging, has been explored by Ahmed (see, for example, Ahmed, 1999; see also Collins, 2018). She points out that home as a destiny is securing, but also that home is a fetish. The migrant subject struggles, as the past no longer offers a home that can be inhabited, while the present offers a habitable space, but one that also offers feelings of distress. The difficulties of fully making sense of the new place become a failure 'which is experienced in the discomfort of inhabiting a migrant body, a body which feels out of place, which feels uncomfortable in this place' (Ahmed, 1999: 343).

Others emphasize the outright hostility that many migrants experience as a consequence of being accommodated through dispersal schemes. For example, Darling (2017: 182) points to aspects related to belonging when discussing dispersal strategies and how they create 'a "policy-imposed liminality", as individuals struggle to establish social networks within alien, and at times hostile, new surroundings'. He points to the fact that effects of dispersal strategies 'have been left largely unexplored' (*ibid*.: 183), and that dispersal is mostly 'argued to represent a desire to "accommodate", rather than a starting point for integration' (*ibid*.: 183). In a similar manner, Netto (2011: 298) emphasizes that for some, 'moving into permanent accommodation provides a foundation for rebuilding their lives', while for others 'dispersal to a city that has not

been of their choosing is likely to be only an interim stop, from which, spurred on by racial hostility and marginalization, they are likely to migrate to other destinations'.

According to Ahmed (2000: 99), establishment of a 'space of belonging' requires 'that which is strange in order to be'. It follows from this that as long as neighbourhoods are imagined as 'organic and pure spaces' (*ibid*.: 26), only some are likely to be included and the stranger will continue to be regarded as posing a danger 'to property and person' (*ibid*.: 32). Ahmed (*ibid*.: 89, emphasis in original) also highlights that 'home' is too often '*sentimentalized* as a space of belonging', when it ought to be understood as a question of affect, of '*how one feels or how one might fail to feel*'. As discussed, it is obvious that many migrants, not least those who have been accommodated through dispersal schemes, struggle with the hostile effects of different techniques of expulsion, among them some caused by the questioning of their belonging.

Forever at the border?

Much focus has been directed at discourses that describe migrants as criminals or drug dealers who should be kept out, and at borders as war zones. Borders can in this respect be understood as 'passive expressions of power' of a system 'that seeks to preserve privilege and opportunity for some by restricting access to resources and movement for others' (Jones, 2017: 38, 43).

There are also borders within the nation-state. Darling (2011: 264) uses the term 'domopolitics' to highlight current processes aimed at 'governing the state as a home'. The nation-state becomes the home in which only some belong. Such forms of governing rest on upholding invisible but disciplinary borders: 'Domopolitics thus entails not a fortress like concern with security at all costs, but rather a desire to categorize and filter flows of people and goods so that the threatening might be dealt with while the advantageous is permitted' (*ibid*.: 265). According to Darling (*ibid*.: 264), accommodation of asylum seekers is a mechanism in such forms of governing, where the result is 'the production of a politics of discomfort, an affective positioning of asylum seekers as those forever at the border, these produced as the other'. In much the same vein, Nicholls and Uitermark (2017: 4) and Keshavarz (2016: 334) point to how such governing of invisible borders is upheld by the practices of local police, doctors, bus drivers, mayors, teachers, voluntary associations and others.

As Ahmed (2000: 32) emphasizes, it is the very (mis)recognition of others as strangers that 'allows the demarcation of given spaces'. It is also clear that the border of the subject functions as a demarcation line between what are considered inhabitable and 'uninhabitable zones of social life' (*ibid*.: 52). Obviously, such demarcation lines generate discursive as well as physical borders between neighbourhoods where migrants are welcome in the city, and where they are not. In a study of two European cities, Hoekstra (2018) identified certain spatial logics that very clearly define where in these cities migrants are welcome to reside. These spatial logics 'are informed by imaginaries in the form of tacitly shared imaginations about the place of migrants in the urban community' (*ibid*.: 375; see also Bråmå, 2006; Fawaz, 2017; Fontanari and Ambrosini, 2018; Wessendorf, 2019; Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019).

Consequently, borders that differentiate between inclusion and exclusion, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the inhabitable and the uninhabitable, are very real consequences of techniques of expulsion for many migrants, regardless of whether these borders are discursive or material in character.

Waiting as manipulation?

Khosravi (2014: npn; see also Griffiths *et al.*, 2013) points out that waiting is often connected to uselessness, emptiness and purposelessness, and that the ambiguity of waiting tends to generate 'a sense of uncertainty, shame, depression and anxiety' in many migrants. In certain situations, waiting can be understood as 'stolen time', for example, as Khosravi (2018: 34) points out, when migrants are forced to leave after having 'worked,

built networks, paid taxes, learnt the local language and become accustomed with the culture, fallen in love and had children'.

Khosravi (2014: npn) also points out that waiting can be understood as 'a technique for the regulation of social interactions', and hence as a manipulation of others' time. Similar interpretations have been drawn by Lilja *et al.* (2019: 158) who, based on interviews with migrants in Sweden, concluded that 'the concept of time is needed in order to understand the precarious experiences of those who immigrate'. Migrants report that they do not embrace the waiting as productive, but they discipline themselves and adapt. The authors (*ibid.*: 155) conclude that the 'subject figuration that emerges in the new Swedish timescape is one who constantly feels the need to comply with the demands of the state—even if it goes against their conviction—or else they risk losing their temporary provisions'.

Citizenship is clearly temporally conditioned in several ways. Cwerner (2001: 10), for example, emphasizes that 'temporal considerations lie at the heart of citizenship issues'. He highlights the problematic consequences that the introduction of temporary permits has had for many migrants (*ibid.*: 21). He also shows how citizenship, by its link to a very specific ethnic origin in the past, reveals problematic but 'distinctive modalities in time' (*ibid.*: 10).

From the above, it is clear that techniques of expulsion can also be temporal in character. As stated earlier, the ambiguity of waiting tends to generate at least as much distress and discomfort with many migrants as the more spatial techniques of expulsion. The fact that migrants, by being kept waiting, are denied rights they should lawfully have (Jacobsen, 2006; Hynes, 2009; Nyers, 2010) must be understood as temporal manipulation. Furthermore, the idea defended by some—that a specific ethnic origin in the past forms a basis for the national identity—can be understood as temporal estrangement aimed at ensuring a 'purified space' for the self and the community, and thus as a technique of expulsion (Ahmed, 2000: 22, 26, 37).

How 1,000 accommodation units for refugees in the city of Gothenburg became 57

In the next three sections, I present the empirical narrative of how the city of Gothenburg planned to accommodate refugees assigned to the municipality in accordance with the 2016 Settlement Act, the difficulties refugees encountered during the process, and why the project eventually failed. I then provide an analysis that reveals how different techniques of expulsion were applied during the process.

The Swedish Settlement Act is a refugee dispersal scheme introduced in March 2016.[1] It states that within two months, all municipalities in Sweden must provide a minimum of 24 months of accommodation for refugees who have been granted a residence permit and who have been allocated to the municipality by the Swedish migration agency (Swedish Parliament, 2016).[2] This new law, which was introduced at a time when Sweden was experiencing its most severe housing shortage in half a century, presented Swedish municipalities with a major challenge, as for decades many municipalities had not provided any accommodation for refugees.[3] Despite being the second largest city in Sweden, Gothenburg had not accepted any refugees on assignment for several decades, mainly because the city receives many refugees who settle there on their own. Through lack of choice and resources, many of these

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1 In the first year, 2016, the city was expected to accommodate 880 refugees on assignment, in 2017 the number increased to 1,098, while in 2018 it decreased to 697. Since then, numbers have remained at a lower level.

2 Refugees in Sweden can choose between finding somewhere to live themselves or accepting accommodation in a municipality chosen by the Swedish migration agency. Many refugees choose to find their own place. The reason is primarily that there are long delays in the assignment process. The 2016 Settlement Act was introduced to change these conditions.

3 Political affiliation mattered in these decisions, as conservative-led municipalities in Sweden have generally accommodated half as many refugees as liberal-led municipalities (Ekman *et al.*, 2014).

immigrants have chosen to settle in the north-eastern districts of the city. In 2016, 34% of the city's population had a migration background (OECD, 2018; Göteborgs Stad, 2021). Like many other cities, Gothenburg is a segregated city; in 2016, 66% of the population in the north-eastern districts had a migration background, while in some of the districts relevant for this article and located south-west of the city and along the coast, only 10% to 17% had a migration background (Göteborgs Stad, 2021). An OECD report (2018: 11) concluded that 'housing and spatial segregation is the main obstacle to integration in Gothenburg'.

In my empirical analysis of how imaginaries of migrants as strangers inform spatial logics, I drew on news articles from the local morning paper *Göteborgs-Posten*; comments from residents sent to the city authorities; municipal documents prepared by civil servants; and interviews conducted with two former politicians who at the time chaired the city of Gothenburg's property management committee and building committee. No interviews were conducted with representatives from political parties, as the political background was not the subject of this analysis. Imaginaries of migrants as strangers were the focus, and committee chairs were chosen, as they were most directly exposed to these imaginaries. Interviews with refugees assigned to the municipality were conducted too, but are not presented here, as the focus was entirely on imaginaries among the majority population, and not on migrant experiences.[4]

Reactions from the public—the city taken by surprise

In early 2016, the Gothenburg daily morning newspaper *Göteborgs-Posten* reported that temporary housing units for 3,000 refugees were to be built on 12 different sports grounds and recreational areas in the city.[5] The project had been agreed by the city's politicians, and the city's property management department had concluded that plots that were flat, located on municipal land and close to schools and public transport were best suited.[6] The newspaper also reported that the city planned to build in districts of the city that had not received many refugees earlier (Göteborgs Stad, 2016a). Information meetings were scheduled to take place within two weeks, and the process to obtain building permits would start at the same time. The first of the planned 1,000 units were expected to be in place as soon as March 2016 (Larsson and Björk, 2016a). The city authorities pointed out the great 'solidarity and willingness to help' that had been visible among residents during the refugee crisis (Carmbrant, 2016a), and the chair of the city's building committee, Ulf Kamne, who represented the Green Party, commented: 'This is an important and brave step for a more equal society which can improve integration' (*ibid.*, 2016b: 13).

Within just a few days, a number of residents had commented on the plans in *Göteborgs-Posten*, and it was obvious that many were upset. Several were negative about the idea of building on sports grounds (see, for example, *Göteborgs-Posten* 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2016d), or expressed concerns over what might happen to their children if unaccompanied refugee youths moved in (see *Göteborgs-Posten*, 2016e). There were

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4   All quotations from news articles, debate pieces and interviews have been translated into English by the author. At the time of writing, both the politicians I interviewed had resigned from their political posts in the city of Gothenburg. They are both identified by their full names in the text. When opinions from residents are expressed, these have been semi-anonymized, i.e. names have been removed, but references to the original published articles are provided. For interviews with refugees, see Grange and Björling (2020).

5   The project to build 1,000 housing units with temporary building permits started in June 2015, when the chair of the city of Gothenburg's property management committee asked the property management department to investigate where in the city accommodation could be erected with temporary building permits. The decision was hence taken before the 'migrant crisis' hit Sweden, and the units were initially intended for socially vulnerable groups in general. The project was officially agreed upon on 31 August 2015 (Göteborgs Stad, 2015; Grahn-Hinnfors, 2016a).

6   The 12 plots initially considered for temporary refugee housing were Amundön, Askimsviken, Björkekärrsplan, Fiskebäck, Fridkullagatan, Hinsholmen, Kärralundsvallen, Lilla Glasmästaregatan, Skintebo's marina, Tuve, west of Lemmingvallen and Änäsfältet (Björk, 2016a).

also a few positive comments from residents who welcomed refugees (see, for example, *Göteborgs-Posten* 2016f; 2016g; 2016h; 2016i).

Two weeks after the first report in the paper, the first public information meetings were held. Right-wing extremists, including a number who resided outside the municipality, attended the meetings, and it was later reported that some attendees had been disruptive and that there had been a hostile atmosphere (Larsson, 2016a; Larsson and Björk, 2016a). The city authority was taken by surprise and changed the way in which the meetings were held. From then on, everyone had to have a ticket to attend the meetings and political agitation was not allowed. These changes led to calmer meetings, but also to right-wing extremist groups agitating outside the meeting venues and distributing flyers (Björk, 2016a). The project was debated in TV programs and in local meetings, and when one of the first information meetings was streamed on the city's website, it was viewed more than 10,000 times within just two or three days (Björk, 2016b; Grahn-Hinnfors, 2016a).

By the end of February, the municipality had already received more than a thousand comments from concerned residents (Grahn-Hinnfors, 2016b). In commentaries concerning the plans to build temporary housing units in some of the more well-off areas towards the coast, deep anxieties and worries were expressed. Many believed that temporary accommodation for refugees, which was primarily perceived to host unaccompanied minors, would lead to a violent environment in the neighbourhood:[7]

> … wonder when the first grenade will come …?

> Who takes responsibility for me or my children if something happens to us? If we are robbed, attacked or raped?

> There will be no more solo jogging tours as a woman or excursions to the playground, the pier, and so on, with the children unless in the company of my husband. We will no longer risk allowing our teenage daughter to move freely [in the area].

Some cited their children as the reason why they would not feel comfortable continuing to live in these neighbourhoods if the plans were realized:

> I will have to uproot my children and move from this beautiful city district.

Other arguments for why these temporary housing units should not be erected included worries over the fact that the areas were close to the sea. Many suggested that culture clashes would emerge as a consequence of the location:

> The way we Swedes choose to dress during the summer months is not compatible with how one dresses in the countries where the persons who apply for asylum come from … many girls and women walk between cars, buses, and the ice cream kiosk farther up, sometimes just in a bikini. The culture clash that will appear between those who visit the bay and those who live in these accommodations will be disastrous.

> … adjacent bathing places and nude bathing must be interpreted as grossly offensive by refugees.

> … they will have cultural values which we are not used to or do not recognize. Also, a non-Swedish perception of women.

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7   Individual comments from multiple sources in the remainder of this section all derive from Göteborgs Stad (2019).

Some argued that the refugees themselves would feel uncomfortable in these environments:

> I think it might be unsuitable to be placed by the sea when one has just survived a terrible journey over the Mediterranean and perhaps seen fellow humans drown along the way. How likely do you think it is that these people will want to walk around along the seashore in the desolation that prevails during the winter half-year?

Others again were outright jealous of the fact that refugees could be housed on coveted land close to the sea:

> How are we ordinary inhabitants in Gothenburg who have worked hard, paid tax, and perhaps obtained the means to buy our own property, and who have chosen to move to a safe area, to ignore the fact that on the best property with seaside ground and a sea view there will be 'temporary accommodation' for refugees, what kind of justice is that and what signals does that send to the residents of the city? Who would not want to live on that property? The most attractive location in Gothenburg!

> If it turns out that my property will lose value because of what you are causing, then I want the city of Gothenburg to cover this loss.

Lost political consensus

The Moderate Party, a conservative opposition party at the time, then suggested in a debate piece in the morning newspaper that the city should start looking for other plots to build on (Magnusson and Josefson, 2016a). In response, representatives from the political parties in office—the Social Democratic Party, the Green Party, the Left Party and the Feminist Party—published two debate pieces in which they jointly emphasized that there was 'broad political consensus that the temporary accommodation should primarily be located in city districts that have had a low reception of newly arrived refugees' (Johansson *et al.*, 2016: 4). They also argued that the Moderates were now delaying a necessary development that drew on decisions to which they themselves had contributed (Kamne *et al.*, 2016).

It should be emphasized that during their term in office, these political parties did not have a majority in the city council. They lacked a single mandate, which generally resulted in lengthy discussions and compromises. The national-conservative populist Sweden Democrats were the only party that voiced an early and flat refusal of the project. The Moderates did not oppose the project at this stage, but during the coming years would continually call for 'a refugee pause' (Larsson and Sahlberg, 2016; Magnusson and Josefson, 2016a; 2016b; Larsson, 2017a; Magnusson, 2017; Magnusson and Josefson, 2017).

At the beginning of March, the municipality decided to dismiss five of the suggested plots. Building permit applications for three were put on hold, and the building permit process started in only four cases.[8] By the end of the month, the relevant plots had decreased to three.[9] The chair of the city's property management committee, Social Democrat Jahja Zeqiraj, emphasized that the city's goal to build 1,000 temporary housing units for refugees would still be met (Björnheden and Molliver, 2016; Grahn-Hinnfors, 2016c). Kamne, chair of the city's building committee, emphasized that the

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8   The four plots for which the municipality planned to apply for building permits were Askimsviken, Kärralundsvallen, Ånäsfältet and west of Lemmingvallen. The three plots that were put on hold were Björkekärrsplan, Fridkullagatan and Lilla Glasmästaregatan (Björnheden and Molliver, 2016).

9   The three remaining plots for which the municipality intended to apply for building permits were Askimsviken, Kärralundsvallen and west of Lemmingvallen (Grahn-Hinnfors and Kindstrand, 2016).

reason why some plots had been dismissed was not because of people's protests, but in all cases because the plots proved to be less suitable for building (Björnheden and Molliver, 2016). It is obvious, however, that the two chairs were disappointed in how the political project had been received by residents. Zeqiraj revealed his deeply emotional and personal opinion, saying 'There are no physical fences in Sweden, but in Gothenburg this process has uncovered many invisible fences built on hate and xenophobia' (*ibid.*: 8).

The plots that had not yet been dismissed in the building permit processes continued to be debated in the morning newspaper. Residents of one of the wealthier districts of Gothenburg hired a lawyer to speak for them. One resident in this district estimated that he would lose 2 million SEK (approximately 200,000 EUR) in property value if the temporary housing units were built: 'We are perhaps 50 here who would lose our sea view. Should we really have to pay 100 million SEK for these buildings? It doesn't seem reasonable' (Larsson and Björk, 2016a: 8). However, Zeqiraj continued to emphasize that the city would start to build as soon as the building permits were granted, regardless of whether there were appeals that had not yet been resolved (Björnheden, 2016).

Towards May and June 2016, when building permits had still not been granted, the politicians started to take what seemed to be a slightly softer approach to the protests. Zeqiraj stated that the city does listen to its residents when their suggestions are 'sound' (Strand, 2016). At this point in the process, the director of the property management department was forced to leave his job due to difficulties in his working relations with Zeqiraj.[10] Zeqiraj stated that from then on, he expected better data from civil servants so that politicians could make better decisions (*ibid.*). However, soon after the director left, the civil servants at the city's property management department informed the politicians that they no longer believed in the idea of accommodating refugees in temporary units, citing economic aspects, time pressure and integration issues as reasons (Larsson and Björk, 2016b). Soon afterwards, the Moderates announced that they no longer supported the project and wanted it to end (Larsson, 2016b).

Alarming delays

The question of how to accommodate the refugees assigned to the city was now becoming a major concern. By the end of June, the Swedish land and environment court stated in a decision that existing temporary housing units that the city had built for students had been unlawfully built and had to be taken down, because the foundation for the units was not considered sufficiently temporary. This decision clearly created stress for the politicians. 'This verdict throws a wet blanket over the ambitions of serious municipalities', stated Zeqiraj (Loudiyi, 2016: 8).

By September 2016, the situation had become alarming. The city increased its search for emergency accommodation at camping sites, in hostels, in dormitories, in trailers, in houses earmarked for demolition, and in other temporary accommodation (Björk, 2016c; Larsson, 2016c; Larsson and Björk, 2016b). At the time, up to 170 refugees per month were being assigned to the municipality. The first were accommodated in apartments that the city's municipal housing company had agreed to provide, but several hundred refugees soon had to stay in emergency and short-term accommodation. By the end of 2016, the city had a shortage of 200 apartments for approximately 300 refugees, and it was estimated that in the beginning of 2017 the city would need an additional 300 apartments for approximately 450 refugees. This delay in providing apartments led in 2017 to the city continually having approximately 450 refugees (for a short period even up to 600 refugees) living in short-term accommodation (Björk, 2016c; Göteborgs Stad, 2016b; Larsson, 2016b; Grange and Björling, 2020).

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10   No other members of the property management board experienced any difficulties in their working relationships with the director, but silently supported the chair's decision to dismiss the director. I contacted the director for an interview, but he declined.

At the end of 2016 the first building permit was granted, for 57 temporary accommodation units in the well-off Askim Bay area. Many neighbours were opposed to this and 1,500 people signed a petition. Some argued that they would no longer be secure: 'Around the Askim Bay area there are families who worry about their beloved children and who do not dare remain' (Larsson and Björk, 2016c: 6). Kamne responded: 'One of the reasons this plot is relevant is because there are people living nearby. We could place these units in the woods, but what kind of integration would that be?' (*ibid*.: 6). In another article he revealed his personal worries: 'I worry about the polarization trend, that people and groups are set against each other' (Grahn-Hinnfors, 2016d: 8).

Early in 2017 the city announced that it had discontinued its search for new plots for temporary units (Larsson, 2017b). The reason given was that the project had become too expensive and too time-consuming. Ongoing application processes for building permits would continue, however.[11] The Moderates once again argued in a debate piece in the morning paper that the project must be halted (Magnusson, 2017).

At this stage it had become obvious that the city's attempts to solve the requirement to accommodate refugees in temporary housing units had failed, so negotiations between the city's property management department and the municipal housing company intensified. It was eventually decided that the municipal housing company, which owns approximately 70,000 apartments, would provide the greater proportion of the apartments needed for accommodating refugees assigned to the municipality. In return, it would receive municipal land to build on. A smaller proportion would be provided by the city's private landlords. Refugees would be allowed to rent these apartments for a maximum of four years, during which they were expected to find somewhere else to settle.[12] In total, this meant that approximately one-third of all rental apartments available annually in the city's housing market would be allocated to refugees. The media and the public hardly noticed this decision at all, and a city official later described it as having taken place under the radar, most likely because of the strong media coverage that had been directed at temporary accommodation units (Grange and Björling, 2020).

In September 2017, the city announced that its plan to build 1,000 temporary accommodation units for refugees had officially been halted. Only the 57 units in the Askim Bay area would to be built (Göteborgs Stad, 2017; Larsson, 2017c). In March 2018, at least two years behind the original schedule, the first few of the 57 temporary units in the Askim Bay area were erected (Borén, 2018). The first refugees moved in towards the end of May and a neighbourhood initiative aimed at providing help and establishing contact between refugees and residents was started soon after (Yousuf, 2018).

Analysis and reflection

Based on the theories of Ahmed and Kristeva, it is clear that when the city announced its plan to build 1,000 temporary accommodation units for refugees, some neighbourhoods in Gothenburg became extended sites for differentiation. In order to understand such processes, three analytical concepts—'belonging', 'borders' and 'waiting'—can be applied as examples of focal points for techniques of expulsion.

Several aspects can be regarded as techniques that question whether migrants *belonged* in these areas. For example, it is clear that politicians wanted to contribute to positive change by locating accommodation for refugees in districts of the city that had not received many refugees previously. Thus, they aimed to use the Settlement Act as a

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11   The building permit applications process for Kärralundsvallen and Lemmingvallen was ongoing at the time. In addition, there were plans to apply for building permits for new plots at Masthuggskajen and Frihamnen (Larsson, 2017a).

12   The maximum time these rental contracts covered was set based on the four to five years it would take for someone queuing in 2016 to be offered an apartment in Gothenburg. Since then, the time it takes to receive an offer has increased by several years. This makes it unlikely that refugees assigned to the city will find apartments with first-hand contracts in Gothenburg. The maximum time for families with children was later extended to include a fifth year (Grange and Björling, 2020).

tool for improving integration. Based on Valentine (2008), we could argue that this was based on a naïve interpretation that the location of housing units in districts of the city where not many refugees resided would have a positive effect on integration. The city trusted in many residents' earlier expressions of solidarity and willingness to help during the migrant crisis. However, it severely underestimated the shift in perceptions that occurred soon after. Kamne, then chair of the city's building committee, reflected on this in an interview: 'There was a huge change between the "Refugees Welcome" situation and the temporary accommodation debate. This change is still moving in the same direction, I would say, towards a much stricter and more skeptical approach. I believe we have not yet seen the end of this development'.[13]

Hostility was expressed by residents and participants at the information meetings the city organized early on in the process, in debate articles published in the morning newspaper, and through petition lists and comments sent to the city. Many people expressed fears that violence would occur, and it became obvious that many imagined that strangers would pose a danger to both property and person. Several commentaries pointed out that residents' and strangers' cultural values and perceptions of women differed. Some of the comments projected 'all that is unknowable' on the stranger (Ahmed, 2000: 22), while the neighbourhood was described as representing the familiar and the pure.

During the interviews I conducted it became apparent that both Zeqiraj and Kamne had been threatened during the process. Zeqiraj had to employ a bodyguard at one time; Kamne had received several threats, and reflected on the risk of self-censorship happening within politics in such circumstances: 'Part of it is the fear of pushing the issue. I have never experienced as many threats or been faced with such unpleasant situations as during these meetings we arranged. But there have also been people mailing me death threats and letters containing powder. All kinds of things. It's never been like that before. This is something that hits you in a way that is not comparable to anything else. Then one can understand if politicians back off'.[14] This comment clearly reveals not only the magnitude of the hostility, but also the difficulties politicians face when trying to achieve developments they believe in, because of strong imaginaries of who belongs and who doesn't belong.

Techniques that focused on upholding *borders* were also part of this process, for example, in the form of many spatial negotiations that took place. On a national scale, the Swedish state introduced stricter rules for asylum seekers, such as the introduction of ID controls at some borders. At the local scale, there were threatening appearances by far-right extremists, as well as hostile attitudes on the part of residents hat were aimed at preserving invisible and discursive borders. Residents in one neighbourhood hired a lawyer to speak for them, further emphasizing that resources would be spent on upholding physical borders. The fact that borders preserve privileges for some became apparent when these residents estimated that the loss of sea views would lead to a decrease in land value equalling approximately 100 million SEK in just one district.

According to Koefoed and Simonsen (2011), the stranger is always a relational figure, constituted by spatial negotiations involving proximity and distance. It is obvious that the negotiations in Gothenburg had clear sociospatial aspects, as most of the arguments against the plans came from residents in the city's wealthiest districts. 'White flight' and 'white avoidance' illustrate that segregation is driven by the behaviours of residents in high-income rather than socioeconomically weaker areas (Bråmå, 2006). Kamne emphasized the socioeconomic conditions that determine urban development today: 'Regardless of the project that is being developed, it is much easier—if one talks about reactions from residents—to do things in neighbourhoods where people live who do not own their accommodation, who do not have as many physical and material

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13   Ulf Kamne, in an interview with the author on 17 April 2020, Gothenburg.
14   *Ibid*.

resources, who have a lower level of education and who know the language less well'.[15] Similarly, Zeqiraj pointed out that placing the units in other parts of the city could have improved the chances of pursuing the project: 'We could have placed them in the suburbs. And now that we have seen these results, perhaps we should have, from the start. At least then we would have been able to push it through'.[16] It is obvious from the analysis in this article that upholding of both invisible and visible borders was employed as a technique of expulsion during the process.

The process was also characterized by temporal estrangement and *waiting* as a technique of expulsion. For example, it was clear that the refugee is someone who could be accommodated temporarily, not primarily someone who should have priority in the housing queue in a city with 70,000 municipally owned apartments. Temporary permits were introduced in July 2016, and representatives from some political parties consistently called for 'a refugee pause'. The aspect of time was also apparent in the constant time pressure the project faced, which without doubt caused great stress to the chairs of the committees and the civil servants. The subsequent delay led to several hundred refugees having to stay in emergency or short-term accommodation. Zeqiraj reflected on the price to society of these delays, saying, 'Those weren't suitable accommodations for raising children. But there were no alternatives. We had to manage. But that failure had a high price. We will have to pay that price socially for many, many years; the insecurity, how children live and are accommodated when they have no secure place'.[17] The delays contributed to the governing of refugees' time and delayed the fulfilment of their due right to be accommodated within two months. These can thus be understood as temporal techniques of expulsion.

Conclusions

Taken together, it is clear that certain spatial logics, informed by imaginaries of migrants as strangers, contributed to halting the political project to build 1,000 temporary accommodation units for refugees in the city of Gothenburg. These logics were pursued by residents and political parties through techniques of expulsion that focused on migrants as those who do not belong, who could be kept out through the strengthening of borders, and whose time could be governed. It is furthermore clear that this spatial and temporal estrangement operated on different scales: the stranger was constituted through processes of expulsion at the scale of the self, the community and the nation. Together, these techniques strengthened the interests of privileged groups. Valentine (2008: 327) emphasized the need to touch on the fundamental question of how dominant and privileged groups have 'the power to extend to, or withhold from, others'. My analysis revealed how such powers can be exercised through imaginaries of migrants as strangers, with societal consequences for how we plan cities, and for whom.

How then can Kristeva's (1991: 191) suggestion that the 'foreigner is within us' contribute to processes whose results are a greater capacity to live with difference and an ability to share social space? What can we do with that conflictual bond we have with 'the stranger'—the figure we simultaneously need to identify with and fear? Kristeva's (*ibid.*) answer is brutally simple: we need to become more aware of our own ghosts. It is not simply about tolerating the stranger, she emphasizes; it is about making oneself 'other' for oneself (*ibid.*: 13). My analysis has made a city and its neighbourhoods 'other' for themselves by exposing their own ghosts, because, as Kristeva (*ibid.*: 182) points out: 'How could one tolerate a foreigner if one did not know one was a stranger to oneself?'

Kristina Grange, Chalmers University of Technology, Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering, SE-41296 Gothenburg, Sweden, kristina.grange@chalmers.se

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15   *Ibid.*
16   Jahja Zeqiraj, in an interview with the author on 29 April 2020, Gothenburg. Zeqiraj did, however, maintain that, in his opinion, the project's failure could be mainly attributed to bad management by higher civil servants.
17   *Ibid.*

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