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# Redefining Urban Citizenship: Italian Migrants and Housing Occupations in 1970s Frankfurt am Main

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This article examines an overlooked group of participants within 1970s housing occupation movements in Western Europe – migrants. More specifically, I analyse Italian migrants' participation in housing occupations in the city of Frankfurt am Main, West Germany, from 1970–3. By engaging in visible protest, Italian migrant occupiers performed 'acts of urban citizenship' that ruptured understandings of localised citizenship and belonging. This case study thus illuminates two interrelated historic phenomena: (1) how social rights became de-territorialised and attached to the individual rather than the nation-state; and (2) how the city became a crucial site of citizenship formation, even across national borders.

## Introduction

In 1972, female Italian immigrants who were actively taking part in illegal housing occupations or rent strikes in Frankfurt am Main, West Germany, authored a flyer that they distributed to their neighbours. The purpose of their communication was to explain to 'West German women' why they went to such extreme lengths to demonstrate for improved living conditions. The Italian immigrants related that they did not want to 'just work here like crazy' and claimed the right to 'live decently like all human beings'. Citing both price and condition, they demanded 'clean, proper housing' that had enough space for the whole family to live together, rather than 'the hovels they lease to us foreigners'.<sup>1</sup> This flyer followed an unprecedented demonstration the year prior in which over 1,200 migrants took part in the largest number of rent strikes ever witnessed in Frankfurt am Main, with many other migrant families physically occupying apartments without paying rent and/or having legal claim to the spaces they inhabited.<sup>2</sup>

Migrants, such as the female authors above, took part in the roughly eighteen housing occupations that occurred in Frankfurt between 1970 and 1973, mainly in areas close to the city centre that had previously provided affordable housing but were undergoing rapid redevelopment.<sup>3</sup> Yet, voices such as theirs are frequently absent from narratives about this first wave of the housing occupations movement in the city. Instead, the Housing Fight (*Häuserkampf*) is dominated by the memory of young activists in motorcycle helmets facing off with police in the streets when city officials tried to clear housing occupations. As a result, scholars frequently place Frankfurt's occupation movement within the realm of radical protest. Sven Reichardt and Alexander Sedlmaier, for example, closely associate Frankfurt housing occupations with the *Spontis* – or anti-institutional and anti-doctrinaire activists who viewed squatting as a tool to challenge state power and capitalist economic systems.<sup>4</sup> Within the *Spontis*'s

<sup>1</sup> Leaflet, 18 Oct. 1972, Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main (IFS), Ortsgeschichte. 1972: Hausbesetzungen, S3/A 10.210.

<sup>2</sup> amantine, *Gender und Häuserkampf* (Münster: UNRAST-Verlag, 2011), 17. amantine does not capitalise their name.

<sup>3</sup> I shall hereafter refer to Frankfurt am Main simply as Frankfurt.

<sup>4</sup> See Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014) and Alexander Sedlmaier, *Consumption and Violence: Radical Protest in Cold-War West Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2014). The association between squatting and generally

broader anti-authoritarian effort, specific far-left political organisations such as the Frankfurt-based Revolutionary Struggle (*Revolutionärer Kampf*) and the Italian-based Continuous Struggle (*Lotta Continua*) entrenched themselves in the city's housing occupations as an extension of their push for more autonomy and self-governance in the factories and within society.

If one digs deeper into the housing occupations that took place in Frankfurt in the early 1970s, however, the reality is much more nuanced. A mixture of individuals took part in the first three occupations in the Westend neighbourhood – one of the areas most impacted by speculation and gentrification. Indeed, Frankfurt's city administration tolerated these initial occupations in September of 1970, recognising the strain that city redevelopment plans had placed on affordable housing. It was not until more than fifteen other occupations took place throughout the city in subsequent months and years – mainly instigated or supported by far-left political organisations – that the response of the city government changed. By 1972, state officials adopted a 'hard line' against occupiers whom they viewed as having more politicised motivations – a stance that led to violence when police tried to clear the occupations.

Due to dominant narratives that have focused on tensions between radical activists and city officials, sociologist Serhat Karakayali pointed out in 2000 that 'the migrant struggles against excessive rents and miserable living conditions at the same time and in the same place have largely disappeared from collective memory'.<sup>5</sup> This article thus builds on Karakayali's corrective and broader calls for a recognition of the heterogenous nature of housing movements to highlight migrant agency, as most existing literature fails to investigate their experiences and contributions.<sup>6</sup> In the 1970s *Häuserkampf* in Frankfurt, Italian migrants' relationship with other squatters within the city was complicated as migrant motivations both paralleled and clashed with local activists' movements. Frequently, radicalised activist groups viewed migrants as 'part of an international proletariat that activists must organize'. Yet, as Pierpaolo Mudu and Sutapa Chattopadhyay recently stressed in their 2015 edited anthology, 'the interaction between migrants and radical squatters is always full of surprises, frustrations, [and] uncertainties', especially as 'migrants are not usually anticapitalist or autonomous'.<sup>7</sup> So although migrant squatters shared the desire of more overtly radical squatters to challenge existing systems (including fellow Italians involved with the far-left organisation 'Continuous Struggle'), for

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young, native-born activists who were part of far-left political groups is not limited to the West German context, but is prevalent in other areas in Western Europe and North America. For an overview see Bart van der Steen, Leendert van Hoogenhuijze and Ask Katzeff, eds., *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present* (Oakland: PM Press, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Serhat Karakayali, 'Across Bockenheimer Landstraße', *Diskus*, 2 (2000), 7, available at <https://diskus.copypriot.com/stadt-stadt-across-bockenheimer-landstrasse> (last visited Apr. 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Freia Anders and Alexander Sedlmaier also highlight that 'research on [squatting in] the rich countries of the Global North has only rarely related the topics of poverty and squatting to each other', frequently portraying housing occupations as the product of youth and/or autonomous movements while leaving out marginalised populations. See Freia Anders and Alexander Sedlmaier, eds., *Public Goods Versus Economic Interests: Global Perspectives on the History of Squatting* (New York: Routledge, 2017). In his recent transnational survey of squatting movements, Alexander Vasudevan takes care to highlight the diversity of 'everyday practices and political imaginations of squatters' (8). Yet only very rarely does he discuss migrant participants. See Alexander Vasudevan, *The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting* (New York: Verso, 2017). Even in Bart van der Steen, Charlotte van Rooden and Merel Snoep, 'Who are the Squatters? Challenging Stereotypes through a Case Study of Squatting in the Dutch City of Leiden, 1970–1980', *Journal of Urban History*, 46, 6 (2020), 1368–85, the researchers only focus on working-class families and alternative youths while trying to diversify the participants.

<sup>7</sup> Pierpaolo Mudu and Sutapa Chattopadhyay, eds., *Migration, Squatting and Radical Autonomy: Resistance and Destabilization of Racist Regulatory Policies and B/Ordering Mechanisms* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 9. Activists and researchers who are part of the Squatting everywhere kollektive (SqEK) – including Mudu and Chattopadhyay – are among those who have recently tried to illustrate the heterogeneous nature of squatting participants. However, most research that investigates migrant squatters (including the majority of the case studies within Mudu's and Chattopadhyay's anthology) generally focus on the 1980s to the present, excluding the earlier wave of housing occupation movements discussed here.

Italian migrants at the centre of this study, their concerns focused more on social rights and discrimination rather than attempts to subvert state power and capitalism writ large.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, I go beyond scholarly investigations of squatting as a tool of radical political protest against the state to analyse what motivated Italian migrants and their experiences while occupying. Housing shortages due to urban renewal plans – in conjunction with discriminatory rental practices toward ‘foreigners’ – meant that Italian migrants were one of the groups hardest hit by high prices and low availability of housing. Though Italian migrant housing occupiers certainly joined or were supported by other activist groups, I borrow from the framework of Manuela Bojadžijev to underscore the practices of migrants themselves instead of reducing their participation to anti-capitalist or class struggles.<sup>9</sup>

I view migrants as participating in ‘acts of citizenship’, which have been defined by Engin Isin and Greg Nielsen as ‘collective or individual deeds that rupture social-historical patterns’.<sup>10</sup> Building on their framework, I illustrate how Italian migrant housing occupiers performed what I call ‘acts of urban citizenship’ – or how they claimed ‘rights relating to the experience of urban residence’ that led to an enlargement of what it meant to be community members. Their acts of urban citizenship subsequently illuminate two interrelated historical phenomena: (1) how social rights began to be de-territorialised and linked to the individual person rather than the nation-state;<sup>11</sup> and (2) how the city increasingly became the ‘vital site for the development of citizenship’, even beyond national borders.<sup>12</sup>

## Methods and Organisation

One of the reasons that scholarship on the *Häuserkampf* in Frankfurt is concentrated on radical political groups is because activists in those circles produced the most material. For instance, the most cited book on Frankfurt housing occupations was written by the *Häusererrat* – or council for occupied houses and those on rent strike – an organisation associated with the *Sponti* movement that was heavily involved in the occupations and was dominated by radicalised students and self-identifying activists.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the *Spontis* also discussed and documented many housing occupation-related events in their magazine ‘We want everything’ (*Wir wollen alles*). In order to uncover migrant occupiers’ voices, I move away from these sources to read between the lines of neighbourhood flyers, news articles from Frankfurt’s three largest newspapers and city documents housed in Frankfurt’s Institute for City History (*Institut für Stadtgeschichte*). In addition, I compare and corroborate migrant practices and perspectives with oral interviews I conducted with a West German housing occupier and with Giuseppe Zambon, one of the leaders of the Italian-based Tenant’s Union (*Unione Inquilini*; UI) that moved into Frankfurt to support Italian migrant tenants. In contrast to the *Spontis* and radical far-left organisations, the UI took a ‘moderate conciliatory stance’ and generally sought to cooperate with state officials in expanding housing protection and access to Italian migrants.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Though concerned about shelter, I will also show how migrants’ social position moved their actions beyond the category of ‘deprivation-based squatting’ outlined by Hans Pruijt, ‘The Logic of Urban Squatting’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24, 1 (2012), 19–45.

<sup>9</sup> Manuela Bojadžijev, *Die windige Internationale: Rassismus und Kämpfe der Migration* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2008), 12.

<sup>10</sup> Engin F. Isin and Greg M. Nielsen, eds., *Acts of Citizenship* (London: Zed Books, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Karim Fertikh, ‘From Territorialized Rights to Personalized International Rights? The Making of the European Convention on the Social Security of Migrant Workers (1957)’, in Monika Baár and Paul van Trigt, eds., *Marginalized Groups, Inequalities and the Post-War Welfare State: Whose Welfare?* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 29–48. Étienne Balibar refers to this and related processes as the ‘transnationalization of the political’ when discussing ‘transnational citizenship’, in *We, The People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, translated by James Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> James Holston, ed., *Cities and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), viii.

<sup>13</sup> See Häusererrat Frankfurt, ed., *Wohnungskampf in Frankfurt* (Munich: Trikont-Verlag, 1974).

<sup>14</sup> Vasudevan, *Squatting*, 108.

This article is organised around a handful of the roughly eighteen housing occupations that took place in Frankfurt from 1970 to 1973. The first two sections outline Italian migrants' involvement in the first occupation, paying attention to migrants' experiences and attempts to portray themselves as community members. The third section then sketches the city administration's shift to cracking down on occupations. The final two sections subsequently move from occupations in which Italian migrants co-occupied to ones that they independently instigated as they attempted to distance themselves from activists with more incendiary political goals.

### The First Occupation: Eppsteiner Straße 47

Facing a shortage of workers to fuel the economic boom that West Germany experienced following the Second World War combined with Italian efforts to address the perennial lack of job opportunities in their southern states, West Germany signed the first bi-lateral labor agreement recruiting foreign workers with Italy in 1955, soon followed by other nation-states.<sup>15</sup> Their stay was meant to be temporary; migrant workers were frequently referred to as 'guest workers', implying that their home was elsewhere. In ensuing years, however, predominantly single men either married or sent for their families, increasing the number of migrants in West Germany. By 1970, for instance, migrants composed 10 per cent of Frankfurt's population, whose city administration was headed by the Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; SPD) from 1946–77.<sup>16</sup> In addition to population growth, housing availability became further exacerbated by the city's 1968 'Five Finger' redevelopment plan, named such because the zones slated for change resembled a splayed hand (see [Figure 1](#)). Within and adjacent to each of the 'fingers', developers purchased run-down buildings that had previously provided low-income housing in anticipation of building new businesses, offices and luxury apartments.

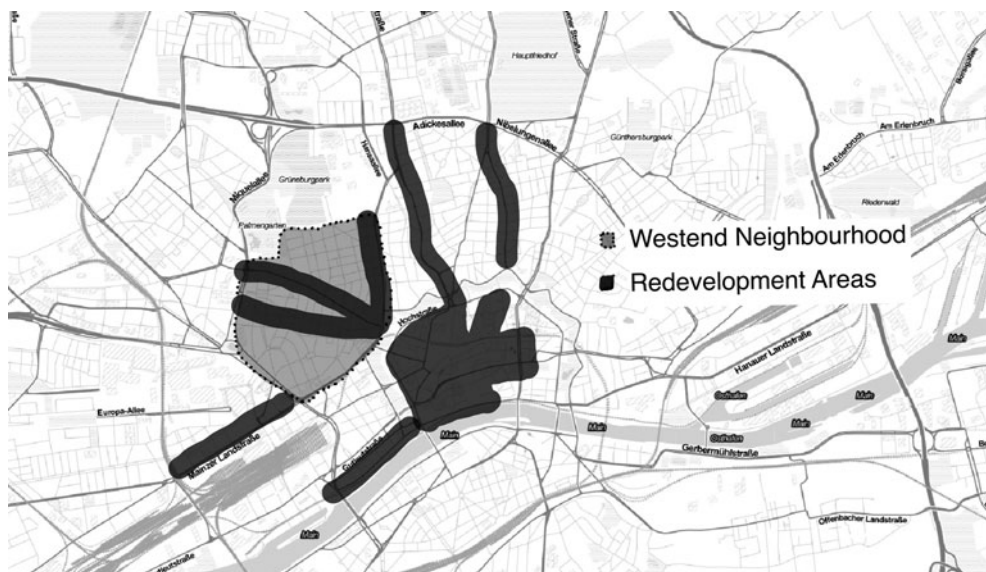
Migrants were hit particularly hard by speculative practices – the combination of availability and social and cultural discrimination often relegated them to precarious living situations. A 1972 study commissioned by the city of Frankfurt reported that only 30 per cent of foreign families lived in apartments that met a standard of living comparable to their West German neighbours, defined as having electricity, running water, washing facilities, sufficient heating and a toilet.<sup>17</sup> It was in these disadvantaged circumstances that Italians within house 47 of Eppsteiner Straße in the Westend neighbourhood decided to join their fellow tenants and launch the first housing occupation in Frankfurt. Experiences within the occupied house on Eppsteiner Straße vividly illustrate how Italians committed various acts of urban citizenship aimed at extending social rights and protections that had previously been denied them due to social discrimination and their status as migrants.

To give context, residents of Eppsteiner Straße 47 had received notice that their landlord wished to empty the apartments in anticipation of its demolition and eventual redevelopment in early 1970. Based on internal conversations within the building, those who had not vacated the house determined to pay only 10 per cent of their wages in rent, take over the house for renovation and prevent eviction and demolition. The house was located in Westend (see [Figure 1](#)), one of the neighbourhoods most impacted by speculation and redevelopment. As a result, the local neighbourhood organisation opposed to Frankfurt's urban renewal plans, Westend Action Collective (*Aktionsgemeinschaft Westend*; AGW), supported the occupation. According to an account written by a young West

<sup>15</sup> For a history of guest worker labour migration to West Germany see Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Ernst Stracke, *Stadterstörung und Stadteilkampf: Innerstädtische Ustrukturierungsprozesse, Wohnungsnot und soziale Bewegungen in Frankfurt am Main* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1980), 105.

<sup>17</sup> Maria Borris, *Ausländische Arbeiter in einer Großstadt: Eine empirische Untersuchung am Beispiel Frankfurt* (Frankfurt/M: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1973), 151.



**Figure 1.** Frankfurt's Five Finger Redevelopment Plan and Westend Neighbourhood (Map created using QGIS open software, Apple Markup, and Microsoft Word).

German and student occupier, Til Schulz, the initial occupiers consisted of a handful of German students and several Italian migrant families.<sup>18</sup>

One of the Italian renters called the Milan-based tenant's union (UI), for help and asked them to support the occupation. Giuseppe Zambon, a UI leader, answered the phone and asked in which neighbourhood he was located. The man responded, 'No, in Frankfurt'. Somewhat surprisingly, Zambon agreed to cross national borders and move the organisation into West Germany, turning the UI into a transnational entity.<sup>19</sup> In a pamphlet written in German and distributed throughout the city, the UI described its objective as 'propagat[ing] the fight for the right to housing in order to appeal to as many guest workers as possible'.<sup>20</sup> With the assistance of both the AGW and UI, Eppsteiner Straße 47 was officially occupied on 19 September 1970.

Relationships between occupiers soon became quite strained due to power dynamics and dissimilar end goals, differences frequently glossed over in existing literature. For instance, Schulz and some of his West German counterparts wished to challenge the dominant structure of the nuclear family by creating diverse forms of communal living within the building. One manifestation would have been shared responsibilities and decision making – characteristics in line with contemporary 'autonomist' movements. However, as Lelle Franz, a single mother of two who occupied due to her association with AGW recounted, 'We tried for two years to establish house rules. We had to table them again and again'.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the Italian occupiers preferred inhabiting separate apartments based on family unit. One father, Mr Francesco, complained that he should pay less in rent because he had fewer

<sup>18</sup> Til Schulz, 'Zum Beispiel Eppsteinerstraße [sic] 47. Wohnungskampf, Hausbesetzung, Wohnkollektiv', in Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Karl Markus Michel, eds., *Kursbuch 27* (Berlin: Kursbuch/Wagenbuch, 1972), 86–7.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Giuseppe Zambon, conducted by author in Frankfurt/M on 20 June 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Pamphlet, 'Der brave Bürger, der die bestehenden Gesetze achtet, seinen Mietzins regelmässig zahlt und seinen Protest gegen die hohen Mieten auf Worte beschränkt, ist nicht nur ein Opfer, sondern gleichzeitig auch ein Komplize der Bodenspekulation', Primo Moroni Archive (PM), uncatalogued.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Sichtermann and Kai Sichtermann, *Das ist unser Haus: Eine Geschichte der Hausbesetzung* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2017), 118–9.



children and lived in a smaller apartment than the other families. He also refused to contribute funds for the running of the day care established on the first floor, as his children were already too old.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, Til Schulz reflected that his and others' initial enthusiasm for a collective living was soon overtaken by the reality of putting it into practice, as the above example illustrates. Schulz admitted that although migrant families participated in the occupation willingly, a vision of collective living 'basically [stemmed from] just the squatters, the intellectuals, the hippies, the students; we occupied with the families, with their consent, but we overruled them with the collective idea'.<sup>23</sup> A single mother who first occupied while she was pregnant, Erna Müller, agreed. Although she wished to raise her son in a non-traditional manner, she related that some migrants feared that 'families would be dissolved'. Müller further explained that occupations which privileged 'houses with no separate rooms, where everyone slept together' differed from those in which migrants took part because 'for the houses that were occupied by migrants, that was not at all the point, in that families lived together'.<sup>24</sup>

Giuseppe Zambon of the UI described a similar difference in strategy between Italian occupiers whose claims centred on more livable conditions while challenging their social and political marginalisation. In an interview at his bookshop in Frankfurt, he related that he himself had occupied in Eppsteiner Straße. He alluded to that occupation and others in explaining why the UI settled for more immediate, concrete compromises with municipal institutions to provide shelter for migrant families. According to him, many self-proclaimed activists disagreed with this strategy. He related the following:

When, from time to time, we happened to be successful – for example, when a judge ruled in our favor ... in our attempts to protect tenants from eviction – we were accused of being false missionaries. Why? [Some claimed,] 'Now that you have won the house, you think you've arrived'. No, we didn't think we had arrived, but what can you do? [They responded] 'We need to continue the ... revolution'.<sup>25</sup>

Although migrants' actions did arguably lead to political consequences, many migrant occupiers' acts of urban citizenship focused on reform and desire for shelter and socio-political recognition, thus differing from those put forth by self-identifying activists seeking more radical change. As occupations progressed, schisms in motivation and language would become even more manifest. In the meantime, however, occupiers did share some common goals that had led to their alliance in the first place, including redefining what it meant to be an urban citizen or community member.

### Making Their Own Meanings of Urban Citizenship

In addition to contesting the effects of redevelopment and asserting claims to decent and affordable housing, the residents of Eppsteiner Straße 47 went to great lengths to establish themselves as good neighbours. Many of their actions and communications reflected what Kathleen Canning characterises as an attribute of participatory citizenship, or the 'positioning of citizens and would-be citizens to one another within a polity, or between themselves and the relevant instances of governmentality'.<sup>26</sup> This relational positioning as an act of urban citizenship had particularly important ramifications for the Italian migrant participants who did not have formal West German citizenship; it legitimised their claim to being community members and, as such, deserving of access to and the protection of basic social rights.

<sup>22</sup> Schulz, 'Eppsteinerstraße', 93–4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 95–6.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Erna Müller, conducted by author in Frankfurt/M on 3 June 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Giuseppe Zambon, conducted by author in Frankfurt/M on 20 June 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Kathleen Canning, 'Reflections on the Vocabulary of Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Germany', in Geoff Eley and Jan Palmowski, eds., *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 231.

One of the first steps residents of house 47 undertook to establish better public relations with the surrounding community was to print a letter they sent to residents in the area to clarify their intentions. They wished to present themselves as neighbours who positively contributed to Frankfurt's social and economic well-being. As such, they asserted their role in what James Holston has described as 'city building', – or inhabiting the urban landscape in constructive ways that contributes to its growth and in turn leads to a consolidated sense of a 'right to the city'.<sup>27</sup> In their letter, the Eppsteiner Straße occupiers appealed to other city-dwellers on moral grounds and illustrated why their efforts would improve the neighbourhood. After discussing the impact of redevelopment in the Westend neighbourhood in the letters they mailed, the tenants explained that they had already begun renovating the building and were 'ready to negotiate with the homeowner for a reasonable rent'. They concluded by trying to create a sense of shared purpose with letter recipients, claiming, 'We believe that all Westend dwellers here are threatened by similar measures by landlords and speculators, and believe that you therefore understand our countermeasures'.<sup>28</sup> It was their hope that by alluding to the negative consequences many locals could relate to, and assuring them that they were already trying to improve the premises, they would garner greater support. They even set up a communal day care on the first floor of the building; it was welcomed in the neighbourhood due to the lack of accessible education and childcare options, adding weight to occupiers' claims to be acting out of civic duty.<sup>29</sup> By portraying their endeavours as productive for the overall city, migrants and other occupiers asserted a position as contributors within Frankfurt, situating themselves on the same plane as formal citizens and neighbours, many of whom were similarly experiencing the effects of gentrification.

Physical renovations undertaken by the residents accordingly improved quality of living for low-income tenants and sought to replicate widely accepted perceptions of a basic standard of living. An article in the centre-left *Frankfurt New Press* (*Frankfurter Neue Presse*; FNP) depicted the apartment of Camillo, one of the Italian occupiers. Journalists narrated that when Camillo comes home from work, he 'returns to a spacious, freshly painted apartment. He and his family do not need to live in a neglected, overcrowded house, like many other guest workers. For exactly eighteen days he has had this apartment; he pays ten per cent of his income for rent'.<sup>30</sup> In the above example, Camillo's apartment serves as a legible text. The comparison between Camillo and 'many other guest workers' established a correlation between poor housing conditions – such as neglect and overcrowding – with being a 'guest' or non-citizen. Instead, Camillo lived in a 'spacious, freshly painted apartment', an anomaly for someone with his legal status. As subtle as it may be, the article implied that an improvement in living condition potentially correlated to an improvement in social and political standing. In other words, a proper home was representative of a certain standard of citizenship or urban belonging, albeit informal.<sup>31</sup>

While positioning themselves in relation to other community members, Eppsteiner Straße occupiers also publicly criticised speculators and the city administration's role in the detrimental effects of urban renewal within their neighbourhood. Painted sheets written in Italian flanked those written in German on the main gate and draped from balconies (see [Figure 2](#)). Some of the slogans posed a direct challenge to the government, with expressions such as 'If the magistrate and the police take the side of the speculators, then they are enemies of all tenants', or 'We have occupied this house to achieve what the government and the magistrate only promise'. Other slogans were directed towards engendering solidarity with passers-by, for instance: 'We occupied this house because the apartments

<sup>27</sup> James Holston, 'Housing Crises, Right to the City, and Citizenship', in Edward Murphy and Najib B. Hourani, eds., *The Housing Question: Tensions, Continuities and Contingencies in the Modern City* (London: Ashgate, 2013), 262.

<sup>28</sup> Schulz, 'Eppsteinerstraße', 90.

<sup>29</sup> Albert Bechtold, 'Sympathien für die Eppsteiner Straße 47', *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* nr. 239.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Alles, 'Haus Eppsteiner Straße 47 wurde vom Kollektiv wieder bewohnbar gemacht', *Frankfurter Neue Presse* (FNP), 7 Oct. 1970.

<sup>31</sup> For a similar discussion in a separate context see Edward Murphy, *For a Proper Home: Housing Rights in the Margins of Urban Chile, 1960–2010* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).



Figure 2. Multilingual signs posted at the Eppsteiner Straße 47 Occupation (Reproduced with permission. Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, S7Wer Nr. 4, Inge Werth.)

had been vacant for a long time and because the apartments were systematically destroyed. For the owner, the house is an object of speculation, for us it is urgently needed living space'. Yet another encouraged other residents to join by urging: 'The apartments belong to those who live in them. Do not let yourself be driven out of your housing! Resist together! Drive away the speculators!'

The fact that these slogans were written in Italian in addition to German further demonstrates that migrants increasingly viewed themselves as having a right to decent housing within the city, even without being German. Rather than nationality, their claims to belonging began to centre on a subjective and constructed sense of urban or localised citizenship – illustrating a trend in associating social rights with the individual rather than emanating from the nation-state in the decades following the Second World War. Their sheets were a means to build bridges within the local community, enhancing commonalities in an attempt to promote greater inclusion. House 47 residents also sent a letter to the mayor – the municipal position that embodied the power to either accept or negate their claims of community building. In their correspondence, tenants highlighted their connection to other urban citizens and why they should be considered such. They recalled house 47's previous state of decay and abandonment and described their efforts to 'restore this house to its purpose as a place of residence for people'. They also claimed that other residents had already accepted their assertion of a right to space and belonging, as manifest by the 'constant sympathy of almost all of our neighbours and visitors from the whole of Frankfurt'.<sup>32</sup>

It appears that many Eppsteiner Straße 47 neighbours did receive occupiers' actions positively, partially because it was located in the Westend neighbourhood that had long protested the effects of redevelopment and speculation. When a Stuttgart paper picked up the news, it reported that over 2,000 German mark (DM) in anonymous contributions were donated to help with paint and wallpaper for the restoration project.<sup>33</sup> In addition, AGW issued an official statement of support to the press. It read, in part, 'We welcome and support the occupation of house 47 on Eppsteiner Straße.

<sup>32</sup> Open letter to the mayor, 20 Sept. 1970, IfS, 1970: Hausbesetzungen. S3/A 9588.

<sup>33</sup> Albert Bechtold, 'Sympathien'.



We see in it and in further occupations of vacant houses a suitable means to mitigate and eliminate deficits in city planning . . . it will alleviate the housing shortage in Frankfurt'.<sup>34</sup> Even the more conservative *Frankfurt General Newspaper* (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*; FAZ) reported that local Westenders greeted the occupation with 'unusual popularity'. The article recounted that although older citizens in particular acknowledged a 'breach in law . . . only a few of them consider the action to be wrong'.<sup>35</sup> This view may be due to the fact that Frankfurt in general, and this neighbourhood in particular, had long been a stronghold of blue-collar workers who could more easily relate to the socio-economic hardships that the occupiers claimed to be challenging, as one interviewee asserted.<sup>36</sup> Some community members offered physical sustenance, serving hot soup to their 'twenty new neighbours'.<sup>37</sup> The many residents who supported or at least did not oppose the occupation strengthened the occupiers' assertion that the right to a home was a widely held view among the general population – and one that migrant occupiers attached to themselves as individuals despite their residence in a different nation-state.

### Frankfurt City Administration Takes a 'Hard Line'

In the months following the initial occupation in Eppsteiner Straße 47, migrants participated in occupations in both Corneliusstraße and Liebigstraße (see [Figure 3](#)). City officials oscillated in their response, with the mayor expressing sympathy for the socioeconomic position of those who felt they had little recourse. Gradually, municipal authorities hardened as an increasing number of occupations cropped up throughout the city after the first three occupations. Still, migrants' claims were received in distinctive ways, in part due to perceptions of both their approach and objectives as being less threatening than that of other more radical occupiers. The official response to various occupations throughout Frankfurt reveals chasms within government leadership itself about questions of public order, legality and the position of so-called guest workers whose stay became much less temporary than originally intended.

Though the Eppsteiner Straße 47 occupation continued to be tolerated, by December of 1970 city leadership had finally settled upon evicting the second and third occupations, and generally pursued that line of action for all subsequent occupations. Comments from Frankfurt's police president underscore the additional layer of precarity that migrants faced in asserting their claims to housing and, by association, their place as community members. In reporting on the impending eviction of the Corneliusstraße occupation, the left-leaning newspaper the *Frankfurt Review* (*Frankfurter Rundschau*; FR) recorded police president Knut Müller remarking that there would be 'consequences of a refusal to voluntarily leave the house', namely that 'the foreigners would probably have to reckon with a withdrawal of their residence permit'. The FNP similarly included a direct quote from him which stated, 'at the slightest resistance of the residents, the Italians who are in the house must expect immediate expulsion from Germany'.<sup>38</sup> Notably, the announcement by the police president specifically referred to Italian occupiers. In doing so, he emphasised their marginality and placed them outside the parameters of national belonging. The collective that formed to represent occupied houses and houses on rent strike, the *Häuserrat*, connected his comments to the issue of rights, declaring 'they want to take away from those without rights their last right, that of the right to work'.<sup>39</sup>

The stance of police president Knut Müller often came in conflict with the mayor's communications. Mayor Möller was more hesitant to use force and he began to differentiate between some occupiers who did so out of social need and other co-occupiers whom he viewed as encouraging illegality

<sup>34</sup> 'Arbeiter und Studenten...viele Sympathiebeweise', *Frankfurter Rundschau* (FR), 21 Sept. 1970.

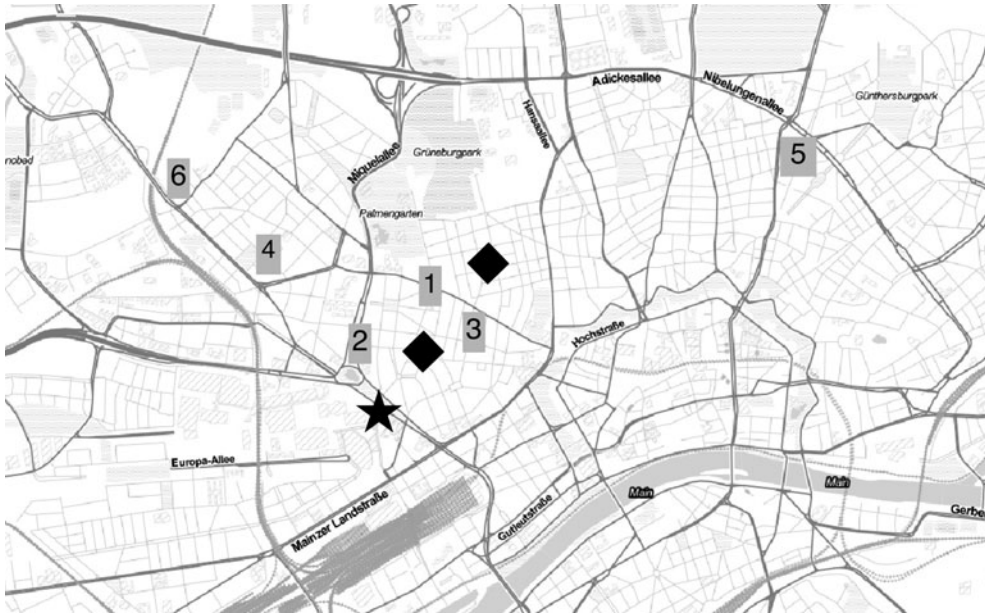
<sup>35</sup> 'Die Diskussion um das Westendhaus geht weiter', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), 23 Sept. 1970.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Erna Müller, conducted by author in Frankfurt/M on 3 June 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Claudia Michels, 'Im Frankfurter Westend began der 'Häuserkampf' der 70er Jahre', *FR*, 19 Sept. 2000. This was an article published thirty years after the events.

<sup>38</sup> 'Haus-Besetzer rechnen mit Räumung', *FNP*, 19 Dec. 1970.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



**Figure 3.** Selected Occupations/Conflicts in Frankfurt am Main, 1970–73 (Map created using QGIS open software and Microsoft Word). 1 Eppsteiner Straße 47 → (September 1970) 2 Corneliusstraße 24 → (October 1970) 3 Liebigstraße 20 → (October 1970) 4 Leipziger Straße 3 → (May 1973) 5 Rothschildallee Camp → (September 1973) 6 Friesengasse 5 and 7 → (September 1973) ★ Bettinastraße 35 ◆ Police Conflict over Forced Evictions in Grünebergweg (upper) ◆ Police Conflict over Forced Evictions in Kettenhofweg (lower)

and potentially even violence. In comments to the FR, the mayor placed the majority of the blame on ‘instigators’ who endangered ‘foreign’ workers and their families by encouraging them to break the law. He criticised what he perceived as false hope when German co-occupiers gave the impression that migrant families could stay there for an extended period of time.<sup>40</sup> In their coverage of the same press conference, the more conservative newspaper, the FAZ, confirmed that the mayor viewed ‘instigators’ as irresponsible in that their actions could eventually lead to the deportation of ‘foreign’ families, still emphasising the difference in potential repercussions based on migrant status.<sup>41</sup>

Though officials negotiated the relatively peaceful dispersal of the Corneliusstraße and Liebigstraße occupations, evictions of other occupations soon turned violent. Most notably, the clearing of student-led occupations in Grünebergweg (1971) and Kettenhofweg (1973) spilled into the streets (see Figure 3), with students and other activists throwing stones and Molotov cocktails and police responding with batons and firehoses. In reporting the number of injured during the Grünebergweg eviction, the FR termed the conflict the ‘biggest confrontation between police and demonstrators since 1968’.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, more conservative-leaning papers labeled the Kettenhofweg occupiers as ‘leftist radicals’ and ‘anarchists’ and called its violent clearing ‘red Wednesday’, drawing ties between the occupation and terrorist groups such as the Red Army Faction – accusations particularly charged in the context of a divided Germany situated in the crosshairs of the Cold War. The police president, Knut Müller, only cemented these views in his debrief after the conflict with the following comments: ‘We must suppress this latent potential for civil war, or anarchy will reign. Occupied houses are turning more and more into a hotbed of political crime. There, the climate of

<sup>40</sup> ‘Jetzt Schluß mit den Hausbesetzungen’: Möller spricht von verantwortungslosen Initiatoren’, *FR*, 22 Oct. 1970.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Oberbürgermeister versucht sich zu rechtfertigen’, *FNP*, 22 Oct. 1970.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Schlacht um leeres Wohnhaus’, *FR*, 30 Sept. 1971.

terror is bred'.<sup>43</sup> As illustrated by the above references, it is perhaps unsurprising that violent street conflict was and is often associated with Frankfurt's housing occupation movement in the volatile years of the early 1970s. However, the enduring climate of tension does not mean that all occupiers or city responses caused ripples of radical protest and/or a strong-armed state response.

### Migrant-Instigated Occupations

As exhibited by the Grünebergweg and Kettenhofweg clearings, the increase in violence as well as the perception of housing occupations as politically threatening meant that the risk in pursuing this form of collective action increased exponentially in the space of about two years. However, some Italian migrants' precarious living conditions were so dismal, they felt they had no other recourse than occupying. This section examines the actions of Italian tenants who lived in house 35 of Bettinastraße (see Figure 3), paying particular attention to how they independently instigated many acts of urban citizenship and forms of collective protest rather than being co-occupiers of a German-led demonstration. Though other politicised organisations would lend support, the Italian migrant occupiers often signalled their claims as less 'politically' motivated (or at least not motivated by a radicalised strand of politics demonstrated by other occupations). They also gravitated towards allies deemed less threatening by the city administration, such as the UI and the *Jusos* – left-wing members of the SPD who generally sought to move the mainstream SPD further to the political left.

Moreover, Bettinastraße residents often couched their justifications on moral grounds, or as a result of immediate physical need. By occupying and visibly asserting their claims in public, migrants demanded what Judith Butler has termed 'a more liveable set of economic, social and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of precarity' as they engaged in embodied collective action. As city leaders (reluctantly) acknowledged migrants' challenge to sociopolitical exclusion through acts of urban citizenship, they modified institutionalised social service practices, thus enlarging who had access to the German welfare state and by relation, definitions of urban citizenship.<sup>44</sup>

According to a police inspection conducted in 1972 – one year prior to the migrants' occupation actions – sixty-two Italians lived in house 35 of Bettinastraße, twenty-nine of whom were children.<sup>45</sup> The Italian tenants claimed that their apartments were filled with 'cockroaches, rats, mice [and] cracked plaster falling from the ceiling' – conditions that the landlords refused to rectify.<sup>46</sup> In May of 1973, four of the Italian families occupied house number 3 in Leipziger Straße because of these conditions (see Figure 3). Their actions were supported by the UI and the *Jusos* who also pushed for Leipziger Straße to be declared a pedestrian area to increase community safety. According to Giuseppe Zambon, the house was owned by a bank and had been kept empty for years, with the plan to tear it down and rebuild. His account is backed by an article in the centre-right FAZ that reported the property as owned by the Frankfurt Savings Bank (*Frankfurter Sparkasse*), currently the fourth largest savings bank in Germany.<sup>47</sup> Zambon further stated that the migrant families occupied just as it was about to be demolished (which was likely how they were alerted to the fact that it was empty) and that supporters formed a human barrier to prevent a forced eviction.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast to the violence on the streets just months prior surrounding the clearing of the Kettenhofweg occupation, city officials surprisingly agreed to let the Italian families stay. The city decided to take over the property, even though the cost of renovations would be between 90,000 and 100,000 DM (or close to 1.5 million Euro in today's currency) according to estimates in an article in the FAZ. Still, the Italian migrants insisted that the occupied apartments 'were much better than

<sup>43</sup> 'Nach dem Straßenschlacht in Frankfurt: SPD-Radikale wollen Polizei-Chef abschießen', *Abendpost*, 30 Mar. 1973.

<sup>44</sup> Judith Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 11.

<sup>45</sup> Police Report, '31 S 13. Polizeirevier: an die Inspektion West'. 17 Oct. 1972, IFS, Wohnungsamt. 969.

<sup>46</sup> amantine, *Gender*, 17.

<sup>47</sup> 'Hausbesetzung in der Leipzigerstraße', *FAZ*, 21 May 1973.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Giuseppe Zambon, conducted by author in Frankfurt/M on 20 June 2018.

their previous quarters' despite the need for significant improvements.<sup>49</sup> In addition, officials from the Italian Consulate arrived on the scene to try and find a better housing solution for all families in Bettinastraße 35, not just those who had physically occupied in Leipziger Straße.

Both the conservative FAZ and the left-leaning FR spotlighted the police president as being instrumental in negotiating the compromise. One article entitled 'Patience Paid Off' reported Chief Inspector Müller as explaining, 'We could not just haul women and little kids out of the [occupied] house. We found it more desirable to place it under the jurisdiction of Wohnheim GmbH', or the city-affiliated public housing entity.<sup>50</sup> He also labeled house 35 on Bettinastraße as 'unmenschlich', a German word that is used to communicate both the meaning of 'unhuman' and 'inhuman', thereby accentuating how the Italian migrants' housing fell below a normalised standard of living deemed to be 'human'. The FR even went so far as to assert that the mice within house 35 would 'nibble on children's fingers', marshalling the image of the most vulnerable population to highlight the tenants' precarious position. Knut Müller's response contrasts greatly with the violent images of the Grünebergweg and Kettenhofweg conflicts, as well as his earlier comments referring to other, generally native-born occupiers as 'terrorists'. Moreover, he did not characterise the occupiers as 'foreign', but as 'women and little kids'. These juxtapositions demonstrate the perceived difference between politics and morality, or the idea that Italian occupiers seemed to be motivated by social need rather than politics as traditionally understood. The migrants' claims to increasingly prevalent ideas of a basic standard of living – as reified by Knut Müller's characterisation of their substandard living quarters – further highlights apparent differences in how occupations were received. By partially extending the umbrella of urban citizenship, as informal as it was, authorities began to acknowledge Italian migrants as city dwellers, rather than being wholly 'foreign'.

When the promised help of better housing still did not materialise, the rest of the residents of Bettinastraße pursued a milder, albeit still deviant mode of protest: they continued their rent strike throughout the summer of 1973. They first reduced their rent price from 800 DM to 450 DM, and then suspended all rent payments. In contrast to the police report in 1972 that documented sixty-two Italians living in the building, the UI claimed that the number was actually eighty in 1973 – space was so restricted that no one had a bed to themselves.<sup>51</sup> When the landlord threatened legal action in response to the Bettinastraße rent strike, the UI issued a statement on the Italian tenants' behalf which declared: 'We live in Bettinastraße 35, where the ceilings fall on our heads, where bugs and mice contaminate the house, where the landlord is quietly waiting until the roof collapses'.<sup>52</sup> Rather than drawing criticism, the public largely responded in favour of the tenants, notwithstanding their legal status as outsiders. In fact, when Albert Osswald – the Minister President of the state of Hessen (the region in which Frankfurt is located) – toured the living conditions of Bettinastraße earlier that spring, he stated 'we should be ashamed that there is such a thing in our country'.<sup>53</sup>

In spite of public support, conditions still did not improve quickly for the families living in Bettinastraße. The majority of Italian families resolved to visibly protest by taking to the streets at the end of September 1973. Their protest march grew to over 200 people, the majority of whom were fellow Italian migrants speckled with a small number of *Jusos*. Their goal was to occupy an undisclosed number of sixty empty luxury condominiums in a newly constructed building in Nordend, a wealthier part of the city (see Figure 3). When police forcibly prevented their entry, the *Jusos* provided three large tents and a handful of Italian families from Bettinastraße began camping out in an adjacent park.<sup>54</sup> In a flyer disseminated by the Italians to explain their actions to the surrounding neighbourhood, they outlined their conditions in Bettinastraße in terms of violations of a normalised basic standard of living: the landlord only provided one toilet for twenty people, there was no electricity

<sup>49</sup> 'Hausbesetzung in der Leipzigerstraße', *FAZ*, 21 May 1973.

<sup>50</sup> 'Geduld hat sich gelohnt', *FR*, 21 May 1973.

<sup>51</sup> Hermann Lammert, 'Wo Ratten huschen und Kakerlaken kriechen', *FR*, 30 Sept. 1973.

<sup>52</sup> 'Wir brauchen keine Luxuswohnungen', *FAZ*, 29 Aug. 1973.

<sup>53</sup> 'Beschlagnahme leerer Wohnungen gefordert', *FR*, 29 Aug. 1973.

<sup>54</sup> 'Neue Phase der Hausbesetzungen'/Jungsozialisten helfen Italienern', *FR*, 30 Aug. 1973.

or heating, and the walls and floors were constantly damp. They also shared that each family had already spent over 2500 DM of their own money to try and make it more habitable, with no repairs or improvement from the management.<sup>55</sup>

Mr Korn, the landlord of the luxury apartments in Rothschildallee, issued a financial explanation to the press as to why sixty apartments were vacant notwithstanding the housing shortage in the city. He painted a rather bleak picture, relating that even though he also considered the rental price of ten DM per square meter as high, he would still lose 400,000 DM a year due to inflation. He claimed that if the protesters did take over the empty apartments, his other tenants would ‘run away’.<sup>56</sup> In reporting the Rothschildallee protest actions, the news publication ‘WIR’ took care to note that the Italian tenants were currently paying the equivalent of ten DM per square meter for much more dismal conditions in apartments on a neighbouring street.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, one of Frankfurt’s deputy mayors proposed a solution to prevent apartments from remaining vacant. Although Deputy Mayor Rudi Sölch (SPD) disapproved of the Italians occupying the green space in front of the luxury housing, he acknowledged ‘the fact that thousands of new apartments in Frankfurt are empty “because of excessive rent”’. He proposed a legislative solution, describing it as a priority for the SPD to ‘ensure that such new apartments are also used’.<sup>58</sup> Some news outlets viewed this stance as backpedaling from the administration’s ‘hard line’ and made their opinions known to their readers. For instance, the FAZ entitled their article on Sölch’s response as ‘The Deputy Mayor Applauds the Occupation Attempt’, although the substance of his comments did not seem to communicate support of the actions themselves, rather the need spurring the migrants’ protest.<sup>59</sup>

The next morning was a scene of calm rather than conflict: there were no police skirmishes, batons, firehoses or Molotov cocktails. The protestors ate a breakfast of fresh pretzels on improvised tables. The FR reported that not only did the police tolerate the demonstration, they even handed over woolen blankets from their stocks so that the children could camp out in greater comfort.<sup>60</sup> By that afternoon, the twenty Italian migrants agreed to take their ten children back to Bettinastraße 35 in return for the city administration’s promise to help rectify their living situation. They were assisted by the UI and the *Jusos* as they made their way back to their apartments to await more concrete aid.<sup>61</sup> Similar to the occupation in Leipziger Straße, city officials indicated a willingness to positively respond to collective action that they perceived as conducted out of social need.

### The Friesengasse Occupations

Lest this be read as a happy ending, it appears that some residents of Bettinastraße were not willing to wait for aid from the city administration or the Italian consulate, perhaps wary after they had been made similar promises without seeing definitive action. On 3 September 1973, just a few days after the Rothschildallee resolution, seven migrant families from Bettinastraße hauled mattresses and a television to occupy houses 5 and 7 of Friesengasse (see Figure 3). When reported by the FR, the newspaper made it clear that the Italians did so independently, without informing any *Sponti* or other radical organisations which promoted or supported occupations. Furthermore, both the FAZ and the FR emphasised the occupiers’ nationality in their news articles on the event, publishing the titles, ‘Italians Occupy a House in Bockenheim’ and ‘Italians Occupy Houses in Friesengasse’, respectively.

<sup>55</sup> Flyer, ‘Schluss mit den Kündigungen!’, IfS, Wohnungsamt. 969.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Die Besetzung wurde verhindert’, *FNP*, 29 Aug. 1973.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Ausländer von skrupellosen Wucherern schamlos erpreßt’, *WIR*, Sept. 1973. Though I have yet to locate information on ‘WIR’, it appears to be a news organ of the *Jusos* based on tone and information contained.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Der Bürgermeister applaudiert dem Versuch einer Hausbesetzung’, *FAZ*, 30 Aug. 1973. Frankfurt am Main was (and is) such a large city that it was administered by multiple deputy mayors under the leadership of one Oberbürgermeister, or ‘Lord Mayor’. Even though Rudi Arndt was then the Oberbürgermeister, he was assisted by other Bürgermeister.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Der Bürgermeister applaudiert dem Versuch einer Hausbesetzung’, *FAZ*, 30 Aug. 1973.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Neue Phase der Hausbesetzungen’/Jungsozialisten helfen Italienern’, *FR*, 30 Aug. 1973.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Protestcamper in der Rothschildallee: Stadt sagt bedrängten Familien Hilfe zu/Zurück ins alte Haus’, *FAZ*, 30 Aug. 1973.



One of the Italian women who spoke with the FR about the occupation related their impatience for housing aid, saying, 'We couldn't live one more day in Bettinastraße. When I prepared my husband's breakfast in the evening, the rats had already eaten it by morning'.<sup>62</sup> Her comments highlight how she (or the news reporters) utilised the traditional association between home and motherhood to present her claims as moral, and less disruptive to public order than radical occupations, whether intentionally done or not. She appeared to be advocating for the best interests of her husband (and by default her children), a register which many readers may have interpreted as 'apolitical'.

In addition to speaking with the press, the occupiers hung sheets from the windows on Friesengasse that declared, 'This house is occupied. Four families from Bettinastraße 35 do not want to be eaten by mice any longer', again emphasising the conditions of their previous quarters as their motivation.<sup>63</sup> After lengthy negotiations with city officials, the landlord Israel Orgler agreed to allow two of the families with the most need to stay on for four months, and the city's social affairs director Martin Berg promised the Italian families in Bettinastraße 35 that 'they would get better living spaces within three months', offering a more definitive timeline. This report, published by the FNP, underscored that this occupation again 'ended without a major confrontation with the police', making clear the differentiation between threatening and non-threatening collective action.<sup>64</sup>

The FNP's conclusions about conflict proved to be short-lived once more politicised groups became involved. Within a matter of days, Friesengasse 5 and 7 were again occupied, this time by a mixture of Italian migrants and West German individuals and families. According to a leaflet distributed about the second occupation, groups such as the *Häuserrat* and the far-left organisation Continuous Struggle contributed to this subsequent attempt. This time, municipal authorities quickly changed their stance toward the occupiers. The same social affairs director who had promised the Bettinastraße inhabitants better housing conditions, Mr Berg, labeled the occupiers 'troublemakers' and declared that anyone who occupied 'must be prepared to take responsibility' for their actions. He cautioned that one cannot assume that doing so would get them 'social housing faster' when 3,000 families had been waiting for an availability, some for years.<sup>65</sup>

Police also posted notices on the occupied buildings, one dated 11 September 1973, warning migrant occupiers of the possible ramifications for their actions. The official warnings invoked the 1965 Foreigner Act (*Ausländergesetz*) and European Economic Community (EEC) agreements as legal justification, stating that 'A foreigner who wishes to remain in the Federal Republic of Germany must be able to support himself and his family members from his own means. This includes adequate housing'. If the tenants failed to 'immediately remedy the current illegal situation', the authorities could resort to 'eviction and deportation'.<sup>66</sup> The consequences of migrants' protest actions were thus much higher than those of native-born occupiers. Based on their difference in nationality, they could potentially be removed from West Germany as a result of their instigation of or participation in housing occupations. Italian migrants' status as EEC members did not offer any sort of special protection from deportation either as they were found in violation of certain EEC residency agreements.

On this occasion, instead of offering state aid, the police forcibly cleared the house of the 'five Italian and German families' who were residing within, though there is no evidence that the Italian occupiers were deported. With nowhere else to go, the recently evicted tenants pitched tents in front of Friesengasse 5 and 7 until the police threatened to break up the makeshift camp with fire-hoses. In response, the politicised organisations who supported the occupiers distributed a pamphlet highlighting the seeming contradictions that guest workers faced in West Germany. They described migrants being 'stuck into holes [for housing] and then told that they would kindly need to look

<sup>62</sup> 'Italiener besetzten Häuser in der Friesengasse', *FR*, 3 Sept. 1973.

<sup>63</sup> 'Italiener besetzen Haus in Bockenheim', *FAZ*, 3 Sept. 1973.

<sup>64</sup> 'Nur zwei Familien konnten bleiben', *FNP*, 3 Sept. 1973.

<sup>65</sup> 'Berg: Hausbesetzung war das Werk von Unruhestiftern', *FNP*, 4 Sept. 1973.

<sup>66</sup> Official police notice, 11 Sept. 1973, IfS, Wohnraumkonflikte; Untersuchungen zu Arbeitsplatzsituationen im polit. Kontext. V 183/14.

after the decent apartments. If you are out of work, you will not get any housing, if you don't have a [suitable] apartment, you will not get a residence permit'.<sup>67</sup> In essence, migrants were often relegated to the least desirable rentals because there was not enough decent affordable housing to go around, yet migrants were at risk for losing their ability to work in West Germany due to their inability to provide themselves and their families with adequate living spaces. To put it more succinctly, migrants experienced sociopolitical induced precarity while that very precarity disqualified them from the economic opportunities to remedy their marginalised circumstances. By participating in acts of urban citizenship, migrants sought to rupture this paradox by highlighting their marginal living conditions and pressuring local authorities to take on the onus of guaranteeing what they viewed as basic social rights rather than retaining it as a requirement for residency.

### Administrative Changes

This close examination of the Italian migrant tenants of Bettinastraße and how their collective actions were received illustrates the differentiation city administrators made as they responded to occupation attempts. When it was clear that the migrants were acting out of social need and were supported by known entities with whom officials had a working relationship, such as the UI or the *Jusos*, social services generally became involved to find a solution for the tenants' 'inhuman' living circumstances. On the other hand, once more threatening politicised groups became involved, namely the *Häuserrat* and Continuous Struggle, city officials continued to pursue a course of clearing the occupation attempts or ensuing protests, reminding the migrant participants that their actions could result in deportation.

In spite of the oscillation within the city administration's responses, the above examples show instances in which state officials expanded social services to include those considered temporary residents. In taking responsibility for the housing of 'foreign' inhabitants, state actors thus shifted established institutionalised practices. As Geoff Eley notes, citizenship is a 'complex intermeshing' of changing governmentality and political self-fashioning.<sup>68</sup> Read within this vein, as migrant occupiers participated in or initiated acts of urban citizenship, municipal authorities modified the administration of social services as they unevenly recognised migrant claims. Thus, in limited ways, certain rights became more securely attached to migrants as individuals residing in their jurisdiction, in spite of differences in nationality. This is an important observation to make within the narrative of Frankfurt's housing occupation movement. Less than six months following the actions of Italians in Bettinastraße, officials would again use tear gas, firehoses and batons in forced evictions and street confrontations with occupiers in Bockenheimer Landstraße. However, as the limited instances of Eppsteiner Straße and Bettinastraße illuminate, city administrators differentiated (and often assisted) those who occupied out of social need. Occupiers who fit this categorisation generally found themselves in poor and even dangerous housing situations – conditions that disparately affected newcomers in comparison with long-time Frankfurt residents.

Rather than an anomaly, the agreement reached with migrant occupiers from Bettinastraße mirrored prior patterns of compromises with city leaders. For instance, migrant occupiers from Liebigstraße and Corneliusstraße also obtained living accommodations after negotiating with officials.<sup>69</sup> In an article reporting on this mutual solution, tellingly entitled 'The Rebels of Yesterday have Become Citizens', the FR reported that municipal authorities transferred the Perotta family to temporary housing in June of 1971 while they awaited public housing. The head of the city's housing department, Mr Zeyen, briefly explained why the Italian migrants qualified for public housing, relating, 'This family of four came from very poor tenancy conditions, so as to warrant further

<sup>67</sup> Flyer, 'Frankfurt. Die Stadt'. IfS, Wohnraumkonflikte; Untersuchungen zu Arbeitsplatzsituationen im polit. Kontext. V 183/14.

<sup>68</sup> Geoff Eley, 'Some General Thoughts on Citizenship in Germany', in Eley and Palmowski, *Citizenship*, 240.

<sup>69</sup> 'Vertrag mit Hauskollektiv', *FAZ*, 13 Jan. 1971. See also Dokumentation des Häuserrates und des Asta der Universität Frankfurt, *Kettenhofweg* 51, 3.

improvement'.<sup>70</sup> In this instance, then, social service representatives extended institutionalised practices to those previously viewed as 'temporary residents' as a result of migrants' acts of urban citizenship. In validating their insistence on proper housing, Frankfurt authorities expanded access to state aid, and by extension, at least partially accepted migrants' perception of social rights across national boundaries.

Moreover, migrants' efforts to expand the parameters of social belonging through visible acts of citizenship also resulted in small successes. In 1973, over 1,000 migrants led hundreds of other supporters in an organised march in support of rent strikes in Frankfurt – a concerted action that the activist known as amantine labeled the 'first ever demonstration organised by migrants'.<sup>71</sup> Protestors also tore down the scaffolding that was erected in preparation of demolition in front of Baustraße 11 – a building that primarily housed Italian immigrants. One of the Italians rallied demonstrators in both Italian and German, calling out, 'Fight hard without fear!'<sup>72</sup> In response, the city froze the eviction for an additional three months while the Office for Housing continued to work with the UI to find a solution for the tenants once the courts deemed the rents 'excessive'. Not only did the Office for Housing seek compensation for families, but the housing director Mr Zeyen even 'agreed that the Italian families should be assigned social housing, if possible'.<sup>73</sup> Though it took over a year for this course of action to finally be realised, the FR eventually reported that 'the city council has procured social housing for all Italian families in this house'.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to catalysing temporary solutions and social changes, such as those outlined above, migrants' actions also influenced longer-lasting legislative reforms. On 31 July 1972, the city of Frankfurt passed an act entitled 'Municipal Measures to Safeguard the Social Responsibility of Real Estate'. Article six specifically prohibited 'Zweckentfremdung' – the use or intention to use property that had previously served as housing for purposes other than living spaces.<sup>75</sup> This measure was meant to prohibit cases such as Eppsteiner Straße, Corneliusstraße, Liebigstraße, or Bettinastraße from happening – that is when developers bought old apartment buildings and let them further deteriorate in order to demolish them and build new offices, businesses, or even luxury housing at the cost of displacing reasonable accommodation. It took about five more years, but eventually the city charged the landlord of Bettinastraße with 'Zweckentfremdung', according to city records.<sup>76</sup>

This came on the heels of a series of reforms initiated by Mayor Möller, who altered Frankfurt's municipal code for housing non-West German workers in 1971. The mayor also launched a campaign to institute similar changes at the federal level, which culminated in new *Guidelines for the Accommodation of Foreign Employees* issued by the Federal Ministry for Work and Social affairs on 1 April 1971.<sup>77</sup> Also at the federal level, the Tenancy Protection Act of 1971 extended access to housing subsidies to immigrants for the first time; a provision that Frankfurt administrators invoked when extending state aid to migrant occupiers in the early 1970s.<sup>78</sup> Though it is difficult to measure the exact degree to which migrants' claims to decent housing directly influenced these changes, they provided the means for migrants to begin to be recognised and treated as urban citizens rather than foreign subjects, as manifest by the public housing issued to Italian occupiers in Bettinastraße and elsewhere.

<sup>70</sup> 'Die Rebellen von gestern sind zu Bürgern geworden', *FR*, 23 June 1971.

<sup>71</sup> amantine, *Gender*, 17.

<sup>72</sup> 'Demonstrationszug am Wochenende', *FAZ*, 17 Apr. 1972.

<sup>73</sup> Marlies Nehrstedt, 'Wieder eingewiesen, aber nur bis Mai', *FR*, 28 Mar. 1973.

<sup>74</sup> 'Schallplatte über den Wohnungskampf', *FR*, 16 Apr. 1973.

<sup>75</sup> Rudolf Heinrich Appel, *Frankfurt am Main: Stadtentwicklung und Wohnprobleme* (Frankfurt/M: Franz Jos. Henrich KG, 1974), 96–102. Commissioned by the Press and Information Department of the City of Frankfurt.

<sup>76</sup> Housing office report, 'Liegenschaft Frankfurt am Main, Bettinastr. 35–7: Verbot der Zweckentfremdung von Wohnraum', 1 Aug. 1978, IfS, Wohnungsamt. 969.

<sup>77</sup> Raika Espahangizi, 'Migration and Urban Transformations: Frankfurt in the 1960s and 1970s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 49, 1 (2014), 197.

<sup>78</sup> Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 'Gesetz über den Kündigungsschutz für Mietverhältnisse über Wohnraum', 25 Nov. 1971. Nr. 118 – Tag der Ausgabe: Bonn, den 27. Nov. 1971, available at [https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav#\\_\\_bgbl\\_\\_%2F%2F\\*%5B%40attr\\_id%3D%27bgbl171s1839.pdf%27%5D\\_\\_1600977702365](https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav#__bgbl__%2F%2F*%5B%40attr_id%3D%27bgbl171s1839.pdf%27%5D__1600977702365) (last visited Sept. 2020).

## Conclusion

By occupying housing, Italians acted as more than ‘guest workers’ in the city of Frankfurt. Their acts of urban citizenship surrounding a proper home show how citizenship is contested and relational – a category that is never fixed but is continually expanding or shrinking based on social and political pressures. In addition, migrants in Frankfurt highlight how the city became a crucial site for developing and challenging citizenship regimes, even across national borders. As neighbours co-occupied or marched alongside them and as municipal leaders responded to their actions, acts of urban citizenship began to shift some of the characteristics of citizenship away from national identities. Though the parameters of citizenship may have been tied to the nation-state for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, movements from the ground thus illustrate how the practices of citizenship are extremely localised in nature.

This study of Italian migrant participation in housing occupations in Frankfurt also hints at a larger reckoning that many nation-states faced and continue to confront as borders become more porous as globalisation only continues to accelerate. As more individuals flee political conflict, environmental disaster, social persecution and economic disparities, cities remain a top destination for receiving those who have left. This article gestures to how migrants engaging in acts of urban citizenship can drastically change processes of community building as they rupture ‘the manufactured consensus of “who belongs where”’.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Mudu and Chattopadhyay, *Migration*, 9.