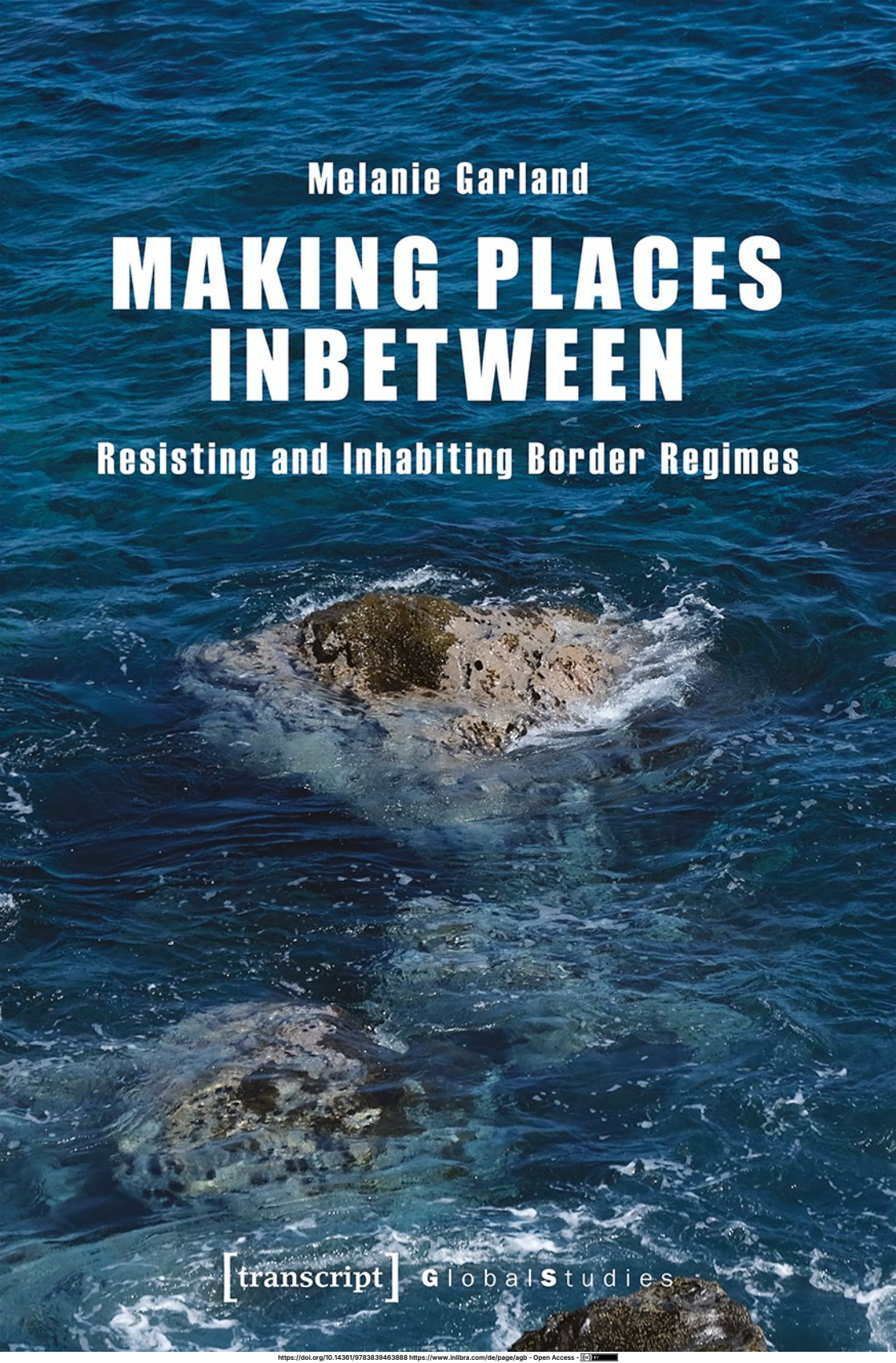


An aerial photograph of a rocky coastline. The water is a deep, vibrant blue with white foam from waves crashing against the shore. Several large, dark, and moss-covered rocks protrude from the water. The overall scene is dynamic and captures the raw power of the ocean.

Melanie Garland

MAKING PLACES INBETWEEN

Resisting and Inhabiting Border Regimes

[transcript] GlobalStudies

Melanie Garland
Making Places Inbetween

Global Studies

Melanie Garland (Dr.) is an artist, heritage restorer, researcher and lecturer. She earned a PhD from the Institute of European Ethnology at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin for her multimodal project “Somewhere Inbetween”. Her research topics are postmigrant society, postcolonial and urban studies, and decolonial practices through artistic-ethnographic methods. She is working at the intersection of art and anthropology through collaborative installation, sound art, and performative and curatorial processes grounded in feminist ethics of care.

Melanie Garland

Making Places Inbetween

Resisting and Inhabiting Border Regimes

[transcript]

Also: Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Faculty of Philosophy, dissertation, 2024, title: Somewhere Inbetween: From so-called Non-Places towards Social Places through states of Inbetweenness

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*In memory of my father, whose guidance instilled in me a blend of critical thinking and
boundless curiosity for “multiple worlds”*

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1 In this book, all names without surnames are fictitious to respect the privacy and protection of their identities. However, their life stories are real and do not affect the accuracy of the events, encounters, and context analyzed in this research.

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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 Dzjangan, 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 Dzjangan, 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 Dzjanganal, 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 Dzjanganal, 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

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 Džjanganl 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 Dzjantal 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.

CHAPTER 1

Oceans, Places, People

In this first chapter, I reflect on the great challenges of writing people's stories. Through fragmented ethnographic and poetic narratives, I explore diverse forms of (re)presenting my encounters with the cities of Calais, Rome, and Antofagasta, as well as with the places and people of the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. Bodies of salt water become my poetic element to navigate the complexities of representation.

1.1 Writing People's Stories: An Autotheory of Positionality in the Field

Since my first approaches to anthropology and ethical issues within artistic practice, my great challenge has been to bring together my own positionality and the complexity of representation to the stories of places and people I encountered during the fieldwork. Using ethnography as one of my research methods to understand and represent people's experiences, the question of “how” and “why” I should represent “the other” was always on my mind—a question that often arises for me as an artist through a kind of abstract presentation of the subject, rather than representing it. In the first fieldwork trip of this research (with my artist hat on), I asked questions like: Who am I to write the stories of others, especially when it comes to stories of places and people in constant uncertainty and vulnerability? Who am I to write stories about forced migrations, border crossings, escapes, evacuations, and expulsions? These questions were sensitized more from within art, where the abstraction and materiality of elements and objects were my guides for dealing with the challenge of representation. Later, at the beginning of the doctoral fellowship, these questions became even more complex, inspired by the autoethnographies of Jennifer Adams (2022); among other things, I asked myself: How can I represent past stories and desired aspirations in an accurate, truthful, and respectful way? What narrative choices do I make as an author to represent voices that are not my own, and what significance do these choices have for the reader's interpretation? What right do I have to make informally shared words public, even if they have said it's

okay to write them down and share them? How do I bring the other voice into the narrative? And how can these stories be told?

Various reflections on the description of ethnography have been my source of inspiration, especially the ongoing debates on self-reflexivity, positionality, multimodal and multisensory techniques foregrounded by case studies that resist the old conventions of representation. Postcolonial, decolonial, and feminist ethnographers have developed this view into a somewhat “holistic” way of representing the culture or phenomenon under study, focusing their attention on a certain “situated encounter” or “event” rather than a “system” and concentrating on a contemporary ethnography of culture-making as a lived encounter (Myers, 2004). Approaches such as collaborative ethnography and co-authorship can highlight alternative modes of representation and expand the subject being researched from a participatory and collective perspective. Likewise, engaging with multisensory and collaborative practices helps move beyond the violence of traditional ethnographic display. In addition, many ethnographers have experimented with fiction and poetry as a writing medium (see Rosaldo, 1989; Jacobson and Larsen, 2014; Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). I have been inspired by Latin American *infra-realist* authors such as Roberto Bolaño (2011), who works with interesting literary stylistic elements such as short, detailed, and complex narratives, as well as the use of open endings for further interpretation by the reader.

The challenge of representation, as I see it, extends beyond narrating complex stories; it's also about how these narratives are situated within different contexts. Whether they appear in scientific papers, literary works, or art exhibitions, the manner of representation can vary significantly. I envision the stories I encountered during my fieldwork as components arranged like constellations in a “fictional place” that I have called “Somewhere Inbetween” and which is analyzed deeply in the Prologue of this book. These narratives relate to each other, collide with each other and intertwine, avoiding a linear chronology and instead presenting fragmentary moments that mirror the everyday experience of encountering the places and people that are part of this research. In contrast to the conventional chronological narrative, which is reflected in a Western and colonial lens that prescribes a single, overarching narrative, I view these stories as constellations. I embrace the idea of multiple narratives simultaneously—an idea inspired by archipelagic thinking (Glissant, 1997) and the multi-plurality within decolonial discourse that celebrates different voices, thoughts, and reflections coexisting within the same sphere, challenging the notion of a single perspective imposed by colonialism (I will return to this in the last part of this section).

My inclination to follow the stories I encountered holistically and spatially was influenced by my own positionality during repeated travels between Europe and South America—traveling back and forth between Chile, Italy, and France, the countries in which my fieldwork was conducted, and also my own migration journey,

which runs between Chile and Germany. The frequent trips across the Atlantic led me to reflect on how the narratives of these geographies are intertwined with the oceans. As I delved into the histories of the places in this research, I also found connections to the colonial maritime trade routes linking Africa, Europe, and the Americas (see below). Examining the connections between the narratives revealed that the geographical expanse of saltwater serves as a common thread that weaves these intersecting stories together. These are holistic narratives shaped by bodies of water that span oceans and encompass a shared migratory past and present, helping me find alternative ways of writing people's stories and addressing the complexities of representation.

Oceans: An Intertwined Form of Research

I became aware of the symbolic power of oceans when I realized my solo exhibition *Somewhere Inbetween*,¹ which took place in July 2022 at Gallery Lite-Haus in Berlin. This exhibition was part of presenting this research to my PhD supervisors, the cultural anthropologist Regina Römheld and art theorist and curator Bonaventure Ndikung, as well as to my colleagues in and outside academia. The exhibition consisted primarily of an art installation on the floor and maps and illustrations on the walls. Specifically, the installation consisted of three blue cloths lying on the floor in an asymmetrical circular shape, representing three puddles of water that I called the Mediterranean, the North Sea, and the Pacific Ocean. On these cloths were objects that I had collected during my field research, as well as diaries, photos, drawings, and old documents/maps. My idea was to create an archaeological site where you can dive into the research depths and find (hi)stories about the migratory routes I was following.

Instead of unfolding my research from the classification of the three fieldwork sites—the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales—and their specific cities—Calais, Rome, and Antofagasta—which are the subject of this research, I wanted to look at these elements and stories aesthetically and analytically and see if it is possible to connect them, not only through my own experience of having chosen these places for research, but also through the saltwater as an element of relation. Ndikung and Römheld reflected on my installation and the relationship I wanted to create through the oceans; Ndikung remarked how everything in the ocean always reveals itself in many different ways, like a kind of “shaking” of the sea, where it moves everything that is below to bring it to the surface, and everything that floats to bring it to the depths (Ndikung and Römheld, 2022). The ocean is not an “empty space,” but a space that is full and rich in histories, stories, relationships, connections, and entanglements. Similar stories run through these waters (Ndikung and Römheld, 2022).

1 See https://somerwhereinbetween.cargo.site/Somewhere-Inbetween_artwork

Later on, I was inspired to continue thinking about oceans as an intertwined form of research, thanks to a visit to the 2023 exhibition *Indigo Waves and Other Stories* at the Gropius Bau in Berlin, which sought to rethink the Indian Ocean, integrating it into African histories of forced and unforced displacement that produced maritime relations charged by mercantile imperialism. The artists in this exhibition showed other perspectives on the African and Asian continents, highlighting their historical, cultural, and linguistic connections. Rather than framing the Indian Ocean as a divider with layers of colonial histories and legacies, they offered multiple perspectives on cultural flows resonating today. *Indigo Waves and Other Stories* emphasized the “perpetual hybridity” found in the Indian Ocean, moving away from a recentering of colonial legacy and power imbalance marked by the ocean (Ginwala, Ndikung, and Corsaro, 2023).

I cannot help remembering my father when looking at the letters and postcards he used to send from Chile to Germany, in which he described how this large puddle of water called the Atlantic separated us. At the same time, as a marine biologist, he saw the oceans as connectors between the marine life currents. As a child, we played with the idea that if we told a fish on the Chilean Pacific coast some secrets, it would travel across the currents to reveal them to its cousins in the Atlantic. He was referring specifically to the speculation of salmon migrating between Chile and Norway. This view of my father, that humans are separated by the oceans but marine life is connected underwater, has also made me think about this shift in perspectives. “Oceans have been a supposed separating element between continents, islands, and countries, a divisive colonial idea, but if we focus on the sea as a corridor where water moves through maritime currents, this conception of separation shifts, turning water into a connector of histories, stories, routes, and relationships” (Ndikung and Römhild, 2023, cited in Garland, 2024a: 31).

Postcolonial Oceans

Text fragments from the sonic-essay: “Attempting to Decolonize Oneself: Sonorities between the ‘West’ and the ‘South’” (Garland, 2024a).

Postcolonial and decolonial studies have been interested in the oceans and seas as containers of sociopolitical and historical entanglement. From colonial trade routes to today’s wars, the oceans have seen different layers of historical events that now form the basis for postcolonial and decolonial knowledge (Erbe, 2018). New ocean studies have integrated this perspective and produced a heterogeneity of discourses on how the oceans divide but also unite continents, cultures, and thoughts. Here, I do not want to leave out the tragic narratives of oceans and seas marked by dangerous past and present journeys where many fail to reach their final destination, such as the ones that take place in the Mediterranean and the English Channel today. Also, the Atlantic Ocean was key to the colonial trade in

enslaved people, a forced migration that many did not survive. The repercussions of these tragic journeys are still present today. They are at the core of the oceans' and seas' narratives, marked by "memories of loss," as Arjun Appadurai (2003b) refers to today's collective memory of migration. (Garland, 2024a: 31)

Postcolonial scholars have also focused on oceans' circulation relationships. The sociologist and cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy (1993), in his renowned book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, focused on the double consciousness of the African diaspora and its history of migration, using the image of the "slave ship" [ship used to transport enslaved people] to represent bodies that are between lands, identities, cultures, pasts, and futures—bodies that are impossible to define in terms of territorial borders and border regimes. The Black Atlantic transcends this diaspora's histories, defining the colonial legacy as "the dark and well-hidden side of Western modernity" (Mignolo, 2011: 2). In a similar vein, environmental anthropologist Gísli Pálsson (1998), known for his work about fishing communities and their relationship with the ocean, argues that the supposedly isolated "new" and "old" worlds were in fact connected by colonial voyages, which he defines as a "global but polarized network of power-relations" (p. xvii). (Garland, 2024a: 31–32)

Besides, contemporary narratives in Italy and Europe about the Mediterranean migration routes brought to the surface colonial histories and discourses that were underwater. Since 2014, social, art, and literary scholars have been interested in the different meanings, connotations, and layers of information and history of the Mediterranean and human crossings, emphasizing the ocean as a separator and connector between the African and European continents. Scholars, artists, and writers inspired by Gilroy's concept of the *Black Atlantic* have begun to develop the idea of the *Black Mediterranean* as a geographical and theoretical dimension to understand what happens to the improvised and extremely dangerous routes of the diaspora across the Mediterranean to Europe (Grimaldi, 2019). The anthropologist Giuseppe Grimaldi, in his article "The Black Mediterranean: Liminality and the Reconfiguration of AfroEuropeanness" (2019), attempts a redefinition of the post-migrant society of Ethiopian and Eritrean origin in Italy through the idea of the Black Mediterranean, emphasizing the need for a rethinking of national identity that recognizes Italians with African heritage. Grimaldi highlights the event of the Lampedusa shipwreck on October 3, 2013 as a starting point for debates in refugee studies and shows how, since that date, the Mediterranean has been the site of many stories of shipwrecks and the sinking of rubber dinghies, but also of successful crossings that have led to the creation of land routes to Northern Europe, especially England, as the English Channel is a gateway for human crossings.

Moreover, the writer and anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa (1998), who explored how the indigenous peoples of the South Pacific islands experience the challenges of modernization, has reconceptualized the idea of the Pacific islands and their culture, people, and surroundings as a network of waters, which, rather than separating the lands, connect them into a "sea of islands." Hau'ofa revives the term "Oceania" to encapsulate how the ocean is a pathway rather than a barrier for the Pacific islands' rich natural, historical, and cultural resources. The poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant (1997) has similar reflections: his "archipelagic thinking" alters our perspective by saying that the world is a largely connected archipelago (cited in Erb, 2019). (Garland, 2024a: 32)

In conversation with the curator of contemporary art, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Glissant asserts that archipelagos "are spaces of relation that recognize all the infinite details of the real. Being in harmony with the world through archipelagos means inhabiting this diffraction, while still rallying coastlines and joining horizons. They open us up to a sea of wandering: to ambiguity, to fragility, to drifting, which is not the same as futility" (Glissant and Obrist, 2021: 20–21).

Glissant's concept of archipelagic thinking is characterized by the fact that it allows for "unpredictability, multiplicity and ambiguity" (Wiedorn, 2021)—a resonance with his earlier exploration of "creolization" in the Afro-Caribbean context. This way of understanding is closely linked to the rhizomatic philosophy of relation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980), in which the absence of a singular root of belonging and knowledge disrupts the notion of universal thought and challenges colonial dominations. In the realm of archipelagic thinking, islands become rhizomatic entities that lack a singular center, countering the idea of the "mainland." The inhabitants of these archipelagos have a multitude of origins whose roots spread outward rather than converging into a single nation-state as in the past. Much like the cohesive gestures of islands within an archipelago, cultures are pushed to extend outward and cultivate connections with other cultures by establishing an interrelationship through the salt waters (Wiedorn, 2021). Glissant's concept of "creolization" illustrates the rich diversity of origins and hybrid cultures prevalent in Latin America and the Caribbean islands. What the postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha ([1994] 2012) refers to as "hybridity" (see below) is echoed in Glissant's unique concept and provides a contextual lens through which to understand the colonial legacy in the Caribbean. Glissant argues how "continental thought" adopts a panoramic point of view, perceiving the world as a cohesive "block" and struggling for a comprehensive "synthesis." This perspective embodies a universalist approach to reality. Glissant argues:

[C]ontinental thought [...] makes us think that we see the world as a bloc, taken wholesale, all-at-once, as a sort of imposing synthesis, just as we can see, through

the window of an airplane, the configurations of landscapes or mountainous surfaces. With archipelagic thought, we know the rivers' rocks, without a doubt even the smallest ones (Glissant 2009: 45).

This quote underlines the tension between particularity and universality in Glissant's thoughts (Wiedorn, 2021). Although this extends beyond the scope of this book, in other essays I have explored Glissant's idea of archipelago thinking toward an ecological aspect of relational listening between humans, non-humans, and their environment—elements that resonate with the contemporary world marked by “exhausted ecologies” (Blair et al., 2023), where migration is perceived as one of the consequences of climate change. This approach looks at Glissant's “poetics of relation” through a non-human lens, questioning how we relate to our environment today (see Garland 2025a and b).

By expanding the concept of the archipelago and shifting the perspective to the relationship between “islands” and the “mainland,” Römhild explores the notion of “thinking with islands” as a contemporary way of understanding the Mediterranean Sea, particularly through the lens of migration. This perspective goes beyond the conventional view of the sea as a mere dividing line and instead considers it as a “space of possibilities.” Römhild posits that the Mediterranean serves as a “geopolitical laboratory” that fosters “counter-imaginings and movements” that challenge the dominant narrative of the “European periphery” (see following paragraphs). In her ethnography on the Greek island of Crete, *The Island as a Space of Borders and Possibilities* (2021), Römhild claims that islands in the Mediterranean and beyond function as political laboratories that deal with the interplay of borders and identities (Römhild, 2021). The concept of “thinking with islands,” akin to Glissant's notion of “archipelago thinking,” offers an alternative perspective to decentralize the traditional view of the “mainland” as the main narrative and primary point of view, especially in the contemporary context of border regimes and migrations that have shaped the Mediterranean in the last decade.

By foregrounding the autonomy of migration, Römhild reflects on the implications of “thinking with islands” for broadening the spectrum of perspectives on borders and migration dynamics. This conceptual approach is based on the “principle of the sea” (Römhild, 2021: 2) and emphasizes the fluidity and openness inherent in the maritime context. Römhild proposes a cosmopolitan perspective that departs from the mainland borders. In her subsequent writings, she advocates this perspective as a way of seeing the world through the perspective of the “migrant,” calling for a “minor cosmopolitan” approach. This contrasts with the traditional idea of the cosmopolitan man—a white male, bourgeois figure who moves through the world with a supposedly universal world view. In contrast, “minor cosmopolitan” refers to a perspective that emphasizes the particularity of the connection and relationship between cultures and people rather than the universalism that homogenizes. In

this context, thinking as archipelago (Glissant) through and with islands (Römhild) counters the predominant narrative of the continent as a mainland. This reevaluation allows for the examination of contemporary events, such as migratory routes in the Mediterranean, beyond the confines of a “continental” perspective (I will come back to this point in the last part of this section).

Following on from the idea of the Mediterranean as a conduit for contemporary migrations, Römhild continues thinking about the Mediterranean as a space of possibilities. Her text *Reflexive Mediterraneanization: Mobilities, Economies, and the Cultural Remittance of Imaginaries* (2016) draws on the idea that the formation of Europe is closely influenced by a globally intertwined “geography of imagination,” a concept formulated by the anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2021), meaning Europe as a territory that has “centers” and “peripheries,” particularly between the notion of European “Western and Northern” centers and “Southern and Eastern” peripheries. Starting from this premise, Römhild argues that while this imaginary geography continues to shape current borders, at the same time, “migrant” communities resist these polarizations that are embedded in postcolonial societies. Römhild proposes a “reflexive Mediterraneanization” that could facilitate the reinvention of “peripheral” places by representing a form of Europeanization that emanates “from below.” Römhild introduces these reflections from the Greek Mediterranean by delving into the current dynamics of mobilities and socioeconomics between the so-called “centers” and “peripheries,” the Mediterranean being an important source of these contemporary entanglements.

In the text “Figurations of the Mediterranean,” Römhild (2008) continues to explore the dynamics of Europe’s imagination and practice in relation to its “periphery,” in particular the edges of Europe that collide with the Mediterranean sea, branded as “backward,” which she analyzes as currently serving as a “laboratory for reimagining” and practicing “Mediterraneanness.” Römhild introduces the concept of Mediterraneanization, revealing a historical hierarchy that initially positioned the Mediterranean as the marginalized hinterland of Western European modernity. Drawing on postcolonial perspectives, Römhild references the works of Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, who examine the European “center” through the lens of “otherness” (see Epilogue). Römhild underscores the significance of “reflexive Mediterranean ethnology” and postcolonial Mediterranean research in analyzing the imaginary geographies and “other” knowledge of modernity. This broader perspective incorporates Europe’s postcolonial space and its internal “others,” paving the way for an exploration of the role of migration in the contemporary context. Römhild, through the concept of “Mediterraneanness,” situates Europe as both a “producer” and a “product” of global interconnections. By using a “migratory perspective” and emphasizing the autonomy of migration, Römhild illustrates how Mediterranean “(post)migratory practices” contribute to a reflexive Europeanization, fostering an understanding of “the (other) Europe” (Römhild, 2008).

Self-Positionality between the “West” and the “South”

Returning to my initial interest in oceans, particularly in relation to my back-and-forth travels across the Atlantic Ocean between South America and Europe, serves as a cornerstone for reflecting on my own positionality amid this research. It provides a lens through which I navigate the interplay between the perceived global distinctions of the “West” and the “South,” an interpretation that continues to unfold in the relationship between “center” and “periphery” in today’s cities (see Epilogue).

I perceive the inbetween space of the oceans and seas as a navigator between cultural identities and borderlands. I have reflected on inbetweenness not only as a state of transit that people-in-transit experience when moving from one place to another—something I have been researching through liminality [see Chapter 5]—but also in the territorial sense, i.e., between the geographical borders of the ocean. The spaces between the Global “West” and “South” in particular, which I entangle with the perspective of “the West and the Rest” (Hall and Gieben, 1992), has played an important part in the postcolonial reflections of the last decade. Stuart Hall, a Marxist sociologist and cultural theorist, analyzes how the notion of “modernity” reached by “advanced, developed and industrial” (Hall and Gieben, 1992: 185) societies has come to represent the conception of Western societies. The “West” is no longer just a geographical term but becomes a discursive and power binary between so-called developed societies (Western societies) and undeveloped societies (non-Western societies). (Garland, 2024a: 28)

When I started working on this research, it did not explicitly address the idea of what is “West” and what is “South.” Instead, I was interested in the liminal state between them, which I associated with the oceans and seas, somehow blurring the boundaries between one and the other. Isabel Bredenbröker, an editor at *The February Journal*, motivated me to look further into these assumed polarities, questioning whether such a clear division really exists today. The idea of standing between the “West” and “South” resonated with my own life experience of being born in Chile and having European ancestors: South America has a distinct history of forced *mestizaje*² that connects it to multiple cultural histories up to this day. (Garland, 2024a: 28)

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- 2 The word *mestizaje* is the Spanish translation of “miscegenation,” which refers to a biological and cultural mixing between different ethnicities. In a postcolonial era, “miscegenation” is considered derogatory due to its racist connotation implying that one of the ethnic groups is “superior and purer” than the other. *Mestizaje* has been used mainly to define Latin American identity, referring to the mixtures between Europeans and indigenous people. Since the 1930s, the term has been widespread in many Latin American countries in an effort to eradicate racial conflict and foster a national identity (Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015). From a decolonial perspective, *mestizaje* continues to hide racial structures, especially those groups that have a major indigenous ancestry. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987: 99) draws on the definition of the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos, who calls *mestizaje* a “cosmic race” in opposition to the

I was especially interested in the history of my own family, which is Chilean with a European background—Italian immigrants from the 1940s on my mother's side, and on my father's, British and Irish predecessors who moved to the Chilean desert to produce and extract the mineral saltpeter. My great-great-grandfather was part of the so-called glorious era of saltpeter, which today is widely criticized as a tragic history of the extractive exploitation of Chilean natural resources and the appropriation of Altiplano indigenous communities' land. Unlike my father's obsession with the family's genealogy, which he and my grandfather traced all the way back until 1680, my interest went beyond collecting our family archive, which I will not detail [in this book]. (Garland, 2024a: 28)

I want to note my interest in my father and grandfather's fascination with knowing our origins—not only with looking at our family history, but also with the idea of “coming from Europe,” which still resonates with many South American families today. The European part of my family (and that of many Chilean families) that migrated to South American territory has significantly influenced my artistic and later anthropological journey and served as a starting point for my interests in “colonial legacies.” Since I was a child, I heard from my relatives that we should be proud to be of European descent, especially because we should be grateful for inheriting a European passport, something that I took very seriously when migrating to Europe. The German and Italian states saw me as a citizen of the European Union for having an Italian passport, and not a “Sudaca,” as many still derogatorily call people coming from South America. (Garland, 2024a: 28)

By this, I do not mean to devalue my family history, much less to simplify or reduce the great suffering and agony that my great-grandfather experienced when he emigrated from the Italian port of Genova to the South American port of Valparaíso during the Second World War to escape from poverty and persecution by the Italian government. Rather, I am critical of the idea of “coming from Europe” as something that elevates a heritage alien to our reality as South Americans, as it is entangled with the colonial legacy of seeing value as coming from the European continent. Knowing that “we came from Europe” provoked me to start reflecting on this supposed polarity, the difference between “Europe” and “Latin America,” or, as we were erroneously taught in elementary school, the duality between the “first” and the “third” worlds. (Garland, 2024a: 29)

My personal sense of being inbetween has guided my interest in the ocean as a unifying and shifting perspective. On the one hand, there is the tangible and geographical aspect of the point of convergence between Latin America and Europe. This intersection interweaves layers of past family histories, including the journeys of my ancestors from the European “mainland” to South America. At the same time, my present

theories of “pure Aryan,” to formulate her ideas about a “new mestiza consciousness,” which is a person conscious of hybridity and borderland.

reality involves migration from an “island”—Chile—which is described in most narratives as an island due to its geography, surrounded by the imposing Andes and the vast Pacific coast. The perspective of the ocean proves to be a crucial lens to understand my own positionality amidst the perceived dichotomies of “Western” heritage and present “South,” which is also reflected in my personal way of perceiving the places and people I encountered during my fieldwork. Examining my own positioning through my own family history has led me in this research to perceive the ocean as a far more complex entity than a mere “inbetween space” connecting two lands. It becomes a dynamic force that influences and shapes my understanding and opens up the potential for an alternative interpretation of the dominant dichotomy that has prevailed since the colonial past.

Writing People's Stories through the Lens of the Archipelago

Returning to my initial questions of “how” and “why” to narrate these stories, I searched linguistic and literary ways of recounting them, looking at how these stories could be told from my positionality as an outsider to these realities. The search with different textual forms led me to use the ocean as my guiding thread in the second section of this chapter. Driven by the Mediterranean, the North Sea, and the Pacific Ocean—bodies of water that are part of the places and people I encountered during my fieldwork—and my own positionality within them, I looked for ways, outside academic writing, to find a more comfortable place when faced with the great challenge of representation. I felt that by immersing myself in the poetry of the ocean, I could find a way of storytelling that is both respectful and authentic. Through this approach, the stories of people-in-transit and their experiences are given space to be told: stories that often go unnoticed or are forgotten. Through the ocean, the ordinary is transformed into the extraordinary, connecting different migratory narratives across similar bodies of water.

Based on this premise, I have experimented with fragmented modes to articulate these stories on paper. This approach is intended to foster a dynamic interaction. Stories relate, collide, and intertwine, mirroring the fragmentary nature of my daily experiences in these places and the inbetween states of the narratives of the people there. Therefore, the notion of *archipelago thinking*, as formulated by Glissant (2009), takes a central role in curating the narratives in the next section of this chapter. Drawing on the rhizomatic thought of Glissant, I interpret these narratives through their different historical roots and their contemporary entanglements.

You will not find a chapter in this book that describes in detail and/or separately the places of the Dzjanggal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. This was a conscious decision, as I did not want to narrate a single story of what these places are like, as a traditional ethnography would do. Rather, I highlight the diversity of fragmented time-space perspectives encountered in these places. The ocean is the channel of the sto-

ries related in the following sections, as well as throughout the book, and through my multimodal artwork, which is attached to this research. By approaching the stories of these places and people and unfolding these experiences as part of the ocean, the representation somehow becomes a holistic element in which multivocal and multiple perceptions connect and relate to each other, trying to find a more respectful approach to the great challenge of how these stories can be told. While inspired by real experiences and encounters, the following stories blend fact and fiction; names, places, and certain details have been changed to respect the privacy of all involved. In this way, I engaged with the cities of Calais, Rome, and Antofagasta, as well as the places of the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, always accompanied by bodies of saltwater as my fictional companions.

In the following section, the reader will find short stories, partly fictionalized, as well as poems, fieldnotes, and dictations—pieces that, like islands, stand alone and yet are connected beneath the surface. Among them are quotes from key poets and authors on postcolonial oceans and migration studies—Epeli Hau'ofa, Édouard Glissant, Aracelis Girmay, Zaher Rezai, Karin Amimoto Ingersoll, Dagmawi Yimer, Vaine Rasmussen, Derek Walcott, and Senait Hagose—acting as threads that weave together the fragmented stories I encountered. They have been my poetic companions, accompanying me in navigating the difficult task of writing people's stories. Their voices have helped me understand the ocean as a place of unity, identity, liberation, mourning, danger, love, travel, and home. Together, these voices create a seascape of movement and fluid identities, key aspects for understanding migration today and especially the life stories of the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales and their struggles with the border regime.

For instance, I start with the fragment of “We Are the Ocean” by Hau'ofa (2008). He writes about how we are bodies of water that share histories, unifying us in a water identity that is interconnected rather than disconnected, as the colonial idea suggests. This resonates with Glissant's idea of “Archipelago,” a water identity that is fragmented yet connected, analyzed in the first section of this chapter. Walcott's (2007) notion of “The Sea Is History” demonstrates that the sea is a space that doesn't forget, becoming an archive of the Caribbean memory long before colonialism. In the case of Rasmussen (2000) in “Our Pacific,” she brings this water memory into daily life, highlighting that people living close to the water have a different way of relating to memory, with their own rhythm and pace that differ from the rapidity of modern life. Following this, Amimoto Ingersoll (2016), in her theorization of “Seascape Epistemologies,” invites us to view the world through a non-Western water-based perspective, shifting the idea of a land-continental landscape by proposing a decolonial understanding of the water-land relation. These authors bring a postcolonial and decolonial way of thinking and feeling about the ocean, history, and migration—resonating with the realities currently unfolding in the Mediterranean, the North Sea, and the Pacific.

The words of poets on the move are also present in the next section, where the intimate and personal connection with the ocean is described through their migratory experiences while navigating European waters. In this sense, the poems of Girmay (cited in SAVVY Contemporary, 2024) and Rezai (2008) bring us into vulnerability and trust with the ocean—a space that holds love and intimacy but also danger, a place where love can drown and affections become the engine of the “migrant” journey—a struggle to cross to the other side. In this ocean space, there are promises, survival, destruction, and rescue. Yimer (2015) and Hagose (2017) recount the perspective of the survivor, a mental place that is almost accidental, where there is no glory or reward, and where the ocean becomes a witness to loss. The mind of the surviving “migrant” becomes a space of crossings between past and present, a place of imagination and escape, with the ocean as the place where they navigate freely, yet also agonizingly. Therefore, the second section of this chapter, *Oceans, Places, People*, interacts fragmentally yet in relation to migratory narratives of struggle, hope, loss, and unity. The ocean space becomes the guiding thread, led by archipelagic currents, transforming into an archive of past and present (hi)stories. Humbly, I curate these stories, moving away from a unilateral narrative to bring a multiplicity of voices, which form the foundation of this book.

I am aware that the book’s physical format, with its inherently linear reading structure, cannot fully capture the nature of this archipelago of encounters. Here, multimodality becomes essential to engage with the sensorial entanglements of (hi)stories and temporalities. However, in the spirit of breaking the written book format, this section can also be experienced *with* and *through* sound. Linked below is *Oceanic Memory* (2023), a sound composition woven from seascape recordings—from the Mediterranean, the North Sea, and the Pacific Ocean—key water narratives I gathered throughout this research. Listening (in loop) while reading the fragmented stories adds a sensory element, allowing the reader (and listener) to move between text and sound, linking these narratives together along their own archipelago of encounters.

Notes for the reader

The reader will come across the names *the Jungle* and *the Dzjanganl*; both refer to the same settlement on the coast of Calais, France—the former the derogatory name imposed by media and politicians, the latter claimed by some people in the community, taken from the Pashto word *dzjanganl*, meaning “forest” or “bush.” Likewise, *Hotel Africa* and *Tiburtina* both designate the same site in Rome, Italy, with *Tiburtina* emerging from within the community as a rejection of an imposed and unrepresentative label. In each case, the shift in their names tells its own story of marginalization, struggle, self-representation, and transformation.

1.2 Oceans, Places, People

SENSORY SATELLITES³



we are the sea,
we are the ocean,
we must wake up to this ancient truth
and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views
that aim ultimately to confine us again.

We Are The Ocean

(Hau'ofa, 2008: 39)

UNITED PEOPLE

"We, the united people of the Jungle, Calais, respectfully decline the demands of the French Government with regard to reducing the size of The Jungle. We have decided to remain where we are and will peacefully resist the government's plans to destroy our homes. We plead with the French authorities and International Communities that you understand our situation and respect our fundamental human rights."

Manifesto of residents of the Jungle Calais when the ultimatum for the camp's evacuation was issued in 2015.

3 Readers are invited to listen to the sound piece **Oceanic Memory** on loop while reading this section. https://soundcloud.com/someinbetween/oceanic-memory-becoming-water-ocean-s-and-seas?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

The Dzjanganl fieldwork, Calais, December 2016

**FRAGMENT FROM AN ARTIST'S DIARY: Ethnographic poem part of the essay
"The Jungle de Calais: Entre liminalidad, espacio fronterizo y lugar de posibilidades" (Garland, 2021b: 68–97)**

When I arrived in the city of Calais, I found myself in a "perfect," "surreal," "(almost) artificial" city, painted in pastel pinks and blues, where time passed with a quiet calm, and flowers bloomed along the walls of this strange place. The perfect pastel architecture of the city blended with the crystalline North Sea, a land of ochre tones and lingering hues, where the liminality of earthly time defined the contrast between these two realities.

At first, these colors seemed to reflect the state of limbo that hung over Calais—the liminal landscape of this territory. As I stepped off the bus on the B side of the city, before I even began to walk, my body started to freeze in anticipation of what I might see, feel, and experience. To reach the Jungle, one must walk more than 45 minutes from the last bus stop, along a long road through a desert-like space, an empty landscape without buildings, resembling a vast wasteland. The road stretches straight into an industrial area, passing by various factories.

Along the way, I began to notice people sitting on the grass, on the sidewalks. From time to time, someone would say "good morning" or "hello," but beyond that, silence remained very present. My blood pressure was low, and my sugar level was at 62. I felt myself slipping into a state of transition—between my own body and the ochre limbo of the B side.

Calais was my first encounter with a liminal city.

Side A of Calais was formed of pastel colors with a delicate, timeless glow—an air of perfection and superficiality, a bubble of unreality inside a tourist city. Contemplation there seemed to follow its own rules.

Side B of Calais, by contrast, its palette of earth and ochre tones marked by simplicity, mixtures, and contrasts, veiled by a haze of yellow dust. Its materiality composed a surreal spatial fog, scarred by the presence of communities who wove their existence into the developing landscape of the camp.

Infrastructure appeared—streets, a school, food shops, communal kitchens, a hairdresser, a library, a local radio, a music studio, and a theater.

The aesthetics of the Jungle—its materials, colors, and constructions—revealed to me the many forms and strategies of people's survival created to transform a desert-like place into a social one, even if only temporarily.

A contrast between two states. Calais (Side A and B): a place where social, political, physical, spatial, and temporal structures of power converge. A place where contradictions and competitions of power are made visible in the material environment of the city—a state of radical coexistence.

Different territorial, geographic, imaginary, real, and spatial edges overlap, attempting to gather everything into one place. The “physical” and “mental” orders of different actors played a role in this city: people in transit, volunteers, neighbors, tourists, visitors, politicians, and police.

In the same territory, one could perceive shifting levels of separation and dialectics, in constant motion between spaces of liminality and spaces of reality—not only in the abstract, but also in a geographical sense.

In Calais and Dover, the transition and immobility between these two cities creates a “void space” across the sea. A separation between the liminal and the real, where people survive and coexist, waiting for the right moment to leap onto a ferry or a truck to cross into the “other place.”

The dialogue between Calais and the Jungle is bound together by the very structure of liminality.

The Dzjanganal fieldwork, Calais, December 2020

FRAGMENT OF THE ESSAY: “The Jungle of Calais: A Place of Resistance and Monumentality” (Garland, 2021a: 118–120)

To arrive at the Jungle [in July 2016], I passed through a deserted landscape and abandoned factory and saw graffiti with paintings, drawings, and texts on the walls, symbolizing solidarity with the inhabitants of the Jungle. Arriving at the camp, I found a human barrier of French police officers who gave me the feeling that they were waiting for something. They told me in French and broken English that if I entered the camp, it would be difficult for them to help me if any “confrontation” occurred. Those sentences were the first ones where I began to understand the tension in the Les Dunes zone. I first drew a map of the camp to locate myself and understand how the settlement was structured. I knew beforehand that the Jungle was divided by communities and languages. Walking along the main street, I could observe the infrastructure and architecture of the restaurants and bars, which were dark colored. When I got closer, I noticed that the surfaces were burnt. The structures were built using light materials, such as wood, plastic, and other recyclable materials. The smell of burning was also present, and by its intensity, I could guess that this had happened the day before or only a few days ago. Later, meeting with some inhabitants, they told me there had been a confrontation with the French police the day before. They mentioned that this event was not isolated and had been going on for a few weeks. Looking back now, it could have been one of the first signs of the mass eviction in October 2016.

Los Arenales fieldwork, ethnographic poem, Antofagasta, January 2022

FIRST FIELD NOTE: ANOTHER SKY IN THE NORTH

Sea below, desert above.
 Saltwater below, dryness above.
 Hot during the day,
 Cold at night.
 Possible tsunami on the coast,
 Possible alluvium toward the hill.

South toward Santiago,
 North toward Iquique.
 Villas in the south,
 Camps in the north.
 Mining work in the interior,
 Street work in the city center.

Change of government across the country,
 Covid pandemic worldwide.

Contradictions and parallels,
 This is how my stay in Antofagasta began and developed.
 Experiencing material paradoxes
 As I walked through the city.
 I was looking for the migration route in Chile:
 “Migrants” of the past, “migrants” of the present,
 “Migrants” in transit and passing through.

Times of post-social crisis,
 Times of migration and post-migration.
 New coexistences,
 New reflections around the Other.
 Rethinking our Chilean identity,
 New learnings.

Shift our gaze, look sideways, look up.
 Get to know our new neighbor.
 Cross the border.

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, November 2018

A FIRST FIELD NOTE

In July 2018, I was invited to an art residency in Rome that dealt with the question of current Italian identity, undertaken from an artistic perspective. The art institution *Latitudo Rome* asked me to be part of the European project *Magic Carpet* platform, funded by the EU commission. The thematic inquiry that year was a reflection on the “migration crisis” in Europe, more precisely in Italy, in my case (see *Magic Carpet*, 2018⁴). The very perspective that migration is a “crisis” made me question how this project would unfold and how much influence from the European Union was behind this questioning of Italian identity. *Latitudo* suggested I collaborate with some local Ngos founded by Roman neighbors, to support people seeking refuge. Their work takes place not in the official *centri di accoglienza* (Italian refugee centers) but in informal ways: distributing food, providing legal advice, and offering medical assistance.

During my time in Rome, I realized that there were no “refugee centers” with the same characteristics as those in other EU countries such as Germany. The centers in Rome are usually regular houses where food, informal education, and some legal supports are offered, but not accommodation. As a result, many people end up living on the streets, in abandoned places, or renting apartments with the help of the government or private institutions.

As part of the residency, I focused on the *Hotel Africa*: a building that had been inhabited by people seeking refuge between 1999 and 2003, before being dramatically evicted in 2003. To this day, the abandoned building still stands, fenced and empty. Around it, however, life continues—communities live in tents set up outside and around the building, and Ngos maintains a large tent nearby to distribute food, provide legal advice, and organize activities.

Hotel Africa was originally *Il Magazzino di Tiburtina* (The Tiburtina Warehouse). Abandoned in the 1990s, it was later squatted in 1999, which gave rise to the pejorative nickname *Hotel Africa*. Inside the building, more than 800 people lived—mostly couples and young men, mainly from East Africa. With the help of neighbors and NGOs, they began to create an informal placemaking: barbershops, small stores, restaurants, and even a radio station that connected with other communities across Europe, reporting on life in Rome and even inviting others to come live there.

The little I learned came from conversations with people who had heard stories about the place. There is almost no information on the internet or in public media, despite its popularity in the early 2000s. What remains today, however, is no longer the vibrant squatted building but a makeshift camp on the outside: tents, a small dining area, and no water or toilets. Local volunteers provide food and water daily, while Ngos organizes small-scale activities for entertainment. Yet the outside camp

4 <https://magiccarpets.eu/residencies/melanie-garland/>

has little potential to become permanent. Every week, the Italian police destroy the tents and take some people to the station, detaining them for a day. Week after week, the tents donated by the local community are put back up to be inhabited again.

The Dzjanganl fieldwork, Calais, April 2022

RENATURALIZATION

Six years after my last trip to Calais, I visited the former Dzjanganl settlement, known to most people as the “Jungle of Calais.” Initially, in 2016, I had also referred to the settlement that way, since I heard locals, volunteers, and neighbors call it the “Jungle.” On this second trip, however, thanks to my visits to new settlements in Calais, I came to understand that the word “Jungle” is actually the Western phonetic rendering of “Dzjanganl,” which means forest and firewood. Still, it does not carry the same connotations of wildness and exoticism that the word “Jungle” can evoke in a Western context.

I tried to cover the same distance as on my first visit, walking in a straight line for more than 45 minutes. Once again, I passed the factories and abandoned places I had noticed before. When I reached the entrance of the former settlement, I walked under the highway; looking up, I could see the “great wall of Calais,” as volunteers and activists called it. The long grid wall covers the entire Calais highway, erected to block the points from which people often jumped onto moving trucks heading through the Eurotunnel toward the English Channel—toward England. Under the highway, various pieces of graffiti from the time of the Dzjanganl were still visible: “Free Syria,” “The Jungle is alive,” and “No person is illegal.”

When I was confronted with the area where the Dzjanganl was once located, my body remained in stillness, contemplating the landscape before me. Images came back of how this land had once been covered with informal structures, tents, and white containers. I approached a sign about ten steps from the entrance that read: *Bienvenue sur l'Observatoire de la Lande* (Welcome to the Observatory of the Land), a place now reserved for the flora and fauna of the city of Calais.

From the observatory, I listened closely to the soft sound of the wind and the song of the birds flying above the wetland, which was a strong contrast to the noise of the highway and the imposing appearance of the Great Wall visible in the distance. Inside the observatory, a sign offered information about both the nature reserve and the Dzjanganl, which the municipality officially referred to as *La Lande de Calais*. This sign bore the caption: *Travaux de renaturation des terrains de l'ex-Lande de Calais* (renaturation works of the former Lande de Calais).

“Renaturation”—what does this word really mean? A return to nature? But how can a place be “renaturalized” after the forced eviction of 6,000 people? How can nature be restored in a space that was already abandoned and polluted long before it

became a site of people placemaking? The sector of La Lande, before the emergence of the Dzjantal, was said to have been a dumping ground for nearby industries, contaminating both the soil and the small lake that now, paradoxically, is proclaimed a protected site for local birds (see Garland, *Invisible Monument*, 2022⁵).

The Dzjantal fieldwork, ethnographic poem, Calais, April 2022

CALAIS WIND

Penetrating, dry wind from the city of Calais.
In mid-April, between 1 and 7 degrees Celsius.
The wind tears tents apart and blows clothes away.
The wind extinguishes the wood fire until it disappears.

The wind travels across the North Sea,
bringing salt and humidity.
The wind blows underneath, and mud sticks to shoes.
Cold rain mixes with the wind and smells of the port.

The wind makes the humidity heavier.
The wind burns the skin, face, and hands.
The cold immobilizes muscles and hardens bones.

Wind embeds the migrant bodies into the landscape of Calais.

Los Arenales fieldwork, ethnographic poem, Antofagasta, January 2022

SAND OF THE ATACAMA⁶

The soft, warm wind of the desert.
In mid-January, between 25 and 32 degrees Celsius.
The wind lifts the sand and whips the bodies of the walkers.
The same wind that causes avalanches
and collapses dunes.
The sand falls between blocks along the way.

5 Based on this on-site experience, I developed a site-specific performance called *Invisible Monument*. See more at <https://somerwhereinbetween.cargo.site/Invisible-Monument>

6 This poem was written in the context of the ISLA art residency during the SACO Biennial Antofagasta, Chile in 2022. See more at <https://bienalsaco.com/2022/01/28/un-otro-cielo-en-el-norte/>

The sand seeps through every hole in the clothing,
 enters your shoes with every step.
 The sun burns fiercely, mixing with the dry wind
 and the sand hits your face, leaving marks.

Extreme heat during the day and freezing cold at night.
 This contrast breaks down the body,
 their skin dry, their face and hands covered in gray dust.
 Fatigue is accentuated by the harsh landscape.

Migrant travelers walk through the Atacama Desert.

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, September 2021

I SAW YOU FROM AFAR

I walk more than 12 km from the Pigneto district to Hotel Africa, past the road and fast cars at the pace of the Roman city. I pass through various landscapes, mostly deserted, empty, in ruins. Every sound street is loud and chaotic. There are no other pedestrians on the street, just me, cars, and buses.

I am already in Via Tiburtina. I look ahead and see the ruins of the Hotel Africa building that I visited three years ago. The 4 p.m. light falls on the jagged, broken windows of the building. Surprisingly, it was barred with two more metal grilles. The panoramic image is wonderfully disturbing from my perspective. The building is surrounded by nature; wild grasses cover the streets. A large tree covers part of the building; it is an Italian pine. This landscape reminds me of the Roman ruins scattered around the city.

Ruins, the building, trees, and wild grasses. The sound of the wind mingles with distant noises from Tiburtina train station.

When I arrive at the end of the street where the barred Hotel Africa is located, I see a sign that reads: “Non è permesso l’ingresso di estranei nei locali” (No access for strangers allowed in the premises). Reading it quickly and with my imperfect Italian, I first understood that the entry of foreigners (*straniero*) was forbidden (I did not distinguish between “straniero” and “estraneo”), then I understood that it had a different meaning. As I looked more closely at the landscape, I was taken back to my first visit in July 2018, when the outside area of the building was open and filled with about 60 tents. The Hotel Africa was cleared in 2003 and its entrance concreted over. From then till 2018, communities lived in tents in front of the building, as I encountered on my first visit in 2018.

I stood there looking at the now blocked and abandoned space, which in the years 1999–2003 was rumored to have been a place of social and convivial activity, home

to more than 800 people, with restaurants, cafés, cinema, and radio station. Today, one can see how nature has struggled to invade the building.

I hear from afar: *Ciao, che cosa cerca Lei?* (What are you looking for?): a young man spoke to me as I was walking in the neighborhood. Ebrima (E) was his name. I told him that I was interested in the history of this abandoned building. E replied with a smile that he lived outside of the building and pointed his finger to the exact area of the building where he was sleeping. He lived there until December 2018, when the final eviction of the entire site took place. He did not live in Hotel Africa, but he knows some of the stories about the place. E now lives near the building; he told me that there is a small settlement behind the hill at the back of the abandoned site. I assume they are the last inhabitants of the area outside of Hotel Africa.

E had just received his first dose of AstraZeneca and was worried that he would feel sick. E mentioned that after the second dose, he could finally enter Tiburtina station and use trains and buses, as without the Green Pass (Covid-Europe Pass), he could not enter buildings or use public transportation, as the police had previously refused to let him in. This information caught my attention, especially when I was at Tiburtina station and other stations in Italy, where there were no border controls to check the Green Pass.

After meeting E, I quickly went to Tiburtina station and checked what he had told me, not because I did not believe him, but because I sensed that he had experienced a racist act. I went back and forth to the different entrances of the station three times, and different police officers told me nothing. Then, when I asked if I had to show the Green Pass and what if I did not have it to hand, the answer was simply: *Signorina, non è un problema perché al momento non è obbligatorio e in realtà nessuno controlla davvero* (Madam, that's not a problem because it's not compulsory now, and nobody really checks).

I think the idea of the archipelago—
as a place where we can begin to understand and resolve the
contradictions of the world.

Archipelago

(Glissant and Obrist, 2021: 19)

FRAGMENT OF THE BOOKLET “HOTEL AFRICA” (2007)*By Formazero Collective: Davide Franceschini, Maurizio Giri, and Antonio Venti**My English translation from Italian*

The entrance and the exit, the tea, the coffee, the cookies, the door, the kitchen, the lunch, the bathroom, the clock, the cell phones, the memories, the pictures, the experiences, the wishes, the worries and the loves, the traces and the actions, the passages and the escapes, the passeurs, the journeys and the arrivals, the boat, the jeeps, the desert, the sea, the shipwrecked, the fear, the prayer, the waves, the gasoline, the captain, the mirages, the prison, the police, the coastguard, the helicopter, the camp, the commission, the residence permit, the refusal, the deportation, the police station, the waiting, the offense, the reception center, the squat, the inspectors on the bus and in the subway, the fines, the employment agencies, the reversals, Termini train station, the call center, the phone cards, the offices, the canteens, the doctors and the medicines, the corpses, the horrors and the surprises, the parents and the friends, the living and the dead, the adventures and the misadventures, the hopes and the disappointments, the beliefs and the convictions...

*The Dzjanganal fieldwork, Calais, April 2022***EUROPEAN LANGUAGES**

Today, I accompanied Alejandro (A) and Jonas (J) on one of their rides with their minivans to a community outside Calais center. A and J are part of a volunteer group in Calais that travels to temporary settlements outside the city center four times a week to share electricity from their generators and mobile internet. Sometimes they stay in the same settlement for two to three months; then, when the settlement is evicted, they move to other settlements under construction. A and J told me that they are constantly mapping the new settlements to offer their services as quickly as possible.

Today we visited the settlement of the Eritrean community, which, according to J, is one of the best organized in Calais and at the same time the most insular; only people from Eritrea can live there, unlike other settlements where there is a greater diversity of cultures within the community. We arrived at the parking lot, the meeting point for the minivan. The community lives near the parking lot, behind a row of bushes, so you cannot see the tents at first glance. J told me that about 90 people live there, with about 40 tents behind the bushes. Unlike other volunteer groups from Calais, they do not drive to the settlements, but people walk out to them, so they do not enter the intimacy and privacy of the community. In addition to providing Wi-Fi,

they also supply speakers and other equipment during their visits. The community can listen to music, sing karaoke, play digital games, make calls with family, and watch movies on their phones. The minivan, with its electronic devices and Wi-Fi, turns into a kind of living room, as visitors describe the sociable atmosphere that unfolds around it.

It was in this setting that I first met Dahlak (D). He noticed me as I was helping to set up tables and asked who I was. I told him where I came from, my current base, and what I was doing there, and he quickly switched to German, explaining that his German was stronger than his English or French. D shared some stories of his travels—how he had learned German after crossing Italy via the Mediterranean and finding asylum in Germany. He had hoped to reach England, but since his fingerprints were already registered in the Italian database, it was easier in 2017 to transfer his asylum claim to Germany. Still, with his brother and cousin settled in England since 2016, he now spends time in Calais, hoping to cross to the UK.

D was new to the community; he had only arrived in Calais a month earlier. For about two weeks, he wandered around town before finding space here, since there had been “no vacancy” when he first arrived. Only later did I begin to understand what “no vacancy” actually meant. J explained that in this community, whenever someone new joins, they are told how the internal organization works and what hierarchies exist between old and new residents. Admission itself involves a kind of vote. According to J, these hierarchies shape many aspects of daily life: from the distribution of food, phones, and clothing, to the decision of where a tent can be set up in the settlement. He said this structure helps maintain a certain harmony, even extending to relations with the police and municipal officials. Newcomers, for example, must take the last tent in the row, gradually moving forward over time. Reaching the first tent means becoming the next person with the chance to get on the inflatable boat bound for the UK.

Sitting on one of the benches in the area, I met Nakfa (N). He came up to me and asked, in Italian, for a SIM card and a transparent ziplock bag—most likely to protect his phone and documents from the water when the time came to attempt the crossing to the UK. I was curious how he knew I spoke Italian. By then, word had already spread that I could communicate in languages beyond English and French. People sometimes approached me to practice their “colonial European languages,” as they jokingly called French, Italian, Spanish, and German—this phrase inevitably connected me to Eritrea’s colonial history, marked first by Italian colonialism in the 19th century, when “Italian Eritrea” was established, and later by British administration in 1941.

N admitted that he was nervous and anxious, as he was preparing to cross to Britain to visit his younger cousin. I tried to guess which tent number he slept in, following the community’s linear order of distribution. J later explained that this particular community worked closely with organized smuggling groups. Many paid

in advance for a place on a boat. If the crossing was interrupted—by police, weather, or other factors—the arrangement allowed for up to two more attempts with the same smuggling provider, a kind of “voucher” that guaranteed a maximum of three tries.

Sea, my oblivious afterworld,
grant us entry, please, when we knock,
but do not keep us there, deliver
our flowers and himbasha bread.

To The Sea

Aracelis Girmay (2024)⁷

Los Arenales fieldwork, Antofagasta, January 2022

FOUR WOMEN SITTING TOGETHER

Yesterday I met Elena (E) at the neighborhood center. I went there with Cynthia (C), after we got off the bus and walked about ten minutes uphill toward the settlement. C is a Venezuelan journalist who arrived in Antofagasta in 2012. At that time, she was a student, which made it somewhat easier for her to get a visa compared to many of her compatriots. She told me this left her with a complicated feeling—aware of her own privilege. She believes that her interest in migrant activism was born from this awareness. Today, she is part of various migrant and feminist activist groups in Chile, and it was through one of these meetings that she met E almost six years ago.

As we continued uphill, we reached a soccer field. Behind it, C explained, stood the community center. She told me that the people of Los Arenales had built the field together with the neighboring community of Villa Isla. It was the result of collective work. The field now serves as a meeting point that connects the two zones of the area: the Chilean residents of Villa Isla and the people from Los Arenales. Later, in conversation with E, I learned that this was no coincidence—Los Arenales leaders had strategically built the field to foster good relations with their “Chilean neighbors.”

We entered the community center, where E and Jesús (J) were waiting for us with cups of coffee. J smiled as she told us it was Colombian coffee roasted by friends of theirs. E, dressed in sportswear, looked to be about 45, while J, also in her 40s, welcomed us warmly. The four of us sat together in the courtyard, where E explained

7 Cited in the exhibition Catalogue *Indigo Waves and Other Stories*, SAVVY Contemporary Berlin, 2024. See more in <https://savvy-contemporary.com/de/projects/2023/indigo-waves/>

that they were in the process of creating a community garden. I could see the early traces of it around us.

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, September 2021

ALEXANDER

I have just come home from a conversation with Alexander (A) in a café on the corner of Via Lautaro in Pigneto neighborhood. A, who is about 32 years old, is currently a volunteer in an Italian NGO helping people who have just arrived at Rome. We ordered coffee—he an Americano, I an espresso. As he lit a cigarette, I asked him for one and began telling him a little about my research and why I was interested in the history of “Hotel Africa.” The moment I mentioned the name of the settlement, his tone shifted; to me, it carried something nostalgic, almost melancholic. He explained that “Hotel Africa” was very important in the history of occupation in Rome. When the final eviction took place in 2003, many of the residents were left homeless and began camping outside the building. Over time, the place turned into a social space where volunteers and neighbors came to deliver food and clothing, and cultural events were also held.

Although he had never entered “Hotel Africa” himself, A had heard many stories and anecdotes from those who lived and worked there. “One of the first and saddest eviction stories in Rome,” he called it, noting how evictions of squats later became routine. “If you want to know more about the history of this community, it’s best to talk to the people who lived there—even though not many are left in Rome,” he said. Many, according to him, had managed to cross to England, while others were still in Calais waiting to cross.

Before we left, A invited me to one of their NGO’s monthly food and clothing distributions in a square next to Tiburtina station. There, he said, I could meet some of the people who had lived in “Hotel Africa” back in 2000.

I have travelled long days and nights on the boat of your love, In the end, I will either be able to love you or drown.

Zaher’s notebook, sheet 13

Zaher Rezai⁸

(undetermined date, possibly 2008, cited in Yimer, 2015: 15)

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, September 2021

THE NAME OF “TIBURTINA”

It’s 5 p.m., and I am walking around Tiburtina Station. Alexander (A) told me that volunteers gather at the station on the last Sunday of every month to distribute dinner and clothes. He mentioned that I might meet some former residents of “Hotel Africa” and insisted that the best way to understand what happened before the 2003 eviction was to speak with them directly. Today was the last Sunday of September.

Tiburtina station is chaotic, noisy, and shaded by an avenue of Italian pines, their characteristic silhouettes so common in central Italy. The air feels like a season in transition—summer slipping into autumn; the breeze is already a little cooler.

By 7 p.m., a group of people had gathered. A large plastic sheet was spread out on the ground with bags of clothes laid on top, while others handed out snacks. Moving among the crowd, I met two older women and asked whether they knew anything about “Hotel Africa.” One of them, whose name I can’t recall—I will call her Mrs. G—told me she had only been there once, at a party in 2003. She remembered about 300 people living in the building at the time, with another 150 guests at the party, nearly 450 people in total. To her, the space felt unsafe: it was, after all, an abandoned building, and she feared part of the structure might collapse. She described it as a large open hall with rooms on the second and third floors and a single entrance, which she considered particularly dangerous in a fire or accident.

Mrs. R (Rita), the other woman, had a different memory of that same night. For her, it was one of the most beautiful parties she had ever attended. She recalled hearing Eritrean music for the first time and tasting traditional food she had never tried before. The decorations, she said, were warm and welcoming, and everything had been carefully prepared “for us, the guests.” Only later did I learn that this party took place just a week before the final eviction—a strategic attempt by the “Hotel Africa” community to show neighbors, local officials, and even representatives of the Vatican that this building was not a random squat but a communal place that deserved protection.

As I continued moving through the crowd, I noticed two men holding open garbage bags where people tossed their food wrappers and plastic cups. I approached them and explained that I was researching “Hotel Africa” and asked if they knew anyone who had lived there. One of them paused and looked at me closely. With some suspicion, he asked why I was naming the settlement “Hotel Africa,” as the real name was Tiburtina.

I hesitated and asked: “Tiburtina?”

8 Zaher Rezai was an “Afghan underage boy who lost his life under a truck in Mestre on 10/12/08, trying to evade border police checks at the port of Venice,” cited in the book *Persian Poetry, Afghan Poetry* (2009) (October 22, 2025).

With a sharp accent, the other man answered: “Yes, Tiburtina. That was the name of our house, because the building was next to Tiburtina station. ‘Hotel Africa’ was a derogatory term—it wasn’t a hotel, and certainly we aren’t in Africa either.”

In that moment, the hairs on my arms stood up. Nervous, I apologized repeatedly. It was the first time I had heard the name Tiburtina—a name spoken inside the community but not among all volunteers or neighbors.

Beginning to talk with them, I felt strange. The encounter was informal, quick, and I struggled to find the right way in. One of the men had a mask; I could see only his eyes. It was impossible to read his expression—whether angry, sad, or calm. The other one was calm and had a bit more friendly posture. But both were a bit stiff and guarded, as if holding something back. They didn’t share their names with me, even though I introduced myself and explained again why I was in Rome and my interest in their house’s history.

They spoke of Tiburtina in factual terms—how many people lived there, the restaurants, the hairdressers, the social activities—but they avoided describing daily life inside. There was a heaviness, a kind of unspoken sadness, something they carried but would not share.

...and in the salt chuckle of rocks
with their sea pools, there was the sound
like a rumour without any echo
of History, really beginning.

The Sea Is History

Derek Walcott (2007)

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, September 2021

THE SHIP “TIBURTINA”

These two men described to me in detail how Tiburtina was organized. Since it was a former newspaper plant, the structure had been designed to hold machines in the center; as a result, the middle of the building was a wide-open space, while the rooms were located on the second floor as a kind of balcony from which one could see what was happening below. On the ground floor, there were six restaurants, a mini-supermarket, two bars, two dining rooms, a few bathrooms, and no electricity except for one electric charger. The bedrooms were on the first and second floors. New arrivals and single men lived on the top floor, while the second floor housed couples

and families. One of the men mentioned that at its peak, almost 800 people lived there, mainly couples and single men.

Later, I learned that some of the former residents had gone to Calais after the eviction, hoping to cross into England and live in “the Jungle,” while these two men chose to remain in Rome, where both still live today. They told me that the Tiburtina committee used to meet twice a month to discuss and organize life inside the site. Twelve people sat on the committee, which decided whether to approve or reject requests from the community, working in three languages: Arabic, Tigre, and Tigrinya. Cultural activities were central—open-air cinemas, concerts, and parties with Eritrean and Ethiopian music, as well as soccer matches with neighbors.

Even though they were not part of the committee, they were closely connected to the general organization of the place, emphasizing that these events were held because the community wanted to show the neighborhood, the Roman community, and even the Vatican (with which they had maintained a good relationship until the eviction) that they were not outsiders but part of the Tiburtina neighborhood. Both underlined that all of this was possible thanks to the support of volunteers and young Italians, whom one of the men called “our cultural translators”—not only translating into Italian but also spreading word of their activities throughout the city.

I was struck by their communication skills. They were both communicative, as if daily life made them storytellers. I mentioned this, and one of them told me that they learned how to speak with the public when they were mediating cultural events between Tiburtina and the Italian communities. They believed Tiburtina aspired to be a truly welcoming center for newcomers of the African diaspora, something Italy lacked. Existing state-run centers, they said, didn’t allow people to sleep properly, cook for themselves, or practice their trades—whether running a restaurant, a café, or a hair salon. For them and for the Tiburtina community, those freedoms were essential to a person’s dignity.

Between 1999 and 2003, Tiburtina became an important reference point for the African diaspora, both in Italy and abroad. One of them noted that in Africa it was already known: new arrivals should reach Tiburtina station and walk 15 minutes to find a community ready to welcome them. The other man told me that sometimes, through satellite phones, they even knew before the Italian coastguard or NGOs how many people were at sea trying to reach Italy. In emergencies, when boats were taking on water, Tiburtina leaders would alert the coastguard, sometimes more quickly than official channels, and more people could be saved. Curious, I asked about these phones—I had already heard rumors about radios used to stay in touch along the route. Both laughed and called me a curious girl. I could sense their pride in the communication network they had built. Elders who had made the journey from Libya to Rome shared information over the radio, providing constant updates from new ar-

rivals. Those still in Libya learned which routes had been closed by police in Europe and which were safest to travel.

One of them repeated often that Tiburtina was the prototype of a true *luogo di accoglienza* (place of hospitality), open to everyone regardless of whether they came from a country at war with another. What mattered to him was that Tiburtina was organized by the people who lived there—no external Italian structure, no outside administration. For him, this was “real integration,” in contrast to the state’s official policies. “Tiburtina was a new model for future newcomers in need of accommodation,” he said, describing it as an *auto-gestione della accoglienza* (self-managed hospitality), where the needs of both the new and the long-established were taken into account. He emphasized this with a smile, his eyes glinting as he spoke. Tiburtina, he added, was on its way to becoming a *palazzo sociale* (social building), at once a cultural center and a home. Thanks to the political and administrative experience of its leaders, the process of seeking legalization was well underway: they had already collected many signatures from within the community. They also maintained strong strategic ties with the Vatican, which had supported them at the time.

Before leaving, I asked them if they could describe Tiburtina in one word. Both paused, then one said that Tiburtina was a great ship—its architecture resembling one, with the common areas on the ground floor and the rooms on the second floor laid out like cabins. It felt like a poetic analogy: a vessel full of journeys and stories that had crossed the Mediterranean.

Seascape epistemology dives into the ocean,
Splashing alternatives onto the Western-dominant
and linear mind-set that has led the world toward
realities of mass industrialization and cultural
and individual assimilation.

Seascape Epistemologies

(Amimoto Ingersoll, 2016: 15)

The Dzjanganl fieldwork, Calais, April 2022

REBECA AND ADRIENNE

It is the month of Ramadan in Calais. I found this out when I arrived at 9:30 a.m. at the warehouse of an NGO, which brings together volunteer collectives specializing in various relief supplies for newcomers in Calais. It was raining a little, it was windy and cloudy, it reminded me of winter in Valparaíso, my hometown in Chile, perhaps because the smell of the wind brought back a little of the coastal smell.

The warehouse was close to the coast of Calais, but not so close to where the Dzjanganl was six years ago. I met A (Adrienne) who is 23 years old and originally from the outskirts of Calais. It was our first day as volunteers and we were both looking for Rebeca (R), a volunteer who would introduce us to the job that needed to be done. We entered the warehouse, and I was struck by the space, with its very high ceiling. Long shelves lined the room, filled with clothes marked with numbers and labels, as well as camping equipment and toys scattered throughout. We walked through the improvised aisles with boxes and long, wide shelves. I was nervous. I was the only masked person in this room with ca. 100 people in it. It was still a pandemic.

Finally, we reached a small room where we met R, who explained how the food and clothes were packed and then distributed by volunteers in the current improvised settlement around Calais. Looking at the boxes scattered on the ground, I was able to estimate the number of people it was destined for. The volunteers had no online record of the number of people living in each of the abandoned buildings or informal settlements in and around Calais, as the French police had tapped their phones and emails, R said. In the past, every time they announced online the number of people and where they were staying, there was a surprise eviction the next day. When the volunteers realized this, they began writing manually the number of people and locations with nicknames, codes, and symbols on physical cards.

Volunteers met weekly with more experienced lawyers and activists to learn more about the legal system so they would be prepared when confronted by the police. One strategy that stuck in my mind was recording a video of a police officer doing or saying racist acts and physical and mental abuse. Later, the volunteers disseminated the videos through their large solidarity networks, and sometimes they ended up in the hands of the leftist authorities responsible for dismissals and restructuring within the police. R mentioned that this activist strategy was one of the strongest in the everyday life of the Dzjanganl back in 2016, thanks to online visualization and viralization.

Walking back to where I was staying after that first day, I couldn't stop thinking about the solidarity and activism I had witnessed in the warehouse. The organizational model, which is quite horizontal, was an important pillar for the growth of the volunteers. The friendship that develops between young French and English people invites new volunteers, most of whom come because a friend has invited them. This

organic networking across the English Channel makes me think about this alternative mobility route across the North Sea. It's no longer community-in-transit trying to get to England, but also young people crossing on ferries to volunteer on the other side.

Los Arenales fieldwork, Antofagasta, January 2022

CECILIA

I met Cecilia (C) today in the hardware store on the edge of the hill next to Los Arenales. It was 11 o'clock in the morning. I saw C from a distance, a small woman wearing sports clothes and with long brown hair. I think she was about 55 years old, but with the mask it was hard to estimate. We shook hands (which was rare in times of pandemic) and walked toward her house.

There were few people in the streets of Los Arenales. I saw some children and young people on bicycles. Her house was very close to the hardware store, but we crossed other roads and turned a few times; I would not know how to get there if I had to go there again; it was like a labyrinth. The streets were wide and had wooden signs with street names, mostly of countries and cities. Later, I understood that they were only names of cities and countries from Latin America. As we walked, C described the place in broad strokes and pointed her finger at the neighborhood center that I could see from afar, a small, brightly painted building with a metal sign that read, "Sede Vecinal" (Neighborhood Center). C mentioned that this is where neighbors meet once a week with the committee and once a month with the other leaders of Los Arenales.

Next to the center was a mural with drawings of people protesting with raised fists, an image I also saw in other parts of Los Arenales. This mural served as a symbol representing the union of Los Arenales, which C told me was called the Macro-campamento Los Arenales (Macro-camp Los Arenales), serving as the umbrella for smaller camps, such as El Jardín, where she lived.

The houses were built with different materials—wood, cardboard, cement, brick, and metal. Almost all had a first floor; some were smaller, others larger with two floors, but generally they followed a similar layout. Only later did I realize that before constructing each house, they had created a general layout grid. C said, as we walked on, that the type of building material of the houses was a sign of how many years the family had lived there; if they were built of more solid materials like bricks and cement, they had probably lived there for about five years. Many houses had barred doors and windows and were rather rectangular constructions without an A-frame roof, which is typical of northern Chile as it does not rain there and there is no need for a pitched roof.

I asked C why some of them were barred and whether Los Arenales in general was dangerous; later I regretted how I formulated that question. C answered in a friendly voice, with no sign of annoyance at the question; perhaps she was already used to this kind of question. She explained that the settlement had a generally bad reputation—there was a lot of crime and drug dealing in the area, and Los Arenales was often blamed for it, with “migrants” seen as responsible. “You have to remember,” C told me, “This settlement is on the border with Villa Isla, one of the most dangerous villages in Chile. We are not the dangerous ones—this came before us.”

Only then did I understand why she had come to pick me up from the hardware store and take me to her house. At first, I thought El Jardin was a dangerous place and it was better to go with a person who lived there, but listening to her now, it could be that she was looking out for me when I crossed the corridor between Villa Isla and El Jardin. She said that the street below the hardware store is one of the best known in Chile for crime involving firearms and cocaine trafficking; when we passed there it was 11 o'clock and there was no one on the street. I understood then that the decision to meet early was a strategic way to avoid “Los patos malos” (bad ducks). “Los patos malos salen a las calles en la tarde noche, porque duermen todo el día” (the bad ducks come out onto the streets in the evening, since they sleep all day), C laughed when she told me this.

During the walk, I asked C why the place was called “El Jardin” (The Garden). I already knew a little that each smaller camp part of Los Arenales had a symbolic name and that there was a background story. She explained to me that El Jardin had an aspirational story. El Jardin was the first settlement in Los Arenales and is the one with the largest number of Colombian communities, most of whom come from tropical areas where there is a lot of vegetation, unlike the landscape in the north of Chile, which is a desert landscape with little greenery. Therefore, the settlement committee wanted to start a green planning project, planting trees and grass in front of the houses, hence the name El Jardin. C told me that they tried to plant trees, but they all died because of the desert landscape. She knows that other settlements in the north of Chile have managed to create community gardens, but it still needs to be well organized; “it’s still in our wishes to have green areas inside the settlement,” she added.

We reached the street “Colombia,” where C had her house. She told me that Julio (J), a Colombian neighbor who was one of the first to build his house on that block, had given the street its name. He decided on this name in memory of his country. C added, “Later, over the years, we had a meeting to talk about whether we wanted to change the street name as there were now more neighbors from countries other than Colombia, e.g., Haiti, Peru, Bolivia, and Venezuela; the decision was unanimous that the name ‘Colombia’ should be kept as a tribute to J and also to the Colombian people living in El Jardin.”

C came to the El Jardin area in 2014, when it was still empty. She told me that at the beginning of the urbanization of the place, there were only about 50 people, whom C already called neighbors. At first, they got together to level the land, as it was uneven and could not be built on. C told me that in other settlements living in informality in Chile, it is common to raise money and hire a professional to flatten the land. The problem in their case was that the land was on a hill that was considered too fragile for construction. In the end, the 50 neighbors leveled the site by hand with shovels and barrels. She told me this story with a smile and said that this was an anecdote that everyone in the community often told: "It was a process of community and solidarity from the beginning to build El Jardin."

We entered her house and sat on her sofa by the window. In one corner, her son Diego (D) was doing his school homework. C continued recounting what happened after they leveled the land, saying that after this stage, they began to "mark the plots" to decide how many families could live on the land, as more and more families were arriving during the planning process and said they wanted to live there. This was the beginning of organizing a planning committee in the area. C was part of this committee, and her task was to begin making a list of people interested in living there and cataloging them by need; families with children were at the top of the priority list, then single mothers, couples without children, and finally single men, who ended up not being accepted because there were many families that had priority.

I listened to the various events as the story unfolded and said to C that it was admirable what she had achieved. C replied: "It is a challenge to be a woman organizing the community when you are surrounded by many men, but I have managed to move forward thanks to the support of other women in Los Arenales, as they were regularly promoting mutual care between them and their feminist struggle. Today, the men here respect us because they know that we are in charge; Los Arenales is a matriarchal place." C laughed out loud as she finished this sentence.

The ocean becomes a metaphor for global unity, pulling together and sustaining humankind.

Seascape Epistemologies

(Amimoto Ingersoll, 2016: 20)

The Dzjanggal fieldwork, Calais, April 2022

SOFT TORTURE

I went with J (Jessica), R (Rebeca), and other volunteers to distribute boxes of food and clothes in one of the largest communities in Calais, known by the French police and local media as the “new jungle.” The volunteers and residents, however, do not call it that. R explained that they avoid using the word “jungle” because of its pejorative connotations, which resurface the ten-year-old history of the earlier settlement derogatorily labeled “The Jungle of Calais” by politicians and the press. Later, in conversations with other volunteers, I learned that the label “The Jungle of Calais” may have originated from the word *dzjanggal*, meaning forest, bush, or wood in Pashto and certain Arabic dialects. Phonetically similar, the word could have been the root of the name, later distorted into the European association with “jungle,” carrying connotations of savagery and exoticism.

J and R also shared how members of the community still recount stories about the Dzjanggal: from the traumatic eviction in 2016 to memories of it once being described as a “small town in Calais,” with restaurants, a cinema, a radio station, a school, and even a music studio. R mentioned that some residents still hope their community might one day grow into such a settlement again. Yet she believes this is impossible. Daily evictions, and larger ones each month, make stability unattainable. French and English police arrive in minibuses to confiscate tents, food, and sometimes even the large water containers set up weekly. In many cases, residents are arrested if they cause any “disturbance” during the eviction. And yet the cycle continues. The following day, volunteers return with new food, clothing, and tents. The residents know the police will come again, and the police know the residents will return.

This rhythm of eviction and return is mirrored in the practical challenges of daily life. To bring food and clothes into the settlement now, everything must be carried on carts. Entering with a minivan, as was once possible, is no longer allowed. For months, the municipality has blocked the access routes by digging holes and piling rubble around the settlement, making it difficult even for carts to pass. These obstacles make the work of distribution heavier, slower, and more exhausting. “The municipality of Calais has created this ‘beautiful landscape’ for us,” R laughed.

As we were busy distributing, six police minivans arrived with more than 50 uniformed officers who began to disperse part of the community. We had to quickly move away from the area to prevent them from taking our boxes of food and clothes. From a distance, I observed and documented the eviction, which surprisingly went as R had described: “a dysfunctional triangular dance.” The police went in groups of 4–5 into the tents where most people were sleeping. People got up, took their things out of the tent and followed the police officers’ instructions to move their tents to the other end of the field. With R and J, we watched from a distance as the tents

were slowly moved from one side to the other, which took about 1 hour. In the meantime, the police officers walked around the settlement. When all the tents were taken down, the police officers got into their minivans and slowly drove away. I was confused that they did not take any tents, food, or people with them. R told me that they sometimes do these actions to “show who is in charge,” a kind of “soft torture,” as some volunteers call it, as they convey a sense of fragility and transience. Afterwards, I stayed and watched the tents slowly return to their previous places as we continued with the distribution. It was already dark, around 18:00.

The Dzjanganl fieldwork, Calais, April 2022

AHMAD, MOHAMMAD, ALI AND JESSICA

Jessica (J) and I walked more than 45 minutes from the bus stop to the Les Dunes Calais sector to go to the “Observatoire de la Lande,” where the Dzjanganl once was located. I met J at the warehouse. J has been a volunteer for over five months, and she knew a little about the history of the Dzjanganl and was interested in accompanying me to the sector where it was located. We reached the Les Dunes zone, now fenced off; it was no longer possible to enter the exact site where the settlement once stood. It was only possible to go to an observatory located just outside the perimeter; from there it was possible to observe the flight of different species of birds circling over the same landscape where people once circulated and lived six years ago.

We went around the perimeter to find a hole through which we could enter the protected area. From a distance, we heard footsteps and voices. Three young men approached and asked us in English where they could cross the fences to get to the coast. I then realized that the area was very close to the sea, although the sea was not visible as small hills blocked the view. J, who was slightly more experienced than me, realized that these three young men had perhaps only recently arrived in Calais. Before they replied, J added that we were volunteers and could help them if they needed anything. The moment the three young people heard this, the situation relaxed a little. The three young men introduced themselves: “Hi, I am Ahamad (AH), Mohammad (MO), and Ali (AL). We arrived four days ago and came from Italy.”

Before we could even introduce ourselves, AL stepped forward and asked if we knew anything about the British government’s current plans for deportations to Rwanda. AL and the other two admitted they were nervous about the news already circulating on social media. MO told us that it would be terrible to be deported to Rwanda upon entering the UK, and that the nearly six-month journey the three of them had made from Syria to Europe would have been for nothing—“we would be back at point zero of our journey.”

I commented a little impulsively that I had read in the BBC online newspaper this morning that they were going to start deporting and that I had already heard

that they had deported some acquaintances of people who had just arrived on the UK coast. J reacted quickly to my comment and said that nothing was certain yet, that it was all just speculation and that neither of us could give any information as it was not yet official.

At that moment, I realized how important it was to be very careful with information, especially to people whose next steps would depend on this information, as rumors often did more harm than good. However, I knew that this was a real situation: the British government had already stated at the Kigali conference center that it wanted to export its asylum responsibilities to Rwanda, which had never happened before in a migration context. The British government claimed that asylum could only be claimed in a legal and safe manner and that routes into the UK had to be legal. If the person arrived on British soil “illegally,” which J believed the three young men were about to do, they would automatically be deported, assuming the three were lucky and managed to cross the English Channel first.

MO pondered aloud that it might be better to take the overland route and go to Brussels, where AL had a cousin. AH said if this rumor was new, they might have a chance to cross that night and not be deported. He said these laws were always delayed and tonight was the perfect time to cross: “we cannot wait any longer.” When J heard this, she shared a pdf file with them that a group of volunteers had made, which they only shared in times of greatest need. For me, it was the first time I had seen this pdf file. It was a one-page text with a very clear and simple layout; it was written in English, French, and Arabic and contained drawings of rubber dinghies and people on board. I understood that these were illustrations of how to handle a dinghy safely and what to look out for. J explained as much as possible about the contents of the pdf; she emphasized that it was important to know what the sea was like before crossing. She stressed that in mid-April the wind in Calais is very strong, so the waves are very high, and it is easy for inflatable boats to flip over. There was also an emergency number in the pdf that did not require phone credit, since it was toll-free. This number connected directly to the coastal rescue brigade, where the person would need to provide a GPS location so they could be rescued in case of danger. J suggested that they should have fully charged cell phones with a GPS app. She also said that it is good to cover the cell phone with a transparent plastic bag so that it works even if it is wet. AH, MO, and AL thanked us for the information. They admitted they had not thought about these details since there was “someone” with experience who would be driving the boat. AL said they would probably get in touch with him tonight.

We wished AH, MO, and AL good luck with their plans, said goodbye, and went our separate ways. I turned as I walked and saw the three young men walking toward the coast; I thought about what would happen that night and whether they would decide to make the crossing. I looked at the weather app on my phone and saw that it would be calm in Calais that night. Around midnight, it will be clear, so it will be

a good night for sailing. After this encounter, J and I walked on in silence for almost an hour.

BRITISH RED CROSS

(following the death of a man in the English Channel on January 14, 2022)

"It is devastating to hear that another person has lost their life attempting to cross the Channel. Our thoughts are with them and their loved ones—who may not even know yet what has happened."

If I am here to speak to you today about those who didn't make it, those whose lives ended in the sea, it is only because I am lucky enough to be still alive. There is no glory in having reached this side of the sea-shore. The day I arrived in Lampedusa I was marked as the one who survived.

Name and Bodies, Tales from across the Sea

(Yimer, 2015: 1)

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, September 2021

URBAN SPECULATION

Today I went to Tiburtina again. I walked along Tiburtina Street and crossed the station to the area where the abandoned and barred building is located. As it was not the first time I'd been to this place, I was more familiar with it. Cars, buses, and motorcycles sped past the large roundabout that surrounded the site. When I had more time to look closely at the enclosed space and see the building from a distance, I could see how nature had taken over: trees (Italian pines), wild bushes, wild grass, weeds, and various animals (insects, lizards, mosquitoes, and a family of birds) that had conquered it because it had been abandoned and without human presence for a long time. On one side of the building there was a large wall of vines that crisscrossed the exterior, and the interior of the building, most of whose windows were broken, served as a gateway for these plants. The beauty in the process of appropriating nature was a point that made me stop and have a different perspective on a place that has a history of appropriation between people and nature, a building that has been empty for almost ten years since the Tiburtina eviction and abandoned for more than ten years before that. Watching nature take its course, I wonder why, in

these 20 years, the state, private, and municipal decisions did not come to fruition and this place is still empty. Was it all urban speculation?

Los Arenales fieldwork, Santiago, December 2021

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE AFTER THE OUTBURST

I continued walking toward the Cathedral of Santiago de Chile, located in the main square, Plaza de Armas. This square is one of the most important in Santiago and Chile (if you look at it from the perspective of the city center). There are many urban actors in this square: portrait painters, street vendors, beggars, policemen, and passers-by. There is a lot of noise and sounds from the city. As this is the center of the old town, there are few cars and buses. People are on foot or on motorcycles. The day is very hot, 38 degrees. A typical summer day in Santiago.

It was not just the tension and fear of the globally perceived pandemic (it was not the usual feeling I experienced in Berlin, Rome, or Naples); it was a different kind of tension, an expectant anticipation that, when I asked some people while walking around, I realized at the end of the conversation that they all said they were afraid of what would happen in the presidential election. There are only 19 days to go until the Chilean presidential elections for the 2022–2026 term.

It's been a year since the "social outbreak" began on October 18, 2019. Some people told me that they feared that if Jose Antonio Kast won, the country would return to the times of Augusto Pinochet, and fascism would spread to all parts of Chile, like an epidemic or a virus. Others told me that if Gabriel Boric won the elections, we would go back to living like in the times of Salvador Allende, where we had to stand in long lines to buy a loaf of bread; the fear of communism was linked to recent experiences in Venezuela and Honduras.

The tension of the presidential election was present.

I crossed the Plaza de Armas and took Avenida Alameda, Chile's main avenue (again, thinking from the center), which was surprisingly empty. It was already three in the afternoon, and I had the feeling that the restrictions imposed by the pandemic played an important role in the feeling of emptiness and absence as I walked along this street. But it was not just this absence; you could also sense the echoes of the events of two years ago. It is still possible to see the urban architecture of what happened after October 18, 2019. The social eruption in which Chilean citizens "woke up" and took to the streets to protest peacefully, but also violently. This violence and social anger could be seen in the writing and graffiti on the walls when walking along the Gran Avenida Alameda. Many, if not all, stores had burnt parts, broken glass, and empty and deserted areas. It was a story of a confrontation between civilians, the military, and the police. This tension was present; on some street corners, there was still the smell of burning.

I was alone on this long, wide street, where there were only a few buses and cars. Thanks to Don Claudio, who ran the only open kiosk in the street, I had already learned that the protests were generally continuing. However, they usually took place on Fridays, so people did not drive through the avenue at the beginning of the weekend because there might be “disturbances” and “confrontations.” The way he put it, such an ordinary, everyday mode, made me think of this new normality. Today was Friday.

There is not *one* Pacific
Only one common theme
That development is certain
Though foreign
And coconuts will continue
to fall...

Our Pacific

Vaine Rasmussen (2000)

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, September 2021

A SILENT EVICTION

I asked the two men if they could give me more details about Tiburtina, especially about the cultural activities. They seemed tired and did not feel like talking to me anymore. One of them asked, “Why do you want to know more about Tiburtina when the ending was so tragic?”—referring to the major Tiburtina eviction in the summer of 2003. I did not know much about how it happened, but I sensed pain around that day whenever others mentioned the incident.

The two men told me they did not want to remember it because they felt responsible for how the eviction happened. In the last months of Tiburtina, both of them were working a lot outside Rome picking tomatoes, so they did not spend much time with the community. As it was summer, there was more work picking vegetables outside the city. Rome was emptier than usual because it was summer break. The fact that they and other residents were often away made the eviction easier, in their opinion, because there was no warning and consequently no resistance from the community: “Everything happened so suddenly and gave us no time to organize and resist. The eviction took place early in the morning, the volunteers were not there either, and many people from the community were outside Rome,” one of them said.

It is rumored that the police arrived unexpectedly in Tiburtina around 7 a.m. on a Tuesday and quickly and violently evicted the few people who were there. The few people removed as many personal belongings as possible before the police closed the door and windows with wooden boards and replaced them with cement that same night, leaving many things inside the place. It is said that the eviction took less than an hour. It is also said that even today you can still see rooms full of personal belongings such as furniture, clothes and personal documents through open windows.

One of the men was already a bit annoyed that I asked for more details about Tiburtina, and he asked me again, “Why do you want to know a story that happened so long ago? What is the point of remembering something that no one wants to remember?”

I quickly thought about how to answer this question—a question carrying so much pain, anguish, and melancholy. How could I respond without pushing for an answer that was not meant to be given? I had already told them that Tiburtina’s history was part of my research and that I was impressed by how the settlement had developed into a convivial place full of cultural life in such a violent context of border regimes and urban evictions. I felt it was important to document and archive this social process as a record of Tiburtina’s existence, which is worth remembering. When I mentioned these thoughts, I felt strange and, at the same time, wondered who I was to document a story that did not belong to me and that, in some way, wanted to be forgotten.

I added that it was difficult to find information about Tiburtina on the internet, as if everything had been erased. One man responded somewhat angrily (not exactly at me) by saying that it was true that Tiburtina was very famous: “We were in the news, and we even had a website that the volunteers had set up as a window to the outside world, but after the eviction everything was erased. From one day to the next, our history was erased.”

We were silent for a few minutes.

One man broke the silence by saying that he understood why it is important not to forget and to remember Tiburtina, but unfortunately, for him, it was better to forget it as it was “a broken dream. We were almost ready to be a *Palazzo Sociale* (community center), and it all disappeared overnight. What is the point of remembering it again?”

I felt strange about this conversation; I realized it was better not to inquire further. I finally grasped why they didn’t want to remember and understood that sometimes there are stories that are better forgotten and not talked about. When I started researching Tiburtina, I didn’t know about this tragic end; I didn’t know that it was a silent eviction and that there was no resistance. Later, I understood that this eviction was the first model for many other silent evictions over the years in Rome.

My mind can travel anywhere
Across the ocean, across dry land
Past, present and future
No traffic lights or mind the gap
No one can stop me moving.

My Brain Is an Immigrant

Senait Hagose⁹

(undetermined date, possibly 2017)

9 Senait Hagose wrote the poem *My Mind Is an Immigrant* as part of a writing workshop organized by the charity Freedom from Torture, which encourages people to write about their experience as a way of therapy. Hagose mentioned that this poem was a form to overcome the struggle of leaving Syria. See the complete poem at <https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/>

CHAPTER 2

Aspirational Archives

This chapter looks closely at the role of three community archives as a counter-response to institutional archival practices, and mainstream migration narratives. Through theoretical analysis, ethnographic vignettes, co-authored contributions, and multimedia archival engagement, it explores the collective aspiration, memory, and placemaking in the Dzjanganl, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. The second and third sections of the chapter are co-authored by Elizabeth Andrade, Adolfo Estalella, Davide Franceschini, Carla J. Maier, Cristian Ochoa, and Kathy O'Hare¹.

2.1 Archive as a Place of Resistance and Aspiration

The origins of the archive are closely tied to the materialization of heritage and to the production of governmental and state narratives rooted in a colonial legacy of an “official and dominant history.” As critical librarianship scholars Nora Almeida and Jen Hoyer (2019) argue, narratives of power and dominance take form through “monuments of states,” which are cataloged, documented, and preserved in archives. In

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this sense, the archive operates not only as a site of preservation but also as a mechanism through which authority is recorded and maintained. The philosopher Jacques Derrida, in *Archive Fever* (1996), addresses this dynamic through the notion of “inscription,” emphasizing how the act of archiving selects and stabilizes traces of the past as an “authentic” history. What is preserved, in turn, becomes a dominant narrative. These foundations of the archive, shaped by Western epistemologies, reveal how archival practices are embedded in colonial structures, even as the archive has been framed as a “neutral and apolitical” space.

Countering this premise, this chapter, rather than examining what is considered an archive, as constructed by the institutionalization of cultural memory and heritage, proposes an alternative approach to archives from a migration lens. It explores the collective memories of the communities of the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales as archival processes of placemaking, resistance, and aspirations. It challenged the traditional notion of the archive in order to construct spaces for alternative narratives and political processes that have been negated by the dominant history. In this case, the notion of “trace” as aspiration, referred to by the cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai in *Archive and Aspiration* (2003b), become relevant by providing another perspective of the archive as a space that does not necessarily contain traces of the past, but rather includes the present and aspirations, particularly in the case of future-making of communities-in-transit facing contemporary border regimes.

Re-thinking the Archive

When I turn to Appadurai’s reading of European humanist historians—especially the historian Marc Bloch ([1949] 2000)—I see how the archive was considered as an “empty, neutral and almost ethically unframed box housing memories” (Appadurai, 2003b: 1) and that its job is to store the most valuable traces of the past. As Appadurai argues, at first, the archive was connected to graphic elements that translated into the idea of a document and then expanded to objects, monuments, places, cities, etc. These documents have been “accidentally” preserved. They are cataloged and organized in specific ways within the archive by the historian, which Bloch argued was a harmless gap between the accidental trace of history and the critical work of the historian in preserving and cataloging it in the archive. In this sense, the archive becomes a “guardian” that protects the documents that are a valuable tangible and intangible heritage. The idea of a “harmless empty box” that houses accidental historical traces was challenged in the 1970s, when the philosopher Michel Foucault, through his reflections in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* ([1969] 2013) and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1973), argued that history and knowledge are pre-designed. From this perspective, the traces encountered by the historian are

not accidental remnants, but traces of elements designed to be found—not products of historical accident, but constructions of it (Appadurai, 2003b).

Before Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the idea of the archive was something intangible: a place, a site, or an institution whose primary role was the care and custody, from an official aspect, of the document. The document was the materiality, the tangible and graphic form that “accidentally” survived, thanks to its protection and collection by the archivist (Appadurai, 2003b). Foucault challenged us to think about the design and form of how traces of stories are preserved and archived by questioning the traditional selection of what is archivable and what is forgotten by history. His argument was crucial in understanding the archive and data collection, not only as a production of a container of cultural materials but, in turn, incorporating the collected information as new knowledge production and analysis (Pribilsky, 2016). Foucault's idea of the selection of what is archivable changed the meaning of a data collection space from a simple repository of cultural materials to the idea that it has been designed. In his concept of “effective history,” Foucault ([1969] 2013) questions established historical narratives by viewing documents as tools for dismantling monumental histories.

As the scholars Giulia Battaglia, Jennifer Clarke, and Fiona Siegenthaler mention in the essay “Bodies of Archives/Archival Bodies” (2020), in the midst of the transformative “archival turn” that has taken place in the last decade in academic circles, a profound reevaluation emerges that gives rise to the formulation of new interpretations and understandings of the “archive.” This not only disrupts traditional notions but also creates opportunities both within and beyond academia. Central to this critical discourse are the colonial patterns embedded within archival practices, highlighting the imperative to dismantle established power structures. Such deconstruction attempts to broaden the archival narrative, fostering inclusive and diverse perspectives in the realm of knowledge production. Anthropologists, in particular, find themselves engaged in a reexamination of their discipline's historical entanglements with colonialism, particularly within archival frameworks. The colonial history, with a legacy of “salvage anthropology” (Battaglia, Clarke, and Siegenthaler, 2020: 11), serves as a bitter reminder of past injustices. The idea of preserving humanity's diversity while perpetuating forms of oppression underscores the complex ethical terrain navigated by anthropologists. Over the past decades, there have been concerted efforts within the discipline to confront this problematic past and map a course toward ethical and inclusive representation (Battaglia, Clarke, and Siegenthaler, 2020; see Chapter 3).

Therefore, as many museum scholars and workers are reflecting in the last decade, the great ethical challenge for institutional archives is the search for multivocality. Postcolonial, indigenous, and decolonial thinkers are engaged in bringing to light the different colonial structures of the archival process at the institutional level. On a more technical level, the ethical issues of cataloging and systematization

within Western Museum repositories and exhibition sites are being questioned, calling for a reconfiguration of these forms of collecting by non-Western practitioners. At the core of the debate lies not only the ethical implications of preserving cultural heritage but also broader epistemological questions concerning the nature of knowledge itself. The prevailing archival paradigm, deeply rooted in European modernity, is challenged by calls for pluralistic approaches to “memory, knowledge, and validation” (Battaglia, Clarke, and Siegenthaler, 2020: 11). In this context, counternarratives emerge, challenging the hegemony of Western archival epistemologies and advocating for more inclusive and diverse modes of preservation and representation. As such, the “archive” is reconceptualized not merely as a repository of historical artifacts but as a site of contestation and transformation, reflecting evolving understandings of collective memory and identity (Battaglia, Clarke, and Siegenthaler, 2020).

Migratory Digital Archives as Counternarratives

In today’s digital age, the idea of the archive is taken not only from institutional and academic viewpoints, but also from civil society and societal actors. The archive is no longer crafted by institutions and governments. Thanks to the democratization of the internet, communities and civil society are reshaping the notion of the “dark” and politicized archive (Foucault, 1973) into virtual spaces where everyday memories, community gatherings, local histories, resistance strategies, and activism converge. The central interest of this chapter is reflecting on how communities, especially communities-in-transit, are documenting the “here” and “now” of their present—a digital compilation of collective aspirations that moves beyond seeing the archive as merely archiving moments from the past, dismantling the traditional concept of the archive. The transformation of cataloging materials into digital archive also offers a reinterpretation of Foucault’s theory.

Appadurai highlights how an “electronic archive” represents a process of democratization of collective memory, not only being easy to design, but also in terms of its wider dissemination through open access. This opens up a new idea of archiving in a more equal, dynamic, collective, non-institutional way. These digital collective memories of the present are a different kind of document creation, where the community individually and collectively gathers documents such as personal diaries, photo albums, and materials from community museums and libraries to preserve local and personal history. Appadurai proposes that collective memory should be seen as a kind of collective project, rather than seeing the archive as a container for the traces of the past, protected by state design. It is not a place where the traces of the past are kept, but a space for “the product of the anticipation of collective memory”: “The archive is itself an aspiration rather than a recollection” (Appadurai, 2003b:

2). In this sense, the archive becomes “aspirational” from the perspective of civil society.

In this context, the digital realm emerges as a potential avenue for political digital decolonization, redefining the boundaries of archival preservation and recovering the political agency inherent in both historical narratives and contemporary discourse. This can already be seen in ideas such as “decolonial museums,” a self-criticism of museums and other institutions within European nation-states. In the last decade, archives and museum collections have undergone significant transformations toward greater accessibility, driven primarily by advances in digital technology. This trend intensified with the onset of the pandemic, underscoring the need to make archives available to the public online, as Appadurai put it, thus fostering democratization and greater accessibility. Moreover, as explored by L’Internationale in *Decolonizing Archives* (2016), archival institutions still often use Western standards and classifications, seemingly indifferent to their digital accessibility, as instruments for maintaining the archival system’s role as an imperial apparatus of domination and validation. Nevertheless, from a counternarrative perspective, digitization can serve as a powerful decolonizing tool. As the need for efficient navigation and searching becomes increasingly important in the face of the avalanche of digitized content, digitization has the potential to truly boost decolonizing efforts (L’Internationale Online, 2016).

In turn, the idea of collective memory in migration archives, especially electronic community archives on open-source platforms such as Soundcloud and Facebook, makes the dynamism, mobility, and flow of migration even more potent. The ease of interaction and spread of archived material between users and beyond expands the nature of migratory communities (without a permanent physical location), their virtual space of these electronic archives, and the meeting place of these multiple migratory narratives. In this chapter, I am looking at how these virtual spaces and electronic archives continue to be present even though the physical location of the community-in-transit no longer exists, as in the case of the Dzjangan and Tiburtina (see Section 2.2). This idea that the archive can continue to be present, even though the site of the archive production no longer exists, highlights the potential of the electronic archive. Free from institutionality, these archives produce anticipated and aspirational memories for communities; as Appadurai reflects, the documents produced in these electronic archives are more than simple material traces of history and memory—they are interventions that are part of a collective project: “the archive is more frequently the product of the anticipation of collective memory” (Appadurai, 2003b: 4).

Following this, the relationship between collective memory and the archive, thanks to digitization, presents future possibilities, which Appadurai refers to as the reconnection of cultural traditions between the archive and popular memory practice. Before the archive’s institutionalization, communities were the agents that

chose how their traces became archives. The community was capable of archiving its traces without specific formal institutionalization. With the democratization of digitization, communities are returning to this earlier way of relating to the archive, countering the idea of archives governed by institutions. Moreover, the electronic archive has generated new spaces of sociability and interaction between users and the archive itself. This interactivity leads to the expansion of collective memory. It is no longer an internal process from the community. Now this digital externalization makes the collective memory dynamic and not guarded as previously, particularly in communities-in-transit, where the spread of collective memory also becomes a strategy of activism against the border regime. This idea of externalization represented by the electronic archive resonates with instances of various “refugee” and “migrant” archives located far from their countries of origin. Here the idea of the collective archive is used to recover knowledge lost in wars and to retrieve silenced histories with the motivation of rewriting their history and genealogy from their own perspective, independent of the current politics of their country or the image of it created by others (Myrtsou, 2018).

As Appadurai highlights, “migrants” have a layered relationship with memory and archiving, as the past becomes highly present in everyday life. Even more so when there is a tragic and traumatic collective memory of the same national/territorial history. These memories of loss are not only the tangible loss of the territory of origin (exile) but also the loss of their old identity, transformed during the journey to the new territory. A complexity of understanding surrounds these communities—of what is lost, what one has/wants to remember, and what one has to forget (Appadurai, 2003b). This is something that, at first, I entangled with the concept of liminality, exemplifying this confusion and the duality of being between time-space, between “what was lost” and “what is present” (see Chapter 5). This memory of loss becomes the basis of the “migrant’s” narrative, which is also collective and public. The feeling of being inbetween territories and emotions becomes the basis of the “migrant’s” identity (Appadurai, 2003b). The Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales collective memories are examples of this complexity, entangled with negotiation, resistance, and territorial claims. By generating digital archives of collective memories they go beyond a memory of loss and the mainstream migratory narrative. Still, they are collective archives that aspire and imagine a new way of living. Without neglecting the suffering and losses of their migration experiences, they still manage to generate archives of hopes, dreams, and aspirations—“The capacity to aspire” (Appadurai, 2003b; see Epilogue).

The “Not Yet” as a Counter-Archival Practice

In his work *Archive and Aspiration* (2003b), Appadurai refers to the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch’s ([1923] 2000) idea of the “not yet” to discuss how archives today

contain more than just the past and the present. This is especially evident for communities facing uncertainty and vulnerability, such as those communities-in-transit dealing with the confrontation of border regimes on a daily basis. These archives are containers for future hopes, aspirations, and dreams. Bloch's concept of the "not yet" is rooted in a utopian philosophy that sees the world as incomplete and in constant motion toward the future. Bloch's notion of the future is uncertain, "it is something that has never been before" (GA 13: 228; Bloch, 1954–59 [1986a: 1375f.], cited in Boldyrev, 2023: 3), suggesting that the future shapes our present reality. His ontological formula "S is not yet P" suggests that reality is evolving and that the world is constantly in search of its "essence" (Boldyrev, 2023). This formula captures what I am exploring in this research. Specifically my interest in how the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales transform from "non-places" into "social places" in the face of the violence and restrictions of European and South American border regimes. The idea of "not yet," in this context, refers to how these places, referred to as "non-places," have become social places, even though they are "not yet" recognized as part of the city. They are "incomplete" in their informality and deviate from traditional Western urban norms. The "not yet" drives the hopes and aspirations of these communities in terms of their daily present and their visions for the future. In this context, as Bloch ([1923] 2000) suggests, reality must be understood as both incomplete and complete: the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales are, through their "incompleteness," complete in their own way.

In the Epilogue of this book, I propose to look at the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales through the tentative lens of *Somewhere Inbetween*. This unfolding idea emerges as I reflect on the present acts of alternative placemaking inside Western cities, and on a collective mindset that combines feelings of belonging and resilience. Through migratory narratives and collective efforts, the residents of these places create strong networks for sharing dreams, hopes, and aspirations (see Epilogue). Here, the notion of "not yet" is seen as an aspiration toward the future that drives the present. Through their efforts of daily placemaking, the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales are already part of the city's present. These aspirations and dreams are evident in the archives I encountered during my fieldwork, as I unfold in the following sections of this chapter. The documents, sounds, and videos collected by these communities reflect their hopes and aspirations for the "not yet" as a place of possibility. These archives carry their hopes for the future into the present, embodying the idea of the "not yet" as an ongoing process (see Epilogue).

Considering this, the archives encountered in the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales mark a profound departure from mainstream narratives surrounding migration. These archives function as repositories of migration experiences and as dynamic agents of resistance and activism, driven by the residents' collective aspirations, hopes, and dreams. They represent a turn toward *anarchive* (Battaglia, Clarke, and Siegenthaler, 2020: 10), a reconfiguration of archives as a constellation of multi-

sensory materials that challenge dominant understandings of the past by activating memory through movement, participation, and feeling—a radical shift from traditional archival forms, offering alternative ways of engaging with memory-making. These archives are therefore more than data collections; they are living testaments to collective struggle, embodying the resilience and agency of communities-in-transit. By reconfiguring the traditional logic of the archive, these archives disrupt established narratives and bring to the front door their (hi)stories that have been marginalized or forgotten.

While beyond the scope of this chapter, the idea of *anarchive* remains crucial. As an artistic-ethnographic lens, it brings these communal archives into the realm of dynamic and performative collective practice. Unlike conventional ideas of archives, which are often fixed, rigid and static, anarchival practices (Brozgal, 2020) embrace fluidity, mobility, and transformation, allowing their material to evolve into new forms, opening space for diverse modes of expression. As the sociologist Stuart Hall (2001: 89) argues, the archive “is alive, continuous, unfinished, and open.” The archives of the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales do not remain as static repositories of the past. Instead, they are continuously reanimated, embedded in the “here” and “now,” resonating with their realities of the present moment, deepening the debates around migration, memory, and belonging. From their own perspectives, these communities are engaging with global conversations around border regimes and migration. This grants the archives transformative power, turning them into counternarratives that challenge dominant border regimes and reveal the possibilities for alternative forms of social organization (Foster, 2004, cited in Battaglia, Clarke, and Siegenthaler, 2020). The archives of the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales unfold in the next paragraphs, embodying a rethinking of migration narratives. They are continuously reinterpreted and recontextualized, bringing them beyond the limits of traditional archival frameworks, creating platforms for alternative forms of memory-making. In doing so, they contribute to a living, evolving archive of today’s migration.

In the following sections, I look at the archives of the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales communities through their counternarrative lens, drawing on ethnographic vignettes written during the various years of my fieldwork. In the final section of this chapter, I also suggest alternative ways of experiencing these archives through collaboration and co-authorships, by proposing the (re)presentation of each archive through its own multimodal nature—sound, image, motion, and voice. Through media such as radio broadcasts, photography, walking, and podcasts, these archives contain a vivid image of migratory communities’ aspirations for territorial reclamation against today’s border regimes.

2.2 Ethnographic Vignettes from the Archives Encountered

2.2.1 The Agency of Listening through a Sonic Archive

Fragment from ethnographic vignette from the Dzjanganl fieldwork, August 2021 (co-edited with Kathy O'Hare)

One night at the end of March 2021, I was thinking about how I could continue my research in the Dzjanganl without having to travel to the site, as the pandemic was still ongoing at the time, although the vaccination program was already showing results and quarantines and lockdowns were being eased. Nevertheless, I didn't know what I would find on the streets of Calais. Together with my supervisor, Römheld, I decided it was best to postpone the trip until April 2022 and continue the research in an online format.

I began my anxious search on the internet, the only medium available to me at the time to find out about the current situation in the settlement. My initial search was chaotic and without clear direction; instead, I scrolled and scrolled through the 50+ pages of Google search results related to "The Jungle." On page 25, I finally came across something that could be a good start, a possibility. It was Jungala Radio that made me stop my search. It was an incredible radio archive made inside the Dzjanganl that was surprisingly still available on the open and accessible platform Soundcloud. This finding was the beginning of a digital/online ethnography. This digital modality, enforced by the uncertainty of the pandemic, helped me to familiarize myself with the active listening of an almost forgotten online archive of the inhabitants of the Dzjanganl.

Jungala Radio, a digital community radio station based inside the Dzjanganl in Calais, was founded between 2015 and 2016. The volunteers offered training in digital community radio to the residents of the place. The training focused on digital and communication skills, story and content development, interview techniques, editing and post-production. The premise of the project was to give access to a digital and social space where participants could develop to the point where they had complete editorial control over the content they created. Jungala Radio was a community-run digital radio station, a creative and professional space that gave participants self-confidence, skills, and a sense of ownership. In this way, participants became digital storytellers and controllers of their political selves. Jungala Radio was a digital community that used social media networks, open-source software, and digital tools to allow the Dzjanganl residents to create their own digital stories, challenging the dominant narratives of mainstream media. Jungala Radio station was named by a 12-year-old who resided in the settlement. She learned how to use digital tools to broadcast her own digital podcasts. "The jungle is where animals and insects sleep, and we are not animals," she remarks. "La' means 'No' in Arabic; hence the name Junga-La—Jungle No!" (Jungala Radio, 2016).

I searched through Facebook, blogs, and comments on the Soundcloud platform for the coordinators of the radio project. I was especially looking for who was behind the update of the digital media three years before. There was no activity from the users, but the material was still online. There was no specific name in the social networks, and the image from Jungala Radio was of a collective group. In turn, the radio platforms (Soundcloud, website, Facebook page) were perceived as inactive, as the last Jungala Radio Facebook post was on August 1, 2017. I wrote messages introducing myself and explaining my interest in the radio and digital platforms. After a couple of weeks, Kathy O'Hare replied to me, starting our exchange through e-mails to coordinate an interview through Zoom.

Kathy, an Irish educator and researcher in digital humanities, is pursuing a PhD in critical digital pedagogy, radio studies, digital humanity, and critical conscience. At the end of 2015 she was a Master's student and Irish community volunteer at the Dzjanganl, helping in the first part of its construction. The first time Kathy went to Calais the camp was already well-established, with around 4,000 people living there. She went with 55 people from Ireland. They fundraised 200,000 euros and spent eight days in the Dzjanganl, building community infrastructure inside the camp, including a school, internet hotspot, nursing team, and building team (for community and private places). As a student, she did not want to interrupt her Master's studies but, at the same time, wanted to spend more time at the camp. She felt she had to contribute somehow, looking for a way to connect her university studies with the Dzjanganl. From that initial motivation Kathy partnered with co-founder Ciaran Henry (videographer and photographer) to co-create Jungala Radio together with the Dzjanganl's residents in December 2015, with the first radio show being the day after New Year's Day and the last one in October 2016, when the French authorities evicted and demolished the camp. Every 3–6 weeks Kathy traveled to Calais from Ireland to continue the workshops. Ciaran took a break when she was in the camp; they shared tasks. Jungala Radio was located next to the Jungle book library, another project created by inhabitants and volunteers. The library had three large and two small spaces, built with wood, plastic, and waterproof fabrics against the rain. It was constructed by inhabitants and volunteers together in a very spontaneous and organic way. The radio was in one of the small spaces; Kathy describes it as a small "hut."

Kathy: It's chaotic to try to work inside the "Jungle" environment. You know, sound recording needs to be a certain quality for recording, but have you had any chance to listen to any of the radio episodes?

Melanie: All of them! I was intrigued; it is such beautiful and intense sonic material. I was listening to it with the method of close listening, repeating, and paying attention to the different sonic textures. I could feel through my body how the people were moving inside the camp. It is incredible how sound can be a partic-

ular perception of the space. Later, I was thinking of how Jungala Radio production was developed. Maybe in the beginning of the radio production there were more rules and script-narratives, like in Adam's show [one of the radio shows]. Is that the voice-name of the girl in the show, right? ... Also, I love the poetry section very much. After the second year of the radio station, I have the feeling that the episodes slowly developed their own thing. You can feel it in the sonic experience; it was more experimental, fluid, and spontaneous, and from that sensation it was important for me to meet, because I was so curious to know more about the history of the radio. How did you get the first participant, and how did it become later an independent identity?

Kathy: We did a little fundraising for the project. It was around 1,200–1,500 euros for the full project. We did a fundraiser and we got one laptop, and then I donated two audio recording devices and two sets of headphones, and that was it, basically. One laptop and two audio recorders, and it works somehow. So initially, when we went back, we went to some of the community meetings. The camp itself was quite political. There were daily meetings with community leaders from each nationality—each nationality had elected a community leader—and then there would be regular meetings in relation to whatever was going on in the camp and how they could better their struggle, you know. So, we went to a couple of these meetings, and we built a positive rapport with the camp leaders, and they were happy to promote the project in each respective community with their larger umbrella of “the Jungle.” We put up some posters, went to the different restaurants and coffee shops there, and then also, you know because word of mouth is always the best way to do everything, people will say: Oh! He is a journalist, or he was a journalist, or he wanted to be a journalist, or he is a videographer or an artist, so there were already people that were quite well known in the camp, and some walked around the camp to look for them and had a chat with them, and said, look, we will start this program, are you interested in getting involved? So that was how it started. Initially, we started with five, I called them full-timers, five full-time participants, and then we had people that would come in and maybe want to do only one show or one story; also, other people just wanted to be in the space, you know, we want the space to be used.

Extract from the interview with Kathy O'Hare, June 14, 2021

One crucial aspect for Kathy and her team was to create a safer space for the participants by trying to hide their identity as much as possible, anonymizing the work and the radio process. “We wanted to hide people's identity and provide anonymity, because, at the time, it was very political to live in the camp, so, radio is the great way to disguise your identity but still have your voice heard.” The inhabitants were in the process of seeking asylum, contesting court cases, and crossing to the UK, so anonymity was essential. Another factor was to prevent interactions from journalists, who aggressively searched for “the juiciest and the saddest story,” making the inhabitants vulnerable. Kathy struggled daily with aggressive, often brutal, behavior

on the part of the press. To find the perfect story, some journalists would promise to help the inhabitants cross to the UK. Then, once they had the story, they would disappear, leaving them more vulnerable than before. They would also take photos of orphaned children and publish them in their digital posts. Kathy named this a “helicopter approach.” They would come in, extract the perfect, “juicy” story and then disappear rapidly. She said that for a healthy relationship in a working group, there has to be an exchange and not an extraction from the community for work/research. In parallel to the radio work, Kathy was reading different magazines, newspapers, and digital mass media on a daily basis to check if any journalist had uploaded inappropriate information. Then, she would communicate with them, insisting that they verify, change, or delete the uploaded material. As she described, these were her working days, between sound recordings, radio work, and constant surveillance of journalists circulating inside the settlement.

One key segment of the conversation with Kathy that caught my attention was when she talked about the content of the radio episodes and the overall purpose of the project. Kathy and her team did not want to deliver to the audience the usual content produced in the context of “refugees” in Europe by the mass media and commercial newspapers. Instead, they wanted to provide a safer place for creativity and playfulness, using the radio project as a tool/workshop to teach radio skills, build community and provide entertainment inside the camp. “What we were providing was a safe space, a confidential space, but also a space that allowed people to get their voices out, and they can go wherever they want to with their own stories.”

Soundcloud, the platform on which Jungala Radio is hosted, is a digital space that is free for users and audiences. By looking at the plays, likes, and reposts of Jungala Radio episodes, I knew more clearly how many people were interested in these episodes. It was a relatively small group, which Kathy also confirmed, saying it was more like friends and people from the volunteer community. The episodes were also burned onto CD and distributed in restaurants and venues inside the Dzjantal. This “analog” method reached another audience that was impossible to target through the digital platform. Soundcloud became the container of this sound archive, and, to date, it is possible to listen to and even download them for free, although the last show was in 2016.

Listening again and again to Jungala Radio episodes on Soundcloud, I found a deep relation between people, place, and sound. The sonic experience produced by the participants and volunteers within Jungala Radio created a space of reflective social listening, mirroring what had happened in the Dzjantal, and developing a deep awareness of the presence and meaning of sound and radio as instruments of empowerment and sociopolitical resistance in the face of the European border regime during 2015 and 2016. The process of recording, editing, post-production, and distribution of the episodes was carried out collectively by the inhabitants and volunteers, through constant negotiation between the two parties. I came to understand how

they were able to sensitively and accurately capture a collective sonic experience and document the camp's daily life. At the same time, these recordings were uploaded to a digital sound platform, opening another parameter of reflection: Radio as a digital medium of archive.

Although the episodes were not primarily intended as archival work, it is evident that the initiators of the Jungala Radio project were interested in collecting and preserving the experience of the radio workshops and the camp's recorded life. The digital archive available on the Soundcloud platform raises questions about how and why this sound material should be archived on the internet. When I asked Kathy why the episodes were uploaded to Soundcloud and why they remained online, she explained that, on the one hand, it was a simple way to share the outcomes of the radio workshops, as Soundcloud functioned as an open-access space, more experimental and freer, oriented toward musicians and sound artists. On the other hand, the decision to leave the radio archive active was rather spontaneous; since the platform is free of charge and requires no maintenance, for Kathy, it was an easy way to leave a trace of Jungala Radio online. Later, the episodes were archived in the Digital Repository of Ireland (<https://dri.ie/>), giving a more formal dimension to these archiving practices. These different forms of digital preservation and circulation open up new possibilities for the archive to be reactivated and reinterpreted over time. Although Jungala Radio stopped operating in 2016, its sonic traces remain visible on the internet, waiting to be listened to in the future (see Section 2.3.1).

2.2.2 Electronic Archives of Collective Memory and Activism

Fragment from an ethnographic vignette from Tiburtina fieldwork, October 2021 (co-edited with Davide Franceschini)

During my second fieldwork in Italy, I accessed a collection of Tiburtina community images by the Italian photographer Davide Franceschini, who had volunteered at the Tiburtina settlement from 2000 to 2003. I had met Davide some years earlier, during my first fieldwork in Rome in 2018. Through the contacts of the art residency *Lattitudo* Rome, which was my hosting institution at that time, I came to know the artistic and activist work of Davide, one of whose most important engagements had been his involvement with the Tiburtina community. During his time as a volunteer in Tiburtina, Davide recounted that he was involved in documentation, counterinformation, and the management of the community website (www.tiburtina.org, now defunct). Davide, together with his artistic collective *Formazero*—comprising Antonio Venti and Maurizio Giri—joined Tiburtina at the request of the residents' committee and the humanitarian organization "Doctors Against Torture". Beginning in 2002, *Formazero* formed a working group inside Tiburtina around the Italian L2 language school, later the "Asinitas" Association. Thanks to the efforts of many volunteers, such as Marco Carsetti, the school became a strategic hub for community life,

advocacy, and resistance. It went beyond simply teaching language, evolving into a space for sharing collective stories and memories. Through repeated exchanges and participatory reflection, Davide highlighted how the school fostered ideas of self-management and a shared desire to preserve and improve the living environment. "On a broader scale, Tiburtina began to envision a new model of refugee reception in Rome and Italy, in which residents themselves managed the infrastructure and organization" (Franceschini, Giri, and Venti, 2007).

Simultaneously, the Tiburtina building was constantly targeted by journalists, photographers, videomakers, and onlookers who, with complete disregard, invaded the occupied spaces "to steal images and fragments of life" (Franceschini, Giri, and Venti, 2007). Davide mentioned that these materials were used to construct instrumental narratives, epitomized by the media-coined nickname "Hotel Africa." Residents opposed this theft and its rhetoric by first rejecting that derogatory label: "We're not in Africa, and this isn't a hotel." Faced with this media distortion, the community sought ways to counter harmful representations with their own narratives of the place. Thus, the "Vista Tiburtina" website (www.tiburtina.org, inactive since 2003) was born.

Davide, together with other volunteers and Tiburtina residents, transformed the Italian school into an improvised editorial office to manage relations with institutions and the press. The site became a window into community stories and a direct channel for unfiltered voices. In this way, www.tiburtina.org functioned as a digital frontier protecting Tiburtina. Davide and Formazero, alongside other artists, joined as documentarians to support counternarrative efforts and to reclaim the place's history. They served the community by handling communication, translation, and skill-sharing for audiovisual production and relational strategies. At a time when social media was barely active, the site quickly became a tool for dialogue with political actors, attracting thousands of visits and disseminating an alternative image of migration tied to this unique experiment in urban conviviality. Davide and Formazero also re-edited and subtitled amateur videos about the Darfur war that had been brought to Tiburtina by Mediterranean crossers. Community leaders wanted to circulate these materials, which were unseen in what the journalist Gabriele Del Grande termed "Fortress Europe," a space increasingly indifferent and hostile. As Davide recounted during our walking interview, the video reworking process was carefully negotiated between Formazero and Tiburtina leaders. This work became part of sharing their collective memory with a European audience (Franceschini, Giri, and Venti, 2007).

The site www.tiburtina.org featured few images, countering the media's violent visual narrative. Visual elements followed a community-driven aesthetic of re-signification, with each choice debated weekly by Tiburtina residents. This shaped how they represented themselves and their space. Davide mentioned that a key goal was showing Rome that despite precarious conditions, their organizational strength

promoted collective well-being—reflecting on community bonds and welcoming newcomers. “In those former warehouses, people from nations or ethnic groups at war (like Darfur) coexisted peacefully” (Franceschini, Giri, and Venti, 2007). Davide’s photographs were only uploaded long after his involvement began. Small documentation campaigns emerged as counter-information needs arose, but their most powerful visual work consisted of just five images of common spaces (see Section 2.3), born from prolonged collective reflection on space and relationships.

Davide’s background in architectural and cultural heritage photography influenced the aesthetic choices on documentation. He described the difficulty of photographing individuals or groups without reproducing migration stereotypes. After years at Tiburtina, he realized the space itself held their migratory stories: “These five photos result from a synthetic, collective act. They preserve and return traces of those who briefly but meaningfully reclaimed these places, who reinvented them—for themselves and the city.” Davide approached the Tiburtina building with the same care and neutrality reserved for documenting cathedrals or monuments, forcing themselves to use the professional tools and rules of photographic representation in a heritage setting. The only shift was the deliberate, communal use of a large-format view camera. Its size allowed for group participation behind the ground glass, where the inverted image was collectively composed, mediated, and discussed to determine the best framing of the photographic image. Thus the idea of the solitary photographer is countered by the collective body involved in its production, where the collaborative practice of documenting the living space of Tiburtina was able to signify the sense of collectivity and community happening in Tiburtina back then (see Section 2.3.2).

Fragment from an ethnographic vignette from Los Arenales fieldwork, March 2022 (co-edited with Cristian Ochoa)

As part of my second fieldwork trip in Los Arenales, I had the opportunity to review the archive of the Chilean photographer Cristian Ochoa, which consisted of different artistic projects with Los Arenales over four years (2012–2016), allowing him to build a close connection with some leaders of the settlement; this was also one of the bridges that let me enter the community in 2022. I met Cristian in 2016 at the SACO art residency in Antofagasta.² It was my first visit to the city and my first inquiry into the dynamics of migration in northern Chile. Cristian, with a critical eye, was very cautious about artists working with “migrant” communities, as he had already seen how cultural institutions and art projects aesthetically exploited the “migrant” narratives at that time in Chile. At SACO, I was working on my letter exchange project *Connecting Stories* (see Chapter 3). Before traveling to Antofagasta, I had collected anonymous letters from the Colombian community in Berlin, to be delivered

2 See more in <https://bienalsaco.com/>

to their compatriots in Chile. Cristian was my bridge to deliver these letters to the Colombian community living in Los Arenales—my first approach to the settlement and the residents. In this first experience and in conversations with Cristian, I noticed similarities and connections with the Dzjanganl community across the Atlantic.

Cristian shared with me the photographic archive he had been working on for more than four years, where many photos (more than 80%) had not been shown to the public. He made a photo book and an exhibition called *The South American Dream*.³ His photographic workshop called *Migratory Mourning* included photographs taken by him and the residents, with the work displayed in the soccer field of Los Arenales and other public places in different parts of Antofagasta. The idea was to collaboratively portray from the perspective of the “migrants” the image of conviviality and solidarity developing in Los Arenales, inviting the Chilean residents of Antofagasta to cross the city’s border and go to the settlement to meet its “new residents.” At that time the racist and anti-migrant protests (so-called anti-Colombian protests) in Antofagasta were expanding, making this photographic project one of the first to try to counteract the misguided image that the Chilean television and social media were presenting. Cristian’s photographs, although they are from his own perspective as an outsider, managed to be among the first to document the community of Los Arenales. They were able to use them later for various purposes, such as funding applications, presentation media, Facebook, and Instagram, as well as constituting an archive of the place’s urban development.

I met Cristian again in 2022, when I returned to Los Arenales. We discussed once more his past project, *A South American Dream*, which had won several photographic awards, and traveled through some parts of Latin America. Reflecting almost seven years after its initial production, he had mixed feelings. He recognized how the project had power issues and had caused a degree of vulnerability to the community. Although his initial intentions were advocacy and capturing racism in Chile, something that was not discussed then, on reflection he understood that photography can be a problematic medium when working with precarious and vulnerable communities. In his own words, “the photographic portraits captured the migrant body, often unintentionally turning it into an exotic object of observation and study.” Currently, Cristian is working with Mapuche people in southern Chile, where there are daily confrontations between police and the community over land claims. He no longer uses his camera. He put it aside and is now concentrating on being an activist-cultural mediator, mainly on volunteer teams for public assemblies and town councils.

It was very interesting for me to listen to his reflections on the problem of photographic representation. I had already seen these red flags in the project when I first

3 See more in <https://cerosetenta.uniandes.edu.co/en-vitrina-cristian-ochoa-y-el-sueno-sudamericano> and <https://www.yorokobu.es/cristian-ochoa-fotolibro/>

heard about it. However, I could also understand his extensive work with the community, which was not visible in the photographs at first glance. The background of this project was much more complex than the visual results. The relationship that Cristian managed to generate with the community, which I could appreciate when he introduced me to the community leaders, is based on a foundation of trust and care. When I discussed it with him and with some of the residents, it was possible to appreciate that there were constant negotiations and processes of trust with the community, allowing him to enter intimate and private places that had not been portrayed before. From some perspectives, his photographic lens was able to capture the reality of the organization, conviviality, and solidarity in the settlement, which counteracted the false and racist image at that time in Antofagasta and the rest of Chile. Anyhow, the complexity of photography as a means of representation, while derived from a reflexive and artistic process, can produce diverse vulnerabilizations and objectifications in its images of the “migrant body.” Although the idea of the portrait as an act of activism is to counteract the false and racist portrayal of the press and other media, often it is distorted and abused, decontextualizing the initial idea in the photographic process.

When I spoke with some members of Los Arenales community, they referred to Cristian with great affection. Also, they remarked that all the photographs that he took are in the digital community archive, together with pictures taken by the residents themselves in the workshop “migratory mourning.” When I visited in 2022, we looked at these together with some community members, starting the first conversations about how to generate a “Living Archive.” Some of these images are available online on the Facebook page Los Arenales, which currently functions as a digital space for their living archive of memories, using this social media platform as well as an amplifier of their struggles and resistance. This digital platform has also contributed in creating a virtual community to organize and network with other self-built settlements in Chile and South America. Los Arenales was one of the first communities to create such an online network, providing a space to exchange their own narratives, struggles, and aspirations.

In light of this, I was interested in Los Arenales’ idea of the Living Archive, as well as their strategies for preserving their collective memories. I could see a dynamic repository that speaks to the past and present of their struggles, as well their aspirations to a collective future. What makes this archive particularly “living” is the way it embraces the immediate online and collective forms of memory-making. The Los Arenales Facebook page contains powerful storytelling as a method for recounting their collective processes and struggles. A large number of live videos, audios and photos constituted this archive, chronicling everyday life in the settlement, as a way of doing para-ethnography (see Marcus, 2021), capturing key moments in its own social, urban, and political development. In this sense, the Los Arenales Facebook page has become the “living” container of their ongoing struggles against border regimes.

In our repeated telephone conversations with the current president of Los Arenales, Elizabeth Andrade, as we thought together about the idea of a Living Archive, I realized the power of her words, and how her voice's narrative style conveyed this particular aspect of "Life," so unique to Los Arenales. I could also perceive these ways of narrating their own stories in the results of the creative storytelling and photography workshops that Cristian had taught a couple of years earlier. Through the study of the basic principles of photography and photo archiving, these workshops focused on how the participants' personal experiences intertwine with the history and events of the territories and their migratory journey. The intention was to continue reflecting on themes essential to the community, such as care, migration, leadership, political activism, and public achievements. Through these workshops, residents gained various tools to begin developing a photo-storytelling archive, allowing them to later organize their community memories and reflect on the identity expressed in their photographs. These workshops, as well as others on urban recovery organized by critical geographers and architects from Antofagasta universities, were key to the community's reflection on the archive of its own history. The archive became not only a repository of their great achievements, but also a political strategy when the leaders of Los Arenales negotiated with politicians and municipal officials to formalize their neighborhood.

Grounded in these different experiences and strategies, I invited Elizabeth to a radio podcast session, where she could narrate the various important events that marked the history of Los Arenales and, furthermore, share with listeners what Los Arenales is currently doing. I discovered that the podcast format captured the unique way the residents of Los Arenales are narrating their present memories—storytelling that emerges from their own experiences with the border regimes and their struggles for inclusion into the Chilean territory (see Section 2.3.3).

2.3 Encounters with Archives

The following are selected excerpts from the three archives encountered during the fieldwork in the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. Each archive is (re)presented through its own characteristics: sound, image, motion, and voice.

First, Carla J. Maier, Adolfo Estalella, and myself presented *Jungala Radio: A Sonic Archive from the Dzjanganal* through a collective listening session that took place on September 26, 2023, via Zoom, where we listened and reflected together on selected episodes of the radio programs. The purpose of this collective listening was to open space for multiple interpretations of the material, which through our different disciplines—sound studies (Maier), urban anthropology (Estalella), and artistic practices (Garland)—allowed us to engage through a range of knowledge

and experiences, bringing together different forms of expertise, perspectives, and positionalities.

Inspired by the collective listening method used in the work *Accessing Colonial Sound Archives* by the anthropologists Irene Hilden, Jasmin Mahazi, and Mèhèza Kalibani (2022), I was particularly interested in approaching this archive through a collective listening lens, responding to the collaborative nature of Jungala Radio. In contrast to the colonial character of the phonogram archive from the Berlin Ethnological Museum, which Hilden, Mahazi, and Kalibani analyzed in their work—a sound framed within colonial patterns, where voices are extracted, separated from their environment, and then cataloged in an archive—Jungala Radio is a collective transmitter of amplified activism which shaped the listening experience into a collective form of engagement. Each episode was recorded, edited, and produced through collaboration between volunteers and residents, making the archive itself inherently collective, countering other migratory sonic modalities that often echo mainstream narratives.

In this sense, Jungala Radio challenges the idea that “sound cannot be sound-ing without the use of power” (Ong, 1982: 7, cited in Hilden, Mahazi, and Kalibani, 2022). Cultural historian Walter Ong argues that sound cannot be neutral and distant from power; it is charged by a power relationship: who records, who speaks, who listens, and for what purpose sound is used. Many institutional sound archives are steeped in the colonial legacy present in these listening practices. Not only could the ethnologist “study” communities through thick descriptions in writing, photography, and silent films, but sound recordings were also an indispensable artifact for capturing how these communities “sounded.” In this context, sound became a tactic of control and surveillance. Instead, Jungala Radio breaks with this vertical power structure, seeking collaborative and horizontal methods to amplify the stories of Dzjanganl residents as forms of resistance within border regimes. By decalibrating the power inherent in listening practices, Jungala Radio centers marginalized voices as the guides of their own narratives, inviting the listener to rethink the idea of sound and radio as a mode of solidarity, resistance, and aspiration.

Guided by the deep listening method of Pauline Oliveros (2005), we approached this radio archive from seven years ago with the idea of tuning into the sensory events in the Dzjanganl and becoming aware of the soundscape and urban environment provided by Jungala Radio. We intended to attune to the sounds occurring in that particular space/time, being careful not to reproduce a sense of violence and dominance when listening to this sound material. The interactive modality of this archive that is (re)presented on the following pages invites the reader to be part of this collective listening. Through links to the episodes previously listened to by Carla, Adolfo, and myself, the reader can first listen to the episode and then continue reading the conversation that emerged from this collective listening.

The second archive (re)presented is *Tiburtina: A Silent Eviction*, a photo archive produced by the photographer Davide Franceschini between 2000 and 2003 within the Tiburtina community. In the following pages, I present segments of narratives of our sensorial-performative walk together which took place on September 2021 in the surroundings of the Tiburtina building in Rome. This narrative is accompanied by photos that Davide took in Tiburtina when he was a volunteer. The walking conversation, translated from Italian, is a sensory dialogue in which walking leads us to unfold parts of Tiburtina's history. Walking repeatedly and circularly around the fenced Tiburtina building, for more than an hour, created a continuous-performative mode of engaging with the place. Here we juxtaposed different elements that constituted the sensory experience of remembering what had happened 12 years before in the Tiburtina building. The walk was accompanied by the imagery of Davide's photo archive, which he shared with me before the walk. This archive was mainly about the inside of the building, which was not possible to enter at the time of our walk as the perimeter was fenced. These images were imaginatively present in our dialogue, allowing us to unfold some crucial events in Tiburtina's history, especially their dramatic eviction.

Through our transdisciplinary orientation between art and anthropology, Davide and I saw the opportunity to walk circularly and repeatedly around Tiburtina as a research practice. Our intention to engage with "walking as a method" was not only a methodology but an affective form of embodying remembrance shaped by our own memory of the place and our different positionalities. The "walking as a method," with its long history in the social sciences and humanities, as well as in artistic practices, especially in performance, engaged with knowledge production through space, memory, and movement of a place (see Chapter 4). Walking, in this case, is transformed from mere transportation toward a tool of remembering. Walking in places charged by complex (hi)stories, as in the case of Tiburtina, becomes a form of accessing and confronting the walker's own urban-spatial memory. Inspired by decolonial walking practices, such as the research group WalkingLab,⁴ we took seriously our positionality and intersections of our gender, race, and sexuality, allowing us to engage with the identity of the place from our particular way of moving in space. This enabled us to understand the complexities and critical aspects of remembering this place. Our walk, without a specific script and sometimes without an explicit train of thought, was a dialogue between a performative act of remembering and a social science method of sensory walking. The photo-walk-interview presented on the following pages is an experiment that explores how we navigate urban memory in motion.

Closing this chapter, *Los Arenales: A Living Archive* is presented through the podcast episode number 34 of Nomadic Radio, recorded via Zoom on September 15,

4 See more in <https://walkinglab.org/>

2024. With the current president of Los Arenales, Elizabeth Andrade, I explored Los Arenales migratory experiences and placemaking through the podcast format, which gave us the possibility to (re)present the “living” aspect of Los Arenales storytelling. Elizabeth takes the listener (and reader, in this book) on a journey through the social practices, activism, and community-making of Los Arenales. The transcribed episode presented in the last section of this chapter, accompanied by Cristian Ochoa’s photographs, narrate the past, present, and future of Los Arenales from a unique storytelling approach, bringing the idea of the “living” archive as a dynamic and ever-evolving entity stemming from a unique placemaking. The daily uncertainty surrounding evictions and the precarious nature of territorial rights burdens their collective memory with a sense of unpredictability, struggles, and hopes. These feelings are mirrored in the conversation with Elizabeth, as well as their many strategies against border regimes and territory reclamation. Slogans such as “Los Arenales flourish when the sun disappears” and “Here I live, here I stay. This is the city where we all fit” that Elizabeth shares in the conversation are examples of how Los Arenales history has been a story of ongoing struggles, negotiations, and resilience. The living archive mirrors all these complex layers as Los Arenales becomes “a Latin America city”, an ongoing dream that contributes to their present placemaking (see Epilogue).

Inspired by the project *The Living Archive, the Learning Diaspora Space*, an online platform dedicated to documenting, archiving, and sharing knowledge within Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities, the concept of the living archive is framed as a “resistant knowledge project” (The Living Archive, 2023). Within this, the act of archiving, documenting, and sharing memory becomes a decolonial endeavor, redefining the archive as a counternarrative. In the context of Los Arenales and the residents’ aspiration to become “a Latin American city,” these decolonial practices are emphasized, particularly the notion of territorial rights. Through daily sharing in social media, as well in public platforms, such as our podcast, their dream of becoming a Latin American city along with their placemaking struggles and accomplishments become a form of archiving their living experiences in the “here” and “now.” Rather than interpreting “city” and “neighborhood” as mere urban boundaries defining a territory and a community, Los Arenales residents perceive the idea of becoming “a Latin American city” not as a process of exclusion from Antofagasta—Chilean city, but as acknowledging the diverse nationalities residing within Los Arenales and advocating for equal rights to those enjoyed by Chileans in urban settings. Los Arenales residents view the city as a platform for citizen-building, where the idea of placemaking serves as a fundamental element in understanding their living archive. This approach seeks to decolonize the city by challenging its geographical borders and questioning the conventional notions of “periphery” and “center” typically associated with Western urban spaces (see Epilogue).

Thanks to the public and online nature of the Los Arenales living archive, it is possible to imagine dynamic and freer aspirations for the community. Los Arenales aspires to overcome the “periphery” and become a new form of neighborhood in Chilean territory. This imaginary city is based on the “capacity to aspire” (Appadurai, 2003b), to enter the urban dynamic through processes of resistance, solidarity, and becoming. The dream of an ideal city in Los Arenales described by Elizabeth in the next section shows that sharing their signals of an ideal future—what Appadurai calls “the first symptoms of belonging” to a place—makes their living archive unfinished and open-ended (Hall, 2001). As the urbanist Catalina Ortiz (2023) points out, the idea of the “living archive” is a space where co-creations, decentralizations, people’s stories, and territorial reclamation take place—an imaginary that speaks of the future-making of a place and its community. This is echoed not only in the present of Los Arenales, but also in the archives of Jungala Radio and Tiburtina. Even though the Dzjungal and Tiburtina no longer exist, the digital nature of their archives allow the collective memories in these places to be brought back to life. In this sense, the notion of “Living Archive” is not only concerned with the present and future but also brings past memories into the present—allowing them to resonate with other, similar narratives in the future.

2.3.1 Jungala Radio: A Sonic Archive from the Dzjungal

Collective Listening, September 26, 2023 with Adolfo Estalella, Carla J. Maier, and Melanie Garland via Zoom

Melanie: This is the link to listen to some episodes of Jungala Radio. I just sent it in the Zoom chat.

Adolfo: So, we should open the link and listen directly from there?

Melanie: Yes, because if we do it via Zoom, the quality is really bad. Usually it’s better to do it yourself, from your computer.

Adolfo: Okay!

Carla: Maybe you can count down and we can try to press start at the same time.

Melanie: Okay, so we can start. Yeah, that is cool!

Adolfo: Okay!

Melanie: So, we can do it in 1, 2, 3...

[Please **listen**⁵ to the following link: *World Radio Broadcast Day Broadcast (8:47min)*]

Melanie: So, you've heard everything, haven't you?

Adolfo: Yes!

Carla: It's a lot! So many different impressions. I thought a lot about the fact that this piece has so many resonances and also dissonances. When I listened to this collage, I had the feeling that I was there the whole time and was also "listening in."

Even things that are in a way outside of the actual presentation. I mean, I think the whole discourse is about the refugee crisis, the state of the camps, and so on. That's so big. I had the urge or the need to just be there and listen to what was being presented, and I think it's a wonderful narrative that gives off so much warmth and richness and creativity and so many positive vibes. But it was really hard for me to take it as such. That's one thing. I feel very unsettled in a way by this weight of discourse or being put in this kind of position, which is my positionality as someone who isn't part of life there, but who is much more exposed to all these political debates and all these things. I feel like I lack any direct connection to the people in these situations.

"So many resonances and also dissonances"

Melanie: Yes, it's interesting when you say that, the weight, the heaviness of the discourse. I've been working with this archive for almost two years, listening so closely. I've met some of the people who have worked on these pieces. It's fascinating for me when it's possible for other people who have nothing to do with the project to listen to it, because the weight changes, because it sounds different. Yes, exactly. This piece is the most curated and scripted from the whole archive, and you can feel that. What is the editing process like for this open call [see *World Radio Broadcast Day Broadcast*]? That's also interesting to me, what narrative they chose for this open call. Because it's actually a collage of many other episodes from the archive.

Adolfo: I found it really interesting and it has captured my attention. So I was thinking when you thought that perhaps it was going to be too long to listen to on Zoom together. For me this has been the constraint, so it has been too short. I think I could have had another ten minutes of listening. And I think that for me this is specifically

5 <https://soundcloud.com/user-633219146/world-radio-broadcast-day-special-broadcast>

relevant because right now with so many podcasts and online audio access, it's difficult to produce something that is able to capture your attention. So despite the resources and the production, I think that it's very, very simple. So, the transitions are very clear between one part and the other. It's very, very simple, but at the same time it's very engaging and I have found it's incredibly potent and also very innocent. The voice of the boys introduces the listening into this different descriptive scene with people in the camp. Yeah, I could have spent much more time listening to it.

But, I don't understand why you use the word collage to refer to it and not program. Because it seems to me that it is basically very simple in the way it has been edited and produced, but at the same time very powerful and very engaging. So, and I think that it's a very good descriptive account. But still I think that the listener can have a certain idea of how people will respond to the challenges of living there. And how they were trying to make their life in these very difficult conditions.

Melanie: That's interesting when you mention the difference between a program and collage. For me, collage is an overlay of different sound textures and also because I know that this sound piece comes from various other episodes that I've heard before. It's actually a curated program. It's more than a collage, even though the collage is also a curated element; everything is aesthetically aligned. But, yes, I like this duality between program and collage.

Carla: I've thought about the idea of compilation. It's a compilation in the sense that it's compiled from existing programs, and it's not like one of those programs that you'd tune into when you turn on Jungala Radio. Maybe the collage thing is interesting. I understand the idea, but I thought about it too and thought that maybe with a collage I'd have expected something more experimental. When you [Melanie] say that these different textures and voices aren't meant to be very experimental. It's still very much about the content and certain messages and things that are being conveyed. Yes, but I also think about the idea of collage in other contexts. I use it in other contexts as well, and then I think, is it really a collage? You know, it's not right or wrong.

[Silence...]

Melanie: We can listen to the next episode. This is episode four and it's called "Jungle Food." This piece is only 5 minutes long and it's a pure episode, not a collage or composition. So, we can start listening, 1, 2, 3...

[Please *listen*⁶ to the following link: *Jungle Food* (5:44)]

6 <https://soundcloud.com/user-633219146/8-the-star-show-jungle-food>

Adolfo: Melanie, have you had a chance to meet the people who produced the program you mentioned earlier?

Melanie: Yes, I met Kathy, she was one of the first volunteers to come from Ireland to the Dzjantal to set up the first part of the radio and they brought three recordings and a computer, those were the only elements they brought and worked with. Kathy and her team are still working in radio for “migrants” in Ireland today. The residents of the camp had the opportunity to continue working with the radio team in various forms after the last eviction in 2016—a transnational radio!

Carla: So the radio was also a way for them to get out of the camp?

Melanie: Not necessary. Because it was impossible for the volunteers to get the people outside. Everyone tried to get across the border alone and not as a group, because it can be easy to get into cars and trucks when crossing into Britain. By the time some people managed to get from Calais to England, there was already a network in the UK. So they knew that if someone managed to get through the tunnel, they were already in contact with volunteers from the UK, because at that time volunteers could cross every week.

Adolfo: I found this episode very moving, especially in a moment where they ask the cook when he will stop cooking, and he said when you have a house and have your life back, at that moment I might stop cooking. This episode made me think because it gives very good descriptions of the inside of the camp. When you listen to this piece, you can imagine how they go about their daily lives. It makes me think about the concept of para-ethnography by George Marcus (2021), which refers to the situation where the interviewees have very similar research practices to yourself as an ethnographer. And what we find in these episodes are children interviewing people and working out descriptions, very much like an anthropologist would do. This is interesting because most of the time we find these ethnographic practices in institutions, in companies with expertise, but in this case they become more of an experimental collaboration, as Marcus proposes. In this way, the ethnographer can collaborate with their interlocutor because they are similar to you, also they are doing the method in the field. They are almost anthropologists. They are almost ethnographers. But still, it's a complete difference. In different contexts that have nothing to do with an “expert context” that anthropology has. I know I am getting into a more theoretical part here, and you [Melanie] have asked us to just express our sensations and feelings about what we hear.

Melanie: The idea of para-ethnography is very interesting. I have not thought about that yet. When I listen to these episodes, I hear an ethnographic vignette in a radio

format. This is one of my favorite episodes. When I asked Kathy in the interview about this episode and why and how her interviewees described it so vividly, she told me that part of the radio workshops was the interlocutors learning English. So the idea that each episode should be as descriptive as possible was a kind of homework assignment. But usually the interviewees recorded alone in the camp.

So, there was not really a script for these episodes. Each episode has a very descriptive part, about the place, the material, the sound, the people. Somehow you can feel like you are there. The common thread of each episode was that in the last minutes of the episodes, some thoughts of hope about the future in the camp and one's life as a "migrant" emerged. The hope was always there, in the different descriptions, that was my motivation to call [this] chapter "Aspirational Archives."

Carla: Yes, I am also very intrigued by this approach. I also wondered how these young people managed to do it in this particular way. Also the question in the previous piece about what is your interest in radio and so on and so forth. That's a great deal of reflection about one's own role in producing the program. But is Adam using she or he pronouns?

Melanie: She. It's not her real name, but she calls herself Adam.

Carla: Yes. Also, in terms of aspiration, her own kind of knowledge gained through the episodes is super interesting. That level of reflection and description is very profound in these radio shows. It's fascinating. I've also been thinking about the concept of "worlding"; the practice of "world-making," right? This is about making radio. It's not just about documenting something, but really making a world or making life in difficult circumstances. Your sense of humanity and all those things. I think that's also something that really touches me when I listen to it. And I think it's connected to the concept of "hope." And also in the descriptions of these restaurants, it's described as being a kind of tent and there's always this kind of sociality that's emphasized. It's a place to meet, but also a place to eat. To warm up.

Melanie: Yes, for me this episode is a beautiful description of the sociability of the place. It's also very simple and at the same time very meaningful how they represented these restaurants, because they are one of the essential elements of social life in the camp. The restaurants were the only place in the camp where there was electricity. So people ate, but they also charged their phones, called their family around the world, listened to music or watched a TV program on the phone. The restaurants were a place that contained different elements. I had the opportunity to be there. I was so overwhelmed by all the different types of socializing going on at the same time. It's very beautiful how Adam leads the listener to the storytelling of each

restaurant. We got a glimpse of everyday life, very ethnographic, or even para-ethnographic. I will look into this concept.

[Silence...]

Melanie: Yes, the feeling after listening to these episodes is very intense. When I listened to them for the first time, I could not stop. I listened to one after the other because each episode immerses you deeper into what happened in the camp. So if you want, we can listen to the next episode. This is episode number 15.

so, 1, 2, 3...

[Please **listen**⁷ to the following link: *Hunger Strike* (4:32)]

Melanie: This is the last episode we will listen to today, because we have been more than an hour on Zoom. I decided to show this episode last because it was one of the last episodes of the radio show before the big eviction in October 2016. This episode is already very political. The camp became very political at that time and with many strategies of resistance.

Carla: Again, I like the narrative framing. That is very interesting. The introduction to the episode was very interesting, interviewing people who can't speak for so long because they're in pain. The episode wasn't padded out with other stories, but in the background you could hear music and field recordings. This atmosphere created a space for afterthoughts. It was as if you were witnessing the situation rather than being given an explanation about it. That was powerful, telling the story or inviting the listener to think about it.

[Silence...]

Melanie: Yes, I really like this space of afterthought. The space of silence, but at the same time rich and full of other things that embody the ambient sound. This ambient sound was also very long, which was even nicer for me because it was an aesthetic decision to keep it long. The different layers of voices, the original voice, then the translator and the interlocutor, become a multiplicity of voices at the same time. This part was very strong.

"I really like this space of afterthought. The space of silence, but at the same time full and rich of other things that embody the ambient sound"

7 <https://soundcloud.com/user-633219146/16-hunger-protest>

Adolfo: We probably all have photos and images of these kinds of camps in our heads that we have seen on social media, on TV, and in newsletters. And the fact that we cannot see these images now with these sound pieces is very interesting. I think it's very powerful because it shows a different scenario of what's going on in these places. It reports on a really extremely difficult situation, but at the same time people are talking very openly about their own situation.

I am now very interested in urban anthropology and I am currently reading the anthropologist Teresa Caldeira (2017), who works a lot in the urban peripheries of Latin America, and one of her main arguments is that these "slums" are not just places of misery, but a territory with extremely difficult situations, but also with a lot of creative energy, political efforts, and inventive political practices going on. So people have their agency. This argument is a response to the idea that a city can only survive or be shaped if it imitates European or North American cities. So in this context, there is another way of designing cities. The point of these studies is not to romanticize these spaces, but to show that they are capable of managing their own spaces. I found something similar here, among the Dzjanganl. People who live in extremely difficult situations with very limited resources, but they are able to produce these kinds of programs that take into account the reality and challenge the political measures that the politicians are taking at that time.

"A territory with extremely difficult situations, but also with a lot of creative energy, political efforts, and inventive political practices going on. So people have their agency"

Melanie: Yes, this is one of the arguments I make in [this] book. These places are places of possibility, of placemaking, and of building other kinds of cities.

Another aspect of my research is how sound can present an alternative narrative to mainstream narratives about the violence of the image. This was one of the reasons I became interested in this sound archive, as a response to the abandonment of photography. Sound can become so powerful that these political actions become a tool of resistance. When I did the interview with the Jungala Radio team, I realized that radio was a safer place to amplify their voices and talk about how the camp was very political without having to show their face. The radio interlocutors were anonymous, but they could still tell their stories. For me, that's something very strong about radio format.

Yes, the whole idea of making a city with its own ecology is very strong here. Even though the Dzjanganl was a transit place, as they call it. It was not meant to stay forever and become a neighborhood, but it still had life for almost 20 years. People came and went.

[Silence...]

Carla: I am still digesting the listening experience, and I will think of other things I want to say or share, but right now I need a little more time.

Melanie: Of course you can also write me an email later. That's no problem.

Adolfo: Or we could send an audio message to continue the sonic experience.

Carla: Yes! I'm sorry, but I have to leave.

Adolfo: Yeah, me too.

Melanie: Thank you very much for taking the time. I really appreciate it and thank you for all your thoughts, comments, and feedback.

Adolfo: It was a great pleasure. Thanks for the invitation!

Carla: Thank you! Bye bye.

Adolfo: Chao!

Melanie: Thanks again, have a nice week!

2.3.2 Tiburtina: A Silent Eviction

Walking Interview on September 20, 2021, between Davide Franceschini and Melanie Garland. Photos by Franceschini. My English translation from Italian.

Fieldnote, Tiburtina, Rome, 2021

I met Davide at Tiburtina Station. I waited at the main entrance. At a certain point someone shouted "Melania!" from afar and I turned around. A man around 45 years old approached, dressed colorfully: I immediately thought it was Davide. We greeted each other. I asked him if I could record the walk with my audio recorder. The idea was to walk around the Tiburtina building and have a sensory walk, talking about the photographic and volunteer work Davide had done with the Tiburtina community between 2000 and 2003. It was Davide himself who suggested meeting there when I contacted him for an interview; he told me that the best way to recount what happened in that place was to go there and relive it.

Throughout the walk, Davide recounted that in the early 2000s the urban landscape around Tiburtina was much barer and flatter, with fewer buildings

compared to today. The station itself was not as we see it now: it was still under construction and would only be completed in 2011. He became emotional when we saw the fenced Tiburtina building, recounting that it was thick and tall. As he spoke, he often pointed with his finger at the internal structure of the building, describing what life was like inside—the sounds, the colors, and the smells. His detailed accounts helped me imagine what that place was like in daily life.

One of the moments that struck me during the more the one-hour walk was when he pointed at the building and said: “Do you see those small holes arranged systematically beneath the windows? They opened those holes themselves because the building received light only from the small windows up high (the top floor), while the middle floor was very dark. Since they were rooms where people lived, they decided to open them.” This small act of improving the living space struck me deeply. It made me understand the strategy to make the environment brighter and more welcoming: an act to transform that building into their home, where light could enter, even in their darkest rooms.

“In later years, there was always a narrative where others spoke for them; this community changed everything because it stood on the frontlines—no longer a spectator to its own history”

Davide: Our stories, the migration stories, the national stories, and our journey, in a much deeper way. In this country, there has long been a lack, toward itself and toward the other, of an honest and authentic narrative. In later years, there was always a narrative where others spoke for them; this community changed everything because it stood on the frontlines—no longer a spectator to its own history.

Melanie: Yes, this community has interested me immensely. In many ways, it represents how “autonomy of migration”⁸ functions, but also a form of decolonization of a place.

Davide: Exactly. It had never happened like this before in Italian history, although in this same city, at the end of the 1980s, the occupation of the former Pantanella pasta factory (and it’s no less dramatic end) opened the migration issue in Italy, putting the country in front of a mirror capable of bringing to light all the repressed and never-

8 In broad terms, one of the aspects of the concept “autonomy of migration” highlights the idea that migratory movements are not entirely dictated by state controls or regulatory frameworks. Instead, “migrants” are seen as active participants who influence and reshape the dynamics of migration and border systems. This perspective shifts the focus toward “migrants” agency, emphasizing how they engage with, resist, and maneuver around mechanisms of state control (see De Genova, 2015; and Chapter 5).

addressed wounds of the recent and less recent past. We must remember that this community was born (in a more fragmented and contained form) at the end of the 1990s and was evicted in 2003, long before the so-called European border crisis of 2015.

Image 1: Exterior of Tiburtina, 2003. © Davide Franceschini



Melanie: But did they really want to stay in that abandoned building and turn it into a permanent home?

Davide: Actually, they wanted to make it something more. Their project—and this is precisely the story that led to the eviction—was to propose to the city of Rome, which at the time handled the reception of asylum seekers in Italy, a hospitality model similar to the Nordic one (no less problematic and contradictory, but certainly more respectful of dignity and diversity, at least formally), where asylum seekers would have greater autonomy in managing their housing and reception. We wanted to open a dialogue with the Municipality of Rome—at the time the mayor was Veltroni—to try, together with the prefecture, to build a hospitality model that could then be replicated throughout Italy. It was a very reasonable proposal, capable of offering asylum seekers a more inclusive and welcoming space to process and heal the numerous,

heavy traumas of the long migratory journey, as well as the very long (and no less traumatic) waits for the outcome of the commissions.

Melanie: I spoke with two men, both of them former residents, and one of them told me that they identified as “Tiburtina” and not as “Hotel Africa.”

Daide: Yes. I didn’t know some former residents were still in Rome. I had heard that no one from the community remained, that they had all emigrated to France, to Calais, to try to reach the United Kingdom.

Melanie: Yes, I also heard that many ended up in the “Jungle of Calais.” That place is also part of my research. I follow the migration route: Mediterranean, Italy, France, English Channel, United Kingdom.

Daide: After the 2003 eviction, I continued to work and fight in Rome to make my small contribution to a city that could still become but ended up increasingly embodying the ferocious, exclusionary, and failed project that by now is the substance of the Euro-American decline and the neoliberal-supremacist model. Between 2005 and 2013, I took part in the great social and cultural ferment that involved the city and which culminated, starting in 2011, with the incredible experience of the Occupied Teatro Valle. That movement, which managed to federate similar initiatives throughout Italy, lost its momentum in Rome at the end of a crazy and situationist electoral campaign for the 2013 local elections, in which we fielded two independent lists, built from the bottom up, where years of conflicts, ideas, and experiences clashing against the same system of powers and interests that had also led to the eviction of Tiburtina. After that umpteenth failure (not an individual failure but a collective one), I first decided to leave Italy and then, after returning, to move to Bologna. I had fallen into a deep depression over everything we had lived through and hoped for, even starting from this place. Thanks to your call for this meeting, I understood that I was ready to speak again about what happened. Returning to the community’s name, at the time this building had a terrible nickname: “Hotel Africa,” a colonial and offensive name. We simply called it “Tiburtina,” because it was five minutes from this station—an ideal place for a reception project.

Melanie: I’ve heard that this community was very well organized, not only here in Rome, but also in African cities, where this place was known, as if it were a communication and information network.

Daide: Yes, Tiburtina had an incredible communication network. Information even reached those who hadn’t yet left Africa, and here in Italy, the SOS messages of those lost at sea arrived before they reached the coastguard and the Prefectures. That was

the value of that place. It wasn't a group of desperate people—also because I never experienced it as an occupation. It was a place inhabited by people with great political and cultural awareness, whose humanity and experiences taught me an enormous amount. I had many teachers among them. They taught us that in some way it is possible to change the refugee paradigm, of being welcomed in a country that doesn't want you. It didn't mean arriving “blindly,” but fleeing from dramatic situations and at the same time claiming dignity, here or elsewhere in Europe and the world, against any further rejection and torture of hope. In their presence, very few Westerners can, now more than ever, claim any pretension or presumed superiority, humanity, civilization.

Melanie: As an artist, photographer, and volunteer, how did you approach the dilemma of documenting this community? Did you photograph people and places?

Davide: Of course, I took many photos to support the work of www.tiburtina.org, but when I decided to make five more personal images, as a photographer, I chose to use the view camera. I understood that it was fairer to let the space speak for the community that had until then been capable of giving it life again. I had seen other photographers enter those places to steal spaces and lives. Not all, but many, too many, and I had seen how much frustration this approach caused. When I was in that place, I realized that its true collective portrait was how they had made it their home, welcoming even for us. It was beautiful that so many people were present behind that lens, together with me, when those photos were born.

“When I was in that place, I realized that its true collective portrait was how they had made it their home”

Melanie: Really? Where were they while you were shooting?

Davide: We were all behind the ground glass of the camera, where the image appears ghostly and upside down. This is one of the beautiful things about the view camera: it cancels the classic concept of the solitary photographer and makes space for the chorus of visions and emotions, for their synthesis. There can be ten or more people behind it, deciding the framing together.

Melanie: So you took those photos together?

Davide: Yes, we constructed them together. For example, we'd say: “Let's take a step back so you can see their home better.” The image I carry with me always is the one of the internal corridor [image 2]. Except there are many people inside. When you

look at it, they are there, like ghosts. There were many people in front of and behind that lens, and no one was posing, there was only presence, space, and pure life. I mean, unlike our society that lives its spaces in a separated way, there the private space belonged to everyone, and the public space was the private space of each person. It has always struck me how people manage to make even the ugliest and most uninhabitable place into a home, even if they would never want to, and I have worked and reflected for a long time, as a photographer and as an activist, on these forms of resignification and reinvention of the uninhabitable. Places are always destinies, despite everything and everyone.

Image 2: Interior of Tiburtina, 2003. © Davide Franceschini



Melanie: Yes, even if it's only a temporary home, it's something incredible.

Davide: Yes, people's capacity to make home. And then, when it assumes this collective value, it transcends the individual and becomes a desiring community, shared space. Nothing to do with what we have become here. We have forcibly erased that profoundly human idea, woven from life, time, and space, which forged over millennia the very beauty that still exists around us and of which we are no longer worthy. Beauty knows how to exist even in destruction, but we have become part of that destruction, for others and for ourselves.

Melanie: This has become the great difference between “the West” and “the rest” of the world; our idea of collectivity has by now dissolved into an individualism without empathy, without listening, without roots. I often struggle to navigate between these two forms of community building.

Davide: Of course, we give value to the individual, which, objectively, makes no sense, because the value of the individual is such only if they live and perceive themselves in the collective, in the *anima mundi*. If you take the collectivity away from the individual, you take everything away from them. Alone, in the immensity of the cosmos, what is the individual, the life of a single person? And the great damage done to the city of Rome and to Italy was precisely to deny, in the stratified and millennia-spanning program of their time and space, this model of community and hospitality that they embodied and have now lost. We have forgotten that in this city, universal citizenship was established as early as 212 AD, and the Tiburtina community tried to remind us of this, tenaciously and gently, as long as it could.

Melanie: Yes, this is what the municipality of Rome didn't understand. They didn't just want to inhabit an abandoned building; they wanted to develop a collective and horizontal model of reception. It was a great challenge for the municipality, because they had to admit that they weren't providing any sustainable alternative. Probably this is why the eviction was so silent and dramatic: the municipality—then represented by a politician like Walter Veltroni, who publicly showed a benevolent and democratic face—knew that it was revealing, beyond rhetoric, its complete inability to understand the profound meaning of this experience and its proposal.

Davide: Yes, it was too much because they posed a problem and a solution, highly sustainable and feasible, that could give life to an innovative model and in step with other similar ones. But the counterpart lacked the capacity and courage, both on the level of consensus and in relation to the political choices of the central government. A community speaks in chorus, until it becomes something impossible to ignore, and this is both an opportunity and a criticality, depending on how it is received. It's dangerous when that chorus tells you things you must change. It's dangerous because you don't want to change. But it's fundamental for those who instead want to change. Silencing that voice was a way to silence that method and the vision of city, country, and hospitality that it carried with it.

“A community speaks in chorus, until it becomes something impossible to ignore”

Melanie: It is fascinating to observe this process of resistance, conviviality, and kinship in and outside of Tiburtina as a method. It was not just a group occupying an abandoned place to make it their temporary home, which is already something very complex and remarkable, but they created a model of hospitality in which they could better understand and unfold a way into the new territory through their similar experiences.

Davide: Yes, it's incredible. They wanted to bring this model to other places too, make it reproducible in other parts of Italy with similar communities. They, and we too, were talking to the municipality of Rome, which at the time was indeed center-left, so there was hope that it could work. We also had the support of the Vatican, the neighbors, and our entire activist network with the youth of Rome, the same one that was already active in the "no global" movement of the 1990s (that prophetic "Movement of Movements" which ended up massacred at the Genoa G8), up to the Valle experience between 2011 and 2013. Of all this past history, the Italian NGO Baobab Experience itself has had no memory and has not benefited. And this has been and continues to be the weak point of Roman and Italian activism, the poor capacity for connection, across time and space, of knowledge, practices, even of their failures. This too makes a community stronger, more rooted and effective, and a community of communities, or vice versa.

Melanie: In the photo archive you shared with me before this walk, there were photos of the community in the street, as if you were following them.

Davide: Ah yes, I was, so to speak, the official photographer, along with another colleague. They chose to be photographed to enrich the narrative of our site, www.tiburtina.org. They organized many demonstrations and participated in many others. It was an important movement. Keep in mind that almost 800 people lived there. These protests took place in the center of Rome, demanding dignified housing and a correct and attentive management of asylum requests, and everything we've talked about so far. We kept our site alive, as a resistant memory, for a while, then it was obscured by the Italian postal police, despite reporting no offensive content. It was only their voice, but that voice wasn't meant to be heard because it told another story.

Melanie: Really? Now I understand why it was almost impossible for me to find material online about Tiburtina. I wondered: if it was such a well-known and important community in the history of occupations in Rome, why is almost nothing found online?

Davide: Just as you'll find practically nothing online about the history of the Ex Pasificio Pantanella. Tiburtina was the first that, in the web era, truly influenced the

history of occupations in Rome; then many others were born, but the phenomenon, governmental and legislative approaches, perspectives, and popular sentiment have further changed, and for the worse. And the fewer traces of the past are found online, or in archives, the less it's possible to trace and intertwine the memories of a struggle that needs roots to become effective. It is also and above all for this reason that the government decided to remove all the material, because during the eviction many illegal things happened that they wanted to cover up. Legally, an eviction must be announced three times, but in this case everything happened quickly and silently, one August morning. No one expected it!

Image 3: Interior of Tiburtina, 2003. © Davide Franceschini



Melanie: I heard from other people I interviewed talk about a big party at Tiburtina—a sort of climax of this entire story.

Davide: Ah yes, it was one of the most beautiful and emotional parties I've ever attended.

Melanie: I spoke with some neighbors and volunteers who were present, and I gathered different opinions. One person told me there were over 1,000 people, including residents and guests, in the building during the party, and from her point of view, it was dangerous for security reasons. She feared that, being an abandoned building, something could collapse from the roof. Another, however, told me that the evening was one of the most beautiful of her life: she listened to Eritrean music for the first time, tasted food made by the residents, and noted that everything was carefully decorated. It was truly well organized—she emphasized that the most.

Davide: That party was a strategy by the community to show neighbors, politicians, the Vatican, and Roman citizens that Tiburtina was a place that deserved not to disappear. We wanted to demonstrate that it was an organized, supportive, and convivial community, offering Rome a reception model for the migrations of that time and telling stories that very few in Italy, in Rome, had ever heard before. Especially about the terrible journey each of them had undertaken: the desert, the horrors of the Libyan camps paid for by the “civil and democratic” European Union. For those who survived, the extremely dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean, and for those who stubbornly survived, the final humiliation in Fortress Europe, the senselessness of the Dublin Treaty, the torture of hope, the cruel roulette of recognition or not of a status, even just humanitarian. Everything that gave substance and urgency to that proposal, far beyond that very testimony and the method it proposed. That party was the last card we had. We were at the climax of Tiburtina’s history and we played it to the maximum in organizing the event. We worked on it for months.

Melanie: So was that party Tiburtina’s last hope?

Davide: We didn’t know if the party could really work, but hope was at its peak. On one hand, we knew the road was very narrow, so it was also a good moment to give everything in the preparation. On the other hand, we knew the possibility of failure was very high. Perhaps we had a 30% chance of succeeding and a 70% chance of failing. But even in that situation, we hoped that at least Roman politics would understand. There was hope that, after such a powerful experience, politics could take a stance. And that hope was reinforced by the fact that Mayor Veltroni had scheduled a national demonstration for Africa three days after our party (which took place on April 14, 2004), to which we were also invited. I even have a photo where he shakes hands with one of the community leaders. This coincidence, when everything ended a few months later (in the way it ended), added a tragically farcical note to that debacle.

Image 4: Interior of Tiburtina, 2003. © Davide Franceschini



Melanie: So this party happened just a few months before the final eviction, right?

Davide: Yes. The eviction, which I call the “silent eviction,” happened during the summer, in August, before dawn. Only the inhabitants of Tiburtina were there. The group of volunteers was at home; our work shifts started mid-morning. It was summer, very hot. Generally, evictions here in Rome happen in summer because it’s when fewer people are in the city; everyone flees the heat toward the sea; it’s a strategy by the authorities and law enforcement to make the eviction process faster and quieter. Even in the two occupied warehouses of Tiburtina, there were few people; many were already in the fields working on the tomato harvest, down south. Many got up at five to wait for the illegal trucks outside Rome. The few who were there called us immediately to see if we could do something. I went as fast as possible, but when I arrived, they had already evicted and barricaded the building entrances with wooden panels or bricks. The excavators had already gutted the walls of the smaller pavilion and had entered to sweep away everything.

Melanie: I heard that the police didn’t allow the few people present at the time of the eviction to take their things—passports, clothes, personal objects.

David: Yes, as I anticipated. It was a terrible thing. How can they think of doing something like that, knowing how slow the asylum process and obtaining documents is? It was an inhuman act by the decision-makers and then the executors. I had never seen an eviction like that. And I've seen many.

Melanie: When you shared the photo archive with me, there were also photos of the evicted building and the objects left there. Why did you decide to document precisely this part of Tiburtina's history?

David: It was a need of the editorial team itself, and I also embraced it as a personal necessity. My need, as a photographer, was immediately to document that part of the story because it would have disappeared, in a way, if I hadn't done it immediately. For me, it was a difficult process; it's like photographing an earthquake, and I know what that means because I've done that too. You see the ruins of a past, of a destroyed hope. But I also felt it was necessary to do it, to one day bring justice, because what happened there was immoral and illegal. I never exhibited those images, nor were they ever used in a trial. However, a selection of those last images ended up on the site within hours, to denounce what happened, and perhaps it was for that reason the website was removed. Somehow, those photographs got lost and didn't even manage to fulfill the purpose that drove me to violate that space, which was reduced once again to silence and which remained that way for many years. Now, thanks to your research, I feel it was necessary to bring them back to light and remember the cruelty suffered by that community. Revisiting those images was like doing an archaeology of pain, but I can also continue to appreciate what was there: a community that created a home in a country without memory anymore (of its wars, its miseries) that did not welcome them and persists in not wanting to welcome them, continuing to pay other countries handsomely to tell masses—increasingly imploded, somnambulant, selfish, and brutalized—that the problem is solved.

2.3.3 Los Arenales: A Living Archive

A Podcast conversation between Elizabeth Andrade and Melanie Garland. Recorded via Zoom on September 14, 2024. Photos by Cristian Ochoa. Podcast original in Spanish, my English translation.

Click **Here**⁹ to listen to the podcast

Melanie: Good afternoon to everyone listening to Nomadic Radio, a radio station to talk about migratory experiences through activism, artistic practices, and sounds.

9 <https://somerwhereinbetween.cargo.site/Podcast>

Today, in episode number 34, we are with Elizabeth Andrade, the current president of Los Arenales community, a self-managed neighborhood, which is located in the Atacama Desert, in the city of Antofagasta, in the north of Chile. Today we will talk about the past, present, and future of Los Arenales and how it became one of the most organized communities for the struggle for housing worthy of the Chilean territory. This episode is part of the exhibition *Somewhere Inbetween*, which will be held in October 2024 at the Central House of the Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. Its initial motivation is to celebrate and recognize autonomous processes of communities like Los Arenales in South America, the Dzjanganal and Tiburtina in Europe, which have been examples of autonomous communities that have created spaces of conviviality within the urban space, fighting migratory border regimes for the right to a dignified life in today's cities.

I am very happy to introduce Elizabeth, the President of Los Arenales and winner in 2022 of the Chilean National Human Rights Award for being an advocate for the right to housing and people who have migrated to Chile. Hello Elizabeth, thank you very much for taking the time for this conversation. I would like to ask first if you could tell us a little bit about your experience of winning this renowned award. What was it like when you found out you won this award?

Elizabeth: Well, first of all, greetings to everyone. From here, from Antofagasta, Chile. A hug from all the people in the struggle in which we are, day by day, giving battle. For being able to face this unequal world and being able, through organization and collective force, to rebuild cities, cities in precarious spaces, abandoned lands. When the neighbors take them or “usurp” them, as they call it now, with this famous law of usurpation, they are condemned for not having a housing solution.

Oh, what a question, right? How was it when I won the national prize? It was very funny. Well, to all this, when they made the application, a comrade from the same institute told me, you have the profile to win; I said, really? Because usually the National Institute of Human Rights awards prizes to people who are linked to the process of the dictatorship, right? The issue of the recovery of memory spaces and all that, that's like the general focus of the institute. And well, I focus elsewhere. Socio-environmental development. Communicational, fundamental rights—we've been working for more than 30 years. And then a team was formed, and that team said, whether it comes out or not. But, uh, it was a whole network that we set up in housing, immigration, women, that we got together and started to set up the application form.

With all the work that in a certain way we had done, for more than 20 years, right? And something that was so difficult, so difficult for me, Um, Uh, What's it called? You do things not to be recognized. And so at the base of the contest, because it is a contest, they ask you for details of causes or processes in which you, as a human rights defender, have participated. And that was very difficult because usually we

do things more by volunteering and without any benefit for ourselves. But well, we managed to do it, we managed to look for many antecedents of many cases that we had been working through immigration, housing, women.

And a comrade, because just in May I went to Lima to see my mother, and I met him, and he said, Eli, you're not going to win. Those awards are not for social leaders, and he is a comrade that I love very much. I told him: well if I did not win it that is fine, the simple fact that I have been nominated is already a win; I felt very honored to be nominated. Many organizations said I had a chance to win the award. So, in July, when I was with my daughter at home, I got a call from Sergio Micco, who at the time was the director of the Chilean National Human Rights Council. And I tell my daughter, because she was with me. They call me on the phone. And I say, hello, I'll call you back. I say, hello, I have a call from this number. Yes, don't hang up, don't hang up, don't hang up. And I hear how people are running in the back and the director speaks to me. And he tells me that unanimously they had decided that I would be the winner of the Chilean National Human Rights Award.

Melanie: Wuuu! Unanimously! How incredible!

Elizabeth: They considered me to be, what do you call it? They are in the process of choosing the postulation, right? So I was like, really? I can't believe it. I had like a week with the high pressure. The emotion.

Melanie: In relation to that, about the history of Los Arenales. I would like to hear a little bit about the context of where you are now. I know you are in a very special place in Los Arenales, right?

Elizabeth: That's right! I will send pictures later. We are a community that has been working together since 2016. And the place where I am right now is one of the offices that we have set up, that my colleagues have made for me. It is part of the corporate space. We are already a corporation, established with legal juridical status and all the rest. That has allowed each of us settlers to be able to exist. If you ask me what the corporation is, "Breaking Barriers" is a community of settlers who have fought and continue to fight for two reasons: One, to feel subject to the law. Because the vast majority of our neighbors are immigrants. Almost 80% of them are immigrants. And the other, because we are "city builders." That's what a comrade told us when she came from France to do a thesis with us. And she made a book from her thesis and her thesis was called *Fabricantes de ciudad* (City Builders) (Martin, 2019).

Image 5: Los Arenales, 2015. © Cristian Ochoa



“Because we are ‘city builders’”

Melanie: City builders! So beautiful.

Elizabeth: I have the book here. I’ll send it to you. There you will find stories from many camp neighbors who tell what they have achieved. They tell their stories and also their intercultural process. It must also be said here, we are a diverse group, that from our origins we have built the city where we want to live.

Los Arenales has been working not only with the neighbors of the area, but also with the different neighbors who live on the roads along the edge of the hill. I will send you a four-page document that we are sharing now to all the neighbors, because we are in the process of submitting the design specifications for the project that we ourselves have done. We have sent relevant milestones of the process to the neighbors. For example, in 2015 we took the land. Although we knew that it was uneven terrain, as the expression says: “We came to stay and from here no one moves us”.

Yes. So, in that year, in that same year, for example, 2016, 2017, we consolidated the camp and formed the Breaking Barriers group, which at that time was a group; now it is an organization. After this process, in the same year, 2017, the movement for decent housing for settlers was created. This organization prevented a massive

eviction that was going to be carried out in more than 40 settlements throughout Antofagasta. So, our organization has always struggled. We in Los Arenales have been consistent in our processes. Other camps, when they saw that they were going to be evicted, did nothing. We, however, have continued organizing ourselves and we have been able to exist in the same way. Also, in that same year we began to read more and to receive visits from “academia.” That was also a very important point for us. Academics came to make workshops to learn about our city. For example, in the same year, 2017, we did a pilot project for a community kindergarten. In the same year we created intercultural corporate work. In 2018, there was another important milestone in Los Arenales camp: we won an international project, “build your city,” that was very interesting.

Image 6: Los Arenales, 2015. © Cristian Ochoa



Melanie: From whom did you win it?

Elizabeth: Here I go. It was very interesting what happened because it was from some comrades in Africa. Comrades who, every ten years, provide funds to communities that are just organizing themselves in city processes, organization, and all that. They collect that money, they call it a bank, but it's not a bank, it has another name, more a bank of the people. I consider them as a bank of reserve, of solidarity.

Forty-five countries applied and only 11 were the winners, and we were one of them. They gave us 18,000 dollars. And with that money, we were able to do participatory mapping, topographies, and risk studies. These studies confirm that 99.9% of the soil we were living on informally has the potential to formally be of use¹⁰. And through this project, we managed to install the word *radicación* (to settle)¹¹ into the camp, with the motto that the housing solution in Chile is to settle. If you don't want to have more camps, settling in the spaces in which we are living is our proposal.

All the neighbors who left the camp to go to a formal state project left the space for other neighbors to take and rebuild in that space. So that was in 2018. Then, we also made an agreement with the bus lines. The same leaders signed letters asking for the bus lines to pass through the whole edge of the camp, which is 11 hectares. All the leaders of the camp made a management decision. They turned to the 112 bus line, which to this day continues to pass through Los Arenales camp.

Melanie: So, you organized yourselves in order that public transportation could reach where you were?

Elizabeth: Exactly. Then, with the new governmental department that arrived here in Antofagasta, we were able to understand that our organization was not only about building a house. It was no longer only about having our home and fighting for our decent housing. It went beyond that, from making a space and being part of a change; that in Chile, for example, we do not have the right to decent housing—I think you already know that. So what we have already done, what we are doing, is that this is part of a space for public policy, right? For the change of the supportive approach we have for the process of housing.

In the same year, in 2019–2020, Covid arrived and the process was stopped, but it did not stop the *radicación*. In that time we were able to make 284,000 food portions in one year and four months. More than eight common pots delivered almost 700 to 800 daily food rations. By self-management, by organization, and by solidarity. That's what I always say, not with pride, because it's still a shame. We were 7,000 people living in the camp, of which only five lost their lives. So, we have tried to take care of ourselves, we have tried to protect ourselves. More than one leader, including

10 Here Elisabeth refers to the fact that usually when buildings are constructed in the desert, close to dunes, the percentage suitable for building is very low due to the instability of the soil.

11 "Radicación" is usually translated as "to settle," but in the context of Chilean activism and the struggle for dignified housing, the term carries a deeper meaning: it encompasses the ideas of inhabiting and belonging to a place, of putting down roots in that place.

me, was sick with Covid more than one time. But we have been able to, as we say *parar la olla*¹² (lift the pot). We have also been able to sanitize houses and all that.

So, that's the story. The phrase: *Los Arenales florece cuando el sol desaparece* (Los Arenales flourish when the sun disappears). This slogan was often mentioned. It had a lot of impact on people, because they were very supportive of us and our work.

"Los Arenales flourish when the sun disappears"

After that, as you know, in the year 2022 I was recognized with the Chilean National Human Rights Award and since 2022 and 2024 many things have happened, among them the installation of electricity and water inside the camp. Also the definition of the timeline of our history and the creation of the work table with the residents of the edge of the hill. In 2015 we were 40 people in the organizational community of the camp and now we are 115.

People across Chile and outside see us as an example and also because we managed to establish ourselves as a national priority in the process of *radicación* and construction. There were two large camps at the time in Antofagasta seeking *radicación*: one in the north, which is us, Los Arenales, and the other in the south, in Villa Costanza. We are a movement. We have, above all, kinship and solidarity.

In our work, in our internal work that reflects the housing committees through different projects and in the community, we also have our struggle, which is the anti-patriarchal struggle. Our organization is mostly composed of women. We are 44 leaders, of whom only 3 are men. We are the ones who promote the development of all the other communities who fight against the forms of oppression and sexist violence. We also defend ourselves against all instances of processes that go against gender. And not only gender, but also identity and existence. We have an organization that is a popular female organization. What drives us is the development of the organization on the territory, and it helps us organize the demands of the local spaces.

Building unity among the popular forces is essential to develop and express popular power on all fronts. That's why we have this slogan: *Lucha y construye el poder popular* (Fight and build popular power). It's what has allowed us to reach out to each neighbor and invite them to take on a commitment. Right now, people are signing—and it's a real commitment, as you can see on the fourth page of the leaflet I sent you, where the letter of commitment is printed. This leaflet allows us to tell the

12 "Parar la olla" is a colloquial Chilean expression that refers to the act of organizing collective cooking efforts within a community, using ingredients gathered through mutual aid and solidarity. Often emerging in contexts of housing precarity, it reflects grassroots strategies for community survival and care.

neighbors that this work has not been free; it has been a history of struggle and not a history of waiting. So if the neighbor wants to be part of it, he has to sign the commitment and join the fight. If the neighbor does not want to sign, that is also fine, he can go to another committee and there is no problem. This is the way we have been working all these years. Every two years we renew the commitment with the neighbors.

"It has been a history of struggle and not a history of waiting"

Right now the Ministry of Housing has made the urbanization design the master plan, and we have delivered it. So, the novelty of this project is that it is not being led by the professionals that the state proposes, but it is led by us, the residents.

Melanie: Oh, that's good news, I didn't know that. When did that process start? Um, Elizabeth, What incredible news! So, soon you will be able to urbanize. These are the last steps.

Elizabeth: What is going to happen now is that they are going to do the design of the urbanization and plotting. That is what is going to happen with this professional who is hiring the SERVIC¹³ with the MINVU¹⁴ so that we can, from there, together with them, be able to select the neighbors who are participating in the process. Because something that we said from day one is that we wanted to be part of the process, not only of the selection, but also in the pre-design of the buildings. And they accepted everything. There are 1,348 families involved and in each committee will be ten neighbors who will be part of the working group and, in a participatory way, look at the building process together.

What we are looking for is that the neighbors who are going to participate in these workshops know about construction. Because the vast majority are professional builders here in Chile. And they know about it. So we are in all this process of organizing ourselves, delivering lists, delivering letters, signing commitments, and at the same time also financing our work, transportation, etc.

Because it has been very hard for us, the coordinators of this process, to do everything on our own. And as we say to our neighbors, it's good that we like to have fun, between here and there and from there to here, but we can't continue to solve with our money a process that will be for everyone. So that's why, as you can see in the commitment, there are self-financing activities that have allowed us to have

13 SERVIC: Servicio Civil chileno (Chilean civil service).

14 MINVU: Ministerio de Vivienda y Urbanismo chileno (Chilean Ministry of Housing and Urban Development).

some money to be able to move from one place to another. More than anything, it's for that. For example, if we stay together all day, they give us a meal to be able to eat and all that. So these are years of sacrifice that have been made for us to be able to do that. And now they have these results.

Melanie: How incredible it is to hear this news.

Elizabeth: "It's going to be a kick in the neck," to say another phrase—if you are in Chile you can understand it. Because we are an immigrant community that has raised this process, and it's the first movement of *Vivienda Digna* (decent housing) that presents its own regulatory plan for urban development.

We know there is a plot and we have always complied with the DS49¹⁵ forms and we improved the conditions of DS49. We have seven construction proposals within the camp, including a center. We even asked the minister for a mall. We told him we wanted a mall. But we want a community mall, where the clothes that are sold are clothes made by the neighbors, the hair is cut by neighbors, the nails are done by the neighbors. And the fourth floor, as in every mall, should be the intercultural gastronomic center of the camp. We don't want KFC, we don't want New York stores, we don't want anything. We want our neighbors cooking with the regularity that they don't have now. And obviously our bakery has to work too.

"We want a community mall, where the clothes that are sold are clothes made by the neighbors, the hair is cut by the neighbors, the nails are done by the neighbors"

Melanie: How incredible these different steps. One of my last questions is, what strategies of conviviality and sociability could we learn from you all?

Elizabeth: We've fought hard. But in the end, we've learned something very true. Coexistence hasn't been easy. When you start to empower yourself and take on leadership, your word can feel like the final one. I'm speaking generally here—it hasn't just happened to me, but to other neighbors too. You know what I mean?

So we say: vote to reach an agreement. And if you don't agree, but the majority wins, you have to go along with it. You have to respect the majority's decision. I believe arguments are necessary—as long as we don't disrespect each other or resort

15 The DS49, also known as the Solidarity Fund for Housing Choice, is a housing subsidy in Chile aimed at vulnerable families who do not own their own home and are looking to purchase or build one, without the need for a mortgage. This subsidy allows them to purchase a new or used home, or build one on their own land, with a cap of 950 UF.

to violence that breaks the relationship. We've tried to carry out this process with a lot of respect.

If a neighbor raises their voice, we gently tell them, "neighbor, please lower your voice." And if a neighbor is too quiet, we encourage them to speak, because their voice matters too. Even if it seems like nonsense, it's still valid. They need to say what they feel. That's how we've learned—because we've been together for ten years now. It's a kind of strategy. And very few neighbors have moved away, so in a way, we're still the same group. Still, the new ones bring a fresh energy that helps us keep going.

In the end, we always say: no matter how well or poorly we get along, we have to reach an agreement. And that agreement is what we respect. It's recorded in a minute book. And it comes through the legitimacy of our assemblies. It doesn't mean anything to call yourself a leader if there's no one behind you. So we've had to go, committee by committee, house by house, to understand what's going on and to keep strengthening the process. Like we say—*trabajo de hormiguitas* (ant work).

We have to know who's involved, what project they're in, and everything else. I don't know if you've seen our booklet slogan, but it says: "Here I live, here I stay. This is the city where we all fit."

"Here I live, here I stay. This is the city where we all fit"

Melanie: This is so beautiful Elizabeth. To close the interview, so I don't take up so much of your time. I would like to know what message you would like to deliver to the people who live in Europe, the people who are going to see the exhibition of all the works of Los Arenales. What message would you like to deliver?

Elizabeth: Sometimes when you speak and say, Ah, Europe, It's like a different world, more developed, and everything. However, when I participated in an international housing meeting of settlers who live in camps, I realized that in England there were camps, in Egypt there were camps, in France there were camps, and they are also struggling with the eviction process, just like us! So I was really surprised because I thought that this only happened in Latin America, and it is not like that.

But something that I found valuable about us, I'm going to say it with pride. We, as immigrants, were able to discover the power we can have when we realize or believe in having the right to stay in the place where we are. That's the first thing. If you came to stay, you stayed. But also, the most important thing is to feel like you are subject to the law. Because you pay tax. Because you work, because you pay your taxes when you buy in any supermarket, store, office, or whatever. You pay your taxes, then you have the same rights as any citizen of each country.

“I’m going to say it with pride. We, as immigrants, were able to discover the power we can have when we realize or believe in having the right to stay in the place where we are”

In these moments, migration is going through a very complex moment worldwide, with everything that has happened after the pandemic. We believe that what is happening in Los Arenales is like a spark of hope. Latin American immigrant communities organize themselves, and they achieve processes in a state as racist as Chile.

It’s like a drop of hope for the whole world. So, Europe, I invite you to organize, I invite you to work together, but more than anything, with strength. In the city with a lot of desire to fight. Because we can have a lot of strength but if we don’t have the desire nothing can be done. And what is left over in Los Arenales is the desire to continue the process of urbanization within the camp, building the first “Latin American city” in Chile and I believe in Latin America.

“What is left over in Los Arenales is the desire to continue the process of urbanization within the camp, building the first ‘Latin American city’ in Chile and I believe in Latin America”

Melanie: It’s so beautiful to end with the idea of the Latin American city, which is one of the points that has marked me when I learned about Los Arenales. Um, well, Elizabeth, thanks very much for the time you have taken. This podcast/interview will be displayed in *Somewhere Inbetween*, which will be an exhibition together with other communities’ archives. These communities are coming mainly from Africa to Europe, and they have also taken places, abandoned buildings, and have created self-managed communities.

Elizabeth: It caught my attention because sometimes you think that poverty is only here in Latin America, and it’s not like that.

Melanie: What’s amazing are all the strategies you and the communities here have created and put into practice. That’s why this project came about—to create an exhibition that celebrates and recognizes all the self-management processes you’ve carried out.

Image 7: Los Arenales, 2015. © Cristian Ochoa



Elizabeth: Melanie, I'd love it if, once the exhibition is up, you could send me photos and videos. That way I can show my neighbors that we're being talked about with pride all over the world. Because that matters—it helps us feel good about ourselves. Not long ago, I was in the United States, and we managed to get Los Arenales included in a transnational housing process. Hopefully, that will also come with resources. We're working on that, connected with people from around 65 countries—especially immigrants—dealing with visas and everything that's happening now around migration.

So yes, I'm happy to have shared our experience. Before, I had to rely on memory, but now I've got a little cheat sheet—it makes it easier to tell our story because I've lived it, I've been part of it from the start.

Please show the neighbors there in Berlin our archive. We also have more books, and I'll send you some we've made together with scholars from the camp. One is about Los Arenales, and another is *Corpo Lugaridades*. In that one, we, as women, worked alongside other professionals and university colleagues. Through storytelling and poetry, we've reached processes of empowerment. We're not just speaking from inside our homes—this has transformed our lives.

CHAPTER 3

Autoethnography of the Inbetweenness. Between Art and Anthropology

In this chapter, I bring my own experiences of being in between the disciplines of art and anthropology. Through autoethnography, I examine the challenges and possibilities of this collaboration. I look closely at the complex relations between ethics and aesthetics, as well as theory and practices, and how this contributes to today's multimodality. I engage with the concept of liminality as a case study by looking at it through the double lens of art and anthropology. In this chapter, I am rethinking the positionality of art within academic projects in the social sciences.

3.1 Multimodalities: Between Art and Anthropology

Over the past few years, there has been growing interest in the adoption of multimodal and cross-disciplinary methods in social sciences and humanities research. Many of these studies include engagements with art, design, architecture, participatory research, and methodological modalities that challenge normative forms of knowledge production, especially academic reading and scientific writing (Stadtlaibor, 2021; Garland and Myrtsou, 2022). This opening of the methodological spectrum to further experimentation has led many research projects in the social sciences to invite artistic partners and cultural producers to collaborate and produce knowledge for a more experimental ethnography that is receptive to new forms and materials, raising interest in the juxtaposition between artistic practices and ethnography; however, it is a relationship that has been forming since the 1980s. In this first section of the chapter, I reflect on this renewed engagement of the social sciences and humanities with creative and artistic practices and the way researchers are working across disciplines to undertake more exploratory research and methods that move beyond text as a format of knowledge production. This “new” interest makes me question (as an artist) the role and recognition of artistic practices in this new multimodal form in the sciences, and ask: When did anthropology become multi-

modal? When did artistic practices and methods become inspirational and relevant in ethnography?

In this section, I am investigating “the ethnographic turn,” which brought various transformations in both practice and epistemology, shaping new research methods in the social sciences and the arts. These developments paved the way for today’s approaches, including multimodal, engaged, and public anthropology. My analysis draws on key moments in anthropology’s history and its intersections with art—particularly during the “decade of cultural critique” in the 1980s and within the art scene of the 1990s. I aim to highlight instances of collaboration between these disciplines and to reflect on them through an autoethnography¹ of my own experience moving between art and anthropology. This reflection also includes two courses I taught to art and social science students, exploring the intersections of both fields. Through these experiences, I reconsider the virtues and challenges of this entanglement, especially regarding the recognition and validation of artists and their practices within social science research, and the possibilities opened by what is now called multimodal anthropology—a contemporary space for collaboration between anthropology and other modes of knowledge production (see Chapter 4).

Between Practice and Theory

Back in 2018, when I joined the Institute of European Ethnology at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (IfEE) to start my pre-PhD process, the term multimodal and artistic practices as methodologies for fieldwork research were not yet “trendy.” Very few students came from applied and artistic disciplines; I was one of only two artists doing a PhD in anthropology at the time. Persefoni Myrtsou,² my colleague and dear friend, was also at the same institute, working on her PhD research on the migratory and “homing” practices of artists, employing the method of performative autoethnography in her data collection and conducting 50 in-depth autobiographical interviews with the artists. Some of the data results are also presented through charts and tables, gesturing toward a quantifiable interpretation of the data. While this felt novel in our immediate environment, it was not entirely without precedent.

1 As it falls outside the scope of this book to reflect on *autoethnography*, I understand it in broad terms as a method through which the researcher draws on their own biography and personal experiences to connect them with broader social and cultural phenomena. The use of self-reflexivity and self-criticism shapes the internal process of analysis. This approach resonates strongly with artistic research practices, where the artist’s thematic interests are deeply interwoven with lived experience, often blurring the boundaries between life and work—the artwork becomes life itself. In this sense, autoethnography is not only autobiographical; it serves as a lens through which wider social and collective phenomena can be understood, extending beyond individual experience (see Herrmann and Adams, 2022).

2 See her website <https://persefonimyrtsou.com/>

The discipline of anthropology already had a history of transdisciplinary crossover between the arts and anthropology stretching back more than 30 years, particularly in the social science departments in the USA and England, where there was a crossover between arts, literature, and film, but in the Berlin universities it was not yet an element of significant interest. Then, in the following years, the IfEE started to take an interesting turn with the arrival of professors Ignacio Farias and Tomás Sanchez, who brought the discourse of multimodality into urban studies research; their laboratory Stadtlabor³ began to perform various multimodal approaches as a valid form that deserves more research. Today Stadtlabor is going further by working with multimodal scholars like Carla J. Maier, Judith Albrecht, and Andrew Gilbert (see Multimodal Appreciation project⁴), researching ways to validate multimodal practices as an aspect of equal importance to scientific academic literature. The multimodal approach's use of non-text as a format of knowledge production remains a challenge in the scientific sphere. There are ongoing debates about how to validate it academically and recognize it in terms of its affectivity, sensibility, and sensoriality, which differs from the rational and cognitive qualities that scientific knowledge production typically entails. The work already done in decolonial, indigenous, and queer studies on self-reflexivity in relation to their case studies has inspired the researcher working with multimodal, engaged, and public anthropology to look for new affective and sensorial settings and methods for connecting with the communities they are collaborating with.

By its very nature, anthropology sits between the humanities and the social sciences, as described by scholar Eleana Yalouri in her essay: "From Cultural Critique to Multimodality" (2022). Given that anthropology exists in a liminal state within academic institutions, it is an ideal discipline for future research on validation and experimentation with other methodologies and forms of representation. However, for me, it is important to reflect on these aspects of validation and recognition of artists and culture producers, and artistic practices as research methods and forms of representation and collaboration, which have unfortunately been missing in the development of multimodality as a sub-discipline. In various multimodal projects, I have found that multimodal discourse benefits significantly from the sensory, aesthetic, and affective forms and qualities of the arts, which in many cases reproduces a pseudo-appropriation of these ways of working by the social science researcher.

This tension between disciplines isn't entirely new. In fact, it echoes earlier shifts in ethnographic thinking. In the 1980s scholars Michael Fischer, James Clifford and George Marcus (1986) began to question traditional notions of ethnography by deploying new understandings and possibilities regarding its formal and material aspects. Their aim was to facilitate research collaboration with other forms of

3 See <https://www2.hu-berlin.de/stadtlabor/news/>

4 See <https://www2.hu-berlin.de/multimodalappreciation/>

practices and disciplines. Clifford, in his renowned book *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), presents ethnography as a “hybrid activity,” which can take the form of writing, collecting, and a kind of modern collage. He suggests that it is necessary to combine more creative and artistic experimentation with scientific disciplines, as anthropology has lost its “subversive vocation” (Clifford, 1988: 12). He criticizes the institutionalization of “scientific ethnography” and how with this shift in the discipline it alienated itself from the creative forms that could have invited other ways of perceiving, interpreting, and describing what ethnography seeks to examine. Clifford highlights the French ethnography of the interwar period, which had not lost contact with literary forms of description and representation (Clifford, 1988: 118). French ethnography was inspired by Dadaist and Surrealist artistic modalities in which Western artists, musicians, poets, and anthropologists came together to problematize the cultural parameters of the West and the experiences they were going through during the Second World War, which for Clifford was an early form of collaboration between the arts and the social sciences. For example, the artistic surrealism at the time was influenced by the way ethnography analyzes culture, and ethnography, as Clifford argues, took a surreal approach when it juxtaposed different ways of understanding cultural phenomena—resembling a surreal collage (Clifford, 1988: 10; also cited in Yalouri, 2022: 3). This early juxtaposition and collaboration between art and anthropology, with ethnography as their meeting point, was lost in the following decades. It has appeared again today from a more dispersed multimodal perspective.

The book *Writing Culture* (1986), edited by Fischer, Clifford, and Marcus, is one of the first approaches to challenge the classical outlook that ethnography had at that time. It problematizes ethnographic representations that had very classical, conventional, and hierarchical ways of describing culture in research. They also touched on the issues of power around ethnographic texts and how it was necessary to move away from the text to rethink the great problem of representation. At that time, there was already experimentation with visuals, but it was ignored by the social sciences, so such experimentation only continued in the arts (Yalouri, 2022). The discourse at that time was divided. On the one hand, it was said that Fischer, Clifford, and Marcus were opening an extended discussion of representation and modalities within ethnography, while others criticized that these “new” reflections threatened the sciences and their rules, institutionalization, and professionalization (Yalouri, 2022). These criticisms ignored the seriousness, efficiency, and efficacy of the arts, literature, and creative processes as well as feminist anthropology, thereby reaffirming the patriarchal and colonialist model within the academy. Today, similar patterns of erasure are surfacing, mirroring how the process of validating collaborators in multimodal social sciences plays out—the recognition of artists and cultural practitioners is often lost in the development of a multimodal project in an academic context. (I elaborate on this in the closing paragraphs).

Years after the publication of *Writing Culture* and after conducting further research into the juxtaposition between art and anthropology, Marcus (1995) reflects on the criticisms made by his colleagues in the 1980s in which the aspect of knowledge production and research within the social sciences through aesthetics would have led to a redefinition of the traditional ways of thinking and practicing anthropology, in which experimentation with the visual and material would have led to a reformulation of the discipline, something which at that time it was not prepared for (Calzadilla and Marcus, 2006, cited in Yalouri, 2022: 4). Today, these entanglements are flourishing again, and aesthetics continue to play an important role in the “innovative form” of multimodal representation and methods in anthropology. But at the same time, this “innovative form” raises questions about its validation, recognition, and credibility within the sciences.

I remember one of my first presentations at the IfEE PhD colloquium. I was nervous because I did not know how to translate my project into an academic scientific context. I remember when I was presenting my research methods, which were pseudo-ethnographic with artistic practices, one of the professors asked me directly, “Why arts? Why does the artist feel that through art, they will be a savior in resolving social issues?” I did not know how to answer at first. I tried to distance myself from the personal and see it from a broader view, which for me was difficult because it was clear to me that being an artist in a context of socially engaged art and with a desire for political change, I could contribute alternative methodological perspectives and insights to anthropological research around my PhD topics on migration dynamics and the border regime crisis in Europe and South America. It was clear to me that for artists and anthropologists there was already historically a beneficial juxtaposition, collaboration, and interest between the disciplines.

Since the “ethnographic turn” produced in the 1990s art scene, socially engaged artists have been influenced by anthropology and taken a greater interest in politics, activism, the social, ethics, and collaborative work. Artists began adopting methodologies from the social sciences such as interviewing, documenting social events (Foster, 1995), archiving struggles, and participatory observation at the site of interest, which was already a kind of fieldwork as a research method (see also Laine, 2018; Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2015; Marcus, 2010, all cited in Yalouri, 2022: 4). In my artistic studies at the University of Chile, we had to read, among others, Hal Foster’s essay: “The Artist as an Ethnographer?” (1995), a classic that is the basis for artistic techniques and expressions, especially in South America. In countries like Chile, where there was a dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s, artists working during that time began different forms of activism, documentation, and reflections related to the massacres perpetrated by the dictatorship and the stories of the disappeared detainees. Later, in our generation of the 1990s, we were called the “sons/daughters of dictatorship.” Through archival techniques, narrative collection, interviews, and storytelling, the artists of the 1990s generation began to create a contemporary Chilean

imaginary, in which precarious art, objectival, museological, and pseudo-ethnography were methodological ways to deal with an absent and unspoken memory of our history, which, if we perceive it through the eyes of the social anthropologist Alfred Gell (1996, 1998), was already a question of the relational in the arts (see below).

After the ethnographic turn in artistic practices, artists began to use fieldwork and in situ research methods to develop socially connected art (Yalouri, 2022). The foundation of this approach can be observed today in the statements of many art residencies, where the artist is asked to do research, conduct fieldwork, and work directly with the community. The artist no longer stays in their studio and produces artwork but instead uses fieldwork as their art studio, where various artistic practices are tested within the community. Thanks to the influence of decolonial and feminist discourses, the artist incorporates awareness and ethical considerations when collaborating with the “other.” This approach, which centers the “concept” as a driving force, recalls the definitions of conceptual art. Anthropologist Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2013a, 2013b) describes a shift from an aesthetic or sensory focus to a conceptual and social one. Similarly, Yalouri (2022) suggests that conceptual art moves the aesthetic and sensory toward ethnographic conceptualism (Yalouri, 2022: 4–5), drawing on Sol LeWitt’s foundational idea from 1967: “The idea becomes a machine that makes the art” (LeWitt, 1967: 80).

Alongside this, since the 1980s, anthropologists have also been influenced by and interested in artistic practices and the art scene, not only semiotic theories as a cultural and visual language, but also, as Alfred Gell writes in his renowned text *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (1998), a relational approach to research that perceives artworks as social actions rather than simply aesthetic elements. Gell asks: What does a work of art mean and do? This opens up new interpretations from the social sciences on the social and relational aspect of art, as analyzed by the anthropologists Arnd Schneider and Chris Wright (2006, 2010, 2013). By experimenting with the tensions between methodological and theoretical research in art and anthropology, we are moving from an anthropology of art to an anthropology through art (Yalouri, 2022). Today, with the turns toward multimodal, multisensory, collaborative, and engaged anthropology (and previously with the anthropology of art, visual anthropology, and the anthropology of sound), we can speak of a growing awareness about the value of investigating emotions, sensations, bodies, and aesthetics, as well as an interest in indigenous practices in a contemporary world, all of which raise new research questions, as Sarah Pink (2015) suggests. These questions lead researchers to go beyond the rational, logical, and cognitive to embrace sensoriality, affect, and spirituality, introducing new materials, categories, and concepts that address “evocation” (Tyler, 1987), “action” (Gell, 1998), and “affect” (Stewart, 2007; Navaro-Yashin, 2009) rather than “representation.” Yalouri (2022) argues that by emphasizing the research process, it is possible to highlight the “thinking through making” by experimenting with materials and methods from art and other practical

disciplines. In her book: *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*, Katherine Hayles (2012) analyzes the process of production through ceramics and its relationship with the idea and conceptualization:

Drawing on my own experience with throwing pots, I typically would begin with a conscious idea: the shape to be crafted, the size, texture, and glaze, etc. Wedging the clay gives other cognitions a chance to work as I absorb through my hands information about the clay's graininess, moisture content, chemical composition, etc., which may perhaps cause me to modify my original idea. Even more dynamic is working the clay on the wheel, a complex interaction between what I envision and what the clay has a mind to do. A successful pot emerges when these interactions become a fluid dance, with the clay and my hands coming to rest at the same moment. In this process, embodied cognitions of many kinds participate, including unconscious and nonconscious ones running throughout my body and, through the rhythmic kicking of my foot, extending into the wheel. (Hayles, 2012: 92)

"Thinking through making" is defined by thinking through and with aesthetic and sensory forms, not only thinking for and about them (Yalouri, 2022). This places the process of conceptualizing and theorizing sociocultural phenomena into another modality, where effectiveness and sensoriality are the guides to the cognitive and the rational. However, it is important to emphasize that multimodal and artistic practices in anthropology do not intend to supplant the text form. With my analysis of the interaction between artistic practices and ethnography, I am not aiming to counteract the analytical power of text, especially scientific text, which deploys another discursive and conceptual modality when describing, analyzing, and questioning sociocultural problems. The recent trend of experimentation in multimodal ethnography and the multiplicity of epistemologies, affectivities, and political ways of engaging with sociocultural, urban, and natural issues instead stress the traditional predominance of the cognitive, rational, and textual approaches of the sciences, yet also opens up possibilities for other ways of producing knowledge, where affectivity, sensoriality, collaboration, and experimentation come into play and contribute to expand research that is more-than-textual, as well as public engagement interventions (Stadtlabor, 2021). In Chapter 4 of this book, I reflect on the aspect of "thinking through making" that intertwines practice and theory, which is reflected in the notion of "artistic research," where artistic practices are considered as working methods that approach the multimodal ethnographic discourse of social sciences.

Today, multimodality is not only a way of dealing with the problem of representation in ethnography but goes further, as Stadtlabor (2021) argues, "as a mode of ethnographic knowledge production in itself, a way of approaching concept-work,

analysis or fieldwork.” From my understanding of the history between art and anthropology and between practice and theory, the way of interacting with the multimodal approach today comes from that old juxtaposition between practices and theory, which makes me question why there is still only limited recognition of artistic practices as research methods in the social sciences. I wonder, with the current tendency to experiment with these other forms of knowledge production, how to develop frameworks that do not neglect the recognition of artistic agents and cultural practitioners who, from within their disciplines, have already come a long way in dealing with the affective, sensory, and material. It is true that nowadays there is greater recognition through multimodal projects, where co-authorship and co-production help recognize artists in social science research. However, there is still a long way to go, especially in the German context, for artists and cultural practitioners to be validated as scholars in the social sciences. The great problem of the anthropological discipline and its colonial legacy of the Western gaze in research toward “the others” is somehow reflected in the ongoing interaction between art and anthropology through the reproduction of hierarchies and vulnerabilities in relation to the artist in an academic social science context. The anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003: 18) argues that anthropology became a “curiosity turned profession,” which I link here to the great interest of the social sciences in artistic practices. In many cases, this “curiosity” has led to a lack of truly horizontal collaborations within academic contexts, where the burden often falls on the artist to “academicize” themselves in order to be accepted into the world of anthropology. This dynamic is rarely mirrored on the other side—anthropologists and social scientists are not expected to study art or become artists in order to engage with artistic practices. This asymmetry continues to shape the terms of collaboration. If the social sciences did not perceive artists and cultural producers as only in “service” of aesthetic production and recognized the arts and their methods as essential aspects of academic knowledge production, collaboration, and beyond, the current multimodal discourse would benefit significantly. (I will return to its implications in the final paragraphs of this section).

Between Aesthetics and Ethics

Returning to the reflections around the juxtaposition and the longstanding relationship between art and anthropology, I reflect here on how the ethics of research and collaboration differ between artistic and anthropological practices, and the kinds of issues these differences raise. On the one hand, aesthetics often exceeds ethics in artistic contexts, raising issues of vulnerabilization, appropriation, and extractivism with the subject concerned—a recurring criticism from the social sciences. On the other hand, ethics and its reflections on positionality and power relations often paralyzes and does not allow researchers to move forward in their experimentation with new modes of research and knowledge production. I was able to experi-

ence the relationship and clash between aesthetics and ethics directly as a lecturer in two seminars I taught; the first was for art and curatorial students (in Antofagasta) and the second for students of the social sciences and humanities (in Berlin). This allowed me to explore practically and also from different educational contexts (between South America and Europe) the difficulties and virtues that exist at the intersection between art and anthropology. In turn, the discoveries we made with the students can help address some of the challenges of multimodal validation in the social sciences and enable a deeper exploration of the entanglement between art/anthropology, practice/theory, and aesthetics/ethics.

From Aesthetics to Ethics

In June 2022, I was invited to be part of the teaching group of the graduate course *Microcuradurias* hosted by SACO's⁵ *escuela sin escuela* program in Antofagasta, Chile—a non-academic program focused on artistic research. I taught the course *Curating in Migratory Zones*, which covers more than reflections on how to work with “migrant communities” in a South American context. I was interested in reflecting with the students on the ethics around the challenges of “social art” and “participatory art” (see Bishop, 2023) and the collaboration of such artists with communities, as well as how an understanding of ethics plays an important role in art in general and specifically in artistic practices that work with the social, taking into account the social science critique that art can produce “aesthetic extractivists” as well as power relations between the artist/curator and the subject. I had already collaborated with SACO within the context of this research on the Los Arenales community in Antofagasta, one of my case studies in this book. The artist and curator Dagmara Wyskiel, the director of SACO, invited me to design this course with the curatorial theme of migratory zones as a result of our repeated conversations about the ethical issues concerning institutions, artists, and the community, and how the production process of an artistic project often makes the community vulnerable and invisible, causing more harm than good, which is reflected in the current ethical concerns of artists and curators working in migration settings in the north of Chile.

These reflections with Wyskiel were ideal for the framework of SACO's educational practices, since SACO is not a university or educational institute but rather an organization that focuses on cultural and artistic decentralization and, as they put it, a process of decolonization of education in Chile, stressing the current reality in the Chilean state and private universities that are financed by the students themselves. This fee-based Chilean education system privileges people who can pay for it or decide to take out loans that leave them with significant debt in the initial years of their working lives. Moreover, in Chile most of the professions that are

5 See SACO Contemporary Art Biennial Antofagasta-Chile, <https://bienalsaco.com/>

less in demand in the Chilean neoliberal market, such as those that involve studying the arts, literature, anthropology, social sciences, etc., are concentrated in the geographic center of the country (between the cities of Valparaíso and Valdivia). The provision of those disciplines in the north and south of the country is either minimal or non-existent. We cannot forget that Chile is geographically long and there is a significant difference between the country's northern and southern extremities and its center. That is why SACO, driven by a strong political, ethical, and philosophical vocation expressed through artistic practice, created the Biennial of Contemporary Art, hosted in Antofagasta, and later developed the graduate program *Microcuradurías*. This program is aimed at students who lack access to formal university education in curatorial studies and art theory, and it opens a space for critical reflection on the Chilean cultural and education system. Through these initiatives, SACO has not only expanded access to artistic discourse but has also contributed to shaping the conversation around ethics in the arts—both within Chile and across the broader South American context.

The students who participated in the course had a variety of backgrounds and interests but were united by a vision of actively supporting the decentralization of Chilean culture. I was struck by their awareness, self-reflexivity, and criticism concerning cultural and institutional practices and their environment. Most of the students already had a prior background in a self-taught or professional artistic and curatorial practice as well as a tendency toward a decolonial discourse, which came across in their reflections when we discussed how to collaborate with communities ethically. It could be that this first cohort of the graduate program (2022) were influenced and inspired by what happened in 2019 in Chile; the struggles and protests that led to the “Estallido Social” (social outbreak)⁶ in 2019 and the long influence of decolonial discourses in theory and practice in South America. They were interested in issues such as natural extractivism, the crisis in border regimes, the struggle of the indigenous Mapuche community to regain their lands, and the general context of the mass demonstrations in Chile. The students were influenced by Chilean feminist movements as a theoretical and practical base, which resonated strongly in their perspectives on ethics in artistic processes and cultural production within communities. The need to create spaces for exchange, support political struggles, and advocate for social justice in aesthetics and artistic practices were strongly present in their projects, making me question the presumption that there is a non-existence or lack of ethical concerns in artistic contexts. It also led me to reflect on whether this ethical and collaborative turn is, in part, a response to the growing influence of South American feminist and decolonial discourses—discourses that challenge

6 See more in Terri Gordon-Zolov's paper “Chile's Estallido Social and the Art of Protest” (2023), <https://sociologica.unibo.it/article/view/16817/16616>

dominant narratives and reimagine the role of art as both a critical and relational practice.

These reflections brought me back to my own experience as an artist navigating the academic world. One of the biggest criticisms (and self-criticisms) that I have faced as an artist working with social concerns and injustices over the years has been the question of ethics. The common image of the artist as having “poor ethics” or “poor self-reflexivity” is present in the daily production of an artwork. One of the questions I was asked at the beginning of my PhD research was: Why does the artist feel they will be able to solve social issues through art? I question this image of the artist and their circle, which is generated outside the art world, and how it influences decisions within the creative process. Since the ethnographic turn in the 1990s, the great increase in artists’ interest in social questions has given rise to new forms of artistic production: social art, participatory art, art action, collaborative performance art, and, lately, activism (art+activism). These new forms have provided spaces for collaboration, not only between artists and the community but also with other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, social work, and political agents and activists. I do not ignore the criticisms of these collaborations, which often tend to reproduce vulnerability, precariousness, and power relations with the community, even if the artist and the curator have good intentions and are aware of their positionality. In this chapter, I do not want to go deeper into these criticisms since there is already a lot of theory and debate about the problem of artists in social and ethical issues (see Bishop, 2006, 2012; Atkins et al., 2008; Dezeuze, 2010; Brown, 2014). Instead, I am interested in looking at this image of the artist from the perspective of the artists’ social circles, which is far more complex and often reproduces precariousness that goes beyond the relationship between the artist, the artwork, and the community, in many cases affecting the curator and cultural mediator as well.

The infrastructure of “the art scene”—including galleries, museums, networking platforms, and art residencies—along with its financing mechanisms, such as art sales, state and private funding, and its modes of visualization through exhibitions, art talks, interviews, publicity, and social media, collectively facilitates the production of artworks and art projects which, in many cases, unintentionally reproduce or even capitalize on vulnerability. In the Chilean context, for example, the funding process, short-term project execution, quasi-obligatory photo documentation, and social media publicity surrounding the artistic result allow the system to generate community visibility while reinforcing its own invisibility. Based on the neoliberal idea, the community “needs” this form of visibility that is provided by cultural and artistic agents. I have seen much more evidence of this aspect in a Chilean and neoliberal context, which differs from the artistic context in Berlin (where my artistic production is based). In the Berlin context, the funding process and reports are based on a framework that helps in some ways to be more careful with the commu-

nity. However, the interaction between artists, institutions/funding, and communities is still complex when seeking strategies for collaboration in cultural projects. By way of contrast, the visualization of the artistic “outcome” from a Chilean perspective has an aspect of “the immediate,” which often raises the question of vulnerability and extractivism in relation to the community. These concerns became especially tangible in our discussions with the students, where we debated and reflected on the visual registration and documentation of artworks and art projects. The need to record and share (in social networks) each process in the production of the art can directly affect communities and reproduce vulnerability. We discussed other types of documentation such as soundscapes, poems, and drawings, which could serve as a counter-response to traditional ways of recording and documenting cultural projects. These reflections also considered the ethical practices of artistic work.

I will not leave aside the recurrent concern that many artistic and cultural agents often think that their artistic or curatorial projects are the right ones for the community without first conducting research and engaging in a dialogue about what the community needs. I understand that the image of the “artist as creator/God who will solve social problems” comes from criticisms about the absence of prior research within the community. From my own experience and looking at it from an artist’s perspective, in general, the artist has noble intentions for the project development, which unfortunately are arbitrated by institutional funding structures whose application criteria require the artist to have already structured the project as a “finished product.” This is in contrast with the social sciences, where funding institutions understand that research and fieldwork must first be completed before the finished product can be defined. Cultural funding structures are not necessarily the “fault” of the artist and the written conceptualizations of their projects. Instead, it is the scarcity of economic resources or the lack of importance attributed to artistic research by the funding organizations which prevents the artist from conducting fieldwork. I am talking mainly about the Chilean and South American context, where there is very little funding for artistic research in the cultural context. In general, if there is funding for artistic research, it is only available within universities and art schools, which means that the opportunity to reflect ethically is only framed in an academic context that is not translated to the public cultural context. Cultural funding is generally directed toward the production and visualization of the artwork, and this structure often leaves little scope for preliminary research into what the community needs and wants.

Therefore, I was struck by how most of the students had already conducted research through collaboration with social workers and psychologists, or were contemplating ethical research about the community in collaboration with social science professionals. Many took up the idea of the “workshop” as a space for data collection, and others worked with the community as artist agents and co-authors to create collective pieces. These aspects of collaboration between cultural and soci-

ological agents exemplify the mutual aid between the juxtaposition of art and anthropology. Through the students' reflections, it was possible to perceive that although there was no funding for prior research, in many cases the partnership with researchers who already had data collections made the idea of collaboration possible and meant that artists did not have to start from scratch. I later understood that many students wanted to work with the social services department of local municipalities, as such departments were looking for cultural agents to visualize and communicate their findings. In many cases, this involved addressing data related to racism in the context of contemporary migration in Chile—an issue that continues to intensify and demand creative, collaborative responses.

It was around this time, when I began collaborating more closely with communities, that I started asking myself a different set of questions—questions I now recognize as grounded in anthropological reflexivity. What is my position in relation to the community? What are my history and privileges? Why and how do I relate to them? What do I come to learn, understand, and deliver to the community? While conducting the fieldwork for this book, members of the community asked me questions like: What are you going to provide us? What is the benefit for us of your presence, research, and ideas? These questions related to the great problem of ethics, which was more strained when I spoke to the community as an ethnographer than as an artist. When I approached my artistic project, the playfulness of artistic practices helped to soften this tension between the researcher and the community. However, the playfulness of art also produced ambiguity and gray zones of ethical practices for developing artistic work. Donna Haraway's "Situated Knowledges" ([1991] 2018) contributes enormously toward dealing with the examination of one's own positionality within the field of study, suggesting researchers take into consideration their own situated positionality and that all knowledge produced is linked to the subjectivity of the one who produces it, which makes the researchers' political positioning explicit. Haraway argues that it is necessary to specify one's perspective, since it is never neutral and generalized. She emphasizes that there are multiple vantage points from which to observe, critique, and reflect upon reality, and that recognizing these diverse positionalities is essential for cultivating a deeper understanding of different ways of knowing. This recognition, in turn, enables more meaningful forms of collaboration—ones that are respectful, horizontal, and rooted in mutual accountability.

Building on these ideas, the students and I were in a position to continue discussing the processes of sensitization from an anthropological and ethical perspective, and how to collaborate "with others"—thereby counteracting the classic way of working "about the other" (see Ortiz, 2022)—by positioning the community at the center of the collaborative and productive process of the curatorial project. We reflected on the possibility that the community's role is no longer that of a spectator or merely a participatory entity, but rather that it is part of each stage of the curatorial

process, from conceptualization to production and exhibition (see Bailer, 2024). We considered how these different stages could be developed in a collaborative and mutually respectful way, trying to leave aside colonial and racist structures that we have learned socially and professionally. We also considered one of the criticisms of collaborative processes, which is the amount of time it takes to carry out collaborative projects. This is something that, when assessed according to the definition of “time” under capitalism and neoliberalism, makes it difficult to design a publicly funded artistic project. How can we keep co-producing and collaborating transdisciplinarily in today’s capitalist and neoliberal context? From my experience of being between the roles of artist and ethnographer, I was interested in openly reflecting on my experiences carrying out fieldwork and artistic projects (see Chapter 4), and on the work of interesting contemporary decolonial artists such as Maria Thereza Alves,⁷ who works with ideas of co-production and co-authorship in curatorial processes. We were engaging with decolonial approaches, reflexivity, and situated knowledge as sources of inspiration when rethinking the dynamics of collaboration within cultural and artistic projects.

From Ethics to Aesthetics

I will now return to my reflections around multimodal discourse and methodologies in social sciences research, especially the engagements with creative disciplines that produce knowledge through a variety of aesthetic experiments, affective tools, and sociopolitical strategies. As artists conducting anthropological research, my colleague Persefoni Myrtsou and I decided to create a course focusing on the entanglement of artistic practices and ethnography, which we called “Making Sense of Culture(s) through Art: Methodological Implications of Artistic Research on Anthropological Knowledge Production.” The course was designed for BSc and MA students in the social sciences and humanities at Berlin universities and was held in the 2022/23 winter semester in the context of an X-Student Research Group supported by the Berlin University Alliance. We were interested in further exploring the entanglements between artistic and ethnographic practices in social sciences research by challenging the view that such disciplinary convergences have little scientific value and validity. Our initial questions were: How can we develop artistic forms of knowledge production and epistemology within academic research and writing that emphasize transdisciplinary experimentation? How can we create a dialogue between different modes of learning that span from rational and cognitive to affective and artistic? How can these learning modes interact with and inform each other in the case of the ethnography–art encounter? What do we learn from transdisciplinary experimentation and interaction between the methods used by different disciplines to view, understand, and relate to their research subjects? What can we learn from

7 See her personal website, <https://www.mariatherezaalves.org/>

the encounter between artistic and ethnographic methods in terms of integrating “non-scientific” methods into our research? (Garland and Myrtsou, 2022).

We started our conversation based on our own experience of being between art and anthropology and of doing a PhD in anthropology, while coming from an artistic and practical discipline rather than a scientific profession. Added to this was the context of the German university, which, given that we are both “migrants” and did not grow up in the German educational context (which differs significantly from the teaching methodologies we learned in our countries of origin), was a burden that at times made us feel even more distanced from the reality of the German academic social sciences environment. Against this background of feeling “out of place” in many senses of the word, we began formulating the course. It involved decolonial and feminist discourses, not only for a theorization of the reflections between art, anthropology, and its transdisciplinarity, or for taking a critical look at today’s multimodality from the perspective of the artist, but also because we were inspired by the spirituality and ethics that decolonial and feminist practices have and their effectiveness in providing a safer and friendlier space to develop the course. We wanted to bring the creative atmosphere of the art classes we attended at our universities in Greece and Chile (and beyond) and transport them into the German scientific academic context. How can we bring the ideas of the art studio, the workshop, and of “making” into the classroom, where the infrastructure is designed for scientific lectures? This was one of the questions that were always on our minds, which we had to translate in parallel into an online/offline space.

The structure of the course was designed in such a way that the social sciences and humanities students would incorporate experimental methods in their research to participate and develop their own projects individually or collaboratively. It was not only a hands-on course—we also had the opportunity to respond critically to the existing literature on art and anthropology. We invited five researchers who work between the entanglement of artistic, multimodal, and ethnographic practices: Elpidia Rikou, a visual artist, social anthropologist, and social psychologist whose work concerns the relationship between the arts and the humanities; Sofia Grigoriadou, a visual artist and anthropologist who used contemporary art and methods such as walking and sound in her PhD research on the art scenes in Athens and Skopje; Michael Westrich, who works on cultural production, urban practice, and ethnographic filmmaking—in his PhD research, he used film as a collaborative tool; Eva Giannakopoulou, a visual artist and PhD candidate who works with performance, installation, film, and participatory acts in intercultural frameworks, public spaces, and secluded or subaltern communities; Carla J. Maier, an independent scholar working on sound and postcolonial studies, music, and cultural anthropology. She has produced sound walks, audio walks, and audio papers.

Through conversations between students, researchers, and ourselves, we began mapping current reflections on transdisciplinary and multimodality between art

and anthropology, including their limitations and virtues. These conversations inspired the second part of the course, where we undertook practical work in a temporary “workshop” space that we created inside the IfEE. Together with the students, we focused on the affective aspects of this cross-disciplinary encounter and their epistemological potential, which still requires more systematic study, hoping to contribute to today’s discussions on the validation and recognition of artistic practices and multimodal approaches within academia. Observing the theoretical and methodological entanglements between ethnography and art can be a valuable tool for students, as it allows them to think beyond the limits of their disciplines and gives them a chance to perceive and combine different cognitive, aesthetic, affective, and bodily modes while planning and conducting research and making sense of their data and their research generally. We aimed to collect a database of existing theoretical positions and applications of the encounter between ethnographic and artistic practices and critically respond to them, provide a space for new theoretical explorations and hands-on experimentation with unique methods that test this transdisciplinary encounter, as well as document our findings and rewrite aspects of the dialogue between art and ethnography through this encounter between students and researchers (Garland and Myrtsou, 2022).

We used a theoretical starting point to introduce the students to methodological reflections on experimentation in artistic practices. If we had been teaching students from the arts, we would instead have begun from a practical starting point. This decision to draw from theory and use a lecture format was also to avoid overloading the students with new ways of receiving information. We had heard comments and reflections from colleagues and professors who taught with multimodal practices; when their courses began by experimentation with practical methods, and without a previous theoretical approach, in many cases the students became blocked and felt uncomfortable as they had the idea that they could not be sufficiently “creative and artistic.” With this in mind, our sessions were divided between theoretical discussions and practical work with the guest researchers. Later on, we began our group process through the online workspace Miro where we collaboratively started to map the topics of interest, projects, ideas, and, in parallel, skills and creative methods that the students had or wanted to try out. This group process helped us to gradually gain a general picture of the interests and methods the students wanted to use for the second part of the course—the concept’s practical and artistic production process. This process of mapping interests and skills was more difficult in some cases than others. Myrtsou and I realized that many students had a clear idea of their topics of interest, but it was challenging to materialize or visualize those ideas and work out how their topics of interest could be turned into a material, audio, visual, or performative production. In our conversations after the classes, we were slowly noticing how challenging it was for the students to translate their idea/concept, as well as the sociological and anthropological topics, into some

form of representation or materiality. For us as artists, it was the other way around: we usually start with experimentation, with a feel for aesthetics, materials, forms, performance, and sensoriality and then, after some trial and error, we begin with the conceptualization.

In response to this challenge, we designed different exercises to help the students “let go” of the distinction between theory and practice. The exercises were a more relaxed, playful, and not so “serious” way to work on their projects, based on the notion of the playfulness of the creative process and involving trial and error as a basis for the process of materialization and production. Our approach was inspired by similar exercises such as “freewriting,” which is a literary technique but is often used in the social sciences and humanities, and which leaves reasoning aside, letting words simply take their place on the paper. We were also interested in further reflecting on the idea of objects as agents and how we relate to them from a practical perspective, which forms an important basis for reflecting on the material relationship between the artist and the artwork. We drew inspiration from Alfred Gell’s theories about the object concept. He wrote that objects mediate and act on social relations as agents. Gell brought anthropology and art closer through his theory on art and agency. In *Vogel’s Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps* (1996), he explored the basis of the distinction between works of art or art objects and “mere” artifacts, which are useful but not aesthetically interesting or beautiful, concluding that an aesthetic definition of the art object is consequently unsatisfactory. Subsequently, in his book *Art and Agency*, Gell (1998: 96) argues “that works of art, images, icons, and the like have to be treated, in the context of an anthropological theory instead of the context of a (western) art history canon, as person-like, that is sources of, and targets for, social agency.” He does not believe that artworks only have “symbolic meaning.” Art objects do not necessarily have meaning—they are not passive signs to be symbolically decoded by a distanced beholder. Instead, they have agency; they do. Gell views “art as a system of action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it” (Gell, 1998: 6).

Starting from the idea of the object as a relational entity, Myrtsou had the idea to create an exercise where the student would think about and look for a representative object that they would like to work with for their project. The aim was to use this object as a “prop”⁸ for different activities within the workshop. A prop is an object used in theatrical staging and later in film and screen production, mainly by actors and performers (Harris, 1975). The instructions for the selection of the object were very broad. Students could use a concrete object (e.g., a photo, a carpet, a text, an artifact from fieldwork, an item of food) or a more abstract/elusive/fragmented object (e.g., water, a photo/video of an object that is not mobile). The idea was to get the students

8 A prop is specifically considered anything movable and portable that can be on stage, leaving aside actors, costumes, and electrical and lighting equipment (Nesfield-Cookson, 1934).

to start perceiving aesthetics, form, materiality, and sensitization, then take the second step toward conceptualizing and theorizing the object and its relation to their project.

How do objects and material culture help us orient ourselves in the world, and how do they mobilize us? Can we visualize our research as an object? With these questions in mind, we took our students to see the exhibition *Material Legacies* at the Kunstgewerbemuseum⁹ in October 2022, which brought together artifacts from the Kunstgewerbemuseum's collection with installations by designers and researchers from the Cluster of Excellence (Humboldt Berlin) to create a dialogue between past, present, and future materials. This exhibition caught my attention, and I thought it would be ideal to begin the process of "letting go" of the distinction between theory and practice, because it was rich in objects and materials from textures to visuals and sounds, making it an ideal "playground" to experiment with how to practically approach materials and objects. We did an exercise with the students, where they walked through the exhibition in silence and drew an object that attracted them in terms of its materiality, color, and texture, without reading what it was and its theoretical and curatorial context. These drawings were not going to be shared later as the aim was not to produce an aesthetic result, but rather to experience the processes of observation, visual synthesis, and drawing. The drawn lines synthesized (like a scientific sketch) what we were visualizing, "capturing" (like an ethnographic process) the desired form on paper.

I had already tried this approach as an ethnographic method in my previous fieldwork, where I began thinking about how the gestures of sitting, observing, and drawing helped me to understand a kind of filter that contributes to the synthesizing of the "real" situation. For example, the raw drawing gave me the first filter for a preliminary field description due to its degree of precision and detail. My gaze became more analytical, searching for the perfect structural drawing line, focusing on specific points to be as precise as possible at the moment of depiction, and blocking out the visual overload of my fieldwork. I used drawing to try and reach the essence of the field site through its dimensions, movement, and forms, and through the effort of visually capturing the atmosphere of emotion and place. The close observation involved in drawing allowed me to be more present in the "here" and "now" of the fieldwork; I felt that I really "was there" (Marquez, 2018: 3) and not in a hazy memory of my presence in the place (Garland, 2023b). It was from this embodied experience that I turned to the students, inviting them to explore similar processes. I asked students questions to open spaces for conversation around the relationship between objects, aesthetics, and practice. Did you feel a connection and/or inspiration with

9 Matters of activity (2022). Exhibition: Design Lab #13: Material Legacies. Kunstgewerbemuseum Berlin. Cluster of Excellence (Humboldt Berlin). <https://www.matters-of-activity.de/en/activities/8684/design-lab-13-material-legacies>

any object? What (new) ways of perception/understanding were you able to achieve while drawing an object? Thinking about an object as the beginning of a process of theoretical and practical research encourages one to focus on the effectiveness and sensoriality of the object.

Returning to the exercise where we asked students to find an object as a prop for their project, we noticed that many chose items closely linked to their initial conceptual ideas. For instance, one student brought a seashell as an inspirational object, which eventually became part of a video work combining old film archives. This piece explored the question “What is listening?” from biological, physical, and social perspectives, tying these threads into contemporary debates about who listens, how we listen, and the role of collective listening as a sociocultural method in postcolonial contexts. In the student own words: “Listening to a seashell explores knowledge as a mediation of an embodied, multisensory and imaginative engagement” (NomadicRadio, 2023). Another of our students, engaged with a piece of fabric as her prop object. She was interested in the physical intertwining of threads as a process of overlapping personal and family histories and genealogies, which led her to a reflection on “The non-tangible component of working with textiles—a practice where oral history is explored as a form of procedural ritual, temporal dimension, and the character of the feminized hands-on work and crafts practices in Central Asia” (NomadicRadio, 2023). She developed a video piece portraying a mother and daughter working with textiles during an artistic production, capturing a multiplicity of voices, languages, and sonorities. These and other student projects were co-curated into a radio show broadcast on FM and online via NomadicRadio, session No. 26, featuring outcomes developed within the course [listen **here**¹⁰]. The works presented by the students in the class offer a rich, multifaceted theoretical and practical contribution to reflections on the value and potential of artistic practices in social science research; they rewrite aspects of the dialogue between art and anthropology (Garland and Myrtsou, 2022).

Recognition toward Validation and Valorization

The landscape of research in the humanities and social sciences is being transformed by a surge of interest in multimodal methodologies, resulting in the spread of diverse forms of experimentation that go beyond the text format historically predominant in these disciplines. Particularly with the current boom in multimodal approaches in anthropology, I have been struck by the great variety of creative methods and techniques coming from the artistic, theatrical, architectural, design, and practical disciplines. These techniques are often renamed or reframed in the context

10 <https://on.soundcloud.com/ZZCLAoCX8lGe5GheVT>

of scientific research, presented as a natural contamination, inspiration, and influence between disciplines. This perceived transdisciplinary approach, which could open new possibilities for a desire for horizontal collaboration and exchange between scholars and practitioners, often overlooks the hierarchies and power dynamics generated in such collaborations. There is often a lack of recognition for the history of these creative and artistic methodologies and practices, as this “new idea” of multimodality is frequently described as an “innovation” within the social sciences in general. In some cases, the artistic professionals who develop these methods and techniques within scientific research projects are not acknowledged as co-authors by academics, as their methods and techniques are seen as “services” provided for the project rather than as integral conceptual contributions.

At the same time, from the perspective of social scientists and ethnographers, there also appears to be a struggle to institutionalize multimodality in their own academic contexts. It is currently very hard to academically classify and validate these multimodal forms in scientific research, and although there is a significant increase in interest in the use of more-than-textual forms as research processes, such forms are still not perceived in the same way as written articles, papers, or monographs (StadtLabor, 2021). This is problematic but also understandable, as questions arise regarding how to place “value” on and “validate” these multimodal forms. The StadtLabor scholars ask: What criteria should be employed to evaluate such multimodal singularities? (StadtLabor, 2021). A new project by the StadtLabor tries to solve this question by selecting and documenting various multimodal research artifacts and creating a set of prototyping and toolkit exercises. The StadtLabor is also looking for ways to facilitate the process of evaluation and institutionalization of future multimodal research in academia (StadtLabor, 2021).

This inquiry drew my attention, and I wondered whether, in the process of reconfiguring the evaluation of these research forms at a scientific academic level, Social Sciences Institutes would invite artists and cultural practitioners to provide their input in the final evaluation of a course or thesis, rather than leaving the social science lecturer alone to evaluate students’ creative, artistic multimodal projects. After all, for decades, art, design, and architecture schools and universities have been trying to solve the issue of how to validate artistic and creative work, where subjectivity is central to the process of aesthetic evaluation. When Myrtsou and I taught our course about the entanglement between artistic and ethnographic practices, our evaluation structure was inspired by art classes, where innovation, experimentation, constancy, craft, and aesthetics are the primary evaluation criteria used to assess students’ final projects. For us, it was also important to remember that the students were not art students, so we could not expect their final projects to demonstrate outstanding technique and aesthetic results. Still, through the course, we motivated them to refine their technical skills and, if necessary, to collaborate with experienced

artists and create a co-production (and, therefore, a co-authorship) with whoever had a technique that suited their project.

In summary, while the social sciences increasingly embrace multimodal and artistic approaches, persistent hierarchies of knowledge and disciplinary boundaries continue to challenge their full recognition and valorization. In some ways, this represents a return to the debates of the 1980s regarding the challenge of opening anthropology to new forms and modalities of representation. Today, there is a desire for experimentation, but the recognition and validation of new modalities as forms equal to classic scientific texts and monographs remain problematic. This reopens discussions around the hierarchies of ways of knowing and producing knowledge, which tend to reproduce an “otherness.” On the one hand, the seriousness, efficiency, and efficacy of the arts, literature, and creative processes as methods for scientific academic research are still not fully validated. On the other hand, anthropologists and ethnographers appear to be fascinated by these “new ways” of experimenting. This anthropological “curiosity” (Trouillot, 2016) toward new forms of producing knowledge reflects the unresolved colonial legacy of the discipline by exoticizing creative and artistic practices and, at the same time, often not recognizing the artist in the scientific research process (see Chapter 4).

Through my own experience of beginning a long path to the “academization” of my artistic practices in the social sciences through my PhD, I have wondered how the hierarchies between disciplines devalue the very process of producing knowledge, which is still framed by the process of academization and Western scientific validation. The ongoing debates sparked by decolonial, indigenous, and feminist discourses not only invite but demand a rethinking of what counts as knowledge, opening the door to debate the hierarchies of knowledge forms that have gone unspoken for decades. These discursive influences have led to alternative, multiple, and plural epistemological and methodological reflections. They have also empowered artists and cultural practitioners to create spaces for their own position within academia and to demand recognition and validation in scientific research.

3.2 Liminality: Between Art and Anthropology

In this second section of this chapter, I approach my understanding of being between practice and theory through the anthropological concept of liminality. The great interest in liminality in the artistic context in recent years and criticism from the social sciences led me to question on the double perspective of this term. I explore how liminality has evolved from anthropology to art to become relevant in the artistic field, particularly in theater and performance, and how in this artistic environment it might be possible for liminality to evoke political and critical thinking among the marginalized and be challenged from an anthropological perspec-

tive. Throughout this book, I engage with liminality from different angles, from a potential concept of inbetweenness in migratory experiences to questioning it as an ambiguous and apolitical term. This comes from critiques in the social sciences, which makes the term problematic when analyzing migration, especially in the context of the current border regimes on which this research is based. In this section, I examine the potential of the entanglement of liminality and hybridity as a political form against marginalization, drawing on the idea of postmigration (see Langhoff, 2011; Yıldız, 2010), which has opened a window for reflections on states of inbetween identities involving the urban fabric with a migratory background.

I want to point out that, in this chapter, I will not analyze the meaning and various theoretical aspects of the concept of liminality and its entanglement with migration studies, as this is dealt with in detail in Chapter 5. Rather, I analyze liminality from an artistic lens and how it has opened new epistemologies that would otherwise have been impossible within the framework of social science. I approach the concept of liminality as a kind of case study to reflect on how art and anthropology coexist and intertwine, not only from a practical perspective, as detailed in the first section of this chapter, but also from a theoretical perspective, asking: How does liminality, a concept so criticized by the social sciences, find a space and flourish in artistic contexts? In this section, I engage with liminality through a theatrical and art action lens, highlighting differences between art and anthropology, and showing how this journey has been a productive process for my understanding of the sensory, temporal, and spatial experience of inbetweenness in migration contexts.

Liminality: From Anthropology to Art

Since my years at the art university in Chile, I've felt drawn to the notion of inbetweenness; this extended beyond physical spaces marked by geographical borders to my own South American context, which has a complex genealogy of forced *mestizaje*. As I described in Chapter 1, I was interested in exploring my own family history, which is marked by narratives of European migration, reflecting the broader colonial traces that are present in many South American families. The personal and familial experience of existing between the so-called Global South and the Global North—the West—became a central point of reference in my ongoing engagement with the idea of “inbetweenness” and, eventually, with the concept of liminality (Garland, 2024a).

Furthermore, together with my theater colleagues at the university, I was constantly inspired by liminality and the liminoid as both theoretical and practical frameworks for acting and performance. The anthropologist Victor Turner was one of the influential scholars who applied liminality to theater; he drew our attention to how to create a spatial moment in which time is suspended and a process of transition and transformation occurs between the spectator, the actor, and the

play itself. During one of my research exchanges in 2021 at the Faculty of Arts and Theater at the Catholic University in Chile, I came to understand this translation from theory to practice—especially in relation to liminality as an anthropological concept for theatrical and performative forms. The temporal character of the spectacle and the “here and now” of performativity were inspirations for the use of ritual processes and structures in stage design. Here lies the great interest of theater and performance art: the translation of sociocultural and political phenomena through bodily encounters.

One of the few books dealing with the concept of contemporary liminality is *Liminality and the Modern* (2016) by the anthropologist Bjorn Thomassen, who emphasizes that liminality is not “just any” concept; it occurs at moments and periods of transition in which “normal” boundaries are broken, self-understanding and behavior are loosened, opening up conceptual and physical pathways and spaces of originality, the unusual and the imaginative, which in turn are marked by construction and destruction. Thomassen emphasizes that liminality can drive new experiments and directions in social and political theory. For these reasons, he proposed the liminality of place as a central concept in the social sciences, in line with our notions of “structure” and “practice” (Thomassen, 2015). Thinking with liminality serves to conceptualize moments where the overlap between structure and action was not easily defined or understood with classical “theoretical structuration” (Thomassen, 2015). Thomassen focuses on the transportation of liminality from ethnographic studies of ritual transitions in (small-scale) communities, as explored by the ethnologist Arnold van Gennep ([1961] 2019), a pioneer of the concept of “rites of passage,” toward an analysis of how large communities and societies respond to and experience change and transition: how they live through the uncertainty of life in the inbetween, and how they manage to come out the other side, if they come out at all, as the notion of “Permanent Liminality” shows.

Thomassen emphasizes that liminality is “a particular kind of unsettling situation in which nothing really matters, in which hierarchies and prevailing norms disappear, in which sacred symbols are mocked and ridiculed” (Thomassen, 2015: 1). He stresses the theatricality that liminality generates, which produces that carnivalesque and playful aspect noted by the anthropologist Victor Turner (1982). This is one of the problematic aspects of liminality when placed in a migratory context, and even more so when it comes to autonomous urban spaces of resistance to the border regime, such as the Dzjungal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, the case studies presented in this book. As I discuss in Chapter 6, one of the challenges in engaging with concepts such as waiting, limbo, and liminality in a migration, refugee, and border regime context is that, as the anthropologist Giorgina Ramsay (2019b) argues, by defining “migrants” and “refugees” as being in a state of “stuckness” and “between borders,” we ignore how they share these particular rhythms of time happening inside these places and view them as “people out of time” (Ramsay, 2019b), re-

producing the idea of “otherness” in a border regime context. As I discuss in Chapter 5, the notion of “inbetween” in liminality becomes a state outside the temporal norm. The cultural anthropologists Christine M. Jacobsen and Marry-Anne Karlsen (2020) refer to the positionality of transition between pre- and post-liminality, highlighting the linear temporality after which the person within the liminal moment should be reintegrated into the “social norms,” assuming that the “normal” lives of citizens are safe and stable and that people living in the “inbetween” are “outside a normal temporality” of everyday life. Such a way of looking at time is associated in post-modern societies with productivity, money, and work from a capitalist perspective, and ignores the alternative spatiality and temporality of people on the move in the border regime (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Returning to the idea of thinking with liminality that Thomassen addresses, the playwright and scholar Ileana Diéguez, in her book *Liminal Scenarios: Political Performance Theatricalities* (2014), reflects on the metaphorical process of translation and interpretation from theory to practice, addressing the idea of liminality as a symbolic process of interpreting societies from the ritual, theatrical, and scenographic process. In her argument, Diéguez establishes a direct relationship between liminality, social drama, and *communitas* (Turner, 1982), with social, poetic, or linguistic events and spectacle (Dubatti, 2000), and with art and relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, [1998] 2020), by focusing on the 1980s and the various theoretical and practical changes that emerged between art and anthropology, as described in the first section of this chapter. Diéguez emphasizes Turner’s view of *communitas*, a relation with society and communities that is not individual but a group process that generates a sensibility and shared experience that becomes the basis of the theatrical experience between the people who are part of this specific performative moment.

In turn, she emphasizes how everyday ritual processes within societies have a scenographic and performative aesthetic, albeit outside of theatrical parameters. Diéguez relates carnivalization, and the grotesque to hybridity (Bhabha, [1994] 2012), saying that hybrid communities living between cultures and social boundaries have been inspirations for reflections on liminality since their early marginalization. As analyzed in Chapter 6, hybridity has been an important concept in postcolonial debate, and refers to the emergence of mixed cultures in areas affected by colonization. It represents the blending of two or more cultures to create a new “in-between” space, recognized as a third space of cultural identity, going beyond mere “multicultural” critique in postcolonial discussions (Bhabha, [1994] 2012). In this context, hybridity can be seen as liminality, the space between cultures. However, even here, hybridity is critical, as it’s often used in cultural biology merely to describe cross-cultural “exchange,” and can be criticized for overlooking power imbalances causing this so-called “exchange” (Young, [1995] 2005; see Chapter 6).

To return to my initial questions: Why does liminality exert such a significant influence on diverse artistic aesthetics operating in the domains of the inbetween

states? What makes this concept less problematic in artistic and aesthetic terms, so that ethics seems to allow its use and translation in the arts? The arts, theater, and literature have been fascinated by ambiguous and confusing spaces since the beginnings of their disciplines (Diéguez, 2014). For example, on the one hand, theater and its scenographic dimension, where the temporality of a performance is considered from the “beginning to the end of the action,” where the concepts of liminality and liminoids encompass the interpretation of being inbetween as a real everyday theatrical performance experience of marginalization. On the other hand, the artist’s lifestyle is often portrayed as an “outsider” to social norms, with the interplay of ethics and aesthetics taking on a particular role in daily existence. Early narratives in which the artist is portrayed as “misunderstood,” “sensitive,” and “perceiving the world through a different lens” have contributed to an alternative perspective that challenges conventional interpretations of ethics and social norms (Thomassen, 2014). This portrayal of marginalization was also reflected in Turner defining performers and artists as “liminal and marginal people” and “peripheral observers” immersed in a kind of “sacred madness,” romanticizing the idea of the artist and the theater with a kind of idealization that, although derived from the idea of marginalization, was raised to a pedestal exoticizing these “peripheral beings” (Diéguez, 2014). Dieguez criticizes Turner with this anthropological vision of the artist and theater as a marginalized and, simultaneously, romantically idealized entity, reproducing the great problem of the anthropological discipline at the moment of representing “the other.” This representation and analysis are exemplified by the transfer of the liminal concept from anthropology to the arts, which finds a home in the theatrical idea and its temporality of the spectacle itself (Diéguez, 2014).

The liminality in theater addressed by Turner in collaboration with Richard Schechner in their work *The Anthropology of Performance* (1988) proceeds from observations in Van Gennep’s “Rite de passage,” associated with situations of edge, limen, and threshold, related to ambiguous, ephemeral life and boundaries between two elements, which, according to Diéguez, exemplify theatricality. Liminality encompasses conditions such as purifying and pedagogical aspects, when one experiences a period of healing and restorative change, and experiments of reversal: “the one who is above must experience what it is to be below” (Turner and Schechner, 1988: 104). Subordinates have the opportunity to take on the role of their superiors, which in other circumstances would have been impossible. In the ritual process, Turner argues, some moments become risky because of their transformative aspect and the unpredictable risk of “what will happen when power is handed over to the weak?” (Diéguez, 2014: 42). This idea of reversal and play between two worlds, between subalterns and dominants, is only possible in the ritual and liminal process, which is embedded in a context of *communitas* as an “anti-structure” (Turner, 1969)

that suspends hierarchies and allows “egalitarian,” spontaneous, and non-rational relationships to appear (Diéguez, 2014).

Building on this understanding of liminality and ritual reversal, western theater evolved from ancient religious rituals and was influenced by ritual processes of communities, in which the ritual later transformed into the idea of “tragedy” through mimesis—the aesthetic concept of representation. The community involved in the ritual processes changed its role from participant to observer, thus creating the idea of the “audience” as spectators of the ritual tragedy scene (Oliva and Torres Monreal, 1990). This is described by Diéguez as an educational process, used as a space for the transmission of values and also for the purification and release of feelings and emotions that had accumulated in the audience (catharsis), representing the culmination of the ritual process. Later on, comedy, satire, and farce gained prominence in the theatrical landscape, providing a platform for political and social critique. Through the art of “mocking,” hierarchical structures and marginalized perspectives found a sanctuary for expression. This unfolding marked a significant shift toward cross-class entertainment, creating a space where the “subaltern” could voice their experiences. In this diverse theatrical environment, a multitude of voices seamlessly integrated into the scene, offering a nuanced representation of society while simultaneously critiquing its intricacies. This juxtaposition and interweaving of social critique and analysis could be experienced in an artistic context. The liminal aspect of the ritual framework that theater provides broke through hierarchical and ethical norms and opened up a space for experimentation and role-playing. The “liminal entities” of social structures—those on the margins and fringes of socioeconomic norms, their stigmatized marginalization as “inferior,” “dispossessed,” “other,” outside the social structure—found a space of liberation where roles and realities could be transformed, even if only for a predetermined time (Diéguez, 2014).

Postmigrant theater and its “liminal” existence

From this perspective, theater developed into a community space for the “subalterns” and offered not only a platform for their emancipation, but also a forum for social and political criticism and a discourse on their “liminal” existence (Diéguez, 2014). In today’s theater, especially in metropolitan cities, the stage is transformed into a hybrid urban space where different “marginalized” voices meet. I take inspiration from the concept of postmigrant theater, particularly from one of its key figures of dissemination, Shermin Langhoff, a theater maker associated with the Ballhaus Naunynstraße and currently the director of the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin. Postmigrant theater emerged as a reaction to the persistent representation of “otherness” in Berlin communities with “migrationshintergrund” (migration backgrounds), especially with regard to the second generation of Turkish immigrants. Born in Germany to Turkish parents, they continue to face marginalization due to their non-German, non-white ancestry. With her film project and per-

formance program *Beyond Belonging* (2006), Langhoff began a process of actively promoting talent from this second generation and advancing the idea of postmigrant theater as a counternarrative to Germany's historical "Gastarbeiter"¹¹ (guest workers) tradition. Postmigrant theater embodies a nuanced perspective on society that is shaped through both negotiation and resistance. It embraces a "transcultural" and "translocal" understanding of society while acknowledging the presence of difference, conflict, and historical narratives (Florino, 2015). Central to this framework is the concept of hybridity (Bhabha, [1994] 2012), which serves as a catalyst for considering postcolonial societies in which traditional social and cultural delineations blur, giving rise to a transcultural urban landscape.

That presupposes a situation in which two or more completely separate and internally homogeneous "cultures" face each other—say one Western and one Oriental—and struggle to establish relationships. This has nothing to do with the reality of Europe and the Federal Republic in the 21st century. No one I know belongs to a single, closed cultural area. Our real life has long been transcultural and translocal, beyond origin. Rather, it is important to us to celebrate and enforce the naturalness of hybridity and transculturality. (Langhoff, 2014). My English translation.

By acknowledging the significance of understanding transculturality and hybridity within the German context, postmigrant theater encourages us to examine a society free from marginalizations based on diverse origins and religions. Instead, it presents a locality that grasps the intricacies of a postmigrant society and embraces subjective perspectives within the same urban space (Langhoff, 2011, cited in Florino, 2015). The sociologist Erol Yıldız advocates the use of the term "postmigrant" to examine the adaptive resilience strategies employed in the global arena by generations lacking direct migration encounters. Yıldız anchors this concept in the transformations evident in present-day society. These shifts, explicated through "cosmopolitanism" (see Epilogue), underscore the assimilation of transnational spaces and global allusions into the everyday routines of every individual (Yıldız, 2010; also cited in Florino, 2015). The concept of postmigration illustrates a dynamic that emanates from the theatrical world and serves as a political and social strategy against marginalization rooted in a social resistance to embrace the diversity and transculturality of the contemporary landscape. In this sense, by wrapping up Diéguez theorization on rituality and liminality, postmigrant theater exemplifies how theatricality can go beyond the theater stage, permeating everyday

11 The term *Gastarbeiter*, originating from 1961 onwards, refers to the period when Turkish job-seekers were recruited by German companies based on the agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and Turkey. This marked the beginning of Turkish guest workers' influx into Germany (see Rass, 2023).

life and creating a political space for encounters echoing Turner's *communitas*. These encounters foster connections between communities that share common experiences—in this case, especially between those who are marginalized due to their migration genealogy. The hybrid communities that live in the interstices of cultures and social boundaries serve as a source of inspiration for reflections on liminality as a potential political space and place of possibility for people who are still marginalized in today's societies (Diéguez, 2014).

Connecting Stories: An Art Action from Berlin to Calais

SENSORY SATELLITES¹²



I would like to end this chapter by focusing on my first experience in one of the case studies I conducted and how this experience raised various questions about liminality and the juxtaposition of art and anthropology by questioning the artistic methodology of my first visit to the Dzjanganl with the art action *Connecting Stories*. In doing so, I introduced liminality from an art action approach and reflected beyond the aesthetics produced in the artistic work. Moreover, the inbetween of art and anthropology has helped me to understand different angles of observation, ethnographic reflection “between” these disciplinary boundaries, and a potential contribution to current discourses on border and migration studies and its relations with liminality.

Fragments of the paper “The Jungle de Calais: Entre Liminalidad, Espacio fronterizo y lugar de posibilidades Post(s)” (Garland, 2021b). Original text in Spanish, my English translation.

The decision to go to the Dzjanganl was spontaneous and a kind of collaborative decision. At the end of 2015 I worked in different formal “refugee camps” in Berlin, the NUK (Notunterkunft: emergency accommodation), where the NUK organizers invited my art collective NomadicArt as a volunteer to run art workshops for children, women, and youth. One of the workshops I conducted was *Connecting Stories*, where a group of participants (women, men, and youth) wrote an anonymous letter to a compatriot they didn't know, but knew that the recipient would ideally be a person of the same language (Arabic and/or Farsi), gender, and age. I

12 More information on the *Connecting Stories* project. <https://somewhereinbetween.cargo.site/connecting-stories>

collected these letters and passed them on to the other NUKs in Berlin, where the same process took place. The aim of the workshop was that writing anonymously to an unknown person could facilitate the participant's process of reflection (on a small scale), and that receiving a letter could (in some way) help them to adapt to their new home. In the anonymous letters, participants shared survival situations, feelings, and strategies to adapt to the circumstances of the new territory. Each participant knew that the letters would be scanned for recording and analysis. In the course of developing the initial translations with the help of friends who can read Arabic and Farsi, we realized that the letters generally told of good and bad experiences in the new country (in this case Germany) and their (often traumatic) odyssey from their country of origin. These letters repeatedly described the feeling of being trapped, stuck, caught between past and present, between the memory of the country of origin and life in the present in the new country (mainly in the context of the official refugee centers and the German bureaucracy). These were my first encounters with the concept of liminality, which was described in some letters as a state of limbo within the NUK.

Connecting Stories was the starting point that led me to travel to the Dzjantal in July 2016. At my last workshop at a NUK in Berlin, some participants asked me if I could bring some of their letters to the Dzjantal camp if I went to France. Some workshop participants believed that their families and friends lived there and were unable to get in touch due to a lack of technical and/or digital information (e.g., Facebook or telephone numbers). Here, the artistic workshop of *Connecting Stories* became more complicated and transformed into a possible means of connecting people and family members who could not communicate. This is where being a "postwoman" was transformed into a possible activist role. I remember how we—five participants, a translator friend, and I—sat on the lawn in front of the NUK and talked about this possibility. I explained to them that the art project was not intended to bring people who knew each other into contact (an almost impossible task). Instead, in its anonymous form, it was meant to share experiences with the other compatriots and create a kind of collective thinking that could accompany the process of traveling and inclusion into the new place. The seven people sitting on the lawn (myself included) agreed that I would go to the Dzjantal to deliver anonymous letters to the Syrian and Iranian community and try to get some letters back, without promising to contact relatives. There was hope that the letters would be shared and exchanged in the camp, and there was a chance that the sender and recipient would match. I received 20 letters from adults, teenagers, and children.

When I arrived at the Dzjantal at the beginning of July (2016), I asked where I could find the Syrian and Iranian communities, knowing that the Dzjantal was segregated by communities and languages. My guides were volunteers and people I met along the way; they pointed me in the right direction. Walking through the streets of the settlement, I passed different communities: Sudanese, Afghan, and Iranian. The last two were very close to the Syrian community as they described themselves as part of the same community (a volunteer I met on the way told me

this). I managed to find the Syrian community and their leader, who spoke fluent English. Thanks to a Bolivian volunteer who lived with them for more than four months, I was very well received because I was from South America as well. The leader kept repeating that most of the “guerrilla” volunteers were Latin Americans. I believe that without this territorial connection I would not have been able to enter the Syrian organization and interact with the leader and his comrades, who called each other “guerrilleros” (in Spanish), as they defended themselves against the French police and the nightly internal disturbances. As we chatted over a cup of tea in the leader’s home with his companions and the volunteer, I explained why I was there and the *Connecting Stories* project. When I told them that I was an artist and that this project was an artistic intervention/action, their expectant attitude changed to a more confident and relaxed one. The group we were in turned into a kind of pseudo-therapeutic conversation in Arabic, English, and Spanish. The group shared their stories inside the camp and their experiences at the border with England, which they could not cross. This is where the letter-writing process began to happen intuitively. At this point, I received five letters addressed to their compatriots in Berlin and handed over the 20 letters I had brought with me. (Garland, 2021b: 77–81)

Since starting my PhD research, I have had the opportunity to take a step back and reflect on my actions and artistic methods from the first experience in the Dz-jangal, which allowed me to position myself in relation to what happened almost seven years ago. My artistic practice at the time was characterized by a pseudo-ethnographic approach, which allowed me to begin a journey of exploring alternative narratives of people living in these borderlands—stories that could be told through letters exchanged between the inhabitants themselves. Collecting and exchanging letters and then collecting them again became a kind of qualitative dataset that formed the basis for my initial reflections on the concept of liminality and its state of inbetween. When I look at the art action *Connecting Stories* again, I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, this action emerged from an art workshop sponsored by the German government on the topic of “integration,” which was heavily criticized in Berlin at the time (2016), both sociopolitically and artistically. The artistic community, especially my fellow artists, questioned these integration methods, which we saw instead as an “adaptation” to German society; but from our precarious situation as artists, it was a convenient income at the time, which created conflicting feelings and ethical questions when we organized the art workshops. Without any in-depth knowledge of the psychological and anthropological aspects of dealing with these communities, many artists began to conduct various workshops with a community that had a forced and traumatic history of migration, working with participants who had survived an odyssey full of obstacles, trauma, grief, and suffering. I do not want to romanticize and celebrate our actions; looking back, I emphasize the issues of power and vulnerability between the artist and the participant. Instead, I want to make known the context in which we lived, particularly the circumstances that led me to pursue this art action in

the Dzjanganl. My privilege of being able to cross borders allowed me to become a postwoman; an artifact of mobility and information exchange.

It is not easy to analyze an art action and its underlying methodology from an ethical perspective, especially when the artist collaborates directly with the community, as is the case with “participatory art” and “social art,” where there is a social science critique of the way artists perceive and relate to the artwork, the community, and the ethical processes of this collaboration. These artistic practices are often perceived as superficial and extractivist, and in many cases lead to complex power dynamics and a degradation of the social and urban fabric of a place. (Garland, 2021b: 86–87) [*Considering the reflections already made in the first section of this chapter on the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, Connecting Stories has several dimensions that illustrate the complex relation and potencial collaboration between art and anthropology.*]

Connecting Stories was initially motivated by the desire to connect people who were unable to communicate with each other due to the circumstances of the border crisis, government policies, and isolation in the camps and NUK; then this art project crossed borders out of the motivation of the participants and myself, initially traveling to Calais. My first motivation was the idea of the art workshop as a possible creative, playful, and quasi-therapeutic space in the face of the humanitarian emergency that Berlin and Europe have been experiencing since 2015. Berlin in particular was unprepared to deal with this so-called “integration,” and the cultural and art scene felt the need to engage in this cause because there was no infrastructure for recreation and socializing within the NUK based on regulations that denied residents access to recreational and social spaces with each other. The Berlin artist communities began to set up various types of art workshops, many of them funded by the German state itself, which also contributed to the problematic idea of “integration” with regard to the migration context. I was in addition motivated to understand more deeply what was happening in these places from the perspectives of the people living there. At that time (2015), there was only information in the European press about the perspectives of political and state actors that spoke of a “migration crisis” rather than a border or humanitarian emergency, leaving aside the colonial history and historical questions of why these communities migrated to Europe. (Garland, 2021b: 87)

[*In this book*], I will not go into detail about the humanitarian conflicts within the NUK, or about the reality in the Dzjanganl at the time; you can find some brief stories from my fieldwork in Calais (2016 and 2022) [*in Chapter 1*], and there are also many academic books that sensitively and profoundly address the humanitarian issue from the direct perspective of the inhabitants of the Dzjanganl, such as *Voices from the “Jungle”: Stories from the Calais Refugee Camp* (Soye, 2019), and *Humans of Calais: Migration from the Perspective of Migrants* (Singh et al., 2016). These books make an important contribution to the postcolonial discourse on cross-border issues from the perspective of people-in-transit. (Garland, 2021b: 87)

Connecting Stories intertwines the complexity between aesthetics and ethics due to the power relationship between the artist-tutor and the “migrant”-participant and a potential aesthetic extractivism given the dramatic situation of these communities. In general, the ethical boundaries in social art and participatory art are blurred and can easily be crossed, leading to their weakening. Based on this ethical conflict, after my first experience in the Dzjanganl—one of the reasons for starting my PhD in Anthropology and Migration Studies—I became interested in ethical issues in social art, which led me to stage a one-off exhibition of the project in May 2019, thanks to an invitation from Lite-Haus Gallery Berlin. At first, I didn’t know how to exhibit this project. How could I visually represent my experience as an artist-postwoman and simultaneously the particular participants’ narratives? How could I present the findings of inbetweenness and limbo within the context of the border regime? I didn’t want to display the content of the letters, as, although I had the consent of all the participants, I already felt that I was about to cross the ethical line. Their letters were going to be part of an art exhibition in a context alien to their nature; also, not involving the participants in the curatorial process as a collaborative process was going to trigger layers of appropriation and aesthetic capitalization of their personal migratory experiences. At that time, I already had almost 300 letters, as this action was reproduced over three years between Germany, France, Italy, Turkey, Syria, and Chile, resulting in significant material which could theoretically introduce the state of transit and inbetweenness of these communities in the face of the border regime.

I invited my good friend, the anthropologist and artist Myriam Perrot, to curate the exhibition with me. In a series of exchanges of letters resonating aesthetically with the action itself, we reflected on the great challenge of representation in the social sciences and participatory art projects, using *Connecting Stories* as a case study and thinking about how to exhibit these participatory projects publicly. One of the first letters between us became the curatorial text, in which Perrot reflected on the moral responsibility and agency of participatory art projects through *Connecting Stories*:

The questions I’d like to share with you in this letter are those I generally ask myself when I’m confronted by projects that fit within the contemporary art genre of “social practice art” or “participatory art.” By this term I mean a variety of artistic endeavors which have in common the use of the social as the main material for the artwork. It could be that artists directly address social issues as part of their artwork, or the collaboration with social minorities is constitutive of it. For instance, since 2015 there has been a noticeable growing response from art world actors to the “refugee crisis,” the latter acting as a kind of goldmine for inspiration and potential appropriation from the first. When I say “appropriation” here, I don’t mean it as something necessarily wrong. I believe creative processes happen through processes of appropriation. Though when we think of these projects from an an-

thropological, critical perspective, then there is an inevitable set of questions we might need to take into account. They concern the positions occupied by the different actors of the project (the artist and other participants), and the various interests crossing such situations. To me, they are ultimately questions about power relations, moral responsibility and agency. (Garland and Perrot, 2019)

I began to discuss with Perrot various questions that would later lead me to a further understanding of the complex relation between aesthetics and ethics: What are the various interests crossing the artistic collaborative endeavor? How are they negotiated in the first place? And whose interest is the artwork ultimately serving? Who is profiting from such an artistic process? What are the power relations at play within the realization of the artwork up to its exhibition and merchandising? (see the complete curatorial letter exchange in Garland and Perrot, 2019;¹³ see further Perrot, 2017). Based on these initial questions, I decided to limit myself to mapping my research process, documenting my routes between countries, and numbering the compilation and distribution of the letters by creating a wall installation of empty letters. I wanted to show my journey as an artist-postwoman and share my concerns between aesthetics and ethics, which prevented me from continuing to produce artistic materials for this exhibition. In retrospect, this was already a kind of multimodal autoethnography in which, by using the text format (the letter exchange between Perrot and myself) and mapping this art action, I revealed the great challenge of ethical issues in participatory art and social art. Through this first experience, I also initiated questions about how to exhibit ethnographically and how the exhibition format itself can be a multimodal method that deepens the questions of the ethnographic field process, which is discussed further in Chapter 4 of this book, describing the different artifacts and multimodal forms I used in the methodological part of this research.

The art action *Connecting Stories* marked the beginning of my journey into anthropology, delving into the ethical challenges inherent in aesthetic processes. The complex and potential interplay between art and anthropology explores questions at the crossroads of practice and theory, as well as aesthetics and ethics. Despite the complexity of this relationship, I became aware of a very strong potential collaboration between the two disciplines. In Chapter 4, I propose artistic practices as a method for multimodal ethnography, highlighting the potential of experimentation and openness through sensorial and ethical modes that challenge the violence embedded in traditional ethnographic methods.

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

CHAPTER 4

Artistic Artifacts

In this chapter, I propose artistic practices as multimodal. I delve into today's multimodal anthropology debate by bringing my artistic practices used in this research—sound, collective listening, and critical walking—as methodological tools for ethnography. I explore their multi-sensory, collaborative and affective dimensions to engage with critical, political, and decolonial approaches beyond traditional ethnographic display methods.

4.1 What Is Multimodal Anthropology? Re-thinking the “Modes” through Artistic Practices

Since my first presentations of this research project in various German academic contexts within the social sciences, I was aware of the challenges my work would face in the years ahead—particularly in terms of validation, evaluation, and institutional recognition. My initial methods, based on artistic practices developed through my earlier art projects—such as soundscapes, art actions, and participatory art—caused discomfort among some academic colleagues. They were perceived as “too arty,” raising concerns about the “superficiality” of the affective and sensorial dimensions of art, and the ethical challenges that emerge when artistic practices engage with the social (see Chapter 3). Later, in conversations with the anthropologist (and my supervisor) Regina Römhild, I came to understand that “too arty” carries a different meaning for anthropologists and artists. For anthropologists, it signals the risk of artists conducting research “just for the sake of experimentation,” without the aim of understanding social phenomena. For me, however, the expression “too arty” pointed to the fact that my research moved beyond traditional ethnographic methods—such as text-based formats, interviews, and participant observation—toward sensory experiences that connect body and mind, including sound and critical walking art, marking an early engagement with what is now discussed as multimodality.

From this anthropological perspective, I began to question the interpretation that emerges when anthropologists “invent” an image of the artist. The mere as-

sumption that artistic practices might be “superficial” carries the danger of “othering,” something central to criticism within the discipline. This brings me back to the tensions between art and anthropology described in Chapter 3, where the ethical challenges defined by anthropology remain tied to the idea that art exists only on the “aesthetic surface” of the issue under investigation (I will return with this in the following sections).

Looking for more-than-textual ways to deal with my research was a risky move for traditional forms of ethnographic methods, especially in a German academic context. Before 2017, the ethnographic texts distributed in institutes for European ethnology and anthropology in Berlin universities were mainly from a traditional normative and standardized approach of ethnography, like the handbooks or manuals of ethnography, leaving aside the inventive and creative anthropological experiments developed in the 1980s mainly in the USA and the UK (see Chapter 3). Subsequently, in some German anthropological communities and laboratories—such as Stadtlabor at the IfEE, an academic laboratory for reflection on urban anthropology in conjunction with science and technology studies (STS)—began to address new forms of ethnography engaging in multi-form documentation and research. It was no longer only visual anthropology, where photography and film were the basis of this sub-discipline; still, other modalities were emerging, such as sound, comics, collaborative actions, performative processes, technological interventions, and the creation of “devices,” which were already known in the English-speaking sector but, in a German context, were “innovative” ways of dealing with the fieldwork. Today, the term “multimodal anthropology” (see Collins and Durrington, 2017) is already recognized in various academic circles, anthropological journals, and university courses as a sub-discipline of today’s anthropology. The “multi” has now opened a spectrum of more-than-text modalities in social sciences methodology¹.

In this sense, multimodal anthropology highlights the quality of experiment, innovation, invention, and creation in the field. It provides a space between the inventive freedom of creative strategies and its academization and scientification, framed in an era of hyper-technology and digitalization reflected in the varieties of technologies used in the field. These “new” methodological forms reopen the desired window to bring artistic practices into anthropology, which the discipline had closed since the 1980s by ignoring the seriousness, effectiveness, and affectivity of arts, literature, and creative processes. The anthropologists James Clifford and George E. Marcus, in their renowned book *Writing Culture* (1986), were amongst the few in the 1980s who said that anthropology needed to rethink issues of representation, as it

1 As discussed in Chapter 3, even as multimodality gain acceptance in anthropology, their institutionalization remains contested. Current debates focus on how to value and validate multimodal work in contrast to traditional text formats, and on efforts to find common standards for academic evaluation (see Criado, Farias, and Schröder, 2022).

was a very classical, conventional, and hierarchical way of describing culture; they also proposed other forms of research in which artistic practices, and aesthetic and sensory processes were an opportunity for the discipline to escape the traditional canons of capturing the field of study. Once again, the possibility today for artistic practices and creative processes to be part of anthropological methods creates a space for artists, practitioners, designers, and cultural producers to enter the scientific academic field—specifically in the social sciences—but also raises questions about disciplinary hierarchies, academization, and valorization (see Chapter 3).

Building on this, what I perceived during my first years navigating German academic social sciences alongside my artistic practices is that it was very difficult to be fully part of anthropology. One of the multimodal trends I noticed at the beginning was that, rather than being recognized as methodological approaches in their own right, artistic practices were often framed simply as the adoption of techniques, forms, and modes drawn from the arts and creative disciplines—such as sound installation, video art, artistic photography, performance, collaborative art, art workshops, design outputs, and urban performative interventions—without fully acknowledging their role in knowledge production. In some cases, it still happens that the artist, designer, and cultural practitioner are perceived as providing a “service” for the anthropologist and their research—the old colonial patterns of anthropology as “a curiosity turned into a discipline” (Trouillot, 2003) in this scenario reemerge. This specific use of multimodal artistic approaches mirrors the old idea of the anthropologist’s curiosity, characterized by a fascination with, and sometimes even an exoticization of, artistic practices. In these projects, depending on the contextual framework, hierarchical distinctions in knowledge production persist, with theorization having greater validation than the practices of creative, sensorial, and inventive processes, even though they are labeled as “transdisciplinary projects,” highlighting the rich idea of interweaving theory and practice. In such instances, creative production remains positioned as a “result” or “outcome” of the research, diverging from the transdisciplinary notion of a collaborative and transversal approach to conducting research and generating knowledge. However, over time, I became aware that in other types of projects, multimodality is not merely about producing outputs or providing artistic services for research; rather, it becomes a process that actively participates in and transforms the production of anthropological knowledge itself.

Volume 121 of the journal *American Anthropologist* published the article “Introduction: Multimodal Anthropology and the Politics of Invention” by anthropologists Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón (2019). This was one of the first texts to conceptualize in more detail the notion of multimodality as no longer a mere outcome, representation, or dissemination of anthropological knowledge. It goes beyond this, involving different modes of doing anthropology and contributing to a “politics of invention” where the anthropologist moves away from the text to

produce multi-form contributions that shift from representational and descriptive to performative and inventive anthropology. Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón reimagine an anthropology that has to distance itself from traditional forms of authorship, scholarship, representation, and academic publishing to experiment with inventive forms in the field and new modalities of collaboration with communities and participants. This draws from the analyses of anthropologists Samuel Gerald Collins and Matthew Durlington in their paper “Multimodality: An Invitation” (2017), published in the *American Anthropologist*, where they emphasize that multimodality stresses new modes of research in the field in which the anthropologist is experimenting with different ways of relating to the community, public, students, and colleagues from other disciplines. In other words, “modality” is not necessarily new technological uses in the field but somewhat different “modes” and means of operation, which empowers the rethinking of anthropological practices per se (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón, 2019).

The (re)turn of “new” research modalities, which once served mainly as a support or adjunct to anthropological practices, are now increasingly valued as research modes in their own right—approaches that understand the research process through and with diverse methods of experimentation (Criado, Farias, and Schröder, 2022). Multimodality creates a space for testing, sharing, and documenting these methods of experimentation and invention, which have always existed within ethnography but often went unspoken or undocumented due to their more-than-textual nature, and thus found little place in anthropology’s textual modes of description and representation. As noted by anthropologists Tomás Sánchez Criado and Adolfo Estalella (2023) in *What Is an Ethnographic Inventory?*—the introductory text of Xcol inventory, an open-access platform for cataloging, archiving, and documenting inventive, creative, and artistic processes within the anthropological field—ethnography has always been, in itself, an act of invention. Yet this inventive quality has often gone unrecorded because it exists outside conventional text formats, resulting in the loss of many modalities that ethnographers have “discovered” or “invented” in the field. In this context, the growing interest in multimodal practices not only acknowledges these inventive processes but also makes it possible to initiate, catalog, and archive them—mapping connections and identifying affinities with other creative and experimental techniques across disciplines, including research-creation and artistic practices (I will return to this point in the next section).

Understanding ethnography as “an act of invention” is closely tied to the diverse challenges anthropologists encounter in the field. Anthropologists face obstacles which cannot be documented and described only through fieldnotes and ethnographic vignettes, especially when they involve the collaborative processes and participatory observations that today’s public and engaged anthropologists seek to foster. There are not enough scripts or methods for these collaborative relationships

to be built within the field. Criado and Estalella conceive of ethnography as more than a method but rather as “an act of invention,” where creative, inventive processes are the means by which material is collected and then analyzed anthropologically. These inventive acts are usually not documented in standard ethnographies, such as the handbooks or manuals of ethnography. Criado and Estalella highlight how, in the past, in the field, there were empirical processes including gestures, creative acts, and inventive interventions, while afterward they were ignored as the ethnographer was seen only as an “observer” and “describer” of society. It is from this observation that I wonder whether the erasure of these inventive processes throughout anthropological history has been one of various attempts to distance the discipline from creative, affective, and sensorial acts in order to validate its scientific modality and status. This reflection aligns with Criado and Estalella’s engagement with the notion of “invention” proposed by the anthropologist Roy Wagner, who, in his book *The Invention of Culture* (1975), considered a classic of ethnography and theory, acknowledges invention as an integral element of anthropological methods, proposing that rather than “discovering” the cultures they study, anthropologists “invent” them. Criado and Estalella propose ethnography as an inventive process recognizing the creative, playful, and experimental aspects experienced by the researcher when engaged in fieldwork.

Multimodal Invention: Where Is the Politics?

During one of my conversations with Römhild about the themes of this chapter, she raised an important concern: multimodality is at risk of becoming “too arty” when it relies solely on experimentation and invention as its *modus operandi* in the fieldwork. For her, the enthusiasm for exploring novel forms of experimentation may devolve into a mere fascination with adopting “innovative” methods for “the sake of novelty,” possibly leading to the undesired “superficiality” of art practices often criticized by anthropology. This delicate balance between becoming a mere “artifact” or “device” for fieldwork could divert the researcher from uncovering crucial insights within the field. Römhild raises a pertinent question about why experimenting with new methods in ethnography is important rather than adhering to traditional methodological forms like interviews or participatory observation. This inquiry doesn’t seek to devalue innovative and novel approaches of multimodality but emphasizes challenging the politics of engaging with these new research forms within the community under study.

Building on this concern, the discussion turns toward the broader context in which these methods operate. Thanks to the recent influence of decolonial, postcolonial, indigenous, and feminist scholars in the multimodal debate, the political dimension of alternative ways of knowing and producing knowledge in academia has become a key component. Beyond incorporating “innovative” more-than-text ele-

ments in research, the multisensory and affective aspects of these discourses inspire a shift from traditional anthropology, characterized by a distant and observational stance, to a politically engaged researcher advocating for social change. The rise in transacademic and transdisciplinary projects today to break with the problematic past of researching “about the other” present opportunities for pioneer research approaches.

For example, by attempting to cross the boundaries of traditional academic research, the new notions of public and collaborative anthropology offer a sociopolitical strategy for breaking down barriers within the discipline. By attempting to disrupt and question its own research hierarchies, anthropology is shedding light on significant social issues by promoting more public and collaborative debates to drive social transformation (Borofsky, 2004). Looking at social problems in ways other than hierarchical academic and scientific forms of knowledge production engages with the non-academic public, contributing significantly to the discipline’s self-reflectivity, especially in the context of an anthropology that focuses on deconstructing the notion of the “other.” In this sense, looking at multimodality as “merely” formal inventive process risks falling into a “superficiality,” prioritizing formality, functionality, and aesthetics over the social and political motivations inherent in anthropological research projects that aim at social change (Römhild, 2023).

Nevertheless, this “superficiality,” where formality, sensoriality, and affectivity prevail as a starting form of engagement in the field, raises a crucial question for me: does this inventive and creative form strip multimodality of its political power, reducing it to an experimentation “too arty” for its own sake? This is where Criado and Estalella’s position becomes relevant. For them, rethinking ethnography as an inventive process does not neglect the social and political aspects of anthropology but, on the contrary, opens a window to making it even more socially engaged. The “politics of invention” lies in recognizing the transformative potential of multimodal approaches as inclusive social research methodologies. By seeking new ways to engage with the community, researchers can uncover connections that remain hidden through traditional ethnographic perspectives. Adopting diverse forms of participation in the fieldwork not only broadens the scope of the research but also fosters tangible actions aimed at social change, transcending the often distant academic engagement and activism on social issues.

Drawing from this, current debates on multimodality increasingly incorporate decolonial, indigenous, and feminist perspectives. These perspectives highlight the political importance of producing alternative knowledge that challenges colonial scientific paradigms. This shift owes much to collaborative efforts between scholars, artists, and cultural practitioners, who offer alternative avenues for knowledge dissemination beyond conventional academic and scientific formats. This collaborative emergence speaks to a multisensory affectivity that challenges the idea of “innovation” as part of multimodality. By incorporating decolonial, postcolonial, and

feminist perspectives, socially engaged artistic practices find a space to contribute methodologically to anchoring multimodality in political and affective meaning, preventing it from falling into mere apolitical innovation. In this way, I highlight how multisensory and affective practices actively confront Western norms of “representation.” These dimensions are essential in maintaining the political engagement of multimodal approaches.

Returning to my concerns about the idea of being “too arty,” I see this critique as stemming from Western art ideals rooted in colonial aesthetic standards. Such critiques risk prioritizing surface-level beauty over deeper engagement with social, political, and cultural concerns. Socially engaged artistic practices (where my own artistic practice is based), by contrast, maintain a critical lens on the aesthetics and sublimations of art. Many of these practices don’t “fit” neatly into today’s Western, postcapitalist art scene, which is dominated by galleries, museums, and curators primarily concerned with the economic, entertainment, and heritage aspects of art. Artists who explore social themes often find themselves on unpredictable terrain within an art world governed by Western aesthetic standards. They frequently grapple with social and political issues related to anthropology, fostering potential collaborations between the two disciplines. These artists navigate the turbulent paths shaped by colonial legacies of representation and Western aesthetic norms, aiming to address the challenges of postcapitalist societies and the negative impacts of imperial globalization, as articulated in the concept of “decolonial aesthetics” (Mignolo and Vázquez, 2013). As Walter Mignolo and Ronaldo Vázquez write, the aim of decolonial aesthetics “is not to produce feelings of beauty or sublimity, but of sadness, indignation, regret, hope, and determination to change things in the future.” In this context, I turn to decolonial aesthetics as a framework for unpacking the complex interplay between *aesthesis*—the sensory and emotional dimensions of experience—and *aesthetics*—the philosophical Western inquiry into beauty. This distinction, I believe, lies at the core of anthropology’s recurring concerns about the perceived superficiality of the “arty” in multimodal work.

In his paper “Decolonial Aesthetics: Collective Creative Practice in Progress,” Raul Moarquench Ferrera-Balanquet (2011), a scholar, artist, and media activist, describes *aesthesis* as “an unelaborated elementary awareness of stimulation, a ‘sensation of touch’ ... closely connected to the processes of perception.” *Aesthetics*, on the other hand, is defined “as a philosophical branch that focuses on the study of beauty as a rational investigation about existence, knowledge, and ethics” (Ferrera-Balanquet, 2011: 89). The dominance of Western aesthetics has erased the importance of *aesthesis*, perpetuating the colonization of artistic expression. Today, there is an urgent need to dismantle this colonial legacy and liberate *aesthesis*. Socially concerned artists, including artists from the so-called Global South, draw inspiration from the legacies of the Bandung Conference (1955) and the Non-

Aligned Movement (1961),² imagining other art worlds beyond the colonial, contributing to the vision of a “decolonial aesthetics” (Ferrera-Balanquet, 2011). From this perspective, artistic practices based on decolonial aesthetics become a powerful counterpoint to the superficiality and apoliticization that can impact multimodal research. By focusing on *aesthesis*—the sensorial, affective, and embodied dimensions of the experience—these practices shift the focus from aesthetic formalism to deeper, more politically engaged modes of interaction. In this way, they not only open up alternative avenues for knowledge production but also forge spaces for sensitivity, collaboration, and self-reflexivity in the field.

Therefore, as will be discussed in the following paragraphs, my great interest is in looking at *research-creation*—the methodological practice of conducting academic research through artistic processes—as a key role in multimodal debates by offering an academic articulation of sensoriality and affectivity. Research-creation emphasizes thinking “with” and “through” *aesthesis*, highlighting the affective and sensory aspect of the research, in contrast to the purely cognitive and rational forms inherent in the sciences. In this light, “thinking through making” (Yalouri, 2022), already discussed in Chapter 3, can be read as a “politics of creation,” resonating closely with the “politics of invention” proposed in multimodal ethnography.

By embracing experimentation, free from the moral traditional aesthetic frameworks, artistic practices invite researchers into unexpected and accidental moments. This openness fosters greater sensitivity and empathy with the environment, allowing ethnographers to perceive nuances and complexities that conventional methods and theory might overlook. Moreover, centering *aesthesis* in the fieldwork can help dismantle colonial biases embedded in academic research by moving away from rigid, hierarchical methodologies toward more inclusive, collaborative, and politically engaged approaches. In essence, by highlighting the creative, sensorial, and effective potential of artistic practices, researchers can transcend the limitations of superficiality and apoliticality, forging new pathways for knowledge production that challenge the colonial structures still present when one is doing academic and scientific research. My proposal here is that artistic practices working through the lens of *aesthesis* are essential for the future of multimodality in the social sciences and beyond.

2 As Fidel Castro emphasized in 1979, the task of the Non-Aligned Movement is to guarantee “the national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of the non-aligned countries” in their “struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism and all forms of foreign aggression, occupation, domination, interference or hegemony, as well as against great power and bloc politics.” See Fidel Castro speech on October 12, 1979. Latin American network information center, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110611014358/http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1979/19791012>

Approaching the Field through Research-Creation

It is within this broader commitment to *aesthesis* that research-creation offers a particularly generative framework. As a methodology, it merges artistic exploration and expression with academic inquiry, promoting knowledge and innovation through creative and scholarly practices. It engages critically in diverse media or art forms beyond performance, technological development, or educational curricula creation. Research-creation focuses more on processes and *aesthesis* than on outcomes of communication, operating as a speculative, future-oriented practice and an invented relational technique (Springgay and Truman, 2016). The artists and scholars Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman (2016) argue that research-creation is the complex intersection of artistic practice, theoretical concepts, and research: “It is an experimental practice that cannot be anticipated or determined beforehand.”

It is transdisciplinary and is used by artists, designers and culture producers, who incorporate a hybrid form of artistic practice between arts and science; academics attuned to the role of arts and creativity in their own areas of expertise; and educators interested in developing curriculum and pedagogy based on cultural production. (Springgay and Truman, 2016)

This flexibility and openness naturally raise questions about how research-creation might fall within academic criteria, and how this methodology can address the complex intertwining between creative, artistic, and scientific academic production. Research-creation in scholarship criteria is a space of analytical knowledge production, where the artist or practitioner must negotiate problem settings, which in artistic and creative practices is usually addressed through the “making of things” (Cohen, 2015). This practical “making” of research-creation as a mode of producing knowledge is the connecting crossroads that multimodal ethnography seeks to achieve with the notion of “inventing.” Negotiating problems through inventive and creative modalities are present in research-creation. These are considered expansive and suggestive, operating by delimiting the research process, offering opportunities to invent, create, and produce any event. As well, the idea of looking for “more possibilities” to counteract framings, borders, rules and parameters that the scientists seek in their research methods. Another core aspect is the notion of “creating problems,” referring to the fact that research-creation is not a practice that pretends to describe, explain, or solve problems. On the contrary, they are “events” that create conceptualizations that further problematize the research (Springgay and Truman, 2016). Lastly, the socio-ethical aspect of research-creation that brings it closer to the social sciences lies in the practice of “observing what arises,” which refers to reconsidering the concepts, forms, and modes that emerge from the re-

search-creation process (Springgay and Truman, 2016). This involves understanding the work from political and ethical perspectives, reflecting on how it is created and invented, and on the effects it has on the environments it seeks to engage, while emphasizing modes of representation rather than simply representing what drives the creation.

This juxtaposition between the inventive, ethical, and processual is where anthropology and artistic practice find a particularly productive meeting point, where the synergy between research-creation and material, affective, and sensory processes can be navigated effectively. Criado and Estalella propose ethnography as an “inventive process,” recognizing the creative, playful, and experimental aspects experienced in the fieldwork. These aspects are the significant points of encounter with the research-creation of the artist, practitioner, and cultural producer at the moment of producing and creating works, and artistic and cultural experiences. The delicate balance between the inventive process and simple appeal represents a crucial aspect of the collaboration between art and anthropology. Anthropology can contribute reflexivity and ethical considerations, while artistic practices can offer experimentation and expansive modes of engaging with the fieldwork.

In this way, research-creation becomes a hybrid practice and a methodological stance that invites more reflexive and politically engaged forms of multimodal research. Through an open and experimental attitude, research-creation cultivates deeper levels of holistic engagement with the research topics. By embracing the unknown and allowing for uncertainty outside traditional methodological parameters, research-creation can create space for new forms of understanding to emerge, offering an opportunity for multimodal research not to fall into undesirable “superficiality” and “apolitization.” This mutual support contributes to the validation and academization of both.

Seen in this light, the potential for research-creation to shape the future of multimodal ethnography becomes both methodological and political. Therefore, in this chapter, using my own artistic methods, I propose a “politics of creation” as an expansive form for a future multimodal anthropology. This proposal leads to the practical question of how the politics of creation might be implemented in the fieldwork. The following section turns to the idea of testing *artistic artifacts* as a way of applying research-creation’s principles during ethnographic work, exploring how inventive and creative gestures can challenge traditional ethnography and, in turn, politicize today’s multimodal anthropology.

4.2 Testing “Artistic Artifacts” in the Field

How can the researcher ‘let go’ of their preconceived assumptions about the social and actually listen to the fieldwork through an inventive and creative gesture?

How can the ethnographer move away from traditional ethnographic methods rooted in the colonial and look for alternative ways of getting a deep and holistic understanding with an open and experimental attitude? (Garland, 2024b: 1).

Throughout this research, these questions have stayed, especially during my return to the fieldwork with an ethnographer lens. Various external factors, such as the evictions at two of my study sites—the Dzjungal and Tiburtina—the pandemic lockdown and subsequent regulations, and the social upheavals in Chile prompted me to explore alternative methodological approaches to data collection beyond the conventional ethnographic methods of participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. However, I wanted to depart from these methodological frameworks that focus on a person-centered approach as the main research method, and thus address the important issue within anthropology regarding the power dynamic between the “researcher-academic” and the “subject under study.” As outlined in the Prologue, this book challenges the person-centered approach as the primary method for researching places where migration movements and conflict arise from contemporary border regulations. Instead, I have chosen to focus on territory and urban regeneration to examine how the Dzjungal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales have engaged with these territorial and urban spaces and how they have given social meaning to abandoned urban spaces through the creation of alternative placemaking. Through various artistic-ethnographic methodological experiments, I seek alternative approaches to connect with these places. In doing so, the focus shifts away from an emphasis on individuals toward a relational and holistic perspective that encompasses places, people, and non-human entities.

Deciding to move away from the person-centered research encouraged me to take a more experimental approach. By letting go of preconceived assumptions of migration study where the “migrant body” is the center of the research, I was able to return to the idea of “listening” to the fieldwork. This requires a mindset that encourages experimentation and openness, without predetermined positions of interest. To achieve this, I had to move away from the classical forms of person-centered ethnography. This shift toward a more expansive attitude allowed me to discover alternative ways of dealing with the case studies: my practical approach to the fieldwork moved closer to the research-creation methodology, which, as previously discussed, has multiple points of contact with today’s multimodal discourse and its notion of a “politics of invention.” By incorporating research-creation, I experimented *through* and *with* materials, techniques, and forms that go beyond mere theorization and representation. In the following section, I detail my experimentation with a selection of key methods that I used in this research, encompassing sound, listening, and walking as means of documentation and artistic creation (I will not delve into all the different methods, artworks, and experiments conducted in this research, which can be viewed and listened to on this book’s website). The methodological artistic

artifacts detailed below serve as an example of “thinking by doing” that challenges thinking *through* and *with* decolonial aesthetics, opening up other ways of producing knowledge in which affectivity and sensoriality come into play, contributing to a political expansion of the more-than-textual research in which today’s multimodality is engaging.

The Politics of Sound and Listening

Text fragments from the sonic-essay: “Attempting to Decolonize Oneself: Sonorities between the ‘West’ and the ‘South’” (Garland, 2024a).

SENSORY SATELLITES³



Sound and listening have enjoyed in recent decades a significantly growing interest in many disciplines outside the arts, music, and performance. Social scientists, anthropologists working with sound, science, and technology scholars, and literary and cultural researchers, among others, have become interested in sound and listening as an enriching avenue of research within the academy. For instance, one of the pioneers of the anthropology of sound, Steven Feld (2004), has taken sound into ethnography. Through sound, listening, recording, and post-production, specific lived experience acquires a very distinct tangibility (Feld, 2004). Sound, with its potential for acoustic-spatial imagination and situational experience, delivers a unique quality of environment awareness, which, through composer and accordionist Pauline Oliveros’ (2005) method of “deep listening,” makes it possible to experience “sound-temporal spaces” (Ndikung, 2020). These “spaces” differ from visual forms as captured in images. Oliveros (2005: 5) formulates the method: “Deep Listening involves going below the surface of what is heard, expanding to the whole field of sound while finding focus. This is the way to connect with the acoustic environment, all that inhabits it, and all that there is.”

Sound, for its part, allows listeners to understand, feel, and sense our surroundings with an auditory consciousness as a means to not only document and shape reality, but also to amplify it. Sound and the technological power of recording allow us to register and amplify sonorous experiences that we cannot hear simply through

3 To read and listen to the sonic-essay *Attempting to Decolonize Oneself: Sonorities between the ‘West’ and the ‘South’* see: <https://somewhereinbetween.cargo.site/Between-West-and-the-South>

our ears and that would have gone unnoticed by our hearing. From a decolonial perspective, as the art theorist and curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung described in a 2020 seminar entitled “Space–Time Continuum of Sonority: Deep Listening Sessions,” listening becomes a political act of sound and voice amplification, a strategy to combat the omnipresence of the image, especially nowadays, when the hyper-speed of social media is dominated by the visual. Sound and deep listening turn into instruments that allow one to hear the “marginalized” that usually go unheard, becoming a political practice of listening through situated knowledge. Here, this practice opens reflections on how we listen today and whether it is possible to decolonize our listening and thus overcome the hegemonic power structures dictating the way we listen. (Garland, 2023)

This seminar was the starting point for my interest in experimenting with art and ethnographic research methods that involve sound and listening. For my PhD research, which investigates stories of places and people in a migratory setting of permanent precariousness and vulnerability due to border regimes, the question of how to represent “the other” has been vital. I did not want to reproduce visualizations of the “migrant body,” especially since my work is situated within the discipline of anthropology. The mainstream narrative of contemporary migration based on the vulnerability and victimization of the “migrant body” via television and social media, through video and photography has been an essential reason for my search for other ways of engaging with migratory experiences. Thus, I began to experiment with sound, from collecting ambient sounds, creating sound archives, recording sound walks, soundscapes and seascapes, and curating collaborative listening sessions as part of my fieldwork, thus going beyond the classic ethnographic methods. (Garland, 2024a: 25)

Recording Oceans

SENSORY SATELLITES⁴

My interest in sound and listening as a way of approaching fieldwork was echoed by my attention with the sounds of non-human entities such as oceans, elements that were present not only in my encounters with places and people in the fieldwork that had a connection to the oceans, but also in encounters with non-human beings where the sound of the ocean became an important aspect that helped me to interconnect these (hi)stories in a sensory and affective way (Garland, 2024b). For this chapter, I delved into the sonic archives I recorded during this research. The collected sounds guided me on the main question of this research: how the places of

4 To listen to the sound piece **Oceanic Memory** through the QR code, see section 1.2 from Chapter 1. Or click on <https://soundcloud.com/someinbetween/oceanic-memory-becoming-water-oceans-and-seas>

the Dzjanganl, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales—so-called non-places—evolved into social places, and how the concepts of liminality and inbetweenness might play a role in their transformation.

Inspired by field-recording artists⁵ and ocean-sound artists such as Nick Kuepfer⁶ and Jana Winderen,⁷ who pay close attention to maritime sound environments and small underwater animals, during the fieldwork travels between 2021 and 2022 I recorded ambient and underwater soundscapes of the Mediterranean Sea, the English Channel, and the Pacific Ocean. I was interested in archiving these tones not only for their poetic and material quality but also for the symbolic value that the sea represents to the people of these places. For example, the Mediterranean and the English Channel often represent ongoing and recurring tragedies and dangerous journeys in the migratory narratives of the inhabitants of Tiburtina and the Dzjanganl in Italy and France. Likewise, past colonial trade voyages in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans are present, albeit deep down, in the narratives of Afro-Caribbean communities who want to reach northern Chile to set up settlements informally in abandoned areas of the Atacama Desert (Garland, 2024a: 26). [See Chapter 1]

In turn, in my investigation of the sonorities of the oceans, I came across colonial sonic archives that allude to layers of the tangled histories of the Dzjanganl, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, which, digging deeper, reveal the legacy of colonial navigation between Europe and Latin America. Looking particularly at residents' narratives of these places, I was able to understand their relationships to the colonial past. This past includes not only colonialism in Africa and Central-South Asia—specifically the British Empire in Afghanistan, Sudan, and Somalia and the Italian empire in Somalia and Eritrea, countries from which Dzjanganl and Tiburtina residents hailed—but also colonial trade in the Atlantic, the Haitian revolution and its legacy in the Caribbean, which is essential to understanding the current migration to Chile. Los Arenales residents are mainly Afro-Caribbean communities originating from Colombia, Venezuela, Haiti, Bolivia, and Peru. Los Arenales is a physical place where different layers of histories are entangled that, at first glance, are invisible in today's reality, but which come to the surface through the violent racist acts that are taking place in Chile against Afro-Caribbean communities. (Garland, 2024a: 26) [See Chapter 6]

5 By "field recording artists," I mean artists who engage in the artistic practice of field recording, as described by the curator Manel Benchabane: "[F]ield recording consists in recording sound landscapes in specific natural or built environments, in order to give sustained attention to the sounds that make up these landscapes" (2017). Field recording practice is the "sound perception" recorded and produced outside of a recording studio, focusing on recording human and non-human sounds as well as soil vibrations and underwater field recordings, among others (see Benchabane, 2017).

6 See Nick Kuepfer's website: <https://cstrecords.com/pages/artist/nick-kuepfer>

7 See Jana Winderen's website: <https://www.janawinderen.com>

For the sound installations I worked on during these years as part of the multisensory aspect of this research, I was mainly interested in using found tracks from the Huntley Film Archives and Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico, namely fragments of the film *Italia Vittoriosa* (1936), which depicts Italian migration to South America and its subsequent transmission of the colonial idea of a “glorious Italian past” to the South American territory, and from the film *Colonial Africa* (1940), featuring the paternalistic propaganda of British colonialism. In deciding to experiment with colonial archives sonically, I kept in mind the poetic idea of the ocean as a guiding thread and a catalyzing track as well as a compositional and theoretical container for colonial and contemporary stories of journeys through the Mediterranean and the English Channel toward the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. (Garland, 2024a: 27) [*To listen to a sound piece with these found tracks, please engage with the sonic-essay **Sound map of a migration Journey***⁸ (Garland, 2022)]

I am inspired by Johannes Ismaiel-Wendt’s (2013) notion of “track.” In his essay “Track Studies: Popular Music and Postcolonial Analysis,” Ismaiel-Wendt analyzes the idea of overlapping and looping in popular music as a counter-response to traditional linear-chronological narrative structures. My overlapping of tracks in the sound installations becomes a decolonial response to this linear way of storytelling, where mixing colonial sound archives (past) and sounds of the oceans and seas (present) allows for breaking with the linearity of storytelling. (Garland, 2022: 79)

In Ismaiel-Wendt’s words: “The track does not imagine a fixed entity, it does not know a single order of events—and thereby lacks a hierarchy between melody, sound, and rhythm—and it is polymorphous and free from the sole task of representation” (2013: 98).

I use the idea of the “catalyzing track” to refer to the movements of the oceans: not only to the flux of colonial trade and contemporary migration, but also to their power to connect and intertwine flows. In my sound installations, marine sound, ambient and underwater, conveys this poetic idea of navigating between the “West” and the “South,” allowing me to reinterpret colonial sonic archives [see Chapter 1]. I am interested in bringing these colonial soundtracks into an experimental and poetic context that differs from other sonic modalities dominated by a single narrative and colonial legacy, thus highlighting the idea that “sound cannot be sounding without the use of power” (Ong, 1999: 65). I consciously attune listeners to the sounds that occurred in a particular space–time, besides being careful not to reproduce a sense of violence and dominance when editing these sonic materials. (Garland, 2024a: 27)

In this context, I reflect on the possibility of sound and listening as an approach to political listening practices through situated knowledge. I borrowed the idea of decolonizing listening from the cultural center and sound residence Tsunami-BASE in Valparaíso, Chile. Their line of work focuses on how we listen, whether

8 click on <https://somerwhereinbetween.cargo.site/Sound-Map>

it is possible to approach the decolonization of listening, and to what extent this can be a liberating experience from the hegemonic power structures that define our ways of listening. Deep and decolonizing listening are possible responses to political acts toward the classical and academic ways of engaging with our surroundings. As I mentioned earlier, rethinking our approach to fieldwork allows us to go beyond the colonial structures present in scientific and academic methodologies and (in this case) to ask the question of “who can listen” (Ndikung, 2020) and “who can be listened to,” from a decolonial lens to the activation of the other as a political entity in response to the Eurocentric colonial legacy. (Garland, 2023)

Listening Oceans

Text fragments from the sonic-essay: “Collective listening as an ethnographic method: ‘Oceanic Memory’ a sonic experience as an active listening exercise.” Tsunami Ediciones Valparaíso (Garland, 2024b). My English translation.

SENSORY SATELLITES⁹

As part of one of my research exchange trips, I was invited by the Italian Center for Artistic and Nature Research L'Aquila Reale outside Rome to be part of an art residency to continue researching and collecting material on one of my case studies: Tiburtina in Rome. I was interested in focusing on the residency with the frame-idea of “listening and letting people be listened to,” working with the community of L'Aquila Reale. Through sound recordings of previous Roman urbanscapes and a collection of colonial sound archives, I was interested in providing a space for collective listening through sound. I designed a listening session called “Oceanic Memory,” highlighting the idea of collective listening not only to actively listen to the sound fragments I was exploring and collecting as part of the residency but also “to tune into the listening of the other,” to actively listen to the person who is close at the moment of listening. These collective active listening exercises are part of my juxtapositions between art and anthropology, where my initial questions were: Who do we listen to? (Ndikung, 2020); Who do we allow to be heard? This was inspired by the reflections of the anthropologist Bruno Latour, “How do we listen socially” (Latour, 2007). The theme produced was to engage with a space for reflection on the listening of people’s experiences on the notion of territory, heritage, and impact on the landscape. These threads are the ongoing thoughts of the L'Aquila Reale directors, reflecting on how the cultural center impacts the daily lives of people and the surrounding ecosystem (L'Aquila Reale Manifesto, 2020).

My initial interest in the residency was to create a space for collective listening to Italian colonial sound archives that I had encountered in my previous fieldwork as an alternative reflection on the cultural heritage underlying the tension of

9 To view and listen to the collective listening **Oceanic Memory** held in Italy, please click on <https://somerwhereinbetween.cargo.site/Oceanic-Memory>

Italian national pride and their approach to it today. In particular, I was interested in juxtaposing different historical layers between colonial archives and the African diaspora's contemporary migrations on Italian territory, layers that are not linked in the main national narrative of Italian heritage. These sound archives were mainly collected from the Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico (AAMOD). My interest in accepting the invitation to the residency at L'Aquila Reale and including it in my PhD exchange program was because they actively collaborated with the Museo delle Migrazioni of Lampedusa,¹⁰ a project of the Museum, Archive, and Center of Mediterranean Migration that rescued from destruction and collected hundreds of objects belonging to "migrants" who had landed on the island of Lampedusa since 2008.

During the residency, I focused on analyzing different recordings from these colonial sound archives to find the best way to share them with the community. I went back and forth many times about how I could make these records heard, or even whether it was appropriate to present them in an artistic-community context. One of my concerns was how these archives should be exhibited, since my intention was not to intervene in the sound material in any way, but rather to create accessibility. For me, it was important to handle these recordings with care—not only because of their quality and their historical and heritage value, but also to avoid a violent listening process for participants when presenting a past that could be uncomfortable for those who might "read between the lines" for the colonial propaganda (see Garland, 2022). I was concerned about how the community would react when a space was created to talk about Italian colonialism, its influence beyond Europe, its connection to the current reality of migration, and border regimes. These concerns arose from the fact that L'Aquila Reale is located in a mountain village inhabited mostly by people between 65 and 90 years old, born in the area. Therefore, it was a very specific audience facing urgent topics that are rarely addressed in everyday Italian life.

My intention was not to confront the community, much less to create discomfort by sharing these sound archives, but rather to test alternative modes of perception, where "listening and letting oneself be listened to" would serve as the basis for finding ways of "tuning in" toward openness and understanding of the information. I was inspired by decolonial and feminist ideas about ways of listening, based on care and affection for others as essential elements for an "affective and effective" listening. Because of these concerns, and given the short time of the residency, I decided to set aside the colonial sound archives and focus instead on natural soundscapes I was recording in parallel during my fieldwork. For this occasion, I used ocean recordings from the Mediterranean and the northern seas, such as the English Channel, without losing the essence of this collective listening, which sought to continue reflecting on the relationship between the colonial legacy, current migrations, and their confrontation with the border regime, taking

10 See <https://isole.blog/isola-06-2/museo-delle-migrazioni-di-lampedusa/>

care to consider what kinds of sounds could be shared with a specific community such as that of L'Aquila Reale.

I am aware that the transition from listening to colonial archives to marine soundscapes may at first seem like a complete change of perspective. Initially, it may be difficult to understand the logic behind incorporating ocean sounds into a collective listening experience about colonialism. I recognize the risk that this decision may seem superfluous, focused solely on the sonic aesthetics of a sea voyage, where the allure of the delicate ocean sound could divert attention from the focus of exploring the hidden layers of Italian colonialism within a contemporary migration context.

On the contrary, here the sensorial experience of immersing oneself in the sounds of water served as a respectful and symbolic mode to guide listeners through the different layers of past colonial histories and present migratory contexts. The interconnected narratives of the inhabitants of the Džjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, intertwined with the diverse legacies of colonialism spanning the Atlantic and Pacific oceans as well as the Mediterranean and Nordic seas, served as pivotal factors in my decision to present my archive of seascapes. The sensory stimulus of marine sounds acted as a gateway to a sonic exploration of colonialism, moving away from the dominant voices of power present in the propaganda of these archives. Instead, the ocean emerged as a non-human voice, guiding attentive, critical, supportive, and reflective contemplation.

The audio shared in this experience was a post-produced recording from my sound archive of oceans and seas, compiled over four years of this research, with approximately 50 samples from different areas of the Mediterranean, the North Sea, and the Pacific Ocean—particularly from the coasts of Calais, Naples, Lido di Ostia, Antofagasta, and Valparaíso. The recordings were made using environmental recorders and hydrophones to capture underwater sound. I was interested in using the poetics of ocean sound tracks as compositional and theoretical narratives of both colonial and contemporary journeys across the Mediterranean, the English Channel, and the Pacific Ocean. Rather than bringing the sounds of the colonial archives to start discussions about the European border regime, I wanted to open these reflections through the ambient and underwater sounds of these oceans, setting aside the propagandistic voice that resonates in the colonial archive and amplifying the texture and rhythms that nature—and in this case seawater—holds.

Through this exercise I sought to explore how audio tracks from the Mediterranean and the North Sea could create an environment conducive to addressing current migration in Italy and its colonial legacy. To achieve my purpose through a "Sonic-Lab" listening workshop, I used different types and formats of loudspeakers that I collected during the residency. Thanks to the help of some neighbors, as well as the village priest who lent me a megaphone from the nearby church used for processions during Holy Week, I obtained loudspeakers mainly from the 1960s. The particular narratives associated with each of these loudspeakers were also present in the collective listening. For me, it was important to recognize where

the loudspeakers came from, what they were used for, and their acoustic qualities, since there was a great difference in quality between the loudspeakers and the megaphones, where the lower tones were more noticeable, producing a more diffuse texture compared to the high-quality loudspeakers that could better reproduce the more sensitive details of the water recordings.

After our collective listening, the conversation opened up, unfolding different topics, relationships, and connections. The dialogue flowed naturally without a predetermined guide or dominant voices. We were able to talk about the tragic events currently unfolding in the Mediterranean, the shipwrecks that have become a daily occurrence, and how the sea has become a vast graveyard of drowned bodies, reminding us of the violence of border regimes. The participants made connections with Italian colonialism, especially seeing the links between Italy's colonial past in Eritrea and the current migration of this same community to Italy. In this circle of exchange, there was a calm and respectful atmosphere toward all participants. Thus, in this collective listening, it was possible to understand and demonstrate that dialogue without confrontation is possible. The absence of explicit conflict showed how participants were able to connect with each other, not only through shared sounds but also by listening to each other, leading to intellectual and emotional dialogues. In this sense, the decision not to share the recordings from the colonial archive was not only due to the fear of it becoming a violent act toward the community, but also opened up the possibility of sharing the sounds of water, of the oceans, which offered a more holistic mode of multisensory reflection.

In this context, I observed how ten minutes of collective listening to ocean sounds allowed participants to synchronize, vibrate, and resonate with one another. By tuning in to nature, we unlocked the potential for reciprocal listening: an intertwining of “affective and effective” engagement. This approach connects with the ideas of Michalinos Zembylas (2021) on “affective decolonization,” where the decolonization process involves not only knowledge and ideas, but also the emotional dimension. Decolonization, in this sense, must involve a transformation in the way we feel about and relate to colonial structures, especially in social and everyday contexts. In my experience with the collective listening method of the ocean sounds, I have observed how the process of tuning in and listening to the ocean allows participants to tune in and resonate with each other, creating a kind of emotional supportive body that goes beyond intellectual analysis. Zembylas argues that this type of transformation affects the “sensory structures” of colonialism, deeply rooted in our institutions, particularly in the Global North. In this sense, the emotional synchronization and resonance among participants while listening to ocean sounds can be understood as an exercise in “decolonizing solidarity” (Zembylas, 2021). Listening becomes a practice that goes beyond the simple passive reception of information and is transformed into a tool for building new ways of relating to others, to nature, and to the colonial legacies we are trying to understand and overcome.

Thus, the interrelation between affective listening and effective listening becomes relevant. By connecting with the sound of water, a space is opened where the past, present, and future coexist in a kind of space–time intertwining. This deep listening unlocks the potential for mutual attunement, where participants not only listen but are also being listened to, creating a space for affective encounter that challenges traditional hierarchies of knowledge and power. “Affective decolonization” requires a profound reconfiguration of our daily practices, especially in the way we facilitate learning and communicate with each other. In this sense, being able to facilitate a space for affective group listening, without imposing dominant narratives or voices and moving away from confrontation, become the core elements for affective decolonization. The acoustic elements of intonation, reciprocal listening, and emotional resonance invite a dialogue that decolonizes not only intellectual knowledge but also emotions and sensibilities, creating spaces of solidarity and deep understanding. (Garland, 2024b)

The Politics of Walking

SENSORY SATELLITES¹¹



My interest in documenting and producing sounds goes hand in hand with walking as a method of data collection during my fieldwork. The direct ties between sound and movement guide my artistic practices and ethnographic methods. Throughout my fieldwork, I critically engaged with walking and its performative nature, drawing upon concepts such as walking art, sonic and critical walking, the notion of *flânerie*, *dérive*, and sensobiographical walking—approaches that I experimented with as a form of multisensorial ethnography.

“Listening, walking, and recording became a kind of socially oriented and artistically informed performative act that guided me through the sensory experience” (Garland, Maier, and Taleb, 2024: 178), through a steady audio track that served as a means to engage with the diverse urban narratives encountered while traversing and engaging with the communities of the Dzjanganl, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. The conscious decision to keep the recorder in “recording mode” throughout

11 For examples of walking exercises from the fieldwork, see: <https://somerwhereinbetween.ca/rgo.site/Critical-Walking>

my walks allowed me to immerse myself in urban sounds amplified and intensified by the recorder, many of which are imperceptible to the human ear. This amplification acted as my guide as I walked. By directing the microphone toward my surroundings, distinctive sounds would emerge, prompting me to pursue them. While the people walking through the cities of Calais, Rome, and Antofagasta served as my guides, the particular sounds I heard prompted me rhythmically and helped me make subtle decisions regarding my own position as a walker among others (see Garland, Maier, and Taleb, 2024).

By using a single, uninterrupted recording, I was able to cross different temporal and spatial forms of urban narratives that I came across during my walks. The entanglement of historical layers, especially those that trace colonial legacies on the city fabric, with the immediacy of the field, where languages, architectures, infrastructures, rhythms, and soundscapes converge, breaks with hierarchical sound narratives. This approach moves away from the colonial drive to impose a singular, linear narrative (Adichie, 2009). It aligns with Ismaiel-Wendt's (2013) claim about the analytical importance of "the track" versus the song in sound and music studies. By juxtaposing diverse perceptions within experiences of walking, it broadens the understanding of sound within the dynamics of movement, community, space, and time (Garland, 2022). "Listening and recording while walking" (Garland, Maier, and Taleb, 2024: 178), led me to reflect on how traces of fieldwork are collaboratively shaped by their inhabitants, their environments, and myself as a researcher. This marked the beginning of my reflections on mapping these encounters sonorously, uncovering alternative paths through the city, challenging conventional European cartographies by bringing a decolonial approach to walking (Garland, Maier, and Taleb, 2024).

My first experiment with walking as a method and an artistic process took place in Rome in 2021, during my first fieldwork trip as a PhD student, as part of my research on the Tiburtina community (see Chapter 1). As I have mentioned in previous chapters, this research started full-time when the pandemic began, which led me to restrict myself in many research areas, as in the case of traveling to the fieldwork location in 2020. By the middle of 2021, European restrictions were loosened, allowing me to travel to Italy. However, there were still restrictions on moving within the city, and public transport was one of the significant areas of contagion. Due to the great fear of contagion, I started to walk around the city between important spots for my research. My daily walks were between 5 and 17 km, totaling 219.5 km in one month, nearly the exact distance from Naples to Rome. These walks become a process of walking art, which highlights walking as an artistic practice, engaging walking to an aesthesis of performative approach, fostering a profound connection between body, mind, space, and time (see O'Rourke, 2013).

Walking art finds its roots in the work of the Psychogeographical Society and the Letterists, who between 1952 and 1957 explored the concept of the *dérive*, draw-

ing on the aesthetic and conceptual influences of Dadaism. By embracing the unguided walks of the *dérive*, they explored the construction of the city and its impact on one's sensory experiences while traversing it. The artist Guy Debord encapsulates the "*dérive* [literally: 'drifting'] a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects" (Debord, 1958: 1). These modes of walking through the city have been a significant influence on my own way of walking through the urban space, which, through the lens of the migratory routes encountered in my fieldwork, gave me the opportunity to grasp in very humble way some of the tactics used by the inhabitants of the Dzjanganl, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales when crossing European and South American urban and land spaces by foot to reach the cities of Calais, Rome, and Antofagasta.

My daily walks were a means for casual encounters with people-in-transit wandering around the city. In some cases, the starting point of conversation was about "walking." Many of them had walked (and sporadically taken buses and cars) from their hometowns in Somalia, Sudan, and Ethiopia via Libya and Tunisia (approx. 6,000 km), and were starting a new walking route from Calabria, the last Italian city, to Rome (approx. 600 km). Mainly, they mentioned it was safer to walk in Italy than to go by car, train, or bus, avoiding the border controls Italy was already at that time implementing more frequently in train and bus stations. These narratives were echoed in the stories of Venezuelan and Colombian walkers, mainly couples, families, and single women, whom I met on the desert route at the Antofagasta, Chile gateway, where they traveled by foot from their homeland to Chile. Their journeys were from Venezuela and Colombia, crossing the jungles and forests of Ecuador and Peru, then to the Bolivian Altiplano, and from there through the Atacama Desert to the northeast of Chile (approx. 7,000 km).

As I listened to these accounts, it became clear that these collective groups of walkers embody some of the most extreme strategies of mobility today, confronting the resistance inherent in the act of walking itself, including its physical and emotional aspects on both personal and collective levels when crossing borders. "Migrant Caravans," currently a hot topic in migratory studies—such as the well-known paths from Central America to the United States—are a good example of embodying the collective nature of walking as a form of protest and resistance against border regimes. The politicization of the "walking migrant body" in these contexts offers a political perspective on migration journeys.

By collectively walking through land and urban spaces, these communities reclaim the mobility and agency that contemporary border regimes have restricted (Wurtz, 2020). Despite the numerous dangers encountered during long walks, such as human traffickers, police checks, adverse weather conditions, and wildlife, the risks are perceived as minor compared to those faced daily when traveling alone, especially in the case of women and children, as is often seen in journeys from Central

to South America. Paradoxically, the road can be perceived as safer than their own homes, as anthropologist Polly Pallister-Wilkins suggests in her essay “Walking, Not Flowing” (2019), quoting the poet Waeshan Shire’s touching observation: “No one would put their children on a boat unless the water was safer than the land.” This stresses the idea that people would only venture on journeys of thousands of miles if the road seemed safer than their homes.

Building on these embodied experiences of mobility, these narratives also resonate in the realm of walking art, inspiring many artists-in-transit to weave their personal journeys into their creative expressions, whether to ponder the act of crossing borders or to explore the barriers to their own body and mobility. During my fieldwork in Rome, I had the privilege of encountering Kinga Araya, a well-known Polish artist whose notable work includes the performance piece *Ten Steps: Walking in Circles, Performing Exile*, presented at ICI Berlin in 2008 (see Mythogeography, 2010). In this performance, Araya intertwines the principles of walking art with her own narrative of exile, recounting her journey from Poland to Canada, navigating various European borders on foot. Araya’s artistic endeavors stand as a testament to the potential of walking art in conveying the resilience of the human body amidst the challenges of displacement. Araya’s personal account reminded me of the various stories I encountered during my walks through Rome, Calais, and Antofagasta. The walkers I met, with their unique life stories, represented singular positions on the experience of migration. On the one hand, Araya, a woman in her 20s at the time of her exile, occupies a particular positionality as she recounts Poland’s political past. On the other hand, the young people of the African diaspora who crossed Italy and France in search of refuge, or the Venezuelan and Colombian families who traveled the desert route in Chile, offer another perspective on the “migrant” experience. Different periods and locations are shaped by forced and dangerous mobility.

In this sense, by approaching these experiences of mobility through a performative and embodied lens, the “migrant walker” highlights the sensory dimensions of these experiences. Beyond recounting their journeys, these travelers embody the act of walking—physically, psychologically, and emotionally—offering a visceral account of their realities as they navigate unfamiliar urban landscapes. Many of those I met during my walks spoke of the transformative impact that walking had on their bodies. The physical exhaustion served as a tangible marker of the miles traveled, distinguishing between the arduous journey from their countries of origin to their final destination. A journey steeped in uncertainty, where walking became synonymous with “waiting” and “passing time.” This phenomenon echoes the themes explored in Chapter 6 of this book, in particular the idea of *waiting as motion* (SAVVY Contemporary Berlin, 2022). The interaction between time, bureaucracy, and the “integration” process shaped by the border regime underscores the profound implications of mobility, or lack of it, for the people crossing the turbulence of today’s border regimes.

In turn, these embodied experiences shaped a shared awareness among the people I encountered. This was the embodiment of the “foreigner” experience in cities that often don’t welcome them. Many expressed a tangible sense of rejection, experiencing a feeling of being an “outsider.” This was particularly present in cities like Calais, Rome, and Antofagasta, where the “migrant body” presence was starkly evident, especially against certain urban backdrops that accentuated the contrast between the “insider” and the “outsider.” The presence of the “migrant body” as an outsider was clearer during the pandemic, when the police more often asked them for identity and vaccination documents. In this time, it was possible to observe how the borders were moving within the territory: checkpoints at terminals, borders between cities and neighborhoods, so-called “sanitary cordons.” Paradoxically, these shifting borders were already visible to people-in-transit within Europe before the beginning of the pandemic—as in the case of France, where the English border was already demarcated in Paris and other big cities, facing the migratory flows traveling toward Calais. These checkpoints in Parisian terminals were only for “the migrants.” The French and English police stopped these groups, asking for their documents and checking if they were already in the European Union database. What we could experience globally in times of pandemic had already been done many times before, only the “target” was different, reaffirming the difference between “who can cross” and “who is stopped.”

Therefore, walking becomes not only a way to pass time, but, in the case of people-in-transit, a vital means of reaching destinations within and outside the urban space. By avoiding border controls within cities, these walkers resist the label of “outsider,” disappearing through the city streets. In this sense, the daily experiences endured by these walkers as they traversed the urban landscapes were characterized by transient and deeply personal narratives, etched primarily upon their own bodies. These walks take place in a context of danger, rejection, and racism, where the road offers little refuge. Walking art encapsulates this essence of the ephemeral and the personal, transforming the act of walking into a sensory and emotional documentation in which the body itself becomes the “artifact” and the “archive” that witnesses the countless experiences lived along the way.

It is in this regard that the practices of “Walking Art”—whether along migratory routes with political significance or in conceptual artistic works—could share a common language of transience, embodiment, and the traces they leave behind. Richard Long’s 1967 exhibition *A Line Made by Walking*¹² is one of the most emblematic examples of walking as trace-making (see Tate Collection, 2007): Long walks back and forth across an area of grass, documented with a single photograph of the field and the trampled line. Long turns the idea of walking and its notion of ephemerality toward documentation of it through an intervention by his footsteps in the grass. This

12 See <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/long-a-line-made-by-walking-p07149>

linear trace produced by his repeated walking shows that art is the walk itself: “walking as art,” as he argues, which by its temporary nature cannot be documented *per se*. With this, Long claims that walking is itself the art and documentation will only be able to address some of the elements of the walking process. The photographic image of the line as a trace of his footsteps is the presentation of the figure of walking that is lost, uncapturable, mysterious, and modest, where the walker is absent, and only his traces can be perceived (Overend and Smith, 2010). Long’s work took walking art in a new direction of interpretation, recognizing that walking is a “private performance,” as the art critic Waldemar Januszczak (1983) points out when referring to Long’s work. By dealing with the absence that walking produces, it becomes a performative process between body and mind, an intimate and private process.

However, when contrasted with the realities experienced by people-in-transit, walking as a solitary, almost contemplative act carries a different weight. The wanderings experienced by people-in-transit within the cityscape stand in stark contrast to the romanticized notion of the “flâneur”—a literary figure popularized in 19th-century Europe, particularly in France, and later embraced by the European bourgeois upper classes. Throughout the history of walking art, this archetypal figure was initially portrayed as an urban white male wanderer—writers and artists like Charles Baudelaire, Vito Acconci, and Paul Smith, among others—leaving aside the portrayal of the “migrant,” destitute, female, and other figures representing the idea of the absent other. Recent scholarship, notably exemplified by feminist historians, has sought to challenge this masculine hegemony surrounding the concept of the “flâneur.” Drawing on the works of writers like Virginia Woolf and George Sand, scholars have advocated for a more inclusive perspective, represented by the notion of the “flâneuse.” This concept, as described by Stephanie Loveless in her text “Tactical Soundwalking in the City: A Feminist Turn from Eye to Ear” (2020), re-frames walking as a feminist and ecological endeavor—an embodied engagement with the environment that counters the detachment associated with the traditional male flâneur.

Loveless, building upon the insights of Lauren Elkin, presents the flâneuse as an active participant in her surroundings, avoiding the aimless wandering of her male counterpart in favor of a more purposeful and attentive exploration. Unlike the emotionally detached flâneur, the flâneuse is acutely aware of her environment, her body visible and receptive to the multisensoriality that surrounds her. This reimagining of the urban experience extends beyond gender to encompass the people-in-transit perspective, where the “migrant’s body” becomes both a vessel for absorbing the city’s burdens and a target for invisibilization. Walking through unfamiliar streets, the “migrant” navigates a landscape that simultaneously marginalizes and alienates—a visibilization of invisibilization is experienced, where the “migrant’s body” absorbs the burden of their environment. These alternative perceptions of the urban experience, which highlight marginalized voices, underscore the vulnerabil-

ity inherent in walking through the postmodern urban landscape. By adopting a sensory and bodily approach to walking, based on feminist principles, walking becomes a political-performative act, in which the marginalized body actively engages with the city environment, even in the face of hostility and indifference.

It is within this reframing of walking as both embodied and politically charged that the notion of “Decolonial Flânerie,” introduced by anthropologist and colleague Adela Taleb (Römhild et al., 2021) and produced since 2020 by Amo collective Berlin¹³, becomes particularly relevant. This method challenges the traditionally individualistic, white, male, and bourgeois nature of flânerie, instead exploring its potential as a transformative practice that uncovers marginalized histories within the urban landscape. Decolonial flânerie involves exploring hidden traces of forgotten and marginalized communities that traversed European streets. This method encourages envisioning how these marginalized groups would navigate city spaces and engage in flânerie, while also valuing their alternative perspectives on urban life and movement. Thus, the approach of decolonial flânerie interprets the city as an archive that challenges dominant narratives. Urban infrastructures in the European cities carry historical colonial imprints, but the decolonial flâneur interprets these inscriptions from a different perspective. By reading the city topography involving imagination, storytelling, and speculation, decolonial flânerie offers a non-canonical view of urban landscapes (Garland, Maier, and Taleb, 2024: 177).

From the experimentations of decolonial flânerie as a critical and collective walking method, we initiated together with colleagues Carla Maier and Adela Taleb questions of how we feel about the city from a decolonial perspective, through an invitation from the editors of the book *Owned by Others: A Map to Possession Island* (Springer and Walch, 2024), which examines the scope for action of artistic interventions by exploring the gaps of an “institutionally mummified city center.” It interrogates the Museum Island zone in Mitte-Berlin as a place constituted by layers of locations and objects and narratives accumulated in collections (Springer and Walch, 2024: 10). Within this framework, we produced the piece “Decolonial Flânerie: Sensing the City ‘Otherwise,’” an interactive essay about our experiences and reflections around the second decolonial flânerie event by Amo collective Berlin (2022).

We investigate the public walk as a critical intervention into urban space that seeks to highlight the forgotten layers of the city. And we seek to encourage other

13 **Amo Collective Berlin** is a group of students, artists, scholars, and members of civil society based at the Institut für Europäische Ethnologie, part of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. The collective emerged through the anti-racist and decolonial struggles surrounding the renaming of our street after Afro-German Enlightenment philosopher and anti-racist pioneer of the early 18th century: Anton Wilhelm Amo. See more in <https://amo-collective.org/>

decolonial flâneurs to engage in performative, collective walking, and how it may encourage us to sense and to listen to the urban space “otherwise”—that is, to read and perceive the city’s archives against the grain of its colonialist inscriptions—and to make space for excluded and silenced voices, bodies, and stories. (Garland, Maier, and Taleb, 2024: 176)

This collaborative engagement with decolonial flânerie continued to resonate beyond Berlin, shaping the way I approached my own walking practices in Rome, Calais, and Antofagasta. In these cities, the method took on new dimensions, leading me to reflect on walking as a form of decolonial action within the rigid colonial urban frameworks that still define cities today. As I immersed myself in the sounds and sensations of these landscapes, intertwined with the stories of walkers crossing border regimes, I was able to perceive walking more clearly as an act that challenges and resists the power structures so deeply entrenched in urban spaces. Questions surrounding the notion of what constitutes a decolonial walk and how people being marginalized can engage with the city from their unique perspectives guided my reflections. I came to view walking as a method of intimately documenting and experiencing the city through a sensory lens that transcends conventional modes of exploration. This *aesthesis* became a methodological cornerstone of my fieldwork, allowing me to navigate and interpret the complexities of postcolonial urban environments through the lens of a “decolonial flâneuse.”

CHAPTER 5

Somewhere: Rethinking Liminality in Border Regimes

In this chapter, I theoretically explore how the concepts of liminality and inbetweenness contribute to understanding the social-urban transformation of the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales from spaces labeled as non-places and places of exception into places of conviviality. I reflect on the inbetweenness of migratory experiences as the uncertainties shaped by contemporary border regimes, as well as the driving force of the creation of alternative placemaking in today's urban spaces.

5.1 Rethinking Non-Places and Places of Exception

Back in the years between 2015 and 2018, during my volunteer artistic work across various “refugee camps” in Germany, France, Italy, Turkey, and Chile, I repeatedly encountered a familiar term used by outsiders to describe these spaces: “non-places.” Visitors, volunteers, artists, architects, urban planners, and academics often portrayed these camps as transit zones—uninhabitable spaces suspended between departure and arrival (see Brugiatelli, 2016; Gregory, 2011; Sharma, 2009). This perspective led scholars in the arts, architecture, and social sciences to further examine how “refugee camps,” akin to train stations, airports, or hotels, might be understood as non-places. Such locations are seen as extraterritorial, linked to a worldwide network of enclaves, displaced and detached from their immediate surroundings. Their specific location and social context seem of little concern to external observers. Within this narrative, “refugee camps” are described as transit spaces devoid of history, identity, and belonging—places where waiting and the inability to shape one’s environment become defining characteristics.

Repeatedly encountering this notion of non-places from those external to the “refugee camps,” I began to question how these locations—while sharing the transient nature of transit hubs—could still foster belonging and a sense of home. During my days at NUKs (Notunterkunft/Emergency shelter) in Berlin between 2015 and 2016, working as a trainer in art workshops for children and women seeking refuge (see Chapter 3), I observed how these “refugee centers,” set up in former municipal

gyms, hotels, and airports, gradually acquired an atmosphere of home. Originally designated by the German state for short-term stays before relocation to private flats, the NUKs became longer-term residences as the German integration system faltered. People began staying for months or even years, challenging the assumed temporariness of these spaces and developing strategies to create belonging and home. Despite being labeled as “non-places” and categorized as “places of exception” in European academic debates, these sites evolved into lived spaces where such notions were contested by the dynamics of human habitation.

To unpack this tension, I turn to the origins of the term “non-places,” first introduced by anthropologist Marc Augé in *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (1995). Augé distinguishes between “anthropological places” and “non-places,” examining spatial, urban, and social developments in major metropolises within the framework of rapid modern production, which he termed supermodernity. Augé argues that non-places are a product of supermodernity, providing examples where “refugee camps” fall under this classification. “Anthropological places,” as defined by Augé, serve as a shared ground where ethnologists and culturally rich communities converge, fostering interpersonal interactions and a sense of belonging. Augé describes them as spaces occupied by “indigenous people” who not only inhabit, cultivate, and protect them but also recognize the presence of ancestral or spiritual entities within their private geography (Augé, 1995: 33). In distinguishing between “anthropological place” and “non-place,” Augé draws upon the sociologist Michel de Certeau’s delineation of place and space (1984). De Certeau characterizes “space” as a “frequented place,” where the movements of individuals intersect with urban environments. He illustrates this concept by stating that it is the pedestrians who imbue a street (typically defined as a place by urban planners) with a sense of space (Augé, 1995: 85). Augé underscores that the dichotomy between place and space is not identical to the contrast between place and non-place. Space represents a convergence of diverse elements, fostering a distinct sense of belonging: the relationship between the human and the more-than-human. In contrast, non-places are the physical absence of human belonging in the space. As Augé (1995: 77–78) puts it: “If a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space that cannot be defined as relational, historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.”

From this perspective, Augé argues that supermodernity produces non-places, which are spaces that are not anthropological places—being without history, culture, or any clear sense of self—setting aside what Charles Baudelaire called “places of memory” (see Nora and Cuesta, 1998), as an element of belonging within space and the urban. Supermodernity has created places within the city that are transitory and temporary, “non-places are then defined based on precisely what place is not” (Joukowsky Institute, n.d.). Augé considers places as spaces with a deep relationship and history, which have an intimate connection and identity with the space

and the human body inhabiting it, from social and individual places highlighted in the landscape and establishing the relationship between humans and the world. He considers non-places contradictory to these attitudes of spatial belonging and its relationship with its environment: hospitals, clinics, hotels, holiday resorts, malls, supermarkets, train stations, airports, bus stops, refugee camps, and shantytowns threatened with demolition, thus remaining within contemporary transport and transit spaces. These spaces fall into the category of places “without history,” “without belonging,” and “disconnect[ed]” from the environment (Augé, 1995).

In his view, non-places—whether luxurious or uninhabitable—occupy the same conceptual level. Rather than examining their socioeconomic dimensions, Augé frames them primarily through the lens of constant flux, noting that they share a degree of external control and technological oversight. Humans are transformed into a number, a code that comes and goes—leaving aside the individual and his belonging. He refers to aspects of non-places and places that intersect and that modern and supermodern places can be characterized by elements of expropriation that non-places have. “Place and non-place are rather opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed” (Augé, 1995: 79). In this sense, non-places have never managed to contemplate and engage the memory and belonging within the space, which can never become a place. Its infrastructure is created from the beginning as a place with no memory, a cold and calculating space in which its creation aims not to create belonging within the city. The collective and the communitarian become individual: “The individual in contact only with another image of himself” (Augé, 1995: 79).

The book *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (Augé, 1995) provides a new outlook in the 1990s on understanding spatial experience under conditions of supermodernity. However, dealing with places as “anthropological places” and “non-places,” as Augé describes them, is a challenging scenario debated by the academy today. We have to deal with a postcolonial approach criticizing “ethnographic illusions” (Joukowsky Institute, n.d.). In a postcolonial era, identity and the sense of belonging to a place are constantly rewritten and modified. Although some places no longer exist, some of them remain in the local collective memory and history in the face of rapid modernity—considering the places’ deep histories, memories, and belongings, even if they are places of transit with technological control, violence, and deterritorialization from state power. Today it is possible to find traces of belonging, sociability, conviviality, and a sense of “home,” countering Augé’s definition of non-places within the city (I will come back to this point in later paragraphs).

Today’s “Non-places”

While everyday life and local dynamics challenge Augé’s definition of non-places, his framework continues to be applied by scholars exploring urban fear, mobility, and

exclusion today. As the urbanists Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin (2022) have analyzed in their paper “Splintering Urbanism at 20 and the ‘Infrastructural Turn,’” non-places are a response to fear in large postmodern cities. They are negatively represented and characterized by crime, economic instability, “migrant” mobility and post-migrant societies. Non-places are today being considered as the container for the “others” of society—vagrants, criminals, and “migrants”—who, by not belonging to a place, do not enter the dynamics of the city. Some debates in urban studies, anthropology, political economy, and postmodernism consider contemporary non-places as a false civic and democratic life, where the “political man” vanishes in the speed of the city and the constant flux (Sharma, 2009). They are centralized in contrast to the ideal public spaces designed for the everyday life of the “citizen with the city,” opposing what the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2004: 72) refers to as “citizens without a city.”

Contemporary non-places are considered to lack culture, identity, and community, as well as the idea of the citizen as an active and political entity (Sharma, 2009). The fear of municipalities and “privileged citizens” of having their public spaces transformed into “non-places” has led them to take different strategies to “reclaim” these spaces as “public” but simultaneously accessible only to a distinct group in society. I noticed in my walks through squares and parks in Antofagasta, Chile an example of this reclamation. Currently, some Venezuelan and Colombian communities have taken over public spaces due to the lack of help from the Chilean government in providing shelters. These communities have transformed public spaces into social places and homes. Using the public arena, they have managed to install tents and mobile kitchens (see Soychile newspaper, 2021¹). The response of the Antofagasta city council, in the form of political propaganda and police action, was that public spaces must be “reclaimed and protected” from these “other” members of society. The mayor of Antofagasta, Jonhatan Velasquez, states: “we will continue working to recover our public spaces so that Antofagasta families can enjoy them” (official Instagram, antofagastamuni, May 2022, my English translation).

Nowadays, in the city of Calais on the coast between France and the UK, the situation is similar. People-in-transit, mainly from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq, arrive at the Calais train station from Paris or Lille without having prior information on the city’s dynamics. Usually, they do not know where the settlements are (mostly outside the center) or if they know their location, they cannot be part of the community because they are “newcomers” and have to wait to join it.² These groups are staying in

1 See more at <https://www.soychile.cl/Antofagasta/Sociedad/2021/08/29/720762/extranjeros-migracion-terminal-antofagasta.aspx>

2 In my second fieldwork trip (in 2022), I observed this social dynamic. The spatial organization set up in the settlement reaffirmed a degree of waiting, where the last to arrive in Calais had to wait for one of his compatriots to cross to England, leaving his place (and tent) free for a

parks, at bus stops, and under bridges, transforming public spaces into their temporary homes. To counter this, French and English police and the Calais municipality carry out daily evictions in these public places. What is particularly intriguing here is that the strategies of eviction paradoxically play an essential role in establishing and sustaining these temporal homemaking in Calais' center. In general, there is a shared knowledge of normalization on the part of volunteers and people-in-transit of when there will be daily evictions and weekly large-scale evictions (usually dismantling settlements outside the center). Often, they estimate the time and day of the eviction. This violence of daily deterritorialization does not prevent the creation and the permanence of these places since, after the evictions, the communities return to the exact location and collect (from the volunteers) new tents, meals, and coats. Volunteers and NGOs in Calais are essential to ensure these locations do not disappear. The art of resistance and activist strategies of volunteers and people-in-transit working together make these places sustainable, lasting, and with a degree of belonging and conviviality, counteracting Augé's definition of non-places.

Another slightly different example was Calais municipality's announcement concerning the 2016 eviction of the Dzjanganl, written on public signs that are currently installed in the *L'ex Lande* zone.³ This zone is where the Dzjanganl was located nine years ago and is currently a natural protected area housing a bird observatory for the Calais region. A fragment of the sign says: "Travaux de renaturation des terrains de *L'ex-Lande* de Calais" (Renaturation works on the lands of the former Lande region de Calais). Before the Dzjanganl appeared, this area, part of the industrial sector of the Calais coast, was deserted. What is interesting here is how the Calais municipality used "nature" as a weapon for the mass eviction in 2016 and how this moment in the city's history is visualized today as a process of renaturation of the area. "Renaturation" as a "bringing back the nature of the place" is how Calais municipality describes the recovery of this public space as part of city's development (see Chapter 1).

Following these examples, today's "non-places" are understood as apolitical spaces of transit, encompassed by hyper-consumerism, the rapid movement of bodies, supermodernity, and technology. "Non-places" have been considered spaces where politics has been lost, where transaction and economic or technological exchange predominate over sociability and politics—romanticizing and categorizing the consumer, traveler, "refugee," and citizen as a tragedy of supermodernity, lost in these spaces of consumption and transit (Sharma, 2009). As mentioned before, Augé does not distinguish between luxurious and uninhabitable spaces and conditions,

new person. I noticed that the settlement tents were in rows side by side, so it was clear who was the next to cross the Channel and also who had just arrived (see further Chapter 1).

- 3 Northern sector outside central Calais, neighboring the French coast where the Dzjanganl settlement was established between 2015 and 2016.

leaving aside biopolitics and the different dynamics that occur between these bodies in transit and their environment, mainly when referring to “refugee camps” and shantytowns threatened with demolition as “non-places”. The media theorist Sarah Sharma, in her paper “Baring Life and Lifestyle in the Non-Place” (2009), argues that contemporary “non-places” need to be seen not as mere “spectacles” or “camps” that are a product of modernity. Instead, they are to be understood in terms of their own politics and the logic of the space in which they are located. Sharma does not see the “camps” as spaces hidden from modernity but as spaces that manage to find strategies to be, in their own right, part of the city (see Epilogue). She refers to how today’s cities have found ways to “optimize” relations between the invested (lifestyle) and reduced (bare life) spaces. It is a recognition that cities today have devised strategies to navigate the interplay between spaces that promote investment, such as lifestyle hubs, and those that embody bare existence. This optimization of relations between lifestyle-driven spaces and those characterized by basic survival is emblematic of the complex dynamics inherent within migratory contemporary urban environments (Sharma, 2009).

Today’s “Places of Exception”

In this context, especially in “refugee camps,” human identity often recedes, reinforcing the notion of spaces of exception in the urban “periphery”, where the symbolic death of the human—the bare life—can occur. The philosopher Giorgio Agamben, in his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), argues that camps, particularly concentration camps and “refugee camps,” have become “places of exception,” excluded in the face of modernity, politics, and the right to citizenship in the city. Agamben discusses the ontological differences between Zoe, Bios, and *Homo sacer* in relation to people inhabiting these camps: *Homo sacer* is defined as a human, but once belonging to the realm of Bios (human political life), who is reduced to Zoe, an entity belonging to the animal realm, thereby entering a state of exception. Agamben’s philosophy relates directly to today’s description of “refugee camps” and their inherent dehumanization. However, while its outward appearance remains unchanged, its essence and significance are shifting, reshaping human rights and creating growing ambiguity: the state of exception is redefining the very understanding of contemporary democracy (Agamben, 1998).

Agamben’s theory links the concept of people in exile with “refugee camps” organized and controlled by governments and policymakers by establishing rules and codes of conduct. Drawing on Foucault’s ideas, Agamben describes these camps as places created for the control of individuals, exploiting their connection to sovereignty and extraordinary circumstances. He examines the evolution of power and proposes a new interpretation of sovereignty and territory, arguing that these abstract legal principles require tangible places to function, such as the “camp”

in this case. Here, exceptional rules can be effectively applied (Panagiotidis and Tsianos, 2007).

Building on Agamben's analysis, the sociologists Efthimia Panagiotidis and Vasilis Tsianos further conceptualize the "camp" as a tangible space where sovereignty and exceptional regulations materialize. In their work *Denaturalizing "Camps"* (2007), they define "camp" as a fixed site originally intended for temporary occupancy. These camps exist outside the law, where the biopolitical aspect of sovereign power is activated. People-in-transit, such as those in "refugee camps," are reduced to mere physical entities—what Agamben calls "bare life." Critics of Agamben's concept of "bare life," such as Panagiotidis and Tsianos (2007), Luciano Ferrari (2001), and Sandro Mezzadra and Enrica Rigo (2003), argue that this concept overlooks elements of the workforce, resistance, and the dynamic relationship with border regimes. Specifically, Panagiotidis and Tsianos analyze how "refugee camps" temporarily immobilize migratory movements, which constitutes a crucial aspect of current border regimes, while also encapsulating the complexities between sovereignty, citizenship, and biopolitics, as highlighted by Agamben. For Panagiotidis and Tsianos, the dynamics between the mobility and immobility of people-in-transit within these camps do not lead to a complete loss of humanity, as depicted by Agamben. They argue that Agamben's notion is rooted in existential arguments, stripping individuals in transit of power. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of philosopher Paul Virilio, they inquire whether it is feasible to examine the concept of the camp "from below," focusing on the transition from "exclusion" to "decelerated circulation of mobility" (Panagiotidis and Tsianos, 2007).

Building on this critique, Panagiotidis and Tsianos suggest that camps are not spaces of total immobilization, but rather they are various points of encounter of governmental and state migration policy operations, making a specific relation with border policies within the European Union. Although at first these "refugee camps" look like rigid authoritarian governmental fortresses of mobility control, Panagiotidis and Tsianos argue that it is a particular space of temporarily controlling movements: that is, of managing the pathways of circulation, the routes, in order to make regulated mobility productive. Permeability is thus the expression of an institutionalized border porosity that is created by power relations, in which the roles of people-in-transit, their smugglers, and EU policies are key to delay, control, and regulate mobility at large (Panagiotidis and Tsianos, 2007). From this perspective, their argumentation leaves an open window to explore the different strategies of subjectification within the notion of "refugee camp" today. Rather than seeing people within these camps as only an "bare life," it shows that the dynamism to delay, control, and regulate mobility becomes productive and not as existential as Agamben proposes. However, in the context of self-built, autonomous settlements, run by people-in-transit without any control by governmental authorities, as analyzed in this book, the scenario is entirely different from the formal, legally defined concept of "refugee

camps.” By operating through the informality and uncertainties of existence, self-built settlements still manage to do placemaking and facilitate alternative forms of urban life. Even though they are generally described as “camps” and looked at through the same lens as “official refugee camps,” they present diverse autonomous strategies for the regulation of their own mobility and inclusion into the urban scenario.

Therefore, from this complex comparison, the core motivation of this research emerges. By examining self-managed places run by people-in-transit inside and outside Europe, I have identified significant distinctions between the notion of “places of exception” associated with formal “refugee camps” and self-governed settlements, such as the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, the case studies in this research. Although both settings involve communities navigating border regimes while seeking refuge, they represent different forms of order and cannot be directly equated. During my research, I observed distinctions between “official camps” and “self-organized settlements”—which I will not unfold here, as such comparisons fall outside the scope of this research. What particularly drew my attention was the “autonomous” and “self-built” aspect of these settlements, which helps illuminate the alternative placemaking of communities that occupy abandoned zones or buildings, resisting placement in “official camps” governed by state laws and regulations (see Chapter 6). In contrast, these autonomous places allow individuals to cultivate a sense of belonging, community, and camaraderie, creating ecosystems that diverge from the conventional norms of “official camps”. Despite their informal character, these communities embody elements of collective memory, agency, and governance.

This self-determination aligns closely with Appadurai’s (2001) concept of “deep democracy,” which illuminates how “marginalized” individuals navigate exclusion at both local and global levels, asserting agency even within the shadows of the broader system (Appadurai, 2001: 27). The urban poor are often reduced to “citizens without a city.” But in today’s cities, places such as the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales have demonstrated their capacity to work together, self-organize, and empower themselves, redefining the concept of governability and local democracy (Appadurai, 2001: 23). This serves as a small-scale example of “grassroots globalization” or “globalization from below,” which, according to Appadurai (2001), is essential for considering the possibility of a future international civil society. As part of “globalization from below,” Appadurai describes the “politics of patience” in response to the “tyranny of emergency”—in this case, the daily instability suffered by “poor,” “migrants,” and “refugees” in their living spaces. Every day becomes a struggle to survive the difficult circumstances imposed by external factors (society, labor, border regime, state, governments), which threaten or destroy their capacity to self-organize. The politics of patience is a long-term strategy of survival and self-empowerment, creating new ways to resist tyranny.

Viewed through this perspective, the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales demonstrate the limitations of the concepts of “non-places” and “places of exception.” Augé’s idea of non-places from a decade ago leaves gaps and ambiguities in the face of the current crisis of the border regime. He argues that “refugee camps” as non-places are the product of the dynamics of supermodernity. This argument is threaded through the self-built settlement of people-in-transit, which are the outcome of contemporary border regimes and constitute an important aspect of the postcolonial era and resistance against the border regime. Here, these self-built settlements are transformed into places of belonging and sociability, as they clearly have a strong sense of attachment and history, even if born out of informality. Moreover, Agamben’s theory of exception and its spatial dimension is also disputed by these places. The inhabitants of these communities begin to appropriate the urban space and create their own sociopolitical structure, reestablishing a sense of citizenship (Bios) in their own term within the city (see Epilogue).

Therefore, through a variety of survival strategies, these communities strive to create a sense of “normalcy” (Agier, 2018). While still temporary settlements, people-in-transit regard them as home. Places like the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales shift from a transient status toward a form of enduring permanence, sometimes offering lasting solutions that foster belonging and identity. Because inhabitants are not fully subjected to imposed territorial rules, they retain autonomy to create, transform, and adapt regulations, developing a space of self-governance with their own norms. The political and social ecosystem is fluid, roles and mandates shift, and hierarchies are constantly evolving, allowing inhabitants to return to a Bios world. These self-built settlements illustrate that not all “refugee and migrant camps” can be reduced to “non-places” or “places of exception,” challenging prevailing notions of today’s border regimes.

5.2 Rethinking Liminality

Drawing upon the concept of “non-places” and its contrast with locations such as the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, my thoughts turned to the notions of “space” and “threshold,” and to experiences characterized by “waiting” and “time.” Conversations with some inhabitants and volunteers at these places often returned to the term “limbo” to describe the atmosphere within them. Some residents made religious connections, likening the experience to a purgatory situated between “heaven” and “hell,” while others expressed a sense of being trapped “between temporal borders” of the past and present of migratory experiences. My first reflections, as will be explored in this section, were toward the “liminal” and its character of inbetweenness.

In these settlements, people may wait for months or years, and time spent waiting becomes predominant: people-in-transit must pause along their journey. In this sense, time emerges as a key unit for understanding the migratory experience. The relationship between migration and mobility is not necessarily only tied to a specific territory—from one place to another—as in Augé’s concept of the “non-place,” which is grounded primarily in territory and space—something physical that dismisses the possibility of history, culture, and the construction of social structures, leaving the sense of temporariness within these places as secondary. In contrast, in migratory contexts, time spent waiting becomes central to understanding the migratory experience.

Despite their temporary nature, inhabitants shape these settlements into places with identity and history, marked by a normalized sense of home. In a seeming contradiction, they consciously and unconsciously engage with their surroundings in ways that help them endure both the waiting and the passage of time, while still regarding the settlement as a place of transit. That is why my initial thoughts on timespace as existing within “limbo,” as described by residents of these places, were tied to the concept of liminality—not only as a subjective, temporal ritual process, as explored by ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep ([1961] 2019), but also through a contemporary lens that views liminality in spatial terms: a space shaped by liminal materiality and urban liminality. In this sense, approaching these settlements through the lens of liminality offered my first point of orientation in understanding the in-betweenness people-in-transit embody while confronting the daily border regime in European and South American urban spaces.

After my second fieldwork trip and discussions with professors and colleagues, I realized that liminality poses a significant challenge when examining the experiences of migratory subjectivities confronted with daily violence under border regimes. Liminality, as a vast and complex anthropological concept, encompasses a wide range of states, from global phenomena like pandemics to ritualistic processes observed in indigenous communities (see Van Gennep, [1961] 2019). This makes it hard to fully grasp the unique aspects of each experience. Often, attention remains fixed on the liminal experience itself, overlooking the broader social, economic, and political contexts in which these states of inbetweenness unfold. Today, within social science circles, liminality faces criticism for being somewhat outdated in interpreting contemporary postcolonial and postmigrant societies. The apoliticization of the term results in a superficial understanding that fails to capture the profound and perilous experiences of communities-in-transit as they resist and confront contemporary border regimes. In other words, the generalization and apoliticization of liminality tend to homogenize different experiences of inbetween states, overlooking the specificities of each positionality and subjectivity.

Throughout this book, I critically engage with liminality from various perspectives. For example, in Chapter 3 I explored its artistic manifestations, questioning

the emergence of liminality in the arts, performance, and theater, and the growing interest in creating liminal experiences in a performative context. In Chapter 6 and the Epilogue, I turn to border regimes and urban studies, examining how the temporal disorientation triggered by liminality contributes to the process of “othering” (Spivak, 1985) in migratory contexts. While people-in-transit often describe themselves as being in liminal or limbo states, these terms imply an “othering” that distinguishes them from “ordinary citizens” integrated into the temporal framework of today’s society.

Nonetheless, I consider it crucial for this research to unfold liminality through the lens of urban and spatial settings, shifting away from its usual focus on subjectivity. In this chapter, I recontextualize liminality within spatiality, exploring its potential to politicize the term, particularly in relation to urban and social resistance within migratory processes. In the following paragraphs, I discuss various aspects of liminality that have enriched my understanding of inbetweenness within contemporary border regimes in Europe and South America. These insights have helped me better grasp the ongoing transitions and inbetween states experienced by the communities of the Dzijangal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, as they aspire to become part of today’s cities in their own right.

Liminality and Mobility

Text fragments from the essay: “The Jungle de Calais: Entre liminalidad, espacio fronterizo y lugar de posibilidades” (Garland, 2021b)

In the current debate on “refugee camps”, liminality has been rethought, problematized, and criticized in relation to contemporary developments in the study of place, space, and mobility (Andrews and Roberts, 2012). Social sciences, architects, and urbanist scholars have further explored the concept of liminality through the relationship between resort towns and spaces of migration, mobility, and marginality. This new perspective is essential when considering the urban areas of Calais, Rome, and Antofagasta—cities with landscapes defined simultaneously by tourism, mobility and migration.

Liminal is defined as “of or pertaining to the threshold or initial stage of a process” (Buchanan, 2018; Oxford English Dictionary). It could, therefore, describe the beginning of a state—or the state itself. The cultural anthropologists Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts (2012) further expand the definition of liminal-as-threshold to connote the spatial: a boundary, border, a transitional landscape, or a doorway, in Simmel and Leggewie’s (1908) sense, of a physical and psychic space of potentiality. The word liminal originates from the Latin word *limen*, for threshold—“any point or place of entering or beginning. A liminal space is, therefore, the time be-

tween what was and what's next. It is a place of transition, waiting, not knowing. (Buchanan, 2018; Oxford English Dictionary, in Garland, 2021b: 88)

Liminal spaces are places we go in search of reprieve from the “normal.” Liminal landscapes are inbetween spaces, with seashores and beaches as archetypal examples (Thomassen, 2012). The liminal experience of migration is one of suspense, limbo, transit, marginality, and matter out of place (Douglas, 1966). For people-in-transit living in this state of inbetweenness—straddling physical and mental spaces—there is a sense of existing between two worlds: the past memory of their homeland and the place of waiting (the present reality). People-in-transit live between past and present, between old and new homes, blending emotions, times, stories, and realities.

The ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep, with his book *Rites of Passage* ([1961] 2019), was the first to interpret liminality, referring to the rites within societies from a micro perspective. Van Gennep divides the ritualistic process into three states that constitute the complete liminal experience of a person in an internal and external transformation. He also emphasizes the importance of these rites of passage as they mark and celebrate important and historical moments of individuals and collectives in the course of life. The three-stage structure of the liminal process is composed of a first stage: the preliminary rite (or rite of separation), which constitutes a symbolic and metaphorical death. Since the person is obliged to leave and break with their past routine, it comprises a symbolic behavior that means the detachment of the individual from a previously fixed point of the social structure. The second stage: the liminal rite (or rite of passage), implies an effective passage through the threshold that marks the limit between two phases, and here the term “liminality” was introduced to characterize this passage. It has a destructive, transforming, and metamorphic character in which essential changes will occur in the individual. These liminal periods are both “destructive” and “constructive,” meaning that it is the formative experience during liminality. In the last stage: the post-liminal rite (or rite of incorporation), the initiate is reintegrated into society with a new identity as a “new” being already transformed. Van Gennep observed this structural triangle as a pattern within the rituals he observed at the collective and social level, reflecting that ritual passages demarcate the transitions of human events.

In my own research to date, I have sought to enrich my understanding of liminality and landscapes, exploring beyond the somewhat limited definitions of the philosopher Karl Jaspers (2014)—he called it the “Axial Age”; the anthropologists Victor Turner (1967, 1969, 1978, 1982, 1996)—liminality as “ritual” and “communitas”—and John Graburn (1989)—liminality as “sacred journey”; and geographer Rob Shields (1991)—liminality as it relates to marginality. All of them have in common how they correlate liminality to the ludic, consumption, the carnivalesque, and human morale. I am more interested in the work of Andrews and Roberts

(2012), as well the social scientist Bjørn Thomassen (2009, 2012, 2015, 2016), who encourage a reevaluation of the meaning of liminality in migration studies and associate the aspect of liminality not only with spaces of pleasure, such as carnivals and playful rituals, but also with the deterritorialization of places and spaces of danger. The process of transformation, described by Van Gennep as a destructive and constructive process, is not always a pleasurable, positive, and transformative experience (Garland, 2021b: 89).

In turn, I am interested in the meaning described by Thomassen and the anthropologist Guiseppe Grimaldi (2018) of liminality as a place of possibilities, occupying the process of transition between one state to the other as a transformative process open to new possibilities of perceiving the environment. Van Gennep describes how between the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal states, there is a metaphorical death and rebirth in the body that is contained within the ritual. This mobility through the states helps in the conception of liminality as a productive state.

Scholars like Victor Turner (1969), Agnes Horvath (2013; Horvath and Davison, 2019), and Bjørn Thomassen (2009) provide the additional perspective of liminal vision as a potentiality. The quality of liminality is naturally vague; the identity of the person or collective dissolves, causing confusion but also the possibility of new perspectives. The liminoid provokes a safer and transforming space to open the mind and observe reality from another angle (Turner, 1969). In his book *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (1969), Turner claims that liminality is considered a time and place of retreat from normal forms of social activity. It can potentially be seen as a period of reflection on the central values and social norms of the culture in which it is produced (Turner, 1969: 156). He investigates the idea of *communitas*—feelings of a united community group that experiences the same liminal experience (Turner, 1969). Turner's *communitas* has specific relevance to the experiences of the groups that inhabit these self-organized settlements. The sense of community and group experience is established by being in a shared state of suspense, inbetweenness, and uncertainty about what was (each inhabitant's past before arriving at the settlement) and what is to come (the desire to be able to cross borders). But what also can be experienced is the degree of potentiality that Turner and other scholars describe as a "place of possibilities" (Grimaldi, 2018) within the autonomous governance to generate new ideas and forms of coexistence for the future. By not having an official/governmental structure, these possibilities are enlarged, provoking a sense of hope and aspirations. (Garland, 2021b: 90) [See Epilogue]

Additionally, the sociologist Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt introduces the concept "Comparative Liminality: Liminality and Dynamics of Civilizations" (1985), which refers to how historical moments affecting societies over long periods can also be called liminality. Eisenstadt drew from Turner's work, which has a crucial significance thanks to the first introduction of liminality by Van Gennep. Turner's approach is more

closely linked to the study of small-scale societies, though, developing the term “liminoid” in response to specific characteristics of the modern world (see Chapter 3 on liminality and art). However, Horvath (2013) claims that the term can and should be applied to particular historical events, providing a valuable framework for historical and sociological understanding. For his part, Turner attributed a unique positive connotation to liminal situations as forms of regeneration, when liminal situations can be periods of uncertainty and anguish (Horvath, 2013).

In the case of places such the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, it is possible to highlight the duality between liminality (Van Gennep) and liminoid experiences (Turner). Van Gennep’s transformative, dangerous, ritualistic, and deconstructive/constructive approach encompasses the big picture within them. The highly vulnerable, dehumanizing state of emergency and the aspect of terror are latent throughout. An example of this can be found in the Dzjanganal, one of the first and largest “migrant” camps in the history of the EU on the Calais coast, where violent confrontations between “migrants” and the French authorities have produced a state of emergency and terror which goes against all human rights and dignity. However, in parallel, there is the reality of “*communitas*,” community, and solidarity produced between “migrants,” volunteers, NGOs, and neighbors, which have provided the “hope” of a possible future. The peak of the urban development of the Dzjanganal was also characterized by conviviality, solidarity, and resistance, providing a state of potentiality that Turner describes in playful and carnivalesque form. The transformative (deconstructive/constructive) process of liminality is present in this potentiality, providing a “place of possibility” in the face of the contemporary border regime (see Chapter 6 and Epilogue). Regarding this, Thomassen states of liminality: “it served not only to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also to understand human reactions to liminal experiences: the way liminality shaped personality, the sudden prominence of agency, and the sometimes dramatic union of thought and experience” (Thomassen, 2009: 14).

Thomassen also distinguishes between liminal bodies: the body of the person within liminality also changes (physical/psychological form). Micro-liminality produces liminality within the local community of liminal bodies, an internal transformation based on the personal and specific experience of each person and their interactions. Macro-liminality is a global change in a given period of history, such as wars and pandemics. Thomassen’s approach to the different dimensions of liminality helps us understand how people live, interact, and transform themselves during the liminal state (Garland, 2021b: 91). Additionally, Thomassen offers a perspective on the intellectual history of liminality and a critical analysis of its connection to the ludic and the carnivalesque. He draws attention to the often missed connection between danger and liminality and also explores the idea of “permanent liminality”—originally from the sociologist Árpád Szokolczai (2017). Thomassen argued how “migrants” can become part of a permanent liminal experience as they navi-

gate through borders and regimes. In this case, permanent liminality relates to a “migrant’s consciousness” of being always on the move—in other words, the development of a mindset of permanence in the inbetweenness (see Chapter 6 on the idea of the *borderland*). Such is the case for people living in the Dzjantal, as many had the ideal final destination of the UK, but were “stuck” in Calais for months and years. This hope of the place of arrival has caused a possible state of permanent liminality by being “trapped” for a long time in border spaces such as Calais/Dover (Garland, 2021b).

The scholar and dear colleague Karam Yahya (2021), in his paper “Journey and Encampment Observations: Liminality and the ‘Protracted Refugee Situation,’” provides an autoethnography of his own journey crossing borders from Syria to Germany, conceptualizing “bordering as a process” from his own and other border crossers’ perspectives. Yahya recounts his experience of becoming a “border crosser”—as opposed to being labeled as a “migrant” or “refugee”—and how this territorial instability, constant uncertainty, and dehumanization by border regime agents produces a “permanent liminal state” of identity represented by victimization and/or criminalization, none of which was self-defined (Yahya, 2021). Yahya argues that the state of inbetweenness, of having an indeterminate legal status and crossing borders, produces a “processual liminal state.” “You are not what you were, but you are still not yet what you will become” (Yahya, 2021: 58). He connects the concept of permanent liminality with “constant waiting” and “ongoing process.” “The border regime tells you that you have to wait ... this period of waiting can vary substantially. It is sometimes experienced in the process of the migration itself—being told, ‘tomorrow, tomorrow’” (Yahya, 2021: 65).

The waiting on the part of the people-in-transit to reach their ideal destination, obtain asylum, be deported, be reunited with their family, work, and study provokes this state of being inbetween, which Yahya has referred to through a liminal form. I am particularly interested in highlighting Yahya’s perception of liminality as an ongoing process of navigating border regimes, which he calls “Bordering as a *process*.” Drawing from Yahya’s argumentation, Monish Bhatia and Victoria Canning, the editors of *Stealing Time: Migration, Temporalities and State Violence* (2021: xxi), describe it as “a process: not only during a journey, but a temporary engagement bound in social contracts that requires constant negotiation through bureaucratic complexities, lost time and Othering in host countries.” As Bourdieu highlighted, and from which Yahya draws, “the all-powerful is he who does not wait but makes others wait ... waiting implies submission” (Bourdieu 2000: 228, cited in Yahya, 2021). To keep people waiting is an exercise of power over other people’s time (Khosravi, 2021). As described in the book *Waiting and Temporalities of Irregular Migration* (2021), edited by the anthropologists Christine M. Jacobsen, Mary-Anne Karlsen, and Shahram Khosravi, “waiting” is a strategy on the part of the border regime to create instability and delay for the “migrant” when they are crossing borders.

Unlike the formal-state camps, where “waiting” is designed, controlled, and structured at a temporal and spatial level by political agents, in self-built settlements such as the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, “waiting” is, in many cases, transformed into an act of resistance. Although time has been “stolen” from the border regime, the process of bordering often constitutes an attempt to “regain control of time” (Khosravi, 2021). Staying in these places is becoming a moving act, a way to have more independence to “control their own time” outside the governmental structures and norms perceived in formal-state camps. I remember some inhabitants of the Dzjantal and Tiburtina sharing with me that, apart from not having their passports stamped, another reason for staying in self-organized settlements was that they could control their time, unlike in the formal-state camps where the schedule, routines, meals, etc., were designed, surveilled, and controlled.

Nevertheless, by addressing waiting, liminality, and the state of limbo, I risk reinforcing a logic of “othering” (Spivak, 1985) when I engage these experiences as distinct temporalities related to migratory states. In her work “Time and the Other in Crisis: How Anthropology Makes Its Displaced Object,” the anthropologist Giorgina Ramsay (2019a: 20) argues: “We deny the coevalness of refugees by describing them as ‘stuck’ in the present and ignoring the ways in which they share particular temporal rhythms with other people.” The tendency is to consider “migrant’s” waiting as a condition of exclusion where being “inbetween” becomes a state outside of temporal norms. These periods of waiting are considered a pause and disruption, producing exclusion and victimization. It is complex to relate waiting to the precarious experiences caused by the border regimes, neoliberal configurations, and capitalism in postmodern societies, where time is associated with success, money, efficiency, and productivity (Eriksen, 2001, cited in Ramsay, 2019a). Following this line of argumentation, “waiting” becomes a loss of time, waste, emptiness, and worthlessness. Reinforcing the image of the “migrant” as a non-productive person, a “human waste” (Bauman, 2004).

During this research, questions were raised as to whether liminality is a sustainable concept for migratory experiences facing violent border regimes. The analysis provided in the above paragraphs alludes to the existing theory of the relationship between liminality and migration, especially on the subjectivity of forced migration and its relation to border regimes. Today it is problematic to look at these “refugee camps” through the lens of liminality, even if they have degrees of inbetweenness, uncertainty, fragility, potentiality, and transformative processes. By considering them liminal, I risk falling into a divisive stance, where “the other” is excluded for occupying a liminal space, emphasizing its state of exception. In the following paragraphs, I engage with the limitations of the concept of liminality and explore alternative ways of understanding the state of inbetweenness from the perspective of the inhabitants. I return to the term “limbo,” which some residents I encountered use to describe a purgatory-like experience when defining what it feels like to live

in these places. This framing provides a perspective that lies between religiosity and cultural interpretation, opening the way to a deeper inquiry into the essence of being in a state of inbetweenness within contemporary migratory contexts.

5.3 Limbo as Terrestrial Purgatory

Returning to the epistemological notion of liminality, my interest lies in deconstructing the liminal state, characterized by its inbetweenness and transformative nature, starting from the threshold—the point of entry, or the inception of a state or process. The threshold serves not as the liminal state itself but rather as the gateway to liminality, which may also intersect with other concepts, such as limbo. The recurring use of the term limbo by residents and volunteers of the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales offers a compelling alternative lens. Limbo, as a concept, has deep roots in Christian theology and medieval cosmology (see Le Goff, 1984), describing a middle ground between heaven and hell—a space of waiting, uncertainty, and judgment. Historically theorized as a purgatorial state, limbo has since been reframed in anthropology through theories of liminality. However, the following analysis does not pursue a theological or doctrinal reading; rather, it remains grounded in residents' own notion of limbo, using it as a critical lens to interpret lived spatial and affective experiences of inbetweenness.

As mentioned in earlier paragraphs, my interest in liminality arises from encountering the term “limbo” repeatedly in the field. This state traverses diverse migratory experiences, ranging from subjective and particular to a collective feeling of being in a constant purgatory when traveling to the intended destination. In the latter, the transformative process in the limbo, in many cases, is considered with a degree of heroism in migratory experiences.

Suppose we consider the initial moment of crossing the threshold. In that case, the person entering the inbetween state goes through different obstacles and barriers to emerge as a “new person” and reach their final destination. This idea is often encapsulated in the metaphor of the “migrant” travelers as the “contemporary migrant Ulysses,” a term used to describe the journeys and obstacles of people-in-transit with a “glorious” formality. Although these communities are crossing obstacles and borders and seeking new strategies to resist the border regime, the journey mostly does not end when they reach their final destination, if they make it at all.

During my travels in Italy, it was commonplace to encounter references to “the migrant hero's journey” or “the contemporary Ulysses” in the news media, literature, and academic conversations, particularly in relation to travelers from African countries to Italy, predominantly young men. These so-called heroes embark on arduous journeys, crossing seas, traversing long distances, confronting border regimes and law enforcement, and navigating asylum bureaucracies. They often endure var-

ious degrees of violence, terror, and dehumanization to reach their intended destination.

The idea of the “migrant hero” draws parallels to the monomyth of the “hero’s journey,” as delineated by the anthropologist Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* ([1949] 2008). Campbell’s argument, inspired by historical epic narratives, describes an inbetween framework that includes stages such as: the call to adventure, supernatural aid, crossing the threshold, the beginning of transformation, experiencing death and rebirth, and, finally, returning to the place of origin or arriving at the final destination. In the context of the migratory journey, these stages resonate in some form. Of particular interest is the importance of crossing the threshold as the starting point in the hero’s transformation during the journey, especially with regard to contemporary “migrant” travelers.

In 2015, the moving scenes of citizens in Germany gathering at borders, train stations, and airports to give a warm welcome to mainly Syrian and Iranian communities remain imprinted in my memory. The avalanche of support and celebration symbolized the culmination of the arduous journey of the “migrants” from their countries of origin, through numerous obstacles, to what seemed to be their “final destination.” However, this perception of contemporary heroes by the media and local communities contrasts sharply with the experiences of those who make the journey. Instead of being celebrated as heroes with a recognized and victorious destiny, many find themselves struggling with the harsh reality of survival upon reaching the “other side.”

A striking example of this contrast is found in the reflections of Dagmawi Yimer, an author and filmmaker from Addis Ababa. After crossing the Lebanese desert and the waters of the Mediterranean, he arrived in Lampedusa in 2006, later settling in Rome, where he established himself as a writer, poet, and filmmaker. Yimer’s reflections, collected in his book *Names and Bodies: Tales from Across the Sea* (2015), challenge the romantic idea of a heroic journey and instead highlight the role of luck in survival. In his own words:

If I am here today to speak about those who didn’t survive, it is only because I am fortunate enough to be alive. There is no glory in reaching this side of the shore. The day I arrived in Lampedusa, I was labeled as “the one who survived”; my duty is to honor the memory of those who perished. (Yimmer, 2015: 1)

Yimer’s narrative paints a vivid picture of the migratory journey as a terrestrial limbo, a purgatory devoid of symbolic rebirth. It’s a journey marked by survival at the cost of leaving comrades behind. Many survivors of these extreme journeys later seek temporary respite in “refugee camps,” self-built settlements, and abandoned buildings around Europe, mirroring the case studies in this book. Amid the

makeshift shelters and palpable transience, one encounters a profound sense of inbetweenness: the limbo and purgatory described by the inhabitants themselves.

During my visit to Rome in 2018, while searching for the story of the Tiburtina settlement, I had the opportunity to meet Dali, a 45-year-old man from Eritrea who had arrived in Italy 15 years prior and had been residing in Tiburtina back in 2002. Dali shared with me his observations on how the Sudanese, Eritrean, and Ethiopian communities coexisted within Tiburtina, despite hailing from neighboring countries often in conflict. Dali referred to the constant violent conflicts of the war between Sudan and Ethiopia, together with Amhara militants and Eritrea, that have produced a state of continuous uncertainty, instability, terror, and deterritorialization that is carried in the bodies of their compatriots toward Europe, which he considers an A'raf state.

Significantly, Dali described A'raf in Islam as a borderland between Annah (heaven) and Jahannam (hell). Beings living there are balancing their actions: they are not completely bad or good. It is considered a kind of purgatory where there is a privatization of pleasure, happiness, and movement, but there is no physical or mental suffering. It is also considered that to enter this place, you have to pass through a threshold. Dali was trying to explain this term in very simple words, and he translated it to me as a kind of limbo from the Muslim perspective. The symbolic representation is a mountain where the person is waiting before crossing into the heavens. A kind of place of waiting where the person could experience terror and hell but at the same time could experience divinity and paradise. The binary between Annah (heaven) and Jahannam (hell) is mirrored by Dali with the reality that he and his compatriots lived in Europe and the dehumanization of the migratory asylum process within Italy.

The sense of lingering uncertainty is also powerfully expressed in the Tiburtina photographic archive taken by Davide Franceschini, analyzed in Chapter 2, which included a picture with a banner saying in Italian: "In Africa, we die immediately, but in Italy, they are killing us gradually." This phrase exemplifies the feelings of being in an intermediate state of symbolic death. Claiming that Italy is killing them "slowly" refers to the terrible bureaucratic structure of the asylum and refugee processes in Italy and the European Union. Many of them called the asylum process "the torture of hope," since the asylum process in Italy could take at least two years to decide the final verdict, and frequently four years. In pandemic times, it took almost six years, Dali told me from his own experience.

In another context, when I traveled to the Chilean settlement of Los Arenales in early 2022, the word limbo and its relationship to religiosity also came to the surface. In this case, it involved the Catholic faith. Cecilia, a resident of Los Arenales, repeatedly mentioned her feeling of being in an inbetween state—living in an earthly limbo, as she describes it. Sometimes she felt that living in Los Arenales and constantly struggling against many barriers can be "a punishment from above" and

“tests that God gives us to see if we are able to get ahead.” Cecilia described how, within the Catholic Church in South America, the concept of limbo refers to a place between *cielo* (heaven) and *infierno* (hell)—a waiting place where God and his angels were checking your actions to see if you were a “good” or “bad” person, and therefore if you were eligible to enter heaven. A kind of purgatory, where the state of the beings who arrived there did not know what their destiny would be.

Cecilia also relates her experience of living in two countries at once to the feeling of limbo, of being between “there and here,” but also “not really being there and here”⁴. Cecilia has to work to support two families, her family in Venezuela and her family in Chile. She spends a percentage of her monthly income (almost 50%) to support her parents and siblings in Venezuela, who have no job opportunities and are financially dependent on her. The feeling of living between two countries, not only at the emotional level, between the memory of her home country and her current Chilean reality, but also economically, produces a sense of duality that Cecilia interprets as living in limbo, a kind of purgatory where the tension of knowing that two families depend on her is a kind of punishment that can only be lived in a purgatorial state of inbetween.

From Terrestrial Limbo toward Spatial Liminality?

Drawing from these migratory experiences and their particularities, the notion of limbo offers a way to reflect on wider forms of potential spatial liminality. The various experiences of inbetweenness shared by the people I encountered during my fieldwork were deeply personal and subjective, influenced by their religious and cultural beliefs. However, a common denominator emerged: alongside these personal experiences of inbetweenness due to their migratory circumstances, there was a tangible sense of inhabiting a territorial purgatory, marked by interminable waiting and daily confrontations with the border regimes.

Through these migratory narratives, I came to understand that the state of inbetweenness transcended mere personal experience, as the spatial dimensions of the geographical territory emerged as crucial aspects of this condition. In my fieldwork, I could sense, from my own external positionality, an aura⁵ arising from the

4 Cecilia, and many communities who arrive in Chile, search for work and better opportunities. Since they are not considered “refugees,” they fall into the category of “economic migrants,” which means that they cannot receive any benefits from the Chilean state. In general, there is very little help from the Ministry of Migration. Still, nowadays, the debates about updating Chilean immigration laws are bringing to the agenda the differences between “economic migrants” and “political refugees,” particularly with the Colombian, Venezuelan, and Haitian diaspora who are escaping dictatorial, military regimes, as well as poverty.

5 Here I use the idea of ‘aura’ to listen to the atmosphere in these places. I am inspired by the writings of the scholar Ana María Ochoa Gautier (2014) and her notion of *Aurality*, which ex-

feeling of being “trapped” in a territorial purgatory described as limbo, alongside the perpetual struggle to overcome barriers and cross borders. This aura was characterized by a combination of emotions—sadness, frustration, anger, grief, and nostalgia—that play crucial roles in recounting the experiences of living in a state of purgatory. Understood through an aural perspective, this sensory register exceeds mood and becomes a politically charged way of experiencing space and belonging (Ochoa Gautier, 2014). However, alongside these feelings, there is a unique aspirational quality, a desire for something beyond the current situation, which is reflected in the placemaking within these settlements. This is evident in the cultural and political materials found within the settlement, such as the building of houses, kinship bonds, mutual care gatherings, the organization of cultural and public events together with volunteers and neighbors, and the coordination of demonstrations defending their right to remain in their homes. As I discuss in the Epilogue of this book, these strategies of conviviality are essential in building alternative placemaking and advocating for the right to the city that these communities have been achieving in the last ten years.

I was initially interested in liminality not only in relation to personal and subjective experiences but also for its ability to define a spatiotemporal form that, thanks to its connection with ritualistic and performative contexts, broadens the notion of person-centeredness into a state involving the sense of an inbetween place. This framed my early approach to liminality as a concept that also incorporated urban studies and postcolonial terms on space such as “marginalization,” “periphery,” “edge,” “between the borders,” “hybridity,” and “space of possibility.” My approach was a reaction against the marginalized designation of “non-places” for “refugee” camps, a term that formed my starting point for thinking about liminality as a potential term for places-in-transit within the border regime. As I mentioned earlier, the recurring word used to define temporality and spatiality within these places on the part of their inhabitants was the term limbo. Limbo becomes a collective imaginary about urban life on the “threshold”; between “what was” and “what is to come.” From the perspective of its inhabitants, the perception of time and space, from transit and belonging, changes significantly, reshaping the discourse on these so-called non-places. The experiences of migration and mobility are linked to the crossing of certain territories, as well as a specific temporal dimension. Time/space becomes the defining feature that shapes the migration narrative and the importance of physical space. This was the starting point for perceiving the Dzjangan,

plores how listening is present in cultural memory and history, contradicting the visual idea of Aura as analyzed by Walter Benjamin from an aesthetic perspective. *Aurality* argues that sound and voice define knowledge and power, as well as the presence of the human in a post-colonial society.

Tiburtina, and Los Arenales as potential “liminal places” where temporality, spatiality, identity, and belonging merge into other urban forms apart from assumptions about everyday life in contemporary cities.

From this perspective, the transition of the concept of liminality from ritual processes in communities (Van Gennep, [1961] 2019) to the production of liminoid situations (Turner, 1982) in theater and performative acts makes the term interesting for its degree of “localization,” especially in relation to the idea of “camps,” whose infrastructure and design is geared toward the management of border regimes. In contrast to official-state “refugee” camps, where political and state actors are responsible for their design and establishment, in places such as the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, due to their informality and self-built nature, the process of designing the place, even if temporary, is determined by processes of alternative placemaking (see Epilogue). Despite the destructive and transformative aspects of the liminal, the process of self-designing and building something, in this case a “temporary home,” can be seen as part of a ritual process highlighting the reconstructive aspect of the liminal (Halse and Clark, 2008). Building on this, my initial interest extended beyond the notion of “suspended time” associated with liminality. I found it compelling to explore how the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, with their uncertainty and fragility about the future, could still foster conviviality, solidarity, and resistance, giving rise to a sense of *communitas*, as described by Turner and Schechner (1988), that is intrinsic to liminality. These initial observations led me to consider the idea of an intermediate stage in the urban area, a place that serves both as a repository for collective migratory memories and as a platform for defense and resistance against the border regime.

As I have discussed throughout this book, the concept of liminality has been subject to critique from various perspectives, particularly regarding tensions between the idea of people-in-transit as being “outside of time.” Initially, as I saw these places through the lens of liminality, moving away from the conventional descriptors of “non-places” and “places of exception,” recognizing the inherent biases in such categorizations. Viewing these places as liminal, however, I risked reinforcing the idea that they exist outside the temporal confines of modern cities. My intention was to shift the focus from subjective experiences to a broader spatial understanding of liminality. Transitioning from subjectivity to a liminal spatiality allowed me to explore the complex migratory inbetweenness within today’s cities. However, this shift did not fully capture the complex nature of places like the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, which are experiencing daily border regimes.

These communities navigate their inbetweenness through migratory experiences on placemaking, political actions, and resistance, seeking to challenge their marginalized status within the urban landscape. Their efforts extend beyond merely being “out of time,” as they actively engage with city-making and citizenship. By rejecting state spatial frameworks (“refugee” camps) that have led to their so-called

illegalization, these communities propose alternative models of urban existence, highlighting the need for a fundamental redefinition of what constitutes placemaking in today's city. This redefinition is particularly necessary in postmigrant cities, where migration is at the core of their urban reconfiguration.

In the next chapter, I examine the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales through a postcolonial lens. This perspective allows me to move beyond labeling these places as "non-places," "places of exception," or "liminal places," and instead to reveal the colonial past underpinning the experiences of their inhabitants. These often-unseen patterns manifest in racist practices against communities-in-transit, exacerbating their "limbo status" and perpetuating systems of inequality. By highlighting these entanglements, the next chapter seeks to contribute to a more holistic understanding of migration, urbanism, and the colonial legacies still present in today's cities through the lens of self-built settlements and their placemaking.

CHAPTER 6

Becomings: Placemaking in Inbetweenness

In this chapter, I examine the enduring presence of colonial legacy in today's border regimes through a postcolonial lens. The Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales embody their inbetweenness, navigating colonial, racialized, and migratory dynamics that shape their unique placemaking. I look closely at their migratory "becomings" and how these have shaped the creation of their social places.

6.1 From Temporary Status to Colonial Resonance

During my fieldwork in Italy in 2021, while participating in an exchange program at the postcolonial and gender center of L'Orientale University of Naples, I encountered the anthropologist Ian Chambers, who offered a different perspective for looking at the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales—the case studies of this book. Chambers understood my initial motivation for employing the term “liminality,” recognizing its significance not only in terms of ritualistic transformation as highlighted by the ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep ([1961] 2019), but also through its temporal, sensorial, affective, and spatial dimensions within border zones, both geographical and affective (see Chapter 5). Through a postcolonial lens, Chambers suggested initially viewing these places as “Elsewhere,” acknowledging them as having “other” knowledge and practices beyond Western ideals. Subsequently, we explored together the potential of adopting a decolonial lens, specifically through the “Borderland/Frontera” framework proposed by the scholar of Chicana feminism and queer theory, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), which encompasses the multifaceted states of inbetweenness—geographical, affective, and existential—of communities living on the border (I will unfold this trend in the last section of this chapter).

Drawing from his extensive work on “Mediterranean crossings” (see Chambers, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2019, 2020), Chambers looked at the layers of colonial legacies within the communities of the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, particularly concerning the African diaspora traversing the Mediterranean Sea—a phenomenon that makes Italy a natural bridge between North Africa and Southern Europe. In

looking at the narratives of the people in these places, as analyzed in the second section of this chapter, we were able to identify relationships to the colonial past among the inhabitants, where there is not only the history shaped by colonialism in Africa and Central-South Asia, but also a connection with the transatlantic trade in enslaved people, the Haitian Revolution, and its legacy in the Caribbean, which are essential traces in current migration in Chile.

In *The Post-Colonial Question* ([1994] 2002), together with the postcolonial feminist anthropologist Lidia Curti, Chambers explored the implications of inhabiting margins or existing beyond established borders, framing it as an experience originating from “Elsewhere,” amplifying the diverse voices of communities emerging from alternative perspectives, offering critiques and resistance to the prevailing Europeanist “center.” Chambers and Curti argue that postcolonialism seeks to recognize diverse points of view and to be mindful of the enduring scars of colonial legacies. However, “under common skies and before divided horizons” (Chambers and Curti, 2002: xii), they identify potential for uncovering new insights and shared responsibilities that amplify the perspectives of those marginalized from the colonial grid (Chambers and Curti, [1994] 2002). In this sense, viewed through the lens of “Elsewhere,” the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales communities highlight ongoing resistance and struggles against the border regime. This is especially so in the alternative knowledge production emerging from these places, which are saturated with migratory narratives embedded in the dehumanization and violence perpetrated by border regimes. The critical stance of postcolonial theory toward the impact of colonialism and its contemporary repercussions on migration underscores the limitations of the concept of liminality within the context of migration struggles against today’s border regime. Although I have attempted to politicize liminality by shifting from subjectivation to spatiality and locating the states of inbetween of the liminal in the context of border regime struggles, as analyzed in chapter 5, it remains a concept that does not fully capture the various layers of the colonial past that these communities continue to struggle with in the present.

I interpret Chambers’ concept of “Elsewhere” as encompassing marginalized histories stemming from colonial times. Chambers diverges from the notion of these histories being viewed as “mere remote elsewhere,” as measured from a colonial standpoint, recognizing that within this “other knowledge” a compulsion to confront a “worldly response, a historical response-ability” (Said, 1977; also cited in Chambers and Curti, 2002: 51). By acknowledging the existence of an “alternate world” distinct from the familiar one, Chambers and Curti introduced in the 1990s a fresh perspective through a postcolonial reading, offering insights into approaching the understanding of “Elsewhere” as an alternative avenue for grappling with and taking accountability for the colonial past. This approach seeks out the alternative narratives that are often intertwined in today’s cities, questioning the assumed ideas of the “center” as “home” and the “elsewhere” as a “distant place”

lacking belonging. Even so, acknowledging these other realities and perspectives does not automatically lead to resolution, solace, or healing of colonial legacies. However, there is the potential to seek answers and define future responsibilities, fostering a collective aspiration to understand and address the enduring wounds of colonialism (Chambers and Curti, [1994] 2002).

To expand on this, I turn to the decolonial sociologist Catherine Walsh's reflections on "other thought," which open a decolonial way of confronting the colonial legacy. In her work *"Other" Knowledges*, *"Other" Critiques* (2012), Walsh examines these alternative "other" spaces, encompassing divergent philosophies and knowledge that challenge not only the definitions and boundaries of Western philosophy and knowledge production but also its geopolitical dominance. Walsh, from a decolonial perspective, places the production of knowledge within a modern and colonial historical context, framing the struggle against it within the context of the "other America." This "other America," as Walsh defines it, encompasses not just the geographical "South" but also epistemological "souths" within the North, including the Caribbean, Central America, South America, and particularly Andean America. Walsh's arguments about "other knowledges" primarily stem from the viewpoints of Andean indigenous and Afro-descendant scholars and activists, who view epistemic production as a crucial aspect of their decolonial political projects in confronting colonialism. These projects aim not only to challenge colonial structures but also to transform and reconstruct concepts of societal perceptions and power dynamics within coloniality (Mignolo, 2012; Walsh, 2012). In this regard, the ongoing process of decoloniality (see Mignolo and Walsh, 2018) seeks to unveil what has been silenced, made invisible, and marginalized. This process of transformation and reconstruction, rooted in colonial subjectivities, histories, and memories, involves the production of these "other" knowledges with alternative philosophies and ways of relating to the world, which have historically been disregarded and denied. This "other" critical thought does not claim to represent a singular and uniform perspective but, as Walsh stresses through the work of Abdelkebir Khatibi (see Khatibi, 2019), it embodies collective thought emerging from difference and marginalization (Walsh, 2012).

Building upon this argument, looking at the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales as "Elsewhere" implies recognizing that in these "other places"—"Elsewhere"—different ways of thinking and community-building are being nurtured. As I have noted throughout this book, these communities counter the categorization of "non-places" and "places of exception" by creating alternative placemaking practices within Western urbanism (see Chapter 5). Their unique conceptions of time and space, reflected in their placemaking practices, must be comprehended on their own terms, distinct from Western frameworks. This perspective reinforces the notion of "Elsewhere" as a counternarrative to enduring colonial structures in

contemporary border regimes, aligning with postcolonial and decolonial discourses that address coloniality more broadly.

Thanks to looking through this “Elsewhere” lens, I have opened a window to examine the colonial past and its current repercussions, as I will elaborate in subsequent paragraphs. However, in the third section of this chapter, I reconsider examining these places from this position by applying Anzaldúa’s (1987) hybrid lens of *Borderland/Frontera*. I have come to understand that places like the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales serve as arenas where dichotomies between the “West” and the “South” are not as clear as they seem. The Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales represent places where the dichotomous borders and the distinct boundaries between colonial legacy and strategies of decolonial resistance pose a complex challenge. In contrast to the distinctions of “other” knowledge production originating from outside Western societies, the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales embody a more nuanced reality. These places illustrate the possibility of experiencing, comprehending, and engaging in contemporary Western urban life while envisioning alternative urban forms inside them, thus challenging the conceptual confines of Western ideals. They embody a dynamic interaction within the urban fabric, emphasizing the potential for coexistence and mutual influence between diverse cultural and social spheres. The concept of *Borderland/Frontera* underscores the understanding of the intermediate state of these communities, whose existential, migratory and territorial inbetweenness extends into contemporary reality and the interrogation of the “West–South” dichotomy.

6.2 Present Advocacy with Colonial Traces

By exploring the (hi)stories of the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, I found it crucial to delve into the migratory routes of its inhabitants, which brought to light layers intertwined with imperial, colonial, and racist structures present in today’s border regimes. It revealed their relationship to the violent tactics of control and identification with a focus on technologies such as digital fingerprints and databases which play central roles in today’s border surveillance. In this section, I look at traces of colonial legacy present in the narratives of people-in-transit. The journeys of the African diaspora across the Mediterranean Sea, acting as a bridge between Africa and Europe, unveil echoes of maritime colonial trade routes. Zooming out, these connections extend across the Atlantic Ocean, encompassing colonial maritime routes between Africa, Europe, and Latin America. Understanding these historical connections is essential in grasping present-day migration trends in Chile, particularly in the case of Los Arenales, where Afro-Caribbean residents endure severe racial violence. These acts of violence, carried out by many Chilean communities, underline “migrants” as an inferior classification, bringing to the

forefront an unnamed racism that violates these communities in Chilean territory. These acts of violence are deeply entangled in centuries of colonialism in America and the suppressed history of African communities during the Spanish and Portuguese colonial era. Exploring the colonial past within these violent actions, as well as pointing out the surveillance tactics of European border regimes, brings to the forefront the colonial patterns present in these urban spaces. Yet it is also possible for diverse strategies to be employed by people-in-transit to challenge the border regime's tactics and structural racism.

Echoes of Empire

Text fragments from the book chapter: "The Jungle of Calais: A Place of Resistance and Monumentality" (Garland, 2021a)

At the crossroads of France and the United Kingdom, where Calais—and with it the Dzjanganl settlement—once was located, a critical lens opens onto the border regimes shaping the European Union and the Schengen Area. The following text fragments engage with the Dzjanganl by situating it beyond the category of a "refugee camp," reading it instead as a historically layered borderland shaped by colonial legacies, geopolitical asymmetries, and long-term displacement.

The Dzjanganl is not only a new urban form of cosmopolitization as analyzed by the anthropologist Michel Agier in his ethnography *The Jungle: Calais's Camps and Migrants* (2018), due to its conviviality between different nationalities, cultures, religions, economic status (the socioeconomic past of each inhabitant), and inter-social positions (refugees/migrants/volunteers). It is possible to go further, understanding the Dzjanganl and its environment as a cosmopolitical border settlement, by its geographical category of being located on the border between the continent (Europe) and the island (the UK). The Dzjanganl not only represents a cultural biopolitics and mobility, it also embraces the politics of geography and nature, with its archeological borderline of being on the edge of geographical, natural, political, economic, cultural forms of contrast, among others (Hicks and Mallet, 2019). By considering the Dzjanganl only as a "refugee camp," seeing it from a defined type of "informal" settlement, risks losing the perspective of long-term juxtaposition between the several human experiences of displacement between the UK's border and the European continent. By defining the Dzjanganl as a "specific" form, it will not be possible to make the spatial parallels that this fringe embraces in the "totality" of the present and past. Dan Hicks and Sarah Mallet write: "These juxtapositions proliferate: between colonial pasts and the (post)colonial present, between shelter and dispossession, between the Global North and the Global South, and even between Old and New Worlds" (Hicks and Mallet, 2019, p. 26). (Garland, 2021a: 125–126)

When I first entered the Dzjanganal and observed its precarious and dehumanizing conditions, I was extremely shocked to experience this reality within a European country like France. With my experiences inside shantytowns, “Tomas,” and “Favelas”¹ in South America, I already had a bit more understanding of the material reality of the inhabitants in these fragile environments. Observing this similar and even more complex context² in a European city inside the economic and political powers of the EU and the Schengen area, it struck me how environmentally hostile what I was seeing was. The contrasts and parallels of contemporary realities between Europe and “the otherness” triggered me to consider how “Western ‘civilisation’ grew in two directions at once, enacting the idea of progress in tandem with its reverse—creating present pasts that justified its own degenerate savagery beyond the bounds of Europe” (Hicks and Mallet, 2019: 51). It is here that the reality of the Dzjanganal (inside and out) embodies the ongoing problematic of colonialist legacies in contemporary Europe. The (post)colonial images and actions of resistance of the surviving bodies of the camp consistently point out the colonialist and imperial legacy of Western civilization. In the Dzjanganal, it is possible to witness firsthand how these ongoing (post)colonial survivors are experienced vividly by displaced people through the strange epoch into which they are forced: “a technological Mesolithic, where, apart from the smartphone, there is no modern technology of shelter, of transport, of lighting, heating, or community based on sedentism” (Hicks and Mallet, 2019, p. 63). (Garland, 2021a: 126)

When looking at the historical legacy as analyzed by Hicks and Mallet, which points out the radical vision of Lucy Mayblin (2017), most of the asylum seekers in Great Britain come from regions that used to be part of the British Empire. More specifically, in Calais these former regions overwhelmingly comprise only four states: Afghanistan, Sudan, Southern Sudan, and Eritrea (with some smaller but significant numbers of Somalis). (Hicks and Mallet, 2019, p. 68). Refugee Rights Europe reports that in the 2015–2016 census of the Dzjanganal population, between two-thirds and four-fifths of the total population comes mainly from five countries: Afghanistan, Sudan, Southern Sudan, Eritrea, and, to a lesser extent, Somalia. A significant number of Syrian and Iraqi communities began to arrive in 2015–2016 and Iranians began to arrive in late 2017.³ Four of the five main countries that have been represented by nationals in Calais were former Protectorates or protected states of the British Empire: Afghanistan (Emirate of Afghanistan, 1879–1919), Sudan and Southern Sudan (Anglo-Egyptian, Sudan 1899–1956), and Somalia (British Somaliland, 1884–1960). And in the case of Eritrea, after half a century of Italian rule there was a significant period of British military rule (Hicks and Mallet, 2019, p. 69). (Garland, 2021a: 127)

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- 1 Refers to the same concept as shantytown, used mainly in South America. For example: Toma in the case of Chile and Favela in Brazil.
 - 2 Its cosmopolitan quality, its location on a territorial fringe, and the daily violence between authorities.
 - 3 Due to the introduction of visa-free travel for Iranians to Serbia.

From this standpoint, people-in-transit crossing the English Channel and navigating the borders of the European Union and Schengen Area grapple not only with the historical legacies of colonialism in their countries of origin but also endure the harsh techniques employed by the present-day European border regime, which are deeply rooted in colonial practices of surveillance, control, and identification. In her book *Postcolonial Surveillance: Europe's Border Technologies between Colony and Crisis* (2022), the feminist scholar Anouk Madörin delves into the history of the European border regime and its ties to colonial predecessors of current border technological artifacts. Madörin explores how Europe's colonial past continues to influence contemporary high-tech politics and has shaped EU border migration policies, border security, and surveillance mechanisms. She sheds light on pivotal moments where the past and present intersect and clash, including “panoptic surveillance, biopolitical registries, biometric classification, and deterrent media infrastructure” (Madörin, 2022: xv).

The reform of the Dublin III regulation in 2013 marked a pivotal point in the technological sophistication of European border regimes. With the European Commission's approval, the first EU member state in which fingerprints are stored or an asylum application is lodged becomes responsible for the asylum application of the individual seeking refuge. In this sense, EU legislation takes control of the database to collect fingerprints of people-in-transit and carefully monitors in which country they must apply for asylum. Once individuals are in the EU database, they are compelled to return to the first European country where they were identified upon entry. This procedure deprives individuals of the opportunity to choose the country in which they wish to seek asylum. The Dublin Regulation stipulates that people-in-transit can and should be deported to the country where their fingerprints were first taken, halting their continued border crossings.

With the Dublin reform update, the implementation of biometric devices in the EU database became a strategic measure to expedite and enhance the identification of individuals crossing borders. Today, these biometric technologies have become the standard for immigration control worldwide. They have transcended their original purpose and have been integrated into various facets of society, not only for controlling migratory flows but also for everyday use in urban settings. For instance, fingerprints, once solely utilized for border-control databases, civil and electoral services, are now employed in schools, universities, pharmacies, supermarkets, and other contexts to identify individuals in a “fast, effective and clean” manner. In this sense, biometric practices are seen as “neutral and clean” methods for classifying a person's identity. Their character of using statistics to calculate biological and physiological data provides this supposed neutrality when it comes to identity categorization (Madörin, 2022). However, as argued by Madörin, these practices of data collection and identification have deeper historical colonial origins than the neutral advancements in EU border regimes suggest.

Biometric technologies emerged during the era of European imperialism, intertwined with colonial strategies of suppression and scientific racism. Biometric technology traces its origins back to the pseudo-disciplines of anthropometry, phrenology, and craniology in the 19th century. These practices were once extensively utilized in anthropology but are now widely discredited for their basis in scientific racism (Madörin, 2022). Madörin identifies fundamental aspects in the history of biometrics: from its origins in the colonial era, its utilization in 19th-century criminology and police work, to the contemporary biometric database of the European border regime. Throughout its history, key elements have revolved around “physical violence, identification, and evidence” (Madörin, 2022: 58).

The current border regime demonstrates an unprecedented level of sophistication, extending beyond physical, technological, and digital means of border control to include the biology of the human body. This sophistication is exemplified by the use of carbon dioxide to detect human presence (via palpitations) within transportation vehicles (such as cars and trucks) crossing borders, tested often at the English Channel Tunnel on the France/UK border. These advancements have refined the state’s mapping of bodies, resulting in a significantly more detailed database for migratory identification. The sophisticated data collection techniques are based on colonial tactics from early biometric projects. Madörin identifies three direct links between modern biometric data collection and colonial biometric initiatives. Firstly, physical violence: each biometric data collection involves violence against the human body, bringing the past of colonial terror into the present. Secondly, the use of biometrics for subject identification: biometrics are frequently used not just for identifying individual bodies but also for categorizing them into specific groups or classes, influenced by racialized structures masked by seemingly impartial statistics, biological calculations, and physiological data. Lastly, the prioritization of machinery and technological precision over individuals’ narratives and life stories. Here, the “facts” collected by biometric data will influence later decisions, erasing the personal experiences suffered by these bodies at the border. Through these observations, Madörin (2022) highlights the deeply entrenched colonial remnants within contemporary biometric practices and stresses the significance of critically examining the ethical ramifications of such technologies.

In this context, despite biometrics being wielded in service of state violence, people-in-transit have devised strategies to counter them, aiming to remain clandestine while crossing borders. These tactics have reached levels of sophistication in the struggle against border regimes, with some resorting to extreme measures such as body mutilation to resist the “obligation to be seen and identified” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007). These efforts challenge the EU database and oppose the Dublin Regulations, which impose authoritarian rules forcing people-in-transit to undergo asylum processes in the first country where they were biometrically identified and entered into the EU database. These ongoing struggles against border regimes rep-

resent efforts to combat the persistent vestiges of colonial structures characterized by racism, authoritarianism, and hierarchy toward “migrant bodies.” The strategies employed by people-in-transit serve as acts of reidentification, reclaiming agency over their bodies colonized by the contemporary border regime. The notion of the right to disappear, manifested through practices of mutilation to dissociate oneself from the database, underscores the importance of reflecting on the migration struggle and prioritizing mobility over border control (Garland, 2021a).

Strategies such as document burning, fingerprint erasure, and the use of border-crossing tactics, as described by scholars Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos (2007), are efforts to erase the connection between the human body and its identity, thus challenging the fundamental notion of human rights. The erasure and mutilation of fingerprints underscores debates about disappearance and the right to disappear. Philosopher Roberto Esposito’s concept of the “immune dispositif” argues how contemporary biometric identification policies present a tangible and symbolic challenge to modern life. This dispositif serves as the central axis, both real and symbolic, of contemporary existence (Esposito, 2011; Sanyal, 2017; Garland, 2021a). The integration of digital and technological elements into the human body through fingerprint identification personifies an official biopolitics of inscription. The mutilation and near-amputation of physical and digital identities emerge as products of violence, state control, and the lingering structures of colonial traces within the present border regime (Sanyal, 2017; Garland, 2021a). By embracing innovative resistance tactics, people-in-transit confront the contemporary manifestations of colonial patterns embedded within security and surveillance within the border regimes. The entanglement between visibility and invisibility in autonomous migration tactics revealed the sophistication of these resistance efforts, echoing colonial terror akin to that described by Madörin above. However, this progressive sophistication of migration strategies and border regimes has led to tragic events that violate all human rights. The many deaths that the Mediterranean Sea and the English Channel contain, and also the Atacama Desert in South America, remind us of the consequences of these struggles, both to prevent mobility and to preserve its right.

These strategies against border regimes have also led to the erasure of individual identity within these same communities, as seen in the case of the Dzjangan community. The high level of community and collective organization within the Dzjangan had fostered a strong sense of unity. However, it had also resulted in the loss of personal identity. The community transformed from being perceived simply as “migrants” wandering the streets of Calais to being recognized as “The Dzjangan”—a resilient, organized community actively resisting the policies of the French and British governments. The community’s appropriation of the Calais area had engendered decolonial attitudes, yet simultaneously led to the suppression of individual identity as a means of defense against the border laws of the European Union.

During my first visit to the Dzjanganl in July 2016, I encountered these mobility strategies. At the time, I was deeply immersed in the complex and dynamic environment of the Dzjanganl, and I couldn't fully comprehend what I was witnessing. During a meeting with Syrian community leaders, I noticed that almost all of them had their fingertips wrapped in medical bandages. While at first it seemed like a minor incident, I now realize their attempt to erase their own fingerprints, preparing to cross the Channel through the tunnel that same night. During the conversation, they told me that the initial plan was to jump from the road that runs through Calais and leads to the tunnel, with one of its entrances located directly above the area occupied by the Dzjanganl. The way they described it revealed a strategically collective organization, with each person having a role in how they would jump onto the moving trucks. I could sense their individual identities fading away—without fingerprints or identification documents—as they merged into a collective strategic body. Choosing to synchronize their movements and jump onto the trucks simultaneously was a deliberate tactic to challenge individualization and leverage the collective act of jumping together. In this sense, the elimination of fingerprints serves not only as a form of resistance against the state and its policies of control but also as a process of disappearance that fosters a collective mindset, provoking a powerful resistance to the search for safer haven outside the confines of official European “refugee” camps. The act of self-eradicating fingerprints is a means to achieve “free” mobility and the ability to choose the destination of their journey. By mutilating their fingerprints, communities-in-transit can assert their autonomy and determine their own path. This collective decision illustrates that by “disappearing” as individuals, they can strengthen their group identity, uniting as “one” and forging a new communal identity. The example of the Dzjanganl serves as tangible and dramatic proof of this art of resistance against border regimes and the still present colonial patterns within it (Garland, 2021a).

Afterlives of Colonialism

From a South American perspective, particularly looking at the reality of contemporary migration in Chile, these colonial traces take on a different form, often more subtle and challenging to discern. As South Americans, we are familiar with a particular colonial legacy deeply rooted in our history—a history scarred by the extermination, violence, and exploitation of countless indigenous communities across the continent. The Spanish and Portuguese colonial imprint is evident in our “official languages,” traditional dances, attire, and iconic national cuisines, embodying a blend of European and indigenous cultures in a contemporary “creole” and “mestizo” society shaped by a turbulent past and the forced coexistence of Europeans and indigenous peoples. Yet, the afterlives of colonialism in Chile are not limited to indigenous histories alone. Unlike in some parts of Peru and predominantly in

Brazil and the Caribbean countries, there is not much historical documentation of the African diaspora as inhabitants of the country in Chile's collective consciousness. However, this omission leaves untold and marginalized stories that resurface today with the influx of Caribbean communities, many of them of African descent, particularly from Colombia, Venezuela, and Haiti.

This unraveling of colonial patterns in Chilean territory invites us to take a closer look at this sociocultural phenomenon, which leads us to possible connections between racism, colonial legacy, and migration, reflected especially in the northern region of Chile, where the Los Arenales settlement is located. The arrival of Caribbean communities in Chile in recent decades has had sociopolitical and cultural implications, imbued with a negative sentiment toward their presence, bringing to the surface deep wounds and hatreds stemming from historical conflicts and colonial narratives, which throughout Chilean history have not been criticized when discussing Chilean national identity. This forgetting and erasure of the past has shaped the present experiences of these communities in Chilean society (Tijoux, 2016).

During my fieldwork in Los Arenales at the end of 2021, I participated in a seminar at the Sociology Department of the University of Chile, taught by sociologist and activist Professor María Emilia Tijoux. The seminar, titled "Racism and Contemporary Migrations," focused on the everyday racism that "migrant" communities are experiencing in Chile, especially communities of African descent. Tijoux and other academics structured the seminar around the effect of forgotten colonial legacies on the socioeconomic and political dynamics of contemporary migration in Chile, highlighting that the intersection of migration and racism has become almost indistinguishable, particularly within the Chilean context. This offered a new lens through which to look at the narratives of "migrant" communities like Los Arenales, echoing similar struggles experienced by inhabitants of the Dzjanganal and Tiburtina in Europe.

[I]mmigration is constructed as an idea, and in the way some people use it, it ceases to express its broader definition and becomes a stigma that labels citizens of specific countries,⁴ placing them in geographical, spatial, and symbolic borders that rob them of their social being and question the law and their human rights ... "[I]mmigration" as a concept, then, becomes a "problem" that ends up sheltering racism. (Tijoux, 2016: 15, my English translation)

In recent years, academic debate surrounding contemporary migration in Chile has been coping with the transformation of migration into a concept extending beyond mere global human mobility. This shift has accentuated the distinction between the

4 In the Chilean context: Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, and Venezuela.

“foreigner” and the “migrant,” effectively linking migration with racism. In Chile, the stigmatization of Caribbean communities, particularly those of African descent, has given rise to stereotypes and daily instances of racist behavior—many of which would be publicly condemned or deemed morally unacceptable in today’s European contexts.

The Chilean historian Celia Cussen, in her article “Race and Quality of Life in the Kingdom of Chile: Colonial Background of Discrimination” (2016), analyzes the history of African people who were enslaved in Chile. She argues that when studying the second contemporary diaspora of African descendants in Chile, it is pertinent to review the history of the first African diaspora, which is poorly known but essential to understand the racist actions of Chilean society toward today’s “migrant” community. Cussen argues that from the beginning of the arrival of the African diaspora in Chile, there was no such evident naming or stigmatization on the condition of “race” or skin color. Instead, the European colonies in the South American territory referred to this diaspora mainly geographically as “Congo,” “Mandinga,” “Angolo,” and “Carabali”; there were also other names such as “Mulato” and “Zambo.” Still, the idea of “race”, as Cussen argues, was not present in the first centuries of the enslavement of African people in America. Rather, the concept of “race” will later be a strong factor in the independent republics of the Chilean “criollos.” The African diaspora in Chile dates back to the 16th century when the indigenous population was dying from disease, extermination, and violence by Europeans, requiring the “replacement” of labor for mining and mechanical work in the city (Cussen, 2016). The “replacement” from the 16th century concerning the African diaspora in Chilean territory, resurfaces today in the labor integration of “migrants” in Chile. In their work “Immigrants, the ‘New Barbarians’ in the Biopolitical Grammar of Contemporary States” (2014), Tijoux and sociologist Gonzalo Díaz analyze the dominant narratives of the Chilean nation throughout its colonial past and neoliberal present, and how they resonate with “new migrants” when they enter the Chilean labor market. They introduce the term “new barbarians” to characterize the role that Afro-Caribbean communities play in this market.

According to Tijoux and Díaz, the “new barbarians,” impoverished and of darker complexion, are depicted as the contemporary “other,” perpetuating longstanding colonial dichotomies and reinforcing Chilean society’s self-image of a white, European, and Greco-Christian civilization (Tijoux and Díaz, 2014). Tijoux argues that the self-image of Chilean society is based on the colonial founding and the establishment of the Chilean nation-state. This creates a potent national image that justifies dominance and supremacy, leading to the integration of racist arguments along with classist discourses into the national fabric (Tijoux and Córdova, 2015: 8). In her work “The Other ‘Black’ Immigrant and the Chilean ‘Us,’” Tijoux (2014) connects colonial historical narratives of a Chilean past with its patterns of racism with the current experiences of communities of African descent when entering the labor mar-

ket. These communities often participate in “precarious employment characterized by flexible schedules, lack of contracts, and extended workdays” (Tijoux, 2014: 12).

There is also the perpetuation of stereotypes associated with “racialized sexualization” (Aguirre, 2018), which have historically contributed to racist behaviors against Afro-Caribbean communities, especially female Afro-Caribbean “migrants,” in South America. These women are frequently exoticized and racialized within and beyond their workplaces. Historical studies and colonial theory reveal a pattern of sexualization and exoticization of female “migrants” of color, stemming from processes of colonization, Eurocentrism, and racial categorization. Many Afro-Caribbean female “migrants” are unfairly stereotyped as excessively sexual, resulting in the reinforcement of such stereotypes in both workplace environments and broader Chilean society (see Barton, 2017). The exploitation of labor and racialized sexualization experienced by “migrant” communities today are crucial aspects to consider when looking at colonial traces in Chilean territory.

Much has been said in Chile about the marked disconnection between Chileans and their African roots. As Cussen speculates, it could be the reason for the early “mestisaje” and also “blanqueamiento”⁵ between European, indigenous, and African communities in colonial times. Since the 19th century it has also been an important factor that has erased and silenced traces of African heritage in the famous liberal discourse of the construction of the Chilean nation-state, the blood union of “the Chilean race.” Early racist Chilean historians, such as Diego Barros Arana (1884), affirm that African people who were enslaved did not play an important role in the economic and cultural development of the Chilean nation. Barros Arana argues that most emigrated to Argentina, Peru, and Brazil because many could not acclimatize to the non-tropical Chilean weather. Another well-known racist Chilean historian, Francisco Encina (1912), says we have been “fortunate” not to have African descent. In his words: “The elimination of the n**** was a great good for the Chilean race. The intellectual and moral manifestations of its mestizos were not encouraging” (cited in Cussen, 2016: 31, my English translation).

These historical racist writings displaced and silenced African traces in our Chilean national imaginary, although scientific studies corroborate that the DNA of

5 *Blanqueamiento* is the Spanish translation of “whitening,” which refers to a societal, political, and economic strategy observed in numerous postcolonial nations throughout the Americas and Oceania, aimed at “enhancing the race” toward an idealized notion of whiteness (Rahier, 1999). The term “blancamiento,” originating in Latin America, is often associated with the concept of racial whitening. However, whitening encompasses both symbolic and biological aspects. Symbolically, it embodies an ideology stemming from the legacies of European colonialism, as outlined in Anibal Quijano’s theory of the coloniality of power, which promotes white dominance within social hierarchies (Montalvo and Codina, 2001). Biologically, *blanqueamiento* involves the process of achieving whiteness by marrying individuals with lighter skin tones to produce offspring with similarly lighter complexions.

thousands of Chileans from different social strata have a percentage of African heritage—2.7% of the total population (Berrios, 2016). However, it is a low percentage compared to our indigenous and European traces. Historically, Chilean society has forgotten, silenced, and denied this past, which flourishes again with the current migration in the country and is becoming “a problem” that somehow is resurfacing issues of “race” and everyday racism (Correa Telléz, 2016).

In her paper, “Immigration as a ‘Problem’ or the Resurgence of Race. General Racism, Everyday Racism and Its Role in the Confrontation of the Nation” (2016), the Chilean sociologist Josefina Correa Telléz argues that in the mainstream Chilean narrative, when the marginalization of the “migrants” are discussed, it is framed as a “problem of discrimination or xenophobia,” while sometimes when the notion of racism is used it is presented as a synonym of xenophobia. Somehow, “racism” loses its connotation and becomes equivalent to the “fear of the other,” also reflected in classism. I remember a conversation with some of my Chilean communities, referring to the various discriminatory and violent actions of Chilean groups against the Venezuelan community. One of the examples we discussed was the event that occurred in January 2022: A group of Chilean citizens from Iquique (northern Chile) burned tents, personal belongings, passports, and important documents belonging to Venezuelan families who were sleeping outside the Venezuelan consulate, waiting for bureaucratic answers. In our discussion, the argument was that these violent acts were more of a “classist” response on the part of this Chilean community and not a “racist” act. “The Chilean is not racist but classist,” one of them told me. The “classist” perception this person was referring to was: “these families come from very poor places in Venezuela. They already had their way of living and relating to public spaces, marked by a lack of education, cleanliness, chaos and noise.”

What this person meant by saying that “the Chilean is classist but not racist,” referred to the xenophobic acts of the Chilean group toward the Venezuelan, Colombian, and Haitian communities. By not problematizing the category of racism to understand discriminatory phenomena and marginalization of people-in-transit, there is a tendency to ignore the historical, political, and economic process that today places migration as a “problem” for Chilean society (Correa Telléz, 2016). Instead, violent acts are individualized only as “racist subjects”; they are not framed as structural and therefore embedded in the colonial legacy of our Chilean history. Another example of this can be found in the 1990s in Chile. According to Correa Telléz, there was a large Argentinian and Peruvian migration to Chile, but only Peruvian migration was perceived as a “threat” to Chilean society as, in the racist imaginary, Peru was seen as having a higher percentage of indigenous population and also because of the shared history with the Pacific War, making the Peruvian people “the natural enemy of Chile.” In contrast, the Argentine people were perceived as being of largely European descent. The Peruvian “migrant” thus became the “illegal,” the

“delinquent,” “the poorly paid worker,” “the nanny,” “the underdeveloped,” and “the unemployed” (Correa Telléz, 2016: 39–40).

Another example I was confronted with was from a neighbor of Antofagasta talking about the Los Arenales settlement and other self-built settlements in the city, where almost 80% of the inhabitants are people from Caribbean countries:

You know what the new name of our city Antofagasta is? It is now called Antofalombia⁶ since we have already had an “invasion” since 2015 of Colombians looking for the Chilean dream.⁷ They are poor in their country and believe they will become rich in Chile. Now we even have sicarios and many daily deaths in our city. Colombians and now Venezuelans have brought crime and danger to the streets. I can no longer go for a walk with my husband, as we find n**** always in the streets.

The neighbor’s comment and the comments above from some of my Chilean community are an accurate summary of the commentary in extreme right-wing Chilean newspapers on the various violent events that have spread in the north of the country, saturated with xenophobia about delinquency, sexualization, and exoticism toward the “migrant” community. “This image of ‘them’ versus ‘us,’ that assumes the existence of ‘superior and inferior’ beings, is achieved in a way that brings back the old question of ‘inferior races’ that shaped colonial representations” (Tijoux, 2016: 18). It may be that our historical ignorance, specifically with regard to the African diaspora and the historical desire for a “Chilean white nationhood,” reveals how class, ethnicity, “race,” nation, and gender are markers that highlight the outbreaks of violence and stigma toward the “migrant” (Tijoux, 2016). “The race,” so questioned and debated, reappears with today’s Afro-Caribbean diaspora in Chile, mainly when government policy seeks to “protect” the nation and to “integrate” the “migrant” into

6 Antofalombia: Antofa: diminutive of Antofagasta, falom: diminutive of “falopa” popular term to refer to the drug cocaine and lombia: diminutive of Colombia.

7 In 2015, Chile stood out as the most “developed” nation in Latin America. The significant surge in migration mirrors Chile’s economic upswing and its democratic consolidation following the end of the Pinochet dictatorship. While the United States remains the main destination for most Latin American communities, and Canada the second, the challenges associated with pursuing the “American Dream” are prompting a growing number of Latin Americans to consider the increasingly appealing “Chilean Dream.” The ripple effects across the region should not be underestimated: as people from other Latin American countries choose Chile as their new home, the country’s market-oriented economic strategies and commitment to strengthening democratic institutions are closely watched in other regional capitals. In contrast to the “American Dream,” often perceived as culturally distant or disconnected from Latin American realities, the expanding influence of a “Chilean Dream” has led many in neighboring countries to believe that if Chile can achieve the status of an industrialized nation, so can their own countries (Navia, 2015).

society. The reemergence of the concept of “race” that we see in Europe, Latin America, and many other parts of the world is seen in the various strategies of border regimes, government policies, and the everyday dynamics of the city, which highlight this harmful discrimination reflected in the dehumanization of the “migrant body” by the host society.

The historical prejudice entrenched in Chilean society remains pertinent today, chiefly due to its direct impact on the prevailing institutional behaviors and attitudes toward newly arrived Afro-Caribbean communities. According to Tijoux and Díaz, the history of enslaved people in colonial Chile, coupled with the nationalist rhetoric of the “republic of Chile” project, forms the foundation of our contemporary racism.

[H]istorically, two primary sources have shaped our identity as a collective “us” in Chile: the colonial legacy embedded in our culture (colonial imagination: civilization); the formation of the Chilean nation-state (national state imagination: racial identity). These origins delineate two interconnected dimensions of the issue: the ideological construction of discourses surrounding “civilization” and the nation-state, and the tangible exercise of power, manifested through institutional violence (via public policies, actions, or omissions) and everyday instances of violence (through gaze, language, and treatment). (Tijoux and Díaz, 2014: 7; my English translation)

In the argumentation of Tijoux and Díaz, the basic social convictions in Chile are reflected in the political constitution of the state of the respective historical time. In it, a notion of Chilean identity is drawn that is permeated with a homogeneity derived from the supposedly unique notion “between Europeans and Araucanians” (Aravena and Alt, 2012, cited in Aguirre, 2018: 11). Consequently, the Chilean social and constitutional imaginary, stemming from the colonial past, has traversed the stages of independence to the present, underpinning nation-state ventures that, according to Tijoux and Díaz, threaten xenophobic, racist, and violent tendencies. This violence, they argue, is exercised and legitimized against the “other,” who does not fit into Chilean society, such as today’s “migrants,” especially the diaspora of African descent, who are marginalized as “the other,” perpetuating colonial dichotomies between “us” and “them” (Aguirre, 2018).

All of that being said, I do not want to claim that “Chilean society is inherently racist,” as has been emphasized by many due to the widespread violence against “migrant” communities in recent years. Rather, with these reflections, I want to emphasize the complexity of the colonial legacy that is deeply embedded in our collective consciousness as “Chilean” and requires a process of deep deconstruction that goes back to the founding of the Chilean nation-state. After the social outbreak in Chile in 2019, layers of colonial traces from even before the time of Augusto Pinochet’s

dictatorship came to light and revealed how our constitution is still characterized by racism, xenophobia, and violence. The ongoing process of reformulating the constitution is a crucial step in breaking down our homogenous perception of Chilean identity. The great efforts to remind us that Chile does not have a homogenous identity, much less the idea of a “white Chile” with only European ancestors, that have been undertaken by indigenous communities, together with the strategies of communities-in-transit in the Chilean territory to seek belonging, have brought South America’s colonial past back to the forefront. In particular, people-in-transit living in Chile have opened up new perspectives on South America’s colonial traces and shed light on the extent to which “being a migrant” in Chile is synonymous with the experience of racist acts. This perspective goes beyond Latin America and highlights the realities of racism, xenophobia, and violence that the “migrant” is confronted with on a daily basis as they move through border regimes and their technological apparatuses for monitoring and controlling mobility.

In a conversation with Tijoux during one of her lectures, I shared my apprehensions about the potentially stigmatizing and racist implications of labeling people as “migrants,” within the Chilean context and beyond (see Prologue). Tijoux shared with us that some communities-in-transit, despite their “migrant” status, are deliberately choosing to identify themselves and their Chilean community as “neighbors,” as I would perceive later in my encounters with Los Arenales community (see Prologue and Epilogue). By using this term, they highlight their shared identity with Chileans and reject discriminatory labels based on their geographic origin. This linguistic shift from “migrants” to “neighbors” could represent not only a resistance to the racist label experienced by the word “migrant,” but also invites empathy, compassion, and care for their Chilean neighbors.

Therefore, this strategy not only serves as a form of resistance against prevailing social norms but also offers an alternative way of imagining a collective future. Beyond making visible the violations of human rights and the right to the city—by bringing to the surface the still-present colonial and racial structures of border regimes—these communities propose alternative urban knowledge strategies. Their aspirations go beyond mere assimilation into Chilean territory and instead extend toward inclusion on their own terms. In this sense, by redefining themselves as “neighbors,” these communities foster mutual understanding and cooperation in the places where they live. This linguistic redefinition is one of many strategies employed by communities-in-transit to challenge current border regimes, providing an aspirational foundation for a postmigrant society characterized by conviviality, solidarity, and a profound respect for all people sharing the same urban space. Through their particular migratory practices, they seek ways of repairing

and “healing wounds from epistemic, racial, slow, and colonial violence inscribed in cities” (Ortiz and Villamizar Duarte, 2024).⁸

6.3 Becoming a Social Place

Returning to my opening reflections in this chapter, in which I examine the Dzjanggal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales through a postcolonial lens of “Elsewhere,” I engage with the colonial past and its ongoing impact on the narratives of people-in-transit. The colonial traces embedded in migratory experiences, as well as in contemporary border regimes, confer upon these places an “other” temporality—one far removed from Western ideals of fast-paced urban life. Their distinctive conceptions of time and space, as expressed through their placemaking practices, must therefore be understood on their own terms. Through these urban practices, so-called non-places gradually transform into social places—an argument that lies at the core of this book. In the following and final section of this chapter, I look more closely at how these places *become* social places, and how inbetweenness, understood as a processual state, plays a key role in this transformation.

Places as a Process

Inspired by the critical geographer Donna Massey’s term “Sense of Place” (1995), I ponder the relationship between time and space in these places, initially perceiving it as “out of time” due to liminality. The intertwined relationship between their temporal and spatial dimension plays a crucial role in understanding the inbetweenness of their social and relational processes. However, the Dzjanggal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, with their states of inbetweenness, temporal uncertainties, and constant violence within the border regimes, as well as their resistances and social and solidarity processes, offer a sense of place extending beyond the “Elsewhere” postcolonial lens. These places serve as arenas where the distinctions between the “West” and the “South” are blurred, challenging clear demarcations in today’s cities. In contrast to disrupting colonial patterns, as perceived by the “Elsewhere,” these places underscore a more nuanced and processual reality. They demonstrate the feasibility of engaging with Western cities while envisioning alternative ways of living and knowing.

8 The urban planners Catalina Ortiz and Natalia Villamizar Duarte (2024) argue that it is essential in times of civilizational crisis to facilitate North–South dialogues to learn from alternative urban practices for a process of healing and reparation of the colonial legacy, by recognizing territory as a living entity that can reimagine the notion of the city and its relationship within the land (Escobar, 2019).

In her book *For Space*, Massey (2005) analyzes how places have more than a single historical identity and cannot be considered static. She argues, somewhat conceptually, that places are social spaces with interactions. These interactions are also in motion on their own. They are not “frozen in time,” and Massey considers them to be processual interactions in constant flux, “places as a process.” By affirming that a place does not have a single and unique “identity,” Massey refers to the temporality and historical events within which it is framed—the internal conflicts produced between past, present, and future. She gives the example of London’s docklands and the conflict between heritage and development (Massey et al., 1991). I linked this conflictual aspect to the reality of settlements such as the Dzjangan, a place distinctly shaped by conflict—through colonial patterns embedded in technological border regimes, the ongoing presence of colonial histories from its residents’ places of origin, and repeated experiences of eviction and border violence. This tension extends into the future as well, reflected in the current framing of the area as one of “heritage and natural conservation”—a narrative used by Calais city council to justify the final eviction in 2016 (see Chapter 1). These diverse temporal and spatial layers render places like the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales inherently processual, constantly shaped by entitlement of past legacies, present circumstances, and future ambitions.

The specificity of place is continually reproduced, but it is not a specificity that results from some long, internalized history. There are a number of sources of this specificity—the uniqueness of place. There is the fact that the wider social relations in which places are set themselves are geographically differentiated. (Massey et al., 1991: 7)

A further observation Massey makes is to consider places without borders in terms of separation from inside and outside, arguing that places are not closed entities. Although geographical studies and territorial boundaries are essential in defining a place, they cannot be considered conceptually in the definition of a place per se. Here Massey’s concept of a “Global Sense of Place” (2014) resonates with the reality of these settlements and their local/global interaction. Regarding the specificity of the Dzjangan, and its unique location on the maritime border between France and England, I would contend that constant migratory flows, the extreme controversies of the French–English police forces, and the sophistication of strategies in the border regime have produced a degree of the local/global relationship that Massey refers to. Although they are particularities of what is happening on this frontier, they resonate internationally in discussions on European border regimes, colonial legacy, and racism toward the “migrant body.”

Following Massey’s line, places are not necessarily rooted in the local, communal, and territorial but go beyond these classical parameters. The Dzjangan,

Tiburtina, and Los Arenales are clear examples of “processual places.” Through the physical design and construction of what was initially understood as a “space of flows” (a space of transit and passage), a “space of places” (a space with history, memory, and identity) can begin to emerge (Castells, 2020) as inhabitants engage with their new environment and negotiate new social and political identities. The local/global interrelationship produces this multiplicity of identities (Massey et al., 1991), which no longer represent a single culture, but the diversity of many people and histories that allows for the creation of its own internal order and dynamics, which in turn is reflected in connectivity, international networking, and, in some cases, a merging with the city. These diverse parameters, such as the colonial legacy, the common background of forced migration, resistance, and aspirations, progressively produce the essence of the place, hence its sociability.

Borderlands and Inbetweenness

Yet, even as communities such as Dzingal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales strive to redefine and reimagine urban life through alternative placemaking, the inbetweenness stemming from their migratory narratives imbues a distinct quality to our understanding of what constitutes a processual place in today’s cities. The concept of “borderland,” articulated by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), amplifies my comprehension of the state of inbetweenness. The existential, migratory, and territorial inbetween embodied in the idea of borderland extends into contemporary reality, challenging the “West–South” dichotomy. The depth of spatiality, sensoriality, and personal experience inherent in the concept provides a great framework to understand placemaking in these communities. It also clarifies why liminality is not a concept that can grasp the spatiotemporal inbetweenness of these places. In liminality, time narrates transformative processes rather than looking spatially and historically at the intertwining of migratory stories, their transformative processes and territorial context.

In her work *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Anzaldúa draws upon her personal biography living at the Texas–Mexico border, where she encountered cultural marginalization. Her theories interweave issues of social marginalization with concepts such as hybridity, inbetweenness, and multiracial identity (Keating, 2006). Anzaldúa introduces the notion of “border thinking,” which decolonial scholars such as Walter D. Mignolo later expand upon, emphasizing its emergence from inhabiting the inbetween space of the border. For Mignolo, Anzaldúa’s concept of borderland prompted a realization of residing within the border without conscious awareness. According to Mignolo, borderland embodies “border thinking in action; Anzaldúa doesn’t merely study borderlands but inhabits them” (Mignolo and E-International Relations, 2017). Mignolo and other decolonial thinkers such as Madina Tlostanova further delve into the idea of “border thinking,” emphasizing its theoret-

ical and epistemic dimensions, which must also encompass lived experience (Garland, 2024a).

Border thinking doesn't emerge independently of modernity but rather in response to it, as part of real-life struggles against the oppressive apparatus of the colonial power matrix. Border thinking is the epistemology of exteriority; that is, it emerges from the exterior created from within. (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 206)

In this context, Mignolo and Tlostanova argue that the border is defined by epistemic difference and geographic distance, thus representing a perspective from the outside that utilizes alternative knowledge, traditions and modes of expression (Global Social Theory⁹). Anzaldúa instead perceives the border as an inbetween space that fosters new possibilities for understanding. She argues that individuals, shaped by their respective cultures, perceive reality through diverse lenses. Those straddling multiple cultures encounter conflicting messages, resulting in what she terms a “cultural collision.” However, this collision can be transformative and productive, sparking fresh ways of perceiving and comprehending the world.

Mignolo's perspective, articulated in his work *Local Histories/Global Design* (2012), reflects on border thinking, emphasizing the need to “inhabit” the border rather than simply cross it. In other words, border thinking is not merely an abstract concept, but a conceptualization rooted in the lived experience of those who exist within it, inspired by Anzaldúa's notion of “the new mestiza consciousness” (Mignolo and E-International Relations, 2017). Mignolo also draws on the reflections of the psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon, particularly in his work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), where Fanon explores the experience of living in the inbetween as an Afro-Caribbean person in a French colony. Fanon introduces the concept of “socio-genesis,” elucidating its role in shaping one's consciousness of being perceived as black. He delineates the boundary between his self-awareness and the moment of realization that, although he was aware of the color of his skin, he had not truly comprehended its implications until he was seen as black (Mignolo and E-International Relations, 2017: 2). Similarly, the historian and philosopher W. E. B. Du Bois reflects on the notion of inhabiting the frontier through his concept of “double consciousness.” Du Bois examines his own experience of embodying his social identity between being African American and American. His own double consciousness of seeing himself through the eyes of a dominant white society and, at the same time, his own idea of identity and culture (Du Bois, 1903).

Building upon these conceptual frameworks, Mignolo theorizes about border thinking, drawing from his own experiences of border dwelling and the diverse

9 See more in <https://globalsocialtheory.org/concepts/border-thinking/>

identities he embodies depending on his geographical location: as a son of Italian immigrants in Argentina, as a “métèque” (Latino, gypsy, foreigner) in France and later as a Hispanic/Latino in the United States (Mignolo and E-International Relations, 2017). Mignolo’s autobiographical reflections on living at the border have sparked considerable debate within the South American decolonial academic community, particularly among decolonial feminist Indigenous scholars who challenge his perspective as a white male thinker. Although this discussion lies beyond the scope of my argument in this chapter, I want to note that Mignolo’s and other decolonial thinkers (mostly white male latinos) have been widely critiqued across Spanish-speaking Latin America, yet these debates have received little attention in English-speaking academia due to the lack of translation. Some critics embrace the “intellectual fashion” of decolonial thinking that some intellectuals have spread outside Latin America, which reproduces power dynamics similar to those it seeks to denounce. One of the most influential books in this denunciation is *Piel blanca, máscaras negras: crítica de la razón decolonial*, edited by the decolonial scholars Gaya Makaran and Pierre Gaussens (2020).

Returning to the idea of the borderland, this concept presents a novel outlook on border dynamics, surpassing binary conceptions to embrace a space—the borderland—characterized by its distinct temporality and spatiality. This space serves as an arena for collective negotiation and interaction among marginalized identities, enabling the articulation of hybridity as both a political and intellectual stance (Anzaldúa, 1987). Borderland deals with issues of belonging and marginalized identities, exploring culture as well as identity construction. Anzaldúa reimagines and constructs a place that doesn’t physically exist but carries a history, emotions, and associated identities—an intermediary state (Pulido, 2016). She describes Borderland as: “A border zone is a vague, indeterminate place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural border. It is in a constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 3).

Anzaldúa describes borderland as a nebulous and indefinite zone, a realm shaped by the emotional residue of an imposed border, constantly evolving and in flux. In this inbetween space various identities interplay and are influenced by the perpetual state of inbetweenness. She particularly associates this dynamic with “mestizo/a and Chicano/a” identities, delving into what she terms “the new mestiza consciousness,” characterized by an embrace of duality, ambiguity, and contradiction. This consciousness embodies a hybrid identity, drawing from diverse facets of one’s identity. Borderland thus emerges as a container for shaping these “new consciousnesses” that navigate a world characterized by hybridity, fluidity, and continual change. By conceptualizing “the new mestiza consciousness” within the context of the borderland, she highlights the colonial legacy inherent in the “mestizo/a” identity (see the idea of a “Latinoamerica city” in Epilogue).

It’s crucial to recognize that the concept of borderland emerged from a sense of tension, stemming from feelings of not belonging and the need to establish a sense

of belonging. These intersections of identity signify an intertwining of cultural and personal identity, shedding light on the multitude of identities that individuals possess, as well as the tangible and intangible “borders” inherent within these identities (Pulido, 2016). This duality is not only present in the identity of the individual living in the territorial borderland but is also reflected in contemporary cities—not only in border cities but in cities where colonial legacies, postcolonial realities, and cultural hybridizations merge into the fast-paced, connected urban fabric. Borderland represents both the reclamation of these border spaces and an identitarian reinvention, serving as a platform for people to recognize their inbetweenness and identity. In this sense, in the “new mestiza consciousness,” Anzaldúa offers a perspective on how contemporary society can engage with the enduring colonial imprints embedded in multiple layers of individuals and their urban identity. This reimagining has the potential to deconstruct the violence inherent in colonial *mestizaje*, seeking more nuanced paths of engagement with contemporary identity and its history.

Building on this, the concept of hybridity, which strongly resonates with the complex race-mixing of *mestizaje* on the American continent, is one of the broad terms employed and disputed in postcolonial theory. It commonly refers to the emergence of new transcultural forms in a zone that had contact with colonization, forming a “third space,” which is the hybrid of two or more cultures. The work of the postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha is one of the most prominent in conceptualizing the term, whereby he argues that all cultural statements and structures are based and articulated in a space that he calls a “third space of enunciation” (Bhabha, [1994] 2012: 37; also Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2013). For Bhabha, the recognition of this contradictory “third” space of cultural identity can contribute to transcending the exoticism of “multiculturalism”, which is so criticized in postcolonial discourse for neglecting the degree of colonial power and legacy that a “multicultural” society represents. Instead, the “inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” (Bhabha, [1994] 2012; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2013) can open a way of conceptualizing an international culture that is not based on the exoticism of other cultures (Mambrol, 2016; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2013; Garland, 2024a: 29). By this, Bhabha suggests looking at hybridity as an inbetween space through which cultural meaning is produced.

Robert Young ([1995] 2005) is one of the postcolonial theorists who criticizes the term “hybridity” because it has been an essential term in the imperial and colonial discourse on negative descriptions and definitions of race mixtures. Young argues that hybridity is a critical concept, particularly because it is often used to describe a simple cross-cultural “exchange.” Such a use can be problematic, as it obscures the imbalance and inequality of power relations that structure this supposed exchange. In doing so, it reflects the asymmetrical power between colonizer and colonized, while veiling the “whitewashing” of cultural differences (Mambrol, 2016). This idea of hybridization somehow flourishes in its “primitive origin,” being part of the

colonialist discourse of racism. Young highlights the complexity of using this terminology as, although initially coming from biology, it is rooted in previous racist premises where creolization or hybridization is framed in the cataloging of colonial race structures. Young highlights how the use of hybridization in the representation of mixed-race cultures unconsciously repeats processes of racialization, as this term clearly had a racial meaning in the past. Although the intention of hybridization is, as Young ([1995] 2005: 27) argues, “deconstructing such essentialist notions of race today we may rather be repeating the [fixation on race in the] past than distancing ourselves from it or providing a critique of it” (also see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2013).

In this context, Anzaldúa provides another perspective to this critique of hybridity, through her conceptualization of borderland, which recalls the notion of border thinking, the being between two realities, which can also produce spaces of possibility for new understandings. The degree of territorial spatiality and personal experience that borderland entails rethinks the notion of hybridity as a political and intellectual position—a place of collective negotiation and encounter with marginal subjectivities. The concepts of hybridity and borderland as put forward by Bhabha and Anzaldúa play an important role in understanding the states of inbetweenness of the inhabitants of the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. Looking at the narratives of these places allows me to grasp their migratory inbetweenness as much more complex than a simple location “in between” two sides, challenging me to look beyond the initial notions of “liminal places” and later “Elsewhere” from a postcolonial lens. Being between cultures, territories, and identities opens the potential for an alternative interpretation of the dominant dichotomies delivered since the colonial past. Placing the migratory narratives of the inbetweenness of these places as a central aspect in the construction of borderland represents a way to better understand how these spaces transform and change into social places.

Toward a Transient Permanency of Becoming

In light of the discussion above, I return to one of the main questions guiding this book—how so-called non-places transform into social places. In closing this chapter, I look at the process of transformation through the inbetweenness lens experienced by people-in-transit inhabiting and resisting border regimes. Living in the borderlands, as articulated by Anzaldúa, leads people to greater awareness of their inbetweenness undergoing nuanced and constant transformations influenced by border regimes, ultimately culminating in what can be described as a “transient permanency.” Within this fluid state, the perception of temporality and spatiality deviates from the conventional frameworks prevalent in Western societies. The notion of “transient permanency” (see Diken, 2004; Martin, 2015) implies a paradoxical juxtaposition of impermanence and continuity. The fragility of change is present

at every stage, yet at the same time there is a degree of continuity. This notion may reflect the experiences that people-in-transit navigate as they traverse cultural, social, political, and geographical landscapes, constantly negotiating their sense of belonging and identity, embodying their existence within a unique temporality.

Therefore, in places like the Dzjanganl, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, identity and urban boundaries blur, creating hybrid, interconnected landscapes—dynamic zones of interaction and exchange (Bhabha, [1994] 2012). The quality of transit and transition in these places, not only spatially but also in the identities of the people living there, challenges the dichotomies inherent in Western spatialities—inside/outside, periphery/center, foreigner/native. Living on the border, as Anzaldúa highlights, entails a profound reconfiguration of consciousness, as people grapple with the complexities of inbetween states. Despite being viewed externally as detached from conventional notions of time (as framed by liminality), the everyday experiences of those in transit embody a sense of permanence. The ongoing transformations and becomings, of people-in-transit emerge as a catalyst for resistance against border regimes, revealing their placemaking and belonging in the place they have taken as home.

A similar understanding of transformation is explored by the scholars Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis Tsianos through the notion of “Becoming.” In their work *The Autonomy of Migration: The Animals of Undocumented Mobility* (2007), they describe becoming as a political practice in migratory contexts. Here, “migrant” actors transcend societal norms to reconstruct themselves in their environment. Becoming, beyond being a mere oppositional force against existing structures (as observed in the struggle against border regimes), also serves as a driving force toward future aspirations. “Every becoming is a transformation of multiplicity to another, write Deleuze and Guattari; every becoming radicalizes desire and creates new individuations and new affections. Becoming is a drift” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007: 1).

In my initial reflections, I argued for using liminality and its state of transformation as a motor process of inbetweenness that the people-in-transit experience at the moment of migration. Here the analogy of becoming transforms the perception of inbetweenness. It is no longer just being “inbetween” that produces a transformation. Still, a state of becoming directs the driving force of migration, making it resilient, autonomous, and aspirational. Papadopoulos and Tsianos highlight Philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari’s universal political project of indiscernible, impersonal, imperceptible becoming, which is becoming “everybody and everything,” by eliminating the use of names and the identity of oneself. Papadopoulos and Tsianos use “dis-identification” (Muñoz, 1999): the act of rejecting a personal identity, as the strategy of becoming “more than one.” “Migrant’s material becomings do not end in a new state of being, rather they constitute being as the point of departure on which new becomings can emerge” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007: 3). Their analogy suggests that “being” is like the transitory

spaces where people-in-transit collectively shelter when they are on the road. These places are a refuge in which to rest, reconnect with their communities who are also on the road, call their family and friends, earn a little money to pay the smugglers, and recharge to continue their journey (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007).

Papadopoulos and Tsianos draw on the life story of Sir Alfred Mehran¹⁰ to analyze migratory becoming, understood not only through movement but also through the appropriation and placemaking of space. Mehran exemplifies this process of becoming while living between borders, often described as being “stuck” in one place. In his case, he was “stuck” in the Paris Charles de Gaulle airport for more than 18 years.

“Sir Alfred Mehran’s biography seems to be emblematic of the figure of the nomad. His desire was to come to Britain on a refugee passport with his original name Mehran Karimi Nasserri. In 1988 he flew from Brussels via Paris to London. In London he was refused entry into the country and sent back to Paris. But France also denied him entry and Brussels did not accept him back ... when he finally got a UNHCR passport and was able to travel again and to leave the transit space, he declined to acknowledge and to sign these documents arguing that the person Mehran Karimi Nasserri does not exist any more. This person existed in 1988, today he is Sir Alfred Mehran” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007: 2).

His life story represents many other “migrant” narratives of individuals who become contemporary nomads. The crossing of borders, obstacles, and corridors becomes the embodiment of the desire to join the two points in between. Papadopoulos and Tsianos claim that “the nomad does not have a target, does not pass through a territory, leaves nothing behind, goes nowhere” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007: 1), but rather occupies the space between departure and arrival. In Mehran’s case, Terminal 1 of Charles de Gaulle Airport was the physical place of his inbetweenness and becoming.

In this sense, Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2007) argue that even “migrants” must face waiting and may never reach their final destination, but this does not prevent them from becoming. Even when seemingly trapped between borders, people continue to travel, evolving and shaping their identities by re-defying spatial limitations. The strength to keep moving forward becomes a strategy for staying in motion: the body and mind continue traveling even if they are not physically moving.

10 “Mehran Karimi Nasserri (1945–12 November 2022), also known as Sir Alfred Mehran, was an Iranian refugee who lived in the departure lounge of Terminal 1 in Charles de Gaulle Airport from 26 August 1988 until July 2006, when he was hospitalized. He returned to living at the airport in September 2022, and died there of a heart attack in November 2022” (Wikipedia, 2022).

Since migration is not an individual process but a collective one, as described by Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2007), it provides the force for this movement; the collective comes into play and becomes a form of connection. The interpersonal relationships that occur are not formed through communication, translation, or the representation of “what was” and “what is now,” but rather through the collective process of becoming “what will be” (Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2007). Becoming is the meeting point where migration is empowered, creating, in many cases, social places imbued with belonging, solidarity, and a sense of home.

By looking at the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales through their becomings, it is possible to discern the transformation of these places toward sociability. Their distinct perceptions of time and space, as manifested in their placemaking practices, offer a vision of alternative urban configurations through resistance and conviviality, thus challenging Western paradigms rooted in colonial legacy. These places embody a dynamic interaction within the urban landscape, highlighting the social capacity between diverse cultural and hybrid spheres. The ongoing becomings of their inhabitants imprint transient statuses with a sense of enduring permanence, as they forge places of sociability and belonging as one of several counter-narratives to today’s border regimes.

EPILOGUE

Somewhere Inbetween: Rethinking "Elsewhere"

Closing this book, the Epilogue invites the reader to rethink today's city through prefigurative practices, hopes, and dreams of the residents of the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. It suggests looking at their placemaking through the lens of "Somewhere Inbetween," acknowledging their migratory narratives, resistances, and resilience toward the border regime. As well as their proposal of a more inclusive urban landscape that reflects the diversity inherent in migratory flows. These communities resist the marginalization imposed by border regimes by creating alternative placemaking. Through these convivial approaches, they rethink urban spaces, collective projects, and coexistence within today's postcolonial cities.

7.1 Autonomous Places

In closing this book, I would like to return to one of my initial questions, which has been the guide in this research: How do these so-called non-places transform and change into social places? This time, I would like to look at it through the urban lens of the self-management and self-construction of the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, which, by occupying abandoned buildings and land in the city, have managed to create autonomous places. I use the term *autonomous* in relation to these places to highlight their processes of self-governance, also connecting their placemaking to the idea of "autonomy of migration," which forms part of their strategy against the border regimes discussed in the following paragraphs.

Even though this falls outside the scope of this chapter, I want to note that I am aware of the debates around the impossibility of fully autonomous urban spaces, especially the view that complete autonomy is unrealistic and utopian, since everything today is, in some way, interconnected (see Knights and Willmott, 2002; Coleman, 2015). Still, as I examine in this chapter, this framework helps me capture the different alternative forms of placemaking that are happening in the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. I draw on argumentation from the cultural and historical geographer Alexander Vasudevan, who, in his paper "The Autonomous City: Towards a Critical Geography of Occupation" (2015), examines the entanglements

of the process of urban autonomous occupation and the struggle toward alternative methods for the “right of the city.” Vasudevan describes occupation as no longer just an action of “occupying” but as something which itself becomes a political act of resistance to the neoliberal and capitalist model and its effects on speculation that are the basis of ongoing gentrification in the city. He highlights that the role of “occupation” in an abandoned space within the city is an autonomous form of urban growth. In this sense, “occupation,” from the perspective of critical geography, is related to political common spaces, where the community autonomously plays an essential role in the political processes for the right to the city (Vasudevan, 2015).

Recent works in critical geography, radical urbanism, urban governance, and the politics of housing, among others, are rethinking the right to the city (Attoh, 2011: 675; see Dikeç, 2005; Harvey, 2008; Mitchell, 2003; Purcell, 2003, as cited in Vasudevan, 2015: 319). They mainly focus on the occupation processes within the city as consequences of Western governments’ current global financial crises (Lunghi and Wheeler, 2012; Bauer et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2011, as cited in Vasudevan, 2015: 317). Although each occupation process is specific and particular in its context, they embrace diverse elements that could be seen as a “transnational protest movement” (Vasudevan, 2015: 317) struggling for economic and social equity, reclaiming urban spaces as devices of reappropriation and transformation for alternative urbanism and city-making (Mitchell, 2012, as cited in Vasudevan, 2015: 317). The Džjungal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales are examples of this notion of occupation. However, their context differs from the occupation histories provided by critical geographers of the protest camps and squats present throughout the long history of European anti-capitalism and anarchism. As their particular reclamation of urban space continues a process of migratory transformation, where they develop self-organized strategies to create new ways of living within the border regimes. This is exemplified by the residents of Los Arenales, who claim the right to *vivienda digna* (decent housing) in their ongoing struggle with the municipality and the Chilean state (a point I will return to in the following paragraphs).

As I have analyzed in previous chapters, their self-management and self-construction processes are exemplified by states of inbetweenness and ongoing becoming. Initially, as discussed in Chapter 5, I interpreted these places from the perspective of liminality—a concept referring to the states of inbetweenness, subjectivization, and placemaking experienced by these communities when engaged in their own management and construction. The residents experience a sense of “limbo,” as some mentioned when referring to the inbetween feeling of “what was” and “what is to come.” Their ongoing feeling of being in a spatial inbetweenness due to the temporal uncertainty of whether there will be an “eviction tomorrow,” leads to the sensation of being in a “terrestrial limbo.” Here, the occupation is no longer only through a specific territory but within a particular time frame during which the residents live in these places. The daily uncertainty of possible eviction gives their placemak-

ing processes their specific characteristics. Therefore, at first glance, liminality was a concept that could cover this sense of duality and uncertainty while allowing for spatial and temporal particularities, enabling processes of becoming and dwelling that go beyond an individual liminal state. Later, as I have analyzed throughout this book, I came to understand the difficulty of today's definition of liminality in a migratory context as it reaffirms "migrants as people out of time" (Ramsay, 2019b), reproducing a state of exception and marginalization, relegating to second place their placemaking and resistance to the border regime and their right to the city (see also Chapter 5). The Dzjantal, Tiburtina and Los Arenales, thanks to their processes of transformation and becoming through their migration narratives, propose another definition of the city, which, as Vasudevan argues, leads us to reflect on the composition of "new critical urbanisms" by asking: "What is the relationship between the figure of occupation and the affirmation of an alternative 'right to the city'? And in what way might a critical geography of occupation challenge our conceptualizations of the city?" (Vasudevan 2015: 318).

To look more closely into these places, despite their shared experience of people seeking refuge and forming self-built environments, the roots of these realities differ. In South America, particularly in Chile, a long history of creating autonomous places, known as "Las Tomas" (or in Central and South America as "Favelas"), has been shaped by poor communities. This history provides an alternative solution for people-in-transit to address the lack of support during their refuge and later in inclusion. The "Tomas" offer concrete possibilities for communities such as Los Arenales. Such communities' refusal to accept the precarious and overcrowded forms of housing offered to the undocumented by private agents and smugglers, and faced with a lack of help from the Chilean government, has led to the occupation of "peripheral" land spaces, where they have developed alternative forms of self-construction in their aspiration for dignified housing.

By contrast, the reality of self-organized and self-built places in Europe, especially in France and Italy, is largely influenced by the communities that migrate to these countries, rather than by the countries' poor citizens. The primary modes of resistance of the Dzjantal residents, who occupied the Les Dunes zone on the outskirts of Calais, outside of formal French refugee centers, were aimed at avoiding registration in the European Migration Database and therefore remaining "free" to decide for themselves in which country to initiate the asylum process—in this case, ideally crossing to the UK and claiming asylum there instead of in France (see Chapter 6). In the case of Tiburtina, not having access to reception centers that the Italian government was supposed to provide, this community occupied the abandoned building of a former newspaper to create an alternative form of welcoming newcomers from the Mediterranean routes. In this context, the recurrent disappearance of such places in Europe can be attributed to aggressive eviction strategies, such as in Tiburtina and the Dzjantal, while in South America evictions have occurred at a slower pace, and

aggressive strategies are less prevalent. This allows places like Los Arenales to persist and evolve, moving beyond a mere aspiration for the future to become a tangible reality in the present.

These examples invite us to reconsider how we understand placemaking itself, not only as an institutional urban planning practice, but as self-governance processes on the part of these communities advocating for new ways of understanding the city. Therefore, the particularities of the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales represent another aspect of the idea of occupation, based on migration narratives charged with self-governance, as one of multiple strategies of resistance against border regimes and their bureaucratic asylum procedures.

Broadening the Notion of Placemaking through Autonomy

In urban and geographic studies, placemaking focuses on how elements of a culture are embodied in a particular urban setting—a process of making meanings in the city. The communities become part of the urban area, creating a “sense of place” (Massey, 1995; see Chapter 6). The community planner Mark Wyckoff (2014: 2) defines placemaking as a “process of creating quality places that people want to live, work, play and learn in.” This process, originating from urban planning, comprises stakeholders such as urban planners, architects, politicians, businesses, community leaders, and residents, who are essential agents for a successful placemaking (Wyckoff, 2014). From this point of view, placemaking is characterized by a city that can provide its citizens with quality components to feel part of a place.

The urbanist and activist Jane Jacobs (1961: 238) argues: “Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.” Here, Jacob suggests thinking of the city as a form of placemaking in which everyone should be involved and actively participate, in which every person can share their values, cultures, and identities. Yet this assumption becomes unstable when applied to communities that are excluded from formal participation and denied the right to belong. From this starting point, I ask: how have the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales created placemaking without the support of social and political stakeholders, and within cities that do not welcome them?

The uniqueness of placemaking in the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales lies in their need for self-governance against border regimes. These placemakings are influenced by their migration experiences, their daily struggle with border regimes, and their desire to physically express their cultures in the occupied territory. They battle to find their position in the city and struggle to have the right to it through alternative placemaking, which, without the help of political agents and without support from many, stresses their inclusion. This is not only to give physical form to their placemaking processes through self-built homes, but also to propose—as in the case of Los Arenales—new ways of neighboring that expand the boundaries of

traditional urban planning. Los Arenales envision the creation of a "Latin American city," not grounded in notions of nation or territory, but in shared ways of living and collective projects that include all who inhabit the city (a point I will return to in the final section of this Epilogue).

By occupying an abandoned space in the city and deciding to start building without urban planning regulation permits, the Dzjanganl, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales actively take control of their homemaking with the required prerequisites for an alternative way of living. These political practices of "space configuration" (Simone, 2018) redesign the city. In this way, the autonomous specificity of these communities allows envisioning the city not only as an urban and sociopolitically marginalizing entity but also to consider it as a "flexible resource" (Simone, 2018: 200) that contributes to a maximization of resources for the self-construction of these places (Vasudevan, 2015). Here I interpret the city and its infrastructure as a "large depository" that, through various "available" resources, these inhabitants use to create strategies of self-construction.

Therefore, the residents of the Dzjanganl, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales become "self-builders" (Castellanos, 2017). By deciding to build their home and being part of the placemaking of their neighborhood, the inhabitants go beyond the traditional definition of building as an act of edification. In his paper "Self-Construction and Autopoiesis: The Expressive Houses," the visual artist Ricardo Castellanos (2017) argues that the processes of self-construction, which he analyzes from a Latin American perspective, drawing on discussions of the sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2007), are a resistance to capitalist policies based on colonial structures in America. Hence, these "popular neighborhood" constructions in Latin America, having a very early history in the struggle for land (rural vs urban), are symbolized today by the dignified housing movement (Zubechi, 2008, cited in Castellanos, 2017: 62). These rural and urban struggles combat "territorial hierarchization" from the capitalist, modern, and colonial systems (Castellanos, 2007). The self-construction becomes a process that occupies "the two modes of build: build as 'caring,' in Latin *collere*, culture; and to build as 'raising buildings,' *aedificare*" (Castellanos, 2017: 3). Thus, dwelling is an intertwining between processes of material-physical edification and processes of construction from the daily care of the built. Self-building becomes a relation of "building" and "caring," a process of placemaking that moves away from standard urbanization toward processes based on belonging, identity, and culture.

(Urban) Autopoiesis

Exploring further the entanglement between "self-management" and "autonomy" as a placemaking, the sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1984) was the first to use the idea of "autopoiesis" to refer to the different social-urban systems that are constituted by "self-creation" (Keenan, 2022) within society. The biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, in their publication *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of*

the Living ([1972] 1991), introduced the term autopoiesis to the discipline of biology, which later influenced other fields such as architecture and sociology, as Luhmann introduced the concept to organizational theory.

Maturana and Varela define autopoiesis as a state of being—the ability of living cells to continuously reproduce and organize themselves (Keenan, 2022). Luhmann moved this analysis to communities' social processes and urban structures, suggesting that although there are large-scale structural frameworks and systems in society, this does not prevent each actor within society from including its own processes. In other words, the same agency within society constructs the elements it consists of. Therefore, an autopoietic system develops its own components—these autonomous and self-managed processes are essential to recognize as they are the basis of the same systems on a large scale (Agüero, 2010).

In his paper “The Autopoiesis of Architecture,” the architect Patrik Schumacher (2011) interprets the notion of autopoiesis in the discipline of architecture as an autonomous network of communication systems, where rather than seeing architecture as consisting of separate categories, such as types of artifact, types of knowledge (academic), or types of practice of the profession, it is the intertwining of all of them, “artifacts, knowledge, and practices,” as modes of communication that connect each other, producing autonomous circular networking (Schumacher, 2011). Schumacher moves away from the relationships of architecture and its sociopolitical effects and interactions with other systems within society. However, what interests me here is to highlight the interpretation of autopoiesis in architecture and sociology as a system of communication and networking that allows the reproduction of self-management. Particularly with regard to the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, I look at the placemaking of these communities as interconnected with the processes of self-construction, where “artifacts, knowledge, and practices” within them at the time of their ongoing construction have allowed for the creation of an urban ecology that has to be interconnected for it to function, and hence become social and housing communities in the present and future.

(Urban) Autonomy of Migration

I cannot leave aside in this section the definition of “autonomy” in the context of *Autonomy of Migration Theory* (Bojadzijeve and Karakayali, 2007; Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 2013; Mezzadra and Nielson, 2013; Scheel, 2017; Nyers, 2015; De Génova, 2015), which comes from a history marked by the entanglement of academia and activism, from a Marxist perspective, and the political sociology of migration outlined by the sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad (1992). These starting points reflect migration beyond the economic and political structure of the territory but provide the possibility of placing the “migrant individuals” and their own life experience with borders at the center of the analysis. The initial aim, as highlighted by the anthropologist Guillermo Castillo Ramirez (2023), was to understand the structural systems of

migration and their relationship with borders and their regimes. Since 2000, there has been an increase in contemporary migration studies in Europe, especially in Germany, for the guest worker system, and in France and Italy, for postcolonial migrations. Scholars from these three countries, such as Manuela Bojadzijev, Serhat Karakayali, Dimitris Papadopoulos, Sandro Mezzadra, and Nicholas De Genova, among others, led to a greater theorization of migration topics due to the heterogeneity and uniqueness of each migration phenomenon in these countries. Most of them were "irregular migrations" that, through different strategies and ways of experiencing mobilization, resisted European border regimes (Cordero, Mezzadra, and Varela, 2019; Castillo Ramirez, 2023). Thus, the *Autonomy of Migration* moves away from the frameworks of economic and citizenship structures to analyze migration and its approach from the perspective of the "individual migrant" and their life experiences from their countries of origin to the final destination. One of the directions of this theory is to accompany the process of migration and understand their migration strategies and practices as processes that permeate border regimes (Mezzadra, 2005; Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos, 2008; Mezzadra and Nielson, 2013; Castillo Ramirez, 2023).

This is highlighted by Castillo Ramirez in his paper "Autonomy of Migration: From the Political Production of Borders to Migrant Struggles" (2023), in which he maps the different aspects of the *Autonomy of Migration* theory from a European context and its possible translation to a Latin American context. Rather than reading *Autonomy of Migration* as a fixed and completed theoretical framework, it can be interpreted as a research framework. This growing academic discourse provides several directions of analysis, such as the relationship between migration and labor in a neoliberal capitalist context, the subjectivization of irregular migration and its exclusion processes from a sociopolitical perspective of both the state and the "migrants" agency, and their different strategies and practices in resisting border regimes (Mezzadra, 2012; De Genova, 2015; Castillo Ramirez, 2023). The last is essential when analyzing the placemaking processes of the Dzjanganal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, which are typified by strategies and practices of resistance and struggle against the border regime. I will return to this point in later paragraphs.

According to the sociologist Stephan Scheel (2019), "autonomy," as variously conceptualized by *autonomy of migration*, is not necessarily the ability of people to decide and act for themselves, as philosopher Immanuel Kant says; the ability to have the degree of control, power, and freedom in everyday life events (Sensen, 2013). But in the context of border regimes, autonomy represents the "uncontrollability" of people-in-transit at borders as a cause of today's border regimes (Scheel, 2019). Therefore, autonomy in this context is the struggle between the border regime's strategies against migration and its challenge to resist. If there were no resistance on the part of "migrants" to challenge border regimes, there would be no autonomy within migration; thus, border regimes would be successful (Scheel 2019; Metcalfe, 2022).

In her paper “Autonomy of Migration and the Radical Imagination” (2022), Philippa Metcalfe, researcher on technology, mobility, and violent borders, draws the definition of autonomy from the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, who refers to the autonomous state as a “self-institution” where the individual or society develops its own laws, which differs from “heteronomous societies” where the law-making process is delegated to an authority that is not necessarily part of it (Castoriadis, 1983, cited in Metcalfe, 2022: 52). Thus, “autonomous societies” go beyond pre-established systems of organization and control to self-create their laws and self-legislate (Castoriadis, 1983, cited in Metcalfe, 2022: 52). By this, Metcalfe, analyzing Castoriadis, does not mean that migration can entirely self-legislate. Still, as the concept of autonomy of migration proposes from its many angles, it possesses the self-creating capacity of a “reactive and relational force” (Metcalfe, 2022: 8), tensioning, resisting, and struggling with the fixed social structures and established border regimes that exclude and repress, calling for a reconfiguration of borders (Nyers, 2015; also cited in Metcalfe, 2022: 53).

In this context, “autonomy” refers to how individuals engage with the nation-state where they seek asylum and with the states they pass through on their journey. Here, the “individual migrant” as a political agent, through their strategies, tactics, and narratives, deals with the regimes of the nation-state of arrival and transit and is essential in shaping migration systems, regimes, and border policies (Mezzadra, 2012). As Mezzadra (2012) argues, for individuals who have been “irregularized” and “illegalized” by nation-states for not having migration documents, the “migrant” agency (often) acts “as if” they are already citizens of the arrival country. In this case, the autonomy of the “migrant” agent becomes an action of not accepting their irregularity and illegality by proclaiming the right of citizenship.

In other words, by acting “as if” they are already a citizen within a state that sees them as “irregular” and “illegal,” they stress citizenship from a new perspective, no longer from the gaze of the state and its administrative policies, but rather from the perspective of the “migrant” individual and their strategies of resistance toward the receiving nation-state (Castillo Ramirez, 2023). Thus, the residents of the Dz-jangal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, through autonomous migratory strategies of placemaking, proclaim their right to the city and, therefore, their citizenship. Or even further, by acting “as if” they are already citizens in the country of arrival and they have the right to be part of it through their placemaking, they initiate a process of reconfiguring and reimagining a new meaning of the city, leading to “prefigurative practices of city–citizen relations ‘as if’ they were otherwise” (Thorpe, 2023: 183; see also “prefiguration,” in Boggs, 1977).

7.2 Liminality and Prefiguration as a Way of Placemaking

In one of the conversations I had with my community in Chile, questions about this research were raised, particularly concerns about the lack of regulations and laws of the Chilean border regime in relation to the arrival of large groups of people-in-transit in my hometown. One of the community members asked me about the case studies on which this book is based. In particular, he asked me what the future held for the residents of Los Arenales, pointing to the dramatic evictions of the Dzjantal and Tiburtina as examples to support his argument. "The 'Tomas chilenas'¹ are living on borrowed land and time because sooner or later they will disappear", he argued. Our conversation went back and forth, with me highlighting the activism and placemaking that was happening in Los Arenales and pointing out the realistic possibilities of it becoming an "official neighborhood," which for him was a "utopia," even more so when I mentioned to him the residents' dream of becoming a "Latin American city" (see the last section of this Epilogue). This community member asked me: How do you cope when these communities tell you about a hopeful future that aspires to an ideal, utopian city? His question made a kind of sense if one assumes a time-space continuum of transition between A and B, between the migratory past of the residents of Los Arenales and the aspirational future of an "ideal city" (Latin American city).

In my initial interest in liminality, I considered the process of subjectivation of the residents of these places as an intermediate process between "what was before" and "what is to come," creating space for a hopeful future that could lead to a utopia. My reflections were based on the hopeful atmosphere I found in the narratives of these places. However, in two of them, evictions and displacement took concrete form, and from that, "hope" seemed to be not only a condition for their visions of the future, even if evictions took place, but also a driving force for everyday practices (I will return to this in the following sections).

How does one escape the traps of "utopia" when analyzing the process of occupation and self-constructed places that rely on "hope" and aspirations as a driving force? This was one of the questions that arose in some academic presentations, when I emphasized "hope" as a constant state in the processes of resistance and placemaking in the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales. Thanks to my colleague and dear friend, the cultural anthropologist Magdalena Buchczyk, and her suggestion to look more closely at the notion of prefiguration (Boggs, 1977) in order to distance myself from the sense of "utopia," I have found the space to look for other temporalities that move away from the limitation of liminality as a form of linear transition between A and B, between the past and the present of migratory narratives.

1 Informal housing in Chile.

As I have already discussed in Chapters 5, one of the many complexities of looking at these places from a linear liminal temporality is that it assumes that at the end of liminality the process of transformation has been completed. Victor Turner describes this as *liminoid*, referring to the moment of time/space created to have a liminal experience producing the sense of being “outside of time”—a form of momentary withdrawal from modern society (Turner, 1967; see Chapter 5). The continuous and permanent reality of the transitory state of people-in-transit makes me look at their placemaking strategies not only with an eye toward the future but also with regard to everyday practices and tactics in the present.

Coined by the scholar of social science Carl Boggs in the 1970s, the concept of *prefiguration* is constituted by an act, modes, strategies, and relations created in the present by social groups and movements for a society that pursues the future (Boggs, 1977). Boggs claims that prefiguration is the ongoing political practice of a group, where their social modalities, decision-making, and personal and group experiences serve the ultimate goal of their desires for the future, but are already embodied in the present.

The social movement scholar Darcy Leach further developed the term, arguing that the prefigurative

Refers to a political orientation based on the premise that the ends a social movement achieves are fundamentally shaped by the means it employs, and that movements should therefore do their best to choose means that embody or “prefigure” the kind of society they want to bring about. (Leach, 2013: 1)

Amelia Thorpe, a scholar working on environmental law, draws from prefiguration to propose *prefigurative performances*, referring to critical and political interventions within the city that produce city–citizen relations “as if” the city were already different. Rather than “proposing” actions, these groups act “as if” the modalities they want to change have already been achieved (Thorpe, 2023).

The political scientist Leandro Minuchin (2021) looks at *prefigurative urbanization* from the perspective of critical geography to describe the immediate praxis of social movements in the present framed by a post-capitalist society. In other words, it is the reclamation of collective agency by the citizens, without the mediation of policy-makers, producing a new urban constellation through their actions: “The notion of prefigurative urbanization [is] to depict a territorial process where a plurality of self-managed infrastructural manifestations, replaces the role played by sovereign institutions and planning technologies in organizing spatio-temporal relations” (Minuchin, 2021: 1).

Looking at the placemaking of the Dzjanggal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales through a prefigurative lens opens up another way of understanding their temporality as an ongoing status. Rather than focusing on the liminal linear state between A and B, it

suggests visualizing the future in the practices of the present. By applying a prefigurative lens to these places, I open the possibility of considering the state of in-betweens as ongoing. Through their placemaking strategies and political practices, the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales pre-design the present toward a desired aspiration for the future. Rather than replacing the existing notion of urbanism and construction, they reimagine another mode of placemaking through the self-constructions that constitute their places. Here, the objects, materials, designs, and elements that are part of their urban area become part of a “prefigurative practice” (Cooper, 2016a, cited in Thorpe, 2023: 184), by producing alternative imaginaries “as if” they are already part of a city that welcomes them and recognizes their citizenship. I return here to the autonomy of migration and the “migrant’s” agency when dealing with the country of arrival, in which, although they are perceived by the nation-state as “irregular” and “illegal” individuals, in many cases they act “as if” they are already citizens (Mezzadra, 2012). By embodying “the agency of being an agency” (Thorpe, 2023), the “migrant” individual allows themselves to reimagine and redesign the pre-established orders of the city, opening up new forms of city–citizen relations from an autonomous perspective. The residents of the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales take agency over their urbanization, acting “as if” they were already part of an “official neighborhood” within the city. Although burdened by the risk of eviction, they are already making neighborhoods. Here, utopia is crushed by a place in the making.

“Hope” as a Prefigurative Practice

Delving deeper into the placemaking of the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, I suggest here the use of “hope” as a prefigurative method to analyze the social practices within these places. During my stay within the communities, I encountered the state of “hope” as a feeling that precedes expectation, aspiration, and desire for something particular to happen in the future. Rather, “hope” was perceived as a form of everyday practice embodied in strategies and methods of placemaking.

I initially interpreted the state of “hope” represented in these placemakings through the lens of the “space of possibilities” that is also embodied by liminality. In his book *Les Rites de Passage*, the ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep ([1961] 2019) describes the liminal temporality between A and B as a transformative process, in which the person opens to the possibility of other perspectives and experiences a rebirth of their own being. The anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen (2012, 2015, 2016) takes this transformation of temporality into spatiality, moving away from the person-centered in order to analyze liminal processes in a spatio-territorial context, especially places that are between geographical and sociopolitical borders. Here, the “space of possibilities” is viewed from the perspective of territory, opening up a “hopeful state” of optimism. In this sense, the temporality of liminality is

understood as a process of transformation that creates new possibilities within the territory, with “hope” situated as the final state of transformation. However, the limitation of liminality lies in its linear temporality (from A to B), which overlooks the concept of prefigurative practices and the idea of “hope” as the driving force of these processes. Prefigurative practices, by contrast, represent a continuous process of bringing the future into the present—transforming the present-future into a permanent state in the making.

Within anthropological studies, “hope” is focused on a discussion of the future in cultural analysis (Appadurai, 2007, 2013). Specifically in migration and border regimes studies, “hope” goes hand in hand with the notion of “waiting,” investigating aspects of the future by focusing on the present that waiting provides. As I have discussed in previous chapters, waiting is often defined by residents as a state of “limbo,” which in some cases, triggers a “waning of hope” (Kornienko, 2014: 47, cited in Hauer, Østergaard Nielsen, and Niewöhner, 2018: 71). Waiting becomes a key strategy on the part of the border regime to “control and delay” migration, leading to a “disruption of hope” in which the “hopeless” state emerges. As I analyzed in Chapter 6, through state-run camps distributed in frontier cities across Europe, the border regime finds a temporary (and spatial) method of delaying these communities from moving. However, from the perspective of those living in these camps, waiting can also be transformed into a strategy against the border regime, which Appadurai calls the “politics of patience” (2001). Patience becomes a strategy to endure waiting, in which “hope” turns waiting into movement: waiting as motion (SAVVI Contemporary Berlin, 2022; see also Chapter 6).

Therefore, the complexity of engaging with “hope” in a border regime setting is that it can be practiced not only by the people-in-transit but can also be a strategy on the part of political agents, municipalities, and nation-states when managing and controlling migration flux. Specifically, in the case of self-built settlements, “hope” becomes one of the political state tactics to cope with the lack of permanent solutions and, in many cases, facilitate evictions within the city. “Hoping temporarily prevents informal settlement from breakdown” (Hauer, Østergaard Nielsen, and Niewöhner, 2018: 14; see below). Here, it highlights the other side of hoping and how the nation-state deals with informal processes in these places. “Hope” becomes a tactic to avoid giving definitive solutions to these informal constructions, substituting “false hope.” In this sense, “hope” becomes a double-edged sword since, when viewed from the perspective of political agents, hoping is a way to keep people “occupied and controlled” (Hauer, Østergaard Nielsen, and Niewöhner, 2018: 14), to delay solutions and decisions, as in the case of the brutal eviction of Tiburtina in 2003.

The Roman municipality was at that time in constant negotiations with the Tiburtina community, through round tables and meetings with the leaders and the community to look for solutions and strategies for Tiburtina to become a model of welcoming people-in-transit, something that, at that time, Italy lacked. These possi-

ble solutions were surrounded by “hopeful words” on the part of the political agents. In turn, Tiburtina’s placemaking was linked to the 2003 elections of the Roman municipality in which the center-left party—whose candidate, Enrico Gasbarra, was later elected president of the Province of Rome between 2003 and 2008—was in conversation with the Tiburtina community, promising bureaucratic solutions in terms of migratory asylum and support for the improvement of Tiburtina’s housing. These actions went viral on social media and television, building a positive image toward the center-left party, and thus getting more votes from Roman citizens, as they seemed to be looking for solutions to the “migration problem,” which were scarce at that time in the context of the Italian border regime (see further Briguglio Asgi, 2003²). The center-left party’s “hopeful promises” contributed to the final eviction of Tiburtina, as it took the residents by surprise and led to a rapid and violent eviction without resistance from the residents, NGOs, and volunteers (see Chapter 1). Here, “hope” became a tactic of violating human and housing rights, leaving the people of Tiburtina homeless and “hopeless” of an urban future.

However, “hope” from these perspectives remains person-centered, where the expectations and aspirations of people-in-transit frame the way the future is perceived. What if “hope” is considered a material-cultural practice of the present and a method for social and urban change? I draw inspiration from the notion of “Landscapes of Hoping,” a term coined by the anthropologists Janine Hauer, Jonas Østergaard Nielsen, and Jörg Niewöhner in their article “Landscapes of Hoping: Urban Expansion and Emerging Futures in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso” (2018). The authors argue for “hope” as a practice, by considering its temporality and the degree of driving force it exerts in “peripheral” urban spaces. They move away from the idea of “hope” as a person-centric modality to bring it closer to cultural-material processes, especially in self-building settlements, as a constant negotiation between the material reality of the present and expectations for a neighborhood in the future. I could sense firsthand the role of “hope” as a driving force in the placemaking of this research’s case studies. Apart from the waiting and the sense of “limbo,” “hope” seemed to be a state that was present in every moment, something that, in previous chapters, I referred to through the notion of becoming (see Chapter 6) and the capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2001; see Chapter 2), as people in these places engage with waiting through hope while navigating border regimes. Some residents of Los Arenales referred to the close connection between “hope” and “waiting” through the Spanish wordplay of “espera-nza” (waiting: *espera*; hope: *esperanza*).

As Hauer, Østergaard Nielsen, and Niewöhner summarize, the notion of “hope” has returned to the spotlight in anthropological discourses where the relationship

2 See <https://briguglio.asgi.it/immigrazione-e-asilo/2003/ottobre/rass-stampa-ferrari-14-10.html>

between contemporary migration and “hope” has been at the forefront in discussions of current migration regimes. Likewise, it is closely intertwined with optimism, expectation, anticipation, and, in some cases, utopianism as a term that has been very influential in the last decade. In this regard, “hope” is viewed as distinct from the subjectivization of person-centeredness and becomes a driving force for collective sociopolitical change. Appadurai, in his text “Housing and Hope” (2013), intertwines urban social change with “hope,” especially in “peripheral” urban spaces where poverty and precarity are the basis for a kind of “hope” that drives the community to act, protest, and demand change. Here “hope” focuses on the person and their community’s ability to confront their present reality and seek changes for the future—the “capacity to aspire” (Appadurai, 2001), for poor and “migrant” communities to make changes in their quality of life.

Instead, Hauer, Østergaard Nielsen, and Niewöhner shift away from the form of protest action and social change as specific events of “hope” toward the cultural material of everyday life, looking at it as a tangible and concrete practice of the present. Specific protest events are no longer regarded as gestures toward an abstract future but rather as actions of “hoping” in the present. The authors propose that “hoping” is an ongoing process and practice and, through the lens of material semiotics, analyze how “hope” emerges from particular worldly situational material in specific settings of self-construction in “peripheral” areas. Here, they outline how “hope takes place” (Hauer, Østergaard Nielsen, and Niewöhner, 2018: 2) when referring to the self-building of housing and urban spaces in the urban “periphery”, birthing the idea of “Landscapes of Hope” (Hauer, Østergaard Nielsen, and Niewöhner, 2018: 1).

The Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales strongly present “hope” as a tangible practice of their everyday self-construction. For example, in Los Arenales, the construction materials used by residents were not lightweight, such as plastic, chipboard, and wood, as in the case of the improvised structures in the Dzjantal; instead, they built their houses using cement and stone, which signified durability and permanence. As one of the members of Los Arenales argues: “We build with cement and stone so that no one can evict us.” Here, she tangibly exemplified a prefigurative practice of urban space. Deciding to use materials with these characteristics was a form of resistance and territorial proclamation, in which the “hope” of not being evicted was transformed into the “hope” of building permanently, “as if” they were already part of the urban space.

Another member of Los Arenales, who mentioned that after the daily construction work, many neighbors would get together to eat dinner, discuss their progress, and give each other building tips for the next day. “This was the moment of the day when we realized that our houses were already taking shape, and one felt hopeful to continue the next day,” this community member said. Here, motivation was derived from “hope” for the next working day, contributing to the daily driving force required to achieve the main objective of finishing their houses. Another commu-

nity member, shared with me his construction tactics when he gave me a tour of his house. After establishing the first pillars and foundations, he focused on where to build the sleeping quarters and then later the construction of the bathroom, living room, and kitchen. He recounted that this idea of building from the "inside out" was a common form of self-building strategy since "one does not know if the building material will be enough in the next few days." Essential rooms needed to be ready first, and the bedroom was the priority since it is "the room that gives the first foundation of belonging to a home." He recalled that when he and his family were building the main bedroom, they all "hoped" to see their home finished in the following years: "Hope made us get up every morning to keep building our home" (fieldnotes; Garland, 2022).

Therefore, the life experiences of these community members exemplify how "hope," in these specific cases, becomes the key to self-building, becoming the daily driver in the present to make room for an imagined urban future. That is to say, "hope" is not necessarily visualized in the future but is situated in the present, pre-designing building expectations. "Hope" becomes an action that produces the motivation to work the next day, not only from an individual perspective but also from one which accommodates the collective imagination of building an urban space—"Landscapes of Hoping" (Hauer, Østergaard Nielsen, and Niewöhner, 2018: 1). In parallel it becomes a material and tangible element: The houses become a concrete representation of "hope," no longer perceived as a "utopian" possibility but transformed into an action already happening in the here and now—these self-builds are "already" happening. From this perspective, "hope" becomes a unified strategy of placemaking by strengthening resistance and struggle in the long run while creating community in the here and now. The Dzjanganl is an excellent example of how duration serves as proof that "hope" became a mechanism to keep the settlement and its ecology of people, infrastructure, and networking from breaking down. The Dzjanganl lasted approximately 20 years. Although the community was only named in 2015, from the late 1990s groups of people-in-transit were already settling in the Les Dunes area outside Calais, where it gradually developed into one of the largest settlements in Northern Europe (see Chapter 1).

Therefore, the occupation in these places is based on an ongoing state of "hope," evolving in the present to open up possibilities and aspirations for the future. Through the lens of prefigurative practice, "hope" becomes a driving force for placemaking, which grabs the imagination of the future and forms the basis of everyday political practices. In these cases, "hope" is not utopianism but a concrete and tangible state coming to light through placemaking.

7.3 Rethinking the “Elsewhere”: *Somewhere Inbetween* as a Way of Neighboring

In this book, I have undertaken holistic research into the social transformation of the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, often categorized as “non-places” and “places of exception.” The central questions that guided my research revolved around the social forms by which these places have created conviviality in the face of confrontation with border regimes. The thread that connects the anthropological and artistic-ethnographic dimensions of this book revolves around three key questions: How do the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales—so-called non-places—become social places? How have these self-constructed places created sociability in the face of violent interaction with border regimes? And to what extent might the concept of liminality and the state of inbetweenness play a role in their transformation and becoming? I conclude this Epilogue by inviting the reader to consider these questions through the tentative lens of *Somewhere Inbetween*—a notion that emerged gradually through the ethnographic and artistic process, rather than from a theoretical framework. This evolving conceptual and artistic framework aims to move away from the marginalized labels of “non-places” (Augé, 1995), “places of exception” (Agamben, 1998), and “peripheral places” (Gregory et al., 2011), toward places that move beyond these polarized categorizations. *Somewhere Inbetween* has helped me to look more closely at forms of placemaking that challenge the conventional dichotomy of “center” and “periphery” inherent in Western urban areas.

The Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales, through their particular place-making, make tangible how their migratory experiences challenge the assumed dichotomy of “center-periphery” and, to a certain extent, question the duality between Western and non-Western societies. “The Marxist sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall argues that the idea of the “West” is no longer merely a geographical concept, but becomes a discursive and power-political binary in the global imaginary between “the West and the Rest” (Hall and Gieben, [1992] 2018), which plays an important role in the postcolonial reflections of the last decade” (Garland, 2024a: 28). Through their self-organized practices and self-constructions, the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales embody a state of personal inbetweenness, as well as navigate the territorial inbetween within the geographical borders of the city. This challenges the polarized urban borders associated with Western postmodern cities.

In this sense, viewing these places through the tentative lens of *Somewhere Inbetween* suggests understanding their social construction as integral to the city rather than as distant outliers implied by the idea of the “periphery.” By recognizing the active role of the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales in reshaping urban space, they challenge the notion of “peripheral places” by existing in a “somewhere” within the urban fabric. “Somewhere”—in-some-place—points to a place still inside the city’s

boundaries, though its precise location remains unclear³. With this, *Somewhere Inbetween* invites us to consider these places as active part of urban life (Somewhere) and through the residents' migratory state of inbetweenness (Inbetween), open other possibilities for living and belonging in the city. In other words, *Somewhere Inbetween* could express both the physical presence of these communities within the city and their ongoing negotiation of identity, belonging, and sociability. (I will return to this in the last section of the Epilogue).

In doing so, it also opens a contrast with the notion of "elsewhere." While *Somewhere Inbetween* suggests urban presence, "elsewhere" points to a space that lies beyond a defined zone. The word "elsewhere" implies "an-other" as an element that is neither neighboring nor familiar but rather distant and foreign. This use of "other" reflects a duality between "us" and "them," accentuating the idea of "otherness" highlighting subordinate social positions. In postcolonial theory the understanding of "Elsewhere" moves to a slightly different direction involving the production of knowledge and practices outside the scope of Western ideals and colonial structures, as analyzed in Chapter 6. The post-colonial scholars Ian Chambers and Lidia Curti ([1996] 2002) explore the ramifications of living on the margins or beyond established borders, framing it as an experience originating from "Elsewhere," or, as the decolonial scholar Catherine Walsh (2012) articulates, the product of "another thought." This underscores the multivocality that emerges from alternative perspectives, offering critique and resistance to prevailing Eurocentrism (see Chapter 6).

Renowned intellectuals such as Edward W. Said and Franz Fanon, in works including *Orientalism* (Said, 1977) and *Black Skin White Masks* (Fanon, 1952), deconstructed "the other," examining issues of race, culture, and intellectual development. Said highlighted the fixed polarity of colonial structures, creating a dichotomy between the "dominant West" and "inferior East," perpetuating a homogenized view of the "other." This racial hierarchy, present in Fanon's concept of the "White Mask," represents the negotiations of identity within the colonial power dynamic. The postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak (1985) coined the term *Othering* to highlight the imperial and colonial action discourse that marks the difference between the "self" and the "other" by creating the notion of the "other" as the marginalized voices excluded from the discourse of power (Römhild, 2018). Through these lenses, the construction of "the other" can be captured in the terms analyzed in this book: "non-places" (out of place), "place of exception" (out of society), "liminal places" (out of time), and "peripheral places" (out of the urban). Considering the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales not as places detached from the dynamics of the city,

3 This metaphoric naming is inspired by the various tactics residents use to protect these places from disappearing. Many of these sites are absent from mapping platforms such as Google Maps, a factor that can also slow down eviction processes.

but as unique examples of placemaking in their own right, challenges the idea of colonial binaries between “us” and the “others.” By examining the prefigurative practices inherent in these places, it is possible to uncover the community’s efforts against marginalization and exclusion, challenging these colonial structures.

Therefore, the Dzjungal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales demonstrate that it is possible to be interconnected within Western cities while simultaneously envisioning alternative forms of urban life, challenging the conceptual limits of Western ideals. Despite their struggle against border regimes, these communities have created their own urban environment, transcending the conventional understanding of placemaking. In their inbetweenness migratory state, characterized by constant uncertainty, flux, and struggle against border regimes, the residents of these places have fostered an environment that allows for cultural dialogue and the flourishing of diverse knowledge production. In this way, *Somewhere Inbetween* emerges as a provisional framework for a more inclusive understanding of placemaking, suggesting that alternative urban practices are essential for transcending the rigid categorizations imposed by colonial frameworks. The possibility of imagining alternative urban lifestyles within Western cities holds transformative potential, inviting a reexamination of urban spaces as sites of dynamic cultural exchange and co-creation. In this sense, *Somewhere Inbetween* operates as a lens through which to observe these places of alternative collective negotiations, struggles, resistances, becomings, and aspirations. Here, the inbetweenness of migratory experiences becomes visible not as a condition, but as a political and intellectual stance toward border regimes.

The Dream of a “Latin American City”

A compelling illustration of this emerges in the idea of the “Latin American city,” where Los Arenales generates forms of knowledge that unsettle the assumed dichotomy of “periphery” and “center.” Los Arenales’ desire to become “a Latin American city” exemplifies how dreams, aspirations, and projects can emerge from an in-between space. The prefigurative strategies emerging in Los Arenales distance themselves from the dichotomy of colonial preconceptions by offering a shared understanding of conviviality as practices of reclaiming territory, as well as dealing with violent interactions with the border regime. When I first learned about the Los Arenales community’s dream, one of the community members answered my question: If the community could say in a few words what Los Arenales is, what would it be? She replied without thinking: “Los Arenales is the idea of a Latin American city.” I asked her why a Latin American city and not a Latin American neighborhood? She replied:

Those of us who live in Los Arenales come from different origins, not only geographically but culturally, which makes our community full of diversity. Why

shouldn't we share it with others in the city? In any case, thanks to our arrival, Antofagasta is no longer just Chilean. We already have the second generation here—we think it's time to cross the borders.

The idea of a Latin American city in this case goes much further than an idea of territory and city, but proposes a way of living with and through communities. Therefore, the uniqueness of Los Arenales, located in Chilean territory introduces an alternative perspective of what a city could look like, one that diverges from conventional Western norms of urban planning. The term "Latin America" acquires here a closed connection to decolonial thinking. The inhabitants of Los Arenales are inspired by the ideas of South American and Latin American decolonial intellectuals who have transcended academic boundaries to shape the city through decolonial practices. This suggests that we should view Latin America not merely as a geographic region but as an expanding perspective and epistemic space that can resonate globally.

It is an approach that, again, while it can be said to have roots in the Latin American experience, finds sustenance globally; hence the appeal to many critical theories, especially those emerging from similar subaltern epistemic locations. This differentiates it sharply from earlier "Latin American paradigms," such as dependency and liberation theology even if these also had a transnational dimension. (Escobar, 2020a, n.p.)

This notion of Latin America contrasts with European colonial ideologies, as it sets aside nationalism and embraces a more inclusive narrative. For the post-development thinker Arturo Escobar (2020), the concept of Latin America serves as a geopolitical manifesto, inviting us to break away from the enduring 19th-century Eurocentrism that violently imposed the ideal of homogenizing the diverse Americas. The Latin American ideology has deep historical layers that encompass the eradication of indigenous peoples to create a Latin America with rigid borders, where only Europeans could be included. Escobar emphasizes that we as Latin Americans must abandon and break with these obsolete fixities and seek more nuanced and inclusive approaches that fit the multiplicities, complexities, and realities of our present.

In his book *The Idea of Latin America*, the decolonial thinker Walter D. Mignolo (2009) also rethought inherited categories by bringing to the surface the constructed aspects of the "idea of Latin America." For Mignolo, Latin America is not a tangible entity, but an idea constructed by European colonialism that imagines a Eurocentric and racialized continent at the "service" of the colonizer's development. Mignolo argues that rather than visualizing the "discovery" and "conquest" of America, it is an "invention" of it (Shaw, 2006). Seen through this lens, over the centuries, Latin America has moved away from its "Latinity"—which refers to the Latin colonizers from Spain, Portugal, and France who settled in American territory and subse-

quently produced a “neo-Latin culture,” which is the result of miscegenation with the indigenous peoples and, to a lesser extent, sub-Saharan Africa (Lucena, 2014). By distancing itself from European associations, Latin America has become the “new world,” categorized as a continent with “mestizaje” in the racial hierarchies of white supremacy (Mignolo, 2009).

From this perspective, “mestizaje,” the Spanish word for “miscegenation,” describes the complicated mixture of biological and cultural elements between different ethnic groups. Through a decolonial lens, the term “mestizaje” carries a derogatory connotation, as it implies that one ethnic group is considered “superior and purer” than another, perpetuating the obscuring of underlying racial structures and marginalizing groups with a predominantly indigenous heritage. However, it continues to be used to define Latin American identity, highlighting the merger between Europeans and indigenous communities (González-Barrera, 2015). In an interview with the scholar Patti Blanco in 1991, the feminist, queer, activist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa takes the idea of “mestizaje” in a new direction by developing the concept of the “new mestiza consciousness,” highlighting how this concept can provide metaphors for a more inclusive and audacious society, with the “new mestiza” as border-crossers who are able to move between cultures, territory, and languages. This perspective from the “borderland” is a unique point of view that cannot be experienced from a “monocultural” perspective (Betancor, 2012) (see Chapter 6).

Today, in a postcolonial era, the idea of the “monocultural” is fractured by a post-migrant society in which the borders within a city are already juxtaposed and fluid. With the image of the “new mestiza,” Anzaldúa motivates us to break with the alienating dichotomies of Western thinking. In doing so, she proposes first unlearning the Western dichotomy, which she describes from a feminist and queer perspective as “the whore/virgin dichotomy” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 84; also Betancor, 2012), which, by extension, reveals the complexity of this supposed colonial polarization. By this, the “new mestiza consciousness” not only challenges the binaries of colonial thinking, but also points toward forms of worldliness based on plurality and lived intertwining, echoing alternative understandings of cosmopolitan belonging.

Returning to the idea of a Latin American city, Los Arenales proposes a place-making where multiple cultures, identities, and knowledges come together, interact, coexist, clash, and, in some cases, create joint projects of alternative urban landscape. In this way, Los Arenales distances itself from the traditional idea of “cosmopolitanism” rooted in patriarchal, bourgeois, and white-dominated colonial structures that pretend that all people are part of the same “universal community” (Kleingel, 2003; see also Cheah and Robbins, 1998). In turn, Fanon (1952) emphasizes how colonialism has influenced other forms of cosmopolitanism, giving the term a postcolonial perspective. This type of cosmopolitanism is intertwined with the contradictions of colonial legacies and analyzes what “global citizenship” is in the postcolonial era. With this, I want to depart from the colonial idea of cosmopoliti-

tanism to highlight how postcolonial discourse has opened up a rich spectrum of ideas that help us understand today's dynamics of mobility, cross-border exchange, and hybridization.

The everyday negotiations in Los Arenales echo what some scholars call "minor cosmopolitanism," which moves away from the idea of "flânerie: a white man's journey around the world" (see Chapter 3). This is a concept that underlines the impossibility of the cosmopolitan claim today, even if the idea of globalization and the technology of communication and mobilization say otherwise. Inequality, racist structures, and patriarchy, among other factors, are embedded in the construction of the cosmopolitan ideal. Instead, "minor cosmopolitanism" does not leave out diversity between communities but embraces it as part of today's postcolonial and postmigrant society while not rejecting the search for common coexistence and shared understandings of justice and equality (RTG Minor Cosmopolitanisms research group, 2018).

Following this, the anthropologist Regina Römhild (2018) coined the term "cosmopolitan interventions" to highlight practices that analyze and transform colonial structures and power dynamics constituted in an urban space, which rejects the traditional Eurocentrism of cosmopolitanism. She sees the minor cosmopolitan as a "cosmopolitanism of the border," which opposes dominant colonial structures and current border regimes from a migratory perspective through "subaltern, minority and minoritized" practices. The "minor" practices of the "minor cosmopolitan" distance themselves from the global ideals of the traditional cosmopolitan; rather, their strategies in the struggle against Eurocentrism are present in their everyday practices (Römhild, 2018: 66). Los Arenales' ideal of a Latin American city thus reflects these two important aspects of a contemporary minor cosmopolitan. On the one hand, in daily prefigurative practices Los Arenales residents contest the structures of Western cities by questioning who has the right to belong and who does not. On the other hand, the recognition and celebration of Los Arenales as a community full of cultural and knowledge-based diversity through the idea of a "Latin American city" proposes an urban living model that recognizes that the city is an urban space where there is "one world with many worlds" (De la Cadena and Blaser, 2018). Los Arenales recognizes that it is part of a postmigrant city in which the Western polarization between the "center" and "periphery" is blurred by a form of mutual conviviality. This is not necessarily communal and collective, but rather framed by respect for others or, as they call it, "respect for one's neighbor." Here, Los Arenales dreams of a city far away from pre-established borders and preconceived nationalisms. A vision captured in their own words:

In our city we have good communication with the neighbors, there is peace, no fights are seen. It can be said that in our ideal city we live in tranquility, things go well but we respect each other. In our city there is no racism, we fully live diversity

in the broad sense of the word. In our city, we have stopped surviving to start living and enjoy well-being. The houses are dignified and spacious, and they allow us to develop intimacy, being sheltered from the outside, with privacy. In our city there are green areas, there are good schools, we have health services appropriate to our needs, commerce is nearby, we have security thanks to the closeness of public order agents with whom we maintain fluid and respectful relations. In our city we all have access to culture and information is available to everyone, especially for the children, who can always attend different workshops that allow them to find new friends and interests. In this city we all know each other. Some get along, others don't, but mutual respect always prevails. In our city we can find recreational spaces full of joy, ideal for us to recognize each other as neighbors. Our city is orderly, clean, and dignified. This city does not yet exist, but we want it to become a reality.

Manifesto excerpt from "Building our ideal city in Los Arenales" created in the workshop on the right to the city held at La Casita in 2019. My English translation from Spanish.

Toward Future City-Making through *Somewhere Inbetween*

Closing this Epilogue, I take inspiration from the dream of the ideal city in Los Arenales quoted above. By searching for ways to design a city that embodies conviviality and neighborhood, Los Arenales invites us to reimagine an urban space from the perspective of autonomous places of migration. In today's urban landscape, characterized by ambiguous borders and unclear socioeconomic dynamics on the one hand, and violent border regimes with racist structures on the other, self-built places such as the Dzjanganl, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales emerge as alternative infrastructures that challenge the current definition of the city. The prefigurative practices observed in these communities are part of their daily struggle to integrate into the city, showing the potential for an alternative understanding of urban life. The creativity and ingenuity of these communities—building homes and neighborhoods on abandoned urban and land spaces—reveal the limits of traditional forms of doing urban planning and pave the way for alternative approaches to placemaking, overcoming the divisive ideas of “periphery” and “center” in today's cities.

Returning to the notion of *Somewhere Inbetween*, I do not wish to romanticize the precarious lives that these communities experience on a daily basis, lives that are, as the urban scholar AbdouMaliq Simone says, “uninhabitable” and characterized by constant “volatility and uncertainty” (Simone, 2018: 16). Instead, I seek to challenge conventional notions of inhabiting a city and engaging in urban life. Simone's insightful analysis in his book *Improvised Lives: Rhythms of Endurance in an Urban South* (2018) helps me to look at the habitability of these places as a form of stepping out of the preconceived idea of the “periphery” and “center.” Simone argues that the survival strategies of the poor are to “take what they can get” from a city that increasingly excludes them from socioeconomic structures. He examines how placemaking

in the Global South provides the elements and infrastructures available in the city for the poor to construct their own kind of urban life. The inhabitants of the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales go one step further. In occupying abandoned spaces and going beyond mere acceptance of the norms dictated by the border regime, they take control by distancing themselves from urban dichotomies, initiating alternative methods of placemaking. Their prefigurative practices of self-governance allow these communities to engage with the fabric of the city; in a sense they take control of “what they want to get” from the city and seek alternative ways to build their own form of neighborhoods.

Through their prefigurative practices, the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales exemplify daily forms of resistance to the border regimes. These “rhythms of endurance” (Simone, 2018) serve as keys to survival and also underscore how everyday resistance offers avenues to discover alternative forms of placemaking. The ecological systems created both inside and outside these places highlight the communities’ remarkable ability to foster conviviality, a phenomenon Simone describes as “relation-making.” The uniqueness of these places lies in the convergence of various forms of relation-making outside Eurocentric ideals.

Viewing the city through the tentative lens of *Somewhere Inbetween* means also advocating for an alternative urban cohabitation that promotes practices of care and territorial healing with a particular perspective that emanates from this migratory context. The urban planners Catalina Ortiz and Oscar Gómez Córdoba (2023) advocate for “territorial healing” as a holistic approach to address trauma stemming from violence in the Global South. Rooted in a decolonial perspective and drawing from postconflict city studies, they emphasize interventions that collectively restore “geotraumas” (Pain, 2021, quoted in Ortiz and Gomez Córdoba, 2023: 1). Their proposal transcends institutional frameworks, incorporating decentralized and autonomous methods to address the symbolic, embodied, and emotional dimensions of urban life (Ortiz and Gomez Córdoba, 2023). The prefigurative practices of places such as the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales are closely related to territorial healing. The creation of a Latin American city on Chilean territory, as envisioned in Los Arenales, reflects a commitment to civic care and territorial healing. Coming from a migration perspective of the inbetween, these places take the social and political position of the “third space” (Bhabha, [1994] 2012) seriously in order to initiate a process of repair and the healing of wounds suffered on their migration journey.

Building on this, territorial healing is one of the principles of a reconfiguration of the urban landscape that departs from traditional urban paradigms, in which capitalist, neoliberal, and fast-paced life in metropolitan cities often forgets the existence of “the other as neighbor.” I am inspired by the ideas of hn. lyonga, a poet, author, and dear friend who has artistically investigated what it means to “become a neighbor” in a European metropolis such as Berlin, researching everyday practices within neighborhoods and rethinking their boundaries for groups that exist outside

of them. For hn. lyonga, the concept of neighborhood goes beyond the physical proximity between communities; it involves belonging and rootedness in a collective way. hn. lyonga argues that fundamental aspects such as listening, mutual learning, and collective thinking are necessary for the creation of a neighborhood, emphasizing that a neighborhood is intertwined with neighbors, friends, and networks whose social values are commitment to community participation and exchange of ideas. This creates opportunities that invite one to imagine “us” as a way of making places (hn. lyonga, 2023). In this way, neighborhood is transformed into *neighboring* (hn. lyonga, 2023), a verb that describes the act of creating a collective identity within the urban landscape. Los Arenales’ ideals of becoming a Latin American city resonate with this idea. Their deliberate decision to discard the label of “migrants” and become “neighbors,” as mentioned in Chapter 6, transforms the way people-in-transit relate to the city they have arrived in. Self-identifying as a “neighbor” becomes a strategy of care and affection toward the new territory and its inhabitants. This mindset of respect for others as neighbors often contrasts with Western cities, where the fast-paced rhythm of life often prevents communal connections, exchange, and bonding within the confines of the home.

As a final reflection, the sociability inherent in the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales has become evident throughout this book, countering the label of “non-places” (Augé, 1995), as well as “places of exception” (Agamben, 1998), and “peripheral places” (Gregory, 2011), as their placemaking goes beyond territorial and geographical aspects and includes the social, cultural, and neighboring dimensions of the city. Through their migratory narratives, resistances, and resilience toward the border regime, these places propose a more inclusive and compassionate urban landscape that reflects the diversity inherent in migratory flows. In other words, the placemaking of the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales proposes a rethinking of urban planning and the fostering of a sense of belonging within a foreign homeland. By prioritizing the well-being of both the inhabitants and their surroundings, they aspire to create urban spaces that resonate with a spirit of care, conviviality, and neighborliness.

In today’s evolving urban policy in the West, where people-in-transit find themselves marginalized from the fabric of the city, it is vital for political figures, municipal authorities, urban planners, architects, and others to earnestly consider alternative perspectives of placemaking. The adoption of a “politics of care” (Simone, 2018) emerges as a key proposal, emphasizing the daily prefigurative practices unfolding in these often-overlooked places by advocating for existing processes, ensuring the “right of way” (Simone, 2018: 134) for these communities and offering support for their improvisational efforts and collaborative initiatives. It seeks to harness the positive energies derived from these grassroots practices, with the ultimate goal of fortifying urban infrastructures and services. These communities offer prefigurative practices that suggest an alternative foundation for a future city-making. Recogniz-

ing their community-making as a form of political practice against border regimes provides invaluable tools for understanding and reshaping today's urban environment. In this vision, cities go beyond mere functionality, becoming welcoming and inclusive.

The places of the Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales strengthen community ties by going beyond conventional placemaking and incorporating various community-building aspects that stem from their own migratory narratives. By interweaving cultural nuances, individual narratives, and collective endeavors, they create a resilient fabric with shared aspirations for the future. Through these ongoing efforts, these communities suggest to the city that it is possible to transcend traditional borders and encourage rethinking established notions of "periphery" and "center." The Dzjantal, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales generate collective responses to contemporary border regimes and foster interconnected social spaces that address the challenges of inclusion in today's cities, proposing that it is indeed possible to envision belonging across borders.

APPENDIX

Somewhere Inbetween—A Collaborative Exhibition

Somewhere Inbetween adopted a collaborative and trans-academic exhibition, bringing together community members, architects, artists, social scientists, and students to explore contemporary urban migration and alternative placemaking in Europe and South America. It also reflects on experimental ethnography through artistic and social practices. The exhibition featured multimodal archives from the Dzjangan, Tiburtina, and Los Arenales communities, recognizing the communal processes developed in resisting border regimes. Inspired by the Caribbean poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant's "archipelago thinking," the archives are part of a museographic design that explores alternative relations in contemporary migration through oceans, featuring sound installations and an architectural design that contributes to connect these communities through water narratives¹.

SENSORY SATELLITES²



1 *Somewhere Inbetween* was held between October 24 and October 30, 2024 in Lichthof Ost exhibition space in the main building of Humboldt University, Mitte-Berlin. With contributions by Jungala Radio-Dzjangan, Kathy O' Hare & Ciaran Henry, Los Arenales & Elizabeth Andrade, Cristian Ochoa, Tiburtina & Davide Franceschini, Melanie Garland, TanzaLab architects, IfEE students; Johanna Dick, Lene Kruse, Alex Maurer, Flora Mettal, Paula Mohne, Nora Pomettini, and Piero Trias.

2 For more information about the exhibition and its afterlife, see <https://somerwhereinbetween.cargo.site/Exhibition>

Image 8: Somewhere Inbetween, overall view of the exhibition, 2024. © Pablo Hassmann



Image 9: Somewhere Inbetween, overall view of the exhibition, 2024. © Pablo Hassmann



Image 10: Somewhere Inbetween, overall view of the exhibition, 2024. © Pablo Hassmann



Image 11: Somewhere Inbetween exhibition, installation view of the Jungala Radio archive, 2024. © Pablo Hassmann



Image 12: Somewhere Inbetween exhibition, interior detail of the sculptural installation 'The Sail' by TazaLab, 2024. © Pablo Hassmann



Image 13: Somewhere Inbetween exhibition, detail of an artist's book with field notes, objects, and documents from fieldwork in the Dzjanganl, 2024. © Pablo Hassmann



Image 14: Somewhere Inbetween exhibition, detail of an old document showing boat construction, 2024. © Pablo Hassmann



Image 15: Somewhere Inbetween exhibition, sound installation featuring a podcast conversation between Elizabeth Andrade and Melanie Garland, 2024. © Pablo Hassmann



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