

PROLOGUE: Water Narratives

Migration is not the evacuation of a place and the occupation of a different one, it is the making and remaking of one's own life on the scenery of the world. World-making.

Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos (2007: 2)

This book arose from an awareness, starting in 2015, of the crisis of the European border regime, and later also in South America. During this period, the escalating crisis of global border regimes was deeply concerning, characterized as it was by violence and dehumanization against communities fleeing from regions of conflict, guerrilla warfare, corruption, and poverty. One of the tactics employed by the European border regimes to control, monitor, and impede mobility was the establishment of “refugee camps” across various countries and borders within and outside the European Union, aiming to create a 21st-century “fortress Europe.” These “refugee camps,” commonly referred to in diverse academic contexts as “non-places” and “places of exception,” became arenas where identity, belonging, and human dignity were undermined by the violent and racist strategies of border regimes. These regimes, rooted in a colonial legacy, persist today amid what is labeled as “the migration crisis.” This book, in contrast, emerges from an exploration of the counternarrative surrounding “refugee camps” governed and controlled by states. It focuses on autonomous settlements established by communities-in-transit seeking refuge. Many of these communities, rejecting inclusion in the migratory identification database (e.g., through fingerprinting), have occupied abandoned urban spaces and buildings in the so-called peripheries of the cities. In these locations, they have forged social places of belonging, creating alternative modes of conviviality and togetherness. Through strategies of resistance against border regimes, these places have challenged conventional notions of placemaking and the dichotomy between “periphery” and “center” in contemporary postcolonial cities.

This book follows three self-built settlements in Europe and South America. The settlements—the Dzjanganl in Calais (France), Tiburtina in Rome (Italy), and Los Arenales in Antofagasta (Chile)—were established by communities-in-transit and remained self-organized. The inhabitants transformed abandoned urban zones into places (Massey, 1995) and neighborhoods through alternative placemaking. I explore

how these so-called non-places change and evolve into social places and how the concept of liminality (Van Gennep, [1961] 2019; Turner, 1969), along with the state of inbetweenness—both geographically and affectively between borders—might have played a role in their transformation. My inquiry includes questions such as: How did these autonomously occupied places create convivial and solidary places despite encountering violent interactions with border regimes? How did they pursue alternative ways of living and redefining the city through the occupation of urban spaces?

This book delves into three main areas of study: reflexive postcolonial, critical geography, and multimodal European ethnology. Within the exploration of postcolonial studies, I reintroduce the concept of liminality to the field of critical migration studies. This conceptual shift has the potential to politicize liminality and states of inbetweenness through the agency of people-in-transit, challenging the constraints imposed by current border regimes. As my account of research in the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales progresses, I address the implications of contemporary border regimes, particularly in the establishment of what are termed “refugee camps.” These places have been labeled as “non-places” (Augé, 1995), “places of exception” (Agamben, 1998), and “peripheral places” (Gregory, 2011). Despite this marginalization, these places have developed alternative urban models and methods of placemaking, resisting categorization. This book examines the political and social strategies of transforming so-called non-places into social places, which have fostered alternative ways of life that actively contribute to the urban fabric.

Methodologically, I explore the intersection of art and anthropology, emphasizing artistic practice as multimodal ethnography. Using methods such as sound ethnography, collective listening, and critical walking as research tools, I argue for the potential of the entanglement between artistic practices and ethnography as methods for the fieldwork. I explore the multisensory and affective nature of these practices to develop critical and political engagement methods in migratory settings beyond traditional ethnography. Drawing on my transdisciplinary background, particularly my approach to anthropology through my artistic training, I analyze the emerging collaboration between art and anthropology, which holds potential value in contemporary discussions on multimodal and experimental ethnography in the social sciences. Through multisensory practices, this book follows the different autonomous migration strategies of “placemaking” and “relation-making” (Simone, 2018) in the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. These autonomous migratory strategies challenged the symbolic and geographical borders of the city, aiming to redefine the contemporary urban landscape and its inclusivity. These communities have fostered resilient and interconnected networks that bear witness to the inherent strength of diversity in today’s societies.

The content of this book is part of a triptych-form (book, webpage, exhibition) multimodal PhD research project that began in 2020 through an Elsa Neumann Scholarship. Some of it has appeared elsewhere as part of exhibitions, art instal-

lations, and sonorities (sound compositions, radio shows, collective listening, and sonic walks), as well as in individual and collective publications in art and social science journals and books. These materials can be seen, read, and heard in the multimodal online space accompanying this book—a webpage that presents the more-than-text form of this research. Additionally, this research included a collaborative exhibition as part of the final disputation held in the main building of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in October 2024, with images available in the appendix of this book.

Click [HERE](#)¹ to go to the webpage

For a more complete viewing experience, it is recommended to visit the website on a desktop computer or tablet rather than on a mobile phone.

Non-Person-Centered

In this book, I have challenged the person-centered approach as the primary mode of investigation for places that intercept migration flows and conflicts with contemporary border regimes. Instead, I have been guided by territory and urban reclamation to explore how the residents of the Dzgangal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales relate to these territorial and urban spaces and how they have socialized these places through alternative placemaking. Drawing on the insights of the philosopher Gaston Bachelard in his work *The Poetics of Space* ([1958] 1994), I emphasize the significance of placemaking in shaping individuals' experiences and emotional connections with a place's materiality. The residents of the Dzjangal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales have developed physical strategies to reclaim territory from the border regime through autonomous practices, primarily through processes of self-construction rather than through a relationship and interaction with predetermined urban infrastructures and architectures. The Dzjangal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales were (and are) autonomous places that have succeeded in creating conviviality and “places of hope” through informality and improvisation. “Hope” is not only a desire for a future but also helped create a self-managed urban present that invites us to understand these spaces not as “peripheral places” far from the city center, but rather as having their own ecology, in which the residents enter into the dynamics of the city to become citizens on their own terms and claim the right to live in it (see Epilogue).

When I say that I question person-centeredness, this does not mean that the residents of these places and their personal life stories are not present. Their narratives and biographies are the foundation of the study, which can be seen in each

¹ <https://somerwhereinbetween.cargo.site/>

chapter of this book through various narratives and stories that surface to illustrate the essential concepts of this research, such as liminality, a state of inbetweenness, placemaking, the art of resistance, becoming, hope, and prefiguration. Instead, I am experimenting with alternative threads of connection, away from the exclusive idea of the person, to bring them into a relationship between place and people on which placemaking is based. In turn, I have moved away from person-centeredness to engage with the disappearance of two places in this research: the Džjanganl and Tiburtina. When I returned to my second fieldwork research in these two places, I was confronted with abandoned places marked by tragic evictions, which prompted me to excavate imaginary archaeological layers. The archives created by the residents of these places were key for me to gain a deeper understanding of their past social unfolding (see Chapter 4).

Deciding to move away from the person-centered as an initial approach was also a way of dealing with my own positionality toward this research. The question of how to represent “the other” was crucial. Who am I to write the stories of others? Especially when they are stories of places and people who are in constant uncertainty and vulnerability. Who am I to write stories about forced migrations, border crossings, escapes, evacuations, and displacements? I asked myself these questions at every stage of this research (see Chapter 1). I did not want to reproduce visualizations of the “migrant body” as a central research topic, especially as my work is situated within the discipline of anthropology (Garland, 2024a). Nowadays, migration and border studies within the discipline are faced with a great challenge since many have fallen into a “Migrantology” (Römhild, 2017) when investigating the dynamics of migratory flows. The cultural anthropologist Regina Römhild, questions this approach, suggesting that migration should be seen not merely as a subject of study but as a broader perspective. Treating migration as a subject tends to perpetuate colonial dichotomies, reinforcing hierarchical distinctions between “native” and “foreigner,” “majority” and “minority” (see Römhild, 2017). Key scholars in the postmigration conceptualization, such as Shermin Langhoff (2011), Erol Yıldız (2025), and Azadeh Sharifi (Sharifi and Skwirblies, 2022), advocate for a postmigrant approach that views migration as a lens through which to examine larger social and cultural issues, moving beyond a sole focus on the “migrant.” The postmigrant perspective helps challenge the prevailing narrative of contemporary migration, which often portrays the vulnerability and victimization of the “migrant body.” Mainstream media, particularly television and social platforms, has played a significant role in reinforcing the “otherness” of “migrants,” largely through visual imagery. This aspect prompted me to explore alternative methods, such as sound and listening actions, to engage with migratory experiences, moving away from the immediate visual violence prevalent in mainstream narratives (Garland, 2024a) (see Chapter 3).

Through my fieldwork engagements, I came to understand that in some situations the word “migrant” is loaded with racist connotations and that people on the move are discriminated against just for the fact of having migrated. The difference between “migrant” and “foreigner” was present during my fieldwork. One’s country of origin and skin color make a big difference in which of these labels are applied, with the binary between “the discriminated” and “the privileged” being present. Based on these concerns, I looked for other ways to tell the stories of these places. By moving away from the idea of the “migrant body,” I was able to feel a little more comfortable with the great problem of representation in social science studies and in art.

In particular, the reader will find throughout this book the term *people-in-transit* (and *communities-in-transit*), which refers to people who migrate and are confronted with the current border regime. In addition, the term “migrant” is placed in quotation marks when discussing theories of others involved in migration and border studies. The use of quotation marks was a way of consciously and carefully naming the people I meet in relation to the current border regime. In doing so, I want to be sensitive to all the people I have met and who have shared their migration stories with me. For many of them, the word “migrant” is frequently a pejorative label, carrying a loaded stamp of classism and racism. This is especially so in a South American context, where residents of Los Arenales in Chile emphasized that the term is used as a discriminatory act against communities that have migrated. In Chapter 6, and in the Epilogue of this book, I highlight the word *neighbor* that the residents of Los Arenales use to refer to each other and also to the Chilean community in order to move away from the colonial structures between “us” and “them.” Through the word “neighbor,” Los Arenales proposes alternative ways of building community, where the designations of nations are blurred by proximity to each other and proposes the creation of a togetherness that moves away from the dogmatic idea of the neighborhood as found in many cities today.

I’m aware of how complex it is to assign any kind of label. Personally, I struggled to find the right words to describe people who are or were migrating, trying to avoid falling into the trap of migrantology, as well as stigmatization. During my fieldwork, I came across many terms, each raising questions about how to speak about and with communities on the move. This challenge is especially present in NGOs and among volunteers, where people often search for respectful and politically conscious language. For many volunteers—including myself—there has been a collective attempt to move away from the label “refugee,” a charged term due to media narratives and institutional classifications (see Bauer, Boemelburg, and Walton, 2021). As a response, terms like “newcomers” began circulating as a way to soften or reframe the violence of imposed categories. Similarly, “displaced people” is sometimes used by volunteers, reflecting a shared awareness around the language of displacement.

These linguistic negotiations became part of my everyday encounters, especially in conversations with people at the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. In those exchanges, I paid close attention to how people responded to the different labels used to describe their situations. The phrase “in transit” often emerged in these conversations, as it was important for many to emphasize that they were still moving—that they hadn’t yet arrived. I often heard comments like “we are people in transit,” “we are people on the move,” and “we are in a transit process,” especially during my fieldwork in France and Italy, where countries were seen as transitional points—bridges between Southern and Northern Europe for those aiming to reach the UK.

As mentioned above, the expression *people-in-transit* appears in various chapters as a deliberate alternative to “migrant.” I chose it carefully, as a way of reflecting the political awareness and emotional complexity that emerged during my fieldwork. The term “transit” conveys more than physical movement—it points to an ongoing experience of inbetweenness, where people live between the memory of a former home and the uncertain future of a new one. People-in-transit speak to transit as an experience rather than a fixed identity. While “migrant” tends to lock individuals into a static, outsider role, “people-in-transit” instead captures the collective emotional and geographical process of movement. These ideas are explored in Chapter 5, where I reflect on the forms of inbetweenness that surface in migratory experiences.

By applying this term to the realities of the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, I aim to acknowledge their collective resistance through the border regimes, as well as their state of inbetweenness. These people are not just passing through geographical territories; they are shaping, reclaiming, and redefining the spaces they inhabit. I remain aware of the contradictions and risks involved in choosing these words—especially when language can easily become a tool of stigmatization. Like many comrades and scholars working within decolonial, Indigenous, disability, and queer studies, I remain committed to finding more respectful ways to communicate—ways that move beyond the entrenched systems of labeling so deeply rooted in our social structures today.

Oceans

Due to the proximity of the oceans around the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, I have broadened my understanding and moved away from the binary notion of the city’s “periphery” and “center” to interpret these places as connective and strategic imaginary entities for today’s migration in Europe and South America. The profound symbolism of the oceans, particularly the North Sea, the Mediterranean, the Pacific, and the Atlantic, where these three studies are located, are present throughout this book. From their sound, texture, and poetry to their theoretical considera-

tion from a postcolonial perspective, the omnipresence of the ocean acts as the guiding thread in this research, weaving together the narratives of these places, their inhabitants, and the concepts associated with them, emphasizing both historical and contemporary tales of migration (see Chapter 1).

Delving into the geographical, territorial, natural, and cultural facets of oceans, I looked for traces between the past and present histories, places, and routes, drawing connections with colonial heritage and migration. From a European perspective, the Dzjanganal's strategic location on the coast of Calais (France), facing the English Channel, makes it a key location in the migratory journey of African diasporas. The constant flow of people seeking passage across the North Sea corridor to the UK encapsulates the complexity of these places. Similarly, Tiburtina, nestled in Rome, a crucial city-corridor in the contemporary migratory path to Northern Europe, is witness to the dangerous routes by which many people-in-transit have crossed the Mediterranean to reach Rome and later continue their journey to Northern European cities such as Calais and thus reach the United Kingdom. These perilous journeys, underscored by the Mediterranean and the English Channel, are embedded in the migratory narratives of those residing in these places. Crossing the Atlantic Ocean, Los Arenales in the northern Chilean desert is marked by the Pacific Ocean as a pivotal witness. Afro-Caribbean communities navigate mountain ranges, jungles, and deserts to settle in Chile. The echoes of past voyages from the colonial trade in enslaved people, carried across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, subtly linger in the narratives of these communities—albeit to a lesser extent (see Chapter 6). The Mediterranean, the North Sea, the Atlantic, and the Pacific are the cultural and symbolic materials of these particular migration narratives. They are multilayered water spaces that rather than being seen as “empty,” are rich with stories, journeys, dreams, and hopes (Ndikung and Römhild, 2022), interwoven by the history of colonial trade and the tragic events of the present: sinkings, imprisonments, disappearances, and deaths.

This book does not focus directly on the tragic, harrowing, and painful layers that these oceans harbor, which is one of the main narratives presented today, especially the Mediterranean and the English Channel. Grief, pain, and fear are present in the waters of these seas and underlie forced and tragic migration experiences. I have deliberately chosen not to focus mainly on these testimonies. The distortion and use of mass media and mainstream narratives about contemporary migration have, in many cases, led to the reproduction of colonial patterns of victimization and paternalism. In this book, I have been aware of these structures and have tried to avoid them at every stage of the research. It is clear to me that the “study of these case studies” as presented in anthropology is one of the many forms of potential exoticization and vulnerabilization of the “other.” Although anthropology has a long history of self-reflexivity, it is very difficult not to cross these thin lines, even if one does not intend to do so.

The decision to move away from person-centeredness as the starting point for this research was also a way of dealing with these colonial patterns. Looking at the border regime from an urban and socio-geographical perspective helped me to somewhat shift the power structures that occur when working with communities. This is not to say that power structures have disappeared; they are always present, even when one is dealing with urban zones, architecture, and objects. By moving away from a person-centered approach as a starting point, I was able to pay more attention to the different forms and strategies of urban resistance and territorial reclamation that were used in the self-construction of these places, which would have been extremely difficult to capture with today's mainstream migration narrative, obscuring the view. Turning to an urban perspective invited me to look at concrete aspects of coexistence, sociability, and solidarity in the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, contrasting the labels of "non-places," "places of exception," and "peripheral places" analyzed in this book.

State of Inbetweenness

Returning to my main question of how these settlements, so-called non-places, evolve into social places, the term "non-places" was used in my initial research as a mainstream term to describe these locations, as was the term "places of exception" in academic discourse. The term "non-places" was coined in the 1990s by the anthropologist Marc Augé, who describes non-places as places "without history and belonging" and "disconnection from the environment." Augé (1995) argues that non-places have been created by supermodernity and gives examples of non-places, such as "refugee camps", that fall into this category. Today, in a postcolonial era, identity and the sense of belonging to a place are constantly being rewritten and reshaped. By taking into account the deep history and collective memory of places, even if they are places of transit, it is possible to find traces of belonging, sociability, care, and a sense of home. The Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales show the limitation of non-places. Here, these places evolve from a temporary status to a transitory permanence and in some cases offer permanent solutions that provide a certain "sense of normality," as the anthropologist Michael Agier (2018) points out (see Chapter 5).

Reflecting on non-places, my thoughts wandered toward "space/threshold/inbetween" and experiences defined by "waiting" and "time." In conversation with some of the residents of these places, the word "limbo" was repeatedly used to describe the perception within the settlement. I remember a conversation with Dali, a 45-year-old man from Eritrea. He told me that life in a camp and the long wait for the asylum procedure in Europe—which many of his compatriots described as "the torture of hope"—is comparable to living in A'raf, a border zone between heaven and hell in

Islamic theology, a kind of limbo from a Catholic perspective. Cecilia, a resident of Los Arenales, also repeatedly mentioned her feeling of being in an intermediate state within the settlement. Cecilia related her experience of living in two countries at the same time to the feeling of limbo, as she had to work to support two families—her family in Venezuela and her family in Chile. Living emotionally and economically between two countries creates a sense of duality that Cecilia interpreted as living in limbo. These and other narratives that run throughout this book led me from initial reflections on the notion of limbo to the anthropological concept of “liminality” and its state of being inbetween, which goes beyond the notion of purgatory as understood in religious tradition (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Liminal could be defined as “on the threshold or in the initial stages of a process” (Buchanan, 2018; Oxford English Dictionary). It could therefore describe the beginning of a state or the state itself. The social anthropologists Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts (2012) extend the definition of liminal as a threshold to the spatial: a boundary, an edge, a transitional landscape or gateway in Simmel and Leggewie’s (1908) sense, a physical and psychic space of potentiality. The word liminal comes from the Latin word *limen* for threshold—“any point or place of entry or beginning” (Buchanan, 2018; Oxford English Dictionary, cited in Garland 2021b: 88). A liminal space is therefore the time between “what was” and “what is to come.” It is a place of transition, of waiting, of not knowing. The liminal experience of migration is an experience of tension, limbo, transit, marginality, and placelessness (Douglas, 1966). For people-in-transit, living in a state of inbetweenness, moving between physical and mental spaces, there is a sense of living between two or more worlds: the place of waiting (the present reality) and the uncertain future. The relationship between migration and mobility refers not only to a specific territory, from one place to another, but also to a specific time; the people-in-transit must await their journey with a specific sense of duality.

After my second field trip, I became aware of the limitations of liminality in analyzing migration experiences. Today, however, liminality is being reconsidered and problematized for the study of place, space, and mobility, associating it not only with spaces of pleasure but also with places of danger. However, the dangerous thing about using terms such as limbo, liminality, and waiting is that, as the anthropologist Georgina Ramsay (2019b) argues, they reinforce the image of “migrants” as people “out of time” and emphasize their state of exception, even though many people-in-transit use them to explain their own experiences. Throughout this book, I track these conceptual limitations, highlighting how engaging with liminality can also be productive. It serves as a way to explore other lenses through which to view the inbetweenness and conviviality in these places, as well as how communities have created alternative forms of urban spaces through struggles and resistance toward border regimes (see Chapter 5).

To return to my initial question: How do these places change and evolve into social places? Inspired by the critical geographer Doreen Massey's "sense of place" (1995), I wonder how time-space can play an essential role in understanding the state of inbetweenness and the relational process that the residents of these places experience, displaying different perspectives on the notion of waiting. These reflections again lead me to see the limitations of liminality as a term that cannot represent the experience of this so-called contradiction between "waiting" and "motion." Waiting generates more than just "being stuck." Waiting is surrounded by circulation, connectivity, and sociality and evokes a sense of social place (SAVVY Contemporary Berlin, 2022²). During my fieldwork in Italy, I met the anthropologist Iain Chambers (2008) from the postcolonial center of L'Orientale University in Naples, whose early work on "Mediterranean crossings" gave me a different perspective on understanding these places as an "Elsewhere" and opened up a different perspective on postcolonial discourse. Chambers grasped my initial motivation for liminality, not only because of the degree of becoming and transformation, but also due to the experiential dimensions of sensoriality and spatiality involved in being inbetween, highlighting the feminist Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "borderland," which she introduced in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), adding another perspective to being inbetween borders. Drawing on her own life of being born and raised on the Texas-Mexico border and personal experiences of cultural marginalization, Anzaldúa intertwines social marginalization with the processes of inbetweenness, geography, and multiracial status (Keating, 2006). Anzaldúa speaks of the notion of "border thinking" (cf. Mignolo, 2012), which is situated between two realities that can also create spaces of possibility for new understandings.

Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others who have or live in more than one culture, we receive multiple, often opposing, messages. The union of two self-consistent but usually incomparable frames of reference causes a clash, a cultural collision. (Anzaldúa, 1987: 85)

The degree of spatiality, sensoriality, and personal experience that "borderland" entails offers a new way of understanding the polarization between borders. Borders do not just create two sides; "borderland" is an inbetween with its own spatiality

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- 2 In the 2022 project "How will you determine time" at SAVVY Contemporary Berlin, SAVVY explored waiting's facets through discussions and performances. Inspired by Shahram Khosravi, they framed the project around the interpretation of time within the context of waiting—"a nonlinear, authority-imposed condition existing on the fringes of capital and colonial time. This waiting, a political state, profoundly impacts individuals psychologically, with varying experiences shaped by class, race, and geography" (SAVVY Contemporary Berlin, 2022).

and sensoriality, a place of collective negotiation and encounter for marginal subjectivities that can articulate inbetweenness as a political and intellectual position (Anzaldúa, 1987). This leads me to comprehend further the limitations of liminality. Time in liminality narrates the experiences of transformational processes and not necessarily the territory and its particular narratives.

Looking closely at the concept of “borderland” has helped me to consider “Somewhere Inbetween”: an evolving lens that view these places that challenge conventional notions of “periphery” as places far removed from the urban landscape, if not rather interpret them as key placemaking, through their convivial and resistance strategies, as well as their ability to aspire, in the construction of the urban in today’s cities. A convincing example can be found in the Los Arenales community, where a collective endeavor to develop into a “Latin American city” is emerging. Here, waiting and being “trapped” in time are discarded and replaced by the desire to overcome the “urban periphery” by creating a distinct neighborhood in the Chilean landscape. Los Arenales navigate their inbetween status and assert their permanence within the territorial context. This way of viewing the city leads me to begin unfolding *Somewhere Inbetween*—places that transcend the boundaries of the so-called periphery in the city. Instead, Los Arenales challenges us to rethink the notions of “center” and “periphery,” advocating for a nuanced perspective that recognizes the transformative impact of these places as part of the city (see Epilogue).

Places

My first encounters with the places and people of the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales took place as part of a participatory art project carried out between 2016 and 2018. As described in Chapter 3 of this book, during one of my artistic research trips in 2016, I managed to enter the Dzjantal (France), one of the largest autonomous settlements in Europe at the time, which has been the first field of investigation of this research since 2019. My first approach to the Dzjantal was through an art action that I called *Connecting Stories*.³ It consisted of the exchange of anonymous letters between newcomers and compatriots in emergency camps across Europe (Germany, France, Italy), as well as in Turkey, Syria, and Chile. *Connecting Stories* emerged as an artistic response to the increasing number (since 2015) of people-in-transit from West Asia, Central Asia, and the Horn of Africa seeking refuge in European countries—academically referred to as “the long summer of migration”⁴ (Hameršak, 2023; see also Kasperek and Speer, 2015; Römhild et al.,

3 See more <https://somerwhereinbetween.cargo.site/connecting-stories>

4 In 2015, the movement of people through Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, and Italy toward the European Union is often referred to as the “migrant or refugee crisis.” Bernd Kasperek and Marc

2017). The impossibility of communication between compatriots and family members in these emergency camps, as they had no access to internet, telephone, or location information, encouraged me to look for an “artistic way” to facilitate this communication. I say, “artistic way” because it was a creative method to camouflage this activist act, as one of the policies of the European authorities was to prevent communication between new arrivals for reasons of their own “safety.” *Connecting Stories* was the starting point for my next encounters in the second and third field trips to the communities of Tiburtina (Italy) and Los Arenales (Chile). This art action was also the starting point for my own personal critique and self-reflection when working with communities, especially “refugee” communities, which are in an extremely precarious position (see Chapter 3). *Connecting Stories* not only led me to encounter the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, but also opened the desired window for a journey into the many ethical challenges that artistic practices such as participatory art, social art, and art+activism pose when working with communities. In Chapter 3, I have undertaken a self-reflexive analysis of the challenges of artistic work with communities in an autoethnography—a starting point for my further reflections on the intertwining of art and anthropology.

I draw inspiration from the concept of multisited ethnography (see Marcus, 1995) to approach this research not merely from the specific locales of each “field site” but from a detached perspective. I alternate between zooming in and zooming out to uncover interconnections, entanglements, and juxtapositions among the social processes unfolding in the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. This approach helped me find connecting threads in the narratives of these places. Interweaving their shared colonial legacies, migration (hi)stories, and contemporary resistance to border regimes invites a perspective that goes beyond interpreting these urban sociopolitical processes as isolated events or from a comparative social science viewpoint. Rather, it encourages the search for imaginary and speculative threads to analyze urban and social dynamics in European and South American contexts. Therefore, in this book, the reader will not find chapters dedicated exclusively to detailing the sites of the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales individually. This deliberate choice stems from my desire to escape the traditional way of describing places in ethnography. In Chapter 1, I invite the reader to embark on a non-linear storytelling exploration of the stories encountered in the field. This exploration is facilitated by fragmentary forms of writing echoing the idea of *archipelago thinking*

Speer (2015) coined the phrase “the long summer of migration” to describe these events. In contrast to the negative connotations of a crisis, this term emphasizes the mobility and social solidarity that could be observed during this time. It stands for a turning point in migration movements and points to long-term, formative effects. The figurative “long summer” portrays a temporal interruption and mobility and emphasizes the relatively unhindered border crossings within the EU during this period (Hameršak, 2023).

(Glissant, 1997) and presents alternative ways of telling the stories of the places and people I encounter in this research.

Places Featured

The Dzjantal was a settlement that existed between the late 1990s and 2016 on the outskirts of Calais, a major port city in northern France. “It is situated at the narrowest point of the English Channel, the Strait of Dover, at just 34 km wide, making it the closest French town to England” (Wikipedia). The Dzjantal functioned as a cross-border space where inhabitants lived together across cultures and languages, positioned at the intersection of two nations (France and England), the European Union, the Schengen area, and the geographical threshold between land and sea. Its residents arrived through improvised and dangerous journeys, with the United Kingdom as their intended destination; however, they became “trapped” in Calais due to the European border regime, which has grown increasingly complex and violent since 2015. In mass media, the settlement was labeled “the jungle,” a phonetic translation of the word *dzjantal*, meaning forest, bush, or wood in Pashto and in several Arabic dialects. The name “the Dzjantal” was also adopted by some groups within the community itself.

By the summer of 2016, the northern part of Les Dunes–Calais was characterized by a dense and informal urban fabric, despite ongoing tensions between police forces and “migrants” and volunteers. This area remained the last urbanized section of the Dzjantal until the camp was dismantled. More than 8,000 people lived there, within a constantly shrinking territory of approximately 10 hectares—equivalent to 80,000 people per square kilometer, a world record and double the density of Cairo or Manila, generally considered among the densest cities globally (Agier, 2018: 70). The settlement rapidly developed into a city with a school, kindergarten, theater, youth center, library, restaurants, radio station, mosques, churches, and residential areas. These urban structures were described as “common buildings” by the ethnologist Michel Agier in *The Jungle: Calais' Camps and Migrants* (2018). Agier defines these “common” spaces as the result of communal and voluntary construction, distinguishing them from “public services,” as the municipality of Calais did not build them. Instead, NGOs, volunteers, and residents collectively produced these social infrastructures. Alongside this rapid growth, media attention increased dramatically—through newspapers, television, radio, and online documentaries—further accelerating the development of the Dzjantal. Gradually, the area became a neighborhood and a small town on the so-called periphery of Calais, with global visibility: “This town began to focus the attention of the whole world, which could well appreciate how it was both prophetic and catastrophic in character, marvelous and wretched, utopian and dystopian” (Agier, 2018: 71). The peak of the 2015 border crisis, particularly

within the European Union, played a central role in subsequent governmental and EU actions, leading to extreme consequences such as demolitions, violence, and repeated human rights violations in the history of the Dzjangan. (Garland, 2021a: 113–114)

Tiburtina was a settlement between the late 1990s and 2003. “It was located in Rome, fifteen minutes from one of the most important train stations in the city. The name “Tiburtina” was coined by groups within the community of this settlement, referring to the proximity of the Tiburtina train station. It is also labeled “Hotel Africa” by the Italian press for being a settlement inside a building inhabited temporarily by more than 800 people originally Eritrea and Ethiopia”. (Garland, 2024b: 33) The community strongly criticized the name “Hotel Africa,” stating, “This place is not a hotel, and we are not in Africa.” The building, which remains unused at the time of this book, occupied a strategic position along the route of the African diaspora from the Mediterranean toward the United Kingdom. After eviction, many former residents traveled to Calais and stayed in the Dzjangan. Communication within Tiburtina relied on satellite phones, connecting residents with people-in-transit traveling from southern Italy and various African cities to northern Europe. The settlement hosted more than 800 people, mainly couples and young men. Supported by a rich ecology of actors—including neighbors, non-governmental organizations, the Vatican (for a period), and an internal leadership structure of 12 representatives—the community organized weekly assemblies to coordinate accommodation, events, workshops, and communal facilities such as restaurants, cafés, hairdressers, a mosque, an Italian school, a soccer field, and dormitories. Tiburtina sought to establish an alternative model of hospitality, in which people-in-transit organized and governed the space themselves, in contrast to the state-controlled “refugee centers” operating in Italy at the time. The limited information I was able to gather comes from encounters with former residents still living in Rome, informal interviews with people familiar with the settlement, and material provided by the Italian NGO Baobab. Despite its prominence in 2000, very little documentation exists online or in public media. Today, Tiburtina no longer exists; the building is enclosed by two large fences, installed in 2018, following repeated reoccupations by former residents after the violent eviction of late 2003. This eviction marked the first in a series of similar events in Rome, violating human rights and citizens’ rights to safe, organized, and informed eviction processes (fieldnotes, 2018).

Los Arenales has existed as a settlement since 2015 and is located on the highest edge of the city, at the geographical boundary between Antofagasta, Chile, and the Atacama Desert. From Los Arenales, looking west, it is possible to see the entire urban expanse of the city stretching toward the Pacific Ocean on the horizon. In Chile, settlements like Los Arenales are derogatorily referred to as “Toma,” literally meaning “taking,” a term used for “informal occupations” of abandoned land out-

side official urban planning frameworks. The name “Los Arenales” was chosen by the community itself, referencing the sandy terrain on which it is built. The area consists of six small settlements housing approximately 7,000 people, primarily from Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, and Haiti. Each settlement has its own organizational committee, and representatives meet weekly in a general assembly to address issues such as territorial recognition and access to electricity and water infrastructure. Community organizers are predominantly women, working through practices of care and collective female empowerment. This gendered leadership offers a distinct contrast to the Dzjangan and Tiburtina, where residents were mainly men. Los Arenales is currently in the final phase of territorial reclamation, and its leaders have engaged directly with former Chilean President Gabriel Boric as part of broader national negotiations between self-built settlements and the Chilean state for access to dignified housing (see Andrade and Sugranyes, 2022).

In the context of homemaking, the process of occupation within South American “Tomas” is more socially normalized. People without access to housing—those unable to afford rent or seeking shelter—occupy abandoned urban land and gradually construct neighborhoods marked by very precarious conditions but also by a degree of flexibility that has prevented multiple evictions, which might otherwise have halted their development. Regulation in these contexts is often ambiguous, with limited control over the establishment of such sites. In some cases, prolonged occupation combined with sustained negotiation with municipal and governmental authorities has resulted in legal recognition, allowing communities to remain and further consolidate their neighborhoods. Within Chile’s current migration context, border regulations and legislation have been widely criticized and reevaluated, leading to policy adjustments for new arrivals. At the onset of the South American border regime crisis in 2014, Chile lacked a coherent “integration” strategy, creating significant challenges related to housing and labor for people-in-transit. For instance, nearly half of the 702 “Tomas” in Chile are composed of people-in-transit (López-Morales, Flores Pineda, and Orozco Ramos, 2018). To date, Chile still lacks clear “integration” policies or provisions for temporary accommodation, and the housing needs of people-in-transit remain largely unresolved (see Chapter 1).

How to Navigate This Book

Chapters

This book consists of six chapters and an Epilogue. Each chapter opens a different window into the research, moving between poetic, and ethnographic writing, artistic multimodal methods, archival approaches, postcolonial perspectives, and critical urbanism. Rather than offering a single, linear, and supposedly complete path, this

book presents a fragmented form of writing, opening the research to an intentionally incomplete and partial engagement with the field (Römhild, 2024). Readers are invited to explore each chapter individually or in combination, much like overlapping or juxtaposed puzzle pieces. This design mirrors a transparent layering that reveals the material, theoretical, temporal, and collaborative dimensions of the research. Following this logic, I will not introduce each chapter here in a linear way; instead, I track my journey through the ideas and methods on which this research is based, which ranged from the introduction of anthropological theories to ethnographic and artistic experiments, with a back-and-forth play between theory and practice.

My starting point was based on my introduction to border regimes and critical migration studies in **Chapter 5, “Somewhere: Rethinking Liminality in Border Regimes,”** where I question the ethnologist Marc Augé’s (1995) notions of “non-places” and the philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) “places of exception” and their critical analysis of the anthropologists Efthimia Panagiotidis and Vassilis Tsianos’ border regime studies on “migrant camps.” In this chapter, I first propose to understand these places through the concept of liminality as defined by the ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep ([1961] 2019) and the anthropologist Victor Turner ([1987] 1996) and its relation to place and mobility as elucidated by the social scientist Bjørn Thomassen (2026). I later criticize the limitations of the concept for the discussion of migration experiences of inbetweenness. Subsequently, in **Chapter 6, “Becomings: Placemaking in Inbetweenness,”** I question the possibility of viewing these places through a postcolonial lens. In looking at the narratives of people in these sites, I identified relationships to the colonial past among the residents. These connections are not limited to histories shaped by colonialism in Africa and Central-South Asia—especially the British Empire’s influence in Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, and the former Italian colony of Eritrea, countries from which the residents of the Džangal and Tiburtina originate—but also include ties to the Atlantic colonial trade in enslaved people, the Haitian Revolution, and their legacies in the Caribbean, which are essential traces in the current migration to Chile.

In **Chapter 1, “Ocean, Places, People,”** I returned to my field material to understand the sociability that developed in these places, which as political spaces produced resistance and territorial reclamation strategies. I used short stories, vignettes, poems, and text fragments to convey their conviviality and their daily resistance to the border regime. In this chapter, I also question the important issue of representation and how the story of others can be told, proposing literary and poetic elements as an alternative form of representation. In doing so, I was inspired by the idea of oceans as a poetic, aesthetic, and theoretical thread between the stories of the places—a holistic concept of representation. I see the idea of oceans as a container for people’s stories about these places, especially the relationship between

the Mediterranean and the North Sea, witnessing the stories of the Dzjanganl and Tiburtina, and the Pacific Ocean with the stories of Los Arenales.

The literary and poetic elements tested in Chapter 1 guided me to look into the relationship between art and anthropology in more detail. Through the autoethnography described in **Chapter 3, “Autoethnography of Inbetweenness,”** I examine my own positionality between theory and practice as well as aesthetics and ethics. I analyze my approach to ethnography through my artistic practices and the processes of validation and recognition of those practices in the social science multimodal debate. Here I discuss “thinking by doing,” which questions thinking through and with aesthetic and sensory forms opening up other ways of producing knowledge where affectivity and sensoriality come into play, contributing to broadening the more-than-textual research that explores multimodality in the social sciences today. Here I also return to the critique of liminality, in this case from the arts. The great interest in liminality in the artistic context and the criticism from the social sciences make me question this double perspective of the term. In Chapter 3, I analyze how liminality evolved from anthropology to the arts and became relevant in the artistic field, especially in theater and performance, through the influence of the anthropologist Victor Turner (1967). Throughout the book, I critique liminality from different angles, and in this chapter I look at it from an artistic perspective and ask: How does the concept of liminality, so criticized by the social sciences, find a place and thrive in artistic contexts?

Reflecting on the relationship between art and anthropology led me to experiment with different methods and practices in my fieldwork. This is described in **Chapter 4, “Artistic Artifacts,”** which is an interweaving between artistic practices and multimodal ethnography. My first visits to the sites took place between 2016 and 2018, when I was wearing my artistic hat. Later, between 2021 and 2022, I returned to the sites for academic fieldwork. This second period was burdened by the daily restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, waiting for presidential elections due to a revolution in Chile, and possible deportations by the British government to Rwanda in April 2022. On my second visit, I was faced with the challenge that two of these sites—the Dzjanganl and Tiburtina—no longer existed, which challenged me to look for new forms outside of traditional ethnography as I was confronted with the memory of abandoned places and the traces of a community.

These methodological experiments led me to dig into the community archives described in **Chapter 2, “Aspirational Archives,”** where I again delve into the narratives of these places, this time through sound and photo archives created by the residents and volunteers, as in the case of Jungala Radio, an online archive posted on an open platform and produced by residents and volunteers in the Dzjanganl between 2015 and 2016. In this chapter, inspired by the reflections of the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2003b), I explore the idea of archives as interventions of collective memories and as a product of anticipation. This chapter is co-authored

by people who have contributed to the archives, which are sensory and tangible examples of the conviviality and resistance of these places, countering the notion of “non-places.” This leads me to my final reflections in the **Epilogue, “Somewhere Inbetween: Rethinking ‘Elsewhere,’”** where I begin to consider how these places might be approached through “Somewhere Inbetween”—a lens that remains open and evolving, shaped by the processes of conviviality, resistance, and the ability to aspire, as these communities move beyond the notion of “periphery” to become social places within the cityscape.

Sensory Satellites

As the readers navigate through this book, they will encounter what I term “SENSORY SATELLITES”—chapters interacting with the book’s website through hyperlinks and QR codes. Audios, photos, and videos accompany some paragraphs, providing readers the opportunity to delve into more-than-textual forms of the research. This design allows for a dynamic back-and-forth between textual content and digital sensory elements, mirroring the immersive nature of experimental and multimodal ethnography. The gestural choreography of the book prompts readers to envision a journey traversing diverse realm—places, people, languages, disciplines, ideas, and methods—all integral components of this research’s machinery.