

CHAPTER 1

Oceans, Places, People

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Oceans: An Intertwined Form of Research

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

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

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

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

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

Postcolonial Oceans

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Writing People's Stories through the Lens of the Archipelago

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes for the reader

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

1.2 Oceans, Places, People

SENSORY SATELLITES³



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

We Are The Ocean

(Hau'ofa, 2008: 39)

UNITED PEOPLE

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

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

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

The Dzjanganl fieldwork, Calais, December 2016

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

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

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

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

Calais was my first encounter with a liminal city.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Dzjanganal fieldwork, Calais, December 2020

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

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

Los Arenales fieldwork, ethnographic poem, Antofagasta, January 2022

FIRST FIELD NOTE: ANOTHER SKY IN THE NORTH

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

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

Change of government across the country,
Covid pandemic worldwide.

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

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

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

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, November 2018

A FIRST FIELD NOTE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Dzjanganl fieldwork, Calais, April 2022

RENATURALIZATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Dzjanganl fieldwork, ethnographic poem, Calais, April 2022

CALAIS WIND

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

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

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

Wind embeds the migrant bodies into the landscape of Calais.

Los Arenales fieldwork, ethnographic poem, Antofagasta, January 2022

SAND OF THE ATACAMA⁶

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

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

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

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

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

Migrant travelers walk through the Atacama Desert.

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, September 2021

I SAW YOU FROM AFAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Archipelago

(Glissant and Obrist, 2021: 19)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To The Sea

Aracelis Girmay (2024)⁷

Los Arenales fieldwork, Antofagasta, January 2022

FOUR WOMEN SITTING TOGETHER

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

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

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

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

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

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, September 2021

ALEXANDER

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

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

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

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

Zaher’s notebook, sheet 13

Zaher Rezaï⁸

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

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, September 2021

THE NAME OF “TIBURTINA”

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

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

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

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

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

I hesitated and asked: “Tiburtina?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Sea Is History

Derek Walcott (2007)

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, September 2021

THE SHIP “TIBURTINA”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Seascape Epistemologies

(Amimoto Ingersoll, 2016: 15)

The Dzjanganl fieldwork, Calais, April 2022

REBECA AND ADRIENNE

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

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

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

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

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

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

Los Arenales fieldwork, Antofagasta, January 2022

CECILIA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Seascape Epistemologies

(Amimoto Ingersoll, 2016: 20)

The Dzjanggal fieldwork, Calais, April 2022

SOFT TORTURE

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

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

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

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

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

The Dzjanganl fieldwork, Calais, April 2022

AHMAD, MOHAMMAD, ALI AND JESSICA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BRITISH RED CROSS

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

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

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

Name and Bodies, Tales from across the Sea

(Yimer, 2015: 1)

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, September 2021

URBAN SPECULATION

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

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

Los Arenales fieldwork, Santiago, December 2021

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE AFTER THE OUTBURST

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

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

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

The tension of the presidential election was present.

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

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

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

Our Pacific

Vaine Rasmussen (2000)

Tiburtina fieldwork, Rome, September 2021

A SILENT EVICTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

We were silent for a few minutes.

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

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

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

My Brain Is an Immigrant

Senait Hagose⁹

(undetermined date, possibly 2017)

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