

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 Dzjanganl, 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 Dzjanganl, 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 Dzjanganl, 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 Dzjanganl, 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 Dzjanganl, 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 Dzjanganl, 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 Dzjanganl, 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 Dzjanganl, 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, Römhild, 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 Dzjanganal, 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 Dzjanganal, 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 Dzjanganal. From that initial motivation Kathy partnered with co-founder Ciaran Henry (videographer and photographer) to co-create Jungala Radio together with the Dzjanganal'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 Dzjangan 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 Dzjangan 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 Dzjanganl 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.