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# Embodying Peripheries

*edited by*  
GIUSEPPINA FORTE  
KUAN HWA

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GIUSEPPINA FORTE  
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Peripheries**

Firenze University Press  
2022



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*Colonia popular* in Naucalpan de Juárez, Mexico.

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# Introduction



Human “embodiment” is a polysemous term that has rich multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary dimensions from various histories of consciousness. As a paradigm for various methodologies, it emphasizes the lived experience and the immanence of the human condition, especially regarding sensory habitus, bodily ways of knowing, and the material-social dimension of humanity within a historically/geographically situated context; it validates all people as bearers of their own insight and knowledge, and emphasizes that experience itself serves as a phenomenological basis for understanding. Embodiment is thus not reducible to an abstract philosophical project, but rather holds possibilities for a practical and applied ethics. In the context of peripheries, embodiment can be understood as the commitment to marginalized communities and teaches us both the scientific and humanistic value of compassion.

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## GLOBAL URBAN HUMANITY - THE “EMBODIMENT” OF EMBODYING PERIPHERIES

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Kuan Hwa

“horše ʔuuxi! Native American Student Development recognizes that UC Berkeley sits on the territory of xučyun (Huichin), the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo-speaking Ohlone people, the successors of the sovereign Verona Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and other familial descendants of the Verona Band.

We recognize that every member of the Berkeley community has benefited, and continues to benefit, from the use and occupation of this land, since the institution’s founding in 1868. Consistent with our values of community, inclusion and diversity, we have a responsibility to acknowledge and make visible the university’s relationship to Native peoples. As members of the Berkeley community, it is vitally important that we not only recognize the history of the land on which we stand, but also, we recognize that the Muwekma Ohlone people are alive and flourishing members of the Berkeley and broader Bay Area communities today.

This acknowledgement was co-created with the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and Native American Student Development and is a living document.”<sup>1</sup>

Conventionally deemed “peripheral,” not central, the people of the “peripheries” are yet the protagonists of alternative modernities, as confirmed by our labor, protest, survival, and bodily practices that take place on the margins of urban centers. Liminality of the edges affords transformation of both people and the city proper, and sensorimotor embodiment is the process and praxis for part of this change. *Embodying Peripheries* engages the ways in which subjectivities differ across urban space, in which our race(s), class(es), abilities, roles, and gender(s)/sexualities are not accidental features of the cosmopolites, but historically effected and primary components of inequity. Inequity is mirrored within city demographics and struggles, such as in Northern California’s bay area, but also within the larger purview of the urban distribution of the planet, as current global inequalities iterate the same inequalities

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<sup>1</sup> “Ohlone Land.” University of California, Berkeley, <https://cejce.berkeley.edu/ohloneland>.

created by the injury of imperialism, colonialism, slavery, and Eurocentric heteronormative patriarchy of the last 500 years (Moore et al, 2019; Go, 2016; Lugones, 2010). National economies, anti-blackness, and global capital are intertwined in this contemporary condition we all (all of us, really) inherit within our own bodies as our very conditions of material life, since all bodies and labor bear the intergenerational imprint of modernist statecraft and historically elaborated notions of property, hierarchy, and belonging or exclusion (Mbembe, 2017). At the local level, partitions of exclusion often intersect with national histories of conflict, and economic globalization. In some instances across the global centers of the world, economic policies concretize ideologies of exclusion, using the nation-state and legal statuses as the technologies through which peripheralization is concretized and enacted onto the bodies of citizen-subjects and subjects who are decidedly not citizens. Brenda Yeoh has shown that “the embodied urban experiences of unmoored transnational lowly paid migrant workers whose navigation of transnational routes to and from ‘home’ and ‘host’ (the city) are not inevitable but perpetuated by the city’s disciplinary policies of ‘use and discard’”. For example, policies ensuring the transience of female foreign domestic worker bodies in cities such as Singapore, in turn, reinforce the permanence of transnational mobilities among unskilled labor migrants” (Yeoh, 2006). So too in this volume, it is possible to see that the state – be it USA, Israel, Turkey, Brazil, India, Nigeria, or others, plays a constitutive role in development policies and attribution of citizen rights or resources that can affect the embodied lives and practices of those within, or excluded from, their borders. The philosopher Martin Heidegger called the fact that we cannot choose the reality or human existence into which we were birthed *geworfenheit*, the “thrownness” of our being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1972). The sociogeny of embodied life is complex, since places have their own histories and dynamics; from our thrownness it is up to us how to move forward in a glocal present that is continuously reshaped by globalizing *processes that are not natural and therefore can be reimagined* (Fanon, 1967).

This publication points at the constitutive outside(s) of normative bodies and yet recognizes that all peoples are subjected to regimes of body management: the political intervention upon the biological and the human body. At the same time, some structures might serve a constructive purpose of affirming ways of life by supporting various bodily practices; what these can be and how to improve quality of embodied life continues to remain a contested but open question. The idea of embodiment does not necessarily have a positive valuation: it can mean trauma and immobilization, the process of violent division, exclusionist practices, disavowal. But another idea of embodiment upholds that

every body exercises embodied agency as well as the potential to make change for the better, and keeps current the possibility that a shared global urban humanity is still possible if you want it.

A gap persists between the literature of the body as the lived experience by the impaired, black, indigenous, person of color, female, queer (the theme of some humanities disciplines), and conventional sociological or ethnological studies *about* these groups as "objects of study." As Julian Go explains of this gap following Edward Said's literary studies, social science research has the tendency to replicate the "imperial episteme's law of division," often only covering peripheral spaces or the people outside of Western metropolises or the Global North as external and local studies rather than as part of a continuum within which Northern agendas benefit or have even caused (Go, 2016). It is unfortunate when social science masquerades the artifact of glorified and remunerated slum tourism and analysis as research, while bodily difference is reduced to scientific curiosity alone. To bridge difference requires tremendous effort, but it must be clear as a goal. It is at least my honest wish for this publication that we have set this goal closer within reach by bringing difficult scenarios of embodied difference to the fore. Yet another gap exists between the conventional division of the body as an object of study and the idea of embodiment as a pure phenomenology, a structural and philosophical preoccupation; contributing scholars and artists have engaged with this dimension of embodiment to varying degrees, sometimes by means of staging the phenomenological experience via photography, or by explicit discussion of it. *Embodying Peripheries* was proposed to scholars and practitioners to gather contributions across geographies and historical timeframes that consider gaps in human and social experience of urbanity in hopes of fostering an active dialogue that combines the ethics and ethos of ethnic/gender/queer studies with the systematic inquiry of sociology and anthropology. The research, voices, and visions gathered here look at the formation of embodied practices and subjectivities in the peripheries that inform the urban imaginaries of a city biography in a way that potentially fuses or juxtaposes issues and approaches. All contributors' perspectives and approaches are their own. Generally speaking, embodied practices in the city include such things as commuting, laboring, occupying, squatting, bodily resistance to forms of oppression, corporeal citizenship, migrations, interventions on the sensescape,<sup>2</sup> performative experiments, music, dance, artistic and aesthetic projects, urban farming, guerrilla urbanism, social movements, *transmovimientos*, embodied political action, and sensuous alter-epistemologies such as urban

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<sup>2</sup> See also how grime and filth are used for creating social partitions but also of belonging via *suciedad* in Vargas, Deborah R. "Ruminations on Lo Socio as a Latino Queer Analytic," *American Quarterly*, Vol 66 No 3, 2014, 715-726.  
\*Thanks to Juan Manuel Aldape Munoz!

foraging, wandering, and local strategies for urban survival (Hernández, 2021). Cityscapes congeal within the human body the same way civilization and its discontents sediment within the mind. They are of the past accumulation of experiences as much as they unfold as vectors to the future.

While activities form one part of embodiment, the built environment affords such actions. Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* (1958) remarked that architecture in the home shapes small gestures of one's body: that repeated use of the staircase during childhood forever remains embedded in our feet, and that "the tiniest latch has remained in our hands" (Bachelard, 2014). But embodiment as a process does not end there. From intimate and proximal domesticity to the spatial expanse of the global cityscape, architecture and our interactions with material culture continually form and reform human embodiment, teaching us how to sense and move through the world as lived-through meaning (Merleau-Ponty, 2014).

As physical and sensory beings, we all appear on these shared global commons and undercommons as particular bodies with particular features – as varying abled, aged, gendered, sexualized, racialized, class-based, or otherwise culturally encoded assemblages of symbols that walk this planet earth (Harney & Moten, 2013). But more than symbols, we are human, and we are all enough. To have or to be? Physical embodiment, as an idea, emphasizes the act of being as *modus operandi* and being as a becoming. As an idea, it invites us to think about the human experience and all that we experience as human beings by specific embodied actions as components of being: who we are from what we do, and *how we do* and listen, rather than by relations of possession or apparent fixity of our social facts. Rather than all "having" faces and bodies, we *are* the faces and bodies that matter, and sense the world through our organs, with one another. In this material reality, we are mortal humans with human friends and families, grounded in a finite bodily way of being. Death is part of fragile embodied life, as is aging, suffering, love, and loss. In contrast to the well-known Cartesian meditations celebrating the life of the mind as *res cogitans* separate from the *res extensa*, philosophers of embodied cognition have emphasized that we cognize this world in an embodied way, and that much of what we know conceptually is undergirded by how we sense and how we move. With every footstep we take, and in the traces we leave behind us (carbon or otherwise), we sense *this world that has us* (we do not possess it), and the world keeps record of our actions through various activities. A phenomenologists say, cognition and collective human life is embodied and embedded,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See also the survey of phenomenological studies since Edmund Husserl in *The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition*. Edited by Larry Shapiro. Routledge, 2014.

and it is inevitable that the activities of an embodied life take place somewhere, at some time, in the larger context of the planet, within our own finitude (Haugeland, 1993; Casey, 1998). By now, it should be clear that "embodiment" as a key conceptual term is polysemous and varies depending on discipline and application. In phenomenology following the tradition of Edmund Husserl, it refers to the structure of experience, and for Maurice Merleau-Ponty it refers to, and acknowledges, the human body as a starting point for experience and all knowledge, *the body as subject* rather than as an epistemological object to be known and represented (Husserl, 1989; Merleau-Ponty, 2014). In this sense, it foregrounds lived experience over preexisting conceptual categories.

In the social sciences, using embodiment or parallel concepts to understand social phenomena has been developed since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Karl Marx's third manuscript from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, for example, describes the way that civilizational modes of thought congeal in the human person by ways of sensing, explaining that "the *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present" (Marx, 1922). Georg Simmel's sociology of the senses identifies the interaction of human to human contact via the gaze, for example, as a productive force for social life, providing a sensory analytic for later iterations of sensory anthropology (Simmel, 1997). Marcel Mauss investigates techniques of the body as a vehicle for cultural transmission and bodily ways of knowing (Mauss, 1973). Pierre Bourdieu articulates a version of embodiment in order to explain the social life of child development within a Kabyle family, to which he posited the dichotomy of objectification and embodiment, the latter referring to the process of socialization (Bourdieu, 2013). In Bourdieu's case, embodiment could account for the domain of human activity taught and imitated by "structural exercises" and transmitted from body to body in a social context by practice: we learn by doing, imitating, and emulating one another (Bourdieu, 2013). In this way, every action we take is a teaching, and every action we make is a teaching for someone else. The anthropologist Thomas Csordas reinterprets embodiment in both Merleau Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* as the body as "setting a relation to the world" rather than as an epistemological object, and in his reading of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* as mediating embodiment and objectification as a strict dichotomy (Csordas, 1990). As a methodological approach to overcome dichotomous thought in the social sciences, Csordas suggests that embodiment as a paradigm allows the social sciences to move beyond a limited notion of the subject-object that also persistently has upheld concomitant dichotomies of self and other, body and mind, a dichotomy that often treats social phenomena as outside and distant from the researcher's own bracketed position. Rather than accept the culturally perceived structures as a given analytic, he suggests that embodiment enables

us to understand *perceptual processes* and ourselves as situated bodies within the world. Embodiment as a paradigm that upholds the body as subject rather than as object has an ethical consequence for him, since “[if] we do not perceive our own bodies as objects, neither do we perceive others as objects. Another person is perceived as another ‘myself,’ tearing itself away from being simply a phenomenon in my perceptual field, appropriating my phenomena and conferring on them the dimension of intersubjective being, and so offering ‘the task of a true communication’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1964)” (Csordas, 1990). At the heart of embodiment as a paradigm for the social sciences in particular, then, is the ethical and rhetorical task of communication: understanding of human people not as objects, but as ourselves, an expanded and collective self-understanding of *we* that must be negotiated relationally. Through embodiment, human beings are not objectivated infrastructures of people, but living communities deserving of respect, dignity, listening, collaboration, well-being, and the love that we might give to ourselves because we are all interconnected. We are academics and artists, but it is up to policy makers, voters, developers, businesses, and specialists in various sectors to love through policy and infrastructure: not just words, but deeds.

In the context of this specific publication, and with this cursory discussion in mind, embodiment refers to the activities, experiences, resilience, and social-sensory processes manifest in the human person not only as a *bearer* of meaning, but also its *agent*. The articles and artistic projects included here range from social sciences, humanities, and contemporary photography. From their own perspectives and methods, contributors reflect on the processes and local instances of embodiment as they occur in the context of globalization and urban development in the peripheries of cities in a globalized world, or in their idea of the peripheries *of* the world. Embodiment is thus construed here as “subject formation,” but also sometimes more explicitly as the performed arts of dance, festival, play, or even the rituals of everyday life and ways in which we inhabit space; at other moments it refers to the perceptual process undergirded by media or architectural space as a stimulus for bodily behavior or community formation through acts and ways of interacting (Ahmed, 2006). Neither strictly political society, political economy, art, nor culture alone in the broadest sense, the notion of embodiment allows scholars and artists here to cut across disciplinary and categorical boundaries to consider actually existing events and urbanity across societies and communities of practice. It refers to the social and surrounding processes of human people that shape cities and their human tools and technologies, both physical-sensory and ideological or emancipatory — which themselves are often expressed and transmitted by sensory means. It is the result, but also partly the

cause, of what we could call urban sensescapes<sup>4</sup> of meaning, the way urbanity is objectivated into the city as stimuli affording embodied actions, such as walls, staircases, and tiny latches if we are to have found ourselves lucky to even have had doors on our homes in the first place. Human identities that accompany embodied life are not neutral or natural categories, just as the center or periphery of urban life is not a natural feature of the landscape, but rather historically material. Indeed, whether beliefs are true or false, or whether desires are fulfilled or not, they often drive human beings with different interests to specific embodied actions that shape and reshape our present moment and the built environment as a site of cultural interaction. We do, but things are also done to us. Inequity in urban life and racialized stratification is also not an accidental feature of nature, but rather the willed blueprint of modernity's design through colonialism and slavery and a long history of policies (Quijano, 2007). What is embodied is partly the materialization of actions that play out ideational content or the result of a content played out on or against us, as we are somatically interpellated into its fold. Embodied experience and identities are historically received and constantly shaped by nature-nurture, and not just by the whim of individual choice nor individual effort alone. Beyond identity as a fixed notion of what Jean-Paul Sartre called "social facticity" (that in fact varies across social codes), the actually existing events of daily life and larger urban events can transform and reencode human modes of life at the sensory or bodily level, sometimes by the violence of dispossession, marginalization, ghettoization, gender/sexual exclusion, racialization, or, in the case of settler-colonialism, attempt to eliminate human life altogether by eliminating people or usurping human agency by means of state control when the state is a military police state turned against human life within it, rather than a state designed to serve all (Sarte, 1984; Nichols, 2019; Du Bois, 2010; Williams, 1998; Wolfe, 2006). Conflict is historical, but conflict and its effects are also contemporary. In the latter process of settler-colonial genocide, it cannot be emphasized enough that the premise of the city, or global urban dwelling, is often predicated on the question of land as much as it is question of embodied life – the ground that is every figure's double. Where embodiment begins and ends is thus not as determinate as where our skin seals us in.

Contemporary artist Noritaka Minami's piezograph photographic series, *California City (Real Estate)* and *California City (Wonderland)*, monochromatically narrativizes the purported promise of urban development and the embodied recreational afterthoughts that play out in this 187-square-mile urban planned residential area in the middle of the Mohave Desert in California, USA. Extremely sharp in focus yet atmospheric in a way that makes the hot

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<sup>4</sup> Consider the elements of a sensory landscape as also subject to urban flows, see Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy." *Theory, Culture & Society* 7, 1990, pp. 295–310.



desert a cloudy white image, the photographs propose a question between land and embodying peripheries by the way in which acts of play are staged on the urban outskirts of this city just north of the highly populated global city Los Angeles, from which thousands of enthusiasts make pilgrimage to the desert for off-road sports and dirt bike racing in this peripheral space (Abu-Lughod, 1999). Dust occludes vision. Here, the ideal of land development of the sociologist turned real estate developer Nathan Mendelsohn in the 1950s is displayed as an entrepreneurial dream arrested in an inchoate phase, giving us a microcosmic glimpse into the biography of every California city (still often unquestioned) and the actions taken on the land to manage and redirect flows of human migration by inviting people with the false promise of “community.” Long aerial shots of the city reveal grids of urban planning that contrast starkly against the expanse of the desert, evoking what could be the visual imaginary of “the frontier.” Both Mendelsohn’s industrial urban plan and the idea of the frontier and endless development are figments of America’s continuing settler-colonial imagination. Land development is inextricably tied here to the forgetting of indigeneity by means of a material-sensory substitution and replacement with the speculator’s American dream, for California City and its suburban experiment is on Yokut ancestral land, and the Yokut people are still here and the stewards of the land but absent from the photographs. The illusion of *terra nullius* and its twin discourse of development can be understood as staged and critiqued here, consummated by the embodied act of bourgeois recreation. This kind of recreation is its own kind of embodied practice in which speed and technology combine as a socio-sensory event... yet what does it celebrate? The motorcyclist serves as a metaphor for the human body yoked closely to the vehicle as off-road individualism exhibited by athletic braap. In contrast to the politics of resistance or embodied survivance of those from the peripheries, here the periphery is recast as a fantasy for someone’s sensory pleasure, the periphery as playground frontier. The heavily outfitted racers in helmets and gear appear anonymous and the photographs give us questions about what it means to promote urban development, and for whom; it reflects on how interstitial urban spaces acquired by means of dispossession replay fantasy through embodiment as recreation, a kind of play in LA’s rugged backyard. It is unclear how to think through this dusty future. Is it possible that recreational activities born out of the bourgeois imagination like dirt bike racing could ever reconnect us to the land? Do new collective and embodied practices still contain the possibility of actualizing community, and if so, what kind?

Similar to Minami’s contemporary photography but journalistic in nature, Sarth Khare’s photo essay, *Unfinished City*, documents the way people and animals inhabit Gurugram,

a city left half-developed outside of New Delhi in the state of Haryana in northern India, the same region that was the ancient setting for the largest battle of the *Mahābhārata*. Gurugram was renamed and repurposed in the late 1980s for capital development, paralleling many other policy changes in India at the time that increased economic divide and ecological decline (Shrivastava & Kothari, 2012). As a consequence to the change in policy and the built environment, so too changed the daily lives and embodied activities of the people there. The essay photos, shot at different times of the day and night, give a sense of Gurugram as an urban space situated within the rhythm and landscape of nature-nurture, part mystery, part poverty, and part developmental "promise." Whose promise to whom? At what cost? Sensitive to the sensory qualities of the space, Khare's opening photograph appears like a peaceful dawn but it is quickly interrupted by scenes of urban development *in media res*, informal settlements set apart from fancy high rise buildings, and the life of activities like games and gatherings for residents and migrant workers from all over the subcontinent. On dirt roads, two women walk slowly without a sidewalk while monumental power lines tower in the background. Cows stand on trash: an image of the divine abandoned in a realm of destitution. Staging social encounter of the gaze classic of Simmel's sociology of the senses, one photograph features a man with a cap gazing directly at the photographer through a well-lit doorway, with what appears to be construction materials inside, the dream of growth and the activity of building found both outdoors and inside the building, conditioning the activities of life. The stranger stares intently but ambiguously at us. More growth? Degrowth? Khare's images and text leave it open to decide how to move forward when capitalist globalization pressures urban development and reshapes Indian ways of life.

This publication contains three contributions focused on Brazil: Matthew Aaron Richmond and Moisés Kopper's "Walling the Peripheries: Porous condominiums at Brazil's Urban Margins," Jeroen Stevens' "Central Occupations: Stills from a City in Movement" and Samuel Novacich's "Makeup and *Marquinha*: Aesthetics of the Bodily Surface in Rio de Janeiro" Richmond and Kopper investigate exclusion in an urban peripheral structure called *condomínio*, arguing that walling as a strategy employed by residents can "preserve residents' sense of security" by separation from "outsiders" or confer class taste upon those who wield power to build or control the walls. Here, Us vs. Them is a constructed dichotomy distributed throughout Brazilian cities and objectivated into architecture through walling as *praxis* so that neighborhoods contain smaller exclusionary spaces within an already partitioned space, thereby stratifying belonging and social formation at the local level. They argue that some residents may even demographically share social facts with those they intentionally attempt to exclude, citing residents' accounts of physical violence and theft as the justified motivation

for exclusionary practices. At other times, walled constructions appear porous and less functional than they originally seem; in this way, they also enable a kind of theater of exclusion, acting as the props for a social status that must be performed as the embodiment of class. Embodiment thus refers in this case to the entire urban complex of racial and class ideology, architectural partitioning, and anti-cohabitation. Prejudice, in other words, causes social effects by embodied means.

Jeroen Stevens brings us again to São Paulo by a photographic visual essay. It examines social movements in the city from 2013-2019. In particular resonance with the architectural support for embodied life, Stevens shows how abandoned spaces host temporary communities that use the city as a resource for organized action. Here embodiment echoes Stephen Ajadi's study of Durumi camp, in which innovative use of occupation and squatting by community members is the primary tool for remaking and reusing space.

Samuel Novacich likewise shows that urban dynamics in the periphery are sensibly manifest. Here embodiment means more explicitly practice upon the surface-level of the body. He gives an ethnographic account of a specific type of aesthetic embellishment on the body called *marquinha* or "little mark," a type of cosmetic enhancement on the skin that entails imitating tanning lines that confers social connotations and ideals of beauty onto its bearer. Novacich's study focuses on how this complex process of bodily aesthetics mediates a social world of Rio de Janeiro's *favela* and all its urban dimensions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and power. Using participant observation, photography, and anthropological analysis informed by psychoanalysis, Novacich gives a human face and a human name to people who engage in this practice and shows how its productive forces constitute psychological selfhood and belonging in the neighborhood.

Francesco Pasta's "Fikirtepe in Limbo: Urban Transformation, Cross-border Migration, and Re-peripheralization in Istanbul" looks at Istanbul, Turkey, from field research conducted 2017-2019 and specifically examines the site of the largest ongoing development there, in Fikirtepe. Pasta's study looks at the historical background of informal settlement there from the 1950s, its transformation into an intermittently formalized urban space, and considers Fikirtepe as a contested site between two disparate embodied experiences of the place: that of the local people and that of the transitory people who migrate there. Embodiment in this study refers specifically to the divergence of standpoints and divergent attitudes about the future and identity of the place with regards to urban settlement. Pasta concentrates especially on local people who bemoan the unfinished development projects and wish for the continuation and fulfillment of the development of the

neighborhood, and residents from Afghanistan who preserve their customs and create new ones to adapt to living conditions without access to basic services; they participate mainly in their designated work or within the confines of the building and Afghan community. In this sense, urban development as a contested element between differing social actors and their time within the space (local or recently migrated) serves as the partition of difference that is simultaneously upheld by practices of everyday life that mark members and set them apart.

As aforementioned, Stephen Àjàdí likewise examines migration and lived practices as a productive force in an informal settlement in his study "Durumi Camp, Abuja: Conflict and Spatial Praxes of a Furtive-Periphery." The study uses spatial analyses to clarify the layered urban processes of internally displaced peoples from within the nation, forced to live in an informal settlement in Nigeria's capital city as the result of violence. The study offers not only an African-specific notion of peripherality with its own historical elaboration to its present day under Fulani rule, but also emphasizes embodiment here as the generative framework for roles of local informal governance and the varied practices across ethnic communities internal to the camp, including the building of homes and everyday habits for wellness such as cooking, traditional midwifery, and application of healing herbs. Cultures of hunting, farming, and botanical medicine thus form the basis for local innovations here that are adapted from traditional embodied knowledge of community members. Embodiment here means community resiliency in the face of duress. Architectural forms and the constitution of community thus expresses the embodied experience of those living at the camp.

David Exumé in "Haitians Live for News" also looks at the sensory dimension of a community of practice: Haitians as a sonic community created across national boundaries by means of radio, specifically exploring collective activities and the rich political and cultural history of Haitians in New York since their immigration in the 1980s. His essay tells a story of how radios maintained Haitian community in spite of political-technological conditions in both Haiti and the USA that sometimes worked against them, and shows how a Haitian-specific experience acoustically tethered Haitians to Haiti via information radio waves and Haitian jazz in ways that allowed Haitian Americans to maintain their identity separate from being "African American" in general, while still enabling them to act strategically in solidarity with the African-American community at times. Embodiment here means that sensory media can act as the intermediary term that exceeds national territory, and that collective belonging can be maintained through the ear.

Also addressing urban soundscape, Diego Caro in "Hidden Music Scenes: Governmentality and Contestation in Post-colonial Hong Kong" gives a history (and playlist!) of underground music scenes in Hong Kong since the 1980s, recounting how empty industrial buildings in

the late 1990s became repurposed for artists and musicians, fostering an underground music culture that became threatened by a cultural battle over the city when development policies seized spaces for real estate investment. Caro shows how in spite of this, individual portraits of musicians and underground music organizations show the continuation of cultural production that sometimes undermines government authority and insists on the survival of the music scene. Embodiment here refers not only to the musical medium that connects the Hong Kong youth that participate in listening, but also in the atmospheric and moody visual space of the concerts that create the unique identity of music subcultures in the post-colony.

Hanna Baumann focuses on embodiment partly in regards to mobility in her work and partly in regards to leisure and performed provocation in “Moving from the Margins: Palestinian Mobilities, Embodiment and Agency in East Jerusalem.” Baumann examines contemporary Palestinians under duress by Israeli state power, showing how their mobility is restricted by the state but how embodied acts of play also reimagine hostile urban environments by asserting the agency of Palestinian youth in their BMX bicycle stunts, backflips in public, and “unsanctioned behavior” that undermines state authority by challenging scripted behavior regulated by the state apparatus. These acts of play and expressions of joy thus reconfigure the phenomenological horizon of experience, shaping self-perceptions of Palestinians and thus conferring upon themselves embodied agency as a political subjectivity.

Fabrizia Cannella’s “*Femminielli* and the City: Urban Space and Non-binary Gender Identities in Naples” looks at a locally specific expression of gender as a peripheral subjectivity within peripheral urban space. The study takes as its inquiry the idea that if “*femminiello*,” a Naples-specific gender subjectivity, depends so closely on its Neapolitan space, then what contours of urbanity influence or are influenced by *femminielli*, and how is the changing urban culture of Naples also changing this identity in practice? While the study shows that the identity has a history that goes back to the 1970s as reported by the interview with Ciro Ciretta, the identity faces the possibility of disappearance in recent years, and indeed Cannella concludes that the identity is also historically specific. Unique to Naples’ urban space is a kind of domestic living quarter called the *basso* that links inside habitation and outside public space at the ground level in districts and neighborhoods characterized by frequent outdoor social interaction and visible activity configured by alleys and nooks. A queer embodiment here is not universal, since in spite of the shared built environment it is not as though all citizen-subjects of Naples become *femminielli* by means of the city’s design; rather, it is the unique circumstance and local

character of the city, however, that gives rise to a decidedly public character to those who are this non-binary gender identity, as Cannella points out specific embodied community rituals such as a group raffle game using a wicker basket in the local neighborhood. As a kind of public personality, the *femminiello* therefore comes to embody the spirit of the local community. Embodiment in this context means that local region informs and questions notions of a global idea of gender, as the expression of both gender and small-scale neighborhood coincide in the "*femminiello*."

Lastly, Anna Jayne Kimmel's "Of the Spaces Between: Prepositional Events of the *Festival de Marseille*" looks at a 2017 iteration of an art festival and all of its attendant social phenomena as the embodied meaning-making activity of performance, giving value and interpretation to everyday interactions in the festival. Rather than focus on the stage as a spectacle, Kimmel's analysis breaks the fourth wall by arguing that a distributed infrastructure of the festival between performers and audience — and indeed the entire city as a whole — participates in a transformative reconstitution of subjectivities in an event-based happening: through their encounters and interactions, African, European, local, and international, all work together through what she calls the festival as "prepositional events." Embodiment here refers to what she calls "visual and valuable relationality of difference," in which community could take place in genuine exchange and mutual recognition as the potential for what the global might still be.

In summary, Richmond and Kopper, Àjàdí, Minami, Pasta, and Khare's work all make bare the operations of walls or spatial urban structures at varying levels of development for the organization of human mobility and dwelling. The embodied experience of difference is often ethnic and class-based, rife with divergent interests, and the practices on the ground bear repercussions for the future of the respective cities of study and, therefore, the future of the global community. Stevens and Caro show us how political communities repurpose buildings to forge embodied protest either literally or musically. Baumann, Novacich, Kimmel, and Caro show us how tactics employed by embodied aesthetic practices can assert agency in the face of political or social illegitimacy. Baumann, Novacich, Exumé, Caro, and Cannella show us that the neighborhood or places of belonging are carried within the human person recreated by local acts, and that sensory media can help maintain an embodied sense of collective identity and selfhood in urban environments under pressure and change.

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Peripheries are processes and places in which conditions and actors constantly shift. The contingent forms of peripheries in this book are assembled around embodied identities and are rooted in specific genealogies: peripheries as urban fringes, periphery countries in the modern world-system theory, and peripheral urbanization. Through these genealogies, the heterogeneous forms of peripheries acquire layered meanings that decenter urban theory. Since no form can exist outside historical relations of power, it is critical to apply methodological approaches that can address the political agency emerging from embodied identities.

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**A word of acknowledgment**

This book is about peripheries and the embodied identities in peripheries. As a multidisciplinary publication, it gathers scholarly contributions from architecture, urban planning, anthropology, sociology, and ethnic, gender, photography, music, and performance studies. *Embodiment* and *peripheries* rarely appear jointly in academic inquiries, and their juxtaposition in the call for papers appealed to scholars researching different histories and geographies. In particular, we prioritized highlighting the work of young scholars. In this sense, this book is semi-peripheral to mainstream academic publishing: early-career scholars have edited and written it, and a non-Anglo-American press has published it.

*Embodying Peripheries* has been conceived and written from the many lands where the authors live, research, and work. I wrote this piece from the land now known as “Manhattan,” which is part of the traditional territory of the Lenni-Lenape called “Lenapehoking,” specifically by those who spoke the Munsee dialects. During the colonial era and early federal period, many were removed from the west and north, but some remained among the enduring historical tribal communities of the region. I acknowledge the Lenni-Lenape as the original people of this land and their continuing relationship with their territory.<sup>1</sup> However, as a settler and scholar at a settler institution, I am aware that land acknowledgment is only the first step toward decolonial practices that include “Indigenous relationality, land pedagogy, and accountability to place and Native peoples” (Stewart-Ambo & Yang, 2021, p. 41).

I am grateful to this book’s authors for their hard work despite multiple disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. They worked from various locations while researching remote sites, often at the expense of interrupting their fieldwork. We decided to slow down the book’s production to acknowledge the unequal burdens the authors and reviewers bore during the breakdown of social networks. Those who lost loved ones or fell ill with COVID-19 are the ones who mainly carried this load. Most of all, the pandemic emerged as an additional layer atop existing structural inequalities, impacting specific populations, many of whom live in the peripheries of the global South.

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<sup>1</sup> I draw on the Land Acknowledgment by the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Nation (<https://nlltribe.com/land-acknowledgement/>) and the map by Native Land Digital (<https://native-land.ca/>).

We ran a double-blind two-round review involving mid-career and senior scholars. All reviewers contributed to making this book better, as did the guidance of our academic advisors, Teresa Caldeira and Winnie Wong. Their time and dedication were valuable in putting together disparate writers' works. I would like to acknowledge the Global Urban Humanities Initiative at the University of California, Berkeley, which created an exceptional context for this publication, providing logistical and financial support, as well as the Joan E. Draper Architectural History Research Endowment, which funded major copyediting of this book. Finally, I am deeply grateful to AbdouMaliq Simone, Teresa Caldeira, and Greig Crysler for their helpful comments on this introductory chapter. I also thank Stathis Yeros and Ralf Korbmacher for their generous remarks.

### **Heterogeneous peripheries**

I was sitting at a table just outside Oscar Niemeyer's iconic Copan building in downtown São Paulo with my colleagues from the Instituto Pólis. We had just attended a seminar on "Intervening in Favelas" by LabLaje, which aimed to bridge the gap between university education and the ways to study and intervene in Brazilian favelas. I asked my colleagues, "Are favelas considered peripheries?"

Various answers surfaced and coalesced into four general categories. First, peripheries are material and imagined geographies located far from a historical, expanded, or financial center and its conditions of centrality—connected, serviced, and with a vibrant life. However, one of my colleagues stated that, according to this definition, the favela of Paraísopolis can no longer be considered periphery due to its developed infrastructure and services. Additionally, she observed that many peripheries in São Paulo have become centralities of cultural initiatives that advance aesthetic and political concerns. Second, peripheries include favelas, as well as irregular and illegal settlements, which may present various degrees of socio-physical vulnerability and precarity. Third, the Brazilian *periferia* is a stigmatized expression that the elites use for urban areas they associate with violence and moral degradation. Finally, *periferia* is also called *quebrada* (meaning "fractured," considering the uneven shape of its streets) by cultural activists as a space from which they articulate race and gender politics. While these four categories were certainly applicable, they failed to catalyze a definitive answer. In the end, my colleagues retorted, "When you discover what peripheries are, please tell us!"

It was then that I wanted to understand better what peripheries were. I realized later that this question precluded the possibility of approaching peripheries as dynamic processes. Often described as "informal" or "illegal," peripheries are instead processes and places in

which conditions and actors are constantly shifting (Caldeira, 2017). This book aims to elaborate on the heterogeneity of the peripheries to complicate them as objects of urban studies. It does so by disarticulating them into a plurality of embodied identities emerging within uneven geographies.

### **Peripheries as a problem space**

The different connotations of peripheries analyzed in this book confirm the polyvalence of this concept. Peripheries are urban fringes, peripheral countries in the world-system, Indigenous lands, occupied territories, or “peripheries of geographies of authoritative knowledge” (Bhan, 2016, p. 15). What makes all these instantiations simultaneously possible? Foucault (1984) used “problematization” as a method of analysis not to find a univocal understanding of a subject matter. Rather, he employed it to examine how a problem is constructed as an object of thought and then analyzed and regulated under specific circumstances. Therefore, problematizing peripheries (considering them as a problem space) means exploring their potential as objects, sites, and substances of thinking (Rabinow, 2008, pp. 43-44).

In this book, peripheries are a question, not a given, the answers to which are contingent forms assembled around embodied identities. Each form advances specific political work. We are interested in this work because no form can exist outside historical relations of power enacted through knowledge, money, laws, and regulations. If framing a process shapes how we think about it (and often act afterward), what does it mean to frame different processes through peripheries as a problem space? How are peripheries produced as a specific field of knowledge, and what are its effects on political and ethical practices? I have addressed these questions after introducing the multiple peripheries in this book. However, my answers have, in turn, led to further questions.

### **Multiple peripheries in this book**

The title of the initial call for papers was *Embodying the Periphery*. Subsequent discussions, however, indicated that *Embodying Peripheries* would better grasp the heterogeneity of the authors’ contributions to the theme. Four tracks organized the call to be published around analytics, which could be considered open questions. In the tracks, the periphery emerged as a topographic anchor for decentering urban theory (*within, in between*) and an urban process (*peripheral urbanization, cityness*). Implicit in these tracks were colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial relations of power and global macroeconomic dynamics grounded in the modern world-system theory.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I will discuss these topics in further detail following this section.

### Embodying the periphery “within”

As practices deemed peripheral unfold in the center, they also raise questions about the (in)visibility of peripheral cultures, the fluidity of urban practices, and the temporal aspect of embodied identities emerging in the center. Through the politics of bodily presence in the center, peripheral subjectivities articulate claims such as the right to centrality (Lefebvre, 1968), advance social projects, and express fragmented dissent. Papers and projects in this track explore the embodied identities in inner cities, the so-called “ghettos,” townships, banlieues and housing projects (Balibar, 2007), districts, spaces of urban decay, occupied buildings and infrastructures, homeless camps, and ruins, among others.

### Embodying the periphery “in between”

A periphery can be a space between neighborhoods, cities, urban/rural areas, and nations. It can also be a border area, a margin, or a peripheral frontier exposed to massive migratory movements (Marques & Torres, 2004), a place where most migrants end up living in conditions of residential illegality and infrastructure deprivation (Holston, 2009). Papers and projects in this track investigate, among others, embodied identities in peri-urban areas, peripheral frontiers, urban/rural translocal topographies, borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987), cultural contact zones (Pratt, 1991), refugee camps, sectarian frontiers (Akar, 2018), zones of dispossession mapped onto “bodies-in-place” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013), and “hyper-peripheries” where socio-residential inequalities overlap with environmental vulnerabilities (Torres & Marques, 2001).

### Embodying “peripheral urbanization”

In this mode of production of urban space, which prevails in the global South, residents of the peripheries build their houses and neighborhoods on their own while transversally engaging with institutional modes of spatial production, including state directives, lawful tenure, and formal employment (Caldeira, 2017). The political significance of these practices is manifold and concerns residence, the right to the city, citizenship, everyday life, and aesthetic choices, among others. Papers and projects in this track examine the embodied identities around self-building in *colonias populares*, favelas, settlements, urban peripheries, refugee camps, and public spaces, among others.

### Embodying “cityness”

This track explores the embodiment of “cityness” as the intersection between people, resources, places, and ideas, which is invisible to formal rendering (Pieterse, 2010; Simone, 2010). Cityness denounces the fallacy of the coherent traceability of movements and behaviors within urban spaces. Papers and projects in this track analyze embodied identities in economies of affect, networks of communication and exchange, spaces of expectation and anticipation, circulations, rituals of transgression, “infrastructures of people” (Simone, 2010), areas of deprivation and insecurity, fuzzy circuits of association, geographies of the new precariat, and urban undergrounds, among others.

We conducted an initial reading of the book through these provisional tracks: embodying the periphery “within” (Àjàdí, Cannella, Stevens), embodying the periphery “in between” (Kimmel, Baumann, Pasta, Minami, Khare), embodying “peripheral urbanization” (Richmond & Kopper, Novacich), and embodying “cityness” (Exumé, Caro). However, multiple specificities and tropes of investigation emerged from these analytical concepts, offering different reading itineraries across the authors’ contributions. These itineraries included race and ethnicity (Exumé, Baumann, Àjàdí, Kimmel, Novacich, Pasta), conflict and violence (Àjàdí, Baumann), cultural practices (Exumé, Caro, Kimmel), technologies of segregation (Richmond & Kopper, Baumann), forced movements and stases (Baumann, Àjàdí, Exumé), settler colonialism and Indigenous lands (Baumann, Àjàdí, Minami), gender politics (Cannella, Novacich), peripheralization (Pasta, Khare), and urban contestations and bodily transgressions (Stevens, Novacich, Baumann).

I invite readers to find other connections between the chapters and essays. We decided not to sort them into distinct parts so that you could follow your preferred itineraries; we did, however, juxtapose the essays according to the cities of the global South and the global North, including Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Porto Alegre, Abuja, East Jerusalem, Istanbul, Naples, Marseille, Gurgaon, Hong Kong, California City, and New York.

Some authors included images in their texts, while others developed photographic essays. Without photography, ethnographies of peripheral cityness are difficult to conduct (De Boeck, 2016, p. 21). However, providing visibility does not imply repair and recovery. Sometimes, remaining invisible is critical for people living in peripheries. How, then, do we negotiate the visibility and invisibility of peripheral practices in a way that forecloses processes of extraction and dispossession in the afterlife of colonialism? This remains an open question.

The different contributions (long, short, and visual) allowed us to tap into multiple archives that sometimes are not immediately available to researchers. While the long chapters present

a more traditional structure, the short essays bring us directly to various contexts through ethnographic accounts. When not specified otherwise, the reader is free to assemble the theoretical, methodological, and analytical approaches behind these micronarratives. If Kuan Hwa's introductory essay developed an overview of the pieces in relation to "embodiment," what follows is an overview of the contributions regarding "peripheries."

**Samuel Novacich** examines the spaces and practices of makeup artists and their clients in and around the favela of Mangueira in Rio de Janeiro. In Rio, the term "periphery" originates from the vernacular word *periferia*, which describes the city's socioeconomic conditions and often overlaps with its geographical features. Novacich draws connections between the aesthetic practices of makeup and *marquinha* and the politics of inequality in the *periferia*. As these practices configure sensibilities that compete with central ones, they become more than status symbols. They have a material and intimate impact on gender relationships and negotiations. The people living in Rio's urban periphery manipulate the surfaces of their bodies in ways that amplify and reflect the dynamics of their daily lives and build novel conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality.

**Matthew Aaron Richmond** and **Moisés Kopper** focus on the dynamics of walling—the division of residential areas through physical walls—in the peripheries of Brazilian cities as places with socioeconomic inequalities and low-income housing. Similar to how walls separate elite enclaves from poor neighborhoods, segregation also occurs in low-income communities. The authors analyze forms of mediated citizenship in São Paulo, Porto Alegre, and Rio de Janeiro through technologies of segregation and surveillance, the movements they inhibit and enable, and, ultimately, the meanings attached to them by peripheral dwellers and the othering that they engender. Based on the concepts of "walling" and "porosity," the authors maintain that walling does not indicate the decline of communitarianism in the peripheries. Instead, they understand it as a socio-material process that conflicts with forms of social differentiation and affinity at various levels.

**Jeroen Stevens** captures different peripheral spaces within the city center of São Paulo. The occupation of the central buildings and public spaces by the houseless people in the city is a form of presence that claims the right to shelter and the right to the city. Photographs in this essay focus on the houseless movements struggling for inclusion in the production of urban spaces in central urban areas. The author develops a broader argument about the importance of the center in 21<sup>st</sup>-century urban movements that engage

in social justice. Their spatial practices include encampments and more structured occupations and practices of resistance, which suggest new models of collaborative urban transformation and collective life. Interactions between human and nonhuman actors are essential in distinguishing the land occupations in São Paulo from reclaiming the vacant urban spaces in the city center.

Bringing conflict and urban studies together, **Stephen Àjàdí** challenges the Eurocentric understandings of the center and the periphery. The author starts from the Durumi camp in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, to develop a spatiotemporal analysis in the context of conflict. Àjàdí captures the various levels of peripheralality in the camp in relation to the other regions of Abuja and within the camp itself. At the same time, the author reconnects the internally displaced persons living in the region to broader historical genealogies of displacement in the area. In so doing, Àjàdí contributes to the field of urban geopolitics by considering how conflicts unfold in cities on a daily basis rather than by viewing this process from a bird's-eye view. Even as recently as January 2021, Abuja was adamant about forcing the Fulani, an ethnic majority in the Sahel and West Africa, into the rest of the country, especially southwest Nigeria. Because of this, the farmers and the Indigenous residents in the Southwest were murdered and kidnapped. Today, Abuja remains the center of the nation, with conflict-ridden peripheries all around and within it.

**Hanna Baumann's** concept of periphery is multifaceted; it encompasses parts of East Jerusalem that are nominally included in the municipality of Jerusalem—a precarious *de jure* inclusion—but spatially excluded through a nine-meter concrete wall, such as the Kufr Aqab and the Shuafat refugee camps. Furthermore, the Palestinians living in Jerusalem are “permanent residents” but not citizens, and most of them are stateless. In an exchange with this book's editors, Baumann asked whether the enclaves are being redefined from “ghettos” (spaces that are marginalized yet included within state institutions) to “frontiers,” spaces where the state bears no responsibility for the residents, resulting in higher rates of violence. For Baumann, the body is not the periphery itself, but the Palestinians might appear to belong to a distinct ethnic group. They occasionally shape the boundaries of who is “in place” and who is “out of place” in a particular locality. While physical movement restricts the Palestinians to the geographical periphery of Jerusalem, leisure mobility disrupts these boundaries, opening the imagination to different futures.



**Francesco Pasta** studies the *gecekond* areas (former illegal/irregular settlements that may still present some degree of irregularity) in Istanbul, a city caught between its integration into the global economy and territorial exclusion. Fikirtepe is a site at the crossroad between migration and capital flows that is currently being erased by urban redevelopment. When the recent economic crisis that started in 2016 brought urban projects to a standstill, Fikirtepe became an interrupted utopia. Here, the shattered simulacra of development coexisted with the very spaces and practices they had to erase in order to exist. The “illusory dream images” of development were haunted by the re-peripheralization emerging from the ruins of neoliberal speculation. Concurrently, Fikirtepe’s “return to the periphery” opened opportunities for the peripheral populations to settle there. The immigrants from Syria and Central Asia who work in construction and garbage collection conferred new spatial and temporal meanings on their neighborhoods.

**Fabrizia Cannella** examines the relationship between the peripheral identities and the peripheral spaces in Naples, the largest city in southern Italy, which is still associated with poverty, crime, and disorder when compared to the “advanced” North. In Naples, the *quartieri popolari* (low-income historic neighborhoods) are notorious for their substandard housing conditions, joblessness, and crime. Living there is the *femminiello*, a quintessentially Neapolitan non-binary subjectivity with fluid sexual identities that first emerged in the historic inner city. The periphery cannot simply be reduced to oppression, marginalization, and subalternity; instead, it often represents a site of possibility where subjectivities assert their right to signify from the margins of hegemonic institutions. Through the voices of Ciro Ciretta, Tarantina Taran, and Loredana, three *femminielli*, Cannella unpacks multiple peripheries in relation to space, identity, and culture.

**Anna Jayne Kimmel** studies how the 2017 Festival de Marseille reconstructed cityscapes by placing the people of the periphery at the center. By reinscribing new boundaries within the urban center and destabilizing rigid constructions of national identity, the festival impaired the ephemeral offering of the performer, who is too often pushed to the periphery or essentialized but never allowed full placement. Through its dispersed crowd of audience and performers, venues, funds, and publicity, Kimmel argues that the festival refused the center-periphery divide that is not exclusively about location. Identity politics continue to haunt this divide through embodied movement. When the scope of the festival’s performance was reoriented beyond the proscenium, the focus was redirected from the staged bodies of the marginalized communities to a new politics of inclusion

and exclusion created by and for immigrants. As its participants embodied new positions, the festival altered the embodied imaginary of Marseille, allowing fluid interplays within its architectural boundaries.

**Diego Caro** takes us to the underground spaces of Hong Kong music, where he actively participates as a musician in the band Cracklebox and as a graphic designer for different music organizations. In a bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, some young artists in Hong Kong oppose the commodification of creativity, speculation, and even Chinese political oppression. Their frequently hidden, inaccessible, and small venues form a scattered periphery within the center, where a small minority of the participants gather. These underground spaces add to the creative venues while also constraining their expansion. The artistic appropriation of these diverse spaces has been reappropriated by monopolistic capital through the “busking experiences” and the “picnic music weekends” sponsored by global corporations. The underground spaces of Hong Kong music have become ephemeral under government control and the threat of real estate speculation.

**Sarth Khare’s** visual essay captures the transformation of peri-urban Gurgaon in northwest India through creative destruction and accumulation, including the uneven integration of agrarian classes into the emerging real estate markets in urban villages. India’s dazzling urbanization of the millennium city reproduces issues of othering as it pushes the low-income populations to the “outside,” and the “heterogeneous beyond” is blamed for the city’s ills. The periphery in Gurgaon is a patchwork of pockets of poverty and prosperity, undergoing uneven agrarian transformations. Among them are the slums of Gurugram, where migrant workers from the hinterlands live and are subjected to discrimination on the basis of caste and gender. While the communities of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Muslims are pushed farther to the peripheries, the women face a lack of privacy, inequalities in wages, and various forms of violence, including sexual harassment.

**Noritaka Minami’s** photography renders the Mojave Desert on the periphery of southern California’s developed lands and public consciousness. Throughout history, deserts have offered a blank canvas onto which people have projected their beliefs, plans, and desires. In the Mojave Desert, Nathan Mendelsohn, a sociologist at Columbia University, developed the master-planned community of California City. Mendelsohn believed that humankind could create a living environment that would provide all the essentials of modern life, even in harsh deserts. As a utopian project, the plan remained on paper, while the Mojave Desert

has served various purposes, such as being a rangeland, a battleground, and the site of off-road motorized recreation. The appropriation of the Indigenous lands by Western-centric imagination and consumption has left imprints of seizure and wheels on the desert sands.

**David Exumé** examines the experiences of Haitian immigrants in New York who moved from the periphery to the center during the 1980s. He considers how radio played a significant role in cultivating the communities from the diaspora, in addition to facilitating resistance against the Duvalier regime. According to the author, diaspora is not only configured as a phenomenon of physical displacement; it is also articulated by the information channels that facilitate a connection with the homeland and other people in the broader diaspora. The transnational radio programs produced by the Haitian immigrants in Brooklyn provide peripheral spaces within the prevalent U.S. media landscapes. Along with complicating national boundaries, they also contribute to the Haitian culture's distinctiveness, which is often reduced to the stereotypical conceptions of Black identity.

### **Worlding peripheries**

As intimated earlier, peripheries as a problem space transcend territorial locations to encompass translocal and transnational processes. However, the worlding of peripheries—their worldliness, or the “art of being global” (Roy & Ong, 2011, pp. 1-23)—is a compelling task that entails translating cultural forms from one context to another.<sup>3</sup>

Subaltern histories are fundamental to each worlding of peripheries, often identified as spaces of subalternity.<sup>4</sup> The Third World and subaltern subjects are signifiers in neo-Marxist accounts that consider capitalism and colonialism to be the two shaping forces of homogenized global conditions (Spivak, 1985). However, such practices of worlding run the risk of neglecting historical and geographical heterogeneity while being committed to the global status quo (Roy & Ong, 2011, p. 3). Peripheries must instead be reduced neither to processes shaped only by global capitalist and colonial dynamics nor spaces inhabited by working classes, subaltern people, and postcolonial subjects.

Similarly, if scholars of postcolonial studies have analyzed peripheries of the global South as sites of inventiveness and politics, they have sometimes confined such agencies to the realm of subaltern urbanism, often romanticized as “localized otherness” (Sheppard et

<sup>3</sup> Spivak (1999) drew on Heidegger's worlding (*Being and Time*, 1927, and “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 1971) to describe how the Third World is brought into the world (Sheppard et al., 2013, p. 897).

<sup>4</sup> Subaltern studies draw on Gramsci's concept of “subaltern” to uncover the histories of subordinate agents—“in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way” (Guha, vii)—in colonial and nationalist archives, particularly in South Asia. Cf. Gramsci, 2016; Guha, 1988; Chakrabarty, 2000; and Spivak, 2015, among others.

al., 2013, p. 5).<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, to achieve specific political goals, subaltern groups may intentionally tone down their complex identities into homogenous ones. Nevertheless, this form of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak, 1984) might obscure the diversified nature of subaltern politics.

How, then, can we move away from peripheries as sites and processes where subaltern agency conflates with a unified “habitus of the dispossessed” (Roy, 2011, p. 228)? One way, I believe, is to understand how specific genealogies of worlding can ground peripheries into specific histories and processes that are, at the same time, capable of re-signifying the global. What follows are three possible genealogies of worlding to help position the various forms of embodiment in this book.

## **Genealogies of (worlding) peripheries**

### **Urban fringes**

Scholars have analyzed the complexities of what are considered peripheries in globalization processes, postcolonial studies, and ethno-racial and gender politics. In urban studies, the term “peripheries” has predominantly come to indicate developments at the urban fringes, including poor settlements, middle-class areas, gated communities, small towns, and rural hinterlands (Herzog, 2014; Ren, 2021). As urban fringes, peripheries have helped interpret post-industrial growth in metropolitan regions. After World War II, the peripheries of European cities indicated areas with social housing where poor and immigrant people lived. If some of these areas have been gentrified, most of the world population still lives in urban peripheries under conditions of socio-racial exclusion, infrastructure deprivation, and illegal or irregular residency (Holston, 2009). In the aftermath of colonialism, the economic crises of the 1970s and the early 1980s, the World Bank’s structural adjustments, and democratization processes led to urbanization dynamics that have produced worldwide peripheries wherein 1.6 billion people live in inadequate housing, one billion of whom reside in slums and informal settlements (UN-Habitat, 2005, 2016).

These peripheries are often spaces of insufficiency that depend on the support and guidance of a center but are not shaped by its logic (Simone, 2010). Still, the center-periphery dichotomy risks spatially reifying massive peripheral urbanization as a one-sided territorialization of urban processes (Guney et al., 2019, p. 46). The dualization of a city, which sees the centers as the radiating cores of city life and the peripheries as repositories of social vulnerabilities, fails to grasp the historicity of urban dynamics and obscures possibilities for social

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Guha, 1982; Chatterjee, 2004; and Bayat, 2007 about the peripheries as sites of inventiveness and politics and Roy, 2011 and Jeffrey, 2009 for agency confined to the realm of subaltern urbanism.

transformation.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, if the analytics of poverty, exclusion, deprivation, and dispossession, often associated with peripheries, help denounce urban inequality, they simultaneously reproduce the fallacies of hegemonic frameworks (e.g., marginality, informality, and illegality). They dismiss on-the-ground processes that exist outside of official recognition, as well as creative resistance to oppressive norms.

Thus, how can we consider peripheral forms of dispossession as generative of political responses to normative ways of being in the world (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013)? How do we write about people from peripheries without essentializing their identities or confining their agency within informal or subaltern urbanism? How do we account for peripheral histories not being outside the logic of the center, which is supposedly planned, formal, and legal? To avoid the center-periphery dichotomy, in this book, we consider peripheries as the *constitutive outside* of variously defined centers—be they metropolises, core countries, urban downtowns, or settler outposts—as centers of city and political life, service, infrastructure, knowledge production, planning, and finance. Investigating the constitutive outside does not mean focusing on dualism but rather on the historical co-constitution of centers and peripheries, which helps avoid fixing people and spaces into pre-formed identities.

This would, however, contrast with the concept of a wholly urbanized planet (Lefebvre, 1968) where there is no bounded spatial unit like a city (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). No cities, no centers, and no peripheries. By considering urbanization as different degrees of capital accumulation, concentration of people, and circulation of goods (Angelo & Goh, 2020), the *urban without an outside* approach (Brenner, 2014) challenges rural/urban divides and liminal spaces like peripheries. However, feminist, poststructuralist, and post-colonial perspectives insist on contemplating the outside, whether “the periphery, the rural, the agrarian question, the hinterland, or the colony” (Roy, cited by Lancione and McFarlane, 2021, p. 26), to analyze historical differences, processes of expropriation and extraction, and social struggles and transformations (Ruddick et al., 2018). We draw on this scholarship to retain the generative role of the peripheries as such an outside for critical inquiry.

At the same time, Harris & Vorms stated that “peripheries” is mostly a term that experts, planners, and administrators use to articulate the overall characteristics of specific areas and formulate public policies (Harris & Vorms, 2017, pp. 10-16)—this is not the case in Brazil, where activist groups from the peripheries profusely use this term. According to the authors, people from various regions of the world do not use “peripheries” as an

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Pereira, 2005; Marques & Torres, 2004; Tanaka, 2006; and Barone, 2013.

umbrella term, much less in opposition to centers; instead, they use many words to indicate the fragmentation of socio-spatial processes and forms. Thus, choosing peripheries as a problem space means being in dialogue with a specific scholarship that consider them as contingent forms distributed over urban regions, fragmented and dynamic.<sup>7</sup> “[T]he standard geographies of core and periphery are disrupted and dislocated” (Roy, 2009, p. 828); this is true within the global South as well.

Other scholars have tackled this fragmentation under the “suburbanization” framework. Harris and Vorms analyzed linguistic imperialism by observing whether different urban and more-than-urban forms are brought into the world as either urban peripheries or suburbs (Harris & Vorms, 2017, p. 6). I selected the term “peripheries” over “suburbs” because suburbanization grounds urban sprawl in Anglo-American urban histories, thereby tapping into genealogies of middle-class neighborhoods. Instead, peripheries in this publication encompass favelas, *gecekondu*, *quartieri spagnoli*, squatted buildings, Indigenous lands, refugee camps, underground spaces, and ethnic enclaves, whose histories have been shaped by colonialism, settler colonialism, neocolonialism, and militarism. This brings us to the genealogy of the peripheries rooted in global macroeconomic dynamics. In this context, Latin-American dependency and world-system theories have been essential for understanding how capitalist globalization and geopolitical forces have unevenly impacted contemporary peripheries.

### Periphery countries in the modern world-system theory

According to modernization theories of the 1950s and '60s, Third World countries would develop through stages of technological and cultural advancement along the temporal lines of Western civilization and progress (Rostow, 1959; Hoselitz, 1960; Parsons, 1964; Lerner, 1958). These theories valued the global forms of economy while marginalizing other forms that were equally important in terms of city economies and everyday livelihoods, especially the informal sector. In the 1970s, scholars from Latin America challenged post-war development modernization by claiming that underdevelopment was an integral part of development. Central countries needed to extract cheap labor and natural resources from peripheral ones (Dos Santos, 1970; Quijano, 1977; Bambirra, 1983). Dependency theorists insisted on the mutual constitution of development and underdevelopment within the center-periphery model, a dynamic termed “development of underdevelopment” (Frank, 1966).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Roy, 2009, p. 825; Caldeira, 2017; and Peeren, Stuit, & Van Weyenberg, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Kaplan, 1972; Scheingart, 1973; and Rofman, 1974 regarding the mutual constitution of development and underdevelopment within the center-periphery model. Cf. Vegliò, 2021 for a detailed analysis of Dependency Theory.

While Castells (1973) applied the center-periphery approach to the urban question through the framework of “dependent urbanization,” others blamed local socio-political structures for underdevelopment while advocating for the transformation of national economic structures, such as import substitution industrialization (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). Wallerstein (1974) further theorized two interrelations of macro-regions constituted by core and periphery countries, each based on a different production model: labor-intensive at the periphery and capital-intensive at the core (Goldfrank, 2000). The unequal exchange of surpluses occurred between the labor-intensive sectors on the periphery and the highly technological, industrialized core (*Ibidem*). The semi-periphery countries served as a buffer between the core and the periphery as sites where a mix of activities and institutions unique to those areas occurred (Skocpol, 1977). Within the modern world-system, Brazilian scholars referred to the urban fringes as the “peripheries of capitalism” (Maricato, 1966; Bonduki & Rolnik, 1982).

Scholars of global cities built upon the world-system framework, reading worldwide urban peripheries of the global South as products of global capital restructuring and international migration of labor (Sassen-Koob, 1980, 1983; Amin, 1997). However, by considering peripheries as homogeneous repositories for the poor, these scholars often fixed peripheral subjectivities socially (the working class and precariat) and spatially (urban informality). Following these lines of inquiries, in the form of slums, peripheries have been analyzed as spaces of surplus humanity resulting from the retreat of the state and shrinking urban economies (Davis, 2006). This account risks neglecting historical and geographical contexts and differences, including race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. It has been through these differences that forms of oppression and liberation have been historically constructed in peripheral spaces and processes.

In urban studies, the reading of urbanization in the global South through the Third-World framework led to dismissing “cities off the map” as being critical to global dynamics. Southern cities were studied through the lens of development *versus* modernity (Robinson, 2002). They were spaces in need of reforms and diagnostics (Roy, 2011). Building on Clifford’s (1997) study, Robinson proposed a discrepant cosmopolitan approach to urban studies to shift the focus from the city center to the urban edge, from global cities to ordinary cities and rural hinterlands (Robinson, 2002, p. 532; 2013a). These studies opened our understanding of modes of non-Western-centric urbanization as separate models informed by colonial histories (*Ibidem*), as well as revolts, detachments, withdrawals, and parallel formations. To complicate this framework, I am adding two additional theoretical anchors advanced by scholars of the global South that we used in the original call for papers of this book: peripheral urbanization and cityness.

### Peripheral urbanization and cityness

According to Caldeira (2017), the term “peripheries” refers to spaces produced by “peripheral urbanization” in the global South. This mode of producing urban spaces is characterized by the residents of peripheries, who build their houses and neighborhoods on their own while transversally engaging with institutional forms of spatial production, such as state directives, lawful tenure, and formal employment (*Ibid.*, p. 7). Rather than referring to a location in the city—its margins—peripheral urbanization refers to a method of creating space that can be anywhere. Spaces are not peripheral because of their geographical location but rather because of the processes by which the residents are the agents of urbanization instead of simply being the consumers of spaces produced and regulated by others (*Ibid.*, p. 5).

In the global South, peripheral urbanization takes on different forms depending on the context. These modes of articulation involve a wide range of actors, sectors, and places whose identities and meanings are not always easily translatable across different situations. Here, the embodiment does not only pertain to individuals or even households but to lateral connections of mutual entanglement—how one thing connects to another in terms of social and material networks. This framework unsettles our understanding of self-built (“autoconstructed”) peripheries as those informally produced by the urban poor. Furthermore, it reveals how self-building (“autoconstruction”) produces both improvements and inequalities (*Ibid.*, p. 9). The transverse nature of these interactions means that inequalities cannot always be mapped based on simple, dualistic oppositions such as “regulated versus unregulated, legal residences versus slums, [or] formal versus informal” (*Ibid.*, p. 7). Consequently, these categories become unstable.

In peripheral urbanization, the geographical, economic, political, and cultural relationships between peripheries and their mutually constituted centers have spatial and material implications. Peripheral spaces may be characterized by specific material and ecological conditions: self-built dwellings, infrastructure precarity or exclusion, underground materiality, interstitial openings, technologies of separation, environmental pollution, hazards, and scarcity of resources and mobility. As such, many authors in this book address the very materiality of peripheries and its entanglement with embodied identities.

The second framework I want to recuperate is cityness, which, as stated before, signifies peripheral practices that are systematically erased or silenced. Originating from the concept of the ordinariness of all cities (Amin & Graham, 1997; Robinson, 2002, 2013a; Pieterse, 2010), cityness refers to the practices of inhabiting the city that cannot be grasped by official accounts of analysts and policymakers. The term pertains to those interactions between people, spaces, and things (Simone, 2010) exceeding attempts to regulate them. Left out of



the analytical picture, assemblages of discrepant movements and economic activities are characterized by unanticipated interactions and flexible outcomes. Although deemed peripheral to urban life, these practices are nevertheless essential to it (*Ibidem*). However, to avoid romanticizing cityness, I want to situate it in everyday geographies and regimes of coloniality. In this context, cityness becomes a political space in which new forms of collective life unfold (Bhan et al., 2020) while, at the same time, different forms of oppression reproduce the “coloniality of power” (Quijano, 2000, 2007).

### **Coloniality of power**

Due to unbalanced relations of power between Europe and the (post)colonial Other, the worlding of cities has traditionally relied on a core-periphery model of globalization, both in neoliberal and postcolonial frameworks (Roy, 2009, pp. 824–825). Beginning in colonial times and extending into the present, the “coloniality of power” entails the logic, culture, and order of the modern world-system. It includes forms of oppression such as racism and heteropatriarchy (Quijano, 2000, 2007; Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992; Lugones, 2007, 2016). Therefore, we cannot study peripheries without addressing questions of postcolonial status, gender, sexuality, and ethnic-racial oppression feeding urban apartheid, forced migrations, gentrification, and environmental racism. These conditions make urban spaces and practices peripheral within colonial histories of extraction. Modern architecture and planning played a critical role in framing development discourses, shaping the Third World as periphery, and administering the European colonies through urban plans and housing programs (Muzaffar, 2007). For example, in the French colonies, the reorganization of bidonvilles by displacement, restructuring, or assimilation constituted the first stage of the cultural modernization of the Natives. In the U.S., the United Nations Housing Town and Country Planning section created multiple missions to produce master plans in Singapore, Kabul, Beirut, Lima, and Lagos. They set up conferences, planning bodies, research centers, and architecture schools in countries undergoing decolonization. Peripheries represented laboratories for experiments to manage local populations and feedback loops on the organization of the metropolis (Rabinow, 1995). Today, many cities of the global South remain laboratories to experiment with policies and planning interventions that can go wrong (De Satgé & Watson, 2018; Simone, 2010, p. 46).

European colonialism and postcolonial affiliations within the global South have operated through institutions and powers that do not have the interest of the general urban population in mind (Simone, 2010, p. 18). Policies have been punitive toward certain

practices and livelihoods, subjecting people to displacement when they do not conform to regulations. People living in peripheries are subject to forced migration and temporary arrangements due to conflicts. At the same time, newly defined zones of environmental preservation and geotechnical risk result in evictions of squatters and slum dwellers. These people become deprived of shelter, livelihood, property, infrastructure, basic services, and the right to the city.

Evictions are embedded in the logic of racial banishment as “state-instituted violence against racialised bodies and communities” (Roy, 2019, p. 227). Within these legal geographies of colonial domination and racial exclusion, the erasure of Black places and histories often causes civil and social death, as noted in McKittrick’s notion of “urbicide” (McKittrick, 2011, pp. 950–953). However, between the ethnocentric logic of “Blackness” of eviction/destruction/death and “Whiteness” of legality/approval/safety, gray spaces are positioned at the “periphery of the periphery” (Yiftachel, 2009a, p. 89; 2009b, p. 247). Additionally, evictions result from the financialization of the housing sector intending to “unlock” land values in cities (Rolnik, 2019). Who owns and can claim home and land? Who regulates such claims, and how? In peripheral capitalism, land occupies a central position for urbanization: mechanisms of land transformation and capital accumulation create highly speculative housing markets.

Beyond evictions and housing speculation, *foreclosure* refers to the negation of certain representations within valorized spatial practices and discourses (Hesse, 2014). However, since the colonial-racial foreclosure is never fully realized, what has been foreclosed constantly threatens the norm. How can radical performances unsettle normative discourses and practices and reopen previously foreclosed spaces and processes? Thinking from peripheries may contribute to answering this question.

### **Thinking from peripheries**

Studying peripheries means not only focusing on the geographical South but also shedding light on relationships of power and knowledge by which alternatives to central (Northern-centric) spaces, practices, and histories have been foreclosed or constructed as unsound. When we consider the South as an embodied relationship between knowledge and power, questions can be posed from any periphery in the world, also in the geographic North. The South can be seen as a set of moving peripheries from which to challenge authoritative knowledge—the “peripheries of geographies of authoritative knowledge” (Bhan, 2016, p. 15; Bhan, 2019, p. 642 citing Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015).

In this regard, thinking *from* a place does not mean merely producing knowledge from where we live, as this does not necessarily lead us to embodied knowledge production. Mbembe, for

example, insisted that African scholars have also written about Africa as an object apart from the world, disengaging from the “exercise in writing the worldliness [...] of contemporary African life forms” (Mbembe, 2004, p. 347). Thinking *from* a place rather than *about* a place requires that we ask certain questions first (Bhan, 2017, cited in McElroy & Werth, 2019). Therefore, we invited the authors in this book to engage with deep ethnography or collaboration with activist movements instead of only presenting analytical or historical work. We looked for ethnographies that could ensure long-term commitments, contextual knowledge, and slow thinking while fully attending to how changing environments are reshaping knowledge production (Günel et al., 2020).

In this sense, the question about “embodiment” that this publication poses helped assemble accounts from the ground as opposed to the “context-less, abstract universalisms of many northern theorists” (De Satgé & Watson, 2018, p. 17). We asked, “How do peripheral structures serve a constructive purpose of affirming ways of life by supporting various bodily practices? What are the bodily challenges peripheral subjectivities pose against their urban conditions? How does embodying peripheries for cultural survival become a radical political practice?” By addressing these questions, the authors of this book tackle political structures emerging from bodily practices that challenge normative notions of subjectivity. The aim is to learn from the realities that peripheral dwellers face by using the body within available models of comportment (Simone, 2010, p. 58). This is critical if we consider that we ought to assemble a self that makes sense while considering what is possible under peripheral conditions (Mahmood, 2005, cited in Simone, 2010, p. 58). Even when people move from peripheries to centers, their bodily, gendered, and racial identities shape new spaces of adaptation and reconstruction.

If thinking from peripheries helps us focus on inequality, then it also triggers questions on resistance, agency, and counter-practices to normative ones. On the one hand, by recognizing forms of dispossession and deprivation in peripheries, we denounce structural racism and heteropatriarchy. On the other hand, it is critical to learn from practices of resistance and activism emerging from noncentral notions of history and spaces. Peripheries are often seen as spaces of potential creativity, innovation, and adaptation—it is precisely the peripheries’ generative role that is usually overlooked in predominant approaches to urban life (Simone, 2010, p. 41). Being peripheral gives access to networks of provisioning, spaces, and infrastructures outside central norms. For some scholars, “the emancipatory potential of the urban planet lies in fact in the periphery” (Keil, 2018, p. 1594), an outlook which—yet again—runs the risk of essentializing peripheral politics and subjectivities but has potential for decentering urban theory.

### **Conclusion: decentering urban theory**

Decentering refers to the process of diverting from an established center, thus departing from existing assumptions about origin, priority, or essence. *Embodying Peripheries* may contribute in many ways to “decentering urban theory” (Caldeira, 2009). As a multidisciplinary publication, it offers different perspectives on peripheries that challenge disciplinary silos. By tackling embodied identities, it exposes political structures emerging from spatial practices that are considered peripheral by mainstream urban theories. Additionally, by providing on-the-ground accounts, the book decenters urban analyses as “views from nowhere” (De Satgé & Watson, 2018, p. 21).

In this introduction, I have argued that thinking from peripheries does not mean analyzing them as embodying localized otherness; rather, it entails investigating practices grounded in peripheral histories and sites capable of re-signifying the global. I drew on scholarly debates that aim to complicate the two universal principles of globalization—capitalism and colonialism—that risk confining peripheral identities and agencies to outcomes of universal laws. What seems to be critical is to reconnect the peripheries with genealogies of worlding that position them as processes, topological sites, and embodied relations of power.

Approaching peripheries as a question rather than as a given helps defamiliarize known and, most of all, univocal articulations of the concept. I suggested that many answers to this question are possible because peripheries as a problem space are not only the objects and sites of thinking but also their substance. We collected many articulations of this framework constructed on different sites and connected to various histories. Each periphery emerging from the authors’ accounts does different political work. As the South cannot be defined *a priori* but must be understood relationally (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015), the relationship between peripheries and centers as constitutive outsides is constantly shifting. There are centers in peripheries, peripheries in centers, and peripheries in peripheries. For all of these contexts, I still refer to processes, central or peripheral.

Scholars of the global South suggest that studying peripheries asks for specific methodologies and ways of seeing and knowing. To articulate peripheral cityness means to create specific archives. It implies the cross-fertilization of ethnographic texture, semiotic and topographical patterns, linguistic and spatial practices, and interpretive metaphors (Pieterse, 2010, p. 217). It also demands reformulating research questions as new empirical evidence emerges since peripheries always change and present various temporalities (Robinson, 2013b). Finally, decentering not only involves urban theory but also investigating conditions of heterogeneity, difference, and emergence simultaneously *within* peripheries. I hope that these approaches will create new opportunities for further research.

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# Chapters

This chapter focuses on two aesthetic practices on the urban periphery of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. First, I discuss applications of bright, deliberately eye-catching makeup in the context of professional makeup salons, among amateur enthusiasts, and in relation to women’s empowerment classes at a community center in a small favela located in Rio’s downtown. Second, I describe a tanning practice known as *marquinha* (little mark), in which strips of tape are applied to the body and used to create precise tan lines. Taking as a starting point the assertion that aesthetics and political dynamics are inextricably entwined, I draw comparisons between these aesthetic practices and their relation to questions of sexuality and desire, power and self-empowerment, and to questions of race. In Rio de Janeiro, as elsewhere, aesthetics are particularly important to the politics of inequality that define the urban landscape. And while aesthetics may often express ideas and indeed “say something” about their practitioners, they are hardly just passive reflections of society. This chapter focuses instead on the pragmatic power of makeup and *marquinha* to “*causar*” (to cause) and make real material impacts on viewers. In describing these practices as pragmatic, I call attention to aesthetics as a relational practice that mediates between the self and other, and invites new social possibilities. As such, makeup and *marquinha* are understood as co-constitutive of the contexts within which they are found, shaping not only relations between individuals and things, but also, one’s understanding of the self.

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## MAKEUP AND MARQUINHA: AESTHETICS OF THE BODILY SURFACE IN RIO DE JANEIRO

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Samuel Novacich

Red is a color that draws attention to the lips...

— Mari

Mari takes a moment for herself and a deep breath before beginning her weekly lesson on makeup and women's empowerment at a small NGO in Morro da Providência, the oldest favela in Brazil. She has invited me and my partner, Candy, to participate in two back-to-back workshops that meet weekly, and we sit in the third-floor classroom of a community center that rests at the very top of the historic favela in the middle of Rio de Janeiro's downtown. Mari is white, in her early 30s, and lives in a middle-class neighborhood in Rio's northern zone, where she also grew up. She has designed this course herself and taught it only once before, but tells me she looks forward to expanding the class to other favelas. Two young women from the community join us. Mayara, the younger of the two, is of lighter complexion relative to her classmate, and has tight curls, while Rebecca has slightly darker skin and straight hair.<sup>1</sup>

"Women have always been silenced," Mari begins, "and it was only in recent history that we have even been allowed to vote." She pauses and scans the room, waiting, perhaps, for a reaction to the statement she has just made. But the room is still, and so she continues: "Red is a color that draws attention to the lips... I've challenged women to wear red lipstick for a week, to see if they can sense a difference. It is powerful, and people pay attention."

"Lipstick like Marta?" asks Rebecca, in reference to the soccer star who recently played in the Women's World Cup for Brazil while wearing a bold shade of purple lipstick.

"Exactly!" responds Mari, with what feels to me like an amalgam of excitement and relief at the engagement. She then passes out cotton swabs and shows the women a tip for applying lipstick. The women quietly follow her instructions; Mayara is silent and methodical while Rebecca moves swiftly and applies her lipstick perfectly, turning to Mari for next steps.

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the names in this chapter have been changed to protect the privacy of participants.

The next class begins with some confusion as students enter at different intervals, obligating Mari to repeat herself for new arrivals. This class is much larger than the first, and Mari begins her lesson about gender discrimination and silencing as the women, ironically, talk loudly. Soon, one of the most vocal members of the class—a woman in her mid-40s named Aliny—interjects to declare, “*Professora*, I don’t like red lipstick. It doesn’t work with me. It doesn’t combine well with Black people.” She points to Candy, whom Mari is now using as a model, and says “See, it looks good on her . . . her fine lips, but she’s much whiter.”<sup>2</sup>

A classmate, darker in complexion and comparable in age, joins in: “Yeah, bright red lipstick on big lips just further exaggerates them.”

Mari encourages the women to experiment with the red lipstick, but is measured, and provides an alternative. “Nobody is obligated to do anything—I have a purple lipstick as well,” she offers, and Aliny quickly accepts.

As the women apply their lipsticks, Aliny turns again to Candy, noting the foundation and concealer on her cheeks, and asks, “Did you put on makeup in the earlier class too?” Learning that the first class had not only applied lipstick, but worked with other makeup products as well, Aliny rekindles her protest. “Look *professora*, I like you a lot and I will say this in a way that I don’t want to offend, because I like you, but I feel like you treat the first class differently, and we don’t get the same attention.” Other students echo her concerns, and Mari becomes visibly fazed, promising the students a makeup lesson, which she soon delivers. By the end of this second class, the women have worked with lipstick, foundation, and concealer, and Aliny and her classmates disband, apparently satisfied.

As we leave the NGO and begin our descent by van to the Central do Brasil train station, Mari asks for my thoughts on the workshop, and I cautiously suggest the irony that I had observed. I point out that Mari had set out to teach a class about makeup, empowerment, and women’s voices, but was immediately confronted by women standing up for themselves, expressing their aesthetic preferences and vocalizing their displeasure.<sup>3</sup> Mari

<sup>2</sup> This chapter is based on dissertation fieldwork conducted in Rio de Janeiro in 2019 and 2020, and the vignette described above occurred in July 2019. Candy, my long-term partner, occasionally accompanied me to events such as these and was routinely solicited as a model by makeup artists and instructors, owing in part, I believe, to her fair complexion. Ironically, Candy’s parents are both Guatemalan-Americans and, at home in New York, she proudly identifies as a woman of color. In Brazil, however, she was consistently interpellated as white.

<sup>3</sup> What I refrain from telling Mari at this moment is that her lesson was premised on two false assumptions. The first assumption was based on a simple ethnographic error: that women in Rio’s favelas are without a voice. As the class itself demonstrated, this is simply not the case. Although Afro-Brazilian women in Brazil are often subjected to direct and intense discrimination on top of profound systemic racism, to paint them as “voiceless” erases the agency and rich political activism that has come to define these groups (Caldwell, 2007). The second assumption, perhaps more easily forgiven, was premised on a theoretical error: that silence equates to a lack of power. Susan Gal’s essay “Between Speech and Silence” upends this popular association, and in so doing points to power that is expressed by remaining silent as others are compelled to speak—i.e., priest, investigator, psychotherapist, husband (Gal 1991; Foucault, 1978).

seems to miss the irony, and responds by calling the students *carente*, or needy, a term used often in conservative media and Evangelical circles to describe favela residents, and one tinged with condescension. She explains that this is just the way things are, and that the students are often jealous of her attention.

This opening vignette hints at what is perhaps already obvious: that bodily aesthetics and productions of race, class, gender, and sexuality are interwoven in complicated and nuanced ways (Cox, 2015). Indeed, this chapter takes as its starting point the assertion that aesthetics and politics are inextricably entwined (Azoulay, 2010).<sup>4</sup> And in Brazil, aesthetics are particularly important to the politics of inequality that define the urban landscape (Edmonds, 2010; Jarrín, 2017), in the ways that beauty standards, for example, are leveraged against women in general (Wolf, 1990), and in the ways that white beauty standards are leveraged against Black populations in particular (Pinho, 2007). More than simply excluding Afro-Brazilians from constructions of beauty, Eurocentric beauty standards have been weaponized as tools of subjugation that actively represent Afro-Brazilians as ugly, unhygienic, and lazy. Indeed, such representations may have swayed Aliny from emphasizing her lips in the narrative above. Yet in response to such representational violence (hooks, 1995), Afro-Brazilians have also cultivated a set of styles that Patricia Pinho (2007) has referred to as “Afro-aesthetics” that valorize Jamaican inspired dreadlocks, “African” prints, and even bright colors. Given the clear link between aesthetics and the politics of race, it is easy to see how stylized makeup applications may betray one’s social position (Mendoza-Denton, 2007), or even serve as a political statement of Black solidarity. And yet, although aesthetic practices often “say something” about their practitioners, they are hardly just passive reflections of social status or societal relations. And in Rio, aesthetics do much more than simply reveal, on the surface of one’s body, the reality of a divided city marked by intense stratification (Velho & Alvito, 2000; Zalar, 1998). In fact, to read the bodily surface as only symbolic of Rio de Janeiro’s social geography misses the broader, pragmatic nature of signs and their influence in shaping political life (Mizrahi, 2012; Rancière, 2004).

Scholars have long documented the ways that aesthetic practices shape individual identity, especially with respect to race, sexuality, and gender (Kulick, 1998; Peiss, 1996). Frequently, however, less attention is paid to the specific modes through which aesthetic practices mediate these broader social categorizations and relationships. Analytically, focusing on the aesthetic modalities at work in shaping social life necessitates viewing aesthetics not as a distant, contemplative orientation toward art objects, but rather, following Christopher Pinney, as a

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<sup>4</sup> Ariella Azoulay asserts that the trend in academic literature to separate aesthetics from politics derives from a misreading of Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936).





**Fig. 1**  
**IMPACTO DAS**  
**CORES (IMPACT**  
**OF COLORS).**  
 A mural just  
 outside of the  
 community  
 center where  
 Mari teaches,  
 Morro da  
 Providência  
 (photo: Samuel  
 Novacich,  
 August 2019).

form of social praxis (2004). That is to say, this chapter studies aesthetics as an intensely relational activity. In describing aesthetic practices as pragmatic, I call attention to them as productive technologies (Gell, 1998) that intercede between self and other, thereby inviting new social possibilities. Significantly, this view is distinct from approaches that understand the aesthetic world as only *expressive* of ideas (Geertz, 1976) or as *representative* of taste, judgment, or social status (Bourdieu, 1984). Indeed, this is a critical distinction that this chapter aims to maintain. The aesthetic practices described herein do not reflect an a priori reality or set of fixed social relations; rather, this chapter analyzes practices like makeup application and tanning as co-constitutive of the contexts within which they are found.

Mari, for example, begins her lesson by describing red lipstick as a source of power, not for what it represents, but for what it *does*. “Red is a color that draws attention to the lips . . .” And although some of the students in Mari’s class rejected the shade of red that she implored them to use, a shift in tone and energy throughout the class was undoubtedly perceptible in the wake of her pronouncement, one for which even Mari was perhaps unprepared. While Mari later read this shift through the neoliberal lens of empowerment and self-esteem, I felt something different emanating from the women—something more akin to delight and momentary gratification. “You felt the change, right? You could feel it?” Mari asked, energized, as we later said our goodbyes at the Central do Brasil train station.

Alfred Gell has shown how different art forms, like Trobriand prow boards, function as “technologies of enchantment,” which, through their sheer beauty and technical complexity, inspire awe and momentary shifts in power between artist and viewer (1994). Gell compels us to consider art objects themselves, not for what they *stand for* in terms of status—this is his critique of Bourdieu—but for how they mediate between two or more people. Gell’s work is full of contemporary examples and rich ethnographic material that support his anthropological theory of art. He argues that aesthetic objects produce a sociological function, describing for example the way the decoration on a child’s bedsheet may *entice* that child to bed. But perhaps most convincingly, Gell delves into the anthropological record to illustrate his point about art and agency, noting that even Mauss described aesthetic objects as pragmatic extensions of human intention in his work on reciprocity and exchange (Gell, 1998; Mauss, 1954). Gell describes decoration and complex patterns as exhibiting “cognitive stickiness,” a phenomenon in which aesthetic surfaces draw in viewers through pleasure and intellectual indecipherability—we never fully “get” them, whether we are attracted or distracted; we are simply stuck. Gell



was also fascinated by a phenomenon that he termed “captivation,” an example of cognitive stickiness in which viewers of an image, familiar perhaps with the artistic process and skills required to render such an image, are captured by frustration and wonder (1998).

Although makeup isn’t always heavily patterned, I argue that it nevertheless produces a similar form of “cognitive stickiness,” “captivation,” and indecipherability that shapes social encounters. And indeed, during my fieldwork I often witnessed and even fell prey to the intangible grasp of makeup, especially the elaborate styles practiced in Rio’s northern suburbs. In fact, makeup artists often tout makeup’s powers of mediation. Mari, for example, discusses lipstick in exactly the same terms that Gell uses to describe Trobriand prow boards; the technical perfection of the craft and the boldness of color inspire awe, direct attention, and—if all goes right—create a momentary advantage. Red draws attention to the lips, Mari reminds us, telling us exactly what color *does* in social encounters. The red lipstick compels us, focuses our attention, and even unsettles.

But makeup is only one of several aesthetic technologies that shape Rio's urban periphery.<sup>5</sup> *Marquinha*, translated literally as "little mark," is another bodily aesthetic technique that commands attention, one that involves the use of electrical tape to create precise tan lines. A practice of aesthetic amplification—one of boldness, contrast, and exaggeration—the origins of *marquinha* are difficult to pin down. Most agree, however, that *marquinha* emerged as a practice of mimicry in which favela residents began using tape and homemade bronzing solutions to recreate the tan lines that were left on middle- and upper-class beachgoers. And while the original *marquinha* practitioners may never have gone to the beach at all, their tan lines nonetheless reveal a process that points indexically to leisure time, pleasure, and status (Ochs, 1992). Like makeup, however, *marquinha* is more than a symbol of status. As this chapter further addresses, *marquinha* is celebrated for having real, intimate, and material effects on both practitioners and viewers (and, in particular, for the effects it is believed to have on men).

There are many ways in which layers of makeup, contrasted lines of light and bronzed skin, and wooden prow boards couldn't be more different. And although Gell's work on aesthetics is vital in terms of rethinking makeup and *marquinha* as pragmatic, his focus on foreign objects limits the utility of his ideas for studies of the body. Indeed, the manipulation of the bodily surface is both conceptually and ethically divergent from the production of a piece of art, and when it comes to makeup and *marquinha*, the imperfect distinction between subject and art object begins to blur. In fact, as layers added to and reconfigured on the surface of the body, makeup and *marquinha* are arguably closer to clothing than they are to prow boards or children's sheets. Webb Keane (2005) uses clothing—owing, perhaps, to its conceptual ambiguity between subject and object—as an example and metaphor in discussions of ontology and semiotics, and as an analytic tool for dissecting the Western distinction between spirit and matter. We assume, he says, that clothing is an expression of our ideas and a projection of our identities. This assumption reflects Clifford Geertz's theory of art and materiality (Geertz, 1976), which Keane pushes back against by arguing that such an understanding of clothing—and, by extension,

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<sup>5</sup> My use here of the word "periphery" is a direct translation of the Portuguese word *periferia*, which, together with its variant, *periférico* (peripheral), is often used to connote the social and economic, rather than geographic, margins of the city. Although there is often overlap between these meanings—socially marginalized, working-class populations are indeed pushed into distant suburbs that radiate out from the urban center, in a sense then "peripheral" according to all three of the word's referents—there are, just as often, ruptures in these designations. Moreover, I have found that working-class residents of Rio de Janeiro are particularly sensitive to suggestions of marginality (Perlman, 1976), both because of local, problematic allusions to illegality that the Portuguese word "marginal" connotes, and because of recent, localized efforts to assert Rio's favelas as important engines of cultural production that are central to political and economic power. For these reasons, I deliberately and unproblematically use the word "periphery" in referring to a favela that is, in actuality, located at the geographic center of Rio de Janeiro.

materiality—is an indiscriminate vestige of Saussure (1966). He asserts that layers of clothing, rather than only expressing who we are, in fact make different ways of interacting with the world feasible. Clothing can be comfortable or uncomfortable, it can allow the wearer to do things or, conversely, restrict their movements. This chapter investigates makeup and *marquinha* in much the same way—as signs whose very substance acts on the world, invites new possibilities, and shapes our engagements.

### **Maquiagem**

Throughout my fieldwork, I felt constant anxiety about the position I had begun to inhabit within the worlds of makeup and Afro-aesthetics. From a personal and ethical perspective, I worried about the negative effects that a white, heterosexual, cis-gender foreign man might have on the people and spaces I was invited into—spaces that were (and still are) largely produced and maintained by Afro-Brazilian women. But when it became clear that my awkward check-ins and wants for reassurance were of greater annoyance to salon participants than my presence itself, these anxieties began to dissolve. From a professional and academic perspective, however, if such a vantage can be distilled from the personal, I was still concerned that my reactions to the made-up faces around me would be unfounded or overly romantic. I had been cautioned against exotifying language in earlier grant writing seminars of the previous year—“eye-catching” makeup, perhaps, but “eye-catching” to whom? Were these makeup styles, in fact, “striking”? Or was I simply an outsider captivated by an otherwise unremarkable, quotidian aesthetic practice?

Initially, these concerns compelled me to watch others for *their* reactions to makeup, and during the first few weeks of fieldwork I refrained from saying much of anything at all about the newly made-up clients in the salons I visited. Women had makeup applied as I sat and watched, cleaning brushes or wiping down vacant makeup stations but keeping my comments to myself as the women were showered in compliments by men and women alike. This approach quickly backfired, and the fantasy of remaining an objective observer proved unsustainable as I began to suspect that the makeup styles on display around me were meant to compel a response. “You can say if you like it,” whispered Priscila to me one evening, urging me to share my opinions.<sup>6</sup> Ashamed, I realized that my deliberately subdued reactions and lack of engagement were, in these situations, simply rude.

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<sup>6</sup> I have known Priscila for 10 years, meeting her for the first time when she still worked in the kitchen of her cousin's restaurant. At the time, Priscila was new to makeup, but devoted hours each evening to honing her craft, watching endless YouTube video tutorials, and attending clients in her small, one-bedroom apartment above the restaurant. Later, when she opened her own studio and began teaching courses herself, she also helped to explain the presence of her gringo friend as I slowly became a fixture in the salon.



**Figs. 2 (left)  
and 3 (right)**

Bruna and Joana, students in one of Priscila's courses, pose for photos after a lesson on auto-maquiagem, or auto-makeup, Priscila's salon (photo: Samuel Novacich, July 2019).



During the next 18 months of fieldwork in Rio, I often heard aesthetic practices described as making an impact, and consistently witnessed requests for makeup that would *causar*, literally, “to cause.” One artist that often touted the power of makeup to *causar* was Pérola, a young woman who Priscila took on as a kind of protégé. Pérola was ever present in the salon, where she had taken classes and now worked, and often sat in a chair at the far end of the room between client sessions. She routinely spent hours applying makeup before washing it off, practicing and experimenting on her own face until it was time to return home. Pérola is much younger than Priscila (she was in high school when we sat for this conversation in October 2019), and was often mistaken by visitors as Priscila’s daughter, since the two have similar complexions, builds, and outgoing personalities. Both women identify as *negra*, or *negras lindas* (beautiful Black women), as they often say. A self-professed cosmetics *viciada* (addict), Pérola was always willing to talk makeup, and waxed expansive when I asked her to elaborate on her work with clients:

**Pérola:** No, it’s like this ... I say: “Give a little look in the mirror ... you like it, want something more?” And she always says, “Ahhh no ... do a little more highlighter because I like to *causar*.” My clients are like that.

**SN:** To *causar*?

**Pérola:** Yeah, to *causar*.

**SN:** How do you mean?

**Pérola:** Like, to cause an impact. To arrive somewhere and have everyone take notice and say “hey cutie” and whatnot, you know? And so I put a bit more highlighter, more blush ...

Pérola patiently explains her approach to working with clients, and describes a scenario in which clients examine themselves in the mirror before asking for additional makeup. This was common in Priscila’s salon, and a protocol that even I was instructed to follow when taking a makeup professionalization course with other women from the community.

Priscila usually begins by asking clients about their aesthetic preferences, and then applies makeup as the women face away from the mirrors that span the length of her salon. As she finishes, Priscila spins her client around to face the mirrors, at which point they inevitably ask for more makeup. They ask for highlighter, or more glitter, because they want to *causar*, or as Pérola expands, “to cause an impact.”

Pérola suggests that the purpose of her aesthetic, the style of makeup that her clients overwhelmingly request, is to *impact* one’s surroundings and elicit reactions, usually in the form of comments and compliments. And indeed during my fieldwork in these salons, with makeup amateurs and professionals, and at makeup workshops, the expectations that makeup and bodily aesthetics mediate our exchanges became increasingly clear. As I learned through transgression, it was considered rude to not comment on someone’s makeup, even if only to acknowledge a shade of eye shadow or lipstick. The gloss of a certain lipstick, impeccably contoured cheeks, or perfectly shaped eyebrows *demand*ed a response. Such exchanges extended to the aesthetics of marquinha as well, and indeed, women frequently entered the salon to refrains of “ooh look at that marquinha ... someone went to the beach this weekend!” About midway through my conversation with Pérola, and hoping to learn more about causing an impact, I asked her if she had a favorite color for makeup, to which she responded:

**Pérola:** [laughing] Yes.

**SN:** Which?

**Pérola:** Black skin [*Pele negra*]

**SN:** Oh ...

**Pérola:** I love Black skin, I don’t know how to explain ...

**SN:** Why? [laughing] You have to at least try to explain ...

**Pérola:** I don’t know, I just don’t think there is an explanation, I don’t know. Because

I just love it. I tell Priscila, if I could, I would only make up Black skin. Nothing against other colors, but I love Black skin so much, like, I really love it.

In asking about color, I had in mind the courses on “colormetrics” in which I knew makeup artists like Pérola had participated. I thought the question might lead to a more in-depth discussion of aesthetic causation. But a serendipitous misinterpretation made the question and response far more interesting than was initially intended. I was met, unexpectedly, with “*pele negra*,” “Black skin.”<sup>7</sup> Pérola often spoke about her love for *pele negra*, and placed her own skin tone within the same aesthetic category. I say “aesthetic category” deliberately, with the logic behind this decision acting as a device to help explain the conversational (mis)interpretation above. My fieldwork has revealed that skin color is not always interpreted first and foremost as a sign of race (Novacich, 2021), and in this exchange, race did not seem to be Pérola’s ultimate referent. Rather, *pele negra* seemed to be used as a term analogous in sentiment to *pele oleosa* or *pele madura*—oily and mature skin, respectively—and therefore as a material, “superficial” description of the skin itself. Later in the conversation, I pressed the issue further, asking Pérola to expand on her love for *pele negra* and the politics of saying “I specialize in *pele negra*”:

**Pérola:** Because if we stop to think, there isn’t this thing called “specializing in Black skin.” People, they’ve in a way imagined this, and think there is a difference between Black skin and white skin, but no, there isn’t. It’s sub-tones and different tones. So, you can’t specialize in something that is natural, understand? What you can specialize in, is like, I can specialize in learning more about makeup, so I can be fierce. Ok, you train, whether it be with a white model or Black, understand?

**SN:** So is this to say that a difference [deliberately vague] doesn’t exist?

**Pérola:** The only difference between a white person and a Black person is the sub-tone of their skin, and different skin tone. They have tones and sub-tones that are different, you know? Black skin is warmer and more reddish, you can ... I mean there is a risk of making it ashy more quickly, especially for people with really dark skin [*negra retinta*]. White skin, no. White skin, the base is more ... it’s always more yellowish, always pinkish, you know? It’s rarely got a warm sub-tone.

<sup>7</sup> I am deliberately using the upper case “Black” here to highlight the racial implication of *pele negra*, especially as it appears in this context. However, as I am trying to show, there is a slippage between aesthetic and racial referents that is exceedingly complex. The Portuguese *negro/negra* are often used in reference to racial categories, while *preto/preta* typically refer to abstract color. Having said that, both terms are often applied to people, though not without negative implications in the case of the latter, depending on the speaker. The overlap between *negro/negra* as aesthetic and racial category—and the exploration of what, if anything, might make such categories different—is explored in the pages that follow.



**SN:** I think I understand the worry, the political incorrectness of saying that you specialize in Black skin, because you're calling out a difference that ...

**Pérola:** That doesn't exist.

**SN:** That doesn't exist. But only an aesthetic difference, between colors.

**Pérola:** Colors, that's it. And if there's a Black person around and someone says: "ah, so-and-so just robbed me," do you think they're going to round up all the white people, or just the Black guy? It's obvious, just the Black guy.

When Pérola talks about *pele negra* she seems to refer to an aesthetic condition of the bodily surface having to do with color and sub-tones. She is careful to point out that difference "doesn't exist." But to what kind of difference was she referring? Perhaps she means to suggest that there is no moral or essential difference—no internal distinction, below the surface of the body—between those with *pele branca* and *pele negra*. Yet at the same time that Pérola repudiated at least one form of difference, she pointed to the difference in techniques required to make up two materially disparate faces (highlighting, for example, the importance of different sub-tones and the dangers of making *pele negra* appear ashy). Later, Pérola directly addressed the politics of race in Brazil, citing examples of rampant racism and mentioning the exclusion of Afro-Brazilians from systems of education, as well as the violent racism of policing. Indeed, she is hyperaware of the systemic, anti-Black racism that is so prevalent in Brazil, and uses this experience to inform her work with clients, promoting styles and techniques that she believes valorize Black skin and *beleza negra* (Black beauty) (Pinho, 2007). Nonetheless, there remains a tension and delicate balancing act as she negotiates racial politics, and she hints at a distinction between "natural" or "essential" difference and "aesthetic" differences in the material surface of the body, reflective, perhaps, of the range and complexity of racial thought in Brazil today. Rife with ambiguity, our exchange emphasizes the complexity of racialized constructions of the body in Brazil (McCallum, 2005; Roth-Gordon, 2017), revealing race as pervasive, yet impossible to pin down.

Racial thinking in Brazil has always been muddled and fragmentary. From Gilberto Freyre's epic *Casa Grande e Senzala* (1933), which painted a romantic portrait of settler colonialism and slavocracy, to the eugenic underpinnings of "whitening" (Skidmore, 1974) and later, the demystification of "racial democracy" (Fernandes, 1965), descriptions of racial exceptionalism have peppered academic work produced within and beyond Brazil (Sansone, 2003). But each of these contributions to racial thinking and associated concepts tend to cohere and smooth over what are otherwise incongruous strands of thought.



Paulina Alberto has described the twentieth-century shift from “racial democracy” to the “myth of racial democracy” in historiographical terms, first questioning the conceptual solidity of “racial democracy” itself (Alberto 2012). Rather than accepting it as a stable set of ideas—typically attributed to Freyre and glossed as social harmony resulting from centuries of miscegenation—Alberto describes “racial democracy” as a shifting identifier that reflects the specific social and political concerns of its time. Perhaps the most significant intervention in Alberto’s work is pointing out that race in Brazil has always been ambiguous and filled with internal contradictions. Conversations about race in Brazil are riddled with contention, and make up an ideologically heterogeneous landscape populated with ideas about color, phenotype, and the body, notably wavering between constructions of race based on skin color and the surface of the body and constructions based on assumed internal qualities like blood, essence, and DNA (Collins, 2011; Wade, 2017).

Pérola seems to navigate these ambiguities by drawing a distinction between that which is visible and that which remains invisible as it relates to race. *Pele branca* and *pele negra* are aesthetically if not internally distinct, she seems to argue, and therefore require specific and disparate cosmetic techniques. Simultaneously, she repudiates other forms of difference—fantasies that support histories of discrimination (Smith, 2016), perhaps—while grappling with the lived reality of being a Black woman in Brazil. Removing experiential and political difference, then, and omitting aesthetic differences in the body as well, the difference that Pérola alleges “doesn’t exist,” seems to reside (or rather, is believed by others to reside) somewhere below the material surface of the body. And as a makeup artist, Pérola and her colleagues seem to navigate this ambiguity by turning away from imagined and invisible interiors (Stoler, 1997). That is to say, rather than forging their identities by carefully peeling back superficial layers to reveal “inner truths” of subjectivity, artists like Priscila and Pérola shape their own truths by adding layers of pigment to the surface of the body.

### **Marquinha**

If makeup adds layers to the bodily surface, *marquinha* divides that surface even further through the cultivation of precise tan lines. Luiz and his girlfriend, Renata, run a small tanning salon on the *laje* (roof) of Luiz’s house, just outside of Mangueira.<sup>8</sup> Luiz is strong and towers over me, and has a gentle persona despite his military background. The

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<sup>8</sup> *Laje* literally translates to “slab,” and usually refers to the flat layer of concrete, reinforced by iron rod, that covers most favela constructions. Often unfinished, the *laje* may serve as a roof in its first lifetime, later becoming a floor as residents build upward (Angelini, 2013).

division of labor in their business is clear and gendered; he handles the finances while Renata handles clients, applying tape and homemade bronzing solution to their bodies. The thin black tape is applied with a liquid that heightens contrast with the skin underneath, placed exactly where a bikini would be worn. Despite the fact that Luiz does not attend clients, he does most of the talking as we sit in his living room, even explaining the technical process of taping as Renata waits, mostly quiet at his side.

Commenting on the state of the economy, Luiz says that the idea for a tanning salon came to him a few years earlier.<sup>9</sup> “I had seen a few videos online about how it’s done, and thought, ‘we can do this.’ The roof is empty, the sun is free.” The couple took a course with Erika Bronze—a popular tanning specialist who has gained great success through her work with celebrities—paying close to R\$3.000<sup>10</sup> for a three-day workshop in which they learned the trade secrets for getting perfect tan lines through the right permutation of time, tape, bronzing lotion, and a secret oxidizing solution called *fixador*. “It’s still got stigma attached to it, but much less than it used to,” he says. Renata recalls how her friends used to tan with tape, and says, “marquinha has always been a favela thing—nobody invented it.” Luiz agrees, pointing out that:

People used to think of it as a kind of *favelada* thing to do, but things really changed with Anitta.<sup>11</sup> Now, we have clients from all over—girls from the favela, you know the girlfriends of *bandidos* [local drug traffickers] and even girls from the *zona sul*.<sup>12</sup> And they all want the marquinha! With white girls it’s harder, their skin is more delicate and easier to burn. But even for darker-skinned girls we don’t recommend tanning for more than three hours. But they always want to stay longer! They want a really, really defined marquinha!

Pausing to let Luiz’s emphasis sink in, I respond by asking for clarification on another point: “I get how the tan lines on top work, how someone might show off their marquinha by wearing a revealing shirt or blouse, but what about the bottom, who sees those lines anyway?” Luiz and Renata both erupt into laughter and I immediately blush from naiveté. “The boy-friends! The husbands!” laughs Renata, as Luiz shouts: “They’re not just doing it for anyone, they’re doing it for them!”

Later that week, I saw a social media post from an account for Renata and Luiz’s business that seemed to expand on their point about marquinha and men, and one that pointed directly

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<sup>9</sup> The conversation above was had in May 2019.

<sup>10</sup> About 1,000 USD at the time.

<sup>11</sup> In a separate interview with Erika Bronze on her *laje* (June 2019), she tells me that her career exploded after collaborating with Anitta, one of the biggest pop stars in Brazil, on the music video for her song “Vai Malandra.” Much of the video is filmed on a favela *laje*, and Anitta dances in black tape, surrounded by other young women wearing black tape “bikinis.” As of this writing, the video has accumulated over 400 million views on YouTube, and is one of Anitta’s most successful tracks, garnering her international fame and bringing middle-class attention to marquinha.

<sup>12</sup> *Zona sul* refers to the southern zone of Rio de Janeiro with the greatest concentration of wealth in the city.



**Fig. 4**  
Priscila's photo of the author—horizontal, despite the position of her phone in the subsequent photo; she took several photos, the one selected here was among the last (June 2019, reproduced with permission).

to the intangible power of tan lines. The Instagram story featured a young Black woman, visible only from the neck down, wearing a black tape bikini and peeling one strip of tape from her shoulder to reveal a perfectly contrasted strip of relatively light skin. Text over the image read: “No man in Brazil is capable of resisting a perfect marquinha! Book today!!” Clearly intended to attract clients to their small business, the post also hinted at marquinha’s intoxicating allure, the implication being that women can turn to their sexuality—and tan lines—to seduce and control their men. The post suggested empowerment while uncomfortably anticipating a lack of responsibility from men for their actions, akin to the “men can’t help themselves” discourse that is so central to male violence. And yet, these dynamics don’t negate the intended semiotic effect of marquinha, one that I would argue, like Mari’s red lipstick, is visceral, and gains currency through cognitive stickiness and captivation. In Gell’s analysis, viewers are transfixed by patterns, contrast, and inventive skill—enchanted by artistry as they wonder how such an image or pattern could have possibly been produced (1998). It is not hard to understand how marquinha, a highly contrasted strip of relative lightness produced through a process that is in fact technical and meticulous, generates a similar sense of awe and wonder.

## Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the bodily surface, and the ways in which corporeal aesthetics mediate between two or more people, an experience that I have referred to as aesthetic pragmatism. Aesthetics do far more than “express our ideas,” as Clifford Geertz once argued, and are instead part and parcel of the material world and our engagements with it. Makeup and tan lines may betray class position, but they are also displayed to *causar*, to create an impact. I have given examples of how red lipstick, worn by soccer stars and women in the oldest favela in Brazil, captures and commands attention. Meanwhile, marquinha, a simple aesthetic design that contrasts bronzed with virgin skin, is praised for its mysterious powers over men. And while I’ve shown how these aesthetic practices captivate and unsettle others, we might also ask, do these same practices modify one’s own sense of self? This chapter thus concludes by investigating what happens when we begin to shift our aesthetic focus inward.

When Priscila and Pérola practice their craft they do so with their clients facing them, and away from the salon’s mirrors. The client sits while makeup is applied, and is then spun around in their chair to see themselves in the mirror, made up for the first time. Although routine, one such episode was, for me, particularly memorable. It was an evening in late June of 2019, and when I arrived at the salon Priscila was inside and sweeping,



while Fabiane, her cousin's wife, was doing a young woman's nails. Priscila and I sat as Fabiane worked, sipping sweet coffee and eating ham and cheese sandwiches while playing with the camera of my new phone. We experimented with different filters that replaced picture backgrounds with flat black, imperfectly cropping faces that were then rendered in grayscale. Fabiane finished her work and I took a photo of her. She crossed her eyes and tilted her head. I then turned to Priscila, who softened her gaze and looked directly into the camera, before she leaned in and aimed her own phone at me.

Later, as Priscila worked, I cleaned brushes, using paper towels and makeup remover to rinse out the pigments, now muddled together, that had collected during the day. When she finished, Priscila and I began practicing eye-shadow techniques on sheets of paper that she had printed out for me. We had only started when her next client, Mila, arrived. As Mila waited for Priscila, who quickly finished a second cup of coffee, she borrowed some tweezers from one of the makeup stations at the far end of the salon and began plucking her eyebrows. Priscila began to work as Mila faced away from me, and away from the mirror, and I didn't see her made-up face until the moment it was revealed to her as well. She smiled when she looked into the mirror and exclaimed, "ahhh eu acordei assim!" ("I woke up like this!"), in possible



**Figs. 5 (left)  
and 6 (right)**  
Fabiane  
and Priscila  
(photos: Samuel  
Novacich,  
June 2019).



reference to Beyoncé’s 2013 song “\*\*\*Flawless.” Mila was not the first client to make such an exclamation—indeed it was a fairly commonplace refrain—but for some reason, this reaction was the most memorable, perhaps owing to her delivery, or because it caused the four of us to burst into laughter.

Jacques Lacan’s work on the mirror stage (1953) is instructive here, and not only because the narration involves literally looking at oneself in the mirror (indeed, Lacan’s initial concern was the interaction of toddlers with their own images, reflected in a mirror). In fact, the anecdote above offers a critical glimpse into the fragmentary nature of subject formation. This was, coincidentally, the main argument that Lacan put forward in subsequent years, moving beyond discussions of mirrors and toward analyses of the fraught state of the ego, split between the inner self as subject (*immanwelt*) and the outer self in the world as both subject and object (*umwelt*). There are two levels of tension in Lacan’s analysis. First, there is the stark contrast experienced between the lived, felt self—one that is real but fragmentary, disaggregated, and chaotic—and the image in the mirror that comes together as a fixed, unified totality. The second tension results from the first, and is the bipolarity—an affective pull between love and resentment—with which individuals relate to their reflected image. Lacan describes a sort of admiration and love for the image in the mirror, which he also uses as a metaphor for the unified sensation of selfhood, or self-image. But also present, he cautions, is jealousy, insecurity, and hatred for

an image that in fact reminds us of our own inadequacy (Lacan, 1953). He writes that it is the “illusion of unity, in which a human being is always looking forward to self-mastery, [that] entails a constant danger of sliding back against the chaos from which he started” (1953, p. 16). Staring into the mirror at the allegedly stable, unified self thus involves repressing the sensation of life as a fractured being, a reality premised on endless transformations during which we are constantly pulled in new directions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). And while Lacan presents “sliding back” into the acknowledgement of such a fragmented state as dangerous, I suggest here that allowing oneself to feel provisional and fluid can be both socially advantageous and politically expedient.

In applying makeup and tanning their bodies, the women of Rio’s northern suburbs are negotiating how they would like to see themselves, and how that introspection relates to the image they want to share with the world. Following Lacan, I contend that examining oneself in the mirror—blanketed in new layers of makeup—heightens the tension between the felt and the seen self. Of course, this tension is further mediated by years of representational violence that Black women in Brazil have been forced to endure (Pinho, 2007). For women feeling the weight of intersectional oppression, the dialectic between desire and resentment may be particularly fierce. As Patricia Pinho has argued, Eurocentric aesthetics have created expectations of Black people in Brazil that are impossible to meet, yet impossible to ignore. These expectations have compelled Afro-Brazilians to contort their bodies into increasingly infeasible and inhumane shapes, wearing extra clothing in hot climates to mask sweat marks, taking extra showers and straightening their hair to stave off white aggression (Pinho, 2007). She writes: “Girls with dark skin and kinky hair make an extraordinary effort to replicate an unachievable ideal of beauty, which commonly leads to frustration and self-rejection” (2007, p. 275). This is not unlike Frantz Fanon’s analysis of representational violence, one in which Black subjectivity is constructed from without, through interpellation (1967). Nicole Fleetwood has argued that Fanon’s shock in being hailed as a Black man was also a moment of feminization, one in which a man became the object of the male gaze. Yet critically, this gendering is left out of Fanon’s own analysis, which in Fleetwood’s critique results in an oversight with regard to the subject formation of Black women (Fleetwood, 2010). Considering this oversight, and following bell hooks, I argue that rather than submitting to the violent gaze of white patriarchy, the women in Priscila’s salon exercise an “oppositional gaze”—one made easier by layers of makeup, perhaps—that stares back into the mirror and points the camera back at the author, in recognition of the power in looking (hooks, 1992).

Stuart Hall once wrote that identity is constituted “not outside but within representation” before urging us to view media “not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already

exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new subjects, and thereby enable us to discover who we are” (quoted in hooks, 1992). The made-up surface of the body, reflected in the mirror, shapes that discovery, arbitrating the encounter with one’s image. Once again, color makes an impact. I have watched Priscila examine herself after doing her own makeup and shiver, as though her own image gave her chills, perhaps a reminder of life in perpetual motion. Seeing oneself mediated by makeup can be jarring. It may calm and soothe, or it may shake us to the core.

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This chapter discusses a widespread but underexplored phenomenon in Brazilian cities: the growing presence of walls and other security infrastructures in low-income, peripheral neighborhoods. This practice can often take the form of bounded and internally regulated regimes of residential organization at a hyper-local scale, associated with the emic term *condomínio* (condominium). The authors propose the concept of “walling” to theorize the practices of socio-material assembly through which peripheral condominiums emerge, driven by the efforts of urban subjects to reconstruct a sense of well-being within environments experienced as precarious and insecure. While walling can significantly reshape socio-spatial relationships and everyday flows of bodies, the authors argue that broader social conditions and relationships in peripheries tend to promote forms of spatial and temporal porosity that weaken or even undermine these regimes of self-segregation. The chapter explores varying dynamics of peripheral condominiums through the presentation of contrasting case studies from three different Brazilian cities: a recently completed *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (My House My Life) public housing project in Porto Alegre; a partially walled and symbolically partitioned favela in Rio de Janeiro; and an occupied and subsequently formalized public housing project in São Paulo.

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# WALLING THE PERIPHERIES: POROUS CONDOMINIUMS AT BRAZIL'S URBAN MARGINS

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Matthew Aaron Richmond, Moisés Kopper

## Introduction

Two decades ago, Teresa Caldeira (2000) memorably dubbed South America's largest metropolis, São Paulo, a "City of Walls." She described how, in a context of extreme inequality, faltering democratic institutions, and rising crime, wealthy Paulistanos were increasingly retreating into "fortified enclaves." Known in Portuguese as *condomínios fechados* (gated condominiums), these privatized and securitized spaces offered their residents comfort, symbolic distinction, and isolation from the perceived threats of the heterogeneous, "public" city. Being physically self-contained, and often connected to various other elite spaces like shopping centers and business complexes via purpose-built expressways, these condominiums could be built further from the city center without compromising mobility and situated closer to low-income settlements without increasing contact between social classes. Caldeira described this emergent socio-spatial configuration as "proximity with walls." Within these spaces, new infrastructures allowed extreme socioeconomic and racial disparities to be preserved under changing urban conditions while inscribing them more starkly into the built environment.

São Paulo's peripheries,<sup>1</sup> by contrast, had traditionally followed a very different process of urban expansion. Since the mid-twentieth century, low-income families had settled in vast, autoconstructed (self-built) urban expanses, typically characterized by irregular legal status, sparse public services, and precarious infrastructure (Caldeira, 2017). During Brazil's long redemocratization of the 1980s, social movements from the peripheries arose to demand regularization, public policies, and democratic elections. This mode of organizing life at the fringes of the city engendered physical and social improvements, as well as an "insurgent" form of citizenship (Holston, 2008), as residents learned to see themselves as rights-bearing citizens. Although peripheries were deeply impacted by the rising gang and police violence

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<sup>1</sup> We use "peripheries," in line with emic uses of the term *periferia* in Portuguese, to refer to low-income peripheral areas, rather than peri-urban elite condominiums. This term tends to carry derogatory connotations when used by outsiders, but residents of these areas have reappropriated it as a positive identity associated with cultural innovation and political mobilization (D'Andrea, 2020).

of the 1990s, they mostly remained “open” spaces with few physical barriers constraining everyday flows of bodies (Caldeira, 1994).

Today, many of Caldeira’s observations about these patterns of socioeconomic and racial segregation still hold for São Paulo and many other Brazilian cities. The withdrawal of wealthier groups into gated condominiums continues apace. However, in quite distinct ways, the walling of urban space has also subsequently become a widely diffused practice in lower-income peripheries. In this chapter, we examine how processes of social and spatial differentiation in these areas come together through the embodied practices of peripheral residents.

We define “walling” as the socio-material assembly of physical and symbolic barriers in urban space through which subjects seek to reconstruct a sense of well-being within social and institutional environments experienced as precarious and insecure. Assisted by combinations of material and human infrastructures, condominiums entail distinct modes of regulating encounters between groups and organizing flows of bodies. Elite fortified enclaves do so through tightly integrated infrastructural assemblages produced and maintained via contractually mediated exchanges, reinforcing a form of geographic isolation organized starkly along class and racial lines. By contrast, “peripheral condominiums” have the propensity to produce moral distinctions without constructing a coherent “Other” or necessarily entailing interpersonal ruptures, and employ walls that may, in various ways, fail to physically and symbolically separate those behind them. It is through this figure of the peripheral condominium that we emphasize the plastic, porous, and unruly nature of walling processes in peripheries, where resource constraints, architectural inertia and informal norms of sociability all tend to militate against the rigid enforcement of spatial separations. At the same time, as infrastructures in-the-making with different practices and degrees of “porosity,” walls and fences show how aspirations for (spatial) enclosure and (temporal) completion complicate common perceptions of peripheries as open and socially homogeneous spaces containing only rudimentary infrastructures.

We explore varying dynamics of peripheral condominiums in Brazil by contrasting three ethnographic instances of walling practices: a recently completed *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (My House My Life, or MCMV) public housing project in Porto Alegre; a partially walled and symbolically partitioned favela in Rio de Janeiro; and an occupied and subsequently formalized and walled public housing project in São Paulo. For each site, research included several months, and in some cases years, of qualitative fieldwork, numerous interviews with residents and key informants, participant observation in local

organizations, and analysis of everyday spatial practices.<sup>2</sup> In presenting each case study, we focus on a particular individual whose role in the community provided them with a privileged view of local dynamics. While inevitably partial, this strategy offers valuable insights regarding the ways in which peripheral condominiums are made into symbolic and material realities, as well as the tensions that emerge inside them and at their boundaries. These accounts are supplemented with broader insights garnered from the field through direct observation and interactions with various other interlocutors.

Walling was not the initial focus of any of these research projects,<sup>3</sup> and the cases were not pre-selected based on what they might reveal about this process. Indeed, aside from all being peripheral neighborhoods in large metropolises in the South or Southeast of Brazil, the cases are extremely diverse in terms of key variables such as morphology, settlement history, legal status, and forms of organization. In each case, however, as we listened to our interlocutors speak about their lives, attitudes toward the neighborhood, practices of sociability, and symbolic distinctions, walling emerged as a major theme. As we discussed and analyzed these and other cases with colleagues at the Centro de Estudos da Metrópole (CEM), São Paulo, we discovered that walling was a widespread, important, and understudied phenomenon in Brazil's urban peripheries. Given the inductive and nonlinear way in which this research process unfolded, we do not seek here to provide a comprehensive account of walling or typology of peripheral condominiums. Rather, through analysis and comparison of three contrasting cases, and by drawing on logical inference rather than sample-based logic (Small, 2009), we seek to identify the mechanisms that drive walling across diverse peripheral contexts and the factors conditioning what form the practice takes.

Beyond this introduction, the chapter contains four different sections and a conclusion. First, we offer an overview of recent transformations in urban peripheries and introduce the concepts of "walling" and "porosity" that guide our analysis. We then present our ethnographic cases of walling in three different Brazilian cities, showing how the pervasive category of the "condominium" indexes the contingent processes of differentiation and efforts at socio-material boundary-making in peripheries today. Finally, in conclusion, we reflect on the implications of walling practices, condominiums, and porosity for the comparative study of embodied socio-material practices and relations in the urban peripheries of the Global South today.

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<sup>2</sup> Moisés conducted fieldwork in Porto Alegre between 2012 and 2017 (CNPq Doctoral Grant) and in São Paulo between 2016 and 2017 (FAPESP Postdoctoral Grant 2016/16265-1). Matthew carried out fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro between 2012 and 2013 (Economic and Social Research Council 1+3 PhD Studentship) and in São Paulo between 2016 and 2018 (FAPESP Postdoctoral Grant 2015/04480-0).

<sup>3</sup> Moisés' research examined the long-term subjective effects of housing activism in Porto Alegre and São Paulo. Matthew's research focused on: (1) socio-spatial difference within and between Rio de Janeiro's favelas; and (2) subjectivity formation in the peripheries of São Paulo.

### Peripheries, walling, and porosity

Social science accounts of Brazil's urban peripheries have offered shifting representations of these spaces and their residents over time (Kopper & Richmond, 2020). The peripheries were once understood as largely homogeneous socio-spatial formations that absorbed a hyper-exploited working class typical of the global capitalist semi-periphery (Kowarick, 1979; Maricato, 1979)—one whose social reproduction was dependent upon both the irregular appropriation of land and the autoconstruction of housing. However, major institutional, socioeconomic, and physical transformations over subsequent decades have led these spaces to be understood today as constitutively *heterogeneous* rather than homogeneous spaces (Marques, 2014; Richmond, 2018; Richmond, Kopper, Oliveira & Garza, n.d.). As the state became more responsive to the demands of peripheral populations following Brazil's redemocratization, public services and infrastructure expanded significantly, albeit in geographically uneven ways. At the same time, there has been a long-term shift from industrial employment to more precarious, but also more diverse, service jobs, while various social policies introduced during the years of the Workers' Party rule (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT, 2003–2016) contributed to new forms of social stratification as well as material and symbolic differentiation in peripheries.

Reflecting these shifts, the social geographies and built environments of urban peripheries have also undergone radical transformations. In areas of autoconstructed housing, credit availability and governmental tax cuts on durable goods made it easier for individual households to incrementally refurbish and verticalize their homes so that they are often barely distinguishable from those of “formal” neighborhoods (Caldeira, 2017; Cavalcanti, 2009). Combined with upgrading through public-private initiatives fostering tenure regularization and incremental installation of infrastructure and utilities (Kopper & Ide, 2019), many peripheral neighborhoods have indeed undergone a process of “suburbanization” (D'Andrea, 2020). There has also been an expansion of public housing, from various state-level programs during the 1990s to the vast federally-sponsored Minha Casa Minha Vida program initiated by the PT in 2009. Under MCMV, units built by the private sector with public funds were distributed to beneficiaries screened by municipalities, sometimes limiting coordination with civil society organizations and enforcing segregation patterns in the peripheries (Cardoso & Lago, 2013; Shimbo, 2012). Finally, precarious new informal settlements or “hyper-peripheries” (Torres & Marques, 2001) continue to form, providing the only option for those unable to access housing via market or bureaucratic mechanisms.

Though largely ignored in the literature, walls have become an increasingly common feature of peripheral landscapes under these heterogeneous socio-spatial conditions. They are part of a range of socio-technical devices that foreground the expanded role of both the state and the market in catering to these residential areas (Jensen & Morita, 2017). Mass-produced housing and community-based upgrading in various parts of the Global South have come to rely on technological innovation to overcome challenges in peripheral areas, including increasing demands for privacy and securitization (Monkkonen, 2018).<sup>4</sup> Walls and fences have been incorporated as mandatory features of new public housing projects, sometimes accompanied by security guards and technologies like CCTV cameras, interphones, and electronic keys (Kopper, 2019). Meanwhile, residents of “open,” autoconstructed areas have also, on a piecemeal basis, sought to fortify their homes, and sometimes streets and wider neighborhoods (Cavalcanti, 2009). These processes appear to be driven by the same desires for security, comfort, and symbolic distinction that Caldeira identified in the case of the elite fortified enclaves (Caldeira, 2000; Kopper, 2019). However, as we discuss further, in peripheries such processes give rise to very different, and far less tightly bounded, socio-material assemblies.

To theorize the particular conditions surrounding walling processes in peripheries, we mobilize the concept of “porosity.” In his cultural history of Rio de Janeiro, Carvalho (2014) defines porosity as the capacity for some bodies, though not others, to traverse physical boundaries, much like the porosity enabled by the pores of the skin. In this way, he argues, porosity may be vital in allowing highly segregated Brazilian cities to function: “a divided city [...] can be argued to presuppose a porous city and vice-versa” (Carvalho, 2014, p. 12). Nonetheless, there are varying degrees and criteria of porosity, determining which bodies are constrained, how, and on what grounds. Spaces like Rio’s Praça Onze (on which Carvalho focuses) are highly porous and allow the extensive mixing of different groups. By contrast, spaces like elite gated condominiums have highly regulated regimes of porosity in which mixing occurs only under very narrow and exclusionary conditions.

Porosity can also be understood as having a temporal dimension. Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis (1986, pp. 156–166), for example, famously described the “porosity” of Naples, where “one can scarcely discern where building is still in progress and where dilapidation has already set in. For nothing is concluded.” They attributed this to a “passion for improvisation,

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<sup>4</sup>While technological innovations in elite condominiums can be attributed to the neoliberal policies of the 1990s and early 2000s (Low, 2003), peripheral condominiums flourished during the late 2000s in the context of the expansion of post-neoliberal governments, which focused heavily on increasing low-income consumption of goods and services via financialized credit. For residents of public housing and even informal settlements, this meant that security technologies were more readily accessible to meet emerging desires for fortification.





**Fig. 1**  
Sentry box  
and gate  
infrastructures  
at Residencial  
Bento  
Gonçalves in  
Porto Alegre  
(photo:  
M. Kopper,  
February  
2017).

which demands that space and opportunity be at any price preserved.” The informal and peripheral spaces of the urban Global South have similarly been understood as produced through an improvised and cumulative assembling of materials (McFarlane, 2011; Simone, 2010) and infrastructural becoming (Lancione & McFarlane, 2016). In this way, these spaces stand in stark contrast to the planified spaces of upper-middle-class enclaves, which tend to be sold as finished products, produced for immediate consumption, and furnished by the formal housing market. Moreover, walls and associated infrastructures can also be understood as “temporal devices” (Anand, Gupta & Appel, 2018) in that they seek to materialize temporal disconnects via the forms of symbolic differentiation and separation of bodies that they enact.

In this regard, attempts to “enclose” and “complete” particular peripheral spaces, like those we discuss below, would seem to reflect current conditions in many Brazilian (and perhaps other Latin American) cities and may contrast with peripheral spaces found elsewhere in the Global South where similar conditions do not prevail. These conditions include the central role of fear of violence in organizing subjective experiences of the city, but also the aforementioned processes of the formalization and/or commodification of much housing and infrastructure provision over recent years. In such a context, walling offers the possibility to demarcate boundaries between spaces differentially coded as secure/insecure and formal/informal, but also temporal boundaries between a past defined by poverty and self-reliance and a desired future of comfort and participation in consumer culture. It is important to note, however, that these aspirations are certainly not universal and may only seem like plausible and desirable goals for *some* residents of peripheries. Tensions over walling processes, then, may be associated with competing visions of past, present, and future within peripheral spaces, at both the individual and collective levels. We now turn to our three case studies to further explore how these themes of differentiation and porosity intersect empirically.

### **Porto Alegre: domesticating porous walls**

In our first study, we transport our reader to a blazing hot afternoon in Residencial Bento Gonçalves (Fig. 1), one of several *Minha Casa Minha Vida* housing projects in the city of Porto Alegre, which was completed in 2014. Standing before the heavy and imposing infrastructure of metal and concrete surrounding the condominium, we felt relieved when we spotted Seu Juliano’s prying eyes gaping through the crack of his apartment door. After motioning discreetly, he seemed to remember us, and smiled as he walked toward the gate. “It’s all right, I’ll take it from here,” he gestured toward the newly arrived porter. It



was February 2017, and we had been witnessing refurbishments going on for months now. In 2016, two years after 540 families had moved to the complex, residents organized to devise a plan to install surveillance and intercom infrastructures. MCMV projects are typically delivered with basic barbed wire fencing the premises. Such structures, however, do little in the way of protecting or securing residents from the surrounding areas. Instead, they are intended to work as physical signposts of sociability and mutual care, qualities that MCMV interventions aim to harbor in order to reintegrate poor communities to the urban fabric. After much public deliberation and spearheaded by an ambitious, newly elected building manager, groups of dwellers organized to put into practice a plan that would transform and modernize the condominium. Before moving, the beneficiaries of this particular housing complex had resided in informal settlements and individual rooms borrowed from family members in the tenements of the hilly Partenon neighborhood. Over the course of five years, they had prepared themselves to become responsible homeowners by engaging in painstaking mobilization via a grassroots housing association—of which Seu Juliano was a leading figure. Now, as anxious talk mounted about soaring crime rates following a dramatic deterioration of public security in Rio Grande do Sul, infrastructural improvements introduced new “authenticating procedures” (Gupta, 2012) between residents and outsiders that refashioned both the built environment and everyday sociability.

Seu Juliano, a retired electrician in his sixties, played a vital role in this process. When we met him in November 2016, he was excited by the promise of security technologies. He had

walked from door to door, attempting to convince residents to contribute monthly installments to pay for video doorbells and underground fiber-cable infrastructures. “We have to know who enters and who leaves. There needs to be *some* control. Otherwise, we don’t *really* have security,” he explained.

Over time, however, things proved more complicated. Despite the brand-new garage door with remote activation, ostensive surveillance cameras, and a walkthrough triggered by electronic magnets that were now being individually carried on key chains, many residents failed to participate in the security regime, even in their daily movements. They did not *actually* use remotes and magnet tags; instead, they expected the porters to “display their usefulness” by diligently opening and closing the gate after them. “These people,” Seu Juliano explained that same day, “used to work as housekeepers and janitors for the rich, and now they want to exercise power to show off their new social status.”

Only when measures were taken to cut costs and a new security company was hired did things begin to change. Residents helped construct a sentry box that would accommodate handpicked security guards in charge of filtering the flow of people and enforcing a separation—both moral and physical—between the inside and the outside of the condominium. These security guards—retired male police officers—were informally trained by people like Seu Juliano to ensure that they met specific standards of responsiveness.

Exercising his proclaimed right to “demand” (*cobrar*) as an informed citizen-consumer, Seu Juliano polled suggestions and admonished security guards, calling on his own past experiences as a porter in middle-class residential complexes. “Before,” he continued, “the porters let everybody in. There were no criteria. People smiled from afar, and he pressed the button to open the gate, just to be friendly. That can’t happen.” He then convinced the guards to drop what he saw as misconceived ideas about the project as just another poverty-stricken peripheral slum.

Today, Seu Juliano continues his stewardship of the condominium through eavesdropping on the porters’ conversations from his apartment and using the doorbell phone to call them and hold them accountable for their actions. He envisions his role as a “homeowner” (*proprietário*) as one of enforcing collective decisions through an experiential language of informed consumerism while also honing a critical stance toward the condominium’s problems.

Seu Juliano now filters his communication with neighbors and porters through the workings of doorbell phones from the comfort and privacy of his apartment. By availing himself of walling technologies like doorbell phones in everyday life—whether advocating for his rights as a homeowner, avoiding bothersome acquaintances, catching the

building manager in *his* place while he shuns complainants in the privacy of his apartment, or merely receiving and passing on prank calls—Seu Juliano enacts an intricate social calculation of the kinds of practices, behaviors, and bodies that are desirable as part of the purified communitarian life he envisions for the condominium.

Throughout these calculations, the private condominium figure comes to mediate the ways people like Seu Juliano conceive of security and privacy. Trickling down from middle-class high-rises, walling technologies work as socio-material reminders of how some housing beneficiaries imagine space and its porosity as they move to formalized residential addresses. From Seu Juliano's particular reasoning of what constitutes good practice in richer condominiums to collective action undertaken for maintaining condominium buildings combined with the proliferation of services and lower-income markets catering to homeowners in peripheral condominiums, it becomes clear that peripheral condominiumization results from numerous institutions, policies, and the everyday practices of direct beneficiaries. Together, these factors shape residents' experiences of organization within the walls and porosity of the city and beyond, both of which are key elements in rendering such space a "condominium" (Donoso & Elsinga, 2018).

The porosity managed by walling technologies also establishes new layers of temporality between desired and unwanted residents. As we learned in our—at times, tense—interactions with porters, infrastructures can be invested with deep-seated imaginaries of dangerous and unwanted individuals. When coupled with their proper "training," security figures bring these imaginaries to life in their everyday practices of blocking and releasing, enabling certain kinds of porosities that work to purge the shadows of residents' troubling pasts in the hills. However, as we learned in conversations with security guards and passersby who repeatedly crossed through the gate, the moral distinctions enforced by the orderly aesthetic belonging to such imaginaries did not wholly prevent bodies from trespassing its enacted physical limits. Chilling stories of covert robberies and undercover drug traffickers running rogue inside the projects continued to circulate in informal conversations as people mobilized to instantiate their visions of the future. Even so, not everyone would promptly acknowledge the existence of unwanted porosities. For many, these were but anecdotal rumors that only defamed the condominium image and did not do justice to the hard work they had put into trying to control the condominium's borders by enforcing symbolic and temporal distinctions through walling technologies. Such infrastructures, for Seu Juliano and many others, were vital in crafting embodied discontinuities both within and beyond the condominium while also proffering the possibility of envisioning technologically mediated urban futures.



➊  
**Fig. 2**  
 Gate, barrier,  
 and sentry box  
 at the entrance  
 of Brisa do Mar,  
 Rio de Janeiro  
 (photo: Theresa  
 Williamson,  
 Catalytic  
 Communities,  
 April 2013,  
 reproduced with  
 permission).

### Rio de Janeiro: regulating internal boundaries

We now invite our reader to Avenida Salvador Allende, in the western Rio de Janeiro suburb of Jacarepaguá. Walking past the main entrance of the Asa Branca favela, we arrive at a smaller subsection known as Brisa do Mar (literally translating to “Sea Breeze”). The homes here are bigger, and a gate and small sentry box guard the only entrance. No roads cut through from the central part of Asa Branca to Brisa do Mar. You have to leave one to enter the other.

People on both sides of the divide describe Brisa do Mar as different from the rest of the favela. Sabrina, who runs a small clothing boutique in the busy center of Asa Branca but who rents a small studio apartment in Brisa do Mar, commented, “It’s a different atmosphere, definitely. You go there, and you don’t think you’re in Asa Branca.” It wasn’t that people had more money necessarily, but she felt they were more organized and cared more about the appearance of their homes. Was it even part of the Asa Branca favela at all? “It is, but they don’t think so. The condominium has its own [residents’] association.” Although located in a district dominated by Rio de Janeiro’s notorious militias,<sup>5</sup> Asa Branca lies close to Jacarepaguá’s boundary with the neighborhood of Barra da Tijuca: a land of gated elite condominiums and shopping malls, popularly nicknamed the “Brazilian

<sup>5</sup> Violent, off-duty police who charge extortion fees and monopoly rents on basic services.

Miami.” The use of the term “condominium” and the name Brisa do Mar itself—which, despite lying some 10 kilometers from the nearest stretch of beach, could easily have been the name of an elite beach-front condominiums—seem to betray an aspirational imaginary, implying distance from the favela and greater proximity to the kinds of lifestyle associated with Barra da Tijuca.

At the entrance to Brisa do Mar, we spoke to the porter, Ronaldo. Age 56, stocky, with light, curly hair and tanned skin, he had lived in the main section of Asa Branca and worked as a porter in Brisa do Mar for about a decade. “Everything here goes through me before going to the chair [of the residents’ association],” he told us. People frequently left their keys with him, gave details about rental vacancies, and asked him to carry out odd jobs in their homes. When he was on his shift, he was always visible and available, and the residents seemed to trust him.

The differentiation between Brisa do Mar and Asa Branca is as old as the neighborhood itself. The land now occupied by Brisa do Mar had belonged to a farm until the late 1970s when the purported landowner allotted it and sold it off to individual buyers who constructed their own homes. The coordinated process ensured a more orderly subdivision of the land than would occur in the rest of Asa Branca. In the latter case, occupiers (many of them the relatives of Brisa do Mar’s original residents) carried out a series of land occupations on neighboring plots of land between the mid-1980s and early 2000s. Nonetheless, although it was settled via coordinated subdivision rather than land occupation, the original sale of lots in Brisa do Mar was irregular, meaning that the homeowners lack formal land titles to this day. As a result, Brisa do Mar is officially considered to be part of the same “subnormal agglomeration” (the official term for favelas used by Brazil’s statistics office) as the rest of Asa Branca.

Despite this, there are several key differences in the way the two spaces are managed. Brisa do Mar’s residents have sought to organize themselves and regularize their situation to the greatest extent possible. Unlike the rest of Asa Branca, everyone pays formally for their electricity. They established their own separate residents’ association, which charges every resident 40 *reais* per month (about 8 USD in 2020). This covers the wages of the association chair, a secretary, and three porters, who between them ensure that the entrance is guarded 24 hours a day. The gate and security box were installed sometime in the late 1990s (Fig. 2). Residents are strictly prohibited from littering in public areas. As of 2013, when this research was conducted, the rest of Asa Branca also had a residents’ association, and had attempted to create similar protocols, but with little success. Most residents refused to pay what they refer to as the *condomínio* (condominium fee), and although there were rules about rubbish collection, parking, and other local issues, they were frequently ignored.

Ronaldo lived on the other side of the gates, in the central part of Asa Branca, and was acutely aware of the differences between the two spaces. “It’s not like this there. There is a community. They’re still trying to sort it out because we also want to pay there. We want it to be the same as here.” His use of the term *comunidade* (community), a widely used euphemism for favelas, was clearly being contrasted with *condomínio* of Brisa do Mar—also an informal space, but one which had achieved symbolic distance from the favela. For Ronaldo, this contrast was associated with the capacity to collect payments and effectively enforce rules to ensure that the neighborhood’s space was well maintained.

There were, however, costs to Brisa do Mar’s impressive level of internal regulation. For example, although children who lived in Brisa do Mar would go to the other side of Asa Branca to play, their friends were not allowed to enter the “condominium” to use the small playground inside. “The residents don’t accept it; they think they come in to destroy the place.” Ronaldo disagreed with this rule. He felt any kid from the area should be allowed to play as long as he or another adult was supervising them. “I let kids in when they come with their parents. The other porters don’t. That’s why everyone likes me.”

Although Ronaldo was able to exercise a degree of discretion in assessing who might or might not “cause trouble,” the matter was largely out of his hands. Decisions were made in the residents’ association and backed by the threat of complaints. With no more than a thousand residents, and with a morphology that permitted such control, Brisa do Mar had certain advantages that the residents’ association did its best to exploit. For the rest of Asa Branca, with around three times the population and a more open layout, such control was far harder to achieve. These contrasting arrangements had allowed for the creation of radically different urban environments that were the basis for important forms of symbolic distinction. Where the state saw one big favela, residents were very clear about which side was the “condominium” and which was the “community.”

### **São Paulo: imperfect isolation**

Finally, we take our reader to a public housing project in the neighborhood of Fazenda da Juta in the eastern periphery of São Paulo. Our host is Graça, a longtime resident of the area and a “community agent” in the local health center. This role requires her to make daily visits to the apartments and some of the neighboring blocks to provide residents with healthcare information, which means she is always circulating around the neighborhood.

Graça recounted to us the history of the area and her arrival there in the year 2000. “The government was building the blocks, and then a group of people came and invaded. I



bought [my apartment] from someone who invaded. So, I didn't invade myself. But there were still a lot of things missing." The building occupations had occurred three years earlier, in May 1997. Some 1,900 units were being built by the Companhia de Desenvolvimento Habitacional e Urbano (CDHU), the São Paulo state housing company, for eventual allocation via official waiting lists (Miagusko, 2011). While the basic structures of the buildings were complete at the time of the occupations, the interiors were unfinished, and they lacked basic infrastructure. As Graça explained, "it was all open, there were no walls, we walked under the buildings, we didn't even have a street [...]. There wasn't even any concrete, just earth." Resident accounts emphasize the presence of criminal groups at this time whose disputes regularly escalated into violent conflict in and around the apartment buildings. As we were told by Graça, "In each of these blocks you pass, at least three people died in the block in broad daylight. When I moved here in 2000, I witnessed two murders in my block, you understand?" In addition to their legal and material precarity, residents had to live amid a fragmented and violent criminal marketplace.

Living in the same two-bedroom apartment today with her teenage son, Graça's situation is entirely different. Levels of violence fell markedly between 2003 and 2004, a change widely attributed to São Paulo's hegemonic criminal organization, the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), "taking control" of the area (Feltran, 2011). But this also coincided with important shifts in the relationship between residents and the state and the emergence of various forms of collective action. By the time Graça had arrived, negotiations with the state government were already underway to regularize the status of occupiers. Most had agreed to sign up for means-tested mortgage plans with CDHU. Work was subsequently completed on the buildings, including the construction of walls around the blocks.

Formalization processes also stimulated changes in the way residents organized themselves. The occupiers had created block associations so they could choose delegates to represent them in negotiations with the state government. These eventually morphed into permanent organizations, which today elect chairs, hold regular meetings, and establish rules and protocols. Residents pay a monthly condominium fee that covers running costs.

As explained by Graça, the process of formalization served to change the social conditions and broader "culture" within her block. Many poorer residents and those directly involved in criminal activities left, either to avoid detection or because they could not afford the costs of mortgages and bills. These processes were reinforced by the self-organization of residents as a condominium:

When it's a condominium, you dictate your rules. [...] There are limits. So you can't listen to loud music, you can't have parties all night long, and you can't swear so much. And it's like, "[if] I can't





**Fig. 3**  
Separation wall and access gate to a CDHU housing block in Fazenda da Juta, São Paulo (photo: M. A. Richmond, May 2019).



even swear, then I don't even want [to be here]!" So, we kind of made these people have to leave. [...] So, they started to sell to different people, and those people came with a different culture, with a different way of thinking.

The kinds of changes propelled by the residents' associations also impacted the physical environment. Repairs are now regularly made to public spaces, and residents who cause damage or litter are confronted and even fined. In some blocks, cameras were installed to monitor the internal space. WhatsApp groups were created in others, so residents could circulate images of environmental problems that they believed needed to be addressed. The higher degree of internal organization and care given to these spaces is reflected in a stronger separation between the "condominiums" and the street. To enter, you must now pass a metal gate that can be opened with an electric key fob or by an intercom connected directly to the apartments (Fig. 3). Whereas before, the space was open and accessible to anyone, today, residents themselves control access.

Even so, this control is not as watertight as it might at first appear. On numerous visits, while waiting for Graça to release the gate, other residents regularly waved us through. Whether because our appearance was read as unthreatening or only out of social etiquette, little beyond the physical gate itself seemed to impede our ability to enter. This lax protocol left the blocks vulnerable to intrusion. For example, Graça recounted a recent incident in which a teenager had entered and tried to steal a bicycle. Some residents had caught him in the act and apprehended him. If she and some other neighbors had

not intervened, he might have been lynched. The suspicion was that someone had nonchalantly let him in as they crossed paths at the gate.

Despite significant improvements to the area's social conditions, it is important to mention that residents are still relatively poor, and the majority are dark-skinned. In other words, demographically, those inside the gates are not always easily distinguishable from those outside. Residents may be wary of criminals and believe they could identify one by sight, but they also know that someone who arouses their suspicions could easily be the friend or relative of a neighbor. Without a permanent and adequately trained security guard, Fazenda da Juta's walling infrastructures lack a reliable human component capable of potentializing and effectively enforcing the separation these infrastructures are designed to preserve. As a result of this lack, the block remains a highly porous space.

### **Conclusion: scales of porosity**

It should be noted that despite significant differences between their respective urbanization histories and socio-spatial arrangements, the three cities in which our case studies are located share certain features. All are large, relatively wealthy cities in the South or Southeast of Brazil. All have large and wealthy, expanded centers with predominantly white populations (which have traditionally stood in stark contrast, socially, racially, and morphologically, to the peripheries and favelas). During the PT era, in all three cities there were also significant increases in incomes, heightened access to credit, and implementation of urban policies in the peripheries. These conditions are less present in other parts of the country, such as major cities of the Northeast and North regions, where white and middle/upper-class populations are proportionately smaller, state capacity lower, and peripheral populations relatively poorer and less served by urban infrastructure. The overarching conditions may also distinguish our cases from other regions in the Global South that display different patterns of urban, socio-economic, and racial inequality.

At the scale of the cases themselves, several similarities (and differences) can be identified in walling processes. The material and technical features of walls and associated infrastructures (fences, gates, surveillance cameras, etc.) may be carefully designed and promoted by state or market actors, as in the case of Fazenda da Juta (São Paulo), or pursued independently by organized groups of residents, as in Brisa do Mar (Rio de Janeiro), or even result from the combination of these forces, as in Residencial Bento Gonçalves (Porto Alegre). Generally, though, the appearance of such infrastructures tends to be associated with processes of formalization and economic inclusion, though these may be highly uneven. In Residencial Bento Gonçalves, many of the new arrivals were former residents of informal settlements,

meaning their entry into the apartments also represented a transition into “formality,” which, in turn, granted them easier access to new modalities of credit. The installation of walls in Fazenda da Juta directly followed the regularization of the occupiers’ status. In Brisa do Mar, walling neither resulted from nor led to regularization. It did, however, coincide with other processes, such as urban upgrading and the formalization of utilities that enhanced both the physical consolidation and legal recognition of the settlement. In all of the cases, then, walling was associated with a temporal transition toward greater visibility, economic citizenship, an enhanced status in the eyes of the state, and greater symbolic distance from the condition of informality.

While the state was heavily involved in such processes, it is essential to emphasize the active role of residents and their representative organizations. In all three case studies, residents’ associations were established during (or, in the case of Porto Alegre, before) the discussion of how to implement such walling technologies as those we’ve discussed. They took on critical roles in regulating space and resolving collective action problems. In each case, these organizations have been responsible for supplementing basic security infrastructures with additional components, such as CCTV cameras, intercom systems, and security guards. They have also introduced various rules about resident conduct and protocols for collective action, from waste disposal to parking restrictions. The cases suggest, however, that these organizations can quickly become dominated by small groups or even individuals, and indeed should not be regarded as representing consensus views among residents. In fact, our interlocutors regularly spoke of the tensions and even conflicts that resident association rules sometimes provoked, and of their efforts to quell them.

To understand how such processes and conflicts unfold, it is helpful to reflect on the emic category of *condomínio*, which appeared regularly during our fieldwork in all three case sites. While seemingly intuitive, this is, in fact, a highly polysemic term. At times it refers to the monthly fees collected by residents’ associations, at others to the neighborhood space itself, and yet at others to the form of collective organization used to manage such spaces. The term certainly has symbolic value due to its association with elite forms of habitation and its connotation of greater security and organization than is believed to exist in “open” peripheral spaces, though all of these associations vary depending on specific context. Nonetheless, we can broadly generalize that living in a *condomínio* implies accepting particular rules and obligations—including financial commitments and behavioral protocols—in exchange for benefits in terms of environmental regulation, security, and social status. Similarly, it also implies accepting specific regimes of porosity—by

crafting and enforcing distinctions to adjacent areas, thus reinforcing their separation.

As all of the case studies have indicated, such a trade-off is viewed as desirable and financially viable for some residents. For others, however, it is not. For example, Brisa do Mar's residents' association had visibly achieved a far higher degree of environmental regulation than the rest of Asa Branca, where many residents refused to pay the condominium fee and failed to observe purported rules. In Fazenda da Juta, according to Graça, inability to pay costs associated with formalization (including the condominium fee) and resistance to new norms of sociability had even contributed to some occupiers choosing to leave the area. In Residencial Bento Gonçalves, the project of installing walling and surveillance technologies was ever-in-the-making as leaders found themselves having to "persuade" cynical residents of their advantages.

Efforts to establish "condominiums" in the peripheries, then, encounter distinct challenges not faced by elite condominiums in which homes are purchased as ready-made products. While some residents of peripheral condominiums may aspire to extensive forms of socio-spatial regulation, whether for practical or symbolic reasons, others may be indifferent or even actively opposed to the same forms of regulation. The success of these projects may therefore depend on the degree to which the rules, norms, and obligations of condominium life can become routinized and accepted even by those for whom they are not a priority. While the internal regulation of condominium life in peripheries poses significant challenges, managing external boundaries presents further ones. Walling involves creating and maintaining socio-material systems that can regulate flows of bodies, preserve a sense of security for residents, and uphold a symbolic rupture from an informal past. As we've discussed, however, walling in peripheries occurs in urban settings of spatial contiguity and social ambiguity that continually pose awkward questions. The lack of clearly identifiable socioeconomic and racial differences between populations within and beyond the walls, in combination with the persistence of complex social ties and cordial norms of social interaction that transcend spatial boundaries, tends to weaken regulation and encourage porosity. Even as solid walls have striated the previously smooth landscapes of many of Brazil's urban peripheries, under certain conditions, they can still, rapidly, melt away.

By chronicling efforts at designing and installing walling infrastructures at the margins of three major Brazilian urban centers, this chapter has examined the drivers and impediments surrounding the formation of "peripheral condominiums." These socio-material assemblies reflect the diffusion of distinctly middle-class modes of urbanization and distinction among lower-income groups. Simultaneously, peripheral condominiums represent the congealment of patterns long-in-the-making in Brazil's urban peripheries, including the expansion

of credit and consumer markets, the ambivalent impacts of social and economic policies, and growing cultural and socioeconomic heterogeneity. Peripheral condominiums thus exhibit layers and degrees of porosity that complicate extant notions of condominiums predicated on spatial enclosure, temporal completion, and neatly interlocking infrastructural assemblages. Powerful factors drive the growing use of walling practices, while others destabilize and subvert their logics. Together they constitute complex, uneven, and tense embodied regimes of difference at the margins of the city.

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This visual essay dwells on the particular struggle for the historical city center of São Paulo enacted by contemporary urban occupation movements. The series of photographs, taken during multiple periods of ethnographic fieldwork (2014–2019), seeks to shed light on the notorious bodily encounter between thousands of homeless families engaged in urban movements on the one hand, and the vacated architecture of the city on the other hand. The aim is to interrogate how occupations are particular momentary spaces where the city is brought into motion by urban movements, prefiguring more just and sustainable ways of re-inhabiting, remaking, and rethinking the city.

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# CENTRAL OCCUPATIONS: STILLS FROM A CITY IN MOVEMENT

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Jeroen Stevens



**Fig. 1**  
Guianases Occupation, 2019. The remainders  
of an old factory hall are prepared to serve for  
shelter during a first occupation night.

**Sem teto**

*Sem teto*, literally “roof-less,” is an ambivalent Brazilian concept, identifying millions of citizens on the basis of their shared deprivation of a decent home. It encompasses numerous different populations, ranging from people left to dwell in areas of environmental and social risk, living in exploitative rent-based tenements, or plainly “sleeping rough” out on the street. With approximately a third of the metropolis’ population living in such inhumane conditions (Pinheiro, 2015), São Paulo is said to be one of the most divided cities worldwide (UN-Habitat, 2010). In the image above, “home” is nothing more than a carriage that provides minimal coverage during the night, while carrying the garbage collected from the city streets during the day. Here, home is an extension of the body, hauled around through a city that falls dauntingly short in providing basic human rights.



**Fig. 2**  
"Attention: Don't throw packaging on the streets and on the sidewalks" (placard on waste picker carriage), downtown São Paulo, 2017.

### **Vacancy**

Often abundantly marked with black *pixação* tags (see, e.g., Caldeira, 2012), vacant buildings comprise up to a third of the building stock in some of the central districts of São Paulo (Silva, 2009; Silva, Biava & Sígolo, 2009). Many of these buildings were once esteemed projects of architecture, their vacancy permeating the center of the city's built urban landscape with opportunities for both re-inhabitation and reformation. The central districts of São Paulo have for centuries been defined by urban investments. Iterative waves of development have continued to deposit the most prestigious architectural and urban projects of their times (Campos, 2002; Toledo, 1983, 1996). The city's historical core, despite concentrating the city's highest vacancy rates, could paradoxically still be considered the "heart" of the city (Tyrwhitt, Sert & Rogers, 1952) in manifold ways. For numerous disadvantaged *sem tetos* the central city is also "central" to their survival, as they frequently draw subsistence from the area's high concentration of public transport, crossing commuters, social services, and job opportunities. Hence, precisely where vacant architecture accrues most extensively, an enormous deficit in low income housing manifests. Vacancy—secured by fences, blockades, and surveillance technology—houses vectors and vermin precisely at the urban core where millions struggle to find basic shelter every day.



**Fig. 3**  
Vacancy and *pixação* tags in downtown São Paulo, February 2015.

### **Movement**

It is from this appalling paradox, characterizing the central city with a concurrent concentration of vacant architecture and homeless people, that central occupation movements began to emerge in the late 1990s. Since 1997, numerous occupations of abandoned buildings downtown have led to highly organized urban movements struggling to claim access to the opportunities embodied by the urban center. Such movements brought bodies and life-worlds into motion, carrying them away from the status quo in which they were hitherto deadlocked (Zibechi, 2012). In doing so, these urban movements inevitably began to move the city, changing spaces of negligence and real estate speculation into prototypes of an aspiring “other” city with improved rights and dwelling conditions. The twenty-four-floor Prestes Maia building, as one of the most striking examples, has been repeatedly occupied, housing more than six hundred families in the concrete relics of an old industrial skyscraper. Due to the edifice’s dysfunctional elevators, staircases and corridors rapidly transformed into a vertical circuitry of streets and alleys, providing the common space of a newly created, temporary community. Electricity wires are haphazardly tied against the walls, the windows by and large covered. Walls suffer from mold and deterioration. It is in the hereafter of former urban investments, and in the shadow of the center’s typical hustle and bustle, that occupants are transitorily residing: merely passing by to find refuge until further notice.



**Fig. 4**  
Prestes Maia Occupation, staircase of the A Block, December 2015.



### **Occupation**

Occupations enact the creative destruction of material borders that usually separate indigent homeless families from the spatial opportunities presented by vacant architecture. Occupations of misused properties constitute the foremost tactical instrument of housing movements in São Paulo, working to eke out dwelling spaces for the excluded urban masses. During the occupation of a building in the city's central Luz district in 2019, movement members sought to break through the reinforced gate of an old residential building, six floors high and desolate for at least two decades according to the homeless. The entire building was covered in black tags, with more windows broken than intact. Grabbing hands and a crowbar try to break through the threshold space that simultaneously connects and separates the inside from the outside. Vacant buildings and homeless bodies assemble in a direct and intricate conflation of human and non-human actors (Latour, 2005). The occupational act seeks to stake a claim over a formerly un(der)used, but still valuable space, addressing both the social function of property legally prescribed by the 2001 City Statute and the Brazilian constitutional and universal human right to dignified housing. The occupation reclaims buildings and peoples that others have forsaken. This insurgent constituent of urbanism (Holston, 2008) appears as an inevitable stepping stone in the struggle to effectuate legitimate and constitutional rights to decent housing. Occupations are transgressive indeed (Earle, 2017), but arise from the need to redress injustices entrenched in the city and its current socio-material form.



**Fig. 5**  
Anhaya Occupation, May 2019.

## Resistance

After the transgressive disruption of architectural borders, the very same material separation is re-established from the inside-out. Resistance follows occupation to defend a movement's claim over space. Former vacancy is instrumentalized to form a defensible stronghold, geared toward securing the newly conquered urban space that should eventually serve as housing. Resistance is fundamental, and its enactment entails a cathartic experience: "Rise up and claim your home!" exclaimed Carmen Silva, leader of the MSTC – Homeless Movement of the Center, during the April 2016 occupation night, when a dozen vacant buildings were simultaneously seized at midnight by multiple homeless movements engaged in the central city. The eight-floor building at the corner of José Bonifácio and Ouvidor Street was occupied by some hundred homeless. The former office building had neither electricity nor running water. In a violent confrontation, military police forces sought to block the entrance with tear-gas bombs but did not manage to stop the occupation. An elderly lady was taken away by an ambulance after being severely injured by rubber batons. Urban movements' pedagogy to politicize and "conscientize" (Freire, 1968) is first and foremost a pedagogy of confrontation (Barbosa, 2014), in which homeless poor are stimulated to take up battle against the oppressive forces that suppress them. Building occupations, then, become a tool for liberation, claiming the spatial foundations to start rebuilding life, community, and society in an autonomous manner.



**Fig. 6**  
José Bonifácio Occupation, April 2016.

### **Mutirão**

*Mutirão*, or “mutual aid,” is the principal modus operandi through which urban movements go about the transformation of abandoned spaces into occupied—and eventually inhabitable—dwelling environments. It is from this collective cleaning and repairing that a gradual process of settling radiates: a laborious choreography of people and architecture engaged in a collective *rite de passage* (Turner, 1974) of mutual purification. The struggle to turn former ruins into habitable communal dwellings is served and fortified by whatever means at hand. Although such communal practices of space-making may sound like a romantic endeavor, the on-the-ground drudgery involved is anything but amorous, often necessitating years of continuous improvement work without any guarantee of tenure-security whatsoever. This makes the *mutirão* a highly contradictory enterprise, since chances of staying depend on investments in home-making, but the permanent gain of these investments remains perpetually elusive as tenure will almost by definition be “lost” again sooner or later. Nonetheless, practices of mutual aid, which for a long time have provided a principal mode of peripheral city-making, are here transposed to the downtown urban core, testing alternative models of collaborative urban reform and refurbishment.



**Fig. 7**  
Guaianases Occupation, April 2019: collective  
cleaning of the floor with minimal means at hand.

### **Encampment**

The center's vacant buildings are, however, not an architectural wasteland, but a rich repository of potentiality, presenting space that is readily up for grabs to serve new programmatic needs. In recognizing the spatial resources held in custody by sheer abandonment, occupation movements demonstrate in a double sense: as political demonstrations denouncing the malpractices of market-led urban (mis)management, and as pragmatic demonstrations, prefiguring potential solutions by setting out to re-inhabit the debris of rampant development-mania. To that end, vacant buildings provide an essential arsenal of resources. Occupations here never start from an architectural "blank slate." There is always *something* that is occupied. The 2016 José Bonifacio Occupation, for instance, demanded the mere act of settling in, installing oneself in the existing rudimentary and naked architectural structure. The agency of occupation movements thus largely depends also on the — often more obscured — agency of architectural artifacts that host them.





**Fig. 8**  
José Bonifacio Occupation, April 2016.



### **Infill**

If successful, the encampments installed by new occupations turn into genuine construction sites, where vacant structures frame the piecing together of new collective dwelling environments. Urban movements have developed remarkable expertise in self-construction ever since their emergence in the 1960s (see, e.g., Caminos, Turner & Steffian, 1969), but in contrast to the squatted peripheries, *autoconstrução* (self-construction) and *autogestão* (self-management) take radically different forms in the downtown city, as naked building frames—temporarily stripped of use and meaning—call for new appropriations and semiotic designations. “Objects act too!” so advocated Latour (2005) incessantly. “Architecture acts too!” so prove central occupation movements. The remarkable power of central occupations as prototypes of alternative forms of urbanism lies precisely within the meaningful symbiosis of strong social movements and significant architectural armatures. On the one hand, architecture demonstrates its capacity to outlive particular functionalist programs. When one regime of use fades-out, others can fade-in: a vast landscape of untapped possibilities. On the other hand, movements demonstrate how such re-engagement of vacant buildings is never a passive procedure, but instead, thoroughly depends on continuous labor investments and creative imagination. In occupations, the agency of urban movements and the agency of vacant architecture begin to converge and comeingle. The Ocupação Direitos Humanos or “Human Rights Occupation,” north of São Paulo’s central area, is exemplary. Occupied in 2017, the concrete skeleton of a never-finished real estate project was piecemeal filled-up with hundreds of squatter-residences, creating an odd assembly of architectural and social potency.



**Fig. 9**  
Direitos Humanos Occupation, May 2019.

### Center

Not only does the center provide ample opportunities for life improvement, it also offers unparalleled exposure. Central occupations sit in the *middle* of things, which consequently gives them high strategic value in the political geography of the city. Given their prominent position along major downtown avenues, squares, and parks, urban movements can—quite literally—stop the regular functioning of the city in their pronouncement of political discontent. Their tactical positioning is capable of instantaneously moving the entire city. During the National Strike of April 2017, which fought against the impeachment of former left-wing president Dilma Rousseff, the entire city’s traffic system was brought to a standstill by carefully orchestrated collaborative blockades carried out by housing movements. As the developers’ saying goes, it’s all about “location, location, location,” but social movements, too, are well aware of the power of location. Place, then, is all but neutral, and the location of occupations within the architectural physiognomy of the city is crucial for the broader territorial tactics of urban movements. The urban movements involved in central squatting thus no longer merely claim a right to “the” city, but to the very *center* of the city.



**Fig. 10**  
São João Avenue, April 2017: general strike.

## Home

In the Martins Fontes Occupation, multiple homeless movements house together in a former six-floor office building. Right in front of the Anhangabau Metro, and in the midst of job-opportunities, social services, and cultural amenities, new chances for life improvement emerge from the reclamation and home-making of unused architecture. All and all, protest goes hand in hand with proposal. While politically ‘protesting’ for central housing, occupations simultaneously set out to pragmatically ‘propose’ how to go about this by initiating the self-construction of this goal. The resulting homes are half home-made, half pre-made, partially self-built, and partially preconceived by already existent architecture. Although they remain predominantly temporary inhabitations, central occupations provide a structural leverage for thousands of *sem teto* families. Are they not, then, in recycling existing central structures, the prototypes of more sustainable and inclusive urban development paths? In any case, the remarkable potentiality of vacant architecture becomes highly palpable through the struggle of urban movements embodied by these central occupations. As a consequence, urban movement struggles often associated with the urban periphery or “margins” of the city, here forcefully claim central stage.



**Fig. 11**  
Martins Fontes Occupation, May 2018.

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The current situation of conflict in Northern Nigeria in the past decade has been responsible for more displacement than in the region's previous recorded history. According to the Global Terrorism Index, Nigeria is the most terrorised country in Africa and the third most terrorised on the planet. The UNHCR and IDMC estimate over 3.2 million people displaced in the region with 2.58 millions of them scattered internally. The consistency of these conflicts has given rise to a perpetual process of internal displacement and rare forms of peripherality. IDP/Refugee camps are most often treated as periphery—appendices to the script of the city. As peripheries, IDP camps and informal settlements in various cities in the north are constantly faced with a pressing need to develop resilience for just surviving. There are currently no significant research attempts to study these resilience characters. The research focuses on the socio-spatial praxes of Durumi (Area 1) camp towards resilience. Durumi Camp is a rather surreptitious periphery sandwiched in a middle-class area in the city of Abuja in Nigeria. Using a mixed approach of ethnography, digital spatial analyses, and architecture, the new lives of the campers are studied in their simple but sophisticated adaptations to the dynamics of their new social and physical environment. The findings of the spatial study engage and further raise new questions and notions of the periphery in terms of socio-spatial compatibility, movement, re-enactment and re-invention of socio-spatial practices and cultures in African urbanity. The study also displaces the current theories of the periphery that describe it as fully dependent on the city center in terms of innovation. The study is a product of three years of ethnographic field work and spatial study in the area. It helps expand the discourse of the center and periphery in the context of conflict, displacement, and vulnerability.

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# DURUMI CAMP, ABUJA: CONFLICT AND THE SPATIAL PRAXES OF A FURTIVE-PERIPHERY

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Stephen Àjàdí

## Introduction

The idea of city centers and peripheries significantly predates the arrival and “departure” of the West, in African cities (Mábògùnjé, 1968). Despite the influence of the West, center-periphery relationships of Nigerian cities are still driven mainly by trade, culture, war, and religion (Hassan & Na’ibi, 1962; Mábògùnjé, 1968) in contrast to forces like industry, housing, and state influence found in the West (Cooke, 1990). In view of these Afrocentric forces, this work focuses on the notion of conflict and the idea of the resilience and peripheralization of a group of people in North-central Nigeria over an ethnographic study period of four years. It attempts to put forward a new notion of the “center” and the “periphery” using the west African city of Abuja as a jumping-off point. It does this through a spatiotemporal appraisal of Abuja in the context of conflict.

## Conflict and the Spatiality of the Periphery in Northern Nigeria

The “center” and “periphery” of ancient Northern Nigeria was catalysed mainly by dynastic inequalities, conflict, trade, and religion. These forces have helped forge commercial complexity as well as wars. The imperial era ushered Islam into the continent. Prior to 632 A.D., Africans practiced a wide range of religious beliefs; at the mentioned period, Islam found its way to the North... in Egypt (Hatch, 1971). In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Islam made its way to West Sudan from where it would eventually penetrate West Africa and then Hausa land (Northern Nigeria) through trade with Borno and Mali (Crowder, 1962; Okoye, 2014). The spatial propagation of religion in what is now Northern Nigeria came with force and war campaigns of multiple cities and kingdoms.

The propagation from the centers was not only about displacement but of conversion. Displacement in terms of material space therefore did not matter as the displaced were pursued, caught, and forcefully converted. This insight helps set a historical backdrop to the formation of centers and peripheries in Northern Nigeria.

Another catalyst is the wall. The wall, as object-oriented as it may seem, is a highly socio-spatial force in the context of Northern Nigeria and has catalysed the formation of centers in terms of power, social inequality, and economic polarization (Hassan & Na'ibi, 1962). It is almost incomplete to document a history of walls in Northern Nigeria without documenting conflict and wars. Walls created and determined political borders and territories in ancient Northern Nigeria (Effah-Gyamfi, 1986). There are many famous cities/kingdoms such as Tunrunku, Zazzau, Kauru, and Zuba, that are known to have been walled. These walls played pivotal roles during wars against them for territory and religious domination (Hassan & Na'ibi, 1962).

It must also be noted that even though cities were taken over during wars, the walls were hardly destroyed; instead they were expanded or fortified to perpetuate spatial territoriality and power. The walls were clear-cut definitions of kingdom center-peripherality dichotomies. The peripherality in the case of walls was terminal, as whatever was outside the walls was not considered as part of the city or kingdom as the case may be. As for Abuja, where this study is based, the accounts of Hassan & Na'ibi imply that the walls of Abuja which were built starting 1829 and first worked as a shield to ward off invaders during wars that involved many, including the Gwari and the Fulani. Subsequently, farming started outside the walls and small villages were built by the chiefs to “camp” slaves who worked on the farm. Now those walls no longer exist, except for some remains that include Queen Amina's wall in modern Zaria and the ancient walls of Kano. The historic impact of the Northern walls as a socio-spatial marker for power and territoriality is noteworthy, since similar responses to territories still exist today in Northern Nigeria (Comolli, 2015). Ancient cities like Kano and Zaria still control permeability at levels of migration, culture, and even policy.

The shift to a Western influence in the North started with the fall of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1903. The Sokoto Caliphate (1804-1903) was a revolutionary outgrowth which led to an Islamic movement sparking a series of unrest and conflict across Hausaland (Northern Nigeria). Usman dan Fodio – a religious scholar, and a resistor of traditional northern beliefs – led the movement. The fall of his revolution and other kingdoms as a result led to the infiltration of the British who came with the notion of modernity embedded in the ideology of colonization. Modernity had a deep impact on the peripheralization of Africa and the colonisation of its spaces. Dussel argues that the birth of modernity, which he postulates as having occurred in 1492, presents, however falsely, the European as the “modern.” Hegel (1956), amongst others, is perhaps one of the most explicit voices of modernity's blanket claims. The early “formal” references and nomenclatures

of a periphery (Hegel, 1956; Hegel, 1967; Dussel, 1993; Kuykendall, 1993) that insulated Europe from all other cavillations passed through various phases and got disseminated into pre-western, sub-Saharan Africa through the phase of colonization. Hegel hierarchializes Africa socio-spatially into three degrees of taxonomy (Hegel, 1956):

- a. “Africa proper”: South of the Sahara
- b. “European Africa”: North of the Sahara
- c. “Egypt”: territory that is connected to Asia.

This classification, loaded with the spatial referencing of modernity and, of course, racism, conjures an “African-ness” of Africa based on proximity and degree of “Blackness” to “Whiteness.” Peripheralization, therefore, becomes not only a gradient of separation, but one of concealment. This is evident in the fallacy of developmentalism upon which modernity proliferated itself as a Eurocentric humanitarian agency for the rest of the new world (Mábògùn-jé, 1968). It is not surprising that modernist urban theory is totalising since it fails to cope with complexity (Cooke, 1990) and systems of exclusion that incite a peripheralization based on discrimination. Now class structure contributes to the framework of peripherality in Nigeria. Drivers like land, employment, religion, and governance all exhibit structural classism that hierarchializes people in space (Young, 1999). This can be said of the North of Nigeria as well. This structure was catalysed by the entry of the British, as explained, and the creation of peripheries of power from the previous peripheries of religion and ethnicity. The two latter structures did not die as hierarchialization systems but evolved and thrived, especially after Nigeria’s independence.

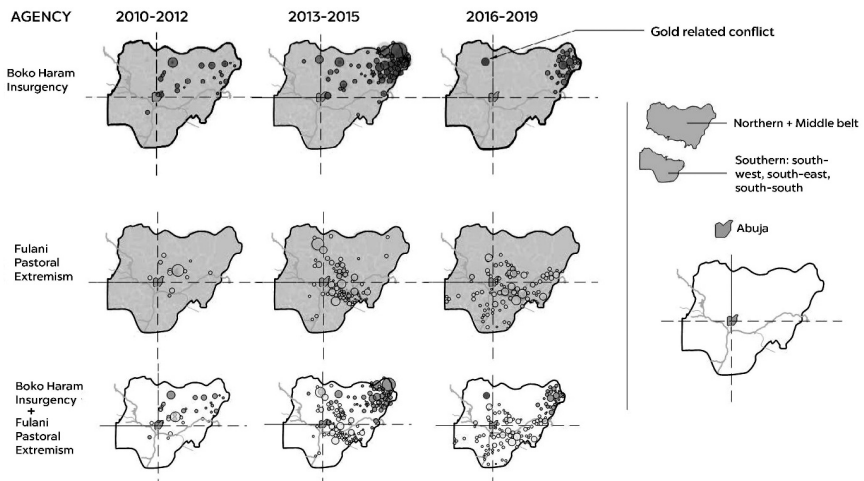
### Theories of the “Center-Periphery”

There are many theories of the center and the periphery, as dynamic situations have grown over the 1960s and 1970s. The categorization of the theories in Table 1 builds on Kühn’s initial effort of grouping thoughts on the center, the periphery, and peripheralization. As explained in Table 1, the Euro-prescribed modernity has led to colonization, which has in turn created a mentality of downplaying the “non-western” in the African city. From politics to heritage identity to territorial recognition, the non-western has been surreptitiously and, in some cases, unconsciously seen as second-rate. It has also been observed that peripheries are seen as objects in the discourse of the city. Their legitimacy and relevance are usually seen in how they can better compliment the center. This problematizes theories of peripheralization as a state rather than a process. Contrary to the public message of urbanization, cities are shrinking as well (Reis et al., 2016). There exists a form of “rhythm” as economic, social, and

➔  
**Table 1**  
 Theories of  
 peripheralization.

Theory	
<b>Economic Polarization</b>	This is primarily positioned as a contrast of the availability of innovations and an innovative workforce in the centers as opposed to the peripherals. It can also be likened to or seen as a development of the theory of “polarized development” (Friedmann, 1973). This is said to drive the market. Krugman explains that this theory is determined by the distance between the center and peripherals. This was later overrun (due to the evolution of more sophisticated forms of communication) by the idea of a “knowledge economy,” which represents service-based economies also perceived as concentrated in the center (Crone, 2012).
<b>Social Inequality</b>	This is characterized mainly by the conditioning of marginalization and poverty. It argues that marginalization and poverty are manifestations of the center-periphery dichotomy. The overlaps of peripheralization and marginalization can be linked to poor governance, social stability, and – more importantly in this study – poor integration and power asymmetry (Jones, Leimgruber, & Nel, 2007).
<b>Political Power</b>	The theories of political power in the context of peripheralization are strongly linked to the accumulation of power in the center as opposed to the periphery. Power is usually found in the center as commerce, financial power, labor control, and innovation (Castells, 1977). This theory plays out in space (Forde, 2019; Lefebvre, 1991; Graham, 2011).
<b>Communications</b>	This is the idea of communications as a determining factor of interdependence between centers and peripheries and within both the later and former. Communication theories shifted the distance cost position of the economic theories to knowledge-based thinking as the idea of distance had to be re-thought in response to the development of communications (Kühn, 2015). Communication contributes to the social heterogeneous nature of the city and an organic tolerance of it (Merrifield, 1997; Katznelson, 1997; Sennett, 1977; Lefebvre, 1991; Berman, 1983). This is challenged in the contemporary city today as the complexity of communication sometimes leads to a development of segregation and peripheralization.

➔  
**Fig. 1**  
 Conflict  
 proliferation  
 in Northern  
 Nigeria, based  
 largely on IEP  
 2018-2020  
 data.



political forces push people in and out of cities. This points to the fact that a periphery should not be seen as a static happening. Centers can become peripherals and vice versa if the right conditions and forces are at play for the right period of time (Fischer-Tahir & Naumann 2013; Kühn, 2015). If there exist possibilities of two-way shifts of either a center or periphery, then both spaces are equally relevant as identities.

### **Contemporary Conflict and Its State in Africa and Northern Nigeria**

Conflict is a global phenomenon. It has affected the world in many ways, and it continues to impact it even in modern times. Recent global reports imply that conflict has risen most significantly in Africa over the past three decades, and most of the global conflict displacement in the past three years has taken place in the region (World Bank, 2017; IDMC, 2016; IDMC, 2018; IDMC, 2019). Alongside countries like DRC, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and CAR, conflict in Northern Nigeria has risen to global attention, with an increase in concern for cities in conflict. The World Bank (2017) has shown that most of the displacement due to conflict has happened in low-income countries. In juxtaposition, since 2001, sub-Saharan Africa has had the highest consistent amount of internal displacement due to conflict (World Bank, 2017). In 2016, sub-Saharan Africa (14% of the global population) overtook the Middle East as the top conflict region in the world by risk levels and with 46.4% of the planet's human conflict-driven displacements (IDMC, 2016). In 2019, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 69.1% of the world's human conflict-driven displacement. In 2020, the value remains a significant 53.7% only because of growing conflict in the Middle East and not because of an inherent decrease (IDMC, 2019; IDMC, 2020).

As seen in Fig. 1, conflict in Northern Nigeria continues to expand, with new agencies proliferating, and displacement is still high (IDMC, 2019). Nigeria remains the most terrorised country in Africa and the third in the world (IEP, 2020), with insurgency, banditry and Fulani herdsmen conflict over land (Abbas, 2012; Okeke, 2019; Chinwoku, 2017; IEP, 2018; IEP, 2020). Very recent attacks in the North of the country include the abduction of 333 boys from a secondary school in Kankara, Katsina (North-West Nigeria) on December 11, 2020. Shortly before this, (between the last week of November and the first week of December 2020), 110 were massacred in Borno, with Boko Haram claiming responsibility.

### **Conflict, Centers, and Periphery in Northern Nigeria**

The propagation of the Northern states was majorly through conflict: the conflict triggered displacement and the formation of more colonies in expansion, bringing about a series of conflict-induced peripherality. The discourse of Hausa states is a lucid place to start the

peripheralization narrative of what is now Northern Nigeria and, in turn, the central part, called Abuja. Though there are many more cultures and languages in the North apart from Hausa, the development of the Kanem and, by extension, the Hausa states, creates a more holistic starting point to understand the North of Nigeria. The Hausa states were, in their early form, under the Kanem empire. Spatially, the English school of thought (Palmer, 1936; Johnston, 1967) mostly lays the origins of Hausa land or language domain as a region south of 13.5°N, when in fact it lies much further North, up to 17°N (Smith, 1970). It is hard to say if this was a conscious or unconscious concealment move. The early English school of thought is hence seen as problematic in the spatial delineation of Hausa land.

In terms of origin, there is a popular Hamitic narrative that described the formation of Hausa people as a “mixture” of Berner immigrants (Hamites) with an aboriginal negro people (Seligman, 1930; Palmer, 1936; Johnston, 1967; Smith, 1970; Hegel, 1956). Apart from the fact that Hamites have been proven to be Negroes (Sanders, 1969), the claims have been found to have no supporting evidence and have been dismissed as inconclusive and racist (Haour & Rossi, 2010; Smith, 1970; Laya, 1992; Armstrong, 1960). From the 10<sup>th</sup> century on, the Kanem Kingship dichotomized its people as free and enslaved. Sayfuwa (also called the “*Mai*”) were the ruling group, and their dynasty governed the Chad Basin upward over the next century. The incorporation of Islam into a syncretic synergy of pedagogy and religion spawned further conflict (Haour & Rossi, 2010). This led to the various micro and macro displacements which shifted the center of Kanem from Kaka/Jaja to Borno and then to Bimi and onward. It was not until the 15<sup>th</sup> century that a new capital was consolidated (by Mai Ali-Ibn Dunama), which would last for the next three centuries. All through these times, the war-defined periphery shifted along with the centers.

In what is now Northern Nigeria, peripheralization at the scale of states began to be highly noticeable between A.D. 1000 and AD 1400 (Crowder, 1962). The Bakawi narrative (though mostly legend) and similar accounts (Laya, 1992) have it that the southern part of the very large Kanem-Bornu empire along the Chad initially consisted of seven main Hausa city states. The main city states, called the “Hausa Bakwai,” are Daura, Katsina, Rano, Kano, Gobir, Biram, and Zaria (Hatch, 1971). The states spatially grew in influence and seven other states emerged as secondary (peripheral) areas that the Hausa Bakwai greatly influenced. These states were called Banza Bakwai (Bastard states) as considered in Hausa land: Zamfara, Kebbi, Gwari, Yauri, Nupe, Ilorin, and Kwarafafa (Crowder, 1962; Hatch, 1971). Zazzau, the southernmost part of the seven

states, would eventually give birth to Abuja through a peripheralization process of conflict and displacement.

Though conflict was rampant in the past millennium in what is now Northern Nigeria (and higher North), the 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were punctuated (more or less) by three main periods of conflict (Laya, 1992)<sup>1</sup>. In the first period, Kebbi rose to dominance in Western Hausaland (1500-1620). Next, Kano also rose to become a caliphate (1620-1730), and thirdly, from 1730-1808, Zamfara collapsed and Gobir rose to the peak of its power. All these times, slaves were drawn from some segregated groups during the wars (Laya, 1992; Hassan & Na'ibi, 1962), which created socio-spatial peripheralities as they were separated from the centers in power. Conflict during those periods were dynastic: between various social classes e.g., between *masu saratuta* (rulers) and the *talakawa* (peasants) and religious; between traditional religions and Islam. Also, conflicts erupted between *malaman fada* (court literati) and the *malaman kirgi* (religious literati) (Falola et al., 2000). The hierarchical relationships of the city center and its *na gefe* (peripherals) were of interdependency. The powerful protected their allied regions while the allied regions helped build the commerce and the collective economy.

### Conflict, Peripheralization, and the Development of Abuja

The area of this study, Abuja, evolved from the Southwest part of Zazzau. Abuja at the time was populated by pagan tribes who were not Islamic. The Gwari Genge (the majority) and the Gwari Yemma, the Koro, the Gade, the Ganagana, the Gwandara, and the Bassa were all in the area that would become Abuja. Abuja was named after Abu Ja, son of Muhamman Makau (who was the first king of Zazzau), who built a new city after he fled from Lapai to come to Zuba then to Jiwa, where his father and brothers (Jaramai, Musa) were murdered in battle. Since Abu Ja had ventured far deep into the south, Abuja was the southernmost part of the seven Hausa states and Southwest of Zazzau. It was the farthest periphery to the center of power, and it was basically a breeding ground for slaves that serviced the domestic and commercial needs of the other six states. Abuja was never fully conquered until the British arrived. One of the reasons cities like Abuja survived can be attributed to the northward direction of major conflict from the 1600s until the campaign of Usman Dan Fodio that was cut short by the British (Laya, 1992; Ajayi & Crowther, 1976).

Spatially, Nigeria was made a country and so named in 1914 when the Northern and Southern protectorates were amalgamated under the authority of Sir Fredric Lugard. The name

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<sup>1</sup> The dynamics of conflict in the "North" and central Sudan in the 16<sup>th</sup> century can be seen in the map plotted by Ajayi Crowther (1976)



“Nigeria” was first proposed by the wife of Lugard, Flora Shaw, in an article she wrote for the *Times* in 1898 (Kirk-Greene, 1956). In addition to factors based on the dynamics of migration, wars, economic progressions, and trade, Nigeria has been regionalized to “North” and “South,” a spatial dichotomy, much highlighted by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Sokoto Caliphate reign (Crowder, 1962; Hatch, 1971). Three decades after independence, Nigeria’s capital moved from Lagos to Abuja in 1991 due to lack of space in Lagos and a monotony of the Yorùbá in the city (Fowler, 2008; Moore, 1984; Nwafor, 1980). It is located at the geometric center of the nation. Abuja was designed but developed rapidly, beyond expectation (Abubakar, 2014). In addition, spatial injustice due to the radical difference in zoning opinions between succeeding regimes, mass evictions, and housing inequality contributed to peripheralization by income and social class within the city (Ukoha & Beamish, 1997; Obiadi et al., 2019).

### **Methodology**

The turn in spatial theory established space as the “social” which produces the physical (Soja, 1980; Soja, 1989; Foucault, 1991; Withers, 2009; Lefebvre, 1991). This deviated slightly from the social empiricism pushed by Harvey (Harvey, 1973; Harvey, 1990) and Castells (1977). The idea of social activity as space informs this study. Since praxis as a form of social activity is to be studied in a place that is referenced to other places (as periphery), a spatial approach is chosen in terms of methodology. Instead of focusing on larger regions, the “local” has become a growing significant standpoint of viewing conflict situations/consequences ethnographically (Miller, 2018; Theidon, 2000; Bräuchler, 2018; Collins & Watson, 2018); therefore, the study focuses on the Durumi camp with the aim of using the insights to help describe a larger narrative of the city. The study adapts a growing Mixed Methods Research (MMR) approach (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Johnson et al., 2007; Thaler, 2017; Luyt, 2012; Glynn & Ichino, 2015); therefore, GIS and Ethnographic Peace Research (EPR) are used to understand the praxis and spatial dynamics of the Durumi camp.

The study of the camp is mainly from 2015 to 2019. Of the recorded 2740 IDP (Internally Displaced People) in Durumi Camp, 1435 were surveyed progressively between 2016 and 2018, with additional studies made in 2019 and the first two months of 2020. The study site is spatially delineated in rectangles of 1.76 km<sup>2</sup> and of 8.27 km<sup>2</sup> rectangles (Fig. 2) with varying scopes of coverage. Calculated visitations have been made to the

camp on a weekly basis<sup>2</sup>. Surveys were not carried out directly via paper or digital readings (though they were stored this way). Engagements were verbal to create a uniform typology of feedback. The existing holistic data on displacement to Abuja has not been thorough across the IDP groups and clusters (UNHCR et al., 2015). It was primarily carried through very limited multiple site visits<sup>3</sup> of inspection by a group of NGOs led by the UNHCR in 2015. Agbaje carried out some studies at Durumi, but they were limited to fifty respondents and were focused on issues of memory and the female gender. In summary, no attention has been given to everyday resilience/innovation and generally the dynamics of IDP spaces in Abuja.

### **IDP Camps in Abuja**

IDP (Internally Displaced People) are people displaced within a country upon the occurrence or introduction of factors that force them to flee. IDPs are different from refugees, who are people displaced outside of a country. Abuja, the national capital, is mostly kept out of all conflict discourses despite the attacks in and on the city in the past five years, as well as the arrival of IDP. Displaced people who cannot settle with friends/relations and cannot afford private accommodation end up in one of the camps in the city. When the insurgence of the Boko Haram sect and the Fulani herdsmen in Northeastern Nigeria continued to grow, new sets of displacement trajectories emerged, and some connected the regions of conflict with the city of Abuja. Conflict is therefore the primary factor for the existence of IDPs in Northern Nigeria and, as a result, in Abuja as well. There are four formal camps in Abuja, which are as follows: Durumi (Area 1), New Kuchingoro, Lugbe, and Kuje. However, a more robust list should include other major clusters of IDP within the city:

- a. New Kuchingoro camp
- b. Kuje Area (including Pegi)
- c. Lugbe Camp
- d. Durumi (Area 1) camp-like site
- e. Wassa settlement
- f. Jikwoyi (including Karu, Orozo, and Mararaba Loko host communities)
- g. Waru, Yimitu, and Zhindyina host communities
- h. Karamajiji and Wuye

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<sup>2</sup> Except periods where data becomes repetitive and gaps between 1-4 months are given to allow for major changes like a group shifting location within the area, a humanitarian project being carried out there or relatives away on farming work returning to the camp.

<sup>3</sup> The UNHCR spent only two days of site visits with other NGOs to survey all “known” IDP clusters in Abuja (UNHCR et al.)



**Fig. 2**  
Spatial Mapping  
of Durumi Camp  
Showing All the  
Group (Ajàdí &  
Anwo-Ade).

This study focuses on the Durumi (Area 1) camp as a periphery. The camp was chosen for study because of its rare placement in between developed residential regions of the main city of Abuja. The displacement tracking matrix by the IOM aims at discovering new centers with each round of survey (IOM, 2019); however, Abuja has not been considered a necessary footprint.

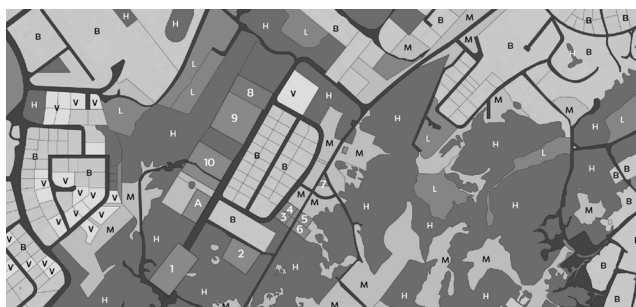
### The Durumi IDP Camp

The Durumi camp was set up on December 15, 2014; this was following a rapid displacement of people from Maiduguri after a series of conflict and violence. The camp has grown to a population of 2740 as of September 20, 2019. The camp is called the Durumi/Area 1 IDP camp. 324 families were detected in the whole camp (updates were made as the people got married). The urban footprint of the camp is more collective rather than specific.

It consists of 12 defined groups loosely dispersed along a cluster of middle-income neighbourhood housing punctuated by the Federal Internal Inland Revenue Service training center, i.e. F.I.R.S. Fig. 2 shows spatial data of the camp groups in the context of site features and the contrasting built-up region in 1.76 km<sup>2</sup> and 8.27 km<sup>2</sup> spaces. There are two sites far from the main cluster, i.e., Dagba River and Banana village. The youth village is not fully identified as part of the camp, but some IDP reside there. Fig. 2 also shows spatial relationships and scaled proximities in a larger 8.27 km<sup>2</sup> sample. This cluster of groups make up the Durumi IDP camp. The groups are on private land informally leased to the IDP for unknown periods in which a three- to six-month notice is served if the properties are to be handed over to the owners. For this reason, housing is temporary and informal. The groups within the cluster are ready to move when conditions warrant. The groups function as a single unit. This is more so administratively than socially, as a central communal form of living is not evidently present. The camp is governed by a chairman/president, a vice president, a secretary, the women's leader, a PRO, a storekeeper, and a representative from each of the 12 groups. The groups are: Dagba River site, Dodo site, Maman Dzamghara site, Kanuri site, Abu site, Adabaza site, Hajja Malam, F.I.R.S site, Banana village, Jumai site, Danja Fence, and Fulani site. The groups are either named after the predominant people in the group or the groups' locations. Camp communication is via a network guided by leadership and general assembly is prohibited for fear of high vulnerability in the case of a possible attack. In this context, the scattered form of the camp's set-up is, in itself, a security precaution.



- 1 Dodo site
- 2 F.I.R.S site
- 3 Jumai site
- 4 Maman Dزامghara
- 5 Danja Fence
- 6 Fulani Group
- 7 Kanuri Site
- 8 Hajia Mallam
- 9 Adabaza Site
- 10 Abu Site
- A Football Field



- B Built up area: 27.01%
- V Other vacant interstitial land: 2.99%
- L Light vegetation: 6.44%
- # Current IDP sites: 3.49%
- R Roads and path ways: 10.31%
- H Heavy vegetation: 36.60%
- M Sand/Mud/Clay: 13.16%

### Demographic Origins and Structure:

The Durumi camp is made up mainly of people from Borno and Adamawa. The Borno LGA includes MMC, Gambaro, Ngambaro, Gwangai, Biu, Gwoza, and Bama. Adamawa makes up about 3% of the camp population mainly with LGAs Golok and Michika. Fig. 3 shows the trajectory of IDP socio-spatial origins linked to their current camps. The data is from 1435 of the 2740 recorded IDP camp members. Some members decided not to indicate their camp locations and are designated “undocumented.” This category makes up about 14.1% of the sample size. Due to this information lag, the F.I.R.S site and Fulani group are not delineated in the mapping of origins. The data, however, still links them with their respective communities in terms of camp identity. The Adamawa-Borno proportion in Durumi is also consistent with IOM data, which puts the total displacement proportions of IDP in the Northeast at 6.8% and 83.3%, respectively (IOM, 2019).

In the formative years of the camp (2015-2017) the rise of displacement in the northern LGAs also coincided with the influx spike in the camp; however, direct correlations have not been fully established. In the Northeast, Gwoza rose by 19.69%, Bama increased by 7.63%, Biu rose by 5.54%, Maiduguri MC, by 6.35%, Mafa by 6.68%. Konduga rose slightly

by 0.86%. Hawul, however, dropped by 3.56% (IOM, 2019). The DTM data, however, does not cover the LGAs of Gambaro, Ngambaro, and Gwangai. As mentioned earlier, the DTM and other allied data sources do not cover displacements and camps in Abuja (IOM, 2019).

**Table 2**  
Gender  
Distribution  
across Groups  
in Durumi IDP  
Camp (Ajayi,  
1976).

Gender	Total	Undocumented	Student	House Spouse	Trader	Bike Transporter	Taxi Driver
F(%)	51	7.6	30.7	9.6	1.4	–	–
M(%)	49	13.2	29.4	0.6	3.1	0.7	0.4

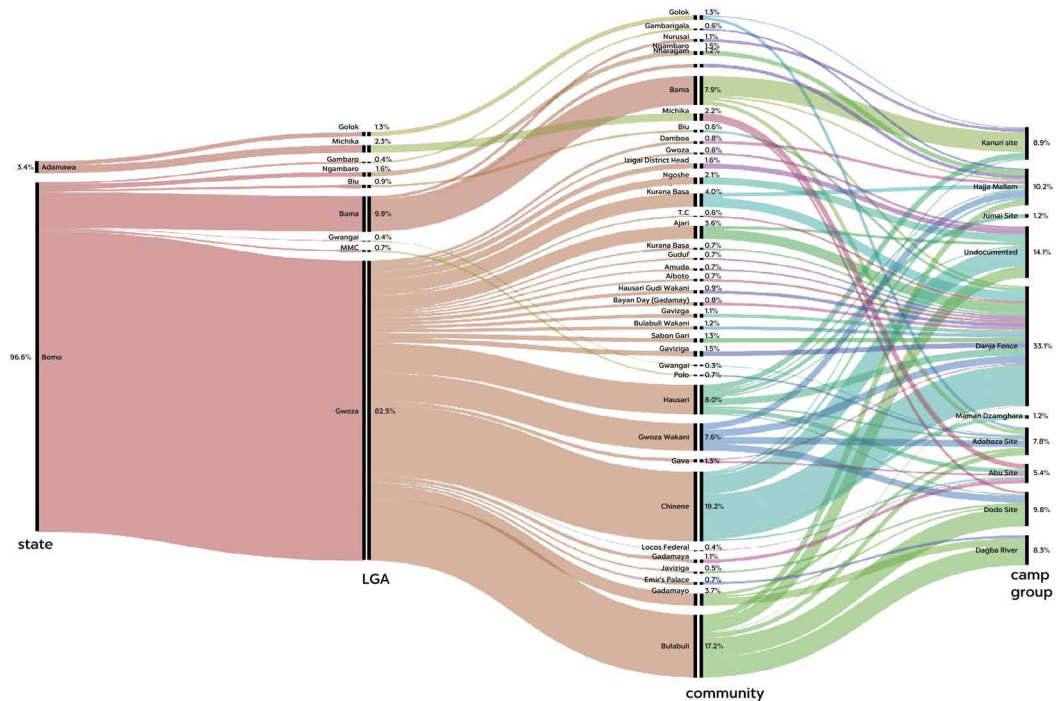
	Farmer	Religious Practitioner	Job Applicant	Tailor	Teacher	None
F(%)	0.5	0.6	–	0.1	–	0.5
M(%)	0.5	–	0.5	–	0.1	0.5

**Fig. 3**  
Origins of the  
Displaced at  
Durumi IDP Camp.

As seen in Fig. 3, the camps are made up of a diversity of communities. Kanuri, Adabaza, Abu, and Dodo sites all have people from Adamawa and Borno, though in obvious significant unequal proportions. Danja fence is made up of Borno IDP only, but it is the most diverse in terms of community representation. The Durumi Camp therefore has a near-equal mix of diversity at the level of community.

In the camp, the dominance of people from Borno (96.6%) make it difficult for IDP from Adamawa (3.4%) to form a substantial mix throughout the camps. Though this is not a problem in that camp, it is known to cause conflict in other IDP camps in Abuja (UNHCR et al., 2015). The data respondents are the ones resident in the camp, while the rest are often away to Nassarawa on farming projects to raise more money for their respective families. This explains the small number of farmers in the camp (Table 2). This is convenient for study as all of the recorded families on the camp are represented in the survey. The Adamawa IDP are found in Abu, Dodo, Kanuri, and Adabaza (four of the 12) sites. These sites are all spatially clustered, except the Kanuri site, which has the smallest dispersion of Adamawa IDP (Fig. 5). IDP from Adamawa are split into Golok and Michika origin communities (source of displacement). Golok makes up 1.3% of the sample size, while Michika makes up 2.3%. The people from Golok are found in Adabaza and Kanuri groups, while the people from Michika are found in Abu and Dodo sites. All four sites have less than 10% each in proportion to the whole sample selection. This implies that the Adamawa IDP are not as demographically spread-thin across the camp sites for a group that only makes up 3.4% of the total camp sample.

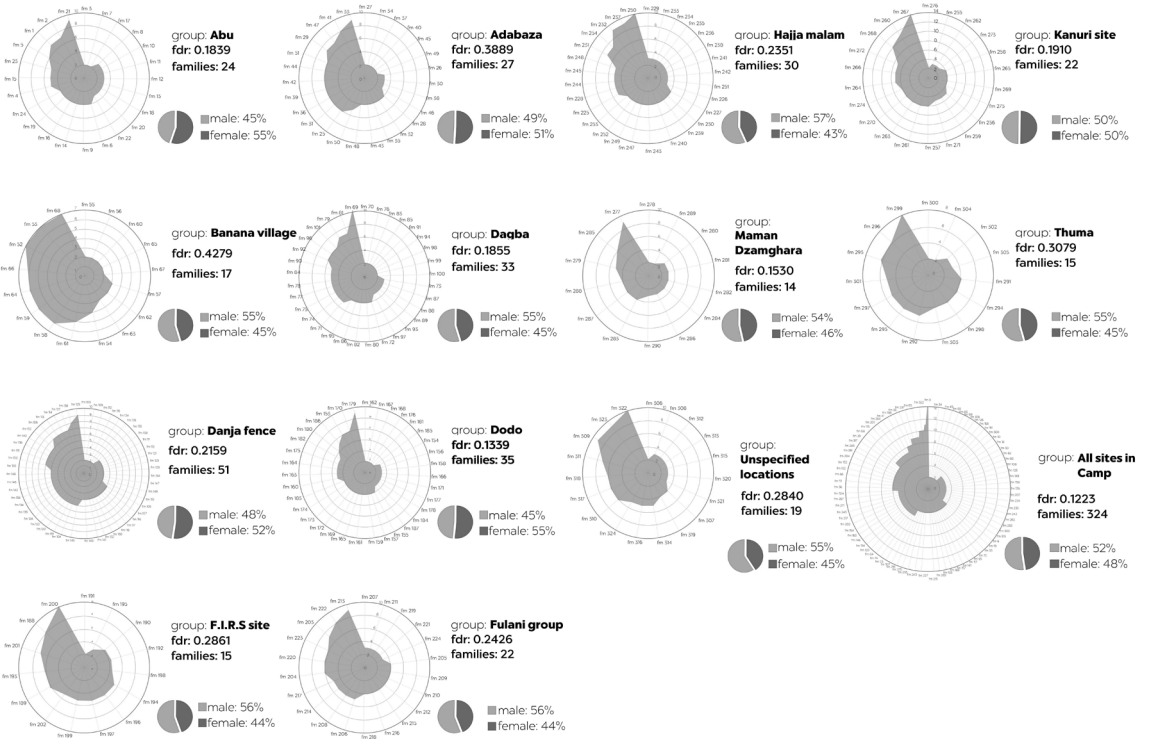
The gender distribution of the camp is almost equal (Fig. 4), with sample size consisting of a total distribution of 49% female and 51% male (Table 2). Even though the camp



is observed to be peaceful, with only one fatality related to conflict (involving two people) since the camp's inception until the end of 2019. Feelings of isolation and then conflict would have been expected within the camp due to a significant majority from Borno. However, there is peace. These spatial structures of origins and demography show how socially close-knitted the camp is. There exists no notion of "intra-periphery" within the camp with respect to demography, gender, or community origins. The clustering of the Adamawa minority and the near-even distribution of gender in skill, occupation, and even across the groups (Fig. 3; Table 2) show why there are no notions of periphery with respect to the mentioned parameters.

### Durumi and the Idea of the Furtive Periphery

The furtive periphery of Abuja is created not only through power but by deliberate oversight and neglect. This study shows that the Durumi camp is interstitially within a middle-income residential area in Abuja, with a high-income space within it and around it to the west (Fig. 5). This spatial configuration makes the IDP disappear into the larger urban section. This makes it convenient for the government to ignore them. Socially, the people remain a periphery embedded within the larger sub-center, but the city as a whole does not recognize



**Fig. 4**  
 Relative Family Density and Gender Distribution in 324 Families (Ajàdi, Surakatu, Olaniyi, Mfonobong).

them as a “valid” periphery of the city. This is so even though they possess the marginalised properties of a typically perceived periphery in terms of income and employment, which are key factors that separate and hierarchialize people in Abuja (Young, 1999). Durumi camp also goes against typical theories of peripherality and peri-urbanity that imply that cities with centers radiate decreasingly in social, economic, and innovation qualities away from the center with decreasing proximity to it.

Looking deeper, based on peripherality theories of social inequality and communication, Durumi camp seems to be largely disconnected from the very space in which it is embedded. In the survey of the camp, 71% of the engaged IDP say that they feel disconnected even though they have social ties to the spatial context. Employment is difficult because they are perceived as a threat. This is perceived by 60% and 20% of male and female IDP respectively.

The camp has experienced humanitarianism and some limited government intervention, but not much has been done in terms of health and education. Government toilets

have been provided for Dodo site, but it is loaded by the entire camp. Dodo site has also been provided with livestock as micro-business start-ups. Other sites are yet to be covered. Generally, through humanitarianism, only 30% of the education needs are met in terms of space and supplies. The structure is not sustainable because teachers cannot be continuously paid to teach. 60.5% of the sampled IDP are students in almost equal proportions of gender (male: 30.7%, female: 29.4%; Table 2). An undocumented number of the children that attend nearby schools funded by some NGO or private individuals show evidence of poor education and, in some cases, negligence and abuse by the school systems. The current rampant cases of kidnapping school children<sup>4</sup> around the contiguities of Abuja in 2021 is also beginning to discourage education as an option for the parents/guardians of the children. Parents are more eager to marry off female children than further their education. There are, however, some rates of success in education, but they are significantly smaller upon observation. Definite findings have not been made in this regard<sup>5</sup>. However, it has been fully observed that the poor education has caused more internal disconnections within the camp, even at the scale of the family. This is because most of the student demographic have to go to the state of Nassarawa to farm with their parents/guardians for food and income. Nassarawa, therefore, is seen as a kind of “center” of food and potential income. This creates a layer of peripherality in the camp. The IDP are also disconnected from home as returning is still not an option due to the continuous conflict in the Northeast (in contrast to what the government claims). The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>6</sup> in the North is also an issue. These continuous developments are projected to even raise the influx of IDP into the city of Abuja.

### **Informality and Innovations of the Periphery**

The notion of innovation as the yardstick or driver for peripheralization needs to be revisited. Friedmann’s “Theory of polarized development” differentiates between “core regions” and “peripheral regions.” Friedmann uses this theory to show a dichotomy between these two regions from the standpoint of technological, economic, and social innovation. He holds that innovation in these domains can only be found in the core areas, while the peripheral regions do not display corresponding evidence of innovation. The findings of this study

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<sup>4</sup> One of the manifestations of the main north-south conflict in Nigeria.

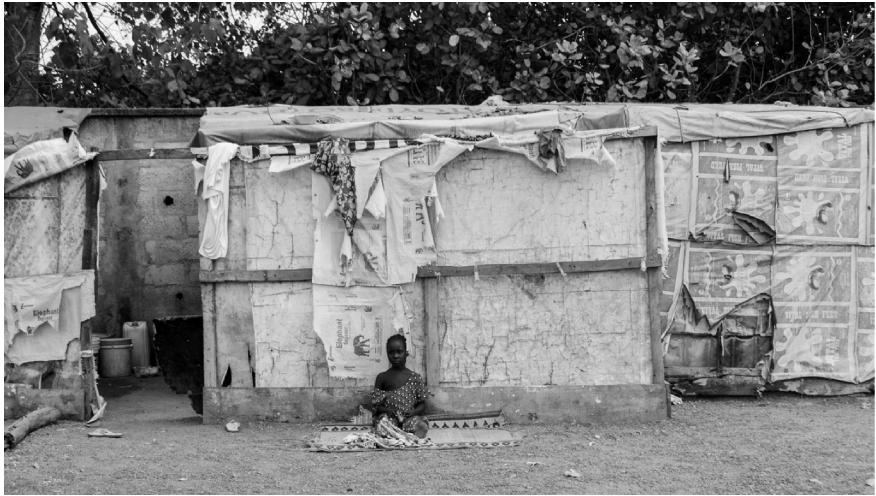
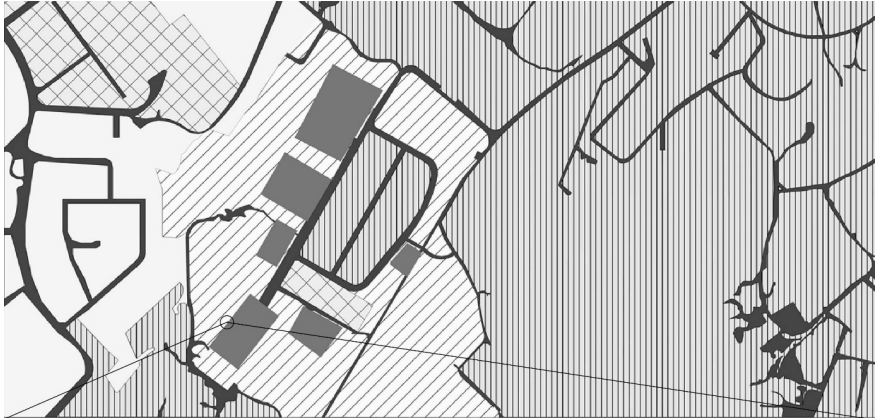
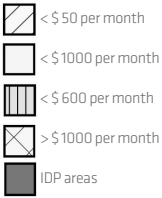
<sup>5</sup> A formal study into the development economy of the education of IDP children across Abuja is currently being made.

<sup>6</sup> The research scope does not cover in detail, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the peripheralisation of IDP in Abuja. This is because the impact is still unfolding, and more information and insights need to be acquired and studied as at the time of the submission of this study.





**Fig. 5**  
 (a) Income  
 Map across  
 Durumi and  
 Immediate Areas  
 (b) Location-  
 snapshot of  
 Typical Housing  
 in a Group  
 (S.T Taiwo, 2016).



disagree with this notion, as most theories of center and periphery take the position that the periphery does not innovate.

The position is that innovation can happen in the city center or the periphery, which is also argued by Sheamur for similar cities. Living activities in the Durumi camp have proven otherwise: the IDP at the camp have responded to the living conditions and challenges with need-based innovation as well as other coping mechanisms (Table 3).

For the intermittency of water and electricity supply, they have developed living conditions that help optimize the use of sunlight. Problems of health are met with the effective

herbal skills of some in the camps, which are taught to others. Strategic social gatherings are also encouraged.

In response to their housing shortage, they are developing a building process in line with cutting-edge sustainability systems and the circular economy. Though their typical houses are very unhealthy in terms of space and materials (Fig. 5b), they are developing new ways of building. The use of renewable materials that are combined with temporality in mind exhibits effective circular economy principles, which push for a perpetual loop of material flow in buildings with financial advantages in the process. Plate 1 shows an example of a mosque built within existing trees, using mud as a binding agent to the blocks that can be reused (hence borrowed), making the entire structure capable of disassembly. There have also been circular economy housing schemes designed by the author on the basis of the innovative housing praxes of the camp. In the project, most the innovations in Plate 1 were optimized<sup>7</sup> and applied.

To augment income, nearly half of the camp (47.6%) is undergoing passive re-displacement in the form of a search for better livelihood through farming in nearby Nasarawa. This is a dramatic rise from only 1% who identified as full-time farmers (only) upon entry. The optimization of this praxis has been linked to the near equal gender distribution across the camp. In addition, the family density ratio, i.e. the extent to which the families are as similar to a scenario of having a group filled with the most populous family population in a group, is rather low (<0.5 out of 1.0) for all groups (Fig. 4). Despite this, the uniformity of family demography can also be seen in the almost uniform mean family size across the camps: seven (three groups), six (three groups), five (five groups), four (three groups), i.e. a mean range size of seven to four across 324 measured families. A wider distribution of identical family size and gender distribution has therefore allowed the praxis of best practices to spread across the camp groups. Most families practice the same survival responses, which is partly determined by their family structure.

### **What, then, is the Peripheralization in Abuja?**

As shown in this study, Abuja was born out of a peripheralization process of conflict and displacement. The entry of the British saw Abuja rise from a peripheral of the Hausa states to a national center of power that has all other parts of a country as peripherals to it. Spatially, the study shows that Abuja experiences three major levels of peripheralization processes that vary in scale. The processes are characterized by the impact of conflict and power asymmetries.

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<sup>7</sup> Designs can be seen on projects of [www.penumbraspace.org](http://www.penumbraspace.org)



**Plate 1**  
An open-air  
mosque with  
100% recycled  
materials.



**Table 3**  
Innovative  
responses of  
Durumi Camp to  
context (Ajādi,  
2020).

The smallest scale of peripheralization occurs within the camp's clusters, as about 47.6% are rhythmically re-displaced to Nassarawa in search of food and income, momentarily disconnecting families and creating a center out of a camp that is termed a "hidden" periphery. This new center is connected to a new periphery of Nassarawa. The second level of periphery is the notion of Durumi as a whole and how it is hidden in plain sight. Durumi is triggered into concealment by the national power identity of Abuja that must not be seen as a harbourer of IDP, which is evidence of the country's failure to end the conflict in Northeastern Nigeria. Though Durumi is not the only camp "unseen," it is the most clandestine, due to its location within a developed region and its fragmentation as it dissolves within it. Though the government has recently accepted the existence of IDP in Abuja, conscious policies and plans for integration are not yet evident. Lastly, the largest process of peripheralization positions Abuja as a center of power instrumentalized by the Fulani currently in power as a means of forcing their footprint of land ownership, grazing rights, and influence (Abbas, 2012; Okeke, 2019) across the entire country. There is a development of the rest of the country as a false and furtive spatial periphery that is being perpetrated by the government across the country for non-democratic political goals. The recent case of the RUGA settlement policy by the federal government of Nigeria that aimed to force the Fulani herdsmen on land as peripheries in all of the 36 states of the federation is a very bold example. The policies emanating from Abuja direct that each state in the country must create/mark out land for the Fulani herdsmen for them to graze their cattle. Though the policies have been nationally rejected, they are still being moved forward despite knowledge that the Fulani herdsmen were declared to be a terrorist organisation (IEP, 2018) and have been responsible for hundreds of deaths across

Socio-Spatial challenge	Setbacks	Response
Intermittency of Water and Electricity	The camps are not formally connected to water or electrical systems linking the camp groups.	<p>Activities that require sunlight are systematically shifted to daytime.</p> <p>Some IDP use gas lamps that require very little kerosene to light some open spaces.</p> <p>Some illegally tap electricity from main lines.</p> <p>Two boreholes have been dug to serve water to the groups with tanks and taps stationed at the larger camps.</p> <p>A fuel generator is being used, however the cost of purchasing fuel is high. The generator is used for administrative purposes and funding for maintenance is from the council's purse.</p>
Poor Health and Wellness Infrastructure	<p>Only an approx. 16m<sup>2</sup> health facility serves 2740 people.</p> <p>Mortality rate is high among new-borns</p> <p>Mental health cases do not get help.</p>	<p>Herbal medicine is made from vegetation around camp. It has proven to be noticeably effective.</p> <p>Traditional midwifery is employed as a option to child delivery</p> <p>Social gathering of women to ease mental health (83% of the women claim it offers some form of help)</p> <p>Men gather in half the women's group size. Though no concrete data exists to show the impact, all groups take part in the process continuously, with large cases of friendship being built in the process...Especially in football games.</p>
Poor Housing	No formal housing. The ones available are made out of thermally unfriendly and unsustainable materials with sizes as small as 3m <sup>2</sup> per family. Even at the assembly cost of \$55 to \$275 per unit, the 'houses' are still unaffordable by the campers. There are varied cultures of living.	<p>Their shed design and construction models save materials that are reusable in many other ways (circular economy architecture).</p> <p>They also build with the possibility of extemporaneous disassembly or (and) relocation in mind.</p> <p>They make the best use of their immediate environment as a material source for building without causing harm to the components.</p>
Lack of Steady Income	The stereotyping of the IDP as potential sources of threat affects chances of employment. Their standard of living has caused a growing socio-spatial divide of them from their immediate environment	<p>Self-assessment: They already have a listed set of needs based on their own self-study. This ready to be shown to anyone willing to help.</p> <p>They have sought for land in Nasarawa—outside Abuja, to farm in order to generate or Augment their income. Families are split between camp and farm in ways that optimises farming business while protecting the family.</p>
Governance & Security	People from different cultures, religions and backgrounds are unexpectedly brought together. Durumi camp is also scattered in sub-clusters. This makes establishing good leadership in the camp a daunting task. The scattered nature of the camp also complicates security.	<p>Each of the 12 clusters are represented in the leadership council.</p> <p>Women have a leadership visibility as much as they think is fair. They are also included in all affairs of leadership.</p> <p>They have no tolerance for religious or cultural bias. Security is collective at the leadership level but decentralised in operation.</p>

the country (Fig. 1). Despite this, conflicts as recent as January 2021 still show that Abuja remains adamant in forcing the Fulani on the rest of the country, especially southwestern and southeastern Nigeria. This is leading to killings and kidnappings of farmers and indigenous residents in the southwest and southeast, with scores dead already. Abuja now remains the political center of the nation with conflict-driven peripheries around and within it.

In conclusion, Durumi shows that the periphery should not be defined only by distance from a center. As such, this study proposes a new perspective of urban periphery in African cities. It also reveals that the periphery is mostly seen through the lens of the center. This is a misconception, since the early opinions of Euro-prescribed modernity come to reference. The development of scalable social innovation as a response to conflict and displacement in Durumi camp shows that peripheries should be best understood as regions that produce an identity that is socially, economically, and politically valid irrespective of a need for interdependency. Though interdependency of the center-periphery is indispensable for sustainable development, it must not be needlessly worked into certain one-way subsystems and parameters of peripheralization in which the narrative is about the center alone or primarily.

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In Jerusalem, intra-urban boundaries are experienced and negotiated in deeply embodied ways, and primarily encountered, undermined, and reinforced through mobility. Palestinians' movements are regularly restricted in areas at the geographical periphery of Jerusalem—especially those neighborhoods that have been severed from the rest of the city by the Israeli separation barrier. In expending significant energy to navigate the rules and spaces of the mobility regime, Palestinians must think of their movements from the perspective of Israeli power. This conceptual displacement of the self results in a sense of alienation, both from the spaces they cannot access and from their own capacities. Many feel stuck in both space and time and cannot envision a future for themselves in their city. Conversely, movement in spite of restrictions can also expand residents' appreciation of their own capacity. Leisure mobilities in particular bear a radical potential because they involve the enjoyment of movement through space, rather than being merely a means to an end. As Palestinians in the city assert their claim through embodied movement, they re-appropriate hostile space with light-hearted playfulness. Mobility thus emerges as a useful vehicle for examining not only how Palestinians' agency is constrained by the broader urban context but how their movements affect urban space: as they redraw the boundaries of spatial exclusion from the bottom up, they call into question who and what is considered peripheral to the city. The chapter traces the restriction of everyday movements, as well as the way marginalized residents navigate and defend contested urban terrain, using a phenomenological lens. By engaging Merleau-Ponty's view of the relationship between the body-subject and the world, it argues that everyday movements shape the spatial and temporal horizon. The restriction of movement limits what is conceivable, but at the same time, the mobility of marginal urban residents in spite of those restrictions expands the sense of what is deemed possible.

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## MOVING FROM THE MARGINS: PALESTINIAN MOBILITIES, EMBODIMENT, AND AGENCY IN EAST JERUSALEM

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Hanna Baumann

Palestinians in East Jerusalem, living under Israeli rule since 1967, hold a precarious status in the city. The municipality's policies are focused primarily on serving the city's Jewish majority, resulting in an ethnically-based allocation of land and resources, often with the explicit aim of increasing the proportion of Jewish residents (Cheshin et al., 1999; Bollens, 2000; Margalit, 2006; Wari, 2011; Dumper, 2014; Chiodelli, 2017). This has restricted the availability of housing for Palestinians, preventing them from building homes legally in their city and resulting in the looming threat of home demolitions for many (Kaminker, 1997; Braverman, 2007; Chiodelli, 2012). At the same time, when Palestinians move out of the city due to this pressure, they risk losing their right to residency (Jefferis, 2012; Ir Amim, 2012). The "impossible situation" (Amir, 2011) in which East Jerusalemites find themselves is commonly described using metaphors of spatial restriction verging on the life-threatening: for example, as a "strangulation" (ARIJ, 2005), or similar to being "choked" or "trapped" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2012). Life in Jerusalem, it appears, is circumscribed by the parameters set out by Israel and characterized by the Palestinians' inability to act. And yet, despite this restriction, Palestinians have remained in the city for the past fifty years and continue to make their lives there. This raises the questions of how they navigate these restrictions and to what degree they shape the contested space of Jerusalem.

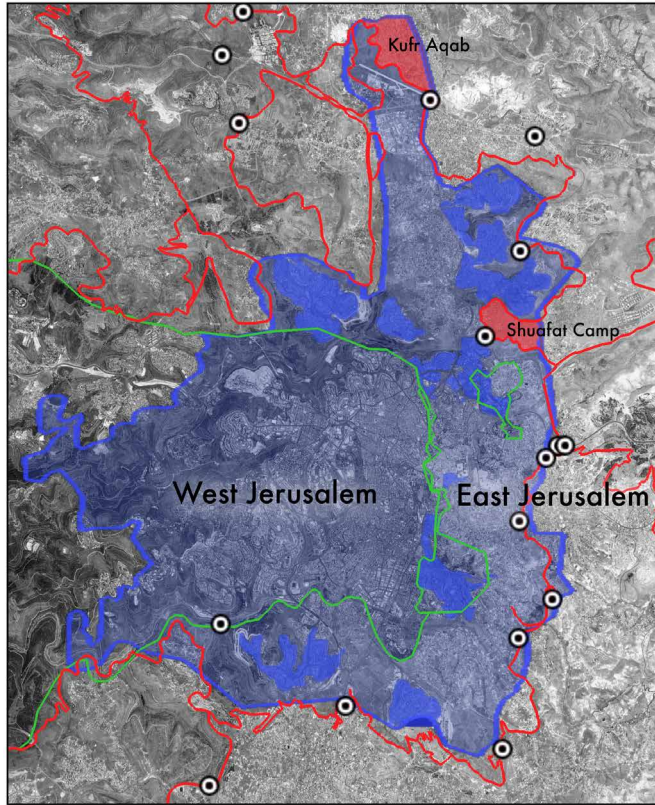
Numerous types of borders cut across the city of Jerusalem (Fig. 1): The 1949 armistice line, known as the Green Line, separates East Jerusalem (which is deemed occupied under international law) from the city's western half. Within Palestinian East Jerusalem, numerous Jewish-only settlements form an advancing internal frontier, threatening residents with dispossession. The West Bank barrier, also referred to as the Israeli separation barrier, which Israel began constructing in 2002, and its associated regime of military checkpoints, has cut the city off for Palestinians in the West Bank—who can now only enter with a military permit—as well as any Palestinian Jerusalemites living in peripheral areas of the city. The separation wall does not always follow the municipal outline but de facto annexes some parts of the West Bank to the city while excluding Palestinian neighborhoods that are part of the



**Fig. 1**  
Map of the  
contested borders  
and urban  
margins in East  
Jerusalem (Hanna  
Baumann, 2015).

**Jerusalem borders**

-  Green line
-  Separation Wall
-  Municipal area
-  Municipal area  
outside the Wall
-  Checkpoint



municipality, such as Kufr Aqab and Shuafat Refugee Camp. One third of Jerusalem's Palestinian population now lives in these urban margins, within municipal boundaries but beyond the wall (cf. Baumann & Massalha, 2021).

The areas where Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem—and also the city's suburbs and traditional hinterlands—are cut off from the city by the Israeli separation wall have most obviously become understood as urban “margins” (Abu Hatoum, 2021). However, with Palestinians across the city being side-lined and pushed out by Israeli municipal policies, and due to the omnipresence of exclusionary borders, marginalization takes place not only in the urban peripheries. The “margins,” then, are also at work in areas of the city where the frontier has migrated to the center (cf. Pullan, 2015a), meaning that the contestation over international borders takes place in a densely intertwined urban setting. This chapter deals with the effects and contestation of this urban marginalization

by examining everyday and leisure mobilities. It argues that embodied movement has the capacity to resist or undermine physical borders and urban marginalization by expanding what I call the “horizon of possibility,” thereby re-centering those who have been relegated to the periphery of the city, both spatially and socially. In this sense, the piece builds on Caldeira’s (2017) argument that production of urban space takes place from the periphery, understood not only in a geographical sense, but as any reshaping of the urban terrain that counters official spatial logics.

The Israeli occupation’s restriction of Palestinian movement, especially since the early 2000s and in the West Bank, has been discussed as a tool of limiting freedom (Abu-Zahra, 2012; Handel, 2014; Bishara, 2015; Kotef, 2015). It has been shown to undermine social lives by disrupting routines and making both planning ahead and spontaneity impossible (Handel, 2009). By limiting Palestinians’ movements to the essential and thus shrinking their social worlds, the Israeli mobility regime minimizes the potential for organized opposition to the military occupation, as Taraki (2008) notes. There is a tendency among those analyzing the strategies and mechanisms of the Israeli occupation to represent its control as omnipresent (e.g., Weizman, 2007), omnipotent (e.g., Kotef & Amir, 2001), and omniscient (e.g., Zureik et al., 2010). On the other hand, Palestinian insistence on mobility in spite of military restrictions has been framed as resistance to that control: Hammami (2004, p. 27) calls it the “everyday resistance of simply getting there” (see also Hammami, 2010), Harker (2009) describes mobility as a form of political contestation; while Tawil-Souri (2009) reads the Palestinian transformation of checkpoints into zones of exchange as subverting the military logic of restricted movement. This chapter examines this tension between restricted movement and mobility in spite of restrictions through an embodied lens. The focus on Palestinian movement in and around the margins of Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem allows us to trace the impact of (im)mobility on the numerous borders dividing the city and restricting Palestinian access to urban space and resources.

Focusing on the phenomenology of im/mobility in and around East Jerusalem, this chapter forms part of my doctoral research, which as a whole involved eight months of on-site research in Jerusalem between 2013 and 2015. For this component of the dissertation, I conducted 46 interviews (in English and/or Arabic) with 28 Palestinian residents of the city and its immediate environs. Of them, 17 were female and 11 male, the majority (24) were between the ages of 20 and 40, and most (21) worked in middle-class and white-collar positions—in part due to the personal networks and snowball method I used to contact respondents. Many of the interviews used a “go-along” approach (cf. Kusenbach, 2003) in which I accompanied respondents on daily commutes or other journeys through the city. This

entailed paying close attention to everyday practices, as well as affect and other “somatic work”—the senses employed when traversing the city (cf. Brown & Shortell, 2015; Low, 2006; Wissmann, 2014). Accompanying residents on their trips proved a good way to access their habitual knowledge as well as witness and co-experience the affective impact of these movements. During fieldwork, my European passport put me in a privileged position. Moving across contested areas or through checkpoints, I could not be treated as arbitrarily as Palestinians under Israeli rule, and I could eventually leave the situation behind entirely. Although my foreign identity certainly imposed a limit on my access and depth of possible understanding of the Palestinian experience, it also allowed me to navigate both Palestinian and Israeli spaces, as well as to traverse different parts of Palestine—a possibility not available to most Palestinians.

The first, conceptual section of this chapter examines the relationship between mobility and embodiment through Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “motility,” which suggests that movement forms the link between the individual and the outside world, both spatial and social. Based on this notion, I examine how individuals’ subjectivities are shaped by the city and how they exert agency within it. The second section shows how the restricted movements of Palestinians alienate residents from East Jerusalem—which the Palestinians continue to see as their capital in spite of Israel’s claim to the entire city—and how this affects their sense of self and their position and future in the city. As they navigate the rules and spaces of the Israeli mobility regime, Palestinians must think of themselves from the perspective of Israeli power. At the same time, the restriction of everyday movements limits the “horizon” of what is conceivable. However, as the third section outlines, movement *in spite* of restrictions can also expand residents’ appreciation of their own capacity. Leisure mobilities such as walking, running, biking, and parkour imbue practitioners with a sense of agency over their own bodies and the spaces they inhabit. As marginalized residents assert their claim to the city through movement, if only temporarily, they re-appropriate hostile space with light-hearted playfulness. Thus, the mobility of Palestinian Jerusalemites in spite of restrictions expands the sense of what is deemed possible in the city more broadly. As I argue in the conclusion, mobility emerges as a form of agency, playing an active role in the everyday negotiation of intra-urban boundaries, and thereby affecting both where the margins are located and which futures can be envisioned.

### **Mobility and embodiment**

To Merleau-Ponty (2005), there is a relationality between subject and object: each is part of the other, and movement becomes an expression of that relationship. Mobility is a

site of consciousness and meaning-making and thus deeply implicated in shaping the identities of political subjects—which in turn affect how we traverse the world. Therefore, mobility appears a useful vehicle for examining not only how much political freedom is granted from above, but also how much agency people claim from below. It is a site of contestation between individual freedom and state control. In examining the relationship between residents, their movements, and the city in and around East Jerusalem, I draw upon basic notions of embodiment and motility as articulated by Merleau-Ponty. Embodiment, here, is based on the understanding that our primary relationship to the world is built upon the fact that we—our bodies—are part of it; we can never relate to it as an entirely separate object. From this it would follow that our relationship to the city as a socio-political entity cannot be separated from our bodily experiences of its physical spaces. The manner in which roads are constructed, for instance, determines where and how people move through the city. Borders, too, determine our movements, but the physical outlines of mobility patterns can undermine those borders or form intra-urban fault lines of their own.

The relationship between the perceiving subject and perceived object, according to Merleau-Ponty, is a dialectical one. As our means of communicating and interacting with the world, our bodies are part of the world and intertwined with it. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, the distinction between body-subject (self) and the outside world cannot be upheld: “Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 474). Our stance toward, and understanding of, the outside world is mediated by motility—a potential movement or motor act toward the object. Thus, movement becomes the vehicle for experiencing the world, but also for understanding ourselves and our own position within the world. Particularly habitual movements—such as quotidian movements through the city—encapsulate a kind of implicit awareness that is pre-conscious. These pre-reflective unintentional movements show that our bodily interaction with an object cannot be separated from our understanding of it. Accordingly, inhabitants’ understanding of the city cannot be separated from the way that they use and engage with it. Their interaction with the city shapes their view just as their preconceived cognitive views shape their physical actions—and at the same time, both shape the space of the city itself.

As the link between the subject and the outside world, the moving body becomes the site of consciousness and identity, the site where meaning is produced. Consciousness, according to Merleau-Ponty, is based on intentions (*Ibid.*, p. 102) and self-perception, always geared with a view “toward a certain task” (*Ibid.*, p. 123). Due to its capacity to shape our stance toward the outside object, and—reciprocally—our understanding of ourselves, motility is the “primary sphere in which initially all significance is engendered” (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p.



142; cf. Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 143). Rather than being derived from a universal realm, meanings are based on the bodily relationship to, and uses of, objects. Movement, then, shapes residents' understanding of the city, and at the same time, the way they traverse the city also shapes their understanding of their own position within it. Everyday movement becomes not only a manner of being part of the city — by bringing the body-subject into relation with the world beyond — but also a means of reinforcing one's identity through habitual actions (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 102).

### **Marginalization through im/mobility at the periphery**

In limiting the use of space and rendering certain spaces inaccessible by disrupting urban trajectories, the Israeli separation wall that cuts through Jerusalem's outskirts affects how residents envision their relationship to, and their own place in, the city. The obstruction and external determination of mobility impacts residents' sense of their own capabilities, leading them to self-limit their movements and actions. By incrementally restricting Palestinians' movements, the mobility regime creates the embodied sense of a lack of options, and as a result, of a viable future in the city — an effect we might think of as a limitation of the “horizon of possibility.”

Salma<sup>1</sup> lives in a house that looks directly out onto the separation wall, which passes through her backyard in Abu Dis, a suburb that is part of the Palestinian governorate of Jerusalem but not the Israeli-determined municipality. When Salma went into labor during the time of the wall's construction in the early 2000s, she was so determined to reach a Jerusalem hospital that she climbed over the wall to make it to the city center in time. After now having lived with the wall in her back garden for close to ten years, she finds it “easier to pretend Jerusalem doesn't exist” (Interview, 13 August 2014, Abu Dis). When I spoke to her, she had not visited the city in several years, even though she had the opportunity to do so during Ramadan, because she found her disconnection from Jerusalem so painful. Amneh from Kufr Aqab (a Jerusalem neighborhood that is part of the municipality but outside the wall), who was suffering from various health problems including a slipped disc, had not gone to see her doctor on the western side of the barrier for several weeks because she anticipated the journey across the checkpoint would be too strenuous.

For both Salma and Amneh, the restriction of movement leads to a decreased sense of their own capacities, which in turn leads to self-limitation. Both women seem to

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<sup>1</sup> Names used throughout are pseudonyms.

consciously limit their horizon: they choose to “forget” the other place and not to access it, even when the possibility is open to them. This self-limitation of mobility, due to a sense that the areas once traversed have turned hostile or alien, can become self-reinforcing over time. The consequent prolonged absence, whether externally or self-imposed, can heighten the sense of alienation. Dina, a young woman from Bethlehem, felt uncomfortable when she went to Jerusalem, even after spending several months in the city:

When I was younger and I had to go to Jerusalem, it felt like a faraway place. They made us feel like it's not ours. I feel very alienated when I am there. [...] When I worked there for five months, [...] My permit didn't allow me to drive in the city, which restricted my work. I also avoided taking Israeli transportation, because of BDS [the boycott of Israeli institutions], but also for safety reasons. So I felt very restricted. (Interview, 19 August 2015, Ramallah)

Difficulties of access and a lack of familiarity are described here in terms of distance—Jerusalem appears “faraway” although it is not geographically remote from Bethlehem. Dina's inability to autonomously navigate the urban space of Jerusalem made her feel restricted, suggesting that self-determined movement might entail a sense of mastery, ownership, or even belonging. This sentiment was echoed when Bilal, who lives in nearby Ramallah but had not obtained permission to enter Jerusalem for several years, visited the city and found that he could not navigate it easily, in part because the built environment had changed and in part because he had forgotten how to find his way around. Noting that he did not recognize the urban landscape around him, he repeatedly exclaimed to this foreign researcher, “I can't believe that you are showing me around my own city!” (Interview, 1 August 2015, Jerusalem). What is circumscribed by the horizon is also the space that can be “grasped,” which in this case, to speak with Merleau-Ponty, means not only reached in a physical sense, but also comprehended. We might read the sense of alienation that several respondents felt when unable to navigate Jerusalem as a lack of embodied understanding. Rather than a mere inability to navigate logistically, the sense of alienation arose from the dissonance between memories of space and the city actually encountered. According to Merleau-Ponty, to “understand is to experience the accord between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the realization” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 146). When there is a significant gap between the city Palestinians expect and the city they find upon visiting, this results in a sense of incomprehension, and thus, also an inability to make use of the city. When confronted with the city in its current form, the visitor experiences a loss, a conceptual displacement from the city as it was envisioned that is at once alienating and traumatic.

This sense of alienation from certain spaces also affects the sense of self. Writing on feminine embodiment, Young (1980) notes that viewing oneself from the outside, as an object, causes

a sense of alienation from one's own body. This alienation limits the sense of one's own capacities and, consequently, the range of one's movements. Similarly, in expending significant energy to navigate the rules and spaces of the Israeli mobility regime (whether moving within its parameters or seeking to subvert it), Palestinians must think of their movements from the perspective of Israeli power. Their own bodies are no longer the "original coordinate" (*Ibid.*, p. 151) of their perception and motility—they view themselves as peripheral. This is also reflected in the fact that Palestinians in the Jerusalem suburbs cut off by the wall refer to the western side of the barrier as *juwwa* (inside), suggesting that they view themselves as stranded "outside" the city that long constituted the main point of reference of their social and economic lives. This conceptual displacement of the self to the urban periphery results in a sense of alienation, then, both from the spaces they cannot access and from their own capacities.

Those stripped of a sense of their own motility limit their activity. Abdel Halim is a man in his fifties who is originally from Gaza but has lived in the Jerusalem area for fifteen years. Before the construction of the wall was completed, he entered the city on a daily basis for work without a military permit. Deemed an "infiltrator," he frequently had to hide from Israeli military patrols, and thus learned their routines to avoid encounters—thinking of his own movements from their perspective. After being confined to Ezariya—the Jerusalem suburb where he now lives and works—for a decade, he received an ID allowing him to travel across the West Bank, albeit not into Jerusalem. Even after Abdel Halim's ability to traverse space had expanded, his embodied horizon of possibility did not immediately catch up. Because encountering Israeli soldiers would have meant arrest and deportation to Gaza for him in the past, his sense of his own motility remained constrained, manifesting itself in an visceral manner:

Yes, I travel more freely now, but still, the prison is in my mind. When I see a checkpoint [freezes in mid-gesture and looks panicked] ... then I remember I have a West Bank ID. You cannot imagine what limits I put to my mind. (Interview, 2 September 2014, Ezariya)

Sara Ahmed (2006) notes that bodies are shaped by their relationship to "reachable" objects, available within what she calls the "bodily horizon." Their tendency toward some objects rather than others is an effect of repetitive action, rather than an inherent quality. In other words, our actions toward the outside world become inscribed in us over time and shape our understanding of ourselves. Thus, Abdel Halim's decade-long inability to move out of Ezariya, his mobility history, has become "sedimented" in his body, to speak with Butler (1988), affecting where he feels out of place and where he feels he cannot go. He underestimates his own motility, and thus remains limited in his

capabilities even when he has authorization to move. Ongoing restrictions of movement thus appear to lead to a deeply ingrained incapacity to act freely.

To Merleau-Ponty, an object's horizon consists of those aspects that cannot be directly apprehended but are nonetheless perceived as part of it, including what lies beyond our current realm of perception. More broadly speaking, the horizon is not fixed—based on the position of the observer, it moves as we move. While it denotes a limitation of the perceptible world, it is also defined by its openness and flexibility. As we alter our position, we perceive the world beyond our previous horizon and we realize our own potential to access different spaces and perspectives, whether actualized or not. When we move, we gain access to other perspectives, as well as the knowledge that there is always more “out there,” beyond our realm of current perception and comprehension. If we are restrained in our movements, our sense of possibilities—not only for ourselves, but more generally—is also constrained.

To those who have not traversed certain areas in some time, those places come to be seen beyond the “horizon of possibility.” Given the co-constitution of self and world, Mensch argues (following Merleau-Ponty) that severing that which exceeds the self and which we depend on is deeply traumatic. Cutting off this self-transcendence “is to eliminate the ‘I can’ that allows an organic being to live by transcending itself” (2009, p. 109). That is, it reduces one's sense of one's own capacity and agency in the world. The restriction of access to Jerusalem, then, is not only violent in that it limits the body's movements (cf. Netz, 2004), but in particular because, in doing so, it limits the body's sense-making capacity (of self and world). If the future is not seen as open to a multiplicity of possibilities, and space is seen as a closed system, there are no grounds for engagement or political action, to paraphrase Massey (2005, p. 11).

Motility, reflected in Merleau-Ponty's notion of consciousness as an “I can,” always pertains to a potential, forthcoming action. As such, any orientation is directed toward the future. The horizon one moves into is thus not merely a background, but also indicative of a potential action. Our anticipated future, or potential interaction with an object, then, shapes our baseline perception of this object. How Palestinians are able to navigate the city in the present shapes their understanding of their own future possibilities in it. As Palestinian space and movements are restricted, for many Palestinian Jerusalemites the range of possibilities for the future is diminished along with their sense of their own capacities. While living space in Jerusalem is constricted and expensive, the most apparent alternative, moving to the urban margins located beyond the wall, bears the risk of being excluded from the city in the long term. This lack of choices was a common theme in many discussions with Palestinian Jerusalemites, some of whom had moved back and forth or divided their time between the two sides of

the wall because both had disadvantages. Feeling physically stuck and consequently restricted in their personal development, some Palestinians see leaving the city entirely as their only option (see Baumann, 2019).

### **Expanding the horizon through speech acts and embodied practices**

Aware of the manner in which decreased mobility restricts what is both possible and accessible, Palestinians seek to maintain or restore severed connections. As they move in spite of restrictions, those movements take on heightened meaning. By engaging in embodied practices through leisure mobilities, they reclaim a sense of agency and re-center themselves in the city, thereby undermining the borders imposed by Israeli state power and opening new perspectives on the horizon of what is possible.

In a situation of increasingly restricted horizons, any Palestinian movement defying restrictions denotes a refusal to let their motility be limited, and gains heightened meaning with regard to future possibilities for Palestinian space. Palestinian steadfastness, or *sumud*, was long understood in terms of staying put in response to the threat of deracination. In the wake of the Second Intifada beginning in 2000, it took on a kinetic dimension due to the Israeli restrictions on movement limiting Palestinian everyday life. As Hammami (2016) put it, “maintaining existence is not simply about staying put”—it requires quotidian movements outside the home and interactions beyond one’s own realm. Thus, Palestinians’ movements are often underpinned by a conviction that this movement serves a broader purpose. Several respondents who crossed checkpoints regularly conceptualized their insistence on movement, in spite of the humiliation and exhaustion caused by the checkpoints, as “maintaining the connection” to Jerusalem that the Israeli occupation was attempting to sever. This was framed as a conscious political choice not to let the mobility regime limit their space of movement and social interaction. Thus, for them, a daily commute constituted an act imbued with political significance—or even religious duty, as in the case of Aya from Kufr Aqab, who traveled to the Old City of Jerusalem at least once per week to pray at the Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount). Residents of the Jerusalem neighborhoods cut off by the wall insisted that their Jerusalem ID cards conferred the “right” to enter Jerusalem, despite the fact that checkpoints were occasionally closed. Smugglers who help Palestinians cross without a permit are often taxi drivers whose routes have been severed by the wall. Some proudly proclaim that continuing to serve these routes supports the Palestinian “national cause.” In insisting on an expansive individual mobility, they thereby also seek to maintain a broader collective horizon of possibility.

In discussing journeys, Palestinians frequently insist on a particular vision of space, even if this does not correspond to the current spatial reality. Everyday journeys are commonly compared to a time prior to the constructions of the wall and the checkpoint regime. The time a journey previously took is invoked as the “real time”—the obstacles in between are thus declared as externally imposed, not accepted, and merely temporary. Even nineteen-year-old Afnan, who probably has little personal recollection of moving from her hometown of Hizma to the center of Jerusalem before the wall was built, said “usually it would take us seven minutes to get to Damascus Gate.” By constantly recalling the former connectivity that has been severed, the homeland in its “original” (pre-Israeli) form is reaffirmed as a space of greater motility and possibility.

Similarly, some respondents insisted that their right to access the city was in no way dependent on Israeli-issued permits, thus suggesting that their claim to the land pre-dated and superseded the State of Israel. Bilal, the Ramallah resident without a permit to enter Jerusalem, refused to accept the Israeli mobility regime: “It is my capital, so I will go just to see my friends, to drink tea with them. There doesn’t need to be an emergency. I should be allowed to go anytime” (Interview, 14 August 2013, Ramallah). However, despite his insistence on casual visits, Bilal only entered the city without a permit on one occasion over the course of three years. In fact, most respondents cut off from Jerusalem only entered the city without a permit when it was urgently necessary—for a visa appointment at a consulate or to visit a friend or family member in hospital. As Dina noted, “It’s not worth the risk just to go for fun.” Perhaps, then, we should read such pronouncements on the “actual” space, and the inherent rights of access to Jerusalem, as an insistence on a broader horizon in light of decreasing spatial options. The adherence to maintaining a wider space of potential movement, if only in speech acts, reflects a conscious attempt to not let oneself be limited by the Israeli restrictions on movement, to insist on a space of political possibility wider than that which is currently within reach. By refusing to heed the wall as an obstacle, such speech acts, like the actions of those who continue to make journeys despite exhaustion and risk, declare: “the border crossed us” (Cisneros, 2013). They deny the validity of the regime that imposed the border, thereby asserting their claim to Jerusalem as a Palestinian city, with a Palestinian future.

Mobility related to leisure can also serve to undermine Israeli control and imposed boundaries in Jerusalem’s urban space in unique ways. Activities such as walking, running, biking, or parkour resonate with notions of freedom of movement on both an affective and a political level. In the mythology of settler colonial states, freely roaming the landscape is a central means of expanding the frontier and laying claim to the land (Cresswell, 1993). Thus, the Zionist notion of *yediat ha’arezt*, or knowledge of the land, became such a means of connecting



**Fig. 2**  
Map for the  
third “Right  
to Movement”  
marathon in  
Bethlehem, held  
in April 2015.



with the territory in the process of settlement (Shavit, 1997). At the same time, roaming of the land has a long history in Palestinian *fellahin* (peasant) traditions. This importance attributed to the unimpeded movement across rural open spaces has only increased with the ongoing Israeli dispossession of Palestinian lands. Explicitly linking embodied experience with collective political visions of space, walks through the Palestinian landscape have therefore been valorised as a means of personally connecting to the land and its history, but also of resisting the increasing fragmentation of Palestinian space (Shehadeh, 2008; Clarno, 2015; on Ramallah’s urban landscape see Shehadeh, 2019). The “Right to Movement” Palestine Marathon has used similarly overtly political rhetoric and imagery. Its route is organized in such a way that runners encounter the wall at Jerusalem’s southern periphery multiple times. The experience is thus designed to give foreign visitors an embodied sense of the restricted nature of the daily trajectories of Palestinians as they are forced to turn around and run in loops to complete the full length of the marathon (Fig. 2).

Those engaging in leisure mobilities in contested areas challenge boundaries, both spatial and behavioral, personal and social. Dina, who is also a member of the “Right to Movement” group and goes on regular extended runs along the Jerusalem periphery, found that this activity allowed her to experience the “Palestinian landscape” in new ways, both by gaining a better understanding of her homeland and connecting to it

physically and emotionally. While running gave her the sense of being “like a bird set free,” she also made the conscious decision to run on roads usually reserved for settlers, and thus to overstep the borders prescribed by the occupation, expanding the space of possibility beyond that of Israeli-sanctioned access (Interview, 19 August 2015, Ramallah). In describing her development as a runner, Dina emphasized the disciplined training required and the confidence she gained by improving her fitness and physical abilities. While running marathons allowed her to travel abroad, it also expanded her horizon of possibility at home: running entailed transgressing physical restrictions imposed by Israel, as well as boundaries of conventional behavior in Palestinian society (see also McGahern, 2019). Jogging alone as a woman, she faced regular harassment from men, but came to brush this off as merely a nuisance. Similarly, those engaging in other outdoor sports such as mountain biking near settlements noted their circumspection, as encounters in seam zones can be dangerous. Several respondents invoked the case of George Khoury, a young Palestinian man who was killed by the al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades because he was mistaken for a Jewish Israeli while jogging near the Israeli settlement of French Hill in 2004. Some worried subsequently that engaging in such activities caused potentially dangerous confusion about their identity; one East Jerusalem commuter who cycled to work, for instance, said he was regularly mistaken for an Israeli or foreigner because this was seen as unusual behavior for a Palestinian. In making use of contested spaces, then, if only by passing through them temporarily, Palestinian joggers and cyclists lay a claim to that space, refusing to let the possibility of dangerous or uncomfortable encounters dictate their spaces of mobility.

In the parceled space of Palestine, where everyday travel is often painstakingly slow and carried out with caution, moving at great speed, without adhering to the rules of the road or the occupation, for personal enjoyment rather than economic survival, can have a liberating effect. Youth from the refugee camps near Bethlehem, for instance, regularly go for joyrides along the separation wall, in spaces that have become emptied of activity because they are now cut off from Jerusalem. They perform high-speed turns and intentionally oversteer their cars in order to make them “drift” as the tires lose traction—instilling a sense of unfettered floating at thrill-inducing speeds. In the documentary *Speed Sisters* (dir. Fares, 2015), Palestinian female race car drivers describe the sense of freedom they feel when drifting, even as their practice sessions take place adjacent to an Israeli military base. The velocity and sense of free-fall they experience briefly overrides their usual stark spatial restrictions. Here too, the embodied sense of excitement the women derive from speed car racing is aligned with their transgression of normative gender roles. When one driver’s mother says racing “opened [her daughter’s] horizons,” we can take this to mean more than that it gave her insight into a new





**Figs. 3–5**  
 Palestinian  
 parkour  
 practitioners in  
 different locations  
 in and around  
 the Old City  
 of Jerusalem,  
 2016 (photos:  
 Genevieve  
 Belmaker,  
 reproduced with  
 permission).

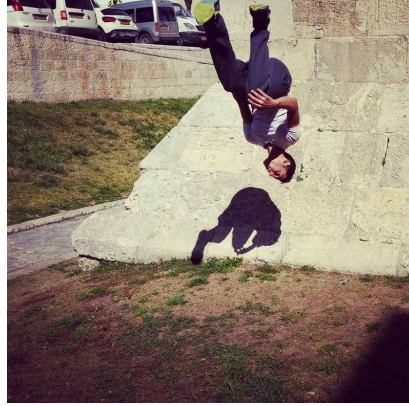
sport, or allowed her to travel to competitions outside of her native city of Jenin. In mastering a new mode of movement, a risky and unusual one at that, she became aware of capacities that were previously beyond her perception and comprehension.

Practitioners of parkour, a form of urban acrobatics born out of the hip-hop culture of the French *banlieues*, engage with buildings and walls, overcoming them by utilizing them as props to propel their bodies. What was once an obstacle or a ruin is thus appropriated for a positive self-determined purpose.<sup>2</sup> In Jerusalem, young people explore the Old City in search of new locations for practicing. This process of “urban rediscovery” (Mould, 2009) allows them to learn about the urban landscape and lay claim to previously unknown sites, such as rooftops (many of which are highly contested or controlled by settlers—Fig. 5). By making use of the built environment for this unsanctioned purpose, they engage with the city in novel ways, testing boundaries of permissible behavior. While the athletic sprints, jumps, and flips can be unexpected and disconcerting in a tense urban environment, it is also difficult for Israeli law enforcement to prohibit them, in part due to their playful nature. Palestinian youths thus occasionally use these displays of physical skill as a means of provocation, undermining the authority of soldiers.

Similarly, those who practice BMX bicycle stunts disrupt the routines of shared and highly securitized spaces, such as the steps at Damascus Gate, making light of a tense situation. Even as it takes the form of “practicing,” carrying out jumps, spins, and other stunts inside the amphitheater of this pedestrian node (Fig. 3) is a way to be seen—a performance that intentionally sends a signal. Acting in a spatially expansive manner, blocking the way of ultra-Orthodox Jewish passersby or soldiers on patrol, the bikers display, through their light-hearted acts, that they are not intimidated by Israeli authority. As in European cities, where BMX and skateboarding subcultures claim public spaces against the parameters of their intended use (Borden, 2001; Spinney, 2010), we see a playful dominance over space. Unlike in most European cities, however, in Jerusalem’s unpredictable urban space, where Palestinians might get shot for acting suspiciously or moving too quickly, acting outside normal behavioral scripts is a risk. Yet because “overcoming fear” (Saville, 2008) is an essential component of these types of sports, the engagement with Israeli security forces is perhaps a part of the appeal (Figs. 3–5).

Leisure mobilities may be viewed as more self-serving, or even escapist, than traveling to work to feed a family, and at first glance certainly seem “peripheral” to the production of urban space, especially in a context so geopolitically overdetermined. In that they involve

<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps no coincidence that parkour is especially popular in Gaza, where movement is so severely restricted (see Grima & Ottomaneli, 2013).



the enjoyment of movement through space, however, rather than existing merely as a means to an end, they can be said to bear a more radical potential for (re)defining individual and collective relationships to urban space. In going beyond the essential, leisure mobilities have an expansive quality that survivalism, or the steadfast defense of the status quo, does not. In addition, they open up new opportunities—new ways of moving, new spaces to move into, and new unsanctioned behaviors that expand the range of what is possible beyond the immediate moment. These leisure activities are, for Palestinians, a means of re-imbuing mobility with joyful meaning that counters the strain of moving across Israeli-restricted space. They also aid in reclaiming movement as a self-determined activity—through training and gaining confidence in their abilities, practitioners achieve a new sense of control over their own bodies. Moving through Israeli-controlled spaces can be unpredictable and dangerous for Palestinians. In the riskier of these practices, they may seek to actively exert control over the level of danger they are exposed to, rather than remaining passive recipients of threats. No longer conceiving of their position from the perspective of Israeli power, practitioners thus re-center themselves in their experience of the city—they become the “original coordinate” (Young, 1980, p. 151) rather than marginal subjects transgressing on the center. In redefining practitioners’ bodily relationships to space, and opening up entirely new avenues of engaging with it, these sports have the potential to counteract the alienation and limitation of the horizon of possibility.

### **Conclusion**

Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of embodiment breaks down the dichotomy between subject and object—between self and world—in a manner that reveals that movement through

space is generative of meaning and identity. If we understand the body as “a system of possible actions” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 260) and as the ultimate expression of human capacity (*Ibid.*, p. 140), then the restriction of the body’s movement can affect its sense of its own capacity. If the “horizon” denotes the current limitations and potential future possibilities, then bodily practices can expand this horizon: by offering new vantage points and thereby altering our view of broader situations and our position within them, embodied movement can provide a sense of possibility beyond what is currently known, thereby also altering our sense of our own potential. Conversely, limited movements restrict the view of that which is currently beyond one’s reach, but otherwise potentially accessible. As the body is the interface of self and world, the limitation of possible movements affects not just the perception of the outside world, but also one’s sense of self, in terms of one’s position in the world and one’s ability to interact with it. Thus, changes in mobility routines affect Palestinians’ understanding of their own capacities, their current position within the city, and their future within it. The difficulties associated with crossing from one side of the wall to the other not only discourage residents from doing so, but also shape their perception of the no-longer accessible spaces.

At the same time, mobility emerges as an expression of agentic capacities. Just as habit is a form of bodily consciousness in Merleau-Ponty’s view, consciousness is a somatic stance. Intrinsic to the notion of motility is the intentionality toward an outside object. Similarly, consciousness, too, is based upon the potential to affect the world from one’s own position — what we might also call agency. Merleau-Ponty sees motility “unequivocally as original intentionality. Consciousness is originally not an ‘I think that,’ but rather an ‘I can’” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 140). Motility, then, is deeply linked to the ability to act. Such a phenomenological understanding of agency constitutes a break with the canonical Western tradition: grounded in the opposition between mind and body, and especially from the Enlightenment onward, agency has been associated with rationality and free will of the autonomous subject (Meynell, 2009). Women and other marginalized groups were defined through their corporeality and pitted as the opposite of rational autonomous agents, and hence could be “legitimately denied some of the privileges of agents.” (*Ibid.*, p. 5). Similarly, the Israeli occupation’s restriction of the movement of Palestinians reduces them to (dangerous) bodies, subject to being constrained. From the point of view of Israeli power, the ensuing framing of their movement as constant transgression, as Kotef (2015) has argued, is then used to show they are not “good subjects” and should thus be excluded from access to certain rights. Yet the academic focus on the Israeli control, management, and regulation of Palestinian bodies appears to reinforce this logic of power, in

which the state is a coherent, unified, rational actor and Palestinians are merely bodies whose movement and survival are to be managed. By seeking to overcome the mind-body hierarchy and instead emphasizing the interrelations between the two, a phenomenological approach avoids feeding into discourse that denies the free will of Palestinians (if only by omission) and, consequently, their role as political subjects with agency.

In East Jerusalem and its outskirts in particular, where the outright political activity of Palestinians is heavily restricted, the political implications of everyday movements are significant. Although at first glance, they might appear marginal to the formation of geopolitical borders in the city, they can tell us about how Palestinians view their position in the city and how much agency they are able to exert within the limited parameters set by the Israeli occupation. Mobility thus becomes a useful lens for examining not only how Palestinians' ability to act is constrained by the broader urban context but also how their movements affect the city; that is, how they exert agency in space. I have sought to show here how mobility constraints shape Palestinian positionality vis-à-vis the city in an embodied manner. The restriction of movement determines the contours of their daily experience and their vision of themselves in the city through limiting the horizon of possibility, leading to further self-limitation. At the same time, expansive movements in spite of these restrictions and rhetorical insistence on continued access to Jerusalem seek to widen that restricted horizon. Unlike the formal political realm, the urban everyday is an arena in which Palestinians have a wider range of possibilities and options, and thus a degree of self-determination. What we might call "kinetic sumud" is expressed not only in resisting immobility but also in asserting mobility. Through insisting on the enjoyment of that embodied manifestation of personal and collective capacity, contested spaces can be (re)claimed.

The lens of embodied movement thus reveals that movements across space are not merely determined by borders imposed by state power. Rather, both everyday and leisure movements can undermine, create, or uphold such borders. The relationship between borders and mobility, as between the built environment and social practices more generally, is a reciprocal one. In "many-bordered" Jerusalem (Dumper, 2014), physical obstacles may be undermined or overcome, and invisible boundaries may be defended or expanded, through movement or temporary presence. Building on Simmel's proposal that a border "is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially" (Simmel, 1997, p. 143), we can think of intra-urban borders not only as determined by spatial facts, but also as products of ongoing processes of reinforcement and subversion through everyday actions. By imposing a border from the top down, the separation wall has certainly had a significant effect on patterns of both residency and mobility. Yet by examining its

effect from an embodied perspective, we have seen how the restriction of movement it enacts also affects the ways in which residents perceive their own role in relation to the city. This consequent shift in perception shapes East Jerusalem as a place alien to Palestinians, and one in which a Palestinian future is increasingly difficult to imagine. At the same time, however, the gradual, “quiet encroachment” of Palestinian movements into contested spaces may solidify and become a “new normal” (cf. Bayat, 2009), resulting in borders redrawn through practice. As various groups in the city are engaged in constant negotiation, mobility becomes a site of contestation regarding urban belonging because it is a tool of defining and undermining boundaries. This process is shaped by more than a one-directional cause-and-effect relationship, as borders and mobility co-constitute one another. Residents shape the city through their mobility practices, but at the same time, their movements through contested space shape them, reconfiguring the boundaries of their subjectivity.

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The historical development of Istanbul's *gecekond* areas (informally-originated neighborhoods) can be broadly interpreted as a progression toward the center and subsequent re-peripheralization, both in sociopolitical terms and in actual urban geography. While Istanbul emerged in recent decades as a magnet for transnational migrants and for capitals pouring into the debt-fueled real estate sector, many such neighborhoods have been targeted by speculative socio-spatial restructuring projects, while also absorbing much of the migratory influx. The recent economic crisis plunged these urban redevelopment sites into a deadlock, generating a fragmented urbanscape in which multiple layers of uncertainty, suspension, and informalization overlap and interact. This chapter explores the unfolding transformation in Fikirtepe, the largest ongoing redevelopment project in the city, which has seen its social and urban fabric torn apart by the redevelopment and is currently stuck in an unstable but protracted limbo. As Fikirtepe becomes "unlivable" for many of its long-time dwellers, a number of migrants are moving in, etching out a living: a collateral effect of redevelopment failure, creating a space of opportunity for new disenfranchised populations with varied backgrounds, legal statuses, and life trajectories. Within this setting, this chapter analyzes the periphery as a condition that is articulated, reproduced, and transformed through embodied practices. With their practices, narratives, and trajectories, those who inhabit such botched urban transformation embody different layers of the periphery, contributing to shape an understanding of it as a perspectival condition with a polyvalent spatiality and temporality.

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# FIKIRTEPE IN LIMBO: URBAN TRANSFORMATION, CROSS-BORDER MIGRATION, AND RE-PERIPHERALIZATION IN ISTANBUL

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Francesco Pasta

## Introduction

Despite an established branch within urban studies interpreting “peripheral urbanization” as a concretization of “insurgent citizenship” (Caldeira, 2017; Holston & Caldeira, 2007), only recently have informally-originated settlements<sup>1</sup> been approached as sites of self-determination for migrant populations (Bastia, 2015; Fawaz, 2017). In parallel, although the socio-spatial effects of entrepreneurial governance and land commodification on informal neighborhoods in the “Global South” have been amply examined (see, for instance Roy, 2011a; Amin, 2013; Schindler, 2017), the spatial interactions between transit populations and the redevelopment of the informally-generated built environment remain largely unexplored—both in the case of Istanbul and globally. This chapter examines the interplay between inhabitants and their changing urban environment in Fikirtepe, an informally-originated neighborhood in Istanbul’s Kadıköy district with a sizeable migrant population, and site of the largest ongoing urban transformation project in town.

With about half of its building stock—hosting up to 70% of its population—developed outside the realm of institutionalized planning (Karaman, 2013b; Aslan & Erman, 2014), Istanbul constitutes a “textbook example of peripheral urbanization” (Caldeira, 2017), while also increasingly presenting itself as “a laboratory of global trends [...] in the changing socio-spatial structure” of cities (Türkün, 2011). As a world city on the edge of the EU bloc, Istanbul is a crossroads on the global fault line that has been defined the “political equator” (Cruz & Forman, 2017): a node where migrants leaving the dysfunctional states and conflicts of so-called “non-integrated” countries transit and settle (Genç, 2015), but also a gate for capitals from the advanced capitalist “core” seeking investment outlets, externalization opportunities, and cheap labor in peripheral economies. In the past couple decades

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<sup>1</sup> By this term, I refer to urban neighborhoods that initially developed outside state-sanctioned planning, mostly self-built by lower-income populations. They lacked official authorizations, did not comply with regulations, and were therefore extra-legal in various ways. Nowadays, these settlements could have been regularized and incorporated to some level into the formal city. Thus, they might not be entirely “informal,” yet they present particular socio-spatial arrangements and a specific development trajectory compared to other neighborhoods in the city.

of neoliberal restructuring and sustained capitalist growth, in particular from the 2000s onward, the Turkish metropolis has thus emerged as a hub for transnational migrants (Marconi, 2009; Pusch, 2012) and attracted growing amounts of investment and credit, pouring in particular into the real estate and construction sectors (Sassen, 2009; Keyder, 2010b; Karaman, 2013).

In this context, Istanbul's informally-originated settlements are being targeted by speculative socio-spatial restructuring policies that are then implemented by a coalition of private and governmental actors. Interestingly, these neighborhoods have also absorbed a substantial share of the influx of foreign migrants—with various backgrounds and legal statuses—settling in the city as a (more or less temporary) stopover (Kılıçaslan, 2016; Karaman et al., 2020). With the recent economic downturn in the past five years bringing redevelopment projects to a standstill, some of these large-scale urban transformation sites have turned into hybrid urbanescapes, suspended in a transitory yet protracted condition, where different subjects carry out forms of adaptation and endurance. Such neighborhoods provide strategic standpoints for observation of the interaction in urban space between fluxes of capital and people triggered by global imbalances, particularly so in the extended temporality of disrupted redevelopment.

Acknowledging the common embeddedness of transnational migration and urban redevelopment in a global regime of structural inequalities and selective (im)mobilities, this chapter examines Fikirtepe as an “emerging space of socio-spatial difference” (Brenner, 2014), where capital flows, appropriating space, intersect with the human flows of disadvantaged populations working to establish a foothold and daily life in the metropolis (Holston, 2009). By approaching this site through a “peripheral” lens, the aim is both to deepen our understanding of the urban transformation dynamics unfolding on the ground, and to expand the conceptualization of the periphery as an analytical device.

The chapter builds upon an understanding of peripherality as a relational condition (Roy, 2019) that is articulated, navigated, and transformed through material practices and subjective narratives. From this standpoint, it investigates the practices and narratives of those who inhabit Fikirtepe during the current transformation, specifically by juxtaposing the intersecting trajectories of two groups—long-time local dwellers and newly arrived transit migrants<sup>2</sup>—who exemplify dissonant and complementary dimensions of the periphery. Exploring the different ways in which the condition of peripherality is approached and experienced, this comparative outlook contributes to the shaping of

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<sup>2</sup>The approximate term “transit migrant” is employed here without delving into the problematic categorizations and differentiations between “refugees,” “asylum seekers,” and “forced/economic migrants” (see Crawley et al., 2016).

an understanding of peripherality as a deeply perspectival construct (Peeren et al., 2016) with a polyvalent spatiality and temporality.

The chapter presents qualitative analysis based on findings from field research that took place from 2017 to 2019, including semi-structured interviews and informal dialogues with both migrants and long-time dwellers, as well as observations and literature review. The first part of the chapter briefly charts Fikirtepe's historical development within the broader frame of informal urbanization in Istanbul, from the emergence of informal settlements in the 1950s up to the current restructuring of the city. In the second part, I delve into the ongoing transformation in the area, outlining the dynamics at play and the emerging socio-spatial landscape. Multiple dimensions of the periphery are briefly discussed here, and I examine Fikirtepe as a case of each of the following: an instance of re-peripheralization, an urban geopolitical fault line, a liminal space inhabited by disenfranchised populations, and an in-between temporality. Against this backdrop, the third section is conceived as an excursion through Fikirtepe's changing environment, relying upon observations, conversations, and interviews from fieldwork. It juxtaposes the diverging narratives of a local family that has been living in Fikirtepe since the 1950s with a group of Afghan migrants, temporarily residing in the area in transit to Western Europe. The concluding part succinctly recaps what can be learned from approaching Fikirtepe through a "peripheral" lens.

### **From *gecekondu* to *kentsel dönüşüm* (urban transformation): informal urbanization and the center-periphery dialectic in Fikirtepe, Istanbul**

The historical trajectory of Istanbul's informally-originated neighborhoods can be broadly interpreted as a progression toward the center and, in some cases, subsequent re-peripheralization, both in sociopolitical terms and in actual urban geography. This section charts the evolution of one such neighborhood, Fikirtepe, from outer squatter settlement up through the current redevelopment, within the broader frame of informal urbanization in Istanbul and its unfolding.

Starting in the late 1940s, millions of people migrated from rural areas to Turkey's metropolitan centers as a consequence of rapid industrialization and agriculture mechanization (Aslan & Erman, 2014; Karaman et al., 2020). The main form of housing for them were simple structures, surreptitiously erected overnight by a family or group of people, for the most part on public land. This kind of structure is known as a *gecekondu*. The term, roughly meaning "built overnight," renders the conditions of briskness, inconspicuousness, and liminality in which these structures originated. Governments were "conveniently looking the other way," since such squatter settlements supplied cheap workforce to the nascent industrial



**Fig. 1**  
New constructions, meant for mid-to-high class, loom over self-built houses mostly inhabited by a working-class population, Fikirtepe, Istanbul (photo: Francesco Pasta, May 2018).

sector while relieving the state from its obligation to provide affordable housing (Keyder, 2005; Karaman, 2013a).

This mass shift of people physically carried “peripheral” values and lifestyles into the city—the supposed “center” of irradiation of modernity—radically altering its space, aesthetics, and culture (Keyder, 1999; Şenyapılı, 2004; Bakiner, 2018). With their parlance, clothing styles, religious beliefs, and social customs, the *gecekondu* (those materially producing and inhabiting *gecekondu*) embodied an “other” to the state’s hegemonic positivist narrative.<sup>3</sup> Through their practices they unsettled the center-periphery framework undergirding entrenched interpretations of Turkish society (see Mardin, 1973). To the bewilderment of established city dwellers, *gecekondu*s quickly proliferated across Istanbul’s rugged topography, resembling rural villages sprouting up over steep slopes, on hill ridges, and alongside creeks on the city’s very margins. Fikirtepe, one of the earliest *gecekondu* neighborhoods, was born in this way. In the late 1950s, migrants from inner Anatolia and the Black Sea region flocking to the city “whose stones and land are made of gold” (as a popular saying goes) began squatting on what were then hilly agricultural lands in the Kadıköy district, which is located in Istanbul’s Asian side. The local main street’s name, Mandıra Caddesi (“Dairy Farm Street”), still evokes its rural past, but within a decade the makeshift settlement had developed into a legally recognized urban neighborhood.<sup>4</sup> Around Fikirtepe it is still possible to spot early *gecekondu* houses, one-story structures with plastered brick walls and tiled roofs, abundant greenery, and open spaces for animals, orchards, and hanging out (Fig. 1).

In the following decades, between populist inertia, unspoken political agreements, and particular favors, most *gecekondu* areas went through an on-and-off process of formalization consisting of non-uniform provision of services and infrastructure and pre-electoral amnesties (Aslan & Erman, 2014). With the blurred limits of formality shifting, as soon as land tenure seemed de facto secured, incremental improvements were made and extra floors added to accommodate growing families and rent out units. The flexible

<sup>3</sup> The Kemalist project had a markedly paternalistic and top-down character: one slogan was “For the people, despite the people” (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008). In its official narrative, rural peasants—then the vast majority of the population—were idealized as bearers of the genuine national identity, but in need to be modernized in order for Turkey to reach “civilization.” In a context in which the Republican state and the urban elite promoted values such as secularism, Westernization, modernization, and Turkishness, peasants were depicted as backward—religious, conservative, feudal. Their mass migration to cities thus “threatened the sanitized, controllable, and homogeneous urban vision of the republic’s early leaders” (Baydar Nalbantoğlu, 1998). Many *gecekondu* dwellers furthermore belonged to religious and ethnic minorities, most notably the Alevis, a heterodox sect stigmatized by the Sunni majority, and, in particular since the 1980s, the Kurds, an ethnic group whose identity and culture have long been suppressed by the Turkish State.

<sup>4</sup> In 1975, due to the steady population increase, the original Fikirtepe neighborhood was split into three: besides the namesake neighborhood, Eğitim and Dumlupınar were created.



metabolism of the *gecekondu*s (Honsa, 2014) thus allowed people to adapt to economic contingencies and gradually improve their situation.

Income from urban rent proved significant in the upward mobility of many long-time *gecekondu* dwellers, and was made possible due to a sustained inflow of migrants. Since urban land was by then increasingly saturated, and *gecekondu* construction more difficult, these more recent migrants mainly ended up as tenants, thus in a more disadvantaged position (Boratav, 1994, in Karaman, 2013a). Especially after the 1990s, as Istanbul turned into a strategic node in transnational migration routes (Marconi, 2009; Paçacı Elitok & Straubhaar, 2011; Pusch, 2012), *gecekondu* areas absorbed a heterogeneous influx of foreign migrants (Karaman et al., 2020).<sup>5</sup> They chose these neighborhoods for a variety of factors: flexible and affordable housing, favorable location, informal work opportunities, and social support networks, but also the invisibility provided by interstitial spaces (Kılıçaslan, 2014).

Following Turkey's 1980 military coup, *gecekondu* land ownership was officially recognized

<sup>5</sup> Among the various nationalities of migrants with differing legal status residing in Fikirtepe, for instance, there are people from post-Soviet countries such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Georgia, often undocumented Afghans and Pakistanis, and Syrians holding "temporary protection status."



**Fig. 2**

A *çöpçü* at work pulling his cart along Fikirtepe's upper ridge, between two construction sites (photo: Francesco Pasta, August 2019).

**Fig. 3**

A view from Fikirtepe, around the Pehlivan mosque, built in Inner-Anatolian rural style. On the left, the fenced-off Teknik Yapı development area, currently halted. On the right, a scrap dealing center (photo: Francesco Pasta, July 2019).



as part and parcel of free-market reforms.<sup>6</sup> By then, the majority of Istanbul's population was living in these dense urban settlements "off-the-books."<sup>7</sup> Transforming *gecekondu* neighborhoods into legally recognized parts of the city—as well as their potentially restive inhabitants into property owners—was part of an effort to reshape these spaces through market forces (Erman, 2001, in Karaman et al., 2020; Türkün, 2011). In doing so, the state thereby constituted a rent-based "populist urban growth machine" as a key mechanism for city development and consensus building (Öktem, 2019). Similar to many other squatter settlements, Fikirtepe morphed into a typical post-*gecekondu* neighborhood (Esen, 2015): a consolidated inner-city neighborhood that, at an intermediate stage in the regularization process, has been incorporated into the mechanisms of capitalist value reproduction. After the 1984 Illegal Buildings Amnesty (Law n.2981), individual title deeds were given to Fikirtepe residents in 1991 (Gökşin, 2009). In a striking materialization of the soaring exchange value of *gecekondu* areas, building regulations were revised allowing for higher densities, low-rise structures were swiftly replaced

<sup>6</sup> Registered dwellers were granted pre-property deeds, leading to full ownership once a cadastral map and upgrading plan were drafted (Türkün, 2011). There are, however, several cases in which the regularization process was never brought to a close, adding a further layer of legal ambiguity.

<sup>7</sup> Istanbul's official population was 4,741,890 in 1980, and increased to 5,842,985 by 1990 (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, 2001). In 2018, the city's population amounted to 15,067,724 (Istanbul Governorate, 2020). <http://www.ibb.gov.tr/tr-TR/BilgiHizmetleri/Istatistikler/Documents/demografi/t211.pdf>



by multi-story blocks, open green spaces largely disappeared, and most village-like alleys developed into narrow, packed streets (Figs. 2, 3). Before the redevelopment started, Fikirtepe's population was comprised of lower- and middle-class residents (Parmaksızoğlu, 2016), and a composite, thick texture of low and mid-rise structures, small-scale factories, gardens, and orchards adapting to the irregular territory. With Istanbul's fast-paced expansion and the exponential development of infrastructures, this hitherto remote settlement found itself on well-serviced prime real estate land,<sup>8</sup> thereby leading to growing market pressure on the neighborhood.

The increasing economic and political capital of established post-gecekondu residents may be read as an instance of peripheral agency destabilizing the center (Simone, 2010), a reshaping of urban space and the sociopolitical balance (Holston, 2009; Caldeira, 2017). It has been argued that it is the newly emerging urban class rooted in Istanbul's post-gecekondu neighborhoods that propelled Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to power (Saunders, 2010; Keyder,

<sup>8</sup> Fikirtepe is serviced by Istanbul's ring-road, the D100 highway, a metro line, the Marmaray rail, and the metrobus, beside countless bus and minibüs lines. As one inhabitant puts it: "From Fikirtepe, you can now get anywhere in five minutes" (Interview, 2018).

2010b; Delibas, 2014), first as metropolitan mayor in 1994 and then in the 2002 national elections. With a blend of authoritarian democracy, liberal economics, and social conservatism (Tuğal, 2016), Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or AKP) has succeeded in maintaining its grip on power at a national level ever since. The AKP (and its predecessor, the Refah Partisi) specifically targeted lower urban classes: by directing public resources to the urban poor, administering a complex system of in-kind aid, and granting cultural recognition in the public sphere, it acquired the image of the party of the marginalized and oppressed (Karaman, 2013b; Cabannes & Göral, 2020). Most *gecekondu* neighborhoods have steadily supported the AKP in local and national elections. Indeed, Fikirtepe constitutes the only pro-government area in the entire Kadıköy district, otherwise an opposition stronghold (Parmaksızoğlu, 2014). As its power consolidated, however, the AKP veered from a welfarist-populist approach toward a stark neoliberal governance model (Karaman, 2013b; Cabannes & Göral, 2020). Under the government's market-oriented urban policies, an unprecedented volume of foreign investments poured into financialized real-estate development, land commodification reached an unprecedented dimension, and the debt-fueled construction sector cemented its position as one of the country's economic engines—with Istanbul, increasingly promoted as a “Global City,” its epicenter (Keyder, 2010a). The country's legal and administrative framework was substantially reshaped, incentivizing municipal entrepreneurialism, centralizing decision making, encouraging integration between the financial and housing sectors, opening the property markets to foreign investment, and removing bureaucratic obstacles to urban transformation (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010; Türkün, 2011).

Given their sometimes unclear tenure and regularity, low-quality housing stock, and often favorable location, post-*gecekondu* areas in Istanbul presented a considerable rent gap, thus turning into the ultimate frontier for profit accumulation. With the increasing economic capital of post-*gecekondu* property owners throughout the '80s and '90s, the dominant narrative concomitantly shifted (Demirtaş & Şen, 2007; Aslan & Erman, 2014; Karaman et al., 2020), recasting them as “petty profiteers,” and their irregular settlements as spaces of illegality “to be bulldozed” (Esen, 2015). This discursive stigmatization paved the way for the actual removal of *gecekondu*s from valuable urban land. Furthermore, with their haphazard structures and precarious appearance, *gecekondu*s came to exemplify the fragility of the metropolis, the perception of which painfully intensified after the 1999 Marmara earthquake. Their eventual destruction, carried out on a large scale under subsequent AKP governments, was justified by the state also on

grounds of public safety and planning rationality, and was done so chiefly through the contested Law n.6306 (Disaster Law), which allows expropriation in risk-prone areas and was instrumental in spreading redevelopment (Bozkurt & Malani, 2017).

Unfolding through mechanisms of co-optation, profit redistribution, and at times coercion, urban transformation (*kentsel dönüşüm*) was deployed throughout the city of Istanbul as a formidable device for socio-spatial restructuring and wealth transfer—albeit not always at the speed and scale desired by the ruling coalition (Karaman et al., 2020). Sustained by an opaque nexus between government, developers, speculators, and selected inhabitants, in what has been described as “state-sponsored accumulation by dispossession” (Altınok, 2015), many informally-originated neighborhoods (as well as “informalized” historical areas) have been targeted for demolition all across Istanbul to make way for office towers, luxury condos, shopping malls, gated communities, mass-housing blocks, and other typical manifestations of globalized urbanism.

Vast evidence shows how urban redevelopment in Turkey tends to drive away local residents and set in motion exclusionary dynamics (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010; Lovering & Türkmen, 2011; Türkün, 2011). Tenants, a majority of the population in many gecekondu neighborhoods, have no voice in the matter and are easily displaced. But the value gap between existing structures and new constructions may also negatively affect property owners. New flats are much smaller and therefore unfit for their families and lifestyles, or the compensation they receive for their property is not enough to afford a new property in the redevelopment. In many cases, mortgages have been forced onto residents to pay the difference, eliciting an interpretation of such schemes as “market-disciplinary tools” (Karaman, 2013). Furthermore, if they do move into the redeveloped properties, running expenditures generally increase—not to mention the hardly quantifiable hidden costs resulting from the dissolution of social bonds and community-based forms of mutual support. Often people are left with no other option than relocating to farther or less desirable areas, in a process that materially reproduces peripheral conditions in the city’s new margins.

Following the Arab Spring (2011) and the Gezi uprising (2013), the AKP government became increasingly authoritarian, while the country’s economic performance worsened. Turkey’s much-praised neoliberal success gradually turned into “an increasingly dirigiste form of financialized, extractionist capitalism” (Madra & Yılmaz, 2019). Starting in 2016, housing demand and relative prices fell, inflation and loan interest rates skyrocketed, the indebtedness of the corporate sector and private households reached unprecedented levels, and the currency quickly depreciated. Many companies were forced to slow down or halt construction altogether, delay housing delivery and compensations, or declare bankruptcy.



➊ **Fig. 4**  
An emptied-out neighborhood, slated for demolition, stands beside a construction site in early 2017. Mosques and some schools are the only buildings spared from demolition in redevelopment areas—and not always (photo: Francesco Pasta, Fikirtepe, Istanbul, April 2017).

Currently, the construction sector (and, with it, Turkey's economy) is arguably on the brink of systemic collapse (Madra & Yılmaz, 2019). In the 2019 local elections, the AKP party suffered major electoral setbacks in many urban centers, losing Istanbul to the opposition after 24 years. The urban growth machine, with the dramatic leap in scale and scope concocted by the AKP governments in the past two decades, has turned into “a Leviathan that eventually devours everything, including itself” (Öktem, 2019).

### **Redevelopment, re-peripheralization, and repossession in Fikirtepe**

Fikirtepe has been defined as “the face and the bleeding wound of urban redevelopment in Turkey” (Parmaksızoğlu, 2014), and arguably constitutes the most significant ongoing urban transformation project in Istanbul.<sup>9,10</sup> With its trajectory, it exemplifies the continuing turn “from boomtown to dystopia” (Öktem, 2019) in Istanbul's urban

<sup>9</sup> As one of the most prominent examples of urban transformation in Turkey, Fikirtepe became the stage for some films focusing on the issue, such as *Saf* (2018) by Ali Vatanserver and, more recently, *Hayaleter* (2020) by Azra Deniz Okyay.

<sup>10</sup> In this chapter, the toponym “Fikirtepe” refers to the whole redevelopment area, comprising parts of Fikirtepe, Eğitim, and Dumlupınar neighborhoods, as well as a sector of Merdivenköy. The scheme covers 131 hectares, with 4,794 plots and a population estimated between 80,000 and 130,000 people (Parmaksızoğlu, 2014; Uzunçarşılı Baysal, 2014; Türk et al., 2020).

redevelopment. The area was earmarked as a “Special Project Zone” by Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality in 2005, designated for demolition that was meant to precede a pioneering redevelopment model in which local property owners and small- to mid-size developers would participate as stakeholders, with minimal intervention from the state (Soytemel, 2017).<sup>11</sup> The plan, based on densification incentives for land assembly (Turk et al., 2020), entailed the merging of Fikirtepe’s tight-knit fabric and highly fragmented property pattern into sixty-one megablocks, each one comprising dozens of plots and hundreds of housing units. With an unprecedented increase in allowed development rights,<sup>12</sup> the vision was that of a high-rise upper-class district, targeting the new affluent class and foreign investors—“quality people,” as the janitor guarding one recently completed tower defined its residents (Interview, 2019). Between 52% to 60% of new construction would be given to property owners, who had to pick a developer after negotiations with construction companies (Parmaksızoğlu, 2014). “Choose your firm, put your signature down, in less than 4 to 5 years Fikirtepe will be Manhattan,” the authorities declared: just like hitting the jackpot for several families (Uzunçarşılı Baysal, 2014). The local high street turned into a string of real estate agencies sporting garish renderings and block-letter slogans—such as IN FIKIRTEPE EVERYTHING IS STARTING ANEW.

In the following years, Fikirtepe’s urban fabric was torn apart as projects by different firms moved on at differentiated speeds in random order alongside the unraveling of its social fabric (Fig. 4). The newly arising opportunities and uncertainties coalesced to deepen the cleavages within the community: between big and small owners, landlords and tenants, those eager to cash in and leave and those who tried to resist (if only to get a better deal). The real estate frenzy triggered new economic circuits. As many tenants departed, depriving their landlords of an important income source, shrewd profiteers purchasing title deeds one-by-one to resell them in block to construction firms and alleged “community representatives”—actually on the developers’ payroll—became actors on Fikirtepe’s stage (Parmaksızoğlu, 2014). Despite strong government backing and a booming real estate sector, the transformation in Fikirtepe plodded along slowly, due to competition among developers, conflicts among neighbors, and mistrust between contractors and residents (Parmaksızoğlu, 2016). There were cases of strategic maneuvering and outright opposition by residents as well as civil society organizations (Soytemel, 2017), including court appeals. In 2014 a photograph acquired iconic status across the country: a two-story *gecekondu* house—one whose owners

<sup>11</sup> Unlike many *gecekondu* areas, in Fikirtepe all homeowners hold official land titles (though 90% of buildings are unlicensed). This ownership pattern induced the government to devise a project based “on consent rather than coercion” (Parmaksızoğlu, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> The floor area ratio was raised from 2.07 to 4.14, the highest in the country (Parmaksızoğlu, 2014; Soytemel, 2017).



had rejected the developer's offer—perched upon a pinnacle of soil, its side flanks damaged, the surrounding land entirely dug out. With its precarious position and unrefined looks, to the eyes of many it embodied the stubborn resistance of local inhabitants to dispossession and the sheer pressure directed at *gecekondu* settlements by the coalition between the state and private developers.<sup>13</sup> When the urban transformation plan had been declared invalid by a court verdict in 2013 on the grounds that it did not comply with regulatory planning principles (Turk et al., 2020), the state, initially presenting itself as impartial guarantor, deployed more coercive measures. It declared Fikirtepe as an earthquake-risk zone, brought the project under direct supervision of the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, and threatened expropriation on the basis of the above-mentioned Disaster Law (Parmaksızoğlu, 2014), thus pressuring homeowners into signing the deals with the private developers.



**Fig. 5**  
The real estate bubble crash forced companies to slow down construction, or halt building sites altogether (photo: Francesco Pasta, Fikirtepe, Istanbul, October 2018).

With the protracted economic downturn beginning in 2016, however, many developers, in the words of residents, “simply disappeared” (Interviews, 2018-2019). The contracts' legal ambiguities prevented many dwellers from asserting their rights as their properties were demolished but new units and cash compensations failed to materialize and the promised rent allowance was cut off. Thousands were rendered homeless (Bişkin, 2020), entire areas became no-man's land, and illegal activities reportedly increased (Parmaksızoğlu, 2014). When a developer vanished after demolishing their homes, residents from one block camped for months in the pit where their houses used to stand (Uzunçarşılı Baysal, 2014) in what became a broadly mediatized protest.

As the economic meltdown continued, Fikirtepe turned into a striking scene. Partly empty, fenced-off multi-story blocks loom, gleaming, over massive craters dug beside surviving neighborhoods (whose inhabitants haven't struck a deal with developers yet) and abandoned concrete skeletons. Thoroughly emptied houses, hollowed out in efforts to sell anything valuable, lie side by side with dwellings still inhabited by families who lost any hope of getting their due (Fig. 5). As their community falls apart, they plan their exit from this quagmire, often leaving their properties in disrepair. Some are eager to see redevelopment extend to their property, while others, living in sectors still relatively untouched, wish that it never materializes.

Fikirtepe's ravaged landscape transformed into a war scene—it was indeed used as a set for war films (Yılmaz, 2016)—and its vacated buildings soon started attracting homeless

<sup>13</sup> The owner of the house, Alaaddin Demirel, was even nicknamed “Fikirtepe's stubborn” (*Fikirtepe inatçısı*) by the media. However, it then turned out that he requested a higher compensation: allegedly, when the developer agreed to give him five flats (each of 90 sqm on average) he let the house be demolished (T24, 2014).





people as well as displaced Syrians in urgent need of shelter (Parmaksızoğlu, 2016).<sup>14</sup> Most did not settle permanently, but some still squat decaying buildings in the neighborhood's lower flank — in a neighbor's view, “because the president [Erdoğan] allows them” (Interview, 2019). Meanwhile, as moneyed newcomers moved into the completed high-rises, the abandonment and depreciation of properties in the not-yet-redeveloped sectors attracted migrants, including many irregular ones from Afghanistan,<sup>15</sup> working in demolitions, garbage collection, and the low-end service sector. As Fikirtepe becomes “unlivable” for some, others are indeed moving in, etching out a living. A collateral effect of redevelopment failure, a space of opportunity has been created for new incoming populations with varied backgrounds, legal statuses, and life trajectories.

As profit-driven redevelopment rips through Fikirtepe's fabric, but struggles to fully incorporate space and relocate the surplus it produces, an unintentional urban typology is taking shape. Here, where gleaming high-rises and stranded concrete skeletons coexist with abandoned buildings, squatted houses, disintegrating communities, and a thriving economy of waste, the interrupted “utopia of development” (Roy, 2011b) falls across its constitutive other. In this collision the periphery arises in multiple layers of meaning. After a half-century journey from edge shantytown to legalized central neighborhood, Fikirtepe has turned again into a periphery: a frontline between the space of global capital and its leftovers, strained between the centripetal and centrifugal forces of redevelopment and exclusion. Its trajectory not only exemplifies a dynamic and incremental process of socio-spatial centralization, but also its subsequent reversion: a re-peripheralization in which informalization mechanisms stand out as a component of power territorialization (Roy, 2005), re-articulating discursive and physical borders through a dual process of incorporation and expulsion of space, people, and livelihoods into/from recognized circuits.

This gradually unfolding process needs to be interpreted as one local articulation of broader dynamics, stemming from the site's geographical collocation. As a border space caught between integration into the global economy and exclusionary territorial policies,

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<sup>14</sup> There are currently 3,605,152 registered Syrians in Turkey, of which 506,301 officially reside in Istanbul (Ministry of Interior of Turkey, 2020). In total, considering those who transited on to Europe and those repatriated, approximately 5 to 6 million Syrians entered the country (Akdeniz, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Turkey has been a transit and destination country for Afghans since the early 1980s, but their number skyrocketed in the 2010s: there were less than 3,000 irregular Afghan migrants apprehended in 2010; this number grew to 12,000 in 2014. In 2015 only, the number of Afghans registered with UNHCR as asylum seekers or refugees went from slightly more than 10,000 to over 94,000, and by August 2019, it was 170,000 (Karadağ, 2021). It is estimated that 25% of the 1 million people who crossed through Turkey into Europe in 2015 were Afghans (İçduygu & Karadağ, 2018). For an analysis of Afghan transit migration in comparison with other migrants' groups, see Daniş, 2006; for a detailed and up-to-date account of Afghan migration in Turkey, see Karadağ, 2020.

Fikirtepe constitutes a geopolitical periphery, transected by flows of people and capital triggered by macro-scale imbalances. Looking at the practices of those who inhabit this contested site of “everyday urban geopolitics” (Fregonese, 2012), we can gain valuable insights into the “bordering” processes constructing an apparatus of illegalization and containment in the city (Newman, 2006), as well as into the urban negotiation of such borders by marginalized populations (Darling, 2016).

Indeed, looking at migrant and ethnically discriminated populations in the Israeli context, Yiftachel (2009) has analyzed the production of “gray spaces” as part and parcel of a system of selective incorporation of people, localities, and activities, forcefully suspended between “the ‘whiteness’ of legality/approval/safety, and the ‘blackness’ of eviction/destruction/death” (Yiftachel, 2009). In their exploration of African and Asian metropolises, Simone & Pieterse (2017) have examined the process of “resonance” through which residents navigate complex and unstable urban dynamics at the edges of formality. In their everyday life, they enact make-shift and informal practices which produce affordable and productive spaces, and are thus a key component of city-making in contemporary “southern” cities, though often overlooked. In a similar vein, studying the informal uses of open spaces in different Middle Eastern cities, Bayat (2012) describes how locally articulated, non-confrontational and fragmented informal practices may jointly make up non-movements—“collective actions of non-collective actors” engendering significant social change. Building upon these perspectives, we may consider Fikirtepe as a space where peripheral populations enact under-the-counter “survival by repossession” practices, resisting marginalization and contributing to the shifting urban texture (Bayat, 2012).<sup>16</sup> Settling in this “uninhabitable” space (Simone, 2016b), they construct “a terrain of habitation, livelihood and politics” (Roy, 2011a).

Lastly, as a “stuck” urban transformation site where “stranded” migrants reside with varying degrees of permanence, Fikirtepe displays a peripheral temporality: with the failure of urban redevelopment, a transitory condition slipped into an unstable but drawn-out limbo, suspended between a crumbling past and a vanishing future (Roy, 2011b). Long-time dwellers are awaiting a foretold future that is fading away, while populations “on the move” dwell in this in-between space as a temporary stopover in their journey. The next section explores the narratives of those who inhabit, negotiate, and adapt to the ongoing transformation in this multi-layered periphery.

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<sup>16</sup> Trajectories of dispossession and appropriation by different people intersect in Fikirtepe. Some groups of people are taking possession—in practice, if not de jure—of spaces and buildings of which the previous inhabitants were dispossessed. At the same time, looking at forced migrants from a country at war—such as the Afghans inhabiting the neighborhood—we could think of many things they lost in the journey, both in terms of material and immaterial elements.

### **Inhabiting urban transformation in Fikirtepe: the periphery as a perspectival construct**

This section, conceived as an excursion through Fikirtepe's changing environment, presents the findings of field research conducted in the area (2017–2019). It unpacks and juxtaposes material practices and narratives emerging from field observations and conversations, presenting in particular the findings from interviews with a long-time resident family planning to leave the neighborhood and an undocumented Afghan migrant living in an informal waste collection center.<sup>17</sup>

Nowadays, urban transformation frames most aspects of life and space in Fikirtepe. It is invoked and opposed, concretized and postponed, longed-for and dreaded. Just like the pervasive dust from excavation and construction sites, saturating the air in the dry season and turning into mud on rainy days, redevelopment is inescapable across the streets of the neighborhood. Right on Mandıra Street, a row of dusty, battered palms lining the failed MINA Towers project site testifies to the developers' unfulfilled vision for Fikirtepe's high street as a "new Baghdad Avenue" (referring to the popular well-to-do shopping street nearby). Instead, the bakery owner in front laments how the stalled construction site is killing his business. Around the neighborhood, the empty windows of busted real estate agencies signal that business is not going well. An idle salesman in a construction company's exhibition branch states that urban renewal is not going to happen anytime soon; it has been postponed "for five or six years." Just next door, an elderly man arranging his hardware store before closing time is not resigned: "With God's will, urban transformation will arrive." A woman in her 60s similarly deplors how urban transformation has not yet reached her block. She is sitting on her balcony, overlooking a huge concrete skeleton, stalled just as it reached its ninth floor.

Three middle-aged women, resting in front of a small Anatolian rural style mosque on their way home from shopping, unanimously dissent: "If only urban transformation had never arrived!" The trio of towers blinding us with the sun's glare, however, shows that redevelopment has indeed made its way into this corner, although their properties haven't been touched yet. One comments: "Living there—it would be like a prison!" A common acquaintance of theirs, who has moved into a new construction, allegedly feels "like a bird in a cage." Not to mention the unbearable running costs: in these upper-class condos the monthly apartment fee is said to amount to 700 Turkish liras—almost enough to

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<sup>17</sup> These interviews were carried out in Summer 2019, in two sessions each, conducted in the residences of the interviewees.

rent a small *gecekondu* flat.<sup>18</sup> If their houses are ever redeveloped, they plan to sell their assets and find a more suitable solution, as many others in Fikirtepe do (Adanalı, 2017).

Up the road Mr. Mustafa, a pensioner, is sitting in front of a simple barber shop run by a long-time friend of his, as he habitually does. A board above the entrance informs that the barber shop will become part of Panorama development (a development project that has never lifted off). Mr. Mustafa himself has moved into one of the new towers—he points at his flat on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor. Living up there is definitely weird for him, but he couldn't leave: his friends are all here, this is his neighborhood. Meanwhile the Turkish bath beside the ring-road, with its perforated domes, has shut. Serkan, a Kurdish man helping out in the neighboring car wash, explains that it is for good: the furnace was in need of repairs, but the looming redevelopment discouraged the owner from investing. People moving into the newly completed and expensive flats would not come anyway—they do not go to public baths. With regards to the car wash, it is doing good business; Kurds run it, but most workers are migrants from Turkmenistan.

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“This place is unlivable. They rendered it so. We can't live here anymore: we are leaving, sooner or later” (Interviews, 2019). Thus Hatice, a housewife in her 50s, describes the situation over steamy cups of tea, sitting on the outer walkway leading to her three-story home, on the fringe of the urban renewal area. The developer ran away, explains her husband Mehmet—a common phrase among residents complaining about disappearing construction holdings. Their situation could well be worse: several families remained homeless when developers “ran away” after razing their blocks (Uzunçarşılı Baysal, 2014). He is washing his minivan—he is a shipper—when he notices me looking at their house, marked by a board stating that “This property has signed an agreement with Eminevim Project,” just as many others in this alley, and invites me over.

He proudly shows me the wooden attic he added himself, where his parents lived until their passing last year. It is finely built in wood, with tiled roof and pentagonal windows, in the style of Çankırın, their province of origin. As many of Fikirtepe's long-time dwellers, the family arrived from northern-inner Anatolia two generations ago. The flat now lies empty and dusty, except for the guard-dog pup in the terrace, which they recently bought to protect their property once they are gone.

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<sup>18</sup> The *aidat* is a monthly apartment fee covering maintenance costs (utilities are excluded). In a detached single-family *gecekondu* house there may be no *aidat* at all, whereas in a central middle-class apartment it can be around 30 to 50 Turkish liras (in 2018). I had no opportunity to verify the amount stated by the three women; but the owner of a flat in a similar development nearby stated that he pays 420 Turkish liras.

For now, indeed, Mehmet and Hatice are unsure about what to do with their house. Mehmet plans to rescind the contract and find another developer: despite the crisis, he is confident someone will invest in this strategic location. Urban transformation, the source of their grievances, seems the only possible solution. Meanwhile, however, they do not believe much gain can be earned out of their house: newcomers are paying piddling rents, it is just not worth it.<sup>19</sup> According to Hatice, all these people moving in don't pay rent at all: "They only say they do, actually they're just squatting." She points at a building across the road, which has been emptied out, only to be re-occupied by Roma people, who refit it with scrap materials<sup>20</sup>. "They have water and light, but of course they are not paying for it: we are paying also for them," argues Hatice pointing at the makeshift electricity connections.

Uncertainty about the future both fuels and hinders the urgency of leaving to start a new life elsewhere. Mehmet and Hatice evoke the good times when Fikirtepe was a lively community where everyone knew each other, visited friends for tea, and slept with doors unlocked. "Don't look at it now," they hasten to add, "we are just letting everything run down, since it has been years we know our houses will be demolished. They care about our property deeds, not the house itself." They point out the balcony's eroded concrete revealing the rusty reinforcement, the broken steps on their neighbor's staircase, and faded wall paint. They once had an orchard between their house and the street, with fruit trees and even a hammock. Now they have poured concrete over it and let the plants die, for they are planning to wash the minivan there every now and then. These days they lock themselves in at night, for with all these newcomers the neighborhood has just become full of foulness (*pislik* in Turkish)—a term which conflates material filth with moral wickedness and apparently finds fertile ground where the perceived "others" often engage in garbage and scrap dealing. Empty buildings are particularly dangerous, as they have allegedly been colonized by drunkards, glue-sniffers, and other dodgy people. As we talk, an old friend who has already moved out passes by for a greeting. They converse about a suitable flat the couple has just visited, in an apartment block further out in the Asian side of the city. They evaluate the option, comparing it to other solutions found by their neighbors: it seems a reasonable choice. Sitting with us on the steps is their niece, living one floor down with her parents who are both away working, so she is staying with

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<sup>19</sup> Others in the neighborhood disagree on this point, asserting that migrants pay even higher rents, but amortize the costs by sharing the space among several people.

<sup>20</sup> A Roma community, mainly concentrated around Bülbul sokak, has been living in Fikirtepe for decades. One important income source for them is the Tuesday market, attracting customers from the whole city, with a vast second-hand section.

her grandparents. Once Mehmet and Hatice move out, they will not join them. They are looking for another solution. This is what urban redevelopment does, they bemoan: “Splitting families, destroying communities. A real pity.”

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Hatice and Mehmet’s story exemplifies what many long-time dwellers in Fikirtepe are experiencing after big capital with political backing wrecked the urban and social fabric, yet struggles to fulfill its vision and dispose of its leftovers. This abrupt failure generated a carved-out landscape with “no way forward, no way back” (Gill, in Roy, 2011b). Residents are left negotiating a way out from this urban limbo, dealing with uncertainty and insecurity on financial, legal, relational, and physical levels. After a decades-long advancement from the city fringes toward its center, they are being re-peripheralized. The narrative emerging from their words, alongside the accounts of many other residents, points to Fikirtepe’s irreparable slippage into the perceived realm of the “uninhabitable” (Simone, 2016b), a world of precarity and disorder. Yet, as we witness with the repaired and re-occupied house of their neighbors, Fikirtepe is not just a quagmire that people wish to leave behind, but a space of opportunity.

As the media was announcing that “Arabs run away from Fikirtepe” (Yapı, 2017)—referring to the petrodollar-rich Gulf investors, not the Syrian refugees—the neighborhood turned into a magnet for various migrant groups (Parmaksızoğlu, 2016). Many arrived from post-soviet Turkic countries, notably Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan; due to linguistic affinity, they have managed to learn Turkish fast and find employment in the service sector, small factories, construction, and domestic works. On the high street one can now spot traditional Central Asian *tandır* ovens, as well as shipping companies displaying Turkmen and Uzbek flags. The busy owner of a crowded Uzbek eatery, a woman in her 40s, says that business is good, and the Uzbek community is growing—although now, in summertime, many women are away with the families from neighboring middle-class districts, where they work as housemaids and babysitters. Uzbek and Turkmen are eligible for a work permit in Turkey, or can manage to stay with a renewable tourist permit working under the counter (a rather typical arrangement). “We come and go by plane,” as she puts it (Interview, 2019). Another sizeable migrant community in Fikirtepe, the Afghans, instead arrived mostly overland, and illegally (Seyhan, 2017). They are therefore much more vulnerable, and engage in more low-pay, labor-intensive work, like scrap dealing and garbage picking (Akdeniz, 2018; Karadağ, 2021).

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“This is a good place,” as Jehangir puts it from his room overlooking the relentless traffic of Istanbul’s ring-road (Interviews, 2019). He shares the room with four friends, all in their 20s and 30s, from the same rural district in Afghanistan. They are cooking dinner together on a

gas stove, vegetables and bread from Fikirtepe's Tuesday market. The room, furnished with large carpets and decorated with Afghan and Turkish flags, religious images, and Christmas festoons, is tidy and kempt, in contrast with the common spaces of the abandoned five-story building.

They live in one of the many informal rubbish collection centers, inhabited by waste pickers, that sprouted around Fikirtepe in recent years: another example of a collateral effect of redevelopment that turned the area into a hub for the informal business of garbage collection, scrap dealing, and recycling.<sup>21</sup> The abandonment and destruction of thousands of buildings (Logie & Morvan, 2014) produced huge amounts of waste, materials, furniture, and unused space to process waste, store it, and shelter workers. A productive economy thrives at the margins of redevelopment and on its leftovers, where buildings constitute both the site of labor and the primary material source of value: demolishers (*çikmacıs*) deflesh empty structures of all valuable elements; scrap dealers (*hurdacıs*), with their wooden carts, search streets and houses for scrap metal and second-hand house stuff, their cry—*Hurdaaacım!*—a familiar feature in the neighborhood's soundscape; waste pickers (*çöpçüs*) go through rubbish yards and rubbles, loading recyclable materials into their tarpaulin bags. In the 1950s, salvaged spare parts from Prime Minister Adnan Menderes' inner-city demolitions were collected and sold in the burgeoning gecekondu outskirts (Ceritoğlu, 2018). Nowadays, however, the periphery is re-emerging within the same carved-out ruins of the gecekondu, while the labor is largely carried out by a new population of irregularized migrants.

Like his fellows in the building, Jehangir is residing in Turkey illegally, having reached the country overland on his way to Europe (in his case, specifically to Germany). No one in the room intends to settle here: this is a stopover. Zilal, sharing dinner with us, will soon try to cross over to the EU; Shahmir just returned after being caught by the Bulgarian police. Their condition is transitory, but indefinite: Abdul, the eldest in the room, has been here for three years now. Jehangir arrived two years ago; after eight months as a waste picker, and after his Turkish improved, he was hired in a diner. Their goal is to save enough money to pay traffickers and attempt to enter the EU.<sup>22</sup> The Turkish lira's recent plunge affected their saving capacity, just as it hindered high-rise developments looming beyond the highway, framed by the cracked corridor window. They have, however, good

<sup>21</sup> The waste and recycling sector was an important source of income in Fikirtepe even before the redevelopment started, but in the past decade it saw a marked expansion, according to many accounts. In a survey carried out in 2022, I counted more than 60 scrap dealing businesses.

<sup>22</sup> In February 2020, as Turkey opened its western borders to outgoing migrants, Jehangir managed to cross over into Bulgaria, and from there, to Serbia.

reasons to hope: they phone a friend who, in fluent Italian, tells me how he made it to Turin, where he has been living for a few years now.

According to them, two hundred people live in the building, all Afghans. All utilities, including Wi-Fi, are covered by the boss. Their work consists in collecting recyclables with two-wheeled carts, sorting them out within the base, then loading them onto trucks toward factories or processing plants. They get a monthly lump-sum depending on the owner's fluctuating profit. Winter is low season, for instance, since people produce less plastic bottle waste in the colder months. Jahangir and his friends describe a particular organizational geography: from their base, they cover a vast perimeter extending to neighboring areas, with each waste picker combing a specific itinerary, competing with those working for other patrons. Logistics require collection centers to be located in low areas. A full cart weighs up to 250 kg: dragging it upward is impossible, but garbage collectors rolling downward, their feet off the ground while they balance the load with their weight, are not an uncommon view across Fikirtepe's slopes.

The waste collection center also represents the heart of their social life. They work from 8 a.m. to midday, and after lunch and rest, again from 4 p.m. to evening, though someone, in turns, always continues sorting out waste later. Several of them reached Istanbul heading directly here: they had contacts, which helps to explain why people are organically divided by floor according to their provenance, just as in the early *gecekond* settlements of the 1950s and 1960s, where chain migration generated communities in which common origin provided a base for social relations and mutual support. They refer to each room as a "village" (*köy* in Turkish), each one hosting anywhere from 5 to 10 people, all of whom share responsibilities—cooking, sweeping the floor, washing the dishes, buying food—and use a common budget. They are pooling their savings to purchase a lamb for the upcoming Feast of the Sacrifice. Most of their social relations take place within the building or the broader Afghan community. On one of my visits, an Afghan *sheikh* (a religious leader), together with some other fellows, were visiting from the European district of Zeytinburnu (also known to be a center for Afghan migration in Istanbul). Jahangir and his roommates rarely go to the mosque: they do pray, but prefer to do so in the building.

All four agree that the people in the neighborhood are friendly and kind, revealing a gap in mutual perceptions (though I did meet locals who spoke of foreign garbage pickers in positive and empathic terms). Directly related to this is the fact that Fikirtepe is safe: safe from police raids, because neighbors do not complain so authorities do not intervene. There may, of course, be further reasoning behind this kind of safety: this particular kind of waste collection and recycling mechanism, flourishing in the interstitial space between legality and illegality,





Fig. 6  
 A completed development, a stalled construction site, and still inhabited sectors of Fikirtepe (photo: Francesco Pasta, Fikirtepe, Istanbul, August 2019).

belongs to a category of activities sustained by informal arrangements with businesses managed by Turkish citizens (arrangements that the authorities are clearly aware of).

Without euphemizing the conditions of exploitation and precariousness that these young migrants live in — disqualified as they are from accessing basic services or opportunities and forced to conduct an off-the-radar existence — it is in such physical and temporal “pseudo-permanent margins” (Yiftachel, 2009) that they find opportunities for shelter, employment, and socialization. Through incremental and contingency-driven practices, these migrants are in effect challenging international mobility regimes and, in doing so, implicitly critiquing citizenship categorizations (Darling, 2016). Although lacking visibility, legitimacy, and political organization, such actions constitute a form of urban politics which is increasingly relevant at the global scale.

### Conclusion

With its historical development and the transformation it has been undergoing since the restructuring started, Fikirtepe constitutes a plastic representation of the non-linear

dialectic between center and periphery and its unforeseen consequences, exposing peripherality as a relational condition, shifting over time, and laden with different subjective meanings. Mehmet and Hatice's close-knit community, created over the course of decades as their neighborhood consolidated, is now splintering, generating a sense of bitterness and nostalgia. But for the Afghan garbage pickers, the abandoned building they inhabit constitutes a node in a relational network extending from rural Afghanistan to Europe's metropolitan centers, providing support and some form of stability in their journey. Their transient condition chimes with Fikirtepe's peripheral temporality, the same limbo that is pushing long-time residents away; a disjunction reflected in the contrast between the neat arrangement of the garbage pickers' "village-room" and the Çankırı family's neglected garden and unkempt attic. Fikirtepe's evolution into a perceived no-man's land, out of the authority's gaze, fuels the sense of insecurity of many long-term residents. Yet this half-light enables undocumented migrants to find opportunities for livelihood while also minimizing the risk of confronting state regulations. Paradoxical as it may seem, the state-led regime of formality—eventually recognizing Mehmet and Hatice's property rights only to have them expelled—is the same apparatus underpinning Jehangir and his fellows' presence here.

Fikirtepe is currently a fragmented urban space in which multiple layers of uncertainty, suspension, and (in)formalization overlap and interact. On one hand, long-time dwellers are bearing the brunt of profit-driven urban transformation's abrupt failure. The stuck transformation has deprived them of many assets, greatly increased their socioeconomic vulnerability, and plunged their lives into an indefinite deadlock. At the same time, non-citizens, whose presence and mobility are disciplined and/or illegalized, inhabit the accidental built environment emerging from incomplete urban redevelopment and re-emerging informalization. They manage not only to deal with multiple forms of insecurity, but even to find occasions for socialization, shelter, and income generation in this peripheral space.

This comparative outlook suggests that against a backdrop of shattering "simulacra of development" (Roy, 2011b), where the periphery is experienced in its negative dimensions of exclusion and disempowerment, a way forward is materially being traced by subjects whose presence was not envisaged in the framing of development. This form of life-driven, non-confrontational politics constitutes a powerful embodiment of the periphery as a contingent, potential condition for self-determination.

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In the years since this research was carried out, many things have changed in Fikirtepe. When in early 2020 the Turkish government unilaterally opened its Western borders to outgoing migrants, Jehangir and some of his fellows managed to cross over into Bulgaria. The

next year, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, Istanbul governorate cracked down on irregular waste collection, raiding several centers across the city, detaining hundreds of undocumented migrants and destroying or walling up the waste collection structures where they used to reside. In Fikirtepe, the building where Jehangir lived for almost three years has now been forcefully vacated and bricked over. Meanwhile, some of the sluggish construction sites were completed, although their street level retail spaces remain mostly vacant. Above all, between 2020 and 2021, the government took a firsthand role in pushing the redevelopment forward by implementing it itself instead of orchestrating the transformation through regulatory instruments. The Mass Housing Authority (TOKI) has taken over from the contractors where they have failed to complete the projects, and property deeds have been transferred to the Treasury. An updated masterplan will be realized between Mandıra Street and the E5 highway, covering only part of the initially envisioned redevelopment perimeter, while the not-yet-redeveloped sectors will be rebuilt in two further phases. This government-driven transformation, repackaged under the name of “New Fikirtepe,” was at first slated for completion in 2023—in time for the Republic’s 100th anniversary and the next presidential elections. In May 2021, remaining residents were given a 150-day notice to leave. In September, buildings were being emptied out, shipping trucks clogged the streets, and inhabitants voiced uncertainty about their relocation within the upcoming deadline. The house of Mehmet and Hatice, which lies beyond the limits of the ongoing redevelopment, was rented out to another family, as they managed to move out from the neighborhood.

This chapter thus captured a particular phase of Fikirtepe’s transformation, a moment which seems to have already been surpassed by the unfolding events. All this speaks to the pace at which peripheralization, urban transformation, and “transit” migration unfold in a globalizing metropolis such as Istanbul. The unsettled temporality of these processes oscillates between protracted slowdowns and sudden accelerations, drawn-out intervals of waiting and hurried leaps forward.

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This essay examines the interrelation between (peripheral) gender identity and (peripheral) urban space. The analysis focuses on the *femminiello*, a quintessentially Neapolitan non-binary subjectivity embodying a fluid sexual identity, performatively crossing across masculine and feminine, deeply connected to the territory where it originates—Naples’ inner city and its low-income historic neighborhoods. Accordingly, the essay looks at the material and immaterial interrelations between urban space and the *femminiello* identity.

Methodologically, the study is built on a qualitative approach based mainly on fieldwork interviews with three of the most prominent *femminielli* of the Neapolitan context: Ciro Ciretta, a recognized exponent of the *femminielli* community and among the founders of a cultural association devoted to spreading and preserving the ancient *femminiello* culture; Tarantina Taran, an iconic local figure dubbed as “Naples’ last *femminiello*” in the city’s Spanish Quarters; and Loredana, activist and secretary of Naples’ Transsexual Association. The voices and stories of these three *femminielli* led us to read this non-binary gender identity in its relation to urban space, from different and complementary perspectives, which ultimately helped us trace a map of changing meaning and emerging forms of adaptation over time.

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# FEMMINIELLI AND THE CITY: URBAN SPACE AND NON-BINARY GENDER IDENTITIES IN NAPLES

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Fabrizia Cannella

The concept I carry with me is [...] that a center does not exist. What does exist is a territory that I traverse. This territory—before I was born, before I identified myself, before I belonged to a social role which each of us is bound to play in the social game—this existing territory is half female and half fish,<sup>1</sup> by which I mean it's a twofold land. This myth was not born in California or in Paris, it was born here, in Naples. This is a very ancient issue: Naples is a land which holds duplicity in itself. You arrive to this land, and you believe you are being visited by duplicity. It is this land indeed that brings the *femminella* to life.

—CiroCiretta, Interview, 2019

This essay examines the interrelation between (peripheral) gender identity and (peripheral) urban space. The focus of analysis is the *femminiello*, a quintessentially Neapolitan non-binary subjectivity embodying a fluid sexual identity, performatively crossing across masculine and feminine, deeply connected to the territory where it originates.<sup>2</sup> We are particularly interested in the linkages between the *femminiello* identity, their lived experience, and local urban space.<sup>3</sup> The essay thus looks at the historical and social linkages between the *femminielli* and the urban character of Naples' inner-city low-income neighborhoods, investigating possible interrelations in the concurrent transformations affecting both these urban spaces and this peculiar gender identity.

The *femminiello* is characterized by a close link with Naples' inner city *quartieri popolari*, low-income historic neighborhoods where they historically embodied a radical questioning of the social construction of gender, existing as men only from the biological point of view but *femmine* (females) in all possible expressions. Inspired by the roles that women assume in Naples' *quartieri popolari* (Di Nuzzo, 2009),<sup>4</sup> coupled with a continuous interpretation of

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<sup>1</sup> In Naples, the word *pesce* (fish) is used to refer to the penis. *CiroCiretta* is therefore presenting Naples as both an amphibious city between land and sea and an entity between feminine and masculine.

<sup>2</sup> The term *femminiello* in itself conveys the peculiar positioning of this subjectivity across genders. It contains a semantic root referring to the feminine (*femmin-*), combined with an alteration, most often declined in its masculine form (*-iello*) (Zito, 2013). In this essay, the masculine (*femminiello/i*) and feminine (*femmenella/e* and *femminella/e*) forms of the term are used alternately, as it happens in Naples' spoken language.

<sup>3</sup> I often use the plural in this essay because the research work has been carried out together with my dear friend and coworker Francesco Pasta.

<sup>4</sup> In Naples and its surrounding areas, women have often played a central social role, despite living within a patriarchal

female gender that becomes behavior and lifestyle, the femminielli enact an “excessive” performance, expressing a militant will to confirm and to be confirmed as a liminal, peripheral identity (Mauriello, 2018).

The city and its *quartieri popolari* become the stage, the scenography, and the public of this performance, exposing the performative nature of gender (Butler, 2014)—a deconstructive performance that is traditionally expressed both in daily activities and in particular ceremonies carried out by the femminielli. In general, neighborhoods such as the Spanish Quarters, the Rione Sanità, and Forcella—where this character with ancient roots tended to settle in—lie at the heart of Naples, but can be described as peripheral in virtue of their inhabitants’ transversal interactions with institutionalized structures (Caldeira, 2017), as well as the fact that they are beset by persisting predicaments such as substandard housing, joblessness, and crime (Dines, 2012).

We approach this urban underbelly—the socio-cultural setting where the femminiello figure has thrived—as “a place produced through inhabiting” (McFarlane, 2011), that is, through embodied practices by its inhabitants, with social relationships deeply inscribed in its urban patterns. We thus read Naples’ *quartieri popolari*, their local culture, and the embedded identities within as mutually constitutive entities, both in socio-spatial terms and as patterns of meaning.

Naples’ marginal integration into circuits of capitalist accumulation allowed the character of such neighborhoods to remain intact, with a persistent rooting of the lower-income classes and activities in the center.<sup>5</sup> However, from the ’90s onward, the situation has been rapidly changing, with emerging issues of gentrification, marketization, and displacement. As an old-time inhabitant of the Spanish Quarters, Gigi, puts it: “You lose the essence of Naples, which was your home, it was your city” (Interview, 2019). The apparent demise of the femminiello may thus be seen as a telltale symptom indicating how the peripheral culture characterizing Naples’ “popular quarters” as “a space of radical opening” (hooks, 1969) is increasingly being lost. If it is in this scenography that the femminiello identity takes shape, what are the material and immaterial interrelations between urban space and the femminielli? Furthermore, is the ongoing local socio-spatial and cultural transformation feeding significantly into the progressive disappearance of this character from Naples’ humanscape, as some studies suggest (Di Nuzzo, 2009; Zito, 2013)—and if so, in what ways?

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culture. Women and femminielli, for instance, famously took part in Naples’ *Quattro Giornate* (Four Days), the famous upheaval against occupying Nazi forces toward the end of World War II.

<sup>5</sup> Naples’ historic center remains one of the most densely populated in Europe (Dines, 2012).

This essay contributes to answering these questions, focusing on the role of urban space and culture in defining this identity. It does so by presenting three different yet complementary narratives, which emerged through fieldwork interviews with three femminielli: *CiroCiretta* (a recognized exponent of the femminielli community, among the founders of a cultural association devoted to spreading and preserving the ancient femminiello culture), *Tarantina Taran* (an iconic local figure dubbed as “Naples’ last femminiello” in the city’s Spanish Quarters), and *Loredana* (secretary of Naples’ Transsexual Association). By leaving space for them to speak for themselves—to explain their own subjective experience—our aim is to avoid positing the femminielli as an abstract object of study. On the contrary, we intend only to render their unexpected and peculiar micro-narratives and pictures, which are closer to their real living contexts and display a significant personal awareness of the evolution of their identities through space and time. We integrate their testimonies with our own observations and scholarly references only to contextualize them and help the reader understand and make sense of the discourse. With help from the voices of these three prominent femminielli, we will now traverse Naples’ urban space, tracing a map of femminiello history—replete with shifting meaning and emerging forms of adaption—over place and across time.

### **Scene 1. *CiroCiretta*: “Don’t look for us out of our neighborhoods”**

*CiroCiretta*, born in the early 1950s, is a recognized exponent of the femminielli community, running a cultural association devoted to spreading and preserving the ancient femminiello culture.<sup>6</sup> You will definitely find him/her<sup>7</sup> at every major event in and around Naples, such as the celebration of *Madonna di Montevergine*, the protector of femminielli, a ritual of devotion, purification from sin, and initiation into a new life<sup>8</sup>. A handsome man with an intense womanly gaze, *CiroCiretta* appears just as he personally defines himself: “A male who, however, carries in himself a pink brush stroke.”<sup>9</sup>

As she implies in the opening quote (this essay’s epigraph), Naples and its territory constitute the cultural and physical background enabling the femminiello to exist as such. Duplicity is in the city’s character, as embodied in the myth of the city’s founding through the figure of *Partenope*, an ornitomorphic mermaid representing both duplicity and self-sufficiency

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<sup>6</sup> AFAN (Associazione Femmenelle Antiche Napoletane), founded in 2009.

<sup>7</sup> We are going to refer to *CiroCiretta* both as “he” and “she” as he/she (lui/lei in Italian) does in conversation.

<sup>8</sup> The *Madonna di Montevergine*, also known as “*Mamma Schiavona*” and revered as protector of the femminielli, is a sort of Christian transfiguration of the earthly pagan goddess *Cibeles* (Zito, 2013). The festivity celebrating her falls in the beginning of February and is held at the namesake sanctuary in *Montevergine*, in the Campania region.

<sup>9</sup> *CiroCiretta* welcomed us for an interview in *Torre Annunziata*, in Naples’ hinterland, where she currently lives. The interview lasted approximately two hours and was conducted in July 2019. All quotes in this section, where not otherwise stated, are *CiroCiretta*’s own words.



**Fig. 1**  
A portrait of  
Ciro Ciretta  
(photo:  
Alessandro  
Genovese).



(Zito, 2013). Half bird and half woman, Partenope personifies Naples as the cradle of the idea of doubleness (Bertuzzi, 2018). According to Marcasciano (2015), Naples is a city that, “for its history and tradition, legend and reality, represented the largest factory of gender variance” in Italy (Fig. 1).

Naples/Partenope thus defines the cultural frame where the *femminiello*—“a person with a masculine body and a feminine feeling,” as described again by a *CiroCiretta* himself<sup>10</sup>—traditionally belongs. This is spatially articulated in the urban tissue of inner-city low-income neighborhoods. As Porpora Marcasciano (2015) recalls in her account of transgender experience in Naples in the 1970s, the city “had possible and probable spaces, places and times, which were absolutely public spaces—such as alleys, quarters, *bassi*, nooks, and, in general, the whole historic centre—open to a visibility impossible elsewhere.” Here, the *basso* (in Neapolitan, *vascio*; meaning, literally, “low”) constitutes the archetypal domestic space, one that mediates social relations and undergirds, in its spatiality, the definition of the *femminielli*’s non-binary identity. The *basso* is a small dwelling constituted by one (sometimes two) room(s), located at ground level and immediately adjacent to the street, over which it often extends through unauthorized built extensions

<sup>10</sup> From the interview in “Come mestiere si vestiva di sogno” (in Italian), curated by Pasquale Quaranta, Roberto Spellucci, Francesca Petrucci: [www.arcoiris.tv/scheda/it/9988](http://www.arcoiris.tv/scheda/it/9988).

as well as flexible uses of space. It is a multifunctional space with neither rigid partitions nor strictly designated functional areas, seamlessly connected to the public space: a spatial continuum which, as *CiroCiretta* explains, is projected into the *femminielli*'s own fluid identity, and constitutes the setting for its social performance. *CiroCiretta* thus explicitly recognizes the importance of the built environment in the cultural definition of the *femminiello* identity and social role, emphasizing its underlying spatial component. The bourgeois house "separates your body and its activities," while the *basso* doesn't.

*Marcasciano* (2015) renders the private-public continuity of the *bassi* and *vicoli* (alleys) of Naples' Spanish Quarters as the *femminielli*'s milieu, situating her observation in one of the most significant periods of their presence in the neighborhood (the 1970s). She vividly describes an utterly surprising, uncategorizable eatery, run by a middle-aged woman known as *Palumbella*, who at some point in the night would spread open her ground-floor one-room home doors, which "became one with the alley," fixing the shutters with chairs usually occupied by transsexuals. The clientele, carefully selected "quite in contrast to the codes in effect elsewhere," was composed of "commoners, rascals, smugglers, prostitutes, and above all, many *femminielli*." Neighboring women took a hand in her successful enterprise: those on the sides selling beer, wine, napkins, and condoms, and the ones from upper balconies pulling down their *panaro* (basket) to trade smuggled cigarettes.

According to *CiroCiretta*, the essence of the *femminella* identity is nowadays facing a "portion of contemporaneity" in a space in continuous evolution dominated by the reverberations of globalization, which combine to eradicate the *femminiello*—as well as other local cultures and identities—from its original condition.<sup>11,12</sup> In this regard, *Bertuzzi* (2018) points out that the new generations tend not to identify themselves with the archaic figure of the *femminiello*, nor do they recognize the historical cultural context to which the *femminielli* belong. Instead, new generations rely on more contemporary and translocal self-ascriptions (such as "transsexual," "transgender," or "cross-dresser"). No historical, mythological, transcendental component is contemplated by them (Fig. 2).

Nevertheless, for *femminelle* like *Ciretta*, such an estrangement from themselves and their culture would only be possible in the event of a true apocalypse, in which the mermaid loses her double, the sea dries up, and the volcano *Vesuvius* gets sucked down underground. In other words, it could never happen! According to her point of view, the *femminiello* follows space-time trajectories that go beyond a superficial union because of the mythical descent

<sup>11</sup> *Ciretta* describes the workings of globalization with a Neapolitan expression, "trasn e sic 'e si mettn' e chiatt," which literally means "they get in thin and they go fat." In other words, they slowly insinuate themselves and then become pervasive.

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed discussion on these issues see *Zito and Paolo*, 2010, 2019 and *Vesce*, 2017 (all in Italian).



**Fig. 2**  
Ciro Ciretta  
(photo:  
Alessandro  
Genovese).

**Fig. 3**  
The vandalized  
mural depicting  
la Tarantina  
in the Spanish  
Quarters, 2019  
(photo: Fabrizia  
Cannella, Naples,  
September 2019).



and deep territorial rooting. Indeed, in her association's name—Associazione Femmenelle Antiche Napoletane (Ancient Neapolitan Femmenelle Association)—“ancient” stands for anti-historical, Ciretta argues: an identity which is immortal, and beyond time. For CiroCiretta, although the number of femmenelle consistent with their original “approach”—the expression of their non-binary identity—seems (apparently) very small, this does not imply an actual risk of disappearance or homogenization into an alternative gender identity. She effectively summarizes this thought with a metaphor: “So I say to myself, should I believe those twelve who in 1931 didn't sign the fascist statute, or should I believe the 30 million who signed? I believe in those twelve, this is my answer!”<sup>13</sup>

### **Scene 2. Tarantina Taran: “Naples' last femminiello”**

“Non è Napoli!” (it's not Naples). This derogatory statement appeared one morning on the recently inaugurated mural depicting La Tarantina, an iconic local figure dubbed as “Naples' last femminiello” in the city's Spanish Quarters. Her portrait was obscured overnight, her gaze and gesturalism sprayed in black<sup>14</sup> (Fig. 3). La Tarantina is a revered

<sup>13</sup> With this statement, CiroCiretta refers to the oath of allegiance to the Fascist regime of 1931, requested of Italian university professors. Throughout Italy, there were only about ten who refused to sign the formal act to join the regime, thus accepting the loss of their university chair along with other restrictions.

<sup>14</sup> In June 2020, the mural was restored to its original condition, with support from Naples' municipality, and re-inaugurated in grand style, with the participation of the city mayor. In this respect, this episode further highlights that the femminiello identity enjoys an across-the-board consideration as an element at the core of Neapolitan culture, despite this unexpected act of vandalism.







character in the “quartieri,” where she lives. In 1947, as a teenager, she escaped from her family in a small town and reached Naples. She settled in the Spanish Quarters, where she became a recognized femminiello. “I was small, I was like 10 ... I was, you know, effeminate ... and everyone was telling me *femmene*,” she recounts, indicating the femminiello not just as a self-ascribed identity.<sup>15</sup> The mural expresses the public will to perpetuate and commemorate the identity of the femminiello and testifies to the relevance of her socio-cultural role. Its vandalization may also reveal ongoing societal shifts within the local community, as Pino, a long-time resident, explains:

[This] ... would never have occurred in other times. The absolute respect of this figure with mythical connotations, of this icon that could also pacify families and complex situations in the neighborhood, has recently undergone this act [...] and therefore the denial of its roots, the history it has developed in the Spanish Quarters. (Interview, 2019)

When we meet La Tarantina herself, however, she proudly declares to be absolutely unaffected by this silly affront.

The vandalized mural depicts La Tarantina holding the *panariello*, a wicker basket used for *tombulella scostumata*, a traditional raffle game that historically brought together the inhabitants of “popular districts” (Fig. 4). Traditionally, the femminella does not participate in the game as contender, but rather—in light of her social role, exceeding dualistic gender divisions—performs the role of guarantor of impartiality, extracting the numbers to read them out loud and weave stories out of them in an overtly vulgar, comic performance (Bertuzzi, 2018). This is a deeply rooted, powerful ritual, its significance lying as much in the creation of a community as in its peculiar performative expression. It is La Tarantina that embraces the *panariello*, and it is the femmenella that holds tight her territory’s community, signifying the local codes of coexistence.

The figure of the femminiello, indeed, is historically embedded in this neighborhood, which remains animated by the chapels of saints and deceased family members, screams of sellers, markets, craft shops, traffic of overcrowded two-wheeled vehicles, and a dense texture of bassi. Although the population is predominantly constituted by a socially marginalized underclass, even middle-class groups coexist structurally with public employees, an intellectual class of bourgeois owners together with immigrants and families of organized crime members (Laino, 2017). A first triangulation of interviews (2019) with local inhabitants reveals disparate perceptions of the femminielli. For some, the



**Fig. 4**  
A scene from  
a *tombulella*  
*scostumata*  
(photo:  
Alessandro  
Genovese).

<sup>15</sup> We met La Tarantina twice in the basso in the Spanish Quarters where she lives. We conducted two interviews of approximately one hour each, carried out in October 2019. All quotes in this section, where not otherwise stated, are La Tarantina’s words, collected in these two meetings.



femminielli continue to characterize the neighborhood—but only in specific places and time slots. For others, it is a figure that has become extinct altogether; some claim that the few remaining femminielli became invisible, moving out from the center, forced to live on prostitution as “transsexuals.” For most people and local media, however, only “the last femminiello” allegedly remains: La Tarantina.

As a matter of fact, when La Tarantina receives us in the basso where she lives alone, she cares to remark upon her role as the last existing authentic femminiello: “Now everything is imitation, and vulgarity.” In the past years, she has indeed ascended to stardom: she appeared on TV reports, a documentary, and is now touring as main actress in a theater piece dedicated to her life. As we sit talking in her bedroom/living room/entrance, a young couple calls, asking for a photograph. The walls display old pictures, and her drawers guard many more images of her youth, when she was allegedly a friend and muse for Fellini, Pasolini, Moravia, Parise, and other writers, artists, and directors of the time.<sup>16</sup>

When she first arrived to the quarters, she recounts, there was hunger in Naples. At that time, the alley she lives in was known to host brothels and prostitution. King Ferdinando too, she tells, had been a regular in his day<sup>17</sup>—the Royal Palace is at a stone’s throw—and a man living

<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed account of La Tarantina’s life experience, see Romano, 2013 (in Italian).

<sup>17</sup> She refers to King Ferdinando I, who ruled between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

just down the alley is widely said to be the illegitimate son of King Umberto (indeed, “he is called Umberto himself”), who is believed to have had a relationship with a beautiful woman from the quarters.<sup>18</sup> The truthfulness of these legends is of course less relevant than their role in highlighting Naples’ historical and still lingering mixture of high and low.

From her perspective—undoubtedly centered on her own character—La Tarantina is categorical when speaking of the fate of the femminiello in the popular districts and in Naples: “The world goes on, it has not fallen behind, and today I am the last one, full stop!” Her somewhat intransigent statement aims to highlight how the core of this shift lies in a process of evolution, the opening up of possibilities for the femminiello in the “multidimensional expression of gender” (Miano Borruso, 2011). In the times of her youth, in terms of substantiality, “as God created you, so you remained,” whereas today, “we can turn the virtue into vanities, cross-dressing and coloring ourselves,” and even, “transform an essence into a form, undergoing surgery.” In La Tarantina’s view, thus, the femminiello is an obsolete character, whose essence has been nowadays irremediably outdated due to the evolving technologies and social costumes.

### Scene 3. Loredana: “We will soon be called TTT”

“The femminielli were the welfare of the quarters!” Thus Loredana, secretary of Naples’ Transsexual Association, around 60, sums up her down-to-earth analysis of the femminielli’s social role and historical path, chain-smoking smuggled cigarettes.<sup>19</sup> She does not hesitate to debunk the widespread view of the popular quarters as a space of recognition and acceptance for the femminielli, and instead explains the relation between such non-heteronormated subjects and the peripheral inner neighborhoods as one of mutual support, a pragmatic compromise. In her view, the femminielli, because of social stigmatization, quite simply had no other place to go, but in the city’s poverty-stricken neighborhoods they would find some accommodation, usually of bad quality and at high cost. They typically engaged in the prostitution business, she explains, putting forward her own experience when she got kicked out from home—“and imagine, my father voted for the Communist Party!” At that time business was good, and the femminielli had some disposable income; they started lending credit or helping neighborhood families buy home appliances—a pan, some bedsheets—getting the money back in small



**Fig. 5**  
Loredana at  
her window,  
in Central  
Naples (photo:  
Alessandro  
Genovese).

<sup>18</sup> King Umberto I died in 1900, making the story highly unlikely to be true.

<sup>19</sup> Loredana agreed to dedicate her time to meet us and invited us to her house in the Rione Sanità. The interview, conducted over coffee, lasted about two hours and was carried out in October 2019. All quotes in this section, where not otherwise stated, were collected in this conversation with Loredana.



instalments. “The femminielli fought for, and bought the acceptance of the quarters,” Loredana states. They built up support networks within the quarters, helping each other out. Concerning the femminielli’s supposedly mythical status, she is just as desecrating: “The femminielli are said to have broken asses, and therefore to bring good luck! That’s why they pick the raffle numbers!”<sup>20</sup> She also cares to mention the other side of the coin, namely that the femminielli have been identified with misfortune: during the 1980s earthquake that hit

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<sup>20</sup> In Neapolitan, “tener o cul rotti” (to have a broken ass) is a colloquial expression meaning “to have good luck.”



**Fig. 6**  
A framed picture  
portraying  
Loredana during  
her *matrimonio*  
(wedding) (photo:  
Fabrizia Cannella,  
Naples, September  
2019).

considers herself as falling within each one of these gender categories.

The femminiello therefore emerges as not just a geographically located, but also a historically contingent category. Things started to change in the late 1970s—not because of drugs, as La Tarantina seemed to argue at one point, or because of the 1980 earthquake, as in a neighbor’s view, but because technological advancement made gender transition possible. Initially it was a do-it-yourself, uncertain process; nowadays, a tighter procedure is in place. Hormones and surgery enable many people, who would have identified as a femminiello half a century ago, to become woman. Being a femminiello was thus a condition framed by, and performed through, the available means; and as such possibilities have changed, so has the femminiello. Now that they can rent a flat anywhere in the city, they do not need to reside only in Naples’ low-end neighborhoods: the femminielli’s purported disappearance, in Loredana’s view, is actually a consequence of their increasingly emancipated role within society.

the city, people frantically escaping from their homes allegedly scapegoated them for the disaster.

Loredana has been living here, near the Sanità neighborhood, for over thirty years (Fig. 5). Her two-room street-level home, leading onto steps climbing up the hill, is garnished with pictures, one of them portraying her in a wedding gown: that was her *matrimonio*, a staged wedding, traditionally a ceremony of the femminielli<sup>21</sup> (Fig. 6). Back then it was a real thing, with the procession, vehicles, and all; now, it’s more like a re-enactment, she says. Yet, she stresses, femminielli have not disappeared: “Of course the femminielli still exist: they are just being called with new names, such as transgender, transsexual, now the Americans are going to find a new name for us, we will be called TTT!”<sup>22</sup> She explains this while drinking one coffee after another, her talk frequently interrupted by phone calls for the Trans Helpline. Loredana

<sup>21</sup> For an interesting account (in Italian) on the femminielli’s wedding, see Zito (2017).

<sup>22</sup> Loredana says TTT to actually refer to DDT (an insecticide). With this term she ironically makes reference to the infinite variety of appellations and acronyms used in the LGBTQI+ community to indicate gender identity.

## Conclusion

The voices and stories of *CiroCiretta*, *Tarantina Taran*, and *Loredana* have led us through the question of the *femminiello* identity in its relation to urban space, from different and complementary perspectives. On a material level, dwelling space in the quarters may have influenced the *femminielli* gender identity and its social performance. According to *CiroCiretta*, the flexible spatiality of living in the *basso*, and its seamless flow into the public space of the neighborhood's alleys, translate into a fluid gender identity which is consciously social and publicly performed.

With their socio-spatial arrangements and lifestyles, Naples' *quartieri popolari* constituted the milieu where the figure of the *femminiello* found shelter and sustenance, engaging in under-the-counter economies and informal livelihoods. Substandard but affordable housing solutions, off-the-books transactions, and "unauthorized" activities in the quarters allowed the *femminielli* to survive and thrive at times of widespread poverty and social exclusion. In the quarters, the *femminielli* gained social acceptance through neighborhood-based pragmatic interactions, rather than any predetermined cultural acceptance, as *Loredana* pointed out.

In this respect, the central location of such neighborhoods within Naples' urban core is likely to have played a role in positioning the *femminella* firmly in the city's cultural imagination and social reality, as *La Tarantina* indirectly explained (and as her case in and of itself demonstrates). A stone-throw from the city's monumental squares, seats of power, and formal spaces, these "peripheral" settlements in the heart of Naples provided the *femminielli* proximity, visibility, and recognition.

Furthermore, beyond the spatial qualities and topographic location of the quarters, it is necessary to recognize a more metaphysical component in the construction of the *femminiello* identity. As *CiroCiretta* unwaveringly states, it is the locality—with its history, myths, and energy—that ensures that despite exterior changes, the *femminiello*, in its locally grounded essence, will not disappear.

The three testimonies presented thus shed some light on how the figure of the *femminiello* intertwines, in practice, with the urban space where it originated, overlapping in material, social, topographic, and symbolic dimensions. Yet the question of the interconnection between the supposed demise of the *femminiello* and the socio-spatial transformations permeating the quarters is far more complex, defying categorization under a single perspective and requiring further investigation across several areas of study.

As a self-proclaimed last exponent of a bygone era and disappearing identity, *La Tarantina* depicts the *femminiello* as an evolving figure embedded in a flow of change—a flow that affects

neighborhoods and their once mutually constitutive identities alike. With her historical analysis, Loredana further articulates this concept: broader processes of social transformation, technological innovation, and ultimately emancipation led the femminiello to sever its ties to the popular neighborhoods. Yet, as Ciro Ciretta explains, the femminiello will continue to exist as a Neapolitan identity, independent from the social role and denominations projected onto it—at least “until the sea dries up and the Volcano crumbles underground.”

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This chapter considers the Festival de Marseille-danse et arts multiple 2017 as a successful apparatus of transition from positions of non-place to place in one of Europe's most diverse cities. Through its temporary installation, the festival crossed spatial, aesthetic, and thematic divisions of the center and periphery, constructing bridges of movement between these invisible borders. In doing so, this chapter troubles the traditional affirmation that the value of performance is most prominently interpreted during its enactment. Instead, it leverages the spatial turn of French theory to emphasize that the festival's significance extends to the process of coming-to-stage, and highlights participant interactions with the city as facilitated by the festival's infrastructure. In re-framing the boundaries of the festival's intended performance scene from the aestheticized proscenium to the larger social context of Marseille, a voyeuristic and objectifying gaze is removed from the staged bodies and redirected to a new embodied praxis of inclusion and exclusion, rehearsed for, and by, the performer whose ephemeral offering is too often pushed to the periphery or essentialized at the center but never allowed full placement. To move away from accentuating the fixed nouns and verbs of place in a recapitulation of the actors and how they danced, this chapter instead looks toward the mechanisms that scaffolded the relationship between the two—the grammar of the event—which both exceeded and preceded its actual content. What emerges is an attention toward prepositional events, the mechanics of societies that facilitate and articulate such relations.

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# OF THE SPACES BETWEEN: PREPOSITIONAL EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE FESTIVAL DE MARSEILLE

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Anna Jayne Kimmel

## Introduction

Following the spatial turn of French theory, anthropologist Marc Augé defined the non-place in counterpoint to place.<sup>1</sup> Common examples include airports, malls, hotels, and other intersections of fleeting encounter with a capitalistic drive (Augé, 2006). Generalized, non-places remove sociality from interaction—due to economic efficiency, but also fear and bias. With its absence of identity, history, and relationality of the individuals who occupy it, the non-place cloaks those who pass through in anonymity as it erases traces of the past and future. In this milieu of place and non-place, then, where do we situate sites of performance—defined as it is by a sense of ephemeral present-ness—as participants come and go at the theater? My experience of the Festival de Marseille was that it belonged to neither category, but was rather an essential bridge between the two, a critical mechanism of transition toward belonging and emplacement. What follows is a winding narration of this transformation from transience to belonging, replete with prepositional clauses that allow for constant slippage between the two (place and non-place). Implicit to Augé’s writing is a hyperawareness of globalization and the sense of mobility, of which the festival presented both. Relationality is not always utopianly reciprocal; often it is dangerous, perishable, and precariously rehearsed: between bodies, yes, but also between sites, cities, and institutions. Together, let us tumble through the peripheral spaces of the festival in order to cypher its meaning, lest we forget “the stumbling block to the coexistence of places and non-places will always be political” (Augé, 2006, p. 115).

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<sup>1</sup> French anthropologist Marc Augé defines the non-place: “If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined accordingly will be non-place. [They] do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of ‘places of memory,’ and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position” (Augé, 2006, p. 77). There is a similarity to Michel de Certeau’s construction of space as different than place, in which place—for both Augé and de Certeau—is the more saturated site of meaning and memory. Throughout this chapter, I maintain the distinction between space and place, but intentionally collapse non-place and space as an empty site of exchange and non-relationality. Admittedly, Henri Lefebvre’s social space, however, complicates this binary between place and non-place/space put forward by Augé and De Certeau.



**Fig. 1**  
Street art in  
Marseille, France  
(photo: Anna  
Jayne Kimmel,  
June 2017).



### Arriving at the Festival de Marseille

This graffitied wall, visible from a public bus when entering Marseille from the north, stands as an unofficial welcome-sign with bold letters: “Je ris / Je pleure / Je vis.” These verbs—“laugh,” “cry,” and “live”—point to the complexities of embodied experience in the city as well as its larger political economy. Together, the verses summarize the city’s conflict between its vibrant cultures and the continued racial, ethnic, and economic inequalities found throughout France. This language also quips at the canonical sixteenth-century poem by Louise Labé, paying homage to the poet’s oxymoronic feelings toward loving, living, and dying, appropriated here by the anonymous artist in public space.<sup>2</sup> Four golden letters come together to script *juis*, the joy and pleasure implicit to

<sup>2</sup> Je vis, je meurs ; je me brûle et me noie ;  
J’ai chaud extrême en endurant froidure :  
La vie m’est et trop molle et trop dure.  
J’ai grands ennuis entremêlés de joie.

Tout à un coup je ris et je larmoie,  
Et en plaisir maint grief tourment j’endure ;  
Mon bien s’en va, et à jamais il dure ;  
Tout en un coup je sèche et je verdoie.

life accented by three exclamation points in satire, or exuberance, or both. Shifting the improvisational tone to the sanctioned, the graphic words appear next to an emblem that denotes Marseille as the 2013 European Capital of Culture. The logo points to an organ of governmentality generated to claim space and capitalize upon Marseille's cultural status, the poetic language an alternative vitality to this state-sanctioned designation.

Notably, the kind of street art that welcomed me into the northern side of Marseille was not found in Cours Julien, a trendy neighborhood nearer the center of Marseille where extant murals have been authorized, but in an industrial edge, already pointing to art's aesthetic traversal through spaces of French culture. These dichotomies between errant and institution were striking, yet their coexistence within the city — if superimposed to subvert a supranational program — suggested a potential for fluid exchange between the national and the local, the state and the individual, the center and the periphery, place and non-place. Rather than exclusion, the layered ephemera of both sanctioned and unsanctioned art painted the multiple valences of the city's cultural geography, tensions included. The salient contrast between government-regulated events and individual-artistic voices sharing space repeated throughout the capital, a harbinger for what was later staged at the 22<sup>nd</sup> edition of the annual Festival de Marseille — *danse et arts multiples* 2017.

For three weeks, the festival's performers danced, acted, and embodied their relationality — to France, Marseille, and each other — as a reminder that (the identity of social) space is constantly re-produced and re-inscribed with new meaning. Stemming from a larger ethnographic study that investigated the political potential of the festival as an intervention into fraught immigration policies of integration particular to France, here I reimagine the Festival de Marseille — with its dual sub-themes of “Focus Afrique” and “Focus Marseille” that emphasized transnational histories — as a successful apparatus of transition for moving from positions of non-place to place in Europe's most diverse city.<sup>3</sup> I aim to draw attention to the ways in which this edition of the festival contextualized place, body, and event in a space of negotiation and activation, rather than staging moments of representation as solution. If, as anthropologist Mark Ingram argues, the relationship between art making and social life is “an

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Ainsi Amour inconstamment me mène ;  
Et, quand je pense avoir plus de douleur,  
Sans y penser je me trouve hors de peine.

Puis, quand je crois ma joie être certaine,  
Et être au haut de mon désiré heur,  
Il me remet en mon premier malheur.  
— Louise Labé (1524–1566)

<sup>3</sup> This project received funding from Princeton University's Department of French and Italian and the Lewis Center for the Arts.

important arena in which French people have self-consciously grappled with issues of cultural heritage and social change,” then the festival seems a prime example to reflect upon the relationships it produced—economic or interpersonal, professional or political (2011, p. xxx).

Located at the periphery of Europe, the Mediterranean, and North Africa, Marseille lives as a city on the edge, a geographic node that decenters the boundary of French national identity south from Paris. Yet through its temporary installation in the city, the festival crossed spatial, aesthetic, and thematic divisions, constructing bridges of movement between center and periphery that blurred not only these invisible borders but, if only for a moment in time, brought them together as one. With Marseille as subject and the festival as resident, I play with Jill Dolan’s claim that “suddenly, the theater *was* the city,” instead suggesting the city as a theater in which a crossing of the center and periphery was staged (2010, p. 12).

Throughout, I understand the Festival de Marseille to invite engagement with the larger question of what is read as the stage, how that boundary effects a contextualization of the power of performance and location of the periphery, and how we—as scholars, artists, and patrons of the arts—can harness that power for the production of a social space of community, of place. Rather than attending solely to the rich and varied performances which together comprise the festival, I trouble the traditional affirmation that the value of performance is most prominently interpreted during its enactment. Instead, I emphasize that its significance extends to the process of coming-to-stage, not limited to what happens on (center) stage, and highlight participant interactions with the city as facilitated by the festival’s infrastructure. In re-framing the boundaries of the festival’s intended performance scene from the aestheticized proscenium to the larger social context of the festival, a voyeuristic and objectifying gaze is removed from the staged bodies and re-directed to a new embodied praxis of inclusion and exclusion—a praxis that is rehearsed by, and for, the performer (whose ephemeral offering is too often pushed to the periphery or essentialized at the center but never allowed full placement).

### **A prepositional event**

Cynicism of the cultural capital displayed at festivals, biennales, and world fairs is both plentiful and justified, well-articulated by contemporary scholars to include the false promises of global multiculturalism, essentialist mindsets, commodity-driven profits, and residues of colonial grabs. Jan Goossens, the director of the festival, has himself

recognized these concerns.<sup>4</sup> Without disavowing such literature, I strive to move beyond an easy critique of the international festival as mere form to instead acknowledge the possibilities and potentialities which arise from its instantiation. I do not mean to suggest that this festival was not also limited in its display. However, I make a deliberate choice to read its embodiment generously, optimistically, euphorically, in hopes of making legible its mechanisms of relationships which work against current critique. By dually remaining in the register of both the city's urban logics and national politics, the festival enables potential mobility between cultures previously marked at either the periphery or center to remain at play.

This stance follows an evolution of festival thought, ranging from the role of the festival in social cohesion, which associated it with ritual, the sacred, and the ceremonial as a reflection of customs (Durkheim, 1976 [1912]); to its substantiation of sites of deviance, disruption, and potential decentering (Turner, 1969; Caillois, 2001 [1959]); to more nascent writing on festivals, including their association with policy-making (Frost, 2016). Following João Leal, rather than viewing the festival as either inherently subversive or reflective, I view it as a scaffold for either potentiality (Leal, 2016). The non-place is global, after all, and bridges may lead to nowhere.

Motivated by the graffitied wall that ushered me into the city, I search here for fleeting moments in which the center and periphery seemed to exist simultaneously. This does not mean a harmonious coexistence, *per se*, but the beginning of constructive forms of overlap in unexpected spaces. At the festival, the subject (as a political address), the individual (as an interpersonal marker), and the body (as a corporeal concern) were all set in motion. For this reason, structures of space, location, access, occupation, movement, and migration become central to my reading of the politics of representation as practiced at, and by, the festival, including the lines of mobility mapped between its sites. Here, the periphery exists not as supplement to, or even separate from, the center, but as a fractured, fragmented part of a national whole. The festival, as I experienced it, operated as a mechanism through which the peripheral and central became blurred, and through which the local and the institutional, as in the street art, combined.

Guiding my writing is an understanding that to “embodying the periphery” is to perform a moment when personhood, positionality, and identity become bound in politics through

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<sup>4</sup> “Festivals in French-speaking countries are often described by non-participating locals as ‘ovnis’ (UFOs), akin to the endless list of art biennales taking place across the world. Of course this word, with its “alien” undertones, is tinged with populism: you can’t reach out to everyone.... But it’s really little more than fancy international shopping. In a world where a lot of theatres in major European capitals put international works on their programmes all year round, we might wonder whether festivals should be looking for a specific new identity that would allow them to return to their initial role as forces of emancipation” (Goossens, 2018).

action, tethered together materially and corporeally. But by what relationality? What connects and reveals orientation—of exclusion or belonging, of recognition or disavowal—to a nation, a community, a cast, an audience? After all, the periphery is not a place, but *a relationship* to the center.<sup>5</sup> Thus I move away from accentuating the fixed nouns and verbs of the place—a recapitulation of the actors and how they danced—and instead look toward the mechanics that scaffold the relationship between the two. In short, I look to the grammar of the event, which both exceeds and precedes its actual content, turning specifically toward prepositions, the grammatical mechanisms of societies that facilitate and articulate relation. To be *before*, *during*, *under*, and *after*, *betwixt* and *between*. The preposition *throughout* best summarizes my experience of Marseille as an American tourist guided by the festival. “Throughout,” in the OED, means to be “through the whole of (a place, thing, or group); in or to all of many parts of; everywhere.” The festival—its dispersed crowd of audiences and performers, venues, funds, and publicity—spilled throughout the city. The space of the festival—not as labor or commodity but as prepositional event—refused the center-periphery divide: geographically, culturally, economically, aesthetically.<sup>6</sup> The center-periphery is not exclusively about location. It is not simply about juxtaposing two nouns, two peoples, two cultures, two identities in concentric circles of dominance. It is about porous boundaries between the two, the moment of encounter and exchange in which prepositional events unfold to facilitate the transition into social and anthropological space, even place. One may argue that metaphors are the weakest form of argument, and perhaps the preposition here is mere allegory. And yet perhaps it’s not. Perhaps the embodied tissue—the permeable membrane of a city that facilitates active and passive transport—was material, structural, and very much alive in the choreo-kinetics of the Festival de Marseille.

### **Before the Festival de Marseille: setting the scene**

If a layer of the street art was created in 2013 to recognize Marseille as a European Capital of Culture, its maintenance until 2017 suggests an unlikely permanence for an art form defined by its constant erasure. I write within this 2013–2017 retrospective, my observations framed by the durability of an urban space that both creates and preserves. The Festival de Marseille 2017 was staged during the resurgence of Le Front National—a

<sup>5</sup> I avoid language of relational aesthetics, for I want to include the artist within the framework of the festival, rather than view the artist as a facilitator of social experience.

<sup>6</sup> Arguably, labor underpins this festival, from the exertion of the dancing bodies, the staff and crew who man the theaters, to the artistic teams and festival organizers. However, it is not labor for the sake of material production, but for shared experience. Thus, there is a fluidity to the social divisions of labor prescribed by Lefebvre (2009, p. 225).

right-wing, populist party characterized by its anti-immigration and neo-nationalist ideologies, sentiments which continue to sweep Europe and the United States.<sup>7</sup> France was forced to acknowledge this particular growth in power by the immense popular vote for Marine Le Pen in 2012 and again in 2017.<sup>8</sup> Le Pen and her party strongly opposed immigration—legal or otherwise—and campaigned that French citizenship should be “inherited or merited” (Marine Le Pen, quoted in Nowak & Branford, 2017).<sup>9</sup> A year later, the word “race” was written out of the French constitution. This xenophobic stance revealed the potential for events such as the festival to embody a tolerant alternative for those who have been labeled as peripheral and forced into a national non-place where value has been reduced to economic output in a newly color-blind state.<sup>10</sup>

To write of place-making, it is necessary to situate the festival as historically located within the context of French immigration politics, with Marseille at the center of that trajectory. Migration as a historical identity of Marseille extends to Greek presence in 600 BC, as the city’s port location established it as a gateway to economic trade. In modern times, migrant flows increased as colonial trade routes solidified its economic foundation, including Italian, Russian, and Corsican individuals in the early 1900s. Individuals from the Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa, and Comoros comprised the principal currents of migration into Marseille in the mid-twentieth century, shifting the population to a more predominantly North African identity in the wake of decolonization. By 2017, migrant identities from eastern Mediterranean nations, such as Syria, increased. I will not replicate a review of immigration debate in France, which includes rhetoric of *intégration*, *assimilation*, *multiculturalisme*, *diversité*, *mixité* and *communautarisme*, as this discourse has been well-charted by political scholars, historians, and cultural theorists (Amiriaux & Simon, 2006). But I include it briefly to suggest the historicity of the city as non-place as the backdrop of the festival and setting in which I arrived.

The festival’s themes themselves touched upon migration, origins, borders, and exclusion, as well as an explicit celebration of Africa. The artists who presented at the festival can be

<sup>7</sup> This political party has identified as Le Rassemblement National (National Rally) since 2018.

<sup>8</sup> In 2012, Le Pen received the third-place popular vote for France’s president, behind François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy. In 2017, she lost the presidential seat to Emmanuel Macron, having received a little over 30% of the vote.

<sup>9</sup> For analysis of the multiple valences of the discourse that structured the election, see: Alduy C. 2017, *Ce Qu’ils Disent Vraiment: Les Politiques Pris Aux Mots*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris.

<sup>10</sup> This chapter employs the term “tolerance” to refer to the lack of physicalized violence used to express differing opinions. It implies a passive acceptance, if not active valorization, of alternative perspectives and modes of living. This is rooted in UNESCO’s *Declaration on Principles of Tolerance*. Although Marseille is regarded as a tolerant city, I do not want to paint a false utopia. Anti-tolerant violence has been performed on both ends of the political spectrum. Indeed, the primary venue of the festival was located near Saint Charles station. In October 2017, the train station was the site of a stabbing, officially recorded as an act of terrorism, escalating tensions in the continued wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris.



largely summarized as Euro-Mediterranean, including the Maghreb, but extended to practitioners from Lebanon, Syria, southern Europe, Senegal, and Burkina Faso, among elsewhere. While these identities are by no means homogenous, they share historically subaltern positioning in binaries such as North-South, colonial-postcolonial, and center-periphery, weaving them together with a common thread beyond the connecting shores of the Mediterranean. Through its programming, the festival forged a space for flow across and between such artificial and isolating categories. These pertinent themes, in Marseille and elsewhere in Europe, contextualized the relationships that the event facilitated—rescripting the festival’s values from aesthetic-peer-collaboration toward practices that contested national culture and narratives of citizenship. This was especially important given the simultaneous rise of nationalistic rhetoric.

Goossens situated the festival within the violence of this ideological turmoil by recognizing the political affairs around him. He did not attempt a euphoric staging of cohesion, but rather recognized the discord, and labored “to include programming at the heart of the brutal problems of mobility of immigration, and multiply the collaborations ‘South-North’” (Beauvallet, 2017).<sup>11</sup> This commitment to local, political complexities allowed the festival to (attempt to) overcome current shortcomings of international arts platforms, and through collaboration and engagement begin to bridge center-periphery divisions on a cross-continental scale.<sup>12</sup> The festival’s invitational dramaturgy perhaps diluted this democratic potential, embedding exclusion before it began. But it also literally extended an invitation to those who might not have previously felt welcomed, and thus became a scaffold of opportunity as many of the invited artists of the festival (including and beyond the 2017 iteration) have continued on to international acclaim.

### **Throughout the Festival de Marseille: internal flows and relationality**

To understand the festival as an event that allowed for movement between non-place and place, one must first understand the physical mobility induced by its format. The festival opening’s placement in the 3<sup>rd</sup> arrondissement encouraged an internal migration within Marseille. The audience—a *mélange* of identities—included a significant proportion

<sup>11</sup> Festival translations are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>12</sup> The festival’s longevity is important, and while its political vision, thematic orientations, and urban trajectory have not remained constant in its two-decade life, its leadership has consistently engaged in politics of inclusion—politically, aesthetically, accessibly, featuring themes such as “*Sous le signe du plongeur de Paestum*” in 1996. Themes of the last decade include: “*Quinzième round*” (2010), “*Out of Africa*” (2011), “*Accents circonflexes*” (2012), “*Année capitale*” (2013), “*La résistance des lucioles*” (2014), and “*Nous nous sommes tant aimés*” (2015). The 2017 iteration, while unique, is thus emblematic of the larger festival institution, and I anticipate that had I attended a year prior, or a year after, my experience would have been similar in terms of how I related to the city and current events through my engagement with the festival.

of the seemingly white-intellectual and artistic population of the upper-middle class, a statistic that did not typically occupy that district.<sup>13</sup> The festival stirred this demographic to transit across the city, and reconfigured the district—if just for the duration of the performance—as a place more widely inhabited. Because of the temporality, local residents were not permanently displaced (a problematic consequence with gentrified forms of urban planning), but rather remained interspersed. In future iterations it may be more radical for the festival to invert this structure by inviting marginalized audiences into bourgeois spaces. To prompt non-elites to enter elite spaces would reverse the power-differential in spectatorship currently prescribed at the theater, and mitigate against the potential pitfalls of slum tourism or gentrification in which the center-periphery traffic flows unidirectionally. Nonetheless, the benefits of the festival were not limited to its particular place but extended to the creation of a porous border, uniting individuals that otherwise might not interact.

After the opening weekend, the festival geographically surrounded nearly all of Marseille, with eighteen participating theaters extending into the majority of the city's arrondissements. This physical embrace of the city—or perhaps by the city—carved not a niche place for the performers but rather an expansive space without habituated boundary or confinement. In doing so, it blurred the line as to where the festival and its strategy (should have) existed. It challenged the liminal borders within Marseille, encouraging a mobile public to reorder lines of economic, social, and cultural difference otherwise enforced indirectly through state initiatives such as income-based housing projects. The performers and audience alike were allowed to inhabit new spaces, to become familiars in new territory (physically and otherwise). As a tourist myself, the festival's map forced me to explore corners of the city I otherwise would not have visited. It generated an intentionally transitory audience, setting the city in motion with an internal flow.

The festival's fluid encounters extended to content and thematic concerns as much as the spatial politics. In total, after three weeks of performance—including dance, theater, concerts, cinema, installations, lectures, roundtables, and public parties—over twenty-four thousand spectators had attended the festival. There were twenty-two artistic installations and forty-eight performances; thirty-two of these seventy events were free. The festival was composed of thirty-two international artists and intellectuals representing twenty countries.<sup>14</sup> Eight of these artists were listed as current residents of Marseille, and four works were created

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<sup>13</sup> The surrounding area was largely comprised of a population considered economically disadvantaged and of immigrant origins, primarily of the Maghreb and Comoros (Peraldi, 2015, pp. 20–21).

<sup>14</sup> These countries include: Algeria, Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Chili, Democratic Republic of the Congo, France, Germany, Israel, Lebanon, Mali, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Rwanda, Senegal, and South Africa.

in collaboration with the city: José Vidal's *Rito de Primavera*, featuring twenty dancers Marseillais alongside twenty Chilean dancers; Brett Bailey's *Sanctuary*, featuring two performers Marseillais with six other actors; Nacera Belaza's *The Procession and Solos*, featuring the city itself as backdrop to the processual event; and lastly, Rimini Protokoll's *100% Marseille*, in which a hundred citizens Marseillais take the stage. Such figures demonstrate the breadth of the programming of the festival and the significance of an annual presence that rehearses its right to the city. Not all of the actors selected for these works were professional performers. Instead, they were chosen to be representative of the city's demographics. The relationality of the festival thus exceeded the audience-performer dynamic to extend to the rehearsal process as well, as foreign artists and local residents became codependent collaborators.

Although the festival staged the evolving demographics of Marseille, most explicitly in Rimini Protokoll's piece *100% Marseille*, more broadly it confronted the national identity of France, questioning who is authorized in claiming Frenchness and who is ostracized as francophone. For while the event attempted to augment the visibility of Marseille's diversity while occupying an unequivocally French stage, conflation of identity was intentionally allowed.<sup>15</sup> The 2017 Festival de Marseille had two themes: "Focus Afrique" and "Focus Marseille." In total, twelve events were labeled as "Focus Marseille," and ten as "Focus Afrique." Although on the surface this binary promoted a continued divide between French and foreign identity, this was not an exclusive labeling system; five events were considered both. For example, Brett Bailey's *Sanctuary* was listed for each. This cross-pollination continued: artists who created works for "Focus Afrique" were not exclusively residents of Africa, and artists who created works of a "Focus Marseille" were sometimes other than French, and frequently other than Marseillais. José Vidal, of Chile, presented *Rito de Primavera* under the genre "Focus Marseille;" Eva Doumbia, born in Le Havre, France, presented *Communauté* under "Focus Afrique." This crossover worked against spatial divides and undermined nationalistic rhetoric of viewing birthplace as a primary factor in figuring national identity.

Even though the festival listed pieces as particularly Marseillais, they were not always themselves of Marseille. *Sanctuary* premiered in Athens and then toured Germany prior to its inclusion in the festival. Similarly, *100% Marseille* is a prime example of what Keren Zaiontz has called a "transposable dramaturgy"—a global dramaturgical model that nonetheless seeks to produce "local" voices everywhere it goes (2014). Past iterations

<sup>15</sup> Diversity, in this writing, follows rhetoric on immigration that traces ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural diversity. It does not speak to diversity of gender or differently-abled bodies, for example, as this language was less visible in my experience of the festival. My application of the term is not meant to disavow the value of such diversity.

include, for example, *100% Vancouver*, *100% London*, and *100% Tokyo*. But it is precisely this kind of transmutability, rather than pure inheritance, that motivated me to see the festival as a prepositional event: the performances became structures for facilitating relationality, for transfiguring a non-place of commodity-driven encounters into a more settled place with relational meaning. The fact that producing the “local” was enmeshed within an explicitly global set of products of the international festival circuit became a productive tension of the festival, a blurring of local-global, center-periphery dynamics that I first perceived in the graffitied wall. If this rendered the Festival de Marseille itself a global product, rather than one belonging exclusively to the French public and cultural policy discourse, it also destabilized the fixed idea of place precisely because these pieces first came to stage elsewhere.

Thus, through the off-stage movement facilitated between sites, by audience members in attendance and through artistic collaborations in performance and rehearsal alike, the festival confronted the city’s migratory aesthetics and resulting history of non-placement. Through its intentional redistribution of the city, identity was contested through mobility, emphasizing a new spatial configuration in which new relationships were allowed to form, and suggesting an inclusive alternative to the restrictive binary of foreigner or French—an alternative where identity was not reduced to an *either-or* but a *both-and*. It did not demand that to present something as Marseillais would require local residence, and by extension did not presume that something French would require national citizenship.

In the years that followed, the festival remained “an event that really belongs to the city’s people and involves them in its development, while never losing its ability to surprise them, move them—and even unsettle them” (“Festivi’alliés,” n.d.) To better facilitate a relationship to the city, the idea of a “partner audience” emerged in 2016, with residents of the city being featured online, sharing their biographies alongside the artists. 2017 was the first year of Le MarsLab, a “forum for interaction, discussion and networking for young local artists working in different disciplines. It allows them to enrich their creative approach via in-depth discussions with the artists involved in the Festival” (“Le Marslab,” n.d.). 2017 was also the inaugural year of the “Festival of Ideas,” a series of workshops, lectures, and roundtables that accompanied the performances, involving local teachers and researchers in more academically focused work. The festival has also maintained an official partnership with the city’s student programming, including the Marseille frère de ses étudiants program and the Carte Culture of Aix-Marseille University (“Educational,” n.d.). Such efforts underscore a value of live art as an experience both social and intellectual, and evidence the structures that allow for internal flows to eddy toward a larger current of exchange, resisting the commodity-critique levied against international festivals.

### During the Festival de Marseille: offering public space

In reading and recounting what social anthropologist Cris Shore writes on the culture of policy, politics of institutions, and European ethnography—that “to put it in more theoretical terms, the invention and expansion of EU-wide policies toward ‘culture’ is in itself a measure of the development of a new type of relationality of government; ... ‘EU governmentality’”—I recognize that debates such as these require tangible sites of negotiation, not just space for theoretical discussion (Shore, 2006, p. 9). In 2017, the Festival de Marseille opened at La Friche la Belle de Mai, “a new territory of art” as opposed to a state theater, such as La Criée (Ingram, 2011, p. 64). First renovated in 1992, the complex is in constant flux, yet hosts over 600 events and nearly half a million guests each year, in addition to 70 on-site organizations. La Friche “affirms the close relationship it has with the surrounding area in formal and informal ways—through cultural initiatives with local schools and community centers in the Belle de Mai, by opening a playground and sports area, and by re-opening the Gyptis Cinema in the heart of the community,” though these intentions are not always realized (La Friche, n.d.). La Friche’s position since 2007 as a semi-private Société Coopérative d’Intérêt Collectif (a cooperative society of collective interest), both draws on centralized policy principles and negotiates its inclusion in the EU’s urban redevelopment program, *Euroméditerranée*.<sup>16</sup> More than a decade after Ingram’s compelling ethnography of the arts in this particular ecodistrict, within the context of the festival, the venue utopically attempted to be the site of a prepositional event, connecting neighbors, municipalities, and nationalities in a sprawling, urban venue.<sup>17</sup>

To enter the sprawling performance venue, I crossed under an overpass plastered with weathered advertisements; the layered ephemera echoed the palimpsest of histories of the mural that first framed my experience of the city. A chain link fence surrounded the property, opening into a concrete courtyard to the right of an exposed warehouse-now-converted-theater complex. A basketball court was situated next to a few skateboard ramps and a ping-pong table, all in use. To the right of this scene, teenagers lounged against the cement wall as though they belonged in this urban playground. It would have been desolate, but the wall was skillfully colored with graffiti, indicating life and voice—or laughter, cries, and life, to return to Labé’s transformed verse. In the afternoon, children filled

<sup>16</sup> Ingram explores this decentralized form of governance and its limits, as based on 2006 ethnographic research, in relation to French cultural policy.

<sup>17</sup> For more on La Friche’s renovation and evolution, see: Della Casa F. 2013, *La friche la belle de mai: Projet culturel-projet urbain / Marseille*, Actes Sud; or Rosenquist M. 2019, *La friche la Belle de Mai à Marseille: Espaces industriels, politiques culturelles et art contemporain*, Presses universitaires de Provence, Aix-en-Provence.

the space with shrieks of giddy laughter and playful footsteps. By evening patrons trickled in, their pristine attire replacing the athletic clothes, a demure murmur replacing spontaneous cries. The local youth faded into the shadows, displaced as the newcomers gathered outside the theater, a growing crowd that pushed others into the edges of the space.

I offer a thick description of this “indeterminate space” because of the importance of the location of La Friche la Belle de Mai for the opening weekend. The numerous subsequent performances there refuted preconceptions of state opulence associated with the performance spaces in French culture (Rosenquist, 2015). Later, as the festival progressed, audiences transitioned into more aesthetically-formalized spaces for theater, evidence of the fortune historically engendered to French haute-culture: La Criée, Théâtre des Bernardines, and the National Ballet de Marseille, for example. Yet the festival chose to begin in a repurposed place of industrialization that was rich in its embrace of its own shifting histories. This warehouse was once a tobacco manufacturer (tobacco having been a prominent colonial export), and thus its twenty-first-century occupation by a festival with a “Focus Afrique” became a less than subtle gesture at the possibility of rectifying colonialist histories—of addressing a wound of the city at its site. This effort toward stability was complicated by the omnipresent notion of migration, as the venue was situated next to an active railroad and the Saint Charles station, a reflection of the city’s port identity even when away from the water. The tracks served as a constant reminder of the migrating patterns of human life, and the perils of immigration policy that too often follow. On stage, however, participants were allowed a space to be *de Marseille*—to gesture away from a colonial history and toward a new relationship with France, if only temporarily.

The continued renovation of the historical warehouse indicated that France, too, was still developing, and distorted the binary distinction between cultures in a developing-developed world. Like the mural, the site was not a commercial space until the artist arrived to reconfigure perceptions of institutional structure. To be brought there was to recognize beauty in a new ideal of virtuosity not rooted in courtly origins, to commit to a future of the arts that began away from the center.<sup>18</sup> Or so it claimed. While the (financial) accessibility of the festival worked against the fear of this site becoming a place of slum tourism for the bourgeoisie, the life of La Friche outside of the festival posited a more difficult history. La Friche was designed to be a space that could accommodate the community in which it was situated, but it was also clearly directed toward an upper-middle-class and “bobo” sensibility. Gentrification—if yet

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<sup>18</sup> For a broader review of the space of cultural politics in post-war France, see: Urfalino P. *L'invention de la politique culturelle*, Fayard, col. Pluriel, 2011, 1ère édition en 1996 (trad. en portugais, *A invenção da política cultural*, Edição SESC, São Paulo, 2016).

to touch upon this area as it has elsewhere, such as nearer to the Vieux Port, but still nearby—weighed on the site, a held breath of anticipated displacement.

Due to La Friche la Belle de Mai's embrace of its non-classical and industrial aesthetic, the moment of exit from the performances was less abrupt. The resemblance of the interior of the theater to the concrete exterior of the street eased the return to reality. Audience members were not jarred awake from a dream-state with a grandiose curtain fall and overhead chandeliers brightening, as typical with the affluent state theaters. No fantastical strike of the clock at midnight shattered the reality temporarily constructed on stage. As the theater-goers left on foot, the pedestrian act and methodical pace of walking encouraged reflection, conversation, and comingling among the audience. I walked out with a solo attendee who offered me directions; a few days later, I serendipitously met him again on the sidewalk, a familiar face in a sea of strangers that exemplified the festival's potential.

Linguistic traces supplement the visual in my experience of the venue. *La friche* in La Friche la Belle de Mai translates to “the wilderness/wasteland,” evoking the dated sentiment of viewing the place of minorities as an undesired destination, the underbelly of a nation, without meaningful exchange and the chance for full placement. Understanding these linguistic clues provides insight into the strategy of the location—a space now filled with art and culture and attended by the public—as the grand opening of a state-sponsored festival.<sup>19</sup> As such, it mimicked the juxtaposition of the graffitied words “Je ris / Je pleure / Je vis” and validated the potential of integration of previously separate spheres of influence: specifically, the potential of financial precarity and foreignness as a visible part of contemporary French identity. The divide between center and periphery was thus submerged into a borderland of existence, where a non-place could become a place. Gloria Anzaldúa's poetic words remain unfortunately relevant.

Municipal support from both local and regional bureaus indicated political recognition of the value of the festival and its efforts. Jean-Claude Gaudin, the mayor of Marseille from 1995 to 2020 and affiliated with the liberal-conservative party Les Républicains,<sup>20</sup> reiterated the local government's investment in the arts and the festival.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The festival was subsidized by: la ville de Marseille, la Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, le Ministère de la culture et de la communication, la direction régionale des affaires culturelles, le Conseil départemental des Bouches-du-Rhône, and les Actions Culturelles d'Arte. It received additional support from media sources such as *La Provence* and *La Marseillaise*, and benefits from partnerships with the Marseille Office de Tourisme et des Congrès and Aix-Marseille-Provence.

<sup>20</sup> Gaudin was succeeded by Michèle Rubirola in July 2020.

<sup>21</sup> To contextualize the political uses of culture in Marseille more generally, and the former Marseille mayor Jean-Claude Gaudin's endorsement of the Festival de Marseille specifically, see: Maisetti N. 2017, *Marseille, ville du monde. L'internationalisation d'une métropole morcelée*, pref. André Donzel, Questions Transnationales, Karthala, Paris, p. 304.

This endorsement from a public official heightened the festival's visibility as a public structure for Marseille's *vivre-ensemble* attitude, rather than a site of private ideas exclusive of the national. It also established a relationship between the festival and state, supplementing the performer-to-city dynamic suggested above. But I'm reminded of Ingram's hesitant description: "Rather than a melting pot, Marseille is a place where communities do co-exist, but often warily and at a distance" (Ingram, 2011, p. 66). Crowded together in one venue, an informal community was formed, this time not at a distance, but perhaps only momentarily.

At best, festivals provide participants with a place for performing citizenship; they structure space for transforming the experience of distance into an activity of proximity. Felicia McCarren references this construction of embodied citizenship when she describes a place where "people can insist upon difference without losing their stake for equality and avoid a racism defined through ethnicity or redirected against immigration or religion: the very cultural diversity that is celebrated in the arts" (McCarren, 2013, p. 26). Thus, the value of the Festival de Marseille moved beyond merely locating public space for the underrepresented of Marseille to locating a place to speak as a part of French culture. Equally important, it offered an audience for such utterances and the opportunity of interaction.

### **Under the Festival de Marseille: against a utopic imagination of space**

If, as I have argued, the overarching dramaturgy of the festival operated as a prepositional event that offered structures of interaction to convert political non-place to place, some performance pieces inverted this dynamic as a form of critique. To the former, *100% Marseille* invited 100 residents on stage to act as data points. Through careful spatial arrangements on the stage, the bodies visualized the city's statistics. *Rito de Primavera*, in a dynamic adaptation of the neoclassical ballet *The Rite of Spring*, eventually invited the audience on stage as the performance collapsed into a collective rave. Non-place became place as interaction and exchange occurred. In contrast to these utopian moments—moments featuring choreography that imagined a more equal future of placement—*Sanctuary* inverted this dynamic, isolating both its performers and audience members and creating strict barriers to belonging that underscored the rigidity of identity formation when space is disavowed. *Sanctuary* was directed by South African Brett Bailey and performed by a team of eight artists coming to the stage with unique stories of migration between places such as Syria, Greece, and Germany. Many of the performers were themselves refugees. The festival listed the performance as both "Focus Marseille" and "Focus Afrique"; only one actor was exclusively French Marseillaise. Given this international configuration, the piece transitioned the understanding of the festival



from a mere meditation of French citizenship to an expression of citizenship in and as globalization, crossing boundaries across the shores of the Mediterranean, between the center and periphery. This cue to view the politics of the festival beyond the national borders of France was made poignant by the renewed support for Le Front National's anti-globalization politics in the elections preceding the festival, as well as the contemporary shift from colonialism to immigration and trade in France's global profile.

Bailey emphasized the precarity of statelessness by forcing the audience to migrate through spaces of confinement. The piece began with audience members entering the performance space one-by-one, a labyrinth constructed out of a tall chain-linked fence made opaque by a blue tarp and ominously lined with barbed wire above. Once inside, it was impossible to see out. The first designated space was a waiting room; benches lined the sterile walls. Rotating projections of European cities appeared on one wall, all idyllic photographs that might be published in an expensive travel catalogue: Grecian beaches with whitewashed houses and striking azure doors, a royal view of Neuschwanstein, the Champs-Élysées. Only signs sponsored by the EU indicating no phones, no headscarves, no cameras, no talking, and no guns ominously warned of the tragedy ahead—an acerbic refrain of the 2013 Capital of Culture logo that foregrounded my experience.

Cued by the repetition of the cycle of photographs, the audience then navigated alone through the labyrinth to proceed through eight rooms, each containing solo installations. I continued with the agency to view at my own pace, to sit in the discomfort provoked by the images or flee to the next. A plaque next to each room—or rather cell—labeled the scene and provided a brief description for those patient enough to read. The construction was reminiscent of a zoo, the sentiment of voyeurism strong: the body on display in each cell was reduced to visual consumption, the balance of power and freedom between the performer and audience member clearly unequal. Jacques Rancière writes that “[t]he place of political subject is an interval of a fissure: a being-together as being-in-between: between names, identities, cultures” (Rancière, 2012). The performers complicated this understanding: they were in-between but not together, not recognized as being in the fissure. Rather, they were in a wasteland, the bottom of *la friche*, performing from the periphery, between spaces not yet located.

*Sanctuary* was a French premiere, having previously been staged in Athens and Hamburg, two cities also enduring controversy over refugees. During the festival, it ran thirty times across six days. Like much of the festival, it too took place at La Friche la Belle de Mai. However, this piece did not occupy a formal theater of the complex, but rather situated itself partially underground in a parking garage of the former warehouse. This

liminal space primed the audience to believe that these bodies were outcasts of society, not truly meant to be seen or heard, just shadows exiled to the periphery of the community. The parking lot setting also underscored the transitory state of existence belonging to refugees, highlighting the absence of a place for them to park, so to speak, outside of the construction of the festival.

The first scene, entitled “Red Carpet,” presented a man arriving on shore with an infant in his arms, his torso and face square to the audience. This peaceful landscape was broken by the barrier of police shields between him and the audience, and by artifacts of shoes and clothing strewn about to indicate bodies left behind. He stared at me, but did not move or speak, as though his agency had been stripped away. He only had the faculty to plea, condemn, and arrest with his eyes—and to hope that his gaze would be returned. Spectatorship would remain central throughout the performance, as the performers were seen but never heard, a critique of representation that bled into the political. By having the actor return my gaze without breaking contact, I began to feel vulnerable. I had arrogantly come to view, not to be viewed. After this first scene, the audience then walked past “Black Friday,” a scene in which the sale of women’s lingerie, shoes, and handbags is foregrounded by a woman in a hijab sitting in a wheelchair and backlit by a haunting red glow. She too was labeled “for sale.” Then, the audience proceeded past an ex-revolutionist from Syria in “Quarantine.” He sat in solitary confinement, alone with a ticking metronome, eyes blank. Each figure was frozen in their dystopia, only able to confront the voyeurs through eye contact. But beyond the titles and identifiers, who were these exiled corps?

The biographical information of each character was provided to the audience as they exited the labyrinth. Notably, the biographies presented were not those of their fictional personas, but their personal stories of migration, and drew attention to the subtle difference between reality and representation in critical engagement of documentary theater. *Sanctuary* presented a scene in drama, the act of staging implying a fabricated reality, yet the truth of the actors’ lives consumed the performance. A few days later, an audience member remembered this tension: “The difficulty, or the ambiguity, is that we saw you as fiction, but in our hearts we know it is real” (“Rencontre,” 2017). The representation of refugee-ness was given a place of belonging; in the parking lot of La Friche la Belle de Mai, and again through documentation by festival programs, press reviews, and local media. This stability of belonging afforded by documentation, however, could not be guaranteed in reality.

The iteration of eight different scenes accumulated toward a larger narrative in which the relationality of the disparate performances was exposed. The artists foreshadowed the indifference that comprised this common thread, several times exhibiting signs that read: “I see you

not seeing me.” This accusation emphasized that the “millions of people suspended in the books, in the margins of the Civilized World, in search of a new place to feel at home” are without aid or active efforts from many around the world (Bailey, “Programme”). It underscored the idea that those in exile are forced to the non-place of societies, to occupy a transient space less privileged and less seen. At the conclusion, spectators were not provided the opportunity to applaud, to express their gratitude for the performers’ endurance and vulnerability. They did not reunite as an audience. They simply arrived at the end of the labyrinth as individuals, somberly set free to choose to ponder or forget the experience and continue with their daily lives.

This performance piece forced an affective experience of non-place for the audience as relationships, comradery, and the utopic *communitas* of theater were disavowed (Dolan, 2010). The solo journey of the audience, coupled with the compartmentalized solo performances of the actors, inhibited interaction and any relational dynamic, forcing an individualism emblematic of Augé’s non-place. Instead, the audience became singular voyeurs, privy to the tragedy of a space sardonically titled *Sanctuary*. I traveled alone, not influenced by—or even aware of—my fellow audience members’ reactions. The relationship was exclusively between myself and each performer.

### **After the Festival de Marseille: reinterpreting the festive**

Although the festival resisted neither difference nor dissonance, it leveraged performance to address the division of the city—expressed through the divided political polls, shaped by the physical gap of Mediterranean Sea, reinforced through targeted political policies, and traced back to colonialism—in order to rehearse a new relationality of and to place. The national hesitation to move away from a homogenous space was interrupted, while an inclusive French identity was performed. The 2017 iteration of the festival promoted a layered, as opposed to discrete, concept of identity, scaffolded by institutional histories, sites of symbioses, points of meeting, and places of encounter, such as seen in the graffitied mural and suggested by the palimpsest of positionality curated at the event. As a result of the festival’s geographic presence, the cityscape was reconstructed with altered demographics, and bodies of the periphery were allowed to take center stage. Encounters between spectator and performer, local and foreign, state and festival, were negotiated in-the-live through the shared event of the festival, and reflected through the site-specific performance *Sanctuary*.

Throughout this chapter, my aim has been to emphasize the ways in which the festival facilitated a movement from non-place to place, transience to emplacement, with

careful attention to the geopolitical specificity of the site: Marseille 2017. Festivals that do so have the opportunity to move beyond the multicultural failures of globalization that underscore their contemporary critique. When the festival is featured as a prepositional event—rather than a commercial enterprise, aesthetic competition, or superfluous fête—something meaningful remains in the crevices, seams, joints, gaps and fissures, between places of relationality. Throughout its duration in the city, the festival bridged non-place to place and facilitated meaningful relationships in transitory spaces of encounter, between individuals who might not otherwise have met. It moved not necessarily toward the EU’s broader principle of “unity in diversity,” but toward visible and valuable relationality of difference. If utopic, the festival affirmed if and how festivals can once again become “genuine avant-garde drivers of artistic creativity and civic emancipation” (Goossens, 2018). In 2020, this mission of reinventing the festival continues in Marseille. By returning to the 2017 iteration, I believe that a new value to the structure of the festival is understood: a motility that allows for an embodied response to the center-periphery divide that continues to haunt identity politics in the present. This particular iteration became a means of confronting the city’s (colonial) past, of filling the resulting void—the non-place of constant motion—that immigrants, refugees, and foreigners have been forced to occupy. It constructed, seen and unseen, a common space of exchange for the performers and audience. From the periphery, it created a space for identity, for witnessing, and for recognition, if not also for understanding. Although the utopian community of the festival was at times staged and not real, it was finally embodied, thus crossing previous boundaries of the center and peripheries of belonging. In the future, there remains the ambition for festivals to “radically foster contextual creations, interactions between artists and cities, and the mobilization of new audiences drawn from ranks that are not controlled by the political establishment” (Goossens, 2018). But in 2017, a step toward this reinvented festival was made.

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Years later, the image of gold letters taken in transit still burns in my mind. I saw it first in passing in 2015—two years later, I returned on the same route from Aix-en-Provence, my camera ready. As I write now, it might have been washed away, or re-layered one more time. I cannot say. But for me, the center of Marseille was this building on the periphery, only marginally within the parameters of city limits. It stayed with me not because of where it was located, but because of what it depicted—the intersection of a Venn diagram, the axis of two aesthetic platters tipped until they poured into one. A visual of encounter. Places and non-places, with a bridge from one to the next.

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Floor 26 of Ho King Commercial Centre in Yau Ma Tei, the elevator stops.

At the end of the corridor, the sound of a heavy metal band, detuned screams buffered by the cracked plywood door of a tiny music studio. Outdated factory buildings in Kwun Tong, industrial architecture gradually surrounded by new commercial and residential complexes; their precarious wait for urban renewal has offered an opportunity for young musicians to establish music studios, classrooms, or improvised bedrooms where music and teenage discoveries mingle with the noise of machinery. A rusty anonymous intercom partially hidden by some plastic ivies. Past the door, a narrow metallic staircase, source of random encounters and only access point to a one-off experience; hundreds of people—local and foreigners—gathered in a tiny dark room, a miscellany of sweat, smoke, voices, and distant music. The hidden networks formed by musicians scattered in unexpected venues around Hong Kong provide a sonic collage that reformulates some of the city's social peripheries from within. Through emergent sub-cultures, young artists deploy a wide range of tactics to counter the commodification and politicization of creativity, and the speculation over space in order to achieve new opportunities in a “bureaucratic society of controlled consumption.” In his work on everyday life, which focuses on the resistance of (extra)ordinary people to structures of power, Michel de Certeau makes reference to the idea of “silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality.” The main actors of this essay, despite feeding on and actively participating in Hong Kong's consumerism dynamics by taking references from social media, e-commerce, or shopping malls, produce “wandering lines” —or wandering sounds— with their own (syn)tactics through their artistic practices. Notably, in Hong Kong's reductionist bureaucratic system, with a strong predominance of statistics and evaluation focused on “classifying, calculating and putting into tables,” these artistic rituals and reinterpretations of the city's culture often remain overlooked or hidden to the system.

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# HIDDEN MUSIC SCENES: GOVERNMENTALITY AND CONTESTATION IN POSTCOLONIAL HONG KONG

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Diego Caro

## Intro

Floor 26 of Ho King Commercial Centre, the elevator stops. At the end of the corridor, the sounds of a heavy metal band, detuned screams buffered by the cracked plywood door of a tiny music studio. When the door opens, a loud guitar riff makes the walls tremble while a young shopkeeper smokes indifferently in the fire staircase. Built in the 1980s, this building, located in Yau Ma Tei area, was known for its origins of being the site of illegal sale of pornographic VCDs by Hong Kongese triads. Currently, it hosts an accidental blend of commercial and leisure premises, cheap hostels, and apartments.

Outdated factory buildings in Kwun Tong, San Po Kong, and Kwai Hing, industrial architecture gradually surrounded by newly built commercial and residential complexes, condemned to a postponed demolition by land speculation. Its precarious wait for urban renewal has offered an opportunity for young musicians to establish music studios, classrooms, or improvised bedrooms where music and teenage discoveries mingle with the noise of hoists and repetitive machinery. In Kwun Tong, Hidden Agenda—what would become the most well-known independent live music venue in Hong Kong—emerged in 2009 as an underground music venue, providing space for an alternative to Cantopop mainstream.<sup>1</sup> Chased by government officials from venue to venue, this organization has become a symbol of the resistance of independent music culture against governmentality over art expression. In January 2018 it re-opened in its fifth location under the name This Town Needs (TTN), this time in Yau Tong area.<sup>2,3</sup>

Such hidden networks, formed by musicians and scattered in unexpected venues around Hong Kong, provide a sonic collage that reformulates some of the city's peripheries from within.<sup>4</sup> These networks, or scenes, are not limited to their spatial aspects within Hong Kong's

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<sup>1</sup> Cantopop is a contraction of Cantonese pop music.

<sup>2</sup> The name This Town Needs refers to the British rock band This Town Needs Guns, who were arrested while performing at Hidden Agenda in 2017 (Lord, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> In February 2020, while this essay was being revised, TTN closed its doors for good with a last farewell gig.

<sup>4</sup> This essay is accompanied by a playlist, a sort of subjacent soundtrack of these hidden music scenes. Links for each song can be found in the "Soundtrack" list at the end of this essay.



geography, but involve a whole array of alternative activities, social connections, and artistic initiatives that are decoded throughout this text. Through emergent sub-cultures, young artists deploy a wide range of tactics to counter the commodification and politization of creativity, as well as the speculation over space, in order to achieve new opportunities in a “bureaucratic society of controlled consumption.”<sup>5</sup> In his work on everyday life, which focuses on the resistance of (extra)ordinary people to structures of power, Michel de Certeau (1984) makes reference to the idea of “silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality.”<sup>6</sup> The main actors of this essay, despite feeding on and actively participating in Hong Kong’s consumerism dynamics by taking references from social media, e-commerce, or shopping malls, produce “wandering lines” — or wandering sounds — with their own (syn)tactics through their artistic practices. Notably, in Hong Kong’s reductionist bureaucratic system, with a strong predominance of statistics and evaluation focused on “classifying, calculating and putting into tables,” these artistic rituals and reinterpretations of the city’s culture often remain overlooked or *hidden* to the system (*Ibidem*).

The present analysis of these non-mainstream musical interventions in space, focusing on Hong Kong’s alternative/indie rock music scene, unveils deeply rooted issues in the city in the following order: past and present debates on culture and art in Hong Kong as a global financial hub; the “post-1980 generation’s” means of expressing its latent discontent in a special administrative region with an uncertain future;<sup>7</sup> and the continuities and discontinuities of Hong Kong’s colonial past via (a not always sophisticated) governmentality and its contestations. The essay ends with a glimpse of the embodiment of Hong Kong’s periphery through lights and sounds, and a brief conclusion/encore.

### **Creating art in a global financial hub**

Market dynamics in Hong Kong in the past four decades have given way to spatial paradoxes where what might appear as opposite realms, like those of indie rock music and banking, are tightly interconnected. The relocation of Hong Kong’s manufacturing

<sup>5</sup> “Bureaucratic Society of Controlled Consumption” is the second chapter of Henri Lefebvre’s book *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, in which he studies the spatial and temporal implications of modernity, where obscure systems aim at “systematizing thought and structuralizing action,” consolidating dynamics of production and consumption (Lefebvre, 1984, pp. 68–109).

<sup>6</sup> De Certeau makes use of the idea of “wandering lines” to refer to those unforeseeable trajectories and actions made by consumers of the functionalized city that “respond to interests and desires neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop” (Certeau, 1984, p. xviii).

<sup>7</sup> The term “post-1980 generation” (Hong Kong) gained popularity during the 2010s in association with a particular political and national consciousness. Their discourse is marked by issues of national sovereignty, urban heritage, and democracy. An important reference is the sociologist Lui Tai Lok, especially his booklet *Four generations of Hong Kong people* (2007).

enterprises to Mainland China in the 1980s provoked the abandonment of many industrial buildings; the metropolis shifted from being a manufacturing hub in the post–World War II period to a financial center, giving way to new scales and modes of consumption.<sup>8</sup> High-rise towers owned by big corporations loomed along the Central Harbourfront in the north of Hong Kong Island, site of the first British settlements and symbol of the city’s international status. Hong Kong was presented as the Asian city of the future, a new economy with a new look, new markets and trends, that shaped one of the most prominent real estate markets of the world. Being part of a key node of international networks where global creative markets are a priority asset, what are the means through which Hong Kong’s underground culture can flourish, challenging the marriage of convenience between art and finance?<sup>9</sup>

[Track 1. *One O’Clock* by Chochukmo]

Starting mainly in the early 1990s, the increase of empty industrial buildings in Hong Kong gave way to a reclamation of these spaces by different art groups.<sup>10</sup> The resulting dynamics led to the establishment of different peripheral clusters of artists in areas like: Chai Wan (located at the east end of Hong Kong Island), with spaces like Asia One Tower, headquarters of Asia One publishing company and art exhibition space, and other galleries and studios; Fo Tan (located in Sha Tin, New Territories), mainly focused on visual arts and site of the open studio festival Fotanian; and Wong Chuk Hang (Southern District of Hong Kong Island), with art galleries and organizations such as Hong Kong Free Press, and whose value has increased noticeably since the completion of the South Island MTR line in 2016 that connects the area with the booming business hub Admiralty. Kwun Tong positioned itself as the main hub for musicians, and recent fieldwork shows the emergence of another cluster of musicians in Kwai Hing.<sup>11</sup> These artistic spaces, without the spatial restrictions and regulations of areas like Hong Kong’s Soho, are versatile and adaptable, often generating opportunities

<sup>8</sup> On the evolution of Hong Kong’s spaces of consumption, see Mathews and Lui, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> The lack of governmental support for emergent small-scale artists versus grand official projects that serve global markets linked to real estate is a hotly debated issue in Hong Kong. The West Kowloon Cultural District project, for example, has been the most controversial case in recent years and is paradigmatic of the role that Hong Kong’s upper echelons are trying to play in the realm of international art and culture exhibitions, but also in creative innovative industries related to advertising, digital technology and entertainment, film, and television.

<sup>10</sup> By 2009 there were approximately 1.07 million square meters of under-utilized or vacant industrial buildings in Hong Kong (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, 2009). According to a survey carried out in 2010 by Hong Kong Arts Development Council, the majority of artists using these industrial buildings belonged to a young generation (47% aged between 25 and 39), and music and visual arts were the major types of art practiced (around 37.5% each). Most recent data indicate a changing trend toward marketing and advertising sectors (Hong Kong Planning Department, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> The same survey by the Hong Kong Planning Department, “Business Establishments in Kowloon East 2018,” indicates that there are around 1,358 art establishments in Kwun Tong district, among which 85.7% are in industrial buildings. Unofficial estimates suggest, however, that these figures could be higher due to a large number of art studios that are not registered as such.

for multidisciplinary collaborations. An example is Osage Gallery, currently located in Kwon Tong after relocating in 2007 from the Soho area, where visual arts, music, performances, and film are combined, debates are hosted, and cultural and artistic awareness is promoted through Osage Art Foundation.

The buildings in which these networks thrive, however, live in a precarious state of latency, ambiguously regulated by the government and waiting for property developers to target them, either for renovation or for demolition. In recent years, industrial buildings like these have become the main asset for real estate investment backed by the Revitalizing Industrial Building (RIB) Scheme 2009-2010 presented by the Hong Kong SAR Government. The consequences of these projects have manifested in a great increase of rental prices for these spaces—between 200% and 300%—that artists cannot afford.<sup>12</sup>

A central theme in this cultural crossroads is the unbalanced battle over space in the city. A great percentage of the struggles of the Hong Kongese people are deeply rooted in spatial inequality and inaccessibility—be it in the form of housing, public spaces, or cultural venues. The Hong Kong SAR Government is both landowner and lawmaker over a territory with a complex geography, which often leads to controversial relations between the administration and large real estate corporations. These dynamics, inherited from the colonial era, have continued and intensified in recent years, partly fueled by the influx of Mainland Chinese capital in real estate, the privatization of public spaces, and the promotion of mega-projects such as the West Kowloon Cultural District, all of which contribute to increasing tensions in an already distressed context. Diverse protests during the past two decades have been triggered by new urban developments (like the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link in 2009-10) or in defense of urban heritage (such as the Star Ferry Pier in Edinburgh's Place and Queen's Pier, in 2006 and 2007 respectively).

The unprecedented demonstrations that have taken place in Hong Kong since the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill protests and, perhaps more visibly, the movement Occupy Central in 2014, can be seen as blunt illustrations of the ongoing battles over public space between young demonstrators and the government (represented by the police) in Hong Kong's main streets, institutional buildings, and university complexes.<sup>13, 14</sup> During the

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<sup>12</sup> More than 77% of the revitalized spaces are currently used as offices (see Chan, Cheung & Wong, 2015, pp. 184–90).

<sup>13</sup> The 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill (Anti-ELAB) movement was a response to the proposal for an extradition bill that was considered by many as a direct attack to the independence of Hong Kong's legal system by the People's Republic of China through Carrie Lam's administration; violence escalated as a response to the brutality in the handling of the confrontations by the police, who became a key motor and target of the movement.

<sup>14</sup> To better understand some of these contemporary phenomena in a global context see Harvey, 2012.

2019 Anti-ELAB demonstrations, the protesters made five demands—“not one less”—that, loaded with emotion and anger, clearly denoted the following political and cultural motivations: the 2019 Extradition Bill proposal, distrust in Chief Executive Carrie Lam’s government and police force, negative perception of China as a backward antidemocratic nation, and the pursuit of universal democratic values.<sup>15</sup> Despite the absence of a demand that explicitly addresses economic and spatial concerns, it has been suggested that the discontent evident at these protests was also rooted in such components, related as they are to future uncertainties regarding housing accessibility and the scarcity of possibilities in a highly competitive job market (both of which dramatically impede young people’s economic independence).<sup>16, 17</sup>

### **Hidden (music) generation: school uniforms and black worn out T-shirts**

Young local musicians in dark clothes, highly trained from a very early age under the competitive pressures of Hong Kong’s education system; a sort of silent punk culture, they represent a mix of discipline, laconic virtuosity, and repressed discontent. The difficulties suffered by the art fields in Hong Kong can be explained to some degree as a result of the education system’s prioritization of market-oriented “practical” careers to the detriment of Art and Humanities; this trend, initiated during the British occupation, has continued after the Hong Kong Handover. From 1997, nonetheless, there has been a clear political attempt to promote Chinese culture in schools and all aspects of life—an attempt to define or consolidate an “imposed” identity—that has provoked a reaction among the post-1980s generation (who grew up listening to popular Cantopop hits). This reaction, or awakening, expresses a sense of rejection and the will to search for their own original identity.

The (until recently) “hidden” talents, those that have learned and practiced music in scattered peripheries surrounded by the boisterous rhythm of the metropolis—are representative of the dissatisfaction of the post-1980s generation. Children of a sinking middle class, rooted in Hong Kong, they have emerged as a political force, becoming visible and expressing their frustration in the streets (Siu, 2011, pp. 129–159). Most of these young musicians, despite forming a heterogeneous group, share similar characteristics: they live with their parents or in small shared apartments; one of their main concerns is that they do not see any

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<sup>15</sup> The five demands were in this order: Full withdrawal of the extradition bill; a commission of inquiry into alleged police brutality; retracting the classification of protesters as “rioters”; amnesty for arrested protesters; and dual universal suffrage, meaning for both the Legislative Council and the Chief Executive.

<sup>16</sup> Researchers from the Asia Competitiveness Institute (ACI) at NUS led by Tan Khue Giap presented the findings of their study on the economic factors behind the massive protests in Hong Kong at the 2019 Asia Economic Forum.

<sup>17</sup> A 2015 survey from the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong indicated housing inaccessibility as one of the key factors of young Hong Kongese’ discontent.



**Fig. 1**  
Images of the  
corridor leading  
to Kai's studio  
and the interior  
of the studio,  
located in San Po  
Kong area of New  
Kowloon, Hong  
Kong (photos:  
Diego Caro,  
October 2019).

possibility of accessing Hong Kong's property market; they feel like there is no future for them in a city with an expiration date (2047);<sup>18</sup> and social media is their common means of interaction.<sup>19</sup> They are mostly students, boys and girls working flexible hours as delivery runners, waiters and waitresses, shopkeepers, music teachers, or, alternatively, new professionals with university degrees working long hours but whose salaries hardly cover their rent. These young people played an important role on the front line of protests, and have formed a dynamic network of artists, gestated in the spaces made possible by industrial buildings.

[Track 2. *Protocol 332* by VIRT]

For many of these youngsters, sharing a cheap rehearsal room with their bandmates in an industrial or commercial building is the only way to have their own space outside their parent's home or school. It is not unusual that those who rent these places occasionally stay overnight, and sometimes even live there (even though it is considered illegal and, in some cases, dangerous due to the poor conditions of the premises). Some of those whom I interviewed affirmed that they rented their first band room at a very young age, starting from 16 years old. Such is the case of Kai.<sup>20</sup>

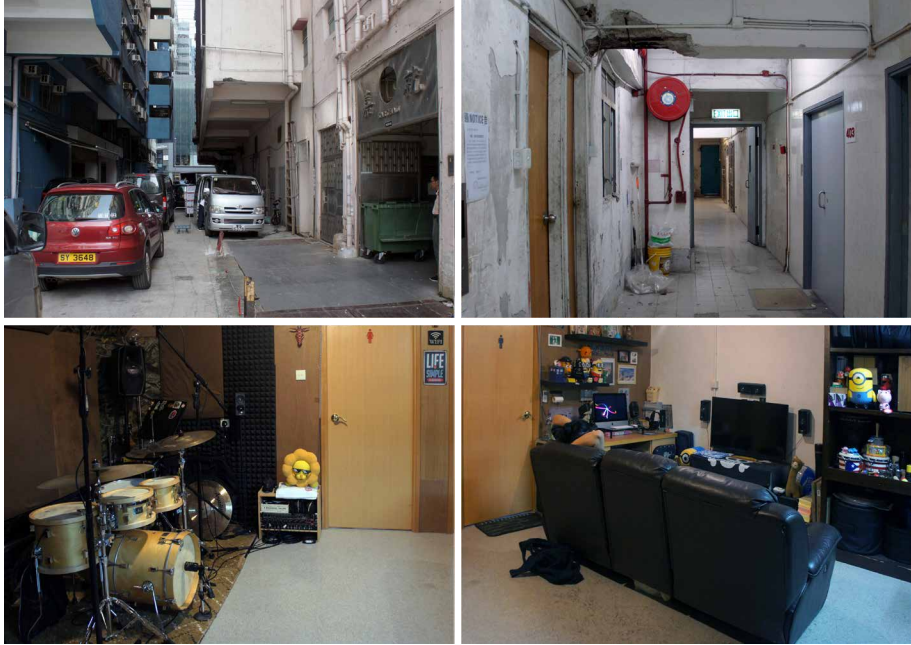
Kai is a 30-year-old percussion teacher and session drummer in jazz clubs of Hong Kong's central business district. He currently shares a 630-square-foot studio space with two other local musicians for a total rent fee of 1,150 USD per month in an industrial building of San Po Kong area in New Kowloon (Fig. 1).<sup>21</sup> The building is accessed through a cul-de-sac street that, at the time of the interview, is completely blocked by different cars and trucks loading and unloading goods. The concierge observes us curiously while I take some pictures of the shabby mailboxes of the building lobby. A freight elevator brings us to a long corridor of damaged walls and ceilings guarded by CCTV cameras—in some parts of the ceiling, the steel reinforcement of the concrete beams has been exposed. According to Kai, there are two more music studios in the building, as well as a photography

<sup>18</sup> According to the Sino-British Joint Declaration signed on 19 December 1984, the United Kingdom Government would return Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China with effect from July 1, 1997. For a period of 50 years after that date, Hong Kong's previous capitalist system was to remain unchanged, following the principle "One country, two systems" that dictated a certain degree of independence with respect to the PRC political system.

<sup>19</sup> The findings presented in this text are drawn from a series of interviews carried out with different musicians and other stakeholders of Hong Kong's music scene (15 interviewees) between the months of May and September 2019. While those interviewed during my fieldwork ranged from age 18 to 60, I focus here on only those belonging to the post-1980s generation.

<sup>20</sup> The pseudonym "Kai" has been used to protect this participant's identity.

<sup>21</sup> This building, the name of which is omitted to keep the privacy of our interviewee, was completed in 1968 and has a total surface of 350,000 square feet (approximately), distributed in 12 floors.



and big drama studio, and a Muay Thai gym. These activities coexist with small storage spaces and mechanical repair workshops.<sup>22</sup>

Once we enter Kai's studio, a feeling of coziness contrasts with the industrial character of the building. He points out the importance of having a room outside his parent's home where he can "chill out, watch TV, work on his computer and, very importantly, store countless instruments and collectible toys." The first reason for him to choose this building was the price and the relative freedom he has when it comes to noisy activities. He had his first studio at the age of 16 with a group of 9 friends that played together in a band located in Wong Chuk Hang area.<sup>23</sup> Soon after that, he started teaching drumming in different studios scattered in industrial buildings around Kwun Tong area.

Emily (28 years old, lawyer) is the lead singer and guitarist of So It Goes and vocalist of the band Foster Studio. She mentions that So It Goes used to rehearse in music rooms located in

<sup>22</sup> Other artists located in different buildings have received noise complaints from neighbors. In some cases, landlords have refused to rent premises to musicians. During my research, several artists have refused to talk as they consider that it might compromise their careers. The regulations on industrial buildings are considered by artists as strong and severely enforced ("Regulation of use of industrial buildings," LCQ18, November 11, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Wong Chuk Hang area, located in the south of Hong Kong Island, has been revitalized through the opening of different coworking spaces, art galleries, and restaurants.



**Fig. 2**  
The former Sense 99 during its farewell party in Wellington Street (photos: Diego Caro, June 2019).

composite buildings of the buzzing areas of Mong Kok or Yau Ma Tei, where the booking costs range between 8 and 25 USD per hour for a packed rehearsal space (between 90 to 200 square feet) with acceptable equipment. These conditions made working on new songs very challenging.<sup>24</sup> She acknowledges, however, the advantages of having their own space to create music without time constraints or the need of carrying instruments in a crowded subway during rush hour. Now, the dynamics with her bands are generally based on “remote rehearsals”; each member records their parts separately and works on songs from their respective residences. They practice together in an industrial space owned by a relative to prepare for their performances, but the long commuting times to the premises, together with their demanding job schedules, do not allow them to meet frequently. This form of rehearsal is common among Hong Kong bands.

[Track 3. *Houston* by Foster Studio]

“Message from Mission Control Center: home is beautiful when it’s far away”

Another option for young creatives are youth centers such as the Warehouse. The Warehouse is an organization that offers “a variety of activities including music, graffiti art, dance, drama, social activities, adventure-based education and sports to youngsters between the ages of 13 and 25.”<sup>25</sup> There are also university music clubs like Hong Kong University Student Union Music Club. However, some youngsters find youth centers quite institutionalized, politicized, or under religious influence, which makes industrial or small commercial premises much more appealing for them.

### **Creative tactics in a global (post)colony: governmentality and its contestations**

A rusty anonymous intercom partially hidden by some plastic ivies. Past the door, a narrow metallic staircase, source of random encounters and only access point to a one-off experience; hundreds of people—local and foreigners—gathered in a tiny dark room, a miscellany of sweat, smoke, voices, and distant music. On June 14, 2019, Hong Kong’s music scene paid tribute to Sense 99, one of the most unique live music venues in Hong Kong Island, with a farewell party that featured performances by Le Groupe Electrogène

<sup>24</sup> Mong Kok and Yau Ma Tei, known as some of the busiest districts in the world, are two adjacent areas of Hong Kong characterized by hectic retail, restaurants, and entertainment activities.

<sup>25</sup> The Warehouse Teenage Club (Warehouse) is a charitable non-profit organization founded in 1992 by professor Frank White of Hong Kong University, housed in what was once Aberdeen Police Station—a grade II historic building (defined by Hong Kong’s Antiques and Monuments Office as “Buildings of special merit; efforts should be made to selectively preserve”). Professor White “observed [that] many [of] Hong Kong’s youngsters lacked a purpose in life and space to develop healthy hobbies and loitered in the streets after school” (Hong Kong Volunteer, 2013).





Fanfare Club (unclassifiable brass ensemble) and Shumking Mansion (funky disco synth-pop) with the participation of artists like the lead singer of After After Party in some of their songs. What had been Sense 99, located on the second and third floors of a colonial-era building at 99 Wellington Street, was moving elsewhere in SOHO area due to a rental increase. “We won’t fundraise, don’t want to give in to real estate developers,” stated the owner as a response to some initiatives presented to cover the rental increase (quoted in Grundy, 2019).<sup>26</sup> This live venue/bar was distributed in two floors of no more than 500 square feet: the first one with a lounge offering alcoholic drinks for a reasonable price, an upright piano, sofas, and a cozy environment; the second floor, dark, with graffiti and bizarre decoration, housed some very worn out music equipment that diverse musicians — most often very talented, but sometimes just random drunk beginners — would play while blending with a mixed audience. This second floor offered a small terrace where customers would go and smoke (Fig. 2).

[Track 4. *I Am Late* by After After Party]

<sup>26</sup> After the high pressures from the property by an excessive rental increase that provoked the closing of Sense 99, the two floors occupied by the live venue were taken over by a barber shop located at the ground floor of the building.



The constant negotiations over place and its narratives, such as we see with Sense 99, are representative of Hong Kong's particular dilemmas when positioning itself as an Asian "worlding city" (Roy & Ong, 2011; Bradser, 2017). Caught up in a Gordian knot created by the pressures of Mainland China influence and Western democracies, Hong Kong's international position—as well as its internal socio-political "equilibrium"—are being challenged.<sup>27</sup> Notions of identity in the city underlie confronting ideas and opinions about absence—particularly, absence of a historic urban legacy—as well as the increasing presence of administrative and spatial strategies that follow Mainland Chinese models. In this respect, a re-definition of post-colonial Hong Kong (and therefore of the national identity of the Hong Kongese people) is subject to the continuities of a land monopoly intensified after 1997, urban policies designed to favor and sustain this monopoly, and the government's strategies on culture (mostly predominated by economic factors before and after the Hong Kong Handover).<sup>28</sup>

Nowadays, China is both a land of business opportunities as well as a catalyst for the anxieties and vulnerabilities of Hong Kong (Siu, 2011). The mainstream music scene of the city is paradigmatic of this situation; whereas in the 1980s Hong Kong's Cantopop was an international benchmark, characterized by its hybrid character and quality of production, in recent years it has experienced a decline—coinciding with the Handover in 1997—as Mandopop, its Mandarin counterpart, has risen in favor (Chu & Leung, 2013). Presently, most of the renowned Cantopop stars rely on the Mainland Chinese market for their success (though there are exceptions, like Denise Ho).<sup>29</sup> Such dependency puts them in a delicate situation when it comes to political positioning—similar to the conflicts of interest experienced by some of Hong Kong's tycoons—and conditions their music and lyrics, especially in the ongoing social unrest of Hong Kong.

A claustrophobic relationship with Mainland China is particularly felt among the post-1980s generation, who do not relate to a Chinese past and who, in some cases, idealize the colonial era. These sentiments have reinforced the Hong Kongese localist movement in recent years (Wong, 2017). In addition to the lack of spaces to perform or listen to live music in the city, the majority of musicians I interviewed emphasized the lack of mobility outside Hong Kong due to the geographical isolation determined by Mainland China and "the sea." Interviewees considered China as a hostile or "forbidden" place to

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<sup>27</sup> Merriam Webster defines the Gordian knot as "a problem insoluble in its own terms."

<sup>28</sup> For more about land policies in Hong Kong see Cuthbert & Mckinnell, 1997, pp. 295–311. For more on culture in Hong Kong see Cartier, 2008, pp. 59–83.

<sup>29</sup> Denise Ho is a singer, actress, and a pro-democracy and human rights activist in Hong Kong. She was one of the five activists testifying at the United States' Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) in Washington, DC, in September 2019.

perform, as many of their lyrics are subjected to censorship there, and playing in China can be seen negatively by other local artists and fans due to emotionally charged political tensions. Thus, progressing as a musician within the Cantonese music scene is difficult due to socio-political and economic obstacles, and entering the English-speaking market, dominated by the Anglo-Saxon world, is another arduous challenge. Moreover, touring outside Hong Kong is often an expensive luxury that underground bands cannot afford.

[Track 5 -彌敦道的一晚 *good trip* by My Little Airport]

Underground artists in Hong Kong, conversely, “no longer care about it”—“it” being the current political situation—as their “songs already got red flagged in China,” as Lam Ah P (frontman of My Little Airport) declared in a recent interview (Wu, 2020). This attitude is liberating when it comes to writing about political and social issues, or to exploring different musical styles, but also indicates a feeling of hopelessness and frustration, as several artists expressed during fieldwork conversations after the disruption in all spheres of life provoked by the Anti-ELAB protests. In addition to further frustration and disillusionment, these clashes—that resulted in the closing of different establishments as well as traffic and public transport disruptions—led to the cancellation of numerous concerts and other musical projects such as album recordings, intensifying the music sector’s precariousness.

Whereas the isolation experienced by these underground artists is a burden in many ways, it also strengthens the local music community, the production of a social space, and a sense of belonging. Ideas of globalization, mobility, and rapid urbanization in the context of Hong Kong are contested on different, everyday scales according to a varied range of societal aspirations (that is, not everyone has the “tools” to respond in such extraordinary ways as these artists). The lack of spaces for rehearsing or performing live music has given way to diverse creative spatial appropriations: ephemeral music venues; spontaneous decoration; informal markets for used musical instruments, equipment, or records (via both the Internet and through local shops like White Noise Records); art installations; paintings and political messages on toilet walls and staircases; posters and stickers distributed around the city; a massive amount of audiovisual web content; and, most importantly, a whole new generation of “do it yourself” music productions in these hidden music scenes with a very particular “Hong Kong sound,” as the music producer and critic Yuen Chi-chung commented during an interview.<sup>30</sup>

These kinds of informal “tactics” have, out of necessity, become common spatial practices

<sup>30</sup> From my conversation with Yuen Chi-chung on January 20, 2020, I would describe this “Hong Kong sound” as a miscellany of moods and alternative styles, with a “do it yourself touch” in terms of audio and production that often results in unorthodox styles and songs.



**Fig. 3**  
Access and interior of Hidden Agenda: This Town Needs at Ocean One in Yau Tong during a concert of the Japanese band Envy (photos: Diego Caro, February 2019).

by lower and middle classes, counteracting the imposed rhythms of “bureaucratic” Hong Kong. Some authors have referred to these practices, as well as to their effects on the urban space of Hong Kong, as “neutral equilibrium” in which different stakeholders’ tactics eventually get to work together (Wai & Zhu, 2016). However, these struggles—especially in underground cultural venues—have become unequivocally political in some cases; such is the example of the above-mentioned Hidden Agenda, or of Sai Coeng.<sup>31</sup> In June 2019, the hitherto latent reappropriation of everyday spaces in Hong Kong exploded, becoming vigorously explicit in the city streets. The massive Anti-ELAB demonstrations provoked the proliferation of countless artistic expressions—especially posters—denouncing the government position toward citizen’s demands. It also led to fundraising gigs and events promoted by musicians and different organizations; the movement even has its own anthem, “Glory to Hong Kong.” During the farewell gig of This Town Needs on February 27, 2020, pro-democracy slogans coming from the audience could be heard in between songs; the same kind of slogans could be heard in other anonymous underground venues that were a part of this study, together with political chants. During some performances artists even took to burning a fake Chinese flag.

[Track 6. *Loosefuck* by David Boring]

On artistic and political levels, it is also relevant for this study to observe how venues like TTN or MOM Live House—together with organizations such as the Void Noize—have collaborated in a twofold exchange between international and local artists.<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, they have provided Hong Kongese bands the opportunity to open acts for renowned international musicians, becoming part of an international network of selected artists and providing visibility to these hidden music scenes. On the other hand, they have managed to spread the Anti-ELAB movement ideas beyond Hong Kong through famous foreign bands. Paradoxically, the ambition of TTN to book good international acts became infeasible in the volatile music scene of Hong Kong due, in part, to the negative effects of the protests in the normal functioning of the city and in its economy. Though they struggled to remain open, they were finally forced to close their doors by the

<sup>31</sup> The Sai Coeng Facebook page, another important underground venue, states the following about its name: “Sai Coeng (細場) is the pronunciation of ‘a small place’ in Cantonese. Aside from describing a physically small area, this name symbolizes our wish for all the possibilities and creativity unlimited by our limited space and resources.”

<sup>32</sup> The Void Noize is a local collective for the promotion of concerts and presents its purpose via Facebook as: “To be born in the generation with information overload, young adults have their own thoughts and attitude on independent music, fashion, visual arts and culture. They would try their best to create their own voice to survive in this hectic society. Giving up being mainstream, not to care too much about being rich or being famous, they act for their passion with no regrets. There’s only one thing they need, the need to express themselves in this world with nothingness.”



Covid-19 crisis (*Time Out Hong Kong*, 2020). TTN had an area of 18,000 square feet and a maximum capacity of 400 persons, being one of the biggest “non-mainstream” event spaces in the city, including a fully licensed bar with a very basic drinks menu (Fig. 3).

### **The embodiment through sounds and lights**

Wong Kar-wai’s cinematographic style has often been characterized as featuring a predominance of atmosphere and mood over the more narrative aspects of film.<sup>33</sup> The embodiment of Hong Kong through underground music follows a similar pattern, the city’s countless narratives generating a series of intermingling moods, a mix of discontent and muffled excitement, of colors and grays—much like the eclectic exchanges of diverse genres that results from the proximity and imperfect separation between rehearsal rooms in some music studios in the city. Thus, the ambiguous portrayal of the latent feeling of young Hong Kongese is often rendered in the sound, lyrics, music videos, album covers, and aesthetics of local bands.

[Track 7. *Stardust* by So It Goes]

<sup>33</sup> Won Kar-wai is a renowned Chinese film director, screenwriter, and producer based in Hong Kong. His movies offer a very particular vision of Hong Kong’s cityscape drawing a collage of moods, unique characters, and music.



**Fig. 4**  
Access and interior of MOM Live House during Thud's performance located at Seven Seas Shopping Centre in North Point (photos: Diego Caro, October 2019).

The post-1980 generation relates to the city's urban landscape in their attempts to somehow (re)construct a deserted identity; Hong Kong's suffocating congestion, hyperstimulation, and control is their common ground.<sup>34</sup> Emily (the lead singer and guitarist of So It Goes and vocalist of Foster Studio) refers to the constraints of space, the surrounding concrete cubes, the pressures of real life, and the cost of living as inspiration for the song "Stardust," released by So It Goes in 2017. People are invisible during the daytime and become real at night, in the secret and stimulating places where music is performed.<sup>35</sup> She describes the idea of evading reality through musical spaces and remembers the band's most memorable performance at MOM Live House.

MOM is located in the lower ground of Seven Seas Shopping Centre. This venue is fairly big for Hong Kong standards, offering a 4,800-square-foot space with good quality music equipment and a bar that serves a very limited drinks menu characterized by cheap cans of beer. During the day, it transforms into a standard restaurant that offers set daily food menus for office workers. The route to MOM, through tiny closed shops, where an infinitude of colorful objects repose after a long day of sales, resembles some sort of initiation rite to Hong Kong's underground music. Before entering MOM, the queue is the origin of casual conversations around an orange metallic cube that turns black, green, or purple in the inside, where the combination of sounds and lights acts as a social condenser via the affective power of music (Fig. 4).

On the night of October 3, 2019, in the middle of a week when the city's protests reached maximum intensity, Kim, the always introverted singer of Thud, all dressed in black, read a short text in English at the end of their concert.<sup>36</sup> Standing behind her synths she asked herself with subdued despair: "who would have imagined this would happen in Hong Kong, at least so soon?" Her tears were shared by all those present in the room.

[Track 8. *Prime of Pride* by Thud]

## Encore

Hong Kong has gained fame during the past years as a "cultural desert," most likely because the economy overshadows any other aspects of the city (Cartier, 2008). I would like to refer to it here, though, as a "deserted culture." This deserted culture has been—and

<sup>34</sup> The need for urban symbols has given way in recent years to a new interest in heritage conservation (see Siu, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> As some of the lyrics of "Stardust" go: "In our world we can do what feels right, but in the real one we stay out of sight" (Chak, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> Thud (named Lucid Express from 2021) is a Hong Kongese band formed in 2015 with a very distinct dream pop/shoegaze sound. The band members are Kim (vocals and synths), Andy (guitar), Sky (guitar), and the brothers Samuel (bass) and Wai (drums).



is constantly being—reconstructed through everyday practices and moments of illumination via organic, leaderless, and multidirectional phenomena built up within a sort of digital and spatial rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The new creative tactics used in this reconstruction have given way to, among other effects, a change in the government's methods to control the population, which have shifted toward more repressive and less subtle forms of governmentality (as can be clearly observed in the evolution of responses applied in the 2014 Umbrella Movement and in the Anti-ELAB protests of 2019). Young artists' hidden networks, fermented in peripheral spaces, have become more fluid and effective in regard to their social, political, and cultural impact and influence. I imagine a compilation of Hong Kongese underground music as the soundtrack to the phenomena: a new generation of Hongkongers with a self-referential identity, restrained and inspired by the city's density and geographical pressures, heterogeneous yet consistent and enduring under a sea of black t-shirts—an original blend of musical styles and voices that will influence the future rhythms of Hong Kong.

### Soundtrack

Chochukmo, “One O’Clock.” Released in October 2013 in Hong Kong as part of the album *A Tragedy Your Majesty*, produced by Jason Choi@People Mountain People Sea and published by Factory Pink. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtu9AG-pA4k>

VIRT, “Protocol 332.” Single released in 2019 in Hong Kong. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPxowEgtmbA>

Foster Studio, “Houston.” Single released in August 2017 in Hong Kong, produced by Foster Studio. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BB-svtM711I>

After After Party, “I Am Late.” Single released in 2018 in Hong Kong. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IyWozNN-GNs>

My Little Airport, “彌敦道的一晚 good trip.” Released in 2018 in Hong Kong as part of the album *你說之後會找我*. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=453u20nMAwM>

David Boring, “Loosefuck.” Released in March 2017 as part of the album *Unnatural Objects and Their Humans*, produced by David Boring. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgKAFHP0pJQ>

So It Goes, “Stardust.” Single released in August 2017 in Hong Kong, produced by Chiwai Chan and Emily Hui. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uG3XtKZ5xY>

Thud, “Prime of Pride.” single released in 2016 in Hong Kong. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhzG2Hpbjdk>



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As Gurgaon expands horizontally and vertically, it continues to transition from farms to urban villages to a concrete maze. This photographic project documents the growth of Gurgaon a city recently developed near India's capital, Delhi. It is a booming financial and industrial center, home to most Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and has third highest per-capita income in India. As its advocates often like to point out, Delhi's booming neighbor has 1,100 high-rises, at least 30 malls and thousands of small and big industries. On the other hand, as its detractors unflinchingly like to note, the dust bowl's population has grown two and a half fold, it has 12-hour power blackouts, and its groundwater would probably not last beyond this decade. Gurgaon's transformation began sometime around 1996, with the advent of Genpact, then a business unit of General Electric. Other multinational companies followed it slowly thereafter. It helped that the city was a few kilometers away from Delhi. Two decades on, Gurgaon is already "on its deathbed." From 0.8 million in 2001, the city is expected to reach a population of 6.9 million in 2031. It is speckled with glass buildings with curtain walls, and swish apartment blocks with Greco-Roman influences, but there is little water or power for them. These numbers alone don't capture the lived reality of Gurgaon, though. The skyline that its older residents were accustomed to has completely disappeared. And yet on the periphery, one sees the "Unfinished City" growing. The landscapes and flora shouting; their sentiments brutalized by evictions and concrete. Slaughtered farms now seem witness to monstrosity with desolate faces and fading memories. Set in 2014 the project explores the ephemerality of Gurgaon's glamor and defective town planning. Families had been displaced, laborers' children were growing up on heaps of cement, and farmlands had turned into things of memories.

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup\_referee\_list)

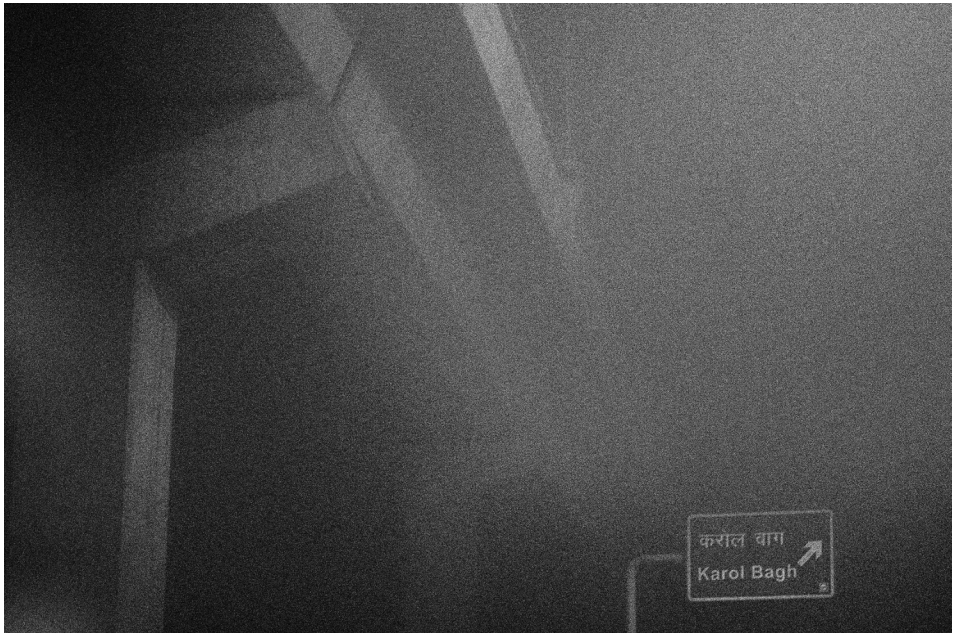
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup\_best\_practice)

Sarth Khare, *Gurgaon: Unfinished City, a photographic essay*, © Author(s), CC BY-NC-ND 4.0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-661-2.12, in Giuseppina Forte, Kuan Hwa (edited by), *Embodying Peripheries*, pp. 258-273, 2022, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-661-2, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-661-2

Gurugram exists today as a chaotic assemblage of plush urbanity, unstirred rural networks, and indefinite “unfinished” edges. The current city is a result of multiple factors. The three primary ones are as follows: “lifting of restrictions on the land-acquisition process and the unusual lack of local government,” the geographical advantage of its closeness to the International Airport and New Delhi, and the liberal reforms in the national policies of India that led to globalization and the rapid urbanization of the country (Rajagopalan & Tabarrok, 2014; Cowan, 2015).

Until the late 1980s, Gurugram, or Gurgaon as it was earlier known, was an agricultural wasteland and was owned by the state government or by wealthy farming families (Khare, 2016; Kapur, 2020). Initial lack of any municipal control led to the Chief Minister of Haryana having a “key veto power in allowing land conversion” of the agrarian land to residential and commercial purposes. He became the “main power center granting licenses to private land developers” (Rajagopalan & Tabarrok, 2014). The private real estate companies like DLF jumped on the opportunity and played a vital role in inviting multinational companies, such as General Electric, and helping them set up their offices in Gurugram (Kumar, 2014). Riding the wave of the recently-adopted liberalization policies that led to the flow of foreign capital in India, Gurugram provided the private infrastructure to meet the spatial and residential needs of these companies. The real estate firms kept acquiring subsequent land parcels as they developed glass buildings with curtain walls and apartment blocks with Greco-Roman influences (Kumar & Misra, 2012). This piece by piece acquisition of an urban space “without a master plan” led to a fragmented development with independent, self-sustaining gated colonies and without a robust municipal infrastructure for water or power (Kapur, 2020).

Gurugram gave new opportunities to young, middle-class workers in the tech industry. The prosperous and educated migrated from around India, and the world moved in to form a new core of elite residential and commercial spaces to fulfill the demand of specialized labor necessitated by the multinational corporations. And to support these employees, the private sector also created the country’s largest malls, golf courses, and apartment complexes (Rajagopalan & Tabarrok, 2014).













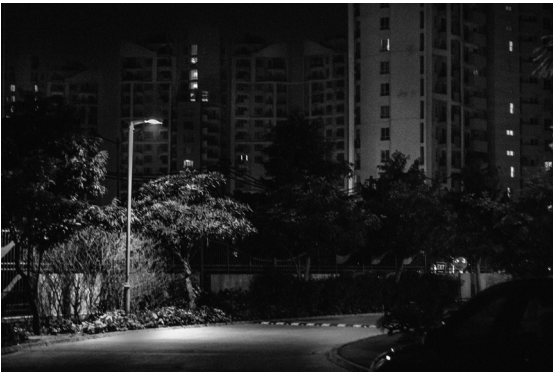
Gurugram's traditionally agrarian land, which was passed down through generations, became the target of potential use by the government for large-scale private development. The traditionally established ecosystem of agriculture, small/micro industries, and community economies was suddenly uprooted as the landscape transformed into this seemingly world-class metropolis with world-class amenities.

Local Jat and Yadav families, who were already "both politically and socially dominant" emerged as a nouveau riche landlords through deals that took place in clandestine secondary markets with under-invoicing, tax evasion, and black market cash transactions (Cowan, 2015; Varghese, 2009; *Times of India*, 2019). These original inhabitants of the land continued to stay in their ancestral villages, while their villages started getting surrounded by high-rises. The residential "Lal Dora" land of the villages remained untouched by the infrastructure boost from which the new private townships were benefiting. With time these spaces, once surrounded by large, open, agrarian lands, started transforming into ghettos enclosed within a robust metropolitan life.

A life with high-rises, malls, and factories which thrived on the foundations of the cheap labor and daily services found in these urban villages. Demand for low end support services such as security guards, sales, marketing, domestic helpers, etc. drew hordes of unemployed youth and adults from different parts of India. They descended on the periphery of glitzy Gurgaon. To encash their arrival, the informal "Lal Dora" lands grew anarchically "to undertake rapid territorial commodification of the city" into dense, dingy urban villages, marred by unregulated, precarious construction, narrow lanes, and a lack of municipal services (Cowan, 2015). Tenants here are denied legal rights and are subjugated by socio-spatial hierarchy of casteist and gender prejudices, leading to a sense of "invisibility in their neighborhood" (Cowan, 2015).

Beyond this heterogeneous patchwork of urban villages and private development, there lies a layer of dystopic poverty in the unorganized and hidden slums of Gurugram. Here live the thousands of others swarming from the hinterlands of Jharkhand, Bihar, and Chhattisgarh as migrant laborers and construction workers. They are generally uneducated, unskilled, and come from the bottom end of the socio-economic pyramid of caste and income (Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, 2017). They can't even afford the claustrophobic rental housing of Lal Dora Villages and are forced to spend their lives in makeshift, inhospitable, hot and humid, unventilated temporary sheds. Substandard shelters are devoid of even basic requirements of enclosed toilets, drinking water, reasonable leg and headspace, and are also vulnerable to the vagaries of weather. There hang shadows of fire hazards and water-borne diseases such as dysentery, cholera, and typhoid (Raghav & Joshi, 2019).





Shockingly, even this supposedly lowest segment of inhabitants is further fragmented by discriminations of caste and gender. Socially lower communities of Scheduled castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Muslims are pushed farther to the margins of the periphery itself, both spatially and in terms of living conditions (Bird & Deshingkar, 2009). The women here face greater hostility: lack of privacy or enclosed hygienic bathrooms, lower wages, harassment – including sexual harassment – from menfolk, landlords, etc (Sundari, 2005).

The lives of both types of migrants, living in dingy urban villages or exposed temporary tinsheds, undergo a traumatic transformation. Their bodily practices and movements, food, and sleep patterns, contrasting with their original agrarian lifestyles, become severely constrained and dictated by their inhospitable, even inhumane, living conditions and low-paid, intermittent, and demanding jobs. In the construction industry, work shifts, usually extending to 10-12 hours a day without any overtime allowance, are aggravated by adverse work environments and lackadaisical implementation of labor laws (Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, 2017). The city for them becomes a relational location, as much a space of emergence and growth as it is of vulnerability (Bhan, 2019). These workers seem to be barely living in the city, contained in their small sphere with no time and space for an engagement with the glitzy “millennium city” and its facilities (*Times of India*, 2019). While Gurugram cannot move without these workers, they rarely are a policy focus in the city (Kapur, 2020).

Gurgaon is an anachronistic and puzzling patchwork of high socio-economic segmentation. It embodies a whole microcosm, embodying features of both the worlds – core and periphery – all at once, in one place. That is why I call it an “Unfinished City,” churning and evolving, encapsulating in the process all the tensions – socio-economic and political.

In an attempt to understand the “Image of the City,” I made my way to the “edges” of Gurgaon (Lynch, 1960). As an architect educated in New Delhi with theories of the global North, Gurgaon perplexed me. Unlike the textbook theories, Gurgaon appeared like a product of pasting images from the north into the base of Indian ingenuity and adaptability. It felt like “a microcosm of Indian dynamism and dysfunction” (Yardley, 2011).

Here, beyond the Gurugram already built, on the literal peripheries of Gurugram, a similar story of expansion is waiting to happen. The groundwork is set and the farmlands have been sold. I photographed stark changes in the physical landscape which alter the lives of people – hidden slums as temporary housing for construction workers, overpowering urbanism looming at a distance, ubiquitous fields of shining swaying wheat, paddy sunny mustard and sunflower soon to be evaporated slowly into a dystopian dark gray skyline. These photographs are an effort to look at Gurgaon from the ground, to look through the layered periphery, often chided as temporary disarray, from within the core.















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This photographic art project examines contemporary embodied activity and urban development in California City, California outside of Los Angeles. The photographs critique the notion of development and the kinds of embodied livelihood it supports according to the cultural imagination of wonder and real estate.

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## CALIFORNIA CITY (REAL ESTATE) AND CALIFORNIA CITY (WONDERLAND)

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**Noritaka Minami**

This photographic project examines California City, a master planned community in the Mojave Desert conceived by sociologist-turned-real estate developer Nathan Mendelsohn in the 1950s. This project aims to explore the gap between the image that was projected onto the desert landscape by Mendelsohn in the 1950s and the image of California City that exists today in reality in order to question whether his vision for a wonderland would have been sustainable in this environment. This city was envisioned as the next major metropolis in California in response to the population and economic growths the state experienced after World War II. Mendelsohn presented California City as a logical location for the overflow of people and industries that would eventually spill out of the Los Angeles Basin and San Fernando Valley. This development was based on the belief that even in a harsh desert landscape, mankind had the power to produce a built environment that provides all the essential needs for a modern life. Mendelsohn and his associates carefully designed the layout of 187 square miles that is to this day listed as the third largest “city” in the state in terms of land size. The early promotional materials for California City specifically employed water as a recurring motif to emphasize the city’s appeal to potential homeowners. The land was touted as having the largest concentration of water wells in the entire Mojave Desert, capable of producing “more than 20,000,000 gallons per day” to create a “water-rich” city.

Today, California City exists as a place that has yet to meet the original ambition of its developer and the idyllic image that was promoted to the public. Moreover, the claim that the land was rich with underground sources of water was found to be largely unsubstantiated. The aerial photographs from this project focus on a vast section of California City that is mostly uninhabited, despite having a complex network of streets that stretch across the landscape and are already named. The photographs present the scale of the vision Mendelsohn proposed on this site and the unintended legacy he left behind on the desert floor. The endless miles of paved streets without any homes are a vivid reminder of the vision that was projected onto the landscape and remains unfulfilled to this day. The photographs show the site seemingly suspended in time, clearly there to host a city in the future but also without any

signs indicating whether that future will ever arrive. The photographs shot on the ground reveal how these streets are being used today but in a way that Mendelsohn could have not foreseen. This unbuilt city is now a haven for off-road vehicle enthusiasts. During holiday weekends, the population of the city temporarily explodes as over fifty thousand people descend to this normally uninhabited land and take advantage of the streets with their recreational vehicles. The thick haze of dust that blankets the air from this use of the land only emphasizes that this city is anything but “water-rich.”

















In Brooklyn, radio programs conducted by and for Haitian immigrants have been historically vital tools for those seeking information to survive both under an ideologically restrictive dictatorship and as newcomers in an unfamiliar country. These radio stations and their blend of news and culture programming served as sonic reminders of community, connecting them not just to current events in the United States, but also to news from their country of origin. Through interviews with staff members at three different kinds of radio stations—college-owned, subcarrier, and pirate—this essay explores the role of Haitian radio in community-building, activism, and citizenship for Haitians who arrived in the U.S. in the 1980s. These programs, which existed on the periphery of a competitive media market, embodied a virtual community for Haitians that superseded nation-state boundaries.

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David Exumé, "*Haitians live for news*", © Author(s), CC BY-NC-ND 4.0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-661-2.14, in Giuseppina Forte, Kuan Hwa (edited by), *Embodying Peripheries*, pp. 282-295, 2022, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-661-2, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-661-2

“Haitians live for news,” said Ricot Dupuy in a 1994 interview with the *New York Times*. Dupuy is the station manager of Radio Soleil, a Brooklyn-based radio station that specializes in news relating to ethnically Haitian people living in Haiti and in the United States. Radio Soleil is one of many Haitian-culture radio stations in Flatbush, Brooklyn—the abundance of such stations can be attributed to the large waves of Haitians that landed in New York City in the ’70s and ’80s during the Duvalier regime.<sup>1</sup> In 1996, 70% of Haitian immigrants in NYC were reported to be living in Flatbush, East Flatbush, and Crown Heights (Wah & Pierre-Louis, 2004).<sup>2</sup> Among these migrants were professional journalists and activists who stayed updated on current events in Haiti after they moved. These information networks kept Haitians in the United States informed, despite very real dangers of being deported, exiled, or imprisoned. “It costs us,” Dupuy went on to say, “but Haitians have to listen to the news. News is everything to a Haitian” (quoted in Clines, 1994).

Radio has long served as a practical communication tool in Haiti. It was more widely accessible than television broadcasts, since the country’s mountainous terrain negatively affected TV signals. Another benefit of radio is that its sonic nature made its content accessible to both literate and non-literate people. In terms of price, a radio was also more accessible than a turntable or a CD player when it came to forms of entertainment. The content aired on Haitian radio programs was, however, impacted by oppressive politics. During the Duvalier regime (between 1957 and 1986), journalists in Haiti were often harassed, imprisoned indefinitely, and even mass-exiled in 1980. Forbidden radio broadcasts dispensed vital information that allowed citizens to survive. Civilians—who often feared being abducted, imprisoned, and/or murdered by government agents for encouraging dissent—listened to news about the government from radios stashed underneath their beds and in kitchen cabinets.

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<sup>1</sup> François Duvalier served as the president of Haiti from 1957 to 1971. His son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, then served as Haiti’s president from 1971 to 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Data taken from the NYC Planning Department, 1996.



After these journalists arrived in the United States and began hosting radio programs, they were relegated to a peripheral portion of the American radio market. Radio shows conducted in Haitian Creole were designated as “minority-language” programming by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which had historically discouraged ownership of radio stations by people of color (POC)—sometimes even actively preventing it. This changed in 1973, when the Court of Appeals decided that POC ownership would “increase content” (Mason et al., 2001). After a period of regulation, “diversity programming” proved too vague of a goal to sufficiently maintain, and the FCC thus transitioned into a deregulation strategy. The Commission assumed unhindered market forces would achieve “broadcasting in the public interest” more than any set of regulations could. But even after deregulatory policies, radio professionals in POC communities still faced push-back from lawmakers actively dismantling any policies that promoted POC ownership. These officials reinforced marketplace barriers to disproportionately uplift broadcasters who communicated a “dominant worldview”—namely, mainstream radio stations that were immediately accessible to the average American listener (Brinson, 2008).

Despite the FCC’s prior commitment to a deregulation strategy, broadcast facilities became firmly controlled by major corporations, leaving radio programs for POC on the periphery. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 raised the single-ownership cap from two to eight stations and completely removed the limit on national ownership. As a result, about 50% of radio stations in the United States changed ownership in the two years that followed—most of them shifting from independently-owned to corporate.<sup>3</sup> The microradio movement was an anti-mass-production movement intended to challenge the growing domination of corporate chain radio ownership. They did this by putting new voices on the airwaves and finding audiences for these new voices.

While these peripheral, “microradio” movements were left with a much smaller share of the national listenership, those who did tune in were intensely devoted. A 2006 case study of this movement showed that the high concentration of market shares held by large chains still left peripheral resources in the form of funding, promotion, and community listenership for more niche participants (Greve et al., 2006). After being designated by industry regulators and policymakers as a less profitable, cultural “out”-group, subgroups of POC radio owners focused on programming that spoke more directly and authentically to the niche audiences they depended on for listenership, enacting a phenomenon referred to as “autoproduction of culture”—how subgroups distinguish their

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<sup>3</sup> See Greve et. al’s 2006 case study, “Vox Populi,” p. 806.

“authentic” selves by grouping with like-minded individuals and consuming the culture they share. This includes active production of a lifestyle and identity from elements of traditional and mass-mediated symbols, and is catalyzed by stigmatization as a cultural “out”-group (Peterson & Anand, 2004).

This isn’t to say that non-English radio programs were doomed to be underfunded. Competition and growth among “minority-language” radio groups has been well-documented and explored. A 2003 study on POC radio listening preferences showed a significantly positive correlation between the size of Black and Latinx populations and the number of programs that appealed to these groups. There was a significant audience for POC radio that was starkly separate from the largely white mainstream (Waldfoegel, 2003). A 2011 media-economics study corroborated this: After analyzing 320 radio stations operating in the largest 50 radio markets in the U.S., researchers Xiaofei Wang and David Waterman concluded that there are indeed significant and positive correlations between the size of foreign language populations in the radio market and the number of radio programs available to POC in their respective languages (Wang & Waterman, 2011). On top of producing programming that could be “authentic,” there was a clear economic advantage for Haitian radio stations to produce authentically Haitian programming.

Haitian radio, in both Haiti and the United States, has a strong historical background in circumventing salient enemies to deliver much-needed information to citizens. As Dupuy mentioned in his interview with the *New York Times*, the independent press faced harsh opposition from the Duvalier regime in Haiti. In 1980, Jean-Claude Duvalier rounded up hundreds of journalists and academics and exiled them—some of them were beaten beyond recognition in the process. But in the United States, Haitian independent press and political media found more support and more followers. *Haiti en Marche*, *Haiti Progrès*, and *Haiti Observateur* were three independent newspapers founded in the U.S. in the ’70s and ’80s, all published in French. They all staunchly opposed the Duvalier regime, representing a political side of what Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide would later call the “Tenth Department”—Haitians living abroad who sent over \$100 million in remittances to their families in Haiti every year (Rhodes, 1999).

This is where Radio Soleil, and many other stations like it, found its mission, its staff, and its niche role in the independent press market. In 1998, social anthropologist Michel Laguerre claimed that the purpose of “transnational media” is to interconnect various sites to the homeland, not necessarily to force incorporation of new arrivals into the receiving country. He studied Radio Soleil as an example. At the time, the station was staffed by 20 journalists—all first-generation Haitian immigrants. Some had previously attended journalism

school in Haiti, and most of them had worked in radio in Haiti prior to arriving in the U.S. (Laguerre, 1998). But upon arriving in the United States, these radio professionals found themselves on the periphery of the American media market.

These journalists were immediately in competition with mainstream American media, which, as mentioned before, benefitted disproportionately from the support of industry regulations, corporate chains, and policymakers. Trying to break into the mainstream by hosting English-language programming that appealed to a wider audience would have been an uphill battle for resources. Radio Soleil's employees, along with those of other Haitian-owned stations, consciously chose to tailor their programming specifically to the Haitians in New York City. Radio Soleil only hosted roughly 10% of its programming in English—50% was in Haitian Creole, and 40% in French. Most of the programming focused on information coming from Haiti, rather than information on American politics and culture. Eventually, these radio hosts began broadcasting tips on where to find housing, jobs, and other Haitian immigrants in a language that their listeners were familiar with. The station carved out its own niche in the growing Haitian diaspora by keeping news local to NYC, rather than appealing to the other sizeable Haitian immigrant audiences in places like Washington, D.C., Montreal, and Miami. By devoting their programming to Haitians existing as both a subset of the American population and a subset of the larger Haitian diaspora, Radio Soleil gathered a devoted listener base and rose to prominence among other Haitian radio stations in Brooklyn. Radio programs conducted in non-English languages are a prime example of a peripheral part of New York urban life—while the language and culture of the programming did not appeal to all New York residents, the information was vital for its Haitian audience.

This preservation of language and culture was a natural response to living in a country in which Haitians faced social designations that misrepresented their ethnicity. Many Haitians took pride in being distinctly Haitian—in addition to their language and culture, some attributed that pride to having come from the country that earned its independence from the first successful slave revolt (Zéphir, 1996). In the United States, however, people who were racially Black—regardless of their country of origin—were often lumped into the same “African-American” social designation by outside groups. The fact that English was not Haitians' first language was also a reported characteristic of “foreign-ness” that increased the likelihood of discrimination (Thornton et al., 2013). Due to these combined pressures—of being designated as “African-American” while simultaneously being treated as foreigners due to their language and culture—Haitians and other immigrants fostered closeness within their communities and distinguished themselves

through cultural practices. Radio—which had historically been important for many Haitians before and after migration—became one of the ways Haitians nurtured this closeness. Haitian radio in New York City served as an autoproduction of community and an affirmation of cultural authenticity. It provided information cultivated just for Haitian arrivals in a language immediately accessible to them. Embodiment, here, is maintaining Haitian identity through consumption of news and culture—using radio to incorporate themselves into American society as citizens, while still retaining the Haitian culture that separated them from the “African-American” generalization.

### **About the interviews**

The following interviews are firsthand accounts from Ricot Dupuy and two other Haitian radio professionals in Brooklyn. I chose the NYC Haitian radio scene for its rich history involving Haitian migration—Radio Soleil being a prime example of how radio stations became incubators for human rights activism, housing assistance, family reunification, and preservation of culture. To get a more fleshed-out understanding of the New York Haitian radio scene, I chose to interview three professionals who have each engaged with distinctly different radio production formats. These interviews took place between January and April 2018. Ricot Dupuy has been serving as station manager and as a radio host on Radio Soleil since its founding in 1992. Soleil is a subcarrier station, also known as a Subsidiary Communications Authority. It uses a separate audio channel that is transmitted along with the main signal over a broadcast station—to receive this signal, radios with special receivers must be purchased.<sup>4</sup> Dupuy describes his show as 70% news from Haiti and 30% news from the U.S. and other countries—specifically, how news from these countries impacts Haitians. Radio Soleil draws a large audience of Haitian immigrants, many of them older by virtue of arriving in the United States around the same time as Dupuy. Its website has a section devoted to “Diaspora Revolt,” hosts extensive sections written exclusively in Haitian Creole, and promotes content from Haitian social media personalities.<sup>5</sup>

Professor Lionel Legros hosted a Haitian news and culture program on WKCR of Columbia University from about 1969 to 2002. He described his show as a “postcard,” focusing on news and musical content. However, toward the end of the Duvaliers’ regime, new DJs joined the show with the intention of rebranding. The program became *The Haitian Hour*, and it took a more radicalized approach toward news, vocally denouncing the Duvalier regime

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<sup>4</sup> “Broadcast Radio Subcarriers or Subsidiary Communications Authority (SCA),” Federal Communications Commission.

<sup>5</sup> [www.radiosoleil.com](http://www.radiosoleil.com)



and the United States' involvement in supporting it. Its political content, combined with WKCR's status as a non-commercial, student-run radio station, drew a large audience of radicalized students and international activist groups. Because WKCR is a Columbia University station and not one he founded himself, Legros' freedom was heavily impacted by university board regulations and the requirement for student engagement in order for him to keep airing his program.

Dorville is a radio host on *Radyo Independans*—a “pirate” radio station that operates without an FCC license or designated frequency. *Radyo Independans* takes over the frequency of a local college, 90.9, after the college station stops broadcasting at 7 p.m. Dorville commits about 60% of his show to music and 40% to Haitian history, but the structure of the show itself differs depending on which Wednesday of the month it is. Each Wednesday corresponds to one of four parts: a music review show that critiques Haitian musical lyrics and structure; a Haitian jazz music program; “Voudou Spirits,” which provides a space for *voudouisants* (practitioners of Haitian vodoun) to talk about their culture; and an open discussion show, in which Dorville invites various guests to discuss any topic of their choosing. Similar to *Radio Soleil*, *Radyo Independans* likely has an audience of older Haitian immigrants; however, because there is no extra cost requirement to listen to this pirate station, it might have a larger audience.

### **On starting radio programs**

I kicked off each interview by asking each host about how they started their radio programs. To be successful and accepted radio hosts, DJs on these Haitian stations must demonstrate cultural competency and a passion for matters of interest relevant to the greater Haitian community. These stations fit the definition of “ethnic enclaves”—immigrants with substantial expertise gained from their home countries participating in concentrated entrepreneurship.<sup>6</sup> Each station had its own distinct qualifications, but one consistent factor in both student-run and volunteer-run stations was that their hosts and DJs possessed at least a baseline competency in journalism.

To host a show at WKCR, Columbia University's student-run radio station, Professor Legros had to apply. He explains his start here:

In the summer of '68 or '69, I came back from Haiti and I came to work for a medical student. We were working in the library, and he said, “I'm the Chief Engineer at WKCR.” And I asked him, “How do you get a program at WKCR?” And that question really gave life to the Haitian show.

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<sup>6</sup>This definition of “ethnic enclave” is taken from Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut's *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, University of California Press (2014).

Legros was required to submit a proposal to be reviewed by a board, and he eventually started his weekly show with a few close friends. As a result, his show was constantly operating under the scrutiny of the board, and at one point the university pressured him to bring more students onto his show. Legros tried to recruit students from the university's Haitian Club, but noted that many students were preoccupied by schoolwork, and those that did volunteer often didn't stick around.

Compare this to Ricot Dupuy, station manager of Radio Soleil. Like WKCR, there was a board to review show applications. Acceptances were made based on whether the station needed the kind of show that was proposed as well as the qualifications of the DJs themselves. As Dupuy told me during our interview:

First of all, you have to be educated. You don't go on the air without a formal education. You have to have the proper voice, vocal equipment. Radio is an art. You have to be able to convince people, which you do with the proper voice and background.

Radyo Independans, by comparison, required a much more DIY approach toward running the station and hosting its programs. In Haiti, Dorville attended school for journalism, with interests in anthropology and sociology. After he moved to New York, he was writing for a newspaper when he was invited to a radio station for an on-air interview. The staff at the station then asked him to join the station as a DJ, kickstarting his career as a radio host. Dorville treated radio as a continuation of the skills he learned in Haiti: "We bring exactly the same kind of behaviors of what we used to do back home. We should use this opportunity to change." He had the same journalistic skills and the exact same intention to use them to inform the public and denounce the Duvalier regime. In the United States, Dorville felt just as empowered by his background in political press as he did when he was in Haiti.

At Radyo Independans, DJs have to take on multiple responsibilities due to the small staff size. Dorville informed me that at this station, every DJ learns to do everything. The mixing setup is small—a mixing board and a couple computers. There is no designated chief operating officer. If there is a technical issue, each DJ must learn how to solve it. Dorville circumvents this by collaborating on a three-man team for his program: one person handles the electronics; another scours the web for information; and Dorville is behind the microphone, hosting the program.

He noted that many people have the money and technology available to start their own radio—anyone could technically broadcast a show, and as long as the range was small enough (Dorville estimated about 20 blocks, maximum), the FCC would not give them much trouble. But not everyone has the "right stuff." I asked what he meant by this, and his response was similar to what Dupuy's had been: the basics. Journalism school was not required, but a good

radio host was someone who didn't "just talk." As an example, Dorville mentioned a particularly problematic DJ: "Every Sunday, he came in and said anything that came into his head." He is no longer a part of the station.

### **Radio as resistance**

Even more important than technical expertise or vocational training in journalism was a passion for addressing issues relevant to Haitian people. In the 1960s, this cultural authenticity manifested in all the stations as a shared mission: to expose and combat the specter of the Duvalier dictatorship. Of the three stations, Legros had the largest audience for political activism, given WKCR's status as a college campus. He recalled pre-1968 Columbia as a "cauldron of student rebellion," and mentioned multiple radical organizations who partnered with *The Haitian Hour*. Action Patriotique was a collection of student activists returning from Europe. Kouidor (or "Golden Calabash"), a radical group from Paris, also partnered with Legros and the larger Haitian community in the U.S. These groups were open in their opposition. During a demonstration in the late '60s, they chose not to obscure their faces, despite the danger of retaliation from the regime. Legros was crystal clear about his refusal to hide his face: "We were going to expose Duvalier openly."

Also partnering with Legros was a group called the Haitian Fathers—a Brooklyn-based group of priests exiled by the Duvalier regime who were a part of a growing, anti-Duvalier theological movement. The Haitian Fathers collected all news related to Haitians and mailed it directly from Brooklyn to Haiti—people would receive these writings and read them in secret. Legros recalled that one of his first published groups of poems was published in the literary review published by the Haitian Fathers. It was titled *Sel*, after the smelling salts used to wake up people who had been turned into *zonbi* (zombies) in vodoun lore.

Throughout the 1960s, Legros became involved in demonstrations against the consulate, which he and his supporters decried for being complicit in supporting the regime. The consulate had given him trouble before, when they seized his passport. He described the process of re-obtaining it as if it were a test of his authenticity as a Haitian: "That was a huge blow to me. Because when they do that to you, they decide who is and who's not a Haitian. If you are not on the Duvalier side, you are not Haitian." *The Haitian Hour* would become so politically vocal that the consulate even pressured the hosts, claiming their program was damaging to tourism in Haiti.

## Haitian radio and mutual aid

Opposing the regime went hand-in-hand with using expertise and information networks to provide mutual aid resources for the Haitian community. In 1972, when the first wave of Haitian immigrants came to the United States seeking political asylum, Professor Legros' radio show took on a new purpose. In our interview, he explained the language he heard Americans directing toward Haitian immigrants:

[We heard] all kinds of made-up justifications: "These people should not be let in. They're not political prisoners. They are not economic refugees." We were fighting a new war. We [were] going to expose what was happening to the Haitian refugees. So, the radio show wasn't just about politics in Haiti. It was about politics here [in the United States]. Because we want these people to have a side.

Legros' correspondents in Miami supplied him with the latest news on shipwrecks, people thrown in jail, and any other information that he believed would help expose Duvalier. As his quote above demonstrates, the United States also fell under his scrutiny. Legros regularly ran exposés on the Haitian embassy in New York, and was thus quick to speak on any ties he saw between the United States and the Duvaliers: "You're not accepting these refugees because you're supporting the regime.' That was our battle cry."

*The Haitian Hour* soon became actively involved in refugee aid. Miami correspondents sent lists of people that were searching for their family and friends. Every Sunday, Legros and his co-hosts received a list of people looking for someone from a certain Haitian province, or a brother, sister, etc., which they read on-air. "You're not just listening to news. You're listening if you're looking for somebody," he told me. When asked if anyone was ever found, he replied, "Oh yes."

Through Radio Soleil, Ricot Dupuy continues to offer similar forms of aid. Legal counseling, immigration services, and advising on landlord/tenant interactions are services the station currently provides. Listeners often call in to the station—frequent talking points include Temporary Protected Status, difficulties with finding jobs, and racial issues. Dupuy corresponds with contacts in Haiti and often receives information from sister stations that are based out of that country. He tells me he uses this information to give his listeners the facts they need to defend themselves and speak up on injustices:

If somebody—a group or a political party—is haunting them, they could use the information to challenge them back. We want them to act in their own interest. Because the country is theirs. We can't allow a group of thugs to wrestle control away from them. One thing now is that they're stealing elections. They're rigged. And this station is heavily involved in challenging that.

For Dupuy, the role of Haitian radio is to inform Haitians of corruption happening in plain sight—in this case, rigged elections—and to empower them to take action.

It's worth noting that none of these programs were hosted for personal monetary gain. Radyo Independans occasionally received financial support from listeners and Haitian businesses, but all the funds were put toward rent and utilities. Both Radyo Independans and Radio Soleil hosted pledge drives and “Radio-thons,” during which their journalists and personalities interacted directly with their listeners. Legros recalled *The Haitian Hour's* largest fundraising event: he invited guest musicians to an auditorium for a live performance. “We packed the place,” he said.

### **Haitian radio and the Pan-African diaspora**

All three Haitian radio stations actively involved themselves in struggles that affected the Pan-African diaspora in the United States. Legros mentioned one instance around the time of the Vietnam War in which vocal separation from other African-Americans was discouraged: “We got into a controversy because [one of our DJs] said something stupid on the news—something like: ‘We are very proud Black people! We are not like African-Americans!’ Something very stupid.” Ricot Dupuy put his involvement in African-American issues simply: “Anything that happens with Blacks here affects Haitians. It's all news. If it impacts Blacks? We're Blacks, so it's important to us.”

Dorville expressed an interest to connect with African-American musical traditions through the Haitian jazz segment of his show. “In the '20s, when we were colonized by America, they didn't want us to mix with Black Americans,” he said, referring to the United States' military occupation of Haiti that lasted from 1915 to 1934. “This is the main reason why we do not have the culture of jazz in Haiti. They tried to separate us because of the Haitian Revolution.” Dorville was adamant in playing jazz from Haitian musicians exclusively—if he was going to connect with jazz, he would only do it in an authentically Haitian way. “Everything from our community, I promote it for free,” he said. In a statement that reflected his and the other stations' dedication to Haitian immigrants' culture and home country, he continues: “We have to promote Haitians. This is my goal.”

### **Conclusion**

In line with the expertise and entrepreneurship seen in ethnic enclaves, each station required journalistic integrity from its DJs and, more importantly, a full commitment to discussing issues that exclusively affected Haitian people. The format of each station and the role of each professional strongly affected how much control they had over

their staffing. Whereas Ricot Dupuy, a station manager, could turn down hosts based on their qualifications, Dorville was unable to make the same decisions, since he was a host and part of a small team, rather than a manager. Legros presumably had more difficulty with recruitment because Columbia forced him to reach out to students rather than trusted members of his community. Across all stations, however, the role of the DJ was clear: they were expositors and resisters. None of these stations accepted DJs that showed any kind of support for the Duvalier regime or its disciples. Resistance was crucial to these stations' collective mission.

To be "authentically Haitian" meant to unequivocally oppose the Duvalier regime through the content of their programming and through more direct forms of community organizing and activism. Greve et al. noted that unmet demand and a salient enemy against which to mobilize spurred the founding of small specialist organizations—or, in other words, enclaves (Greve et al., 2006). These authors explored this theory by studying corporate chains in the radio market, but the same theory applies to an ideologically restrictive regime. Through restriction of information and punitive measures, the Haitian government set the stage for clandestine radio broadcasts to emerge. After arriving in the less ideologically restricted but more competitive American radio market, opposing the regime and uplifting the now marginalized Haitian community became a practice of culture production. This is how these three Haitian radio professionals distinguished themselves from other cultures and maintained closeness in their communities.

While issues specific to the Haitian community took the forefront of Haitian radio programming, this did not exclude hosts from incorporating African-American culture into their programming. Through his Haitian jazz segment, Dorville bridged a cultural divide between Haitian and African-American music that had been exacerbated by U.S. imperialism. In "Postcolonialism and Multiculturalism: Between Race and Ethnicity," Sneja Gunew (1997) writes: "It could be suggested that while race is structured by the desire to be considered human, ethnicity is structured by a concomitant desire for citizenship ... to be a legitimate part of political structures." Professor Legros' experience at the center of international radical movements spoke to what citizenship meant for him and for other members of the Haitian community: interrogating the relationship between the country that received them and the country they came from. They demanded that the United States be held accountable for implicitly supporting the Duvalier regime. Haitians used the information gained from radio to incorporate themselves into the United States as citizens and members of a new political landscape, forming political alliances through a struggle against the government in a country they no longer lived in.

Haitian radio professionals used cultural critique, news coverage, and direct outreach to connect Haitian listeners in both the U.S. and Haiti, creating a dynamic, virtual, and international community. Ricot Dupuy, Professor Legros, and Dorville have all actively worked to maintain their Haitian identity and culture in a country where they could have assimilated as just Black. This embodied community may not be symmetrical to living in Haiti itself, but the love and importance of radio was the same there as it would become in the United States. For Haitian immigrants, the media market had changed, but the practical uses of radio and the ghost of the Duvaliers were still present. Diaspora is not just characterized by physical displacement, but also by the channels of information that facilitate connections to the homeland and to the greater diaspora. The movement of Haitian culture through migration kickstarted the formation of these radio stations and continues to be why they provide valuable, lived-through meaning for both their actors and their listeners. In line with the understanding of periphery as a mode of production of space, transnational radio carved out its own space in a capitalist media market and created a two-way information channel for Haitian migrants that superseded nation-state boundaries.

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This book combines approaches from the design disciplines, humanities, and social sciences to foster interdisciplinary engagement across geographies around the identities embodied in and of peripheries. Peripheral communities bear human faces and names, necessitating specific modes of inquiry and commitments that prioritize lived human experience and cultural expression. Hence, the peripheries of this book are a question, not a given, the answers to which are contingent forms assembled around embodied identities. Peripheries are urban fringes, periphery countries in the modern world-system, Indigenous lands, occupied territories, or the peripheries of authoritative knowledge, among others. No form can exist outside historical relations of power enacted through knowledge, political structures, laws, and regulations.

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