frontiers | Frontiers in Political Science

# Strangers at Home? Informal Hosting of Undocumented Migrants and the Ambivalences of Encounter, Compassion, and Care in the Private Sphere

*Rivka Saltiel**

*Department of Geography and Regional Science, University of Graz, Graz, Austria*

Through a feminist care ethics lens, this paper explores the particular caring relations of Hébergement, an informal hosting initiative for transitory undocumented migrants in Brussels. It elaborates on how the intimate, private setting of hosting at home affects a *caring-with* relationship. Hosting and being hosted significantly differs from other forms of shelter and migrant (or homeless) support. There is no script for this particular social constellation. Hosting requires trust and a great deal of physical and emotional labor of all involved and often leads to exhaustion. Being together in and sharing the intimate space of the home entails a continuous negotiation of—sometimes conflicting—needs (for space, intimacy, distance, self-care, etc.) of *all* at home. The informal caring arrangements and the resulting relations of Hébergement are ambivalent and are understood as yet another expression of the lack of sufficient and adequate caring resources on a societal level ('care crisis'). With its fundamentally relational approach, feminist care ethics unravel the uneven structures that permeate and define both the practice of care and caring relations. Thereby, it challenges the structural organization of care in capitalism that is exclusive, racialized, inherently feminized, domesticized, privatized, and individualized and envisions an alternative, more just social organization of care—in a caring-with society. Drawing on narrative interviews, the paper explores how strangers encounter each other 'at home', how they care-with each other, and how they address the potentials, ambivalences, and limits of hosting and caring-with strangers at home.

Keywords: care crisis, homelessness, intimacy, justice, migration, shelter, support

## INTRODUCTION

Hébergement is a local response to the precarious conditions of transitory undocumented migrants in Brussels. As such, these migrants are denied access to formalized professional shelter and care provisions. Uncared for, they are forced to sleep on the streets, facing cold temperatures, heavy rainfall, violence, and policing. In welcoming and accommodating strangers at home, Belgian residents (predominantly female) took responsibility and *cared-for*, *-about*, and *-with* the shelterless migrants who were passing through Brussels over the last years on their flight from mostly East-African countries to their anticipated destination of asylum, the UK.

In the intimate sphere of the home, strangers encountered each other and new (caring) relations were established. More than 10,000 Belgian households have hosted undocumented migrants since 2017, when the Plateforme Citoyenne de Soutien aux Réfugié(e)s (Citizens' Platform for the Support of Refugees, further referred to as: Plateforme Citoyenne) initiated the informal hosting program through a call on Facebook. In Maximilianpark,[1] a central space of arrival in Brussels, volunteers matched migrants seeking shelter with prospective hosts, who, following the call, came to the park and invited strangers to their homes. To keep the commitment low, the premise initially was to meet material needs: providing a roof, a bed, and food for one night only—and maybe hosting different people on another night. In practice, however, hosts and hosted came to know and often sympathized with each other, and, in many cases, hosts invited those they hosted to return to their houses to stay for longer periods of time.

Being with strangers at 'home' requires a certain level of trust as well as a great deal of physical and emotional labor of all involved. It is personal and intimate, but, at the same time, it can be intimidating and overburdening. In this paper, I focus on the relations between hosts and hosted who have shared transitionary time and space 'at home' for several weeks or months. Through narrative interviews, deep insights on individual experiences of this particular social constellation were gained to explore how the strangers encounter each other, how they care-about, -for, and -with each other, and how they engage with the potentials and ambivalences of encounter, compassion, and care. It is generally unusual to encounter strangers at home, and even more so to have encounters there that are fundamentally shaped by structural injustices that create and rely on differences (—in needs). Thus, I argue that the informal hosting of undocumented migrants within the private sphere of the home is particular in that, on the one hand, it is fundamentally different from other forms of accommodation for undocumented migrants (be it informal squats, camps, or rather formalized shelters) and, on the other, it diverges from other forms of volunteering and migrant support. Emphasizing this particular social setting, I ask: What kind of relations emerge in this specific constellation of care-full encounters at home, and how do they occur? How does this intimate, private setting affect a caring-with relationship?

Geographies of encounters strongly debate and conceptualize encounters between strangers and their effects. However, these considerations are based on empirical research in public and micro-publics. The discourse refers back to Gordon Allport's (1954) long-standing contact hypothesis, which claims that encounters with strange 'others' can lead to a reduction in discriminatory prejudice and the development of intercultural understanding. More recent critical research, however, shows that encounters alone do not necessarily lead to changes in preconceptions and prejudices nor to greater respect or solidarity—too often, underlying unequal relations of power

are overlooked and reproduced (Amin, 2002; Valentine, 2008; Wilson, 2017). Referring to encounters that do lead to a change in values and attitudes, Valentine (2008, p. 325) introduced the term "meaningful contact." The latter is associated with micro-publics and organized around purposeful activities, such as in schools, sports clubs, or theater clubs (Amin, 2002; Valentine, 2008). Encounters between strangers in the private sphere remain absent from this debate.

Furthermore, it is critically debated how humanitarian charities and NGOs related to migrant support often entail a paternalistic care discourse. Migrants tend to be encountered with pity rather than respect. In volunteering, generous citizens (mostly women) prove to be compassionate caregivers while refugees are (re)constructed as passive, grateful supplicants whose (political) agency and social inclusion are denied (Ticktin, 2006; Pupavac, 2008; Darling, 2011). While encounters with the "other" might lead to reflecting on one's own favorable circumstances and privileges, it often fails to challenge the mechanisms, structures, and institutions that produce and stabilize exclusion and oppression and thereby generate disparities (Wilson, 2017). Following these considerations, there has been a recent debate (especially since 2015) on the disruptive and transformative potential of migrant and refugee support and whether it is politicizing and subversive or merely reproducing the status quo through a humanitarian approach (see Rygiel, 2011, 2012; van Dyk and Misbach, 2016; Fleischmann and Steinhilper, 2017; Frykman and Mäkelä, 2019; specifically for the case of Plateforme Citoyenne and migrant support in Brussels, see Depraetere and Oosterlynck, 2017; Vertongen, 2018; Lafaut and Coene, 2019; Vandervoordt, 2019; Saltiel, 2020). So far, this discussion, too, is entirely based on public discourse.

In what follows, I will not engage in the discussion on whether volunteer support for undocumented migrants is to be understood as subversive and/or political, and I will not elaborate on whether prejudices are reproduced or reduced in these encounters. To approach the specific, complex, and ambivalent relations that emerge in the encounters between hosts and hosted in the private sphere of the home, I will turn to *care* and *feminist care ethics*. With its fundamentally relational approach, a feminist care ethics perspective focuses on structural inequalities as well as on personal relationships between caregiver and care receiver. As such, feminist care ethics unravel the uneven structures that permeate and define both the practice of care and caring relations, challenging the structural organization of care in capitalism that is inherently feminized, racialized, domesticized, privatized, and increasingly commercialized and individualized. Moreover, a perspective of care not only provides a normative framework for criticism but also reveals concrete visions toward an alternative and more just society (Tronto, 1993, 2013, 2017; Lawson, 2007; The Care Collective, 2020).

The political theorist Tronto (2013, 2017) has defined *five principles of care*[2] that serve as a meaningful analytical framework to reflect on the complexity of caring relations—from the

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[1]Maximilianpark is situated in the Northern Quarter in Brussels next to the Foreigners' Office where asylum applications are processed, and right in front of the Brussels North station. For the meaning of Maximilianpark as *the* space of arrival in Brussels, see Saltiel (2020).

[2]The five "principles" or "phases" of care—Tronto (2013) uses the terms synonymously—are not necessarily performed chronologically.

structural context and underlying relations of power to the actual practice of hands-on care work:

1. *caring-about*: noticing and identifying unmet needs.
2. *caring-for*: taking responsibility to make certain that these needs are met.
3. *care-giving*: actually doing care work and having the competence to do so.
4. *care-receiving*: response of the object who has been cared-for, assessment of the effectiveness of the caring act(s), arise of new needs.
5. *caring-with*: occurs when members of a society can rely on established caring relations based on interdependencies, trust, and solidarity. Caring-with includes a notion of an alternative, more just, and democratic organization of care work.

The five principles of care will structure this article, exploring the ambivalent yet contiguous aspects of the caring arrangements of Hébergement and the social relations that result from it to ask if and how they affect a caring-with relationship that ultimately breaks with the uneven hierarchical distribution of care and its classifications in Western European capitalist societies. It sets off with a conceptual discussion on care theory and feminist care ethics. Drawing on the long-standing feminist struggles for the recognition of social reproduction, how the (increasingly privatized and commercialized) care arrangement is subjected to capitalist relations is elaborated upon. Furthermore, this uneven distribution of care (re)produces processes of social exclusion, resulting in a substantial *care crisis*. This first section is then followed by a reflection on the methodological approach and the endeavor of engaging in a caring research practice, before turning to the empirical analysis of the caring relations of Hébergement. This will be done first by analyzing the phases of caring-for and caring-about migrants in Brussels, emphasizing the incentives and motivations of hosts in reacting to the condition of uncare and in their decision to host migrants at home. Second, this analysis will focus on the relations between hosts and hosted in the practice of care-giving and care-receiving. Eventually, the principle of caring-with will inform the discussion on the ambivalences and limits of these new caring arrangements and their potential toward a caring-with society that is centered upon solidary and interdependent social relations.

## THE CARE CRISIS IN CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

Capitalism, as an institutionalized economic and social order, from the very beginning has evolved based on unequal relations that make use of the construction of difference. Capitalism is (and always has been) dependent on colonial and imperialist relations, on the expropriation, displacement, and exploitation of entire societies, and on the exploitation of women. A gendered and racialized division of labor is inherent in capitalist economies. Likewise, the division of production and reproduction is seen as inevitable between the public—as the space of production,

associated with men and masculinity—and the private—as the space of social reproduction and care work, associated with women and femininity (Federici, 2004, 2019; Fraser, 2017).

Since the 1970s, feminist theorists and activists have criticized the separation of production and reproduction in capitalist societies and the associated gendered division of labor. Emphasizing the mutually constitutive relation between the two spheres, reproductive labor and care work are the basis of any capitalist production, though their relation has been organized differently at different times. In her historical analysis, Fraser (2016, 2017) identifies three regimes of "social reproduction-cum-economic production" (Fraser, 2016, p. 104). In the first regime, liberal competitive capitalism, the ideal of *separate spheres* created a bourgeois imaginary of domesticity and rendered social reproduction, at the expense of women, as belonging to the private realm of the family. By this, care work was made invisible, its importance obscured, and, by relating it to love and virtue, its exploitation naturalized. The new familial organization of separate spheres not only depoliticized domestic labor but structurally subordinated women doing unpaid care work to men earning cash wages (Fraser, 2017; Federici, 2019). The second regime refers to state-managed capitalism of the twentieth century and the ideal of the *family wage*. In that era of Fordism, capitalist relations had permeated social life to the extent that the working classes were deprived of the resources to reproduce themselves. To ensure continued economic growth, public investment in health care and social reproduction was internalized through the state as well as the corporate provision of social welfare (Fraser, 2016, 2017).

The third and current regime, the globalized neoliberal order, is characterized by a scarcity of care resources that are unevenly distributed, meaning that "care work remains gendered, invisible, unacknowledged, and yet still fundamentally maintaining the society" (Schlitz et al., 2022, p. 94). The systemic disinvestment in social welfare while real wages were reduced raised the number of hours of paid work per household necessary to support the family and required a new social organization. The *two-earner household* became the new ideal. A strong increase of women in the paid workforce followed, while they nevertheless remained accountable for care work and social reproduction. Resituated as a private matter, care work in neoliberalism is characterized by "a dualized organization of social reproduction, commodified for those who can pay for it and privatized for those who cannot, as some in the second category provide care work in return for (low) wages for those in the first" (Fraser, 2016, p. 19). Thus, care work in Western European societies and elsewhere has been reprivatized at a market level and individualized as a responsibility of the family, while the capacity to perform it is diminished (see Lawson, 2007; Winker, 2015). The growing gap between care needs and the resources allocated to meet them has led to the so-called care crisis (Dowling, 2021). Exhaustion, burn-outs, and "compassion fatigue" result from the great pressure under which assumed tasks and responsibilities are maintained until the excessive demand on oneself can no longer be sustained. However, while burn-out is a social phenomenon and yet another expression of structural flaws, the incapacity to care (for oneself and others) is framed as personal failure

for which one is to be blamed individually (Winker, 2015; Fraser, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017; Dowling, 2021). Moreover, the individualization and commercialization of care obscures the interdependence of all people, repressing alternative, more inclusive and less hierarchical modes of social organization (Green and Lawson, 2011).

To fill the emergent care gap, different strategies are resorted to. Given that care work cannot be rationalized, this has resulted in the reliance upon underpaid migrant care workers and global care chains on the one hand, and unpaid voluntary labor on the other. Volunteering is framed as an expression of civic engagement and advocates even perceive a 'social' turn for capitalism. Rather than providing solutions, these "care fixes"— within the capitalist logic—only reinforce unequal social relations and exploitation and further enhance the devaluation of care work, both within and outside of family relations (Dowling, 2021, p. 15).

More and more (groups of) people find themselves excluded and uncared-for. Those outside of naturalized forms of dependency are cast as no longer deserving of caring relations (Green and Lawson, 2011). The lack of care migrants are facing in the midst of European cities is to be seen as a result of a lack of sufficient and adequate caring resources and its uneven and racialized distribution on a societal level. It is thus understood as yet another expression of the care crisis that is rooted in the structural flaws of capitalism's social organization, which is highly exclusive, leaving many (groups of) people uncared-for and/or at best (made) dependent on charity and compassion of (groups of) individuals (Tronto, 2013, 2017; Winker, 2015; Fraser, 2016, 2017; The Care Collective, 2020; Dowling, 2021).

In the so-called 'summer of migration' in 2015, where the lack of institutional care sparked civic responses[3] throughout Europe, the ambivalences of care and responsibility as well as of temporal fixes became apparent. Rapidly emerging grassroots initiatives (often together with more established humanitarian NGOs) organized for the arrival of refugees in European cities and borderlands—they cared-for, -about, and -with the refugees. While there undoubtedly was an urgent need for care, which was (partially and temporarily) fixed by volunteers, in these spontaneous caring arrangements, "care took the pressure off local states to adequately respond to the situation and make public resources available . . . . [This] certainly provoked in some instances the de-professionalization of care-work and often led to the physical and mental overload of many volunteers as a result of the lack of 'self-care'" (Gabauer and Lebuhn, 2021, p. 168). By stressing the fact that all humans are in need of care and can provide care, feminist care ethics challenge the uneven distribution of care, demanding a democratic rethinking of care and responsibilities (Tronto, 2013, 2015, 2017; The Care Collective, 2020).

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[3]For the purpose of this paper, the focus lies on 'pro-refugee' responses. However, it is important to keep in mind that the arrival of refugees (both before, in, and after 2015) also became a target of right-wing propaganda, which led to a rise in right-wing nationalist parties and electorates as well as xenophobic hate speech and racist attacks.

## Caring-With in a More Just Society?

[T]o include care as a public concern upsets the distinction between public and private life. Because contemporary society has historically relegated care as the concerns of women, working-class people, and racial and ethnic minorities, including care in public life forces a reconsideration of how to think about gender, race, class, and the treatment of "others." (Tronto, 2013, p. 143)

With the fifth principle of caring-with, Tronto (2013, 2015, 2017) puts care in the center of an alternative and more just social order. She does not imply that caring alone will transform society but rather envisions a more public conception of care and a radical rethinking of responsibilities. At the heart of caring-with lies the recognition of interdependent relations: all members of a society are needy; all are both care receivers and caregivers. Embracing interdependencies unsettles the hierarchical implications of neediness and dependency and the dominant liberal imaginary of a "'proper' and dignified citizen [who] is constituted as independent, self-actualising and productive" (Atkinson et al., 2011, p. 564f). Since caring needs often exceed the capacity of individuals, they are to be understood as the responsibility of society of a whole. Accordingly, Tronto (2013, 2015, 2017) conceptualizes caring-with as an inclusive and democratic principle, that includes a collective process of assigning responsibilities. As such, it breaks the uneven distribution of care and the social hierarchies that determines it.

Tronto renders caring-with as a future, a utopian scenario, that is, grounded in the pressing need to rethink caring relations and arrangements in current society. By turning to Hébergement, I explore how the experiences of this specific caring arrangement in the private sphere informs a vision of caring-with. The microanalysis of caring relations reveals the ambivalences of care, encounters with, and compassion toward strange others in the private sphere. Hébergement responds to local needs. It challenges contemporary categories of inclusion and exclusion, of proximity and distance, of public and private, of caregivers and care receivers. Yet, the relations are inherently based on an individualized and privatized notion of care that is intrinsic to contemporary neoliberal societies.

## METHODS. A CARING RESEARCH ENCOUNTER?

Since care and caring relations lie at the heart of this research, I strived to establish a caring research practice that necessarily includes a reflection on the issue of power and positionality in research relationships (Rose, 1997; Blazek and Askins, 2020). To encounter my research partners in a care-full manner is a serious attempt not to make use of nor to reproduce dependencies and uneven relations of power. This comes with numerous methodological and methodical challenges.

This research is part of a continuous academic engagement with the Plateforme Citoyenne[4] and the Maximilianpark in Brussels since the informal refugee camp was established in 2015 (see Saltiel, 2020, 2021). In 2020, the focus of the empirical research turned to Hébergement. By conducting narrative interviews with one employee of the Plateforme Citoyenne, seven hosts (in five different households), and eight hosted persons, I gained insights into individual experiences of Hébergement to obtain a grounded understanding of these specific caring encounters in the private sphere and the resulting relationships.

The chosen sample of interviewees is specific and does not aim to be representative of all experiences with Hébergement, since not all hosting experiences lead to repeated meetings, people sympathizing, building intimacy, and/or long-term relationships. As such, particular cases were explored that were exemplary of encounters that *did* result in recurrent stays and in lasting caring relations between hosts and hosted. They are per definition incomplete and "[f]urther examples may add, alter or challenge the findings of one set of examples" (Raghuram, 2019, p. 617).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, participant observation could not take place as originally envisaged. Thus, my analysis of caring practices and relations is limited to verbalized narratives, to "accounts of what people say they do, not [as] evidence of their actual practices" (Valentine and Sadgrove, 2014, p. 1983). The narrations are understood as a process of meaning making and thus best suited for research with a focus on personal experiences and emotional dimensions (Valentine and Sadgrove, 2014). In a caring manner, a narrative approach allows the interviewee to largely guide the conversation and to prioritize specific narrations, experiences, and emotions over others.

The interviews were analyzed and interpreted by means of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2010). This approach allows both for considering the context of the narration and the latent structuring of meaning. I combined *summarizing* with *explicating* and *structuring* content analysis (Mayring, 2010). After the transcription of interviews and field notes, I first summarized each interview to gain a structured overview of the material and the individual experiences that I could draw on to contextualize particular interview segments in further steps of analysis. Using the software MaxQDA, I then inductively generated thematical categories, created coding guidelines, and organized the material accordingly, before I filtered out certain aspects in a structuring step. In this process, particular, typical, and/or exemplary text passages were extracted. These were then interpreted by referring to the summaries as well as contrasting and contextualizing them with statements by other interviewees on the same issues.

The conversations with (predominantly female) hosts were held for the most part in their respective homes. Twenty months after the first interviews, I revisited the hosts to understand how relationships had changed over time, how families had adapted to struggles (including the pandemic), and to allow for a reflection with a certain distance to the hosting experiences.

The interviews with those hosted took a different form. Homeless migrants in Brussels are preoccupied with the struggle for survival, finding shelter, organizing their passage to the UK, and trying to escape the risk of arrest and deportation. Talking about encounters with hosts and the relationships between them, asking how they got to know each other, built trust, and spent time together appeared ignorant and care-less in this situation. Furthermore, I sought to prevent hosted individuals from agreeing to meeting me out of a feeling of obligation and/or gratitude toward their hosts, through which initial contact had been established.[5] Consequently, interviews with people hosted were conducted after the hosting experience and with those who had settled and gained a legal status. Given that most of the persons hosted in Hébergement eventually settled in the UK, this meant interviews were conducted there (except for the case of a mother and son who had settled in Brussels). As the interviews focused on past events, it allowed me to talk to people who were no longer facing the pressing needs of survival and in positions of direct dependency toward their hosts. They literally gained distance from (the experiences in) Brussels. Attempting to avoid a rigid setting and to generate other than (prepared and repeated) narratives, my conversations with hosted people were of a rather informal character. Thus, I asked no questions related to aspects of their flight or their reasons for it. As locals, they decided on the meeting point. Our encounters took place in everyday spaces in the city (in a public park, café, pub, restaurant, at home, or while going on a walk). To keep it informal, only parts of the conversations were recorded.

In my research encounters, I myself experienced the hospitality, trust, and openness that is so fundamental to Hébergement, and to which my interview partners repeatedly referred. I stayed in touch with my research partners, delivered gifts and greetings from Brussels to the UK and vice versa, and, in this process, I have established relations with people and places that surpass my positioning as researcher (Lawson, 2007; Blazek and Askins, 2020).

## HÉBERGEMENT AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW CARING RELATIONS

The first four principles of care in the context of Hébergement—caring-about, caring-for, care-giving, and care-receiving—are explored through the narrations and experiences of my interviewees. Caring-about and caring-for are about how hosts noticed the unmet needs and their incentives and motivations to take responsibility and to react to the condition of uncare in hosting strangers at home (Tronto, 2013, 2017). In contrast, the principles of care-giving and care-receiving refer to the encounter between hosts and hosted, the practices of care, and the relations that result from being together and giving and receiving care. To do justice to the "multiple ways people occupy subject positions of care giver and receiver" (Power and Williams,

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[4]The Plateforme Citoyenne was formed in the process of the emergence of a makeshift refugee camp in Maximilianpark in Brussels in 2015 and has provided different forms of support and care for undocumented migrants ever since.

[5]I received contacts from interview partners in the UK, both from hosts who I had talked to and through a call placed in the Hébergement Facebook group.

2019, p. 4), the principles of care-giving and care-receiving are discussed together. Any separation risks the reproduction of dichotomies, failing to account for the complexity of social realities, such as conceiving the hosts as generous caregivers and the hosted as dependent care receivers. Rather than describing the acts of hands-on care, the focus is shifted to the relationships that are formed in the caring and to the emotional labor that *all* involved must accomplish. Such a perspective aims for a nuanced relational understanding of care and of processes of giving and receiving, yet without disregarding the power relations that permeate these complex social settings. Furthermore, the emphasis on relationships reveals that Hébergement is much more than the 'mere' provision of material care services. Angelique[6] (Host, Interview, Belgium, 2020) makes this clear: "Yes. We could say, okay, I host, I feed, and I give you clothes and I wash your clothes and that's all. But you cannot! You are part of their life." Hébergement, as well as the people she met through it, also became an integral part of Angelique's life. In being together at home, people got to know each other and, in some but not all cases, friendships arose: "I could not have been friends with anybody that I hosted because some of them just . . . you know . . . there is some people you can be friends with and some other not, you don't know why" (Sara, Host, Interview, Belgium, 2020).

## Caring-About and Caring-For

> [We started hosting] when it was the worst, when there were so many refugees in the streets, there [at] Park Maximilian. . . . It was very, very cold and again we passed through [the park] because it's [on] our way to come from the city . . . . I was with the phone and I read: It's half past eleven and we still have fifty persons [with no place to sleep] and I said: Okay, that's a good idea to do it and then we did it. And then we passed with our car. We stopped. We didn't know anything about [it]. We were just there asking a young girl with a white jacket and I say, okay, we are like *tourists* we don't know nothing but we can do something and so she gave us three and they came home and it was nice. That was the first time. (Carole, Host, Interview, Belgium, 2021)

As a reaction to falling temperatures, continuous rain, and a growing number of police raids in Maximilianpark in Brussels in September 2017, the Plateforme Citoyenne posted in their Facebook group, asking citizens to host "the most vulnerable" homeless undocumented migrants from Maximilianpark. The appeal elicited great response and drew hundreds of Belgian residents to the park who spontaneously invited strangers to their homes. By the end of the day, *all* people seeking shelter in Maximilianpark were hosted in Belgian households. For two years, the Plateforme Citoyenne continued to coordinate the hosting, matching hosts and hosted every evening in Maximilianpark.[7] Volunteers also offered

driving services and the hosting network expanded quickly throughout Belgium.

The existential struggle of hundreds of homeless people sleeping in a public park in the center of Brussels and the initiative of the Plateforme Citoyenne mobilized thousands of Belgian residents to become active, to 'do something' about the situation, to help and support, and to meet the needs of the uncared-for migrants in Maximilianpark. As pointed out elsewhere (Saltiel, 2020), the visibility and proximity of migrants in the park played an essential role in the vigorous public attention and raising awareness of the deplorable conditions that made mobilization on the part of the Plateforme Citoyenne so appealing. In addition, the political climate in Belgium was hostile toward migration, with the state secretary for asylum and foreign affairs[8] persistently stoking fears in the media of so-called 'pull effects' that would result in a rising number of undesired migrants in the city and the country. In this sense, intolerable conditions were considered acceptable to act as 'deterrent examples.' Moreover, in the autumn of 2017, the Belgian government requested the Sudanese intelligence services to come to Maximilianpark for the purpose of identifying undocumented Sudanese migrants. Public reports about that gave impetus to volunteers to take people into their homes and help mitigate the threats to their presence in Brussels, thereby setting a hospitable example countering the government and the dominant political climate.

From the beginning, social media was the crucial means through which the Plateforme Citoyenne communicated, mobilized, informed, and organized. All my interviewees followed the Plateforme's Facebook group. For some, it was through social media that they learned about Maximilianpark, the shelterless migrants, and the citizens' support. Others passed by the park regularly and became acquainted with the situation. Some heard a radio story, read a newspaper article, or had friends who volunteered and who shared their experiences.

> You always think, okay, there is difficult things in the world but what can I do? And this, I could *do* something. So, it was really simple: I take my car, 10 mins, I take people back home, and that's it (Sara, Host, Interview, Belgium, 2020).

The informality of Hébergement allows for a flexibility that was highly appreciated by interviewed hosts. As opposed to volunteering in shelters or other formalized migrant support infrastructures or charities, there is no need to plan months in advance nor to fill in schedules and/or lists. Also, the hosts are less integrated into the organization's social fabric (this was

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[6] All names of interview partners are pseudonymized.

[7] From being an informal grassroot organization that emerged during the establishment of the informal refugee camp in Maximilianpark in 2015, the Plateforme Citoyenne gradually professionalized and became a non-governmental organization (financed by the city; predominantly the communes Brussels and Schaerbeek, and the regions Brussels and Wallonia as well as private donations)

that counted eighty employees by the end of 2021. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, and within the process of professionalization, the Plateforme prioritized running collective shelters over hosting in private households and withdrew from the organizing and match-making of Hébergement. Hosting up to eight hundred undocumented migrants in transition, the Plateforme Citoyenne builds rather formalized arrival infrastructures for transitory undocumented migrants, filling the gaps in the institutional provision of care. Yet, these still depend on the unpaid volunteer labor of thousands of volunteers.

[8] Theo Francken, a member of the Flemish nationalist N-VA party (then part of the federal governing coalition), was the state secretary for asylum and foreign affairs between 2014 and 2018.

appreciated by some, while criticized by others) and under less social control.

Before deciding to host strangers in their homes, my interviewees, most of whom had no prior experience with refugee support and/or volunteering, acquainted themselves with the park and its inhabitants through delivering donations or offering driving services. Only after that did they decide to invite migrants into their homes. Some hosts were used to living with strangers. While Jacques and Carole both grew up with foster siblings, Angelique lived with a family on a different continent as an au pair, where her neighbors, a family of Vietnamese refugees (boat people), cared-for her and welcomed her into their house, and Sara's family occasionally rents out a room in their house via a short-term rental platform.

## Care-Giving and Care-Receiving

Both welcoming strangers into your home and entering a stranger's house comes with certain risks and many insecurities: expectations, customs, and needs are unclear. While hosts decided (voluntarily) to welcome migrants, hosted people mostly lacked alternatives and had no choice. It is once again important to note the differences in power and decision-making autonomy. Unsurprisingly, those hosted recalled coyness and feelings of discomfort at the very start of a stay:

> In the beginning, it's a bit... you don't know this person. If I need to drink water, do I need to ask? In the beginning, it's a bit hard. Because you don't want to overstep your ground. You want to be as polite as possible [laughs], but you don't know how. (Sagal, Hosted, Interview, Belgium, 2020).

> I didn't want to ruin something. Or say something. I said: Can I go to sleep? It was seven! [laughs] So, I went to sleep. I just stayed there. And then I wanted to ask for internet. . . . [B]ut I was [too] scared. (Nija, Hosted, Interview, UK, 2021)

One interviewed host recalled that someone they hosted long term kept a (social and spatial) distance from them, locked doors to her room, and avoided encounters and common activities. However, this remained an exception in the interview narratives. In most cases, hosts and hosted became accustomed to each other and eventually enjoyed each other's trust and comfort.

Trust is a fundamental prerequisite for Hébergement. In the establishment of trusting relationships, the Plateforme Citoyenne played a crucial role. Both hosts and hosted referred to it as an instance of trust. For example, according to Sagal (Hosted, Interview, Belgium, 2020), "[f]or us [hosted], we trust [the Plateforme] that they find the right people. . . . I don't think that anything can happen there." Hosts found confidence in the fact that they could report individuals if incidents and/or inappropriate behavior occurred, resulting in the exclusion of certain individuals from Hébergement. Yet, the level of trust that was built over time exceeded expectations and I have not heard of any major instances of its abuse. In most cases, the first contact between hosts and hosted was established through the Plateforme Citoyenne. Some hosts and hosted exchanged phone numbers or social media contacts, allowing them to contact each other and to stay in touch autonomously. Subsequently, hosting became more and more independent from the Plateforme and from the park

and hosts repeatedly hosted already familiar persons (sometimes for longer stays).

At the beginning of each stay, priority was given to the needs of the hosted to sleep and rest. In this period, they were taken care of: their laundry was washed and food was prepared for them. However, once recovered from the exertions of having tried (and failed) to cross the channel, those who stayed longer engaged in the reproductive work of the household, cooked for themselves and the hosts, washed laundry, helped in the garden, or took care of the hosts' children. What is more, keys were handed out allowing those hosted to enter and leave the house at any time, regardless of the presence of their hosts. Furthermore, interviewees recalled instances when the hosted were alone in the house for a period, for example, when the hosts were on vacation. This not only solved the need for shelter, but the hosts also found their apartments/houses taken care of, their plants watered, and their cats fed. These experiences not only point to the acquired level of trust but also to shifting roles of providing and receiving care and the recognition of interdependency. All are in need of care and support, although different needs were at stake.

Everyday life was shared in the household. For most, shared dinners became an integral part of being together. Much more than satisfying one's hunger, commensality is a symbolic social and community-building activity, sitting together, chatting, and experiencing a sense of 'normality.' Cooking is also a way to share eating habits and dishes from the countries of origin. As such, it is a simple but effective and profound form of cultural exchange. Besides commensality, hosts and hosted engaged in a whole range of joint everyday activities such as playing with children, sharing, listening, and dancing to music, watching movies,[9] going on walks, doing sports, shopping, engaging in conversations and discussions, and teaching each other their native languages. Moreover, hosted interviewees were introduced to friends and other family members, joined the families for weekend trips or vacations, and celebrated Christmas and other holidays with them.

## Kindred Relations

By building intimate relationships between hosts and hosted and the latter's integration into the social life of the household, Hébergement exceeds material support and also responds to the needs of social ties. Referring to the level of integration, hosts and hosted refer to each other as family members:

> You are part of their life, and they all call you Mama and Mammae. And you act like this. And for some of them, yes, I really consider myself as a mother. (Angelique, Host, Interview, Belgium, 2020).

> They see you as you are their own family. They are family. . . . We take care of each other. It's the same like your family, like your sister. (Biruk, Hosted, Interview, UK, 2021).

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[9]Apparently, *Paddington* is a recurrent movie watched in different households. The children's movie is about a bear from Peru seeking refuge with a family in London. Arriving in London at Paddington Station, he wears a note around his neck: "Please look after this BEAR. Thank you".

Depending on the specific relations and on age differences, hosts and hosted also refer to each other as siblings. More than an expression of respect, these kindred relations serve best to capture the intimate relations that result both from care and cohabitation in the private sphere, given the fact that care in capitalist societies is located within the realm of the family and the domestic. The notion of kin serves to legitimize giving and receiving care as well as justifying the high level of trust and hospitality. However, family relations are not 'neutral': (patriarchal/matriarchal) hierarchical power relations and normative notions of dependence permeate them. Thus, uneven relations of power do not only stem from structural discrimination of undocumented migrants—which caused certain needs and dependencies in the first place—but also emerge and are consolidated in the positioning of oneself within hierarchical family relations.

Encounters in the private sphere in general, and its resultant kindred relations in particular, blur the boundaries of 'we' (French: *nous*) and 'them' (French: *vous*). This leads to a new identification, a specific togetherness. The caring relations of Hébergement challenge normative attributions and dominant patterns of social categorization, hierarchization, and exclusion of care (and society). The hosting volunteers and the Plateforme Citoyenne express this through the invention of the term *vnous*, which circulates across social media and in the official communications of the Plateforme Citoyenne (for an analysis of the virtual social spaces of Hébergement, see Vandervoordt, 2020).

Through Hébergement, strangers are made familiar and new social bonds are forged, allowing for a multiplication of caring relations with people who are positioned outside of the nuclear family, with 'distant' racialized others who are excluded from any institutionalized forms of care and any means of social and political participation in the city while, at the same time, having lost kinship relations in the course of migration (Raghuram, 2016). In their envisioning of an alternative organization of care and society (which is informed by Tronto's notion of caring-with), The Care Collective (2020, p. 43) suggests an ethic of "promiscuous care" that is based on alternative kinship structures replacing the family as the prime relational unit. In this way, "[p]romiscuous care argues that caring for migrants and refugees should carry the same significance that our culture places on caring for our own" (The Care Collective, 2020). However, this does not suggest that care work is to be left to the free labor of strangers; rather, all care work in a society should be resourced and democratically organized.

## TOWARD CARING-WITH? AMBIVALENCES OF ENCOUNTER, COMPASSION, AND CARE

The microanalysis of the different phases of care in Hébergement and the caring relations leads to a grounded understanding of these new caring practices and confirms the thesis that encountering and caring-for and -with strangers in the private sphere results in different relationships—but also different

challenges—than in (semi-)public spaces and more formalized caring arrangements. The experiences of hosts and hosted illustrate "how the negotiation of care under current conditions . . . can lead to highly ambivalent forms of 'taking care of each other'" (Gabauer and Lebuhn, 2021, p. 167). This involves the issues of underlying injustices, dependency, temporality, and the burden of care and responsibility.

## "I Need My Space"

Reflecting on her experiences in Brussels, Nija, a young woman who, together with four other people, was hosted by a Belgian woman for three months, addressed the emotional stress she was (and still is) confronted with. Since fleeing from her country of origin, she has lived in temporary and restrictive co-living arrangements in relations of vertical dependence on volunteers (in Belgium) and state provision (in the UK). She was pregnant when she arrived in Belgium and reached the UK one month before she gave birth. I visited Nija and her infant daughter in their current temporary 'home,' an asylum accommodation on the outskirts of a major UK city, where they live with four other female asylum seekers:

> Where is our life is starting? For me that is not life. Because, I have my own vision, I have my own future. So, when is it? When is it [going] to end? . . .
>
> Belgian families are nice, people are nice . . . everything is nice. So, everything is comfortable for us, but you miss your independent time. You miss your private time, you miss your *own* thing. That was stressing me a lot. And I was crying so much. And [Name of host], she was ready to raise my kids, even she had chosen a wallpaper for my baby. I was happy [about] that, but I need *my* space, you know, like I need my own thing. I don't want to give birth and [be] sitting or sleeping there again. . . .
>
> Come on, where [do] these things end? I think most of my friends are thinking that too. We discussed [it with] each other when sitting at the Maximilianpark. (Nija, Hosted, Interview, UK, 2021)

Although Hébergement caters to some needs of people who are excluded from formal social caring arrangements, the emerging caring relations can be invasive and overburdening. It does not solve—but sometimes rather reproduces—the structural conditions of injustice that cause vertical relations of dependence and restrict the capacity of self-sufficiency and self-care. Consequently, any rethinking of more just caring arrangements "must be coupled with analysis of the structures and institutions that reproduce exclusion, oppression . . . and on the like" (Lawson, 2007, p. 7).

Moreover, Hébergement does not solve the insufficient and inadequate distribution of care in the context of neoliberalism's care crisis. Rather, it contributes to an overstrain of caring capacities—physically and emotionally—especially for women, who are the driving forces behind Hébergement. The time and energy invested in Hébergement often led to the very lack of care elsewhere. This not only led to exhaustion and disappointment but also to disagreements about the hosting within families, the negotiations of boundaries, and

the allocation of care capacities. Under different circumstances than Nija but also triggered by sharing the home within the context of Hébergement, Sara's husband and her family also claimed the need for *their* space (and time). Sara referred to the emotional burden of hosting and the tension between different (and conflicting) needs she found herself confronted with. She is in her mid-thirties, married, and has three small children.

> So, we started it and I didn't know what was going to happen next and then it was so fast, it went all so fast, I was emotionally completely … lost. I was crying all the time and I was always feeling I was not doing enough. First, we had a rule in my family. [It] was only [hosting] in the weekends. And then I started to ask my husband: Okay, can we also host on Monday? And then it was every day. . . . And it took me a few months to realize that I was a little bit forgetting my family, that it was not easy for my husband, for my kids. . . . And my husband at some point had to tell me, if you don't stop, I will go because it is not possible for me. Like, he would not leave me, but he would maybe take another apartment because he was not feeling at home anymore. So then, after I think only four or five months, we had to stop hosting people at home because the balance in the family was not good anymore. . . . Because I didn't realize it when I got into all this, you know, I kind of put him [husband] aside because I was really finding myself in this volunteering. And I was not conscious of it, but I pushed him away more and more and more. (Sara, Host, Interview, Belgium, 2020).

Based on her reflections, Sara felt individually responsible to improve the situation of those who were enduring terrible conditions in Brussels, to support them and to take them in. Inevitably, this led to a sense of never doing enough and an overload of both the physical and emotional capacities to care. Other hosts also reported exhaustion and tiredness as a result of prioritizing caring for others over the care for oneself. Even though the individualized notion of responsibility that dominates current society renders the overburden of caring duties as self-inflicted, it is yet another expression of the uneven geographies of care and of the care crisis (Winker, 2015; Dowling, 2021).

Because the demand for care very often surpasses the capacity of individuals, there is clearly a need to rethink how caring responsibilities are allocated and how care can be organized in an inclusive and democratic manner. To think about alternative and more just caring arrangements, I return to feminist ethics of care. Tronto's (2013, 2017) notion of caring-with conceptualizes care as a public concern, as a radically inclusive and democratic principle that includes a collective process of assigning caring responsibilities. As such, it "upsets the distinction between public and private life" (Tronto, 2013, p. 143) and breaks down the uneven distribution of care and the social hierarchies that determine its distribution in a capitalist society. Care is the responsibility of society as a whole, not an individual burden. By emphasizing the interdependencies of human relations, feminist ethics of care resist any individualization and privatization of care (Lawson, 2007). Such a democratic and solidarity-based negotiation of caring

relations and responsibilities ensures agency to both recipients and providers of care and prevents certain individuals from being overburdened with care, an experience illustrated by both Nija and Sara.

## A New Social Order?

> When you are with [a] family, you are safe. Nobody can go to that [place]. Because if something will happen, it is the family who can protect you. Because you [undocumented migrants] have no identity. Nobody knows you. Even you cannot call [the police]. But if you are with a family, especially the ladies, there is safety. (Nahome, Hosted, Interview, UK, 2021)

Nahome, a twenty-eight-year-old male student who fled from East Africa to the UK via Brussels, addresses the aspect of safety and protection within Hébergement and the fact that undocumented migrants, given that their presence in the city is illegalized, lack certain rights and means of protection that are attributed to citizenship. This makes them (once more) dependent on compassionate citizens to care-about and -for them and their safety: In public, they are at constant risk of arrest and perhaps deportation. Along with these threats, homeless bodies (especially feminized bodies) are also subject to sexual violence. Through rape or sex work, many shelterless women become pregnant or contract sexually transmitted diseases. In the intimate setting of Hébergement, undocumented migrants felt protected from the risks they face during their journeys and in forced homelessness. Caring encounters in the private sphere matter.

Moreover, in being together, in sharing space and time, normative representations of refugees as needy, passive care receivers and/or as a threat to local society was disrupted. At the same time, hosts also proved to be vulnerable and in need of care. Thus, both hosts and hosted experienced the relational interdependence between humans. When I asked Jacques and Kim about their relationship to a family (mother with three children) they had hosted for several months, Kim responded:

> It is funny because in some ways we are very different. . . . It is difficult to explain, I guess it is because they lived here, we saw them really at their lowest point [and] because they lived with us, they probably saw us at low points as well. We were tired. We were tired in that period. But we do have a very close bond. (Kim, Host, Interview, Belgium, 2020).

In showing themselves as vulnerable, one-directional hierarchical paternalistic accounts of caring discourses are disrupted, allowing for a different encounter and a relation that is based on interdependencies. These experiences deepened the intimate relationships—despite all differences that Kim stressed. In hosting, as opposed to other volunteering activities, there is no retreat to the private. Instead, there is a constant negotiation of needs (for space, food, intimacy or distance, self-care, rest, and much more) of all at home. This is yet another reason why the context of the private sphere makes a difference.

This was again emphasized when hosted persons compared their experiences with families to those in shelters and rather formalized and professional care provision[10]:

> I prefer families. . . . They are so nice to me. They understand me, they explain me everything. Like they are helping me, you know they are kind. I feel confident; I feel like, you know… comfortable with them. That's why families… I prefer families! More personal, more relations. And you know, it is safer than the camp. Because when you are there, like, there is family. (Jim, Hosted, Interview, UK, 2021)

Furthermore, hosted interviewees pointed out that, in shelters, "the people who are working are employed. They are doing the business. They work for the sake of a salary. It's another story if you go to [a] shelter" (Nahome, Hosted, Interview, UK, 2021). Jim (Hosted, Interview, UK, 2021) made it even clearer when stating: "They just do their job. It's not helping!" This indicates different roles, different subjectivities, and different relations. In a shelter, personal relations are limited and come with stark hierarchies and clear boundaries between professional care workers and inhabitants. Since shelters are organized as institutions of rather one-directional care services, inhabitants are rendered as 'clients' and become objects to professional care providers. In the private sphere of a household or a family, with people who voluntarily (and without any financial reward) welcome people into their homes, these boundaries blur, allowing for a different encounter and mutual support. What is more, interviewees (both hosts and hosted) emphasized that the setting of these intimate encounters encouraged processes of learning about geopolitical realities as well as cultural practices and specificities.

For as long as caring activities are 'women's business,' every multiplication of those cared-for and -about however, is a multiplication of responsibilities and a multiplication of burdens for individual women. Although all interviewed hosts (in fact, I spoke with only one male host) emphasized that the consent of their partners and the whole family was crucial, men often distanced themselves from both the caring activities and those hosted in the house. If they did become actively involved in hosting, they were more likely to do work outside the home (driving, taking clothes to the laundromat) while women were primarily responsible for activities at home, such as cooking (often with the hosted), preparing the rooms, and doing and maintaining the work of emotional relationships. In the cases of my interviewees, it were exclusively women who gave out their telephone numbers, invited and coordinated those they hosted, and maintained contact over longer periods of time. Even though the hosting might represent a rupture of the everyday life in the household, the ultimate negotiation is still rooted in the traditional gender division of labor and spheres. This adds an additional burden to the already burdened woman in the household. Striking a balance between family life and volunteer work, between the extra care tasks and professional working life, is a major challenge for women and their families and often leads to intra-family tensions and conflicts.

A feminist care ethics approach is sensitive to difference and modes of differentiation. It addresses inequalities, draws attention to those who are excluded, and elaborates on how exclusive patterns of care (re)produce exclusions in society (and vice versa) (Tronto, 2013, 2017). While gender has often been a privileged analytic through which care is analyzed, race and class have received much less attention in conceptualizing care despite being as crucial to shaping caring practices and caring regimes (Raghuram, 2016, 2019). Any rethinking of a society from a caring perspective needs to start with ensuring and providing a social infrastructure that enables all members of a society to care for themselves, for (close and distant) others, and for democracy (Tronto, 2013; The Care Collective, 2020). A precondition therefore is to guarantee political and social participation for *all* through democratic structures. Excluded and marginalized groups and individuals—including migrants, both documented and undocumented—thus need to take part in the allocation of responsibilities. To care for others and for democracy, however, first requires one to be able to care for oneself. This involves for illegalized and asylum-seeking people to have the right to abode as well as access to their *own* homes and the labor market. After all, people in precarious and permanently insecure living conditions have no means, time, or strength to engage in any democratic discussion in addition to coping with everyday life nor to organize themselves and make their needs visible and audible (Winker, 2015). Adequate material resources, space, and time are required to care-for, -about, and -with.

The caring arrangement of Hébergement is ambivalent. Material emergency support is provided. The accommodation of homeless strangers temporarily meets the existential needs for shelter, food, hygienic infrastructure, and the like. Furthermore, Hébergement in many cases responds to the needs for social ties, trustful relations, and protection. All hosted interviewees stressed that it were the personal and intimate relations that made a difference. Having left their homes, traveling for months/years, many had experienced a lack thereof. Thinking about their experiences in Brussels, many hosted interviewees became nostalgic and reflected on the loneliness they are experiencing in the UK. After Hébergement, contact was kept through phone, social media, and visits.[11] When it comes to visits to the UK, former hosts become hosted themselves. They are shown around, are invited to dinners, and—depending on the circumstances— might be accommodated by the people they had hosted in Brussels. The roles in the relationship have changed. With settling down, receiving papers, renting an apartment/room, and earning wages, the former hosted become independent

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[10]When I speak of "rather formalized" care provision, I refer to the expanding and professionalizing infrastructure of the Plateforme Citoyenne (see footnote on page 9) as these are the only shelters transiting undocumented migrants have access to in Belgium. Institutionalized shelters are exclusively for asylum seekers, yet there is an insufficient capacity to provide shelter for all asylum seekers. However, interviewees also referred to experiences they made in different countries—and in some cases as 'asylum seekers'.

[11]At the time of my research, it were only the hosts from Brussels who came to visit. Although all hosted interviewees in the UK intended to return to Belgium, this was not possible yet due to the lack of travel documents or to pandemic-related travel restrictions.

of the compassion of former hosts. Acute emergency support is no longer needed. While some relationships are still based on (rather one-dimensional) help and patriarchal relationships, others are changing into (reciprocal) friendships—depending on personality, needs, or age difference.

## CONCLUSION

[A] feminist democratic set of caring practices . . . is aimed in part at reducing both these power differentials and their effects on people. (Tronto, 2013, p. 33)

Caring encounters at home in the context of Hébergement are distinct. At 'home' caring between co-residents is expected and it is through caring that a dwelling becomes a 'home' (Bowlby, 2011). As such, the notion of home is closely related to the family and to caring between co-resident kin—although it too often also becomes a site of oppression, abuse and, uncare (Bowlby, 2011; Brickell, 2012). It is unusual, however, to encounter and care-with strangers in the private sphere—be it for one night or longer periods. There is no script for this particular social constellation. For all parties, it significantly diverges from other forms of shelter and migrant (or homeless) support. The resulting relations are intimate and meaningful. In emphasizing that encounters between "different" strangers alone do not bring about change, Amin (2010) advocates the need to create spaces of interdependence to break out of patterns of interaction and learn new ways of being and relating. However, learning and negotiating this specific togetherness can be overwhelming. Hosts and hosted require space to retreat. Whereas hosts have the power of choice to take a break from or stop hosting altogether, homeless undocumented migrants are far more limited in their strategies to withdraw. In being together in the space of the home, hosts and hosted are constantly confronted with negotiating intimacy, closeness, difference, and distance. Home is a symbolic haven for safety and protection but also a site of delimitation—of inclusion and exclusion (Brickell, 2012).

In Hébergement, "distant others" shared the intimate space of the home. Strangers became familiar and friendships developed. The analysis of encounters in the private sphere profoundly adds to the conceptualization of encounters across difference and their social effects. Further research (on other case studies) is required to contribute to the development and strengthening of a grounded understanding of encounters in the private sphere. For this, the racial dimensions of such caring encounters need to be taken into account. Considering the postcolonial context of Belgium and the entrenched uneven approaches to race in the country, I turn to Raghuram et al. (2009, p. 6), who stress "that a more critical engagement with postcolonial thinking will reveal not only the intimacies and generosities within existing practices of care and responsibility, but also expose their political contestations and the pain and the absences that underpin global relationships touched by histories of (post)colonialization, exploitation and inequality." Given the scope of this paper—and the fact that the interviewees self-directed in a variety of topics on "intercultural exchange" and "difference"—the racialized dimension of care in the context of Hébergements' caring

relations remains underexplored and needs further elaboration. Moreover, it is essential to extend the sample in the case of Hébergement and to interview hosted migrants who are not procured by hosts and perhaps do not (or no longer) maintain relationships with former hosts. Following the findings of this research, I furthermore advocate to include reflections on *friendship* relations in the remits of geographies of care and geographies of encounter, a suggestion that Bowlby (2011) already put forward over a decade ago: a focus on friendship moves away from heteronormative notions of family, kinship, and home toward different forms of intimate relationships that include much emotional labor, care, and support.

Homeless undocumented migrants are *cared-for* and *cared-about* through Hébergement. Unmet needs are noticed and responsibility is taken to meet those needs. As a transitory care fix, Hébergement temporarily and partially mitigates acute local needs for care. Furthermore, in being-together (*care-giving* and *care-receiving*), social boundaries are challenged and new social configurations and relations emerge. However, Hébergement does not solve the "problem"—the structural condition of uncare—that is rooted in the uneven distribution of care and the exclusive and racist migration regime. Quite the contrary, it inevitably reinforces existing needs and/or creates new ones. The principle of care-receiving includes "a moral quality of *responsiveness*" (Tronto, 2013, p. 35 emphasis in original), an observation of response and judgment on whether the care given was sufficient, successful, or complete, "[a]nd the response will often involve noting that new needs emerge as the past ones are met, thus the process continues" (Tronto, 2013, p. 35). This fourth phase of care reveals inherent ambivalences and the limits of the informal caring arrangement Hébergement, which does create and reproduce vertical relations of dependency: in one way or another, hosted persons remain restricted in acting autonomously. At the same time, hosts are often confronted with an overburden of caring duties and all are torn between different (sometimes conflicting) needs. Any rethinking of care in a more just society thus must include the guarantee for all to have sufficient means to care—for oneself and for others—and to be cared-for.

The grounded microanalysis of caring relations revealed that the setting of intimacy of Hébergement has affected *caring-with* relations. Interdependency was experienced and dichotomous normative representations of caregivers and care receivers—of local volunteers and undocumented migrants—were challenged. This presents a rupture of the current exclusive regimes of migration and (un)care that leads to the encounter of the (not so) 'distant other' and to novel relations, which both hosts and hosted gained from:

I think in a way it's good for the families. It's good for us who need a place to sleep. But it's also good for them [and their] kids to open their minds and to see. That can help them to think [and act] otherwise. (Sagal, Hosted, Interview, Belgium, 2020).

And it was very important for me to make [my children] realize that we have different realities in this world and that we are lucky

and that when we are in our situation, it's important if we can to help other people. Also, not to be afraid of what's different. . . . So, first step don't be afraid; start to know the others. (Sara, Host, Interview, Belgium, 2020).

For Sara, her three children encountering undocumented migrants and creating an awareness of injustice, needs, and privilege—to teach them to care-with—is a clear incentive. As such, this local alternative care arrangement responds to challenges of contemporary capitalist societies and moves away from capitalist paternalistic/maternalistic notions of care and the exclusive migration regime (Gabauer and Lebuhn, 2021). Yet, it is transitory and does not break with the dominant uneven distribution of care and responsibility; rather, the practice of caring in the context of Hébergement remains individualized, privatized, and feminized. With the individualization of care, the struggle to provide care is also individualized and privatized. Thus, it disappears from public awareness, becomes invisible, and is de-thematized (Winker, 2015). "The privatization of care is therefore probably the most potent systemic tool toward fragmenting and atomizing societies" (Trogal and Viderman, 2021, p. 105). As long as the separation of public and private is not abolished and as long as caring is exclusive, domesticized, feminized, and devalued, unjust hierarchical social relations will be reproduced. The challenges and limits of encounter, compassion, and care in the context of Hébergement point once more to the urgent need to reorganize care, and society—to break with capitalism's division of labor, its social classifications, and the separation of public and private spheres.

A feminist care ethics approach unravels the uneven geographies of care and addresses the complexity and ambivalences of caring arrangements. This perspective deepens the debate of refugee volunteer work and the geographies of encounter and envisages how caring-with in a caring society overturns dualisms and hierarchical social categorizations; a caring society is organized around the principle of care and is based on relations rather than identity (The Care Collective, 2020). It is centered upon a public notion of care, a democratic allocation of responsibilities, and on the recognition of interdependent relations. In embracing social interdependencies, a caring society challenges the hierarchical connotations of neediness and dependency, it disrupts patriarchal caring relations, and allows for a caring encounter that is based on solidarity rather than charity.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

## ETHICS STATEMENT

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

## FUNDING

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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