

EDITED BY LUCIE BERNROIDER,
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AND SUNG UN GANG

INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE CITY

Exploring Violence and
Inequality in Urban Space

The Refiguration of Space



INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE CITY

This book combines intersectional perspectives and urban research to demonstrate the importance of intersectionality as a concept that can complement “refigurational” understandings of social change as the outcome of spatial conflicts. Showing how intersectionality enables us to grasp the intersecting categories of inequality in these spatial tensions, it remains attentive to the role of social difference and power in these processes, as well as to modes of normativity and resistance. With case studies gathered from a range of national contexts, it provides rich empirical insights into the relationship between urban spatialities, power dynamics, and embodied social inequalities, addressing the manner in which different conflicts are made manifest intersectionally in and through situated urban spaces. The chapters consider issues such as the gendering and racialization of urban spaces; urban marginality and environmental pressures; intersectional power dynamics in research; heteronormative and cisgender-centric structures in the city; aging in the city; young people, control, and insecurity; police violence; migrant emplacement and activism; racialized gentrification and commoning, and pandemic safety and protest, to explore the uneven outcomes of spatial planning and urban development. As such, it draws attention to the interplay of various forces in the production of exclusion and injustice and will therefore appeal to scholars of sociology, geography, and urban studies with interests in inequality, social change, and resistance to exclusion.

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The Refiguration of Space

Based on the premise that what is social always takes on a spatial form, this series explores the changes wrought in the relations of human beings to spaces and their spatial practices by current social transformations, conflicts, crises, and uncertainties. Welcoming studies from disciplines across the social sciences, such as sociology, geography, and urban studies, books in the series consider the ways in which people (re-)negotiate and (re-)construct spatial orders according to a common pattern of “refiguration,” a process that often involves conflict and is frequently shaped by phenomena such as mediatization, translocalization, and polycontexturalization.

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Urban Space

*Edited by Lucie Bernroider, Anthony Miro Born,
Christy Kulz, and Sung Un Gang*



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INTRODUCTION

Exploring urban violence and inequality from intersectional perspectives

Lucie Bernroider, Anthony Miro Born, Christy Kulz, and Sung Un Gang

On an afternoon in late July 2024, three young girls were tragically killed during their dance class in a community center by a seventeen-year-old boy in Southport England. Due to his age, his identity could not be released. Shortly afterward, however, rumors circulating via social media claimed that the perpetrator was a migrant and a Muslim who had recently arrived on a small boat across the Channel. There were calls for unrest by right-wing influencers, while far-right UK Reform party leader Nigel Farage fanned the flames by suggesting that the Merseyside police investigating the case could be withholding evidence from the public. In the following days, violent far-right riots broke out across several UK cities and numerous police officers were injured. The violence manifested differently in each city, as the different spatial locations and material features of cities were exploited: In Rotherham, a hotel housing asylum seekers became the focal point for 700 rioters. Windows were smashed, bins set alight, and staff and residents stacked furniture against the front door to prevent entry as the crowd chanted, “Get them out!” In Southport, the local mosque was the key target, with suspected members of the far-right English Defense League shouting “English ‘til I die!” In Middlesbrough, rioting was more mobile and less focused on a particular site, instead involving dispersed crowds roaming across various parts of the city. The unrest was accompanied by unsubstantiated claims that women had been raped by asylum seekers, along with assertions that police were more punitive toward white people than ethnic minorities—despite data existing to the contrary (Head 2023; Runnymede Trust 2024). As the days went on, counter-anti-racism protests also sprung up across English cities in response to the right-wing violence.

This condensed snapshot of both overt and symbolic violence in urban streets highlights the numerous ways in which intersectionality is embedded within, and crucial to, understanding how these incidents unfold. The tragic murder of three young white children is mobilized by the right and becomes a stage upon which forms of inequality and hatred—continually circulating through social discourse—coalesce and erupt. The murders become tied to illegal immigration and racialized others, portrayed as “polluting British soil.” Asylum seekers are not only positioned as a drain on society but also scapegoated as the murderers of British children. The murders also invoked the Muslim man as a folk devil (Rashid 2016). Urban sites like the Southport mosque or the

Rotherham hostel quickly become material locations to which pre-existing hatred attaches itself. Here, race is conflated with migration status and religion. The trope of brown men as particularly predatory is evident in the unsubstantiated rape allegations, while white men position themselves as the protectors of (white) women.

Through these events, we can see how urban spaces differentiate and organize the lives of their inhabitants in relation to their positionality in society, functioning as both a materialization and reproduction of power dynamics and violence in everyday lives. Like this series of events, the texts in this collection show that the urban not only acts as a backdrop against which intersectional forms of overt and symbolic violence play out; urban spaces also actively shape how these encounters unfold. This volume develops similar themes across a wide range of geographical contexts and was born out of the 4th International Conference of the Collaborative Research Center 1265 “Re-Figuration of Spaces,” which took place in Berlin in 2022. This event entitled “My City is a Battleground: Intersectionality and Urban Violence” brought international scholars together to reflect upon the interplay of spatial and social conflicts, and how intersectional tensions are intertwined with processes of urban spatial refiguration. In many ways, this volume has been directly inspired by the conference’s focus on the link between lived urban materialities, embodied social inequalities, and their intersectionality embedded therein. It presents key papers from this fruitful exchange in Berlin, while also expanding the boundaries of the conference’s scope by inviting additional relevant contributions from international scholars.

The emergence of intersectionality

Intersectionality was popularized as a term by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1993) over three decades ago to account for the inextricability of various social divisions and their impact on experiences of inequality and discrimination. Women of color feminists and scholars in the United States, in particular, had been working for some time not just to broaden the scope of scholarship and practice, to incorporate issues of gender, race, sexuality, ableism, and migration, but to reformulate their tools of inquiry and critique (Collins 2000 [1990]; Combahee River Collective 1995 [1977]; hooks 1992). They produced significant interventions that challenged the limitations of mainstream discourses that marginalized women of color by tending to address only one dimension of discrimination and not its interconnectedness. Intersectionality then drew critical attention to how systems of oppression and privilege intersect to shape different social positionalities and lived experiences. Crenshaw’s work is widely recognized as formative for later intersectional scholarship and activism. However, the development of an intersectional genealogy or mode of thought is not isolated to the United States in the late 1980s but can be observed across various regions and periods. Escaped slave and women’s rights activist Sojourner Truth’s *Ain’t I a Woman* (2020 [1851]) already pointed to the intersection of Blackness and womanhood in the mid-1800s. In 1922, Yi Sangsu, a pedagogue and anticolonial activist, urged his contemporaries to recognize colonized Korean women’s double-bind oppression based on their ethnicity and gender (Gang 2024, 244). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde (1985) wrote about categories of oppression that included race, gender, class, and sexuality, while the seminal text *Farbe bekennen* (Oguntoye, Ayim, and Schultz 2021 [1986]) was published by a collective of Black German women who brought the term “Afro Deutsch” (Afro-German) into the mainstream. Viveros-Vigoya (2024) has since described the development of intersectional thinking in Latin America, from debates within the Brazilian Communist Party in the 1960s to the influence of decolonial feminism and rural and working-class feminisms, shaping its local

trajectory. Meanwhile, grassroots women's groups in the Global South, including the Zapatista women's movement in Mexico and the Digital Dalit Feminist Network, organize around the concept of intersecting oppressions, highlighting that the Global North hardly has a monopoly over how intersectionality is being employed and developed (Salem 2018).

Over the last three decades, intersectionality has become a central feature of critical thinking within and beyond the horizon of feminist research and studies of racism (Davis and Lutz 2024). By 2024, it was hard to find a field of social science and humanities where intersectionality had not yet been discussed or adopted as part of an analytical framework, or included in methodological interventions. In social science, for instance, such endeavors have been made in studies of cultural anthropology (Goel 2015), geography (Valentine 2007; Sultana 2020), sociology (Kumashiro 1999; McGall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2011; Brown et al. 2017), disability studies (Amirpur 2016; Pieri 2023), and politics (Narrain and Bhan 2005; Bilić and Kajinić 2016; Hankivsky and Jordan-Zachery 2019), to name but a few. Similarly, scholars in literary studies (Provitola 2019; Streeby 2020; Eom 2022), history (Tschurennev 2018; Gang 2024), philosophy (Bernstein 2020), and media studies (Eguchi and Kimura 2021) have actively engaged with the concept of intersectionality. Drawing on the broad dissemination of the concept in and outside of academic debates across the globe, Kathy Davis and Helma Lutz (2024, 7) suggest considering intersectionality as a “traveling theory” in keeping with Edward Said (1982).

However, the journey of intersectionality has not been without its pitfalls. In the early development of the term by the Combahee River Collective and others writing from the experience of Black women, there was an insistence that the term should not be reduced to identity, but rather used to express a structural critique of historically entrenched and institutionalized systems of inequality and violence. There has arguably been a push in recent decades, both within and outside academia, to co-opt the term away from this systemic critique, and to use it as a buzzword for (neoliberal) notions of “diversity,” which are content to incorporate some social categories of difference into still fundamentally oppressive systems. Indeed, it is not difficult to find examples of how powerful corporate actors, foundations, and mainstream media have used it as a slogan without engaging with the deeper, critical frameworks that Crenshaw and others envisioned. We position ourselves explicitly against the impulse to remove the political commitments of the term and propose reaffirming our commitment to systemic critique and challenging forms of oppression.

Intersectionality and urban research

Several comprehensive collections of intersectionality explore the concept in relation to topics like popular culture, disability, or border work (Nash and Pinto 2023), or examine how it can be deployed methodologically (Esposito and Evans-Winters 2021). A historical perspective has here been shown to be a fundamental aspect of intersectional analysis, as it allows us to trace how systems of oppression have developed, transformed, and shifted over time while highlighting how they are still embedded in various historical continuities and ruptures. Yet space and violence receive little or no attention in most volumes, with the exception of Grzanka's (2014) collection. Our volume addresses this omission. As the contributions in this book show, the analysis of intersectional constellations of violence requires a spatial perspective because the interlocking violence of racism, patriarchy, classism, heteronormativity, and capitalism—among other systems of oppression—are critically constituted, expressed, and experienced as spatial formations. Thinking spatially, therefore, provides an entry point through which to examine and critique the institutions and systems that catalyze inequalities. Indeed, it has been pointed out elsewhere (Mollet

and Faria 2018, 570) that intersectionality, as pioneered by Black feminist thinkers, was already, at its inception, a deeply spatial concept. This is exemplified by the ubiquity of spatial metaphors embedded in Black feminist thought: “peripheries,” “the margin,” or “crossroads,” or the famous metaphor of the traffic intersection central to Crenshaw’s elaboration of intersectionality. Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) work, meanwhile, has not only had a profound impact on intersectional thought by highlighting the dynamic and unfinished unpredictability of life in the “borderlands,” where national, cultural, historical boundaries collide, overlap, and blend, producing a consciousness that defies binary logics of difference. It also directly and viscerally evokes the spatiality of the intersectional. Space, then, can be seen as somewhat implicit in intersectional thought and its theorizations of power in space (566). Sharlene Mollett and Caroline Faria (2013, 120), in this spirit, advocate for an intersectional postcolonial analysis that “acknowledges the way patriarchy and racialized processes are consistently bound in a postcolonial genealogy that embeds race and gender ideologies within nation-building and international development processes.”

Intersectionality has made its mark more specifically on urban research. While not adopting the concept of intersectionality vocatively, Neil Smith (1996), for instance, found that the gentrification of New York City, Philadelphia, Paris, Amsterdam, and Budapest was a process of creating “revanchist cities” that were hostile not only to the poor, but also to various intersecting categories of marginalized people—including women, people of color, queer people, and people with disabilities. Meanwhile, Black feminist geographers and other racialized feminist scholars in North America have significantly shaped the field of intersectional urban geography. This development aligns with critiques of gender as a “master category” in intersectional studies (Klinger and Knapp 2008; see also Davis and Lutz 2024, 8–9), as well as with concerns about the academic marginalization of racism (Mollett and Faria 2013, 116). In this spirit, Zenzele Isoke (2013, 37) reveals how the “process of colonization, gendered racialization, and neoliberalization produce social geographies in US cities,” which influenced the socio-economic condition of “a despised city” (3) like Newark and perpetuate intersectional violence against Black women. Likewise, Rashad Shabazz (2015, 1) delves into the historical process of “spatializing blackness” in Chicago, focusing on how carceral power infiltrates the urban landscape. He demonstrates that this “prisonized [...] landscape” (2)—consisting of architecture, police presence, and city politics—not only contained Black residents but also “informed Black men’s performance of masculinity” (2).

Furthermore, a growing body of literature deploys intersectionality in the field of urban planning. Doan’s (2015) research on urban planning and LGBTQ communities, for instance, argues that urban planners need to think beyond the traditional “gaybourhood” in order to recognize the diversity of these populations, while Rigon and Castán Broto (2021) argue for an intersectional perspective when making policy interventions in poor urban areas of the Global South. Although the field of architecture has had a more limited engagement with intersectionality, recent interventions like the work of Boys (2017), as well as Harris and House (2022), demonstrate its growing relevance in this field.

While our volume focuses on urban spaces, intersectionality is, of course, not a solely urban phenomenon. For instance, Stroma Cole’s feminist political ecologist study of Labuan Bajo, Indonesia (2017), demonstrates how the burgeoning tourism industry causes a water crisis in the region, affecting people of different backgrounds. She argues that while Indigenous women are “disproportionately affected” (21) by increasing water work, some men and children—depending on the complex entanglement of ethnicity, poverty, and age—also have to engage in everyday struggles to obtain fresh water (20). Gilly Hartal and Yael Bar Tzedek (2023) highlight how queer women navigate antagonisms and subtle discrimination in rural areas of Israel at the complex

intersection of gender, sexual orientation, confession, and ethnicity. When it comes to queer lives, turning to urban space can reproduce what Jack Halberstam (2005, 36) calls “metronormativity” where the rural is imagined as a “closet” (37) for queer individuals to exit, despite “the ubiquity of queer sexual practices” (37) in rural areas. The myth of the “urban age,” too, has long been questioned and refuted. Indeed, when Mollett and Faria (2018, 566) contend that spatialities are “inherent in intersectional thinking,” which examines “power in space, place and across scale” as well as “the mutual constitution of race, gender and space” (568), they assert that intersectionality is a fundamental aspect of geography—not just in North American and European cities—but everywhere.

Yet exploring intersectional violence in urban spaces is necessary to critically reexamine and diversify the concept of *the city* itself. In light of the current global and regional political upheavals marked by war, the global pandemic, gentrification, growing intolerance against social minorities, as well as threats to democracy, we need to renew our understanding of the city. Furthermore, research on the city as a space that (re)produces violence of various forms and scales is crucial, particularly considering the prevalent tendency of urban studies to represent certain metropolises in North America and Europe as urban archetypes, despite continuing postcolonial intellectual interventions (see Sintos Coloma 2020; Narayanan 2021; Parida and Agrawal 2023).

Building on the aforementioned critical endeavors, our volume adds to this growing body of work that examines intersectionality and spatiality together, integrating diverse regional and disciplinary contexts, perspectives, and approaches. Instead of representing cities as mere backdrops or stages for case studies, chapters in this volume highlight the urban as enfolding particular intersectional dynamics of inequality and demonstrate how people navigate and resist intersectional marginalization in the city. In doing so, we aim to broaden the geographic scope of research on cities while decentering its usual loci. Furthermore, this volume contributes to understanding the spatial aspect of intersectional violence in the city through various cases as well as conceptual and methodological reflections. It should be noted that a great deal of what may be termed intersectional scholarship does not label itself as such, or, in fact, even use the term at all. Indeed, several of the contributions to this book do not make much reference to the term. However, in the way they approach their empirical cases, orient their analytical work, or engage reflexively throughout the research process, they apply (either explicitly or implicitly) an intersectional lens as a way of addressing multiple dimensions of difference, as well as interlocking systems of power and oppression.

Intersectionality, inequality, and urban violence

This edited volume contributes to current debates by shining a spotlight on the intersection between lived urban materialities and embodied social inequalities. Intersections of social inequality in urban space are not ephemeral phenomena; they are situated and unfold across particular urban spaces. Intersectional analyses, moreover, span different registers of precarity or vulnerability, highlighting specific conflictual constellations that range from exclusion from, or tenuous claims on, the right to city spaces to experiences of physical violence. Here, violence could assume the form of grievous corporeal harm—which can be even lethal, particularly to people under intersectional discrimination (see Collins 2024)—as well as subtler, yet equally insidious forms of damage that include symbolic or material violence resulting in social exclusion. This book then asks how conflicts manifest in and through urban space and what forms of violence they may take, offering a deeper understanding of (urban) social conflicts, notions of spatial injustice, and

different forms of violence in the city, including those produced by capitalism, heteronormativity, and classed, gendered, and racialized exclusion.

The particular context of the urban, we argue, requires further attention, as it is in the close quarters of the city that specific intersectional dynamics of inequality and violence play out, deeply entangled in the contingent and historically embedded spatialities of any specific urban area. Urban space plays a key role in how we construct and represent differences in the city. Contemporary cities are shaped by intersectional dynamics of exclusion, violence, or oppression, materialized, for example, in spatial segregation and institutionalized racism in the housing market, often resulting in deeply segmented urban landscapes of privilege and disadvantage—along racialized lines. Indeed, intersectional spatialities critically remind us of the ways in which structural forms of violence and suffering often operate and are experienced through different materialities, such as housing or urban infrastructures. They also offer an understanding of how certain bodies, read through intersectional social markers, are subjected to surveillance regimes in, or displaced from, certain places and territories in the city and naturalized in others. Contests over power and privilege in the city then occur not only in space, but over space—who can use it, who has rights to it, or who can change it (see Haritaworn, Lee as well as Barry in this volume). In short, bringing intersectionality and spatiality together allows us to “interrogate and demonstrate the ways in which violence is woven through everyday lives, institutions, and structures” (Springer and Le Billon 2016, 2). One of the aims of this book, therefore, is to embed intersectional perspectives more firmly as an analytical sensibility in the interdisciplinary study of urban space—a project that is still very much ongoing.

Intersectionality and the refiguration of space

This volume brings together impulses from various disciplines across the social sciences—including sociology, cultural studies, geography, and urban studies—and geographical contexts to illustrate how spatial research needs to be refined to attend to the ways in which socio-spatial architectures are entangled with intersecting and embodied inequalities, particularly in relation to modes of normativity and resistance. Some contributions draw more directly on the concepts of refiguration theory, the shared conceptual terrain of the “Refiguration of Spaces” series of which this book is a part (see the chapters by Löw, Gang, Kulz, Ignatieva, or Lee in this volume). Starting from the premise that the social always takes on a spatial form, refiguration hones in on the changes brought about by contemporary social transformations, conflicts, crises, and uncertainties in people’s relations to spaces as well as their spatial practices. The term refiguration summarizes how people (re)negotiate and (re)construct particular spatial orders according to common patterns, a process shaped specifically by the phenomena of mediatization, translocalization, and polycontextualization.

There are several ways in which the concept of intersectionality can be productively engaged with this conceptual arsenal. First, the theory of refiguration recognizes communicative actions as a crucial part of the social construction of spaces (Christmann, Knoblauch, and Löw 2022). In this approach, the corporeal becomes a key site of analysis. Communicative actions gain meaning by reference to embodied qualities; thus, they center the body in both its sensory and affective capacities, as well as in the ways it is read and regulated as a marker of intersecting differences (e.g., as an indicator of gender, class, race, age, dis/ability, etc.). Moreover, the refiguration approach considers spatial transformations across three different levels: from the subjective level (encompassing individual and embodied forms of knowledge, experiences, imaginaries, and affects), to social actions (now increasingly taking place in digitalized or hybrid cyber-physical

environments), and finally, to different forms and processes of objectification in infrastructures, circulations, and institutional orders (e.g. urban infrastructures or governance regimes). This cross-scale analysis is often echoed in approaches that adopt intersectional perspectives, which, too, are concerned with bridging scales—the body, the home, the state, and the translocal. For example, localized instances of violence may be deployed in nationalist narratives that also shape deeply gendered and racialized debates about immigration and citizenship, as illustrated in the events described in the opening paragraphs of this introduction. The combination of an intersectional and a (refigurational) spatial perspective may then allow us to understand, more profoundly, how expressions of violence are shaped by the specificity of the local contexts in which they occur, as well as being embedded in broader socio-spatial and politico-economic patterns, including nationalist and (neo)colonial frameworks and neoliberal policies. Furthermore, it directs our attention to how these arrangements are translocally linked in ways that (re)produce inequality and violence between, within, and across refigured spaces (see Springer 2011). As this book demonstrates, intersectionality is therefore a crucial complementary concept needed to grasp the role of intersecting categories of inequality in processes of spatial refiguration.

Outline of the book

Clearly, these contributions can cover only a fraction of this contested terrain. In the process of assembling this volume after our Berlin event, some contributors dropped out while others were added, resulting in the disappearance of certain themes and geographical contexts. While there are many reasons why people decide to drop out of an edited book project, it is crucial to highlight how the precarity of today's academic system—geared towards the publication of journal articles—also affects which scholars can “afford” to contribute to edited volumes and which simply cannot.

As we critically reflect on our own knowledge production in the form of this book, it is important to note that several topics and contexts have been somewhat short-changed. For instance, disability, environmental issues, and climate change are only tangentially discussed in the pages that follow. Given our affiliation with a research center based in Germany, it is perhaps not surprising that scientists working in this geographical area are overrepresented. While this does not diminish the value of the individual contributions that follow, as editors we feel it is essential for the reader to understand that this volume is itself a result of academic power relations—and we are aware of what has fallen by the wayside.

Nevertheless, the themes described earlier in this introduction are explored, developed, nuanced, and extended in the sixteen contributions that follow. Each contribution offers an exciting perspective that can be read independently or as part of a more comprehensive exploration of the interplay of violence, urban space, and intersectional inequality.

The three-part structure of this book aligns with key lines of inquiry pursued by intersectional scholarship. As a critical sensibility, intersectionality offers new ways of theorizing and provides key analytical insights, particularly concerning conceptions of space. Furthermore, self-reflexivity has become a central part of intersectional research agendas, encouraging researchers to move beyond disembodied truth claims and to reflect on their own positions of privilege and their impact on the research process. The concept of intersectionality has been powerful in stimulating reflection on the possibilities for more (politically) responsible, self-reflexive, and creative methodologies. These key methodological and **conceptual terrains** are explored in the first part of this book. Intersectional research has been crucial in highlighting how systems of inequality and domination do not work in isolation; instead, it recognizes their complex interactions,

enmeshment, and co-constitution. This perspective has been vital for understanding the **social life of urban violence** through multiple interwoven prisms, including patriarchy, capitalism, racial structures, and migration systems, without privileging one or conceiving of it as operating autonomously of the other. It is this complex constellation and the urban experiences it generates that the contributions in the second part of this volume focus on. Finally, while intersectionality is concerned with the operations of power that affect marginalized people, it also has a rich history of addressing how people navigate and challenge systems of domination in different ways, often by fostering intersectional solidarity. Part 3 will, therefore, focus on practices of **challenging urban violence**.

Part 1, conceptual terrains, primarily engages with conceptual frameworks and underlying theoretical issues, as well as methodological questions raised by a deeper engagement with intersectionality and (urban) space. It opens with a contribution by **Martina Löw**, who uses vivid examples from Berlin to argue that the intersection of the social constructions of race and gender is different from other social constructions. Drawing on the theory of spatial figures, she examines how property and public space are simultaneously gendered and racialized, a process she interprets as symbolic violence. **Thomas Hoebel** revisits the death of Mouhamed Dramé, who was shot by a policeman during a police operation in the stigmatized district of Dortmund Nordstadt in August 2022. Focusing on this extraordinary case, Hoebel asks what significance “concrete places” have in shaping experiences of violence.

Turning to Seoul, **Sung Un Gang** critiques self-centered reflexive methodologies in urban ethnographic fieldwork, arguing that they overlook the labor of ethnographic others in maintaining the homeostasis of field spaces. Drawing on case studies from queer spaces in Seoul, his essay advocates for the concept of relational space, highlighting how spaces are co-created through interactions shaped by intersectional positionalities. In collaboration with the visual artist Pablo Quiroga Devia, **Francesca Ceola**’s contribution presents an experimental approach that combines illustrations with analytical and methodological reflections. Based on her research with internally displaced persons in Lagos, Nigeria, she guides us through the dialectical process of collaboration between researcher and artist. The first part concludes with a conversation between **Anthony Miro Born** and **Javier Auyero**, exploring Auyero’s extensive research into urban violence in Argentina. The interview delves into Auyero’s ethnographic approach and contributions to understanding the multifaceted nature and implications of urban marginality.

Part 2, the social life of urban violence, presents a series of empirical studies that shed light on the social dynamics of violence and the lived experiences across different urban settings. Bringing together case studies from Africa, Europe, and Asia, this section explores how different forms of violence permeate everyday urban life. **Irene Appeaning Addo** examines Accra’s airport city as a neo-modernist bourgeois space to illustrate how low-income workers navigate this rigidly formal urban environment. These workers operate in the liminal space between formality and informality, blurring the boundaries between the city and the hinterland as they employ informal strategies to survive. **Christy Kulz**’s chapter explores how disparate geographies of material privilege shape the future outlooks of young Londoners living on the city’s peripheries. She argues that social mobility often perpetuates social inequality, leaving inequitable structures intact while promoting the ideal of meritocracy, causing pain and alienation for those attempting to move beyond stigmatized neighborhoods.

Iryna Ignatieva then discusses the spatiality of checkpoints in war-torn Ukraine, highlighting both its integration into the urban landscape and its “filtering” function. She explores how these checkpoints force migrants attempting to flee Ukrainian territory to adopt protective strategies

to avoid violence and negotiate safe passage. She shows how migrants' vulnerabilities are compounded at the intersections of Ukrainian and gendered identities. **Anna Juliane Heinrich** and **Angela Million** examine the increasing social control of young people's spaces, arguing that factors such as poor maintenance and social conditions lead to perceptions of insecurity. They show how societal prejudices intersect with age, class, race, and gender to circumscribe young people's spatial knowledge and experiences. In Berlin, **Friederike Enßle-Reinhardt** and **Ilse Helbrecht** focus on aging and intersectionality, critiquing how public institutions often ignore the diversity of older populations. They argue that this oversight leads to exclusion and reinforces stereotypes, creating spaces of alienation for minority groups.

Seoyoung Lee explores the affective violence experienced by cisgender women and trans individuals in gender-segregated public restrooms in South Korea. Through interviews and autoethnographic fieldwork, they vividly capture how the pressures of postcolonial modernization and the threat of the male gaze shape the spatial arrangements of women's restrooms, and how the senses of security and identity are formed at the intersection of gender, class, and notions of *civilization*. Finally, **Céline Barry**'s chapter illustrates the intersection of nature, gentrification, surveillance, and resistance through a psychographic practice of walking in and photographing Kreuzberg (Berlin). By highlighting the ongoing struggle against neoliberal urban redevelopment, her contribution provides a powerful bridge to the third part.

Part 3, challenging urban violence, focuses on how urban violence is confronted, tackled, and interrupted. Part 3 begins with a contribution by **Paula Medina García** and **Ana Santamarina Guerrero**. Drawing on research conducted in Cali, Madrid, Valencia, and Glasgow on bordering and othering technologies, the authors highlight the importance of an intersectional perspective for identifying migrant agency. Next, **Lucetta Y. L. Kam** and **Carol P. H. Chow** analyze the resurgence of affective alliances in Hong Kong despite political repression and COVID-19 restrictions. They explore how fandom gatherings, such as those of Keung To's followers, reclaim urban spaces for collective identity and expression, illustrating the role of popular culture in reshaping solidarity in the face of socio-political challenges.

In Berlin, **Jin Haritaworn** critiques pandemic policies from an abolitionist perspective, highlighting how these policies disproportionately affect Black and migrant communities. By exposing racial bias in COVID regulations, Haritaworn shows how communities resist state surveillance and create new forms of collective care and social change as part of anti-racist activism. Finally, **Karim Murji** and **Steve Pile**'s photo essay looks at post-lockdown London, focusing on contrasting protests—one against the invasion of Ukraine and another diverse gathering in a city park—to unravel the complex interplay between protests and urban spaces. These protests highlight how cities like London become contested sites. The clash of different political expressions challenges conventional narratives of public space use amid post-pandemic uncertainties.

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PART I

Conceptual terrains



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2

INTERSECTIONALITY

Gendering and racializing urban spaces

Martina Löw

Introduction

Moving within a city means using your body; it means communicating with others and being “read” by them through the body. It also means attributing meaning to communicative actions via embodiments. These bodies are, as a rule, gendered, and ethnicized. They are being read as Black or white, and judged according to age, sex and class position. The complexity of this process has been described in many studies (e.g. Duden 1987; Butler 1990; Villa 2006), also, in key aspects, for urban contexts (for a summary see Watson 2000).

The term “intersectionality”, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the context of Black Feminism, is also used in urban research to capture the phenomenon of intersecting cultural inscriptions and their discriminating consequences. It was originally coined to designate the process of making invisible social discriminations at their point of intersection. Here is one example: When US companies hire Black male workers and white female workers, but no Black female workers, Black female workers’ discrimination cases are regularly dismissed, because the company will argue before the court that neither people read as Black, nor people read as female are indeed excluded in the recruitment process (Crenshaw 1989). In recent research, however, the focus goes beyond the intersecting moment, as the concept has found wider uses in detecting correlating clusters of social constructions that give rise to social injustice. This chapter is concerned with intersectionality understood as simultaneously relevant constructions of race and sex/gender and the relational dynamics of gendering and racializing bodies in the context of urban spaces. I proceed from the assumption that social differentiations such as race and sex/gender must be physically performed, and thus the body almost necessarily is a key starting point for urban research. It not only involves practices of movement, but crucially also practices of representing bodies in urban contexts, for instance in advertisements. Performance, as it is used here, has a textual, visual as well as a corporeal dimension. Structures such as race and sex/gender are regularly realized as body-text-image assemblages interacting with the built environment and spatio-relational orderings of objects (Löw 2016). The chapter is devoted to showing that cities are socio-material fabrics in which conflating gendered and racialized knowledge, and bodies and objects are positioned and put into relation in specific ways.

In the following section, I will introduce new concepts in spatial theory to identify these positions and relations. Using an example from the city of Berlin, I go on to illustrate how the intersection(ality) of race and sex/gender permeates major areas of our everyday lives in powerful ways. My argument is that embodied actions under the condition of a pluralization of hegemonic spatial figures are correlated and intersected with aspects of racialization and gendering.

To prevent any misunderstanding, I want to stress that constructions of race—perhaps more than sex and gender—are *imaginings* associated with body features and/or bio-genetic constructions. Throughout history, they have been connected with political agendas and used to differentiate between groups of human beings to legitimate ‘difference’ without any empirical foundation. Many contexts, in which these fantasies were made a reality (Spanish inquisition, colonialism, fascism), have revealed the cruel, brutal side of the social construction of race and sex/gender. These social constructions are usually motivated by the desire to consolidate, legitimate and reproduce power balances based on ideas of purity. In this paper, the use of the terms ‘race’ and ‘sex/gender’ (and their intersections), is strictly referring to the level of *doing* gender and *doing* race, not to innate or unchanging categories.

New concepts in spatial theory: Spatial figures and intersectionality

Processes of globalization and digitization have led to dynamic changes and processes of refiguration in many societies (see Knoblauch and Löw 2020; and Löw 2024 for the concept of refiguration), resulting in the pluralization of spatial figures (Löw 2020; Löw and Knoblauch 2021). We are witnessing a novel type of societal change characterized by the decline of the hegemonic role of the concept of territorial space, which prevailed in the twentieth century. This does not imply that the territorial figure has disappeared entirely; rather, we are observing the pluralization of hegemonic spatial figures, which also includes the conflicts, tensions, opportunities and excesses this process entails.

In the collaborative research center on the “Re-Figuration of Space” in Berlin, we distinguish between four different types of hegemonic spatial figures: territorial space, place, network space and trajectorial space. The latter is elementary in urban planning in the form of air and water spaces, and as systems of marked-out routes, transport paths and lines traversing urban space. Each of these spatial figures is associated with its own logic of practice (Löw 2024). We assume that the construction of territorial spaces (such as nation-states, special zones, camps, but also children’s playgrounds and so on) follows the logic of demarcation and boundaries, creating an inside and an outside of territorial space, and a tendency toward homogenization within the territory. Exclusion and inclusion are effected by means of establishing boundaries and borders. Network space follows a different type of logic, which is the logic of association. Inclusion and exclusion are organized through processes of connecting and linking, or via interfaces (or lack thereof), rather than territorial closeness. The spatial figure of place follows the logic of identity and heterogeneous, dynamic encounters. Its direct counterpart—within the framework of urban development—is the trajectorial space, i.e., mapped-out routes, tracks, lines and paths organized according to the logic of cutting across and traversing space. The logics of lingering, as well as the specificity distinctive of the figure of place, do *not* form part of the concept of trajectorial space. Tensions are, however, not restricted to these two figures alone. Empirical data suggests that there are conflicts to be observed between all four spatial figures in question. One example is the clash between the territorial logic of spatial closure and the network logic of regulatory control by using smart apps during the Covid-19 pandemic (Löw and Knoblauch 2020). These tensions can give rise to violent urban conflicts.

To shift the perspective on the intersectionality of race and sex/gender, we need to conceive of spatial figures in corporeal terms, since the constitution of space is based on embodied actions. Let me explain this in a brief recourse to etymology. The word “figure” is derived from the Latin “*figere*” (which means ‘create’, or build). The notion of “*figura*” connotes the dimensions of plasticity and movement, in contrast to the concept “*forma*.” Hence, “*figura*” does not relate to *static* entities, it is conceived as generally “more flexible, more resonating” than “*forma*” (Auerbach 1967, 57). In dance theory, a figure not only designates a specific body posture or shape, it also refers to the unity of movements and their rules of combination, as the theorist Gabriele Brandstetter notes. A figure is expressive of a unique interpretation and a specific figure-ground relation (Brandstetter 1997, 599). An arabesque, for example, is thus a code, precisely a body-and-movement code. The figure itself is an abstraction, it only exists in and through the actual performance and interpretation of the dancers who “rewrite the figure in the process of moving” (Brandstetter 2007, 13). This implies that figures, including spatial figures, have to be performed by and through bodies to exist.

Communicative actions are assigned meaning by bodily appearance and embodied properties, this also applies particularly to cities. In urban contexts, bodies are invariably gendered, ethnicized and racialized. They are seen as indicators of class, sex and age, and the complexity of these processes have been shown in many studies (e.g. Puwar 2004; Wacquant 2006; Blokland 2008). However, differences made relevant by referring to bodily appearance, such as age, sex/gender, class, ethnicity, race, dis-/abilities, sexuality, are not all equally effective in social situations. Bodies are not always “read” as either *white* or Black, there are a lot of nuanced shades in-between this spectrum, which are inflected by class, religion, dress, etc. How bodies are classified and valued is dependent on spatial contexts, and also on the intrinsic logic of a city. Some distinctions are constructed through binary difference, others are based on process (age), or on multiplicity (ethnicity). Only sex and race are, in our times in many places, imagined as “biologically rooted markers” visible on and “read off” from body features (Hirschauer 2014, 170). As a result, we are witnessing the relational dynamics of gendering and racializing bodies.

Without intending to play down the adversity every form of exclusion can cause, class and nationality are nevertheless categories which include the idea of social mobility (Hirschauer 2014, 171). Colonialism has established sex and gender as binary-based categories to the extent that other systems of regulation are no longer accepted (Oyewùmí 1997). Sex/gender have become “naturalized” in the course of the (colonial) modern period (Laqueur 1992; Quijano 2000; Lugones 2007), a destiny they share with only one other major marker of difference, and that is race. The question arising for further studies in the refiguration of spaces is thus how to integrate and analyze the racializing and sexualizing dimensions in the research on the construction and transformation of spaces. Focusing on this aspect, I will, in what follows, describe the theoretical fundamentals of this special type of intersection, and illustrate problematic aspects of these rather common attributions and characterizations using an example from the urban space of Berlin. In the conclusion, I shall return to the construction of spatial figures.

The race and sex/gender nexus

Structured by the legacies of colonialism and patriarchal patterns of differentiation, modern societies are geared toward producing binary readings of sex/gender. Attempts to (re-)introduce a third, or more, gender identities (third sex, non-binary, trans, and so on) are successful only if resolute resistance practices against the dominant two-sex/two-gender matrix are applied. Nevertheless, the openness, hybridity and dynamics of the sex/gender category must be reiterated.

The case with race is not as clear-cut though. What seems clear is that race was introduced as a colonial classification practice with static, ‘essentializing’ effects (Radcliffe 2015, 15). In recent research, the category of Black has attracted criticism on the grounds that the binary construction of whiteness and Blackness seems too narrowly focused on North-American contexts and realities (Bacchetta, El-Tayeb, and Haritaworn 2017, 36). The neglect of African and Asian experiences of race, and ignorance of South American forms of resilience, which make use of quite heterogeneous ways of ethnic-racial positioning (Lehmann 2022), are key criticisms. One example is Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who uses the term *ch'ixi*, taken from the Aymara language, to describe a blend of color polarities comparable to the color mix of ‘heather gray’ (Rivera Cusicanqui 2020, 65).

What race and sex/gender have in common is that both social constructions historically experienced a process of naturalization. With regard to studies of spatial constitution, this calls for an intersectional research strategy that addresses both the issue of gendering *in* cities and the gendering *of* cities, as well as issues of racism and racialization at the same time—and vice versa. Analyzing the close ties between gendering and racializing will allow us to capture the systematic and systemic forms of discrimination, and, on a more general level, to identify specific forms of social inequality, dominance and repression inherent in these body-based distinctions. A new research strategy must also include findings in critical whiteness studies and men’s studies to deconstruct the imago/image of that which is ‘universal’ (e.g. Eggers et al. 2005) to be able to investigate how the gendered and racialized body is operative, even if one falls into the category of ‘neutral and unmarked’ (Goffman 1975). The complementary social construction of the city connoted as male, and suburbia as female (Frank 2003) also needs further investigation. Particularly in the United States, the ‘city out of control’ is not only gendered as male, but also racialized as Black, while images of suburban areas are clearly read as racially white, otherwise they are labelled ‘dangerous ghettos’ (Frank 2003, 343). It has been frequently noted that if women enter any scene, gender is immediately made relevant, and people read as Black instantly bring the dimension of race into the foreground, even though this visibility has negative social effects and sticking out is felt to be undesirable or conflictual. According to African-American feminist Anna Julia Cooper, the intersection of race and gender comes to a head when race and gender are “read-off” from or perceived in one and the same body: “Only the Black Woman can say, when and where I enter [...] then and there the whole Negro race enters with me” (Cooper [1892] 1969, 31).

The issue of who makes race and sex/gender visible and relevant as a social reality is not just a matter of degree. Since acting in social contexts is body-based and relationally oriented toward other people, race and sex/gender are conveyed through the body in terms that also extend to objects and objectifications. Even cities are read as gendered cultural figures, i.e. as male or female. In the essay “Venice”, Georg Simmel reads the houses and palaces in Italy’s city of Florence as an ‘expression of their inner qualities’. Solemn and ostentatious, they articulate, according to him, the power and self-confident personality of their owners. Venetian palaces, in contrast, appeared to him as a pretentious or ‘precious game’ aimed at masking the individual character of their owners by a rather uniform style, a veil whose layering follows the laws of its own beauty (German original in Simmel 2017). The reading of Venice (including, of course, floods and flowing waters, see Theweleit [1977/1978] 1995) as feminine in contrast to the masculine Florence is a recurring topic (Gaier 2014) and by no means exceptional. Cities are frequently described as either masculine-objective-honest or feminine, playful and adorned (Anselm and Von Beck 1987; Weigel 1995). However, the literature rarely addresses the fact that images of femininity often hinge on the construction of the woman as a *white woman*. At the 1851 Women’s Rights Conference in Akron, Ohio, Sojourner Truth was heckled by white men shouting that women were too weak and delicate

for the business of politics. She reacted with shock and surprise, reminding the audience that she had been forced to do the heaviest physical labor and endure the whiplash during enslavement (see Crenshaw 1989, 153). Truth's simple question "Ain't I a woman?" later served as a central slogan for Black feminists (hooks [1981] 2015). Coming back to Venice and the city, there are also orientalizing aspects to be observed in the imagination of Venice's 'femininity', which, again, underlines the need and significance of analyzing sex/gender and race in their multiply entangled dimensions.

The benefits of focusing on the commonalities of gender and race as difference markers sharing the feature of lifelong 'inscription in the body' have been shown in several feminist studies (e.g. Blokland 2008; Tischleder 1995). If space is produced in actions and in relation to things and people—a widely accepted view since Lefebvre (1991) and De Certeau (1984; see also Löw 2016)—then the constitution of urban space and tensions between a variety of spatial figures in operation cannot be separated from issues of gendering and racialization. Moreover, in a world where sex/gender and race have been developed into naturalized categories, the gendered body always already intersects with the racialized body—even if, situationally, certain aspects may remain latent. The following example from the Berlin housing market might illustrate this.

Property location Berlin

Anyone who was recently looking for a new-build flat in Berlin to buy or rent sooner or later landed on the website www.mein-besitz.de. The website has been shut down, but it is still accessible via the internet archive.¹ The start page shows a blond, blue-eyed boy smiling at us with satisfaction. In his hands, he holds his 'own' house made of toy blocks. Taking possession of it, he embraces the house with the whole of his body, head gently inclined over the toy roof. The message seems clear: No one will take this house away from him anytime soon. "Immobilienstandort Berlin"/Property Location Berlin, the headline reads. The image of the blond, blue-eyed child who is read as a boy and a white person, not only featured on the company's online homepage, it also graced redevelopment projects, especially in Berlin's eastern parts, as huge advertisement posters extending over several stores. The house is not shown in its proper urban environment, instead it sits in the lap of the child on the green lawn. The city context is erased entirely. Other people are only indirectly present, implied via the child's gaze upward, toward the place where, from the child's perspective, "adults" would look down at him. The child's body posture leaves little doubt that he knows how to take possession of things. Would the same effect have been achieved with a child read as a girl? Probably only if we read it as an inversion of some previous campaign (featuring a male child), with the aim to address a new target group, as illustrated by the campaign of a famous Swiss watch manufacturer which, parallel to the father-son duo, now also shows a mother-daughter team in the ad to convey the message that these watches are inheritance material for all of us. But what effect would the real-estate advertisement have if it featured a child from the African diaspora instead of this white blue-eyed boy? Or a child read as being of Turkish background? Would the protective interpretation signaled by the blond boy's body posture vis-à-vis the object have survived in these cases? Would we re-read it as a gesture of some unfriendly takeover, rather than interpret it as protective act? The absence of images of girls, or Turkish-German children protecting their property is, in any case, noticeable in Berlin's public spaces.

It is rather unusual that images referring to urban gentrification, construction activities and property depict people, but if, in countries like Germany, advertisers want to associate real estate

with human activities in pictorial form, it seems only conceivable by depicting a child read as male, blond and white, if the desired message is the “naturalness” of a friendly appropriation and positively connoted acquisition process. It seems only “white and blond” is able to cancel out the logic of dubious acquisition, speculative transaction or even hostile takeover. The large-scale real estate advertisement on buildings throughout the city of Berlin is a case of gendering and racializing the public space in one and the same act.

Visualizing this white-blond-blue-eyed communicative action by a representation of a child read as male, *mein=besitz.de* may be a conspicuous example of the socio-material production and maintenance of the city as a dense web of gendered and racialized spatial arrangements. Several studies indicate that gendering and racializing aspects are inherent in concepts of property and ownership. For example, Brenna Bhandar explicitly correlates the development of modern property legislation in colonized countries with displacement and dispossession policies directed at social groups racialized as Black. Property and race, she argues, are construed along similar lines and logics, producing and reproducing each other in colonial contexts (2018, 8). Real estate and land ownership in the United States or Canada are organized in ways that find their origin in the act of colonizing, in displacement and enslavement strategies. Ananya Roy shows that property is a direct consequence of “racial capitalism” (2017, 3), the power of which is derived from the fact that Black people were resettled or simply excluded from purchasing real estate.

Asha Best and Margaret M. Ramírez point out that it is black women in particular who are pushing for the reintegration of the black imaginary into concepts of home and ownership through artistic “enactments” (Best and Ramírez 2021, 1052) and acts of queering and dis-placing the norm. For example, Nona Faustine’s works display nude and semi-nude self-portraits in public spaces, and artistic interventions by Amara Tabor-Smith stage ghost parades near places where women were trafficked in the past. Although these debates on property and possession mostly refer to North American contexts, colonial legacies and racialization issues are also increasingly discussed in the context of German cities as well. Here, much attention is being devoted to the renaming of streets (all named after men) and monuments glorifying colonialism (in a close interplay of patriarchy and colonialism), and to calls for contextualization. Germany also looks back on a history of active colonial occupation and conquest of other countries especially in the period between 1884 and 1915. Furthermore, urban contexts in France, England, Portugal and Belgium have been shaped by the imports of products; it was not only the British who developed a liking for tea. Colonial products were appreciated and consumed in Germany too, including colonial board games and novels by Karl May, e.g. his Orient cycle. This interest extended to far-away places: “The colonial imaginary of the Germans not only had a hunger for Togo and Samoa (i.e., German colonies at the time, ML), it also kept an eye on the empires built by their European neighbors. The microbiologist Robert Koch led his experiments in Egypt, India and in southern parts of Africa; and while the German Emperor Wilhelm II liked to dress himself in a pasha uniform, it wouldn’t have crossed his mind to ever wear garments worn by an African ruler” (Conrad 2019, 87).

In major German cities, social movements (or initiatives) have now formed to fight for new decolonizing strategies. Their battle seeks to identify the dense web of interconnections between particular places and their colonial past. Here are some examples: The passion for rum in the North German city of Flensburg (which organizes rum regattas and has a rum museum) is closely connected with the “Atlantic Triangle Trade” importing cane sugar from Jamaica to be refined and processed into rum in Flensburg, and it also critically connects to a history of enslavement. In Cologne, the memory of federal Germany’s first post-war chancellor Konrad Adenauer’s membership in the German Colonial Society is still kept alive—a society that, in 1934, had

organized the biggest Colonial Exhibition in Germany (see Eckardt and Hoerning 2012 for research in Flensburg, Cologne and Bielefeld). In Hamburg's new HafenCity the traces revealing the city's worldwide colonial entanglements that crucially contributed to the city's wealth are only gradually being disclosed (Ha 2017, 82). And in a bitter twist of irony—at least for some of us—the new-build imitation of the historic Prussian imperial city palace in Berlin was reconstructed as a major exhibition site for the state's ethnological (colonial) collection. A further colonial twist lies in the fact that erecting the new building was premised on the demolition of the “Palace of the Republic,” one of the most symbolic structures built during the GDR period. This not only literally cemented the supremacy of West Berlin over East Berlin, it also gave the Protestant Prussian Cathedral opposite the place, a dome built in the heyday of German colonialism with the personal support of Emperor Wilhelm II, a new position of prominence (Vinken 2021, 153ff.).

Opponents of the decolonizing movement regularly refer to the spatial figure of the territory (i.e., on nationalistic self-discovery and self-assertion) and, more frequently, on the spatial figure of place. By contrast, the postcolonial imaginary and movements rely and operate on the spatial figure of the network and on interconnections. They emphasize entanglement and the intertwining lines of action across the globe. They highlight the fact that migration is a consequence of colonialism and argue against territorial closure for politically relevant spatial images on the basis of worldwide networking. When, on the other hand, opponents of decolonization refer to the specifics of a place, it is used to serve as an argument that Berlin is in urgent need of a recognizable historic center. Or that Flensburg must seek to establish its own unique identity. And in Hamburg's HafenCity, the threads of the colonial past are so neatly knitted into the city's self-image as a glorious international crossroads and globally significant hub that the suffering and harm connected with this past are hardly perceptible.

In the German social sciences, we are great at narrating the history of industrialization and including all the critical consequences for social class (Fariás et al. 2024), but when it comes to analyzing the colonial history and the legacies and consequences regarding racialization and racism, we are at a loss. Yet both histories hardly make any sense if the concepts and aspects of sex/gender and race are left out. The history of industrialization is at once the history of the division of labor, and the history of colonization is also the history of the embodiment of sex/gender and race.

Looking at history in the same way we look at figures of dance, we can see how social practices have to be performed by bodies to exist. We perceive body-bound, lived experiences and embodied agency all over the place—which explicitly include the practices of *doing whiteness*. This view on embodied action also inevitably leads to and addresses the issue of urban violence. Interpretive sociological research on violence in Germany favors a type of analysis which results in a thick description of situated actions directed at the body, as opposed to other approaches that investigate and assess the causes of violence. The interpretive approach does not see violence as “the other,” that which is different and deviates from and disrupts the “good” order. Instead, Heinrich Popitz's (1986) key argument is taken seriously here. His research suggests that violence is a resource for each and every one of us, and a means of communicating with others; violence is described as one of many possible options for action in the social world. Doing violence to the body can never occur *outside* the social order. It is part of an ongoing effort to bring order into the world, which also includes constructions of sex/gender and race. The point is this: violence must be seen as an integral part of modern societies' obsession with order. What all acts of violence have in common is that they have effects on the body. The focus is on the physical violence of abusers causing bodily harm for victims, yet the potential to cause bodily harm is not restricted to physical violence. Signs and symbolic gestures can also do physical harm. The material (physical) effects of

symbolic violence are manifested in the form of traumatization, in palpably felt shivers through the body, in uneasy, uncomfortable feelings and bodily sensations, or even in people's visible, physical efforts to "make themselves small" so as not to be noticed.

There is no valid data on whether and how the message of *mein-besitz.de*'s large-scale advertisements in Berlin actually get "into the bodies" of passersby. What we do know is that sexist and racist advertising is often experienced as an act of *physical* violence (Wimmer-Puchinger 2016; Dackweiler 2017). Focusing on spatial constitution and conflicts between different spatial figures might help to better understand the violent intersections if we conceive of spatial constitution as a bodily bound, body-based process.

Conclusion: Concurring spatial figures

The advertisement of *mein-besitz.de* at once genders and racializes home ownership. Posted across the city, it contributes to increasing the presence of sex/gender and race in public spaces in ways that foreground and underline white, male appropriation practices. Putting up posters of this little blond boy on buildings that covers several stories helps to at least co-produce forms of knowledge and techniques of gendering at the same time as it produces racializing techniques. Yet looking at our computer or smartphone screen in private in the search for new apartment offers is not a "placeless" practice occurring in a vacuum, either. Spaces are created through relational arrangements, and so they always involve placement as well as linking processes. Our own placement as physical presence in front of the screen opens up a space in relation to the display. In the synthesizing process, which is part of the spatial constitution process, the blue-eyed boy on the green lawn is thus put into relation to the place where we are located. The analysis of the advertising image shows that this interrelatedness, referring simultaneously to two placements here and there, is constituted in a sexist and racializing environment. In a conflation of gendered and racialized knowledge, bodies and objects are put into a specific relation and position, although it seems that not all bodies and objects are affected in equal measure. In this process, social actors are guided by often concurring spatial figures: place in the act of placement, the usually territorial-defined space of property and possessions, and the network space of media constructions each follow their own, i.e., different, spatial logics. Network-space constructs often collide with territory-based constructs of the delimited nation-state, not only on the level of politics. The resulting need to switch and shift between different spatial logics is no small challenge in the context of embodied action, i.e. in everyday life, too, since it invariably implies different placements simultaneously. The fact that territorial space (and crucially, the nation-state) established itself as hegemonic order in political, intellectual and emotive terms precisely in the heyday of colonialism, is no coincidence. The spatial figure of territorial space has always been used to promote concepts of homogenization and purity, which not only serve to establish divisions between inside and outside, between the familiar and the foreign, but also find their counterparts in binary gender constructions and racial classifications. Therefore, it seems hardly surprising that the emotive drive and imagination of postcolonial movements strongly focus on network space, although this does not guarantee that inclusive strategies are naturally adopted or exclusion is ruled out. In network spaces, too, exclusion experiences can be as dramatic if a person is not or cannot be associated in the structure. However, the experience of exclusion makes a difference depending on whether it is based on practices of bordering or practices of association.

The fact that territorial space has ceased to be the dominating spatial figure has not automatically led to an increase in hybrid and creolized places or a decrease in masculine/feminine-coded and

de-racialized spaces, nor has it promoted spatial practices of *undoing* gender and race as of yet. But the identification of a set of simultaneously relevant spatial figures allows us to focus on questions concerning the how, when and why cities, urban spaces and objects, and city life—including architecture, urban development and urban culture—are being gendered and racialized. Sharing the destiny of having become “naturalized” categories in the wake of (post)colonial modernity, means that race and sex/gender, i.e., issues of racialization and gendering, must finally find their way into analyses of urban space, without, of course, ignoring the inherent differences in doing race and doing sex/gender. The intersectional approach is difference-oriented and focused on socio-material structures that (re)figure cities and urban spaces in terms of gender and race in powerful (and different) ways, as well as on latencies as parasitic correlates of the spatial arrangements. With reference to Edmund Husserl and Michel Foucault, among others, Anselm Haverkamp has proposed conceptualising the presence of the past as “latency” (Haverkamp 2021). Accordingly, the intersectionality of gender and race is not only articulated materially, but also latently in contemporary texts, images and spaces. Race and sex/gender, for example, are not only carved in stone in the palace building in Berlin, but are also latently reproduced in the implicit national-heroic narrative. Therefore, it is an ongoing search for the multiple bodies in their urban spaces, and the condensed meanings that are generated at points of intersection.

Note

- 1 <https://web.archive.org/web/20220129181001/http://www.mein-besitz.de/> (accessed on June 12, 2023)

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3

ARRIVING/BEING STOPPED

Six fatal shots and the sociology of place

Thomas Hoebel

Casing six fatal shots

On the afternoon of August 8, 2022, 16-year-old Mouhamed Lamine Dramé is crouching in the courtyard of the youth care facility where he has been living for about a week.¹ It is a hot summer's day. The facility is located in an inner-city neighborhood on the grounds of a church and offers residential groups for young refugees. Mouhamed Dramé is squatting there, bare-chested, his T-shirt wrapped around his head. Motionless, he holds a kitchen knife, the tip of which is pointed at his stomach. The courtyard is barely visible from the sidewalk of the street that runs along its back; there is a fence with a privacy screen that has numerous perforations, and the entrance to the courtyard is at the front of the property.

At 16:25, an employee of the youth care facility calls the police. He describes the situation and asks whether he has dialed the right number for this situation and whether it would be better to call an ambulance directly. Mouhamed Dramé is unresponsive but also understands little German as he comes from Senegal and has not lived in Germany for long. The police control center informs the local police station and the situation is classified as a "suicide attempt." After a few minutes, a senior police officer arrives on the scene, and after about half an hour, a total of twelve police officers have arrived. The social worker remains on the line, and the conversation is recorded as usual. The audio recording will later be of fundamental importance to the public prosecutor's office in order to reconstruct the events.

The police officers are in contact with each other via radio. They initially surround Mouhamed Dramé at a safe distance. Some of them are in the courtyard, others on the sidewalk, with the fence between them and the young man. Two plainclothes police officers approach the young man, who remains motionless, and one speaks to him in Spanish. Three other colleagues secure the situation; two of them hold out their ready-to-fire pistols, and another has a submachine gun at the ready. The officer in charge designated the handler of the submachine gun as the "last man standing."

After Mouhamed Dramé does not respond to the police officers' attempts at contact, the officer in charge orders the use of pepper spray. According to the radio protocol, he initially says, "Move forward and pepper him. The full program. The whole bottle!" After a short pause, he shouts,

“I repeat: Move forward. Quickly, and pepper the man! The full program from the big bottle!” Without warning, a policewoman sprays the teenager through the fence for six seconds. She aims at his head, and the liquid runs down his face. Mouhamed Dramé starts to move, and he turns towards the inner courtyard. From now on, everything happens very quickly and without any explicit announcement. One of two shots from a taser misses the young man; the other hits him and establishes a closed circuit. Less than a second after this second taser shot, the police officer fired six times at Mouhamed Dramé with the submachine gun, five bullets hitting him in the thigh, stomach, right shoulder, face, and right forearm. He falls to the ground and remains motionless. The officer in charge puts a foot on him, a typical reinforcement measure before an ambulance takes the seriously injured man to a nearby hospital. At 18:02, the doctors pronounce the death of Mouhamed Dramé.

In the hours and days that follow, more and more people learn of the young man’s death. That same evening, the police and the Minister of the Interior announced that Mouhamed Dramé attacked the police officers with a knife (an account that would become increasingly implausible due to witness statements from the neighborhood and investigations by the public prosecutor’s office). In the days that follow, the local and national media report on the events. People gather for rallies and a spontaneous demonstration that marches upon the station of the police officers involved. Here, above all, they want to know the name of the man who was killed, which is not yet publicly known. “Say, say, say his name!” the protesters shout angrily but peacefully (Bermúdez 2022a). Local religious communities organize a prayer service for Mouhamed Dramé. The public prosecutor’s office orders an investigation by officers from another district at very short notice. In the following weeks and months, public discussions and rallies take place, with the district parliament and the city council debating the events and resulting consequences. Newspapers and online magazines repeatedly report on the matter. In February 2023, the public prosecutor’s office brought charges against the five police officers involved, and they have been on trial since December 2023 (upon completion of this text, no verdict has yet been made).

How does place matter for Mouhamed Dramé’s death?

In the immediate hours and days after Mouhamed Dramé’s death, much is initially ambiguous, and much remains so over the weeks and months that follow. “Who was Mouhamed? And what happened shortly before the fatal shooting? ... Why did the operation end so ruthlessly fatal for the teenager?” (Wörz 2022). Many people are looking for explanations. “Was it self-defense or excessive police violence?” (Bosen 2022).

Why not fire warning shots or shoot at the feet or in the air to intimidate him? Why did the police officer shoot 6 times? Why were 11 police officers not able to subdue a young man and fix him to the ground? Why did they not hesitate to cross the threshold of violence by firing an automatic weapon? Why not bring in someone who speaks French, the official language of Senegal to avoid a misunderstanding? Would the police officer have fired at close range like this if it were a 16-year-old white teenager? Have the policemen taken any courses regarding Anti-Black racism? Is there any training in this area within the police in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) in order to avoid such accidents? What experiences does the police have with people with mental disorders?

(Herzberger-Fofana 2022)

Various interpretations and doubts about them circulated in those days. The situation in which a police officer killed Mouhamed Dramé is a case of disputed violence, at least in two respects. Firstly, although the audio recordings and the statements of those involved allow for a detailed description of what happened, they remain open to interpretation, especially with regard to the question of how Mohamed Dramé approached the police officer after the pepper spray attack. This gives an idea of how open to interpretation the events were for those involved. Secondly, many people involved with the death of the young man were working with and against each other; some sought to keep the controversy alive, while others tried to downplay or resolve it.

However, one aspect is certain: geographically, the place and local environment where Mouhamed Dramé first crouches motionless with a knife, and where a police officer finally shoots him, are the same. The killing occurs in the courtyard of a facility in Dortmund, a large city in the eastern Ruhr region of Germany. It is located in the Nordstadt, in a neighborhood known as the Nordmarkt, a usually well-frequented area where diverse people meet.

So, it seems self-evident that in the following hours and days, people who take part, mourn, protest, have questions, or give answers, meet in relative local proximity to the site of the violent police action. And it seems obvious that journalists localize the events by using the names of nearby places and landmarks. In the headlines, they typically mention that the killing and the controversial discussions afterward took place in Dortmund. In the reports themselves, they then usually write longer passages about the Nordstadt. Some mention names of streets and institutions. One journalist locates the killing of Mouhamed Dramé on the basis of the three “cornerstones:” the courtyard of the youth care facility, the police station, and the railroad embankment that separates the Nordmarkt quarter from the adjacent Borsigplatz quarter (Laberenz 2023). In short, they consider the location of the events to be significant in order to make the death of Mouhamed Dramé comprehensible for themselves and their readers, despite all the unanswered questions.

Advancing the experiential space thesis

Meaning-making by localizing violent events may simply be a journalistic or everyday convention. But it is also a starting point to investigate the events in more detail. This is at least the case if we follow Thomas Gieryn’s (2000) thought-provoking proposal to sociologically define a place as a “unique spot in the universe” with a certain “physicality [...], artificial or natural,” which is constructed in two ways at once: “Most are built or in some way physically carved out” and “[t]hey are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined” (464–465; see also Löw in this volume). Hence, Gieryn sensitizes researchers to distinguish between places and spaces in sociological studies, insofar as spaces refer to abstract or absolute entities in which “the unique gathering of things, meanings, and values are sucked out” (Gieryn 2000, 465).² He does not explicitly refer to Georg Simmel’s “philosophy of landscape” (2007), but from this sociological perspective, places are like landscapes. Unlike sheer nature or geometric spaces, landscapes are not characterized by the mere arrangement and interconnectedness of natural and artificial elements at a specific geographical point, but instead by the sociomental meanings that certain ensembles of such elements have for those present and those viewing them. The interrelation of such ensembles and their experiences makes each landscape unique.³

Moreover, Gieryn’s proposal opens up the possibility of understanding places not simply as settings or stages, but as aspects of a social event or social fact that are significant in their own right. Without an explication of this significance, any description, interpretation, or explanation of them would be incomplete. Thus, how “remarkable” (Gieryn 2000, 471) are such unique spots,

like the one where Mouhamed Dramé died on August 8, 2022, in their ability to describe, interpret, and explain such violent events? This incident took place in a unique spot, and the analytical question is: how do the meanings associated with this concrete place contribute to the unfolding of the event?

The contributions in this volume demonstrate the breadth and diversity of research on questions such as these, i.e., how space and violence are interlinked. At the same time, the state of research on this question is deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, the significance of “unique spots” in Gieryn’s sense has no systematic weight in social science research on violence. To avoid misunderstanding: without doubt, there are countless studies that mention the specific location of violent events (insofar as these are the central object of investigation). Typically, however, the research interest concentrates on “micro-mechanisms” (R. Collins 2008), “situational interaction” (Nassauer 2023), or “patterns of interactional courses” (Hoebel 2014), which are not tied to a specific location (or this question is not even up for discussion). And equally undoubtedly, there are approaches (usually those that are more macroscopically interested in spatiotemporally expansive sociohistorical constellations) that make strong territorially based patterns of argumentation (on “zones of violence” Reemtsma 2012) or emphasize an “omnipresence” of violence, the suffering of which varies considerably intersectionally (Collins 1998, 2017). However, they do not address concrete sites of violence because the argumentation is usually not linked back to concrete events.

Alternatively, there is a bulk of studies that point in particular to a recursive relationship between the social meanings of unique spots and the doing, suffering, and perception of violence (see such diverse accounts as Albrecht and Jenss 2023; Anderson 2022 or Tyner 2012). They vary considerably in their epistemological interests, methodologically, theoretically, and in terms of their context of origin. I give three examples by way of illustration, without aiming for an exhaustive or representative compilation.⁴ They show how events qualified as violent create, solidify, perpetuate, or reshape the social meanings of a place, which then, in turn, have the character of a landscape that itself shapes concrete forms of violence and their (non-)awareness. Lee Ann Fujii has recently shown impressively that lynchings in the US South and in border states such as *Maryland* have historically depended to a great extent on how race relations were interpreted in a locally specific way, “from state to state, county to county, doorstep to doorstep” (Barnes 2006, 19; Fujii 2021, 102), and how they were violently enforced on the basis of alleged crimes committed by Blacks against Whites.⁵ The locality of mass violence is a recurring motif in Wolfgang Sofsky’s (1997) study of the concentration camps of the Nazi regime. He describes the camps in *Dachau*, *Buchenwald*, or *Sachsenhausen* as places of absolute power, where all domains of life of the inmates are condensed; these places are characterized by a permanent social terror, which is decisively based on how the camps are constructed physically and symbolically in equal measure. Arguably, one of the most influential studies of how the everyday significance of interpersonal violence is tied to a particular place where people encounter each other on a daily basis is Elijah Anderson’s (1999) ethnography in *Germantown, Philadelphia*. He carves out the prevailing “code of the street,” the particular requirement for young men to command respect through toughness, and in case of doubt, to have to prove that toughness in physical confrontations.

For all their diversity, the investigations mentioned (and the many they stand in for) are characterized by the fact that they deal with concrete places in order to investigate the actions and suffering, public debate or tabooing, and many other aspects of violent events. It is in the nature of things that the transferability of material research results obtained with regard to concrete places is limited (or at least that the analytical generality of place-based arguments is an open question).⁶ However, the arguments put forward by Fujii, Sofsky, and Anderson are instructive from a

methodological point of view. They are based primarily on the remembered, observed, or made experiences of people who were present in the studied places at a certain time. These experiences were accessed through official files, memoirs, retrospective descriptions, or ethnographic notes and are experiences that could only have been made in certain places.

From this perspective, places are spots of specific bodily experiences, as Teresa Koloma Beck (2016), in particular, notes in an assessment of the debate on the so-called spaces of violence in the early 2010s (for a critique, see Hoebel and Knöbl 2019, 106–13). Beck identifies the primary outcome of the “spatial turn” in violence research as the shift towards analyzing the everyday practices existing in social spaces that are marked by the presence or threat of violence. These practices are closely intertwined with the crucial question of which encounters with others are typically sought and which encounters and movements should be avoided to minimize danger and maintain as much self-determination as possible in terms of one’s actions and expressions (Lyman and Scott 1967).

To assume experiential spaces is not to assume that everyone shares the same experiences, nor that each person’s idiosyncratic experiences exist completely isolated from each other. While Gary Alan Fine (2010), for instance, proposes a “sociology of the local” that defines the local through a shared understanding of a group, the experiential space thesis works without this consensual assumption. Rather, the analytically significant point is that the experiences made and the experiences to be made share the same “locus operandi” (Beunza and Stark 2003, 141). This means that the experiences made are related to each other and co-created. It is an empirical question whether this locus operandi has the same “horizon” for all or most participants, against which they interpret what is happening to themselves and to others (Zerubavel 1993). If we consider that the individuals’ historical experiences, which serve as “the prime reservoir of historical connection from past to present” (Abbott 2005, 3), can vary significantly within social structures and that they share and interpret these experiences within different, more or less permanent social constellations and with regard to their intersectional social belongings, then it becomes more plausible to empirically recognize the diverse perspectives associated with a particular locus operandi.

In sociological terms, bodily experiences in and of places are recursively related to site-specific patterns of social interaction. These patterns are neither purely *situationally* bound to the presence of specific persons, so that they cease to exist when the participants go their separate ways, nor are they sheer *situated* enactments of general manners (Goffman 1966, 21–22). Rather, they are situated and exist because diverse participants materially and symbolically shape the specific place into a unique spot, both in cooperation and in conflict with each other. “Everything has to be someplace” (Becker 1998, 51). To reiterate, the significance of a specific place can vary greatly for individuals directly involved, as well as for those who only know, or believe they know, about it through narratives or media. In their interactions, people develop a “sense of place” (Gieryn 2000, 471), a knowledge about certain spots that often is not explicitly discussed but can be articulated when prompted. This includes where people like to be, how they should behave there, but also which places they should avoid (such as at certain times of day or places they would never visit at all).

The experiential space thesis proposed in the context of violence research is basically a plea to develop a sociological “sense of place,” with a particular focus on how violence is practiced and suffered, as well as avoided and prevented. It emphasizes being sensitive to the prevailing understandings of violence in certain places, which may act as guidance for sociological research. One could say that the everyday sense of the locals is far ahead of violence research when it comes to the question of why certain places are remarkable.⁷ The killing of Mouhamed Dramé

in Dortmund-Nordstadt is one of many possible occasions for violence research to pick up the trail here.

Arriving and being stopped: How “Nordstadt” matters violently

Let us return (virtually) to the inner courtyard of the youth care facility in Dortmund-Nordstadt, carrying with us the experiential space thesis and the assumption that we are dealing with a unique spot. The guiding question is to what extent this spot and its significance for those present, passing through, or observing, contributes to explaining the killing of Mouhamed Dramé from a sociological perspective.

I argue that a certain pattern of encounters and experiences can be found in the backyard as a concrete place and in the Nordstadt as a surrounding landscape (in the Simmelian sense mentioned above). This pattern, which I am concerned with, can be described by the keywords *arriving* and *being stopped*. Both aspects are closely interwoven, as I will show, two sides of the same coin, so to speak. I am arguing here from an ethnographic semi-distance, but I lack direct experience of this pattern, because Nordstadt is neither a so-called place of arrival for me, nor have I ever been stopped here from doing something I had planned to do. It might not have become clear to me ‘on the street’ alone if I had not dealt with the tragic case of Mouhamed Dramé’s death: I myself hardly ever have direct access to this pattern because, intersectionally speaking, I am not involved in its recurring enactment, if at all from an observer position.

The empirical focus of my argument is, as described, on everyday experiences and patterns of encounter. However, Nordstadt is rarely analyzed from this perspective. Social science studies that focus on the district and its people mainly collect statistics—above-average unemployment, above-average rate of recipients of social benefits, above-average share of people with a history of migration, and above-average crime rate. These measures, however, prove to be of little help here, as they do not address how they relate to concrete encounters and everyday practices in the neighborhood.⁸

In contrast, Koloma Beck (2019) uses an ethnography conducted over several months in Kabul in the spring of 2015 to show how a place can be investigated as a space of experience and its relevance to violent events. She got in touch with a city that only partially matched the image of it that existed in Western Europe at the time. It became clear to her quite quickly that a central pattern of interaction in this place did not consist primarily of dealing directly with violence. Instead, it consisted of an ongoing act of “making safe places,” in which the participants did not submit as objects to a dangerous situation, but rather acted as proactive designers of an everyday life that was as livable as possible. The design consisted primarily of collective production and safe interior spaces. They existed not only in the material sense as physical protection in an environment of ubiquitous presence of actual or threatened violence but also in the presence of others or in restricted access to people from whom no immediate danger was to be expected. Only under these conditions, symbolized by affiliations or the way the participants presented themselves to each other gesturally or through their style of dress, did the participants actually experience the respective interior spaces as safe for the moment. “While [all] ‘safe places’ were interior spaces, not every ‘interior space’ [was] necessarily perceived as a safe place” (Koloma Beck 2019, 282). Moving from one place to another, on the other hand, was risky per se; in public spaces, the challenge was to keep moving and avoid standing still.

It is obvious that the ethnographic description of Kabul only serves as a methodological model for dealing analytically with Dortmund-Nordstadt. Focusing on experiential spaces, its particular strength lies in the comparative contrasting it enables: anyone who is regularly out and about

around the Nordmarkt, at Borsigplatz, or in the direction of Dortmund-Hafen will be struck by the situation that a large part of everyday life in the Nordstadt takes place precisely not indoors, but on the streets, stoops, public squares, and parks (Krämer-Hoppe and Weber 2019). This occurs with rhythms and frequencies of public life that vary depending on the time of day, the season, and the street.

Nordstadt is an urban landscape for which Jack Katz (2015, 87; 2016, 12) may have invented the term “street-level hermeneutics.” Its residents and visitors develop a sense of place, in particular in the publicly accessible space, by reading each other and what is happening around them, especially with regard to their intersectional social belongings. They figure out what they and others will do by presenting themselves to each other or trying to avoid attracting attention as much as possible, and by following sometimes individual, sometimes collective lines of action.

The more I reflected on my experiences in the Nordstadt (e.g., in the café at Nordmarkt, in the bookstore at Mehmet-Kubaşık-Platz, in the cinema on Münsterstraße, or the pubs in the Hafen quarter), whether walking from one location to another (e.g. coming from the main station to the night bus stop) or crossing it by bike, the more I found myself actively exploring the area during this investigation. As I gathered more accounts about life in the Nordstadt and researched the events of August 8, 2022, I increasingly felt that the answer to my question could be found “on the street.” At the same time, I discovered two other things: (a) The events surrounding and the death of Mouhamed Dramé draw attention to encounters, experiences, and a particular form of violence that are closely interwoven with Nordstadt as a place. The case itself highlights specific aspects of Nordstadt, making the analysis appear promising for discussing the significance of Nordstadt as a concrete place for the course of events on August 8, 2022. (b) This ensemble of encounters, experiences, and the particular form of violence is patterned, and as mentioned above, I propose to describe this pattern using the distinction between *arriving* and *being stopped*.

Arriving. Since the 2010s, Dortmund-Nordstadt has been regarded as a place of arrival. However, this has less to do with the evolution of a new local situation and more with the emergence of new semantics. Doug Saunders’ book *Arrival City* (2010) has now become a cue for urban planners and researchers dealing with the Nordstadt (Döring and Kurtenbach 2020; Geiges et al. 2017, 49–96; Gottschalk and Tepeli 2019; Kurtenbach 2015; Staubach 2014). Since its beginnings in the second half of the 19th century, the area has been a place where people arrive, especially due to cheap housing and easy access to (unskilled) work.⁹ Today, Nordstadt is the most densely populated part of the city, with around 60,000 inhabitants living across 14.42 km². In recent years, the district accounts for around a third of new arrivals each year (Döring and Kurtenbach 2020, 196–200; Krämer-Hoppe et al. 2019).¹⁰

It stands out that Dortmund-Nordstadt has continuously been a destination for people who are largely destitute and/or have been forced to leave their previous place of residence.¹¹ For many years, it has been an environment in which many newcomers meet relatives or acquaintances. Not to mention that there are numerous municipal and civic institutions, associations, initiatives, and networks that offer points of contact and support (see Hanhörster and Wessendorf 2020 for “arrival infrastructures” in more general terms).¹²

Mouhamed Dramé also arrived at such a facility at the beginning of August 2022. According to his statement, he had been on the road for a long time, having left the village of Ndiaffate Socé in Senegal with his younger stepbrother in 2019 or 2020. He reached Morocco via Mali and Mauritania, where he lived on the streets for a long time and had to beg. His brother died on the way there. He finally reached Spain on a tugboat, lived on the streets again in Seville, and later in a shelter for asylum seekers. A Senegalese man gave him a train ticket to Paris, and he crossed the

border into Germany on foot. He turned 16 in those days. In Worms, he registered with the police, then lived in a facility in Zornheim from April 2022, from where a caregiver took him to Dortmund in a car.¹³ Again and again, he met people who helped him, but a painful scar on his neck was also evidence of the abuse he had experienced along the way. In retrospect, the caregivers in Zornheim and in the residential group for young refugees where he now lived, as well as the people in the neighborhood, describe Mouhamed Dramé as a quiet, introverted youngster who avoided noise and commotion, but was enthusiastic about everything to do with soccer. He enjoyed kicking around a ball, and was especially interested in the local club Borussia Dortmund. When he was in a good mood, he sang and danced, and was talkative and helpful. Nonetheless, it was also clear to him that he needed therapeutic help. He had already expressed this wish in Zornheim, and on August 6, 2022, in Dortmund, he sought help from the local police, who assisted him in reaching a psychiatric clinic. He spent one night there but was then released. Doctors and caregivers assured Mouhamed that he could come back at any time.

In a way, Mouhamed Dramé and his biography are representative of the many people who arrive in Nordstadt and are initially in particular need of protection and help. Likewise, his story also makes us aware that through a continuous process of arrival, Nordstadt is linked with experiences from many other places in the world, visible through clothing styles, restaurants, and meeting places. From this perspective, the Nordstadt is anything but a self-contained place, even if public discourses often convey such an image.¹⁴

The constant arrival characterizes numerous encounters in the Nordstadt, often as a joyful reunion or as the aforementioned support, help, and advice for the newcomers by established residents and/or professional agencies. Again and again, there are new faces, which is also connected with experiences of not knowing each other, not understanding each other, feeling strange in places that change due to newcomers' new or changed appropriations, and retreating to the places where one meets acquaintances. Younger people, in particular, find themselves in the situation of having to gain respect if they want to be part of public life (Paul 2015, 59).¹⁵ Sometimes, loud disputes are just as much a part of everyday life as the various forms of dealing with disputes or translating for each other. "If someone really doesn't speak German at all, then they know who to call for and thirteen windows open and out comes the person you need for the language," is how one gastronome describes the Nordmarkt (Krämer-Hoppe and Weber 2019, 47). Often, the children help, and it is not uncommon for them to be able to communicate better than their elders.

Being stopped. The case of Mouhamed Dramé also draws attention to a local downside of arriving (as the possibility of stopping, at least temporarily, and finding a safe place, however small, to do so). In the public life of Dortmund-Nordstadt, it is not improbable that police officers will stop people while they are on the way somewhere, but the probability of being stopped by the police is unequally distributed and depends on whether those stopped are considered non-White from the police's point of view. The fact that the 12 police officers attempted to stop Mouhamed Dramé on August 8, 2022, seems counterintuitive at first glance. As they arrive one by one, the situation is static, and the young man is immobile, with a knife pointed at him. However, this is the crux of the matter; this is where the police officers want to stop him.

To be stopped by police officers in Nordstadt generally requires far less sensationalism. At the rallies and events, and in conversations with journalists, many People of Color who have lived in Nordstadt for years take the opportunity to talk about their experiences of being stopped by the police. "I could spend the rest of the evening now telling them how many times in my life I've had police encounters because I'm Black" (quoted from Bermúdez 2022b). Periodically, people who are not considered White by the police are asked for their identification. "Who are you?"

Why are you here? What are you doing?” Sara Ahmed describes questions like these as stopping devices: “You are stopped by being asked the question, just as asking the question requires that you be stopped.” The people who are stopped may have lived in Nordstadt for a long time. They basically do not know each other, although stopping is a part of everyday life (Wörz 2022).

An ascribed status as Non-White establishes the initial suspicion that it is questionable whether the person being stopped is actually allowed or supposed to be in the place where he or she is encountered (Ahmed 2007; Ruch 2022).¹⁶ Non-White, however, does not denote a particular skin color in an essentialist sense, but is primarily a “perceptual category” (Anderson 2022, 15) that is linked to institutionalized understandings of how the world is or should be (Ahmed 2007, 165). As a sociomental and evaluative schema, as it were, in policing Nordstadt, it generally serves to detect and scrutinize the “unclean” or “contaminating,” and to stereotypically regard certain people as a “kind of person” (Hacking 2005, 112) who behaves inappropriately, sometimes just by sheer presence, as if they are unclean or defiling the place where they are.

What police officers describe as “operational communication”—“actually ... the best weapon we have,” as one training officer describes it (Laberenz 2023)—is experienced by the people stopped as a specific form of violence. It does not have to be physical at all, as in several incidents in Nordstadt that have played a significant role in shaping the reputation of the local police station (Bermúdez 2022b; Laberenz 2023; Wörz 2022); the incidents circulate as stories or via smartphone videos in the neighborhood¹⁷.

Abstract definitions of violence, especially those that reduce violence to physical acts, do not lead us anywhere here because they overlook forms of violence that are indexically linked to concrete places and experiences there (Collins 1998; Fassin 2013, 128, 249; Hoebel and Koloma Beck 2019, 9; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, 1). The violence of being stopped already begins with the humiliating experience of being stopped in the first place, based on mere presence or appearance (Ahmed 2007, 160–63; Thompson 2021, 114–18). It “affects the integrity and the dignity of individuals, not just their body and flesh” (Fassin 2013, 129), often leaving them unable to do anything but let the situation wash over them because anything else could be judged by the police officers as improper behavior (see also Fassin 2013, 87–88). Such controls characterize Nordstadt as a spot where many squares and streets are designated as “dangerous places” by the police, which is then listed by the Ministry of the Interior of Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW) for the entire state. This provides a legally secure basis for police officers to carry out warrantless checks on passers-by who are in or moving around these “dangerous places” (Forth 2020; Laberenz 2023). Such designations co-constitute “police spatial knowledge” (Brauer, Dangelmaier, and Hunold, 2022), complemented by everyday experiences that support such perceptions.

Refugees living in Nordstadt are usually extremely reluctant to talk about their experiences of being stopped, or only do so in hushed tones, either publicly or with third parties they do not know or only know sporadically; many of them actively try to avoid these encounters, some hardly dare to go outside the door (Fatma Karacakurtoglu and Wiliam Dountio, quoted from Bermúdez 2022b). For them, unlike the caregivers of Mouhamed Dramé’s residential group, for example, Nordstadt is a place with a central rule of behavior: do not call the police, no matter what the problem is (Laberenz 2023). From their perspective, calling the police invokes a particular policing of place that makes them feel out of place.

Meanwhile, little is known about the “sense of place” of the police officers in Nordstadt; here too, there is a strong reluctance to speak out publicly or to third parties, suggesting more or less rehearsed patterns of defense against criticism (on this, see Heidemann 2022). Within the police, Nordstadt is considered a difficult and challenging place. In May 2023, a tabloid newspaper

reported that two-thirds of the police officers there wanted to leave the local station, some because they had received instructions not to stop and inspect “migrants” anymore (Schneider 2023). Right-wing media, in particular, picked up on this report.

Sociological investigations have the advantage that they do not have to coincide with legal or journalistic investigations and evaluations of an event (Boltanski 2014, 224–67). I have argued that the case of Mouhamed Dramé, who was killed, draws attention to a pattern of interaction and experience that corresponds significantly to arriving and being stopped. In particular, this stopping is linked to the experiences of violence by those who are stopped, which are associated with Nordstadt as a cosmopolitan place, heavily policed and considered “dangerous.” However, Mouhamed Dramé, a Black refugee in need of medical and therapeutic help, stands not as one presumed to be particularly dangerous, but, rather, as particularly vulnerable (see Aladin El-Mafaalani, cited in Bermúdez 2022c).

But how does this sociological description of Nordstadt as a unique spot contribute to examining the events surrounding the death of Mouhamed Dramé? Why does “Nordstadt” matter in this case? Well, *first* of all, such an approach undermines attempts to explain the events in either a very abstract or a personalizing way. Addressing the place of the event and the way people materially and symbolically shape it, both with and against each other, complicates the analysis.

Second, if it is true that many encounters in Dortmund-Nordstadt are characterized by arriving and/or being stopped, then this offers a genuine sociological interpretation of the events of August 8, 2022, that focuses on “senses of place.” The people involved—Mouhamed Dramé, the facility’s staff members, and the 12 police officers on duty—create a situation with and against each other that begins with the specific need to protect the person who has just arrived, particularly from themselves. The staff member who alerts the police describes his impression of Mouhamed Dramé’s psychological situation; the interlocutor classifies the reason for the intervention as a suicide attempt. This classification is especially noteworthy from an analytical point of view. It raises the question of how much room for interpretation the police officers still perceive in the situation, or whether they perceive any at all. This first and foremost applies to the officer in charge and the officers who drew their weapons. In any case, it is striking that they treat the courtyard as a place where they need to stop a young Black man from behaving in an extremely unusual manner. For them, they view it as a place that requires rigid policing, just as they do with many other encounters with people they see as Non-White. Those who know that even children in the Nordstadt are recognized for doing translation work, while the police officers themselves do not consider translation as necessary, might get the idea that they lack a “sense of place,” meaning they are unaware of the many ways in which even dicey situations are resolved in the Nordstadt. However, I think it is quite the opposite: they have a much too rigid sense of place that limits their ability to act non-violently.

Third, in theoretical terms, the proposed argument emphasizes the self-similarity of place and events in Dortmund-Nordstadt. In general, self-similarity means that the same pattern repeats itself, no matter where we inspect it (Abbott 2001, 158–159; Karafillidis 2010, 149–155). The pattern in question consists of a certain unit or a certain distinction. Crystals are a key physical example because they have the same overall structure as their basal elements. In the social sciences, the ideal type of bureaucracy is one of the best-known cases, with its hierarchical organization as a whole, as well as between individual positions (Abbott 2001, 165–167). In the case examined here, it is not only Nordstadt that is characterized by arriving and being stopped at the level of encounters and bodily experiences but also the killing of Mouhamed Dramé. The status of someone who has just arrived in the neighborhood, catalyzed by his psychological situation and

mediated by the initiative of worried and overburdened staff members, comes into contact with police officers who are accustomed to stopping others in their lines of action. The pattern of arriving/being stopped, which persists through the course of many encounters in the district, thus largely characterizing it, also continues in the inner courtyard of the youth welfare facility, but here with deadly consequences.

Conclusion: Theorizing how place matters violently

Theoretically, the case under investigation—six fatal shots fired at Mouhamed Dramé—points beyond itself. In sociological research on violence, there have been numerous efforts over the last few decades to investigate violence at the level of individual encounters. I have already mentioned the widespread interest in micro-mechanisms, situational interaction, or patterns of interactional courses. But these approaches run into problems that Simmel (1980) already mentioned in a seminal lecture on the *problem of historical time*, held in 1916. Here, he suggested that the more microscopically one examines violent events, the more similar they become. This is mainly due to the fact that such an approach runs the risk of detaching them from their sociohistorical context of origin and effect, e.g. their intersectional dynamics. One can then put forward a general theory of skirmishes, i.e., Simmel's example, or a general theory of police use of firearms. However, Simmel was concerned that such theories remain largely ignorant to the fact that the skirmish only occurs *because* a battle is raging next to Zorndorf, a village in Pomerania—or that six shots of a police officer kill a young Black man *because* they meet in Dortmund-Nordstadt.

The concept of site-specific self-similarities offers a theoretical alternative here, without implying that the analytical potential of a sociology of places for violence research is exhausted by this concept. However, it does suggest that researchers in this field should look at patterns of encounters and bodily experiences which also shape the locus operandi beyond the situation under investigation. In short, the self-similarity argument scrutinizes common “zones of comparison” (Abbott 2001, 159) in sociological research on violence. Here, it is common practice to compare cases of violent interactions with each other, but not with how people act and experience the places where the attacks occur. As a result, there is a constant danger of treating the object of investigation as exceptional or “exotic”—and not as an aspect that sometimes plays a significant role in shaping an everyday pattern of social life that many people experience. “One will look for violence—and find violence,” as Koloma Beck (2019, 291) puts it, especially if the focus is too much on the immediately visible, physical aspects of violence. However, if we take into account that precisely those experiences of violence that are not so easy to detect, comprehend, and describe are also part of everyday life for many people—“hidden in plain sight” (Collins 1998, 924)—because they are in certain places and have a certain status position there, then a change in the zone of comparison could be a starting point for analyzing more closely this “ubiquity” (918), which manifests itself in a location-specific way. The notion of self-similarity brings attention to the idea that violence—and its role in co-determining everyday life and encounters—is not straightforward; rather, it is contingent upon certain places.

Notes

- 1 The “casing” here (Ragin 1992; Hoebel and Knöbl 2019, 41–60) is based on several journalistic reports (Dinger 2023; Fischhaber et al. 2022; Laberenz 2023; Wörz 2022) and prosecutorial investigations into the events.

- 2 In this perspective, then, the “social spaces” discussed by Henri Lefebvre are places rather than spaces: “Take Venice, for instance.” (Lefebvre 1991, 73)
- 3 Eviatar Zerubavel (2011, 13) aptly speaks of “insular chunks of space” that are symbolically highlighted, often with names, and treated as discrete. “The way we carve out of ecological continuums such as continents and urban settlements supposedly insular countries and neighborhoods is a classic case in point. ... Despite the fact that Egypt and Libya or Chinatown and Little Italy are actually contiguous, we nevertheless treat them as if they were discrete.” He emphasizes the distinctiveness of places that sociomental meaning-making creates.
- 4 In terms of spatial sociology, the approach of the “distinctiveness” of cities also points in this direction (Barbehön and Münch 2016, 39). However, the associated research program of the “intrinsic logics of cities” has not yet been used to analyze violent events.
- 5 Capitalizing Black and White emphasizes that these are categories that denote human-made entities. It “highlights the artificiality of race,” as Sally Haslanger notes (quoted from Appiah 2020). Insofar as the terms do not appear in direct quotations, which I reproduce in the original, I agree with her view.
- 6 Of course, there are exceptions. An international team of researchers argues that elements of the “code of the street” described by Anderson in Germantown can also be found elsewhere, including in Dortmund (Heitmeyer et al. 2019; Kurtenbach and Rauf 2019).
- 7 I owe this thought to an intensive discussion with Athanasios Karafillidis.
- 8 Also useless (but interesting as a separate object of study) are many of the public imaginations and discourses that can be found about Nordstadt. Partial but often mentioned segments, such as the drug scene near the main train station or run-down real estate, are emblematically presented as a whole, and Nordstadt is described, for example, as a no-go area (for critical reconstructions, see Katzenberg 2020; Krämer-Hoppe et al. 2019, 27–30). “Don’t move there under any circumstances. There are only broken-down buildings there and you can’t go outside in the evening” (Dieluweit 2022, 43). The tenor is often that constant danger lurks here for “upright citizens”. When discussing Nordstadt, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that although violence is portrayed as frightening, it has hardly been systematically studied (for a more systematic classification of this typically modern way of dealing with the topic of violence, see Reemtsma 2012, 259–311).
- 9 The photo exhibition “Göç. Borsigplatz’da yaşayan 13 kadının dilinden / Ankommen 13 Frauen vom Borsigplatz erzählen [Arrival. 13 women from Borsigplatz tell their stories]” by photographer Leopold Achilles, ran from April 28 to July 9 2023 at StadtRAUM, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte in Dortmund, Germany, underscores this point (f2 Fotofestival 2023). At the same time, it draws attention to the fact that the perspective of arriving women is usually downplayed when recognizing the achievements of migrants. Initially, people from the eastern areas of Prussia and the German Empire, especially the former Kingdom of Poland, East and West Prussia, Posen, Pomerania, and Silesia, settled under the most basic conditions and became the core of the proletariat of one of the centers of industrialization in Germany (Kurtenbach 2017, 410–12; Staubach 2014). “The hordes live in the north” is a catchphrase that dates back to this time and is often brought up again when there is negative news about the Nordstadt (Laurin 2016).
- 10 It must be taken into account that many newcomers also move on again once they have established themselves.
- 11 Immediately after World War II, displaced persons from Silesia and East Prussia found cheap housing there; then, from the 1950s onward, migrant workers from the Mediterranean region (the so-called “guest workers” and their families) who were recruited by the state; since the EU’s eastward expansion in the 2000s and the associated freedom of movement, job seekers from southeastern Europe; and in recent years, especially refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and the African Sahel states (Geiges et al. 2017, 49–96; Staubach 2014).
- 12 Nonetheless, for many, life is hard here. The past and present of Nordstadt also include the conditions in which landlords, entrepreneurs, and criminal gangs took advantage of and exploited the plight of the arrivals.
- 13 He stated to official authorities that he was an orphan. However, reports and photographs of his death led to his brother and parents coming forward after a few days (Dinger 2023).
- 14 Such notions date back to the early 20th century, when the Nordstadt was closed off for around eleven hours a day to regulate train traffic (Kurtenbach 2017, 410–12). The railroad embankments that surround it to this day, the underpasses and entrances that were unkempt for many years (and have since been largely remodeled), and the harbor to the west are material reminders of this period and continue to act as sociomental boundaries, especially for outsiders, that make the district seem like a container space (Paul

2015, 61). This supposed closedness significantly shapes the “territorial reputation” (Kurtenbach 2017) of the spot.

- 15 See, also, the comparative research on the “codes of the street” (Heitmeyer et al. 2019; Kurtenbach and Rauf 2019).
- 16 On the legal gray area in which police officers operate here, and which is prone to discrimination, see Thurn et al. (2023).
- 17 A video significant to the local discourse was posted by @der_neukoellner to TikTok on 21 May 2022: www.tiktok.com/@der_neukoellner/video/71001409795939077 [accessed 17 July 2022].

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4

ONLY A RESEARCHER'S STRUGGLE?

Reconceiving the ethnographic field as a relational space

Sung Un Gang

Introduction

This study reflects on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted on the everyday spaces of queer residents in Seoul. The critical reexamination of fieldwork as a qualitative research method has been carried out from various angles, the *interpretive turn* initiated by Clifford Geertz in the 1970s being one of the earliest endeavors (Rooke 2010, 27). In this undertaking, scholars have developed various concepts and methods, such as reflexivity in ethnographic works (Marcus and Fischer [1986] 1999), conceptualization of fieldworkers as embodied subjects (Turner 2000), affective aspects of fieldwork (Brown 2008), feminist and queer geographies (Browne and Nash 2010), and queer of color reflexive ethnography (Adjepong 2019). While these new approaches have distinctive foci, critical inquisition of the power relations between researchers, and the societies and people they study has been a common element.

To borrow a phrase from Donna Haraway (1988), these efforts can be seen as a process of recognizing and putting into practice the fact that all knowledge is inevitably “situated knowledge.” She critiques the disembodied objectivity assumed by scientists and philosophers, pointing out that it is based on the impossible illusion of a gaze from nowhere that is distanced from everything while seeing everything (581). According to her, “Objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision” (582–583).

At first glance, anthropological fieldwork seems to be a step away from the doctrine of objectivity that Haraway’s main critique is based on. This is because fieldworkers participate and observe in the field, and in doing so, they explore the uniqueness and meaning of different practices in each community on site. Fieldwork, therefore, seems like the kind of research that would fulfill Haraway’s claim for “an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability in part to translate knowledge among very different-and power-differentiated-communities” (Haraway 1988, 580). But does it?

Often conducted by researchers who travel to geographically and culturally distanced places (Rooke 2010, 29; Jackman 2010, 117), fieldwork is a method paradoxically close to what Haraway

calls “a wandering eye, a traveling lens” that “have often been violent” (586), evoking European ethnography’s past as one of the tools for “possess[ing] the world epistemically” (Mignolo 2021, 24; see also Adjepong 2019, 29–31). The geographical and cultural distance between the field and the home (or the academe) is further established in the writing process where “the complex relationship between experience, writing, and the reception of ethnographic works is often erased from the final ethnographic record in order to maintain the objective stance of the researcher,” as Michael Connors Jackman summarizes (2010, 116) James Clifford and George E. Marcus.

Capturing local specificity through researchers’ physical and emotional changes in the field responds to the call for both “experienced objectivity” (Clifford 1986, 14) and for embodied, situated knowledge. However, it often creates the illusion that the spaces and people being studied are relatively static compared to the researcher, despite efforts to honor their agency and avoid essentialism. For example, Dorinne K. Kondo’s (1990) ethnographic study as a Japanese-American woman in Tokyo where she practiced “becoming Japanese” by conforming to the expectations of her surroundings, Loïc Wacquant’s (2004) study of his experience as a white French man training in a Black boxing club in Chicago, or Kimberly Kay Hoang’s study (2018) of her experience as a Vietnamese-American woman working as a hostess in bars in Ho Chi Minh City, include sincere reflections on their own situatedness that allow for a deeper understanding of their respective communities. However, by focusing on the shifting and conflicting researcher-self in fidelity to the “anthropological imperatives to immerse oneself in another culture” (Kondo 1990, 12), they do not portray the other half as vividly changing. In other words, “there is [little to] no consideration of the other side, namely the impact of the incomer anthropologist’s arrival upon the hosts” (Okely 2007, 66). Ironically, the pursuit of dismantling the old ethnographic self’s claim to disembodied objectivity by focusing on its physical and emotional changes and limitations often draws more attention to the “I” in ethnographic accounts, while presenting it as a thoroughly receptive subject. In Wacquant’s words: An ethnographic self “soak[s] up the atmosphere [...] like a human sponge” (2004, 4). From a self-reflexive perspective, Kondo compares the relationship between the self and the setting in ethnographic writing to that in “realist fiction” (1990, 8), “because it evokes the experience of fieldwork by locating the author and the reader in a world that is initially strange, allowing the author to render that world comprehensible to the reader just as it became familiar to her in the process of doing research” (7).

In some ways, this essay builds on Pierre Bourdieu’s criticism of “narcissistic reflexivity” (2003). Criticizing certain reflexive ethnographic writing conventions, he suggests practicing “participant objectivation ... of the analyzing subject—in short, of the researcher herself” (282) to achieve scientific reflexivity. This approach explores “not the ‘lived experience’ of the knowing subject but the social conditions of possibility—and therefore the effects and limits—of that experience and, more precisely, of the act of objectivation itself” (282). Bourdieu argues that by “turning anthropology against itself” (285), an anthropologist can gain “inward knowledge” (287) of ethnographic self as a social construct and avoid what he calls “‘Lévy-Bruhl’s mistake’, which consists of creating an insurmountable distance between the anthropologist and those they study, as well as between their own thought and ‘primitive thought,’ due to a lack of necessary distance from their own native thought and practice by objectifying them” (286). Additionally, he contends that critical reflexivity and the active application of one’s own “native knowledge” in analysis can help “defend [one]self against the ‘folk theories’ of [one’s] informants or of the anthropological tradition” as well (289).

While a researcher’s “rigorous scientific examination” (291) of one’s own epistemic presumptions and institutionalized habits is indeed necessary, the ethnographic (or sociological)

self still remains at the center of the endeavor in participant objectivation. But can an ethnographic self exist in the field without the countenance of ethnographic others?

Starting from this awareness of the problem, this study explores how the presence of the researcher creates socio-spatial conflicts and changes in the field. If—to borrow Wacquant’s phrase—a researcher can “penetrate a universe” (Wacquant and Deyanov 2002, 183) or “insert” (Wacquant 2004, 9) oneself into a field, we must inquire if and how the spaces and people they encounter maintain or remake the space. If we assume that there is some homeostasis in the field and the people the researcher meets there, despite the presence of this “space invader” (Puwar 2004; see also Adjepong 2019, 28), then we need to assume that there must have been work done to maintain the very homeostasis, like a human body produces sweat or sends more blood through vessels to maintain its temperature at around 36.5 degrees Celsius. In short, we need to examine the relational work of spatial constitution, in which both ethnographic self and ethnographic others are actively involved.

For this aim, this study will first give an overview of my research field and the concept of relational space as an analytical tool. Adopting this concept, I will describe two of the cases focusing on socio-spatial interactions between people I encountered there and myself, and the work and negotiations we did to maintain homeostasis in the space we resided in. This will provide insight into the intersectional reconstruction of identities in the field and its impact on our use, perception, and meaning-making of the spaces we inhabited.

Between everywhere and somewhere else: Doing fieldwork of queer spaces in Seoul

I embarked on ethnographic fieldwork in Seoul in July 2022 as part of the research project “Smart People: Queer Everyday Life in Digitalized Spaces” at the Collaborative Research Center 1265, Berlin. My aim was to understand how queer individuals create, appropriate, and claim spaces in everyday settings and how this process relates to digitalized communication. Due to administrative and family reasons, I conducted four segments of fieldwork until February 2024, spending three to seven weeks in the city each time. Engaging in a “patchwork ethnography” (Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020) involved repeatedly entering and exiting the field. Additionally, to meet dozens of interviewees in this mega city, I had to visit various locations. Personally, I was in the process of relocating between four different cities in Germany as well. As a result, my fieldwork experience was characterized by constant searches for connections and access, leaving them shortly after finding them, and attempting to maintain and reestablish connections across the globe instead of *total immersion*. Thus, this approach offers an interesting case for queering ethnography by “exploring the normative logics of ethnographic research and writing” (Rooke 2010, 29).

During my fieldwork, I became aware of the fact that the separation of queer life from *other* lives in South Korea manifests in everyday spaces such as residential areas, streets, public transportation, and workplaces (cf. Gang et al. forthcoming). It was individuals and groups opposing equal rights for queer citizens who actively advocated for this separation (Rashid 2024). For instance, the underlying logic of opposition to queer pride events stems from a deep anxiety that the spatial separation between queer individuals and everyday spaces could be disrupted by the spectacular and joyous celebration of LGBTQIA+ people and their allies. The desire to segregate queer life from everyday spaces is evident in the words of a Christian preacher who, on July 15, 2022, the day before the Seoul Queer Culture Festival (SQCF), shouted in front of Seoul City Hall that the “Queer Culture Festival should be held not here in Seoul Plaza, but *over there, far*

away [*chŏgi, chŏ mŏn te*].”¹ This sentiment was also reflected in the statement of a member of the Seoul Metropolitan Government’s Citizens’ Committee for Open Plaza, convened in May 2023 to decide whether SQCF could use Seoul Plaza again. The member remarked that such events were originally held in “hidden... somewhat different places like Itaewon” (Seoul Citizens’ Committee 2023). The “far away” and “hidden and somewhat different places” they referred to were areas of invisibility separated from everyday spaces. The overrepresented discriminatory voices (Rashid 2024) have played a decisive role in preventing the Queer Culture Festival Committee from using Seoul Plaza in 2023 and 2024.

The separation of queer lives from everyday space in South Korea can also be observed in academic discourse.² Among the already rare studies on LGBTQIA+ issues in Korea, research focused on space is even rarer.³ There are three major reasons for this.

First, in the field of human geography, there have been occasional studies on LGBTQIA+ spaces, but the vast majority of these studies focus on designated queer spaces, such as lesbian pubs, gay bars, transgender clubs, and areas in Seoul with a concentration of such establishments—like Hongdae (Kang 2015; Kim 2013), Jongno (Lee 2007; Lee and Zoh 2020), Itaewon (Han 2013; Hamilton 2016)—or pride event venues (Kim 2015; Cho 2022). These night spaces, convivial places, and event spaces are themselves stages of LGBTQIA+ history and serve as the most evident examples showing the impact of significant economic and social phenomena, such as gentrification and anti-LGBTQIA+ hate campaigns, on queer life. Additionally, these spaces are considered to be relatively easily accessible and clearly distinguishable as spaces of queer life, making them suitable subjects for study.

Second, due to the social and political pressure to separate queer life from the everyday and make it invisible, as well as the effects of everyday discrimination and oppression faced by queer individuals, even the spaces where they spend most of their day—including the aforementioned *typical* queer spaces—often opt for strategies of invisibility (Gang et al. forthcoming). Research on queer individuals’ communities, residences, workplaces, and other spaces is difficult to conduct because it poses a significant threat to their safety if protective measures, such as ensuring the anonymity of research participants, are not sufficiently implemented. Thus, potential participants are reluctant to share their everyday space with researchers.

Third, when queer everyday spaces are chosen as subjects of urban research, the deconstruction of the anthropological premise that views communities “as clearly demarcated entities” (Jaffe and De Koning 2016, 14) and the inherent characteristics of urban residents’ lives make studying queer everyday spaces in cities challenging. Specifically, “in cities, people may spend much of their time in relatively inaccessible places of work, leisure, and home” (Jaffe and De Koning 2016, 14), and researchers “cannot fall back on the clearly circumscribed field sites with their dense, bounded social life” (Jaffe and De Koning 2016, 14).

Despite these challenges, research on queer everyday spaces in urban settings is essential for a nuanced understanding of the lives of queer individuals in cities, which are imagined and lived as spaces of queer life (D’Emilio 1983; Bell and Binnie 2004; Oswin 2015). In South Korea, the socio-spatial reality that queer individuals are ubiquitous has been expressed in queer rights movements. In 2018, Seoul Queer Culture Festival (SQCF) took place under the neologism “Queeround” to convey the message that “We, sexual minorities and queers, are around you, and now our round is going to start” (SQCF 2018). To celebrate the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) in 2020, Rainbow Action against Sexual Minority Discrimination South Korea posted an advertisement on a billboard in a subway station in Seoul using the slogan “Sexual Minorities Are in Your Everyday Life.” This ad was restored after a man vandalized it

(Lee 2020). The same initiative held a press conference in 2021 under the slogan “Queers Are Everywhere. Transgenders Are Everywhere” to raise awareness on International Transgender Day of Visibility (ITDV; Cho 2021). Expanding the focus of queer spatial studies from leisure and nightlife spaces to include anywhere else is an academic effort to acknowledge this reality. Furthermore, research on queer everyday spaces is a task of restoring the multifaceted nature of queer life, including its everydayness.⁴

How can I conduct fieldwork in a spatial context that spans both *everywhere* and *somewhere else*? To broaden the scope of studies on queer lives and address the often concealed and denied aspects of queer everyday life, I drew upon the concept of relational space to define and analyze Seoul’s queer spaces. According to Martina Löw and Gunter Weidenhaus (2017), spaces are “relational arrangements of social goods *and* living beings in places,” perceived through “linking physical objects” (557). In this sense, we can alter spaces by linking things and beings differently, as well as by adding, removing, or rearranging them. Relational space allows us to consider seemingly heteronormative public spaces in Seoul queer, too.

The concept of relational space is particularly helpful for expanding the focus of reflexive ethnography from the researcher’s self to their environment, and for recognizing how ethnographic others develop their own perceptions of the linkages between things and beings, including or even excluding “me” in the field, thereby creating their own relational spaces. In the context of fieldwork, a researcher’s entry into a site initiates a new relational space, especially as they interact with people residing in the place, thus generating new semiotic and perceptual linkages. Alison Rooke (2010) notes that “if the ‘field’ is intersubjectively constructed by the ethnographer, we might argue that he or she is the *only* person who inhabits the field *as* ‘the field.’ The informants may be in the same place at the same time but their experience of it is different to that of the ethnographer” (30). Viewed as a relational space, an ethnographic field is inevitably decentered and affords multilaterality.

While Löw and Weidenhaus (2017) emphasize the role of “institutions” in setting the conditions for placing things and humans, as well as perceiving, experiencing, and remembering spaces, my experiences in the fieldwork suggest that we need to consider the subject and its intersectional positionality, too, when discussing spaces of fieldwork in relational terms and trying to decenter the ethnographic self, since it influences their perception of each other and interactions between them. This claim will be underpinned by two encounters with queer individuals and spaces during my fieldwork in a queer bar in Jongno and in a popular café in Mangwon-dong, Seoul. The choice of two places corresponds with the dichotomously imagined loci of queer lives in Korea that are *somewhere else* and *everywhere*. In each place, inter-subject relations and spatial practices produced an unexpected rupture in the space, which my conversing partners and I managed to mend.

A stranger in a gay bar: Intersectionally constructed outsider position

As an ethnic Korean cis-gender gay man born and raised in Seoul who uses Korean as his first language, I planned and carried out my research under the assumption that I could easily pass as an in-group member in gay spaces. However, on the very first day of my fieldwork, during a visit to a gay bar in Jongno, I experienced my intersectional positionality being reinterpreted and assessed in ways that deviated from my expectations. This had implications for the possibilities and direction of conversations, as well as the relationships I formed with the people I encountered in that space.

I visited a well-known gay bar in Jongno on a weekday evening at 10 p.m. Unlike many other establishments, this particular bar was known for welcoming everybody, regardless of gender,

sexual orientation, age, or nationality. Apart from one customer sitting at the bar, a couple (that passed as heterosexual) sitting at a table, a staff member, and the bar owner, there was no one else in the establishment. I sat at the bar and started talking to the nearby customer, the staff member, and the owner. But each time, I sensed that they felt slightly uneasy. Soon after, the owner asked me, "So, where are you from?" He was asking about my nationality or place of origin. Although I was speaking Korean and appeared ethnically Korean, he had detected that my behavior was somehow out of place in the local context. When I told them that I had lived in Germany for over ten years, they seemed to understand my behavior. However, I was quite taken aback to be estranged in a place where I expected to fit in. Drawing on their fieldwork in a Ghanaian community in Houston, Texas, queer migrant scholar Anima Adjepong (2019) challenges the assumption that people of the same national and ethnic background naturally form a community. While their concept of invading ethnography "performs the disorienting negotiation the queer of color experiences as an ethnographer in spaces designed as normatively heterosexual" (42), my case shows that disorientation and space invasion can also occur in queer spaces due to varying intersectional positionalities, including cultural backgrounds (domestic vs foreign), life experiences, and economic status.

During the ensuing conversation, I was constantly reminded that I was an outsider, distinct from the other customers. Factors such as my age (late 30s) and what was perceived as my lack of experience in gay spaces, my long-term overseas living experience, and my legally recognized same-sex partnership (I was wearing my wedding ring) all contributed to constructing my outsider position, regardless of my actual nationality and my understanding of the identity. After hearing that I was in a registered partnership in Germany, someone remarked, "Well, you went abroad early, but if you had stayed here, you probably wouldn't be much different from us." The core of this statement was that my life abroad had afforded me certain privileges, which created a difference between me and the group that person referred to as "us"—likely gay men living in Korea. At the same time, this constructed foreignness intersected with my professional and economic position as a researcher at a European university, which I had to disclose in accordance with fieldwork ethics. The owner did not hide his hostility towards researchers before me who "asked a lot of questions, received answers, and then never returned."

These interactions helped me decenter my role as a researcher and observe how others in the bar worked to create a new relational space. My physical presence in the bar and their perception of me as an outsider strengthened the relational linkages among them while estranging me. Emphasizing cultural, socioeconomic, and personal differences between us was a crucial tactic for the owner to safeguard the bar from perceived space invaders like myself. Although I could understand his decision, I also felt the need to address the rough generalizations. I explained that I could relate to his frustration, as I had to deal with similar situations with journalists and felt abandoned after a campaign I initiated in Germany. This explanation seemed to surprise and somewhat soothe him. The next day, I asked the staff member to convey my apology for disturbing the atmosphere with my query to interview the owner. When I visited the bar again a few days later, the owner greeted me, and I apologized once more.

Over the course of two years of fieldwork, I frequented the bar and gradually overcame the initial awkwardness with the owner. This process involved more than merely adapting myself to the space by drinking more alcohol or accepting my foreigner-like status during interactions. The bar owner also made efforts to incorporate me as one of his patrons while respecting the fact that I was doing my fieldwork—albeit elsewhere. Eventually, he began to acknowledge me during my visits, and we exchanged brief updates or jokes. Sometimes, he even inquired about my research progress, though he never asked me if I still wanted to interview him. He insisted on a particular

way of relating to me, which helped maintain the bar's convivial atmosphere despite my presence. Between him and me, there were more than bottles of beer or slightly overpriced food menus that became part of the relational space between us. This space was built upon initial skepticism and gradual acceptance from his side, and my willingness to bridge the gap by embracing my outsider status.

Two men at a café table? Creating an ephemeral queer space

To understand the spatial experiences, knowledge, and practices of queer residents in Seoul and the surrounding metropolitan area, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork along with in-depth interviews. Six of these interviewees suggested meeting at various cafés across Seoul to have our conversations.⁵ While functioning as the city's extension of living rooms across the generation,⁶ it is rare that men choose a café as a venue for non-business-related personal meetings. If at all, young men in their 20s use cafés as a place to study alone or as a heterosexual dating spot. There is a tendency to view intimate conversations between two or more men as conflicting with the cultural norms of cis-gender heterosexual masculinity (Song 2014, 437–438). During my university days in Korea, I often heard comments like, “For a guy, you quite like going to cafés, don't you?” For me, cafés were an alternative to bars or internet cafés, which were considered macho spaces. Cafés offered a quieter environment where I could listen to music, engage in long conversations, or write in my journal. For this reason, conducting in-depth interviews about the lives and spaces of sexual minorities in a café diverged from the conventional use of café spaces on multiple levels, temporarily transforming the space into a queer one. In this process, the intersectional positionality of both the researcher and the interviewee played a crucial role in utilizing and simultaneously remaking the café space.

On a weekday afternoon in July 2022, I conducted an interview with Yu Seung-Tae,⁷ a non-binary interviewee, at a small café in Seoul's Mangwon-dong, which they often visited. According to the geographical information provided by a local navigation app, approximately 70% of the store's patrons were women, with most visitors being in their 20s or younger. Indeed, the other customers besides us appeared to align with this primary demographic. The app also described this popular venue using hashtags such as #brunch_place, #dating_course, and #cafés_with_plants. While the café primarily catered to heterosexual couples and young women, it also had a queer aspect: a single-stall restroom that was not gender-segregated.⁸ Although Seung-Tae and I did not discuss this fact during our initial conversation, they later mentioned the all-gender toilet as an example of a non-binary space during our second interview. Other non-binary interviewees I met also spoke about the sense of relief provided by single-stall restrooms. In other words, both Seung-Tae and I either already had or were prepared to form a certain intimate relationship with this café.

However, in constructing our actual accessibility to this café, not only our personal relationships with the café space but also our externally formed intersectional positions played an important role. Seung-Tae, who passed as a cis-gender man in his 30s, and I were, on the surface, unusual presences in this venue. Nevertheless, we could construct a culturally and implicitly approved accessibility to this specific space through our clothing, behavior, usage patterns, and economic standing. Seung-Tae was dressed in a T-shirt with a popping color and wide-legged pants with bold prints, while I wore a casual T-shirt, thigh-high shorts, and sneakers—a combination rarely seen among men in their late 30s in Seoul. Additionally, we adhered to the unspoken customs of trendy café usage, such as not loudly commenting on drink prices, ordering new types of drinks

and desserts without expressing exaggerated unfamiliarity or reluctance, and focusing solely on our conversation in an undertone without looking at other patrons. Our meeting time on a weekday afternoon indicated that we were engaged in occupations free from the typical constraints of a 9-to-6 work schedule, contributing to our socio-spatial familiarity with the local restaurants, entertainment, and publishing industries in the area. Furthermore, my interviewee and I could willingly pay for beverages priced in proportion to the steeply rising rent in the neighborhood. In other words, although atypical patrons—two older *men* having an intimate conversation—our clothing, behavior, economic means, and ability to navigate café customs helped us blend in, maintaining the space's homeostasis. I sensed that the staff and some customers glanced at us briefly, but they did not seem to care much.

Despite our efforts to maintain the café's atmosphere, the sensitive nature of our conversation, discussing queer lives, might have prompted others to perceive the space differently, making it temporarily queer. Toward the end of the interview, Seung-Tae suggested the possibility that the woman seated behind me might have eavesdropped on our conversation. Although it was not our intention, by telling our life stories as sexual minorities—a topic generally unheard of in Seoul's public spaces—we extended the queer space in the café to other patrons. The woman who overheard us, the staff, and others co-constructed this queer space by silently linking two queer individuals, a café table, and their presence surrounding us.

Conclusion: Decentering the ethnographic self

In this essay, I have depicted the process of creating relational spaces during my fieldwork in Seoul, focusing on the negotiation of intersectional positionality of both the fieldworker and the people involved. While the two case studies describe interactions with different places and spatial contexts, they commonly illustrate how a researcher and people in the field co-construct the spatial context through their active and inactive interactions. Just as entering a bouncy castle alters its physical state and the arrangement of people and objects inside,⁹ the researcher constitutes a new space through their physical presence and interactions with living beings and objects in a given place. Therefore, in qualitative spatial research, the researcher must be reflexive about the spatial, existential, and cognitive influences they bring into the research process. Rather than focusing solely on corporeal and affective changes in the researcher self, the concept of relational space requires us to reflect on how research participants also adjust themselves and their spaces in relation to the stranger through communicative actions and other practices. We need to extend our analysis to include the relational spatial works of research participants as actors, instead of highlighting only the researcher's immersion and transformation. This perspective can provide insights into how research participants, especially those who are not able to actively assert their rights to the city for political reasons, might not experience fieldwork as another form of urban violence. It also explores how the researcher might engage in a "power-charged social relation of 'conversation'" (Haraway 1988, 593) with the field, rather than merely *discovering* it. Furthermore, the learnings from intersectional feminism invite us to consider the relationship and mutual perception between researchers and participants, given their differing positionalities.

These reflections underscore the relational and socio-spatial dynamics inherent in qualitative research methodologies of minority spaces—dynamics that are not fully captured by reflexive ethnography and related debates within the broader spectrum of social sciences, including Bourdieu's criticism of narcissistic reflexivity. The concept of relational space highlights that designing and conducting urban anthropological research on everyday spaces involves a continuous

process of co-constructing the space, sometimes even without recognizing the presence of silent cooperators who passively enable the space-making of both fieldworkers and their contacts. Based on this, I propose that when planning and conducting fieldwork, researchers should consider not only their intersectional positionality in the matrix of factors that constitute their identities (such as gender, class, race, and age) as done in reflexive studies but also the contributions of ethnographic others who are positioned in the same place as the ethnographic self. This approach challenges the marginalization of queer individuals and reveals the potential ubiquity of queer spaces in Seoul, which are constantly co-created and renegotiated.

Notes

- 1 I personally witnessed and recorded the speech in front of the city hall on the afternoon of July 15, 2022.
- 2 Meanwhile, individuals, cultural creation groups, and civic organizations paying attention to this issue are producing maps, local historical records, publications, and other materials. See Seoul Queer Collective 2020; Seongsuk Cultural Foundation 2022; Song and Nam 2022.
- 3 Hyemin Lee et al. (2024) analyzed 1,322 journal articles and 657 master's and doctoral theses on queer lives in Korea published by the end of 2021 (311). Among the 20 most frequent title words across five periods (until 1989, 1990–1999, 2000–2009, 2010–2019, and 2020–2021), none directly related to space, place, or specific sites (316).
- 4 A gay activist I met during fieldwork expressed approval of my use of the term “queer residents of Seoul,” noting that it highlights an everyday dimension that has been seldom emphasized in Korean LGBTQ/queer discourse.
- 5 In addition to cafés, interviews took place in the following locations and frequencies: nine times in residential spaces (a queer housing project), seven times in short-term rental offices, four times in participants' workplaces (offices), twice in homes, once in a public space, twice in friends' homes (the queer housing project), once via messenger app, eleven times via Zoom (participants were at home), once via Zoom (participant was in a hotel), and once via Zoom (participant was at a workplace).
- 6 Kim Hyein's master's thesis (2018) discusses the appropriation of cafés as a private space in South Korea. See “A Study on the Privatization of Cafe Space,” Seoul National University (<https://s-space.snu.ac.kr/handle/10371/142612>).
- 7 Names have been anonymized and the pronouns they-their-them are used according to the interviewee's request.
- 8 For a discussion on the affective violence experienced by non-cisgender users in gender-segregated public restrooms in Korea, see Seoyoung Lee's chapter in this volume.
- 9 I borrowed this metaphor from Uljana Wolf ([2007] 2021), who compared the reading and translation of poems, as well as the changing perception of the language and self, to the experience of jumping in a bouncy castle: “People let themselves fall, bounced off, and were thrown back into unexpected positions. With each jump, the space changed; with each new bounce, the jumpers' spatial sense shifted. The scenery prodded back in unpredictable ways. The Bounce House, in essence, was a poem” (12; own translation).

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5

EXPLORING URBAN SPACES OF SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL ENTANGLEMENT IN LAGOS

A collaboration between a researcher and a visual artist

Francesca Ceola

Introduction

The research on which this chapter is based is part of a larger transdisciplinary investigation into the spaces of refuge of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Nigeria. Specifically, it focuses on IDPs who were driven out of the northeast of the country, primarily by armed insurgency and violence, and settled in the city of Lagos, in southwestern Nigeria. Bearing witness to the precarious emplacement “solutions” that IDPs resort to in Lagos, the research framework of this study addresses the question of IDPs’ self-provision of housing in the face of the failure of humanitarian and state-led response to the “crisis” of forced internal displacement.

This intervention emerges from a moment of intersection in the research process between bodies of literature I am just beginning to immerse myself in, and a variety of fictional, non-fictional, artistic, and experimental media that I want to attend to—as they not only paint the background context but fully enrich the research. This intersection is fruitful as it allows me space and time to contend with the ethical and aesthetical dilemmas that the research subject/object has prompted me to contemplate. Crucially, it also allows me to reflect on the ways in which I have made the research design work around and with these dilemmas. The chapter aligns with insurgent voices calling for the recognition of the plurality of onto-epistemologies but also for the disruption of writing canons and the ‘undisciplining’ of geographic research—with movements such as “Writing Differently” and demands to think “otherwise” (Ortiz 2022; Mason and Riding 2023; Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2024).

I start with a scene from my field diary, evoking an inner voice of mine, these days inspired by Nnedi Okorafor (2014), Eloghosa Osunde (2022), and Jumoke Sanwo (2019). It articulates a recurring thought about my embodied experience of navigating space and public transport in Lagos.

Lagos, Nigeria. Èkò in Yoruba. A few degrees latitude north of the equator line, at sea level altitude, built around the lagoon water body—and named after it by the Portuguese. But also located along the Atlantic oceanic coastline and defined by its hydrogeological and meteorological forces. The average temperature is consistently higher than I am used to. The sunscreen I apply on every square centimeter of exposed skin creates an uncomfortably oily layer that attracts and fixes the dust and pollution on my body; it disrupts my dermic transpiration rhythm every time I step out

of the generator-powered air-conditioned interior environments of the flat, the university halls, and the cabs. The public buses, the yellow tricycles—keke in Lagos—and the busy roads pedestrians navigate are not enveloped by the cooling effect that burning fossil fuels affords. Thus, whenever we set out to do interviews, field observations, and space explorations, I am reminded of the climatic trade-offs that enhance habitability—and comfort—for the human body under conditions of heat. To power air conditioners in a state where even government buildings run on generators, urban residents who can afford it resort to autonomous electrification—just as the recent removal of national fuel subsidies has caused fuel and thus energy prices to spike. Alternatively, fans running on solar panels provide some relief. Urban dwellers who cannot afford either still inhabit the city somehow.

The research context

This research revolves around a sample of 43 identified IDP settlements in localities that can go undetected in a bustling city of over 20 million people. Through an extensive mapping exercise, the research team¹ geolocated the settlements, interviewed their community leaders, and established contacts for follow-up community visits. The mapping process was intended to identify the spatial distribution of IDP settlements by getting an idea of the scale of this invisibilized urbanism. The subsequent phase, which I elaborate on in this chapter, aimed at recognizing dwelling practices and organizing them systematically through prototypes. The analytical phase pointed me to something unexpected—the production of intangible space and the ephemerality of spaces that entangle the environment with material social practices.

Working with IDPs in Lagos requires a heightened sensitivity with regard to data protection, as their presence in the city is politically delicate and socially contested for complex reasons (Roberts and Lawanson 2023). In short, in a postcolonial city where the legacies of colonial exclusionary urban planning continue to haunt the spatial and demographic present of the city, a heterogeneity of millions of urban dwellers responds to the shortage of housing provision with self-provision, thereby defying the inadequacies of state-led planning (Immerwahr 2007; Olukoju 2017; Davies 2018; Ajiola 2022; Somotan 2023). Additionally, national internal migration in a country with plurality of ethnic identities, a history of ethnic conflict (see the Biafra Independence War and the Fulani herders conflict), religion-fueled armed violence (see Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria), and a political system that wrestles with social complexity by seeking and securing economic power, renders multi-ethnic life in Lagos a tense social situation (International Crisis Group 2018; Àjàdí 2022; Lawanson 2023). Thus, the IDPs at the center of our research, who belong to an ethnic minority in Lagos, whose economic capacities are often depleted or left behind in forced displacement, and whose reproduction of their largely agricultural livelihoods is undermined by the city's environmental conditions, struggle to claim, make, or be given space (Roberts forthcoming).

In retracing the geographies of dwelling and the socio-spatial practices of IDPs and the urban social groups they interact with in Lagos, the Berlin-based research team partners with a wide range of urban activists, specifically from the Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlements Federation² and the IDP support NGO, the LOTS Charity Foundation, as well as with IDP representatives³. With every IDP community visited by the research team, we adhere to the ethical standards and research protocol of conduct with urban poor communities as per the guidelines of the Pro-Poor Research Cluster of the University of Lagos, from which we had to seek approval for this research. We are bound by a non-disclosure agreement with the communities regarding their location and identity. For publication purposes, we anonymize them and take every possible precaution not to

expose them to city authorities and a variety of other urban actors with control over or interest in the territory where they are located.

A visual research approach, dilemma, and experiment

While the community profiles are still operable—i.e., the anonymized data is still usable—the limitations on data reproduction forced me to rethink the role of the photographic material I collected for the mapping. In a lengthy interview, Portuguese geographer Raquel Soeiro de Brito traces the key role photography played in the geographic discipline's fieldwork practice. It served as a memory dispositif for fieldwork impressions, and the objects it produced—the printed photographs—were often used to present research and disseminate results (Roque de Oliveira et al. 2021). In this sense, photography is both a methodological tool and a social practice of producing material objects—and not so-material objects in the case of digital photography nowadays—whose circulation in academic presentations and different formats of science communication imbues them with social salience and performative power (Edwards 2005). Accordingly, I examined my photographic archive from the fieldwork and realized that, despite its aesthetic quality and perhaps its suitability to work within social (mostly “scientific”) contexts, it was not conducive to analytical purposes in ways that surprised me or that exposed previously unreflected facets of the case study. Thus, in order to experiment with unlearning and reassembling meaning from my material, I imagined the exercise of fictionalizing the settlements, communities, houses, ecologies, and social complexes around the mapped IDP settlements as an extension of my spatial thinking. In line with creative geographic methods (Foster and Lorimer 2007; Hawkins 2011, 2012, 2015) and influenced by my ongoing involvement in counter-mapping experiments (Peluso 1995; Ceola 2023; Kincaid and Schoenfelder 2023), I therefore approached the visual and plastic artist Pablo Quiroga Devia.

Conversations between Quiroga Devia and me have been ongoing for years, but it was only after my second fieldwork in November 2023 that we began to collaborate in earnest on my work in Lagos. We have worked together conceptually and practically in constellations with other researchers on other spatial practices and proposals before—on *desire paths* (2019–2021) and *migrant landscapes* (2023–2024)⁴. The entanglements between forced displacement and urbanities that my work in Lagos revolves around resonated with histories of the place where Quiroga Devia is from, Colombia, and that his artistic practice has grappled with in different forms. Hence the decision to think through these together. The dialectical approach that unfolded between us was less of a formal decision and more of an experiment to revisit my field experience, to mobilize memories I might have overlooked, to problematize assumptions that had been sedimented in my perspective, and to outgrow them. Pragmatically, the process first entailed sharing my photographic, moving image, and sound archive from the phase of mapping IDP settlements, where I believed the housing units, environmental context, and socio-cultural signifiers of the people visited were visible/audible. I shared Google Street View references so that the artist could explore these spaces virtually and autonomously. Secondly, we talked extensively about the housing types, their materiality, what I hypothesize to be the correlation between construction materials and the socio-legal and physical security of the IDPs living in the specific housing, and their self-projection and perception of inhabiting these specific dwellings in the future.

As these were the analytical foci of this phase of the research, I envisioned the dialogue moving towards the visualization of housing “typologies” and thus reflecting, through unlearning, the empirical findings. For every housing solution I had encountered across the many IDP settlements

we had visited, we worked towards a prototypical illustration. Quiroga Devia drew initial sketches that served as discussion material for multiple subsequent cycles of discussion that eventually shaped the final drawings.

Drawing dialectically: Outcomes of an experiment

The first typology, self-built dwellings, consisted primarily of single-room housing units constructed with different materials according to economic affordability, environmental settings, and the contractual conditions of the land lease agreement. We synthesized two prototypes: 1) housing made of woven palm leaf panels for the walls, a wood beams structure, other vegetal fibers for the roof, and rocks or tires to prevent the wind from blowing them away (Figure 5.1); 2) housing made of a combination of corrugated zinc, wood, wooden chips panels, plastic sheets, fabric, and sometimes concrete blocks (Figure 5.2). The second typology was comprised of units in already existing housing, where IDP households rent rooms from local residents. The third typology grouped together different squatting situations: 1) in public space but under the conditions of local actors, such as under the elevated ramps leading to expressways (Figure 5.3); 2) in vacant buildings; 3) in enclosed open spaces. We observed that the latter three prototypical dwelling solutions sometimes featured colorful mats that demarcated the space where shoes must be taken off from the surrounding areas; the mats then formed a wall-less space for prayer, rest, and sleep against a potentially dusty outside space.

These synthetic housing prototypes are the product of the processes of description, problematization, and abstraction that Quiroga Devia and I discussed iteratively. Elaborating on the descriptions and reflections from my empirical work, Quiroga Devia drew sketch illustrations that he presented to me to initiate further discussion. Debating the shape of things, the texture of forms, and the details of space hereby served as a preamble for problematizing questions of representation. The reflection emerged from the realization of my discomfort with producing images for future circulation in contexts where they could be received as reinforcing essentialized arguments of “informality.” While in urban planning and architecture circles in Lagos, the ontological status of slums and makeshift urban spatialities is treated as equal to other urbanization processes⁵, I was uneasy with the possibility that our work might reproduce an exoticizing gaze “*back home*.”⁶ Treading the path of Bayat’s politics of informal people (1997), we were unsatisfied with both the idea of a supposedly innocent and/or apolitical scientific interest and with the sanitization of representations of IDP spatialities. Hence, we decided to overcome this by maintaining a focus on the materialities and design of the dwellings, as this builds towards the argument of intersectional urban injustices IDPs experience, based on the relation between (the feebleness of) land tenure rights and self-provided housing construction, which I expand on in my doctoral project.

We also elaborated on the environmental conditions, geophysical forces, and microclimatic regulatory practices of spacing that are reflected in the spatialities we depict. In fact, coastal erosion is washing away the land from under the feet of the IDPs and residents of the settlements located along the Lekki coastal stretch. Quiroga Devia illustrated the effects of geophysical forces on the IDPs’ housing by proposing a before-and-after juxtaposition (Figure 5.4). The aesthetic and technical choice attests to the temporality of spatial processes—an implicit allusion here to Doreen Massey’s discussions of *space/time* and the problems with claims of fixity of (visually) represented spatial “truths” when in actuality they are only provisional (Massey 2005, 110). The additional layer that the illustration illuminates is, simply put, the interconnectedness of the environment and societies. But it also illustrates so-called geosocial formations, as in the reciprocal and profoundly

entangled processes of structural formation that together encompass the organic (biologies), inorganic (geologies), and historical sociocultural arrangements (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Clark and Yusoff 2017; Agwor, Zurita, and Munro 2023). For instance, Yusoff (2024) repositions the understanding of colonialism as the material and normative formation process that embedded white supremacy on the planet through plantation ecologies (biologies), mining landscapes of extraction (geologies), and territorial theft through racial subjugation and the alteration of human interrelations (historical sociocultural economies). Hence, reading spatial formations—as processes and outcomes—as embodiments of temporal processes and subject to multiple intersectional geo-, bio-, and sociocultural forces unpacks the concurrent negotiations (and struggles) at play. Through this lens, I read the appearance of human settlements, made of specific organic and inorganic materialities that come from specific production cycles of human activity (labor), constrained by socio-economic, historical postcolonial, but also environmental geophysical conditions, along a coastal landscape swept by winds, rainfall, and waves, whose geomorphological changes shape the human settlements sitting above it, and might lead to the eventual disappearance of the human settlement. Geosocial formations as a concept critically hold together these intertwined processes.

Another facet that emerged was the microclimatic regulation of some of the IDPs' spatial agency. As hinted in the field diary note at the beginning of this chapter, the issue of relentless heat during the day is partly reflected in architectural choices and material spatial practices. In a third working step between Quiroga Devia and me, we discussed the production of shade. In the way we had viewed the corpus of fieldwork material up to that point, shading as a practice had only featured as a collateral effect of dwelling production. However, the recurring presence of shaded areas—and material structures that produced shade—across the various spatialities we had been analyzing cast a light on an under-recognized element. At different moments during our visits to the IDP communities, we were made to wait sitting in the shade of colorful umbrellas from street vendors, tropical almond trees, or open verandas made of wood and dried raffia fibers (Figures 5.5 and 5.6). Unlike the energy-powered cooling systems I mentioned above, these design solutions and spatial tactics of heat and light regulation do not require fuel costs and technical intensity. While the spatial agency and livelihoods of IDPs are severely constrained at the intersections of socio-ethnic and economic exclusions, they cope by harnessing both material affordabilities and ecological properties. Thus, the spatial production of something as intangible and yet performative as shade underscores the socio-ecological entanglements that permeate the geographies of IDP settlements and those of many other urban dwellers in Lagos. During subsequent fieldwork at the beginning of the rainy season, the same design and spatial elements that produce shade revealed their dual significance as protection also from rainfall.

Conclusion

Mapping the invisibilized urbanism of the forcibly displaced in Lagos required me to research, elaborate, and represent, sensibly and sensitively, their material social practices, and their entanglements with the environment, revealing the production of intangible and ephemeral spaces. The dialectical approach of a researcher/visual artist collaboration and a certain degree of architectural curiosity encouraged me to think expansively about what the studied spaces tell us⁷.

It is important to acknowledge that the collaborative process presented here had certain limits. First and foremost is the challenge of the narrative filter, as Quiroga Devia relied on my accounts to imagine both the spatialities and the processes at work that generate such spatialities. Additionally, the presentation of the images as illustrative of spatialities and practices is not isolated from the

dialectical process that produced them. Thus, a narrative is again required to contextualize the produced material, which otherwise appears scattered and fragmentary. Yet, I believe that the power that the drawings Quiroga Devia and I have made lies precisely in the conflation of process and result. Their genealogy, composition, and aesthetic elaboration hold together architectural, ecological, social, and geophysical meanings delicately balanced in unitary objects—the drawings themselves.

Beyond the contribution of the drawings to my personal analytical process, the hope is that the process that generated them illuminates possibilities for unlearning and rethinking modalities and methodologies of analysis and synthesis. Particularly, the explication and subsequent problematization of memories, notes, and stories enabled me to uncover and anchor the multilayered meanings of spatial objects (dwellings), tactics (shading), and their situatedness (as geosocial formations). Put differently, intersectional attention to the multiple domains called into question by spatial research and any research embedded in spatial constructs opens many avenues of inquiry simultaneously. But it also meaningfully brings together the multiple facets of spatial issues by attending to complexity, as I have attempted to examine through this collaborative study of the geographies of IDP emplacement in Lagos.

Notes

- 1 I use “I” and “we” interchangeably as the fieldwork I do is never a solitary endeavor—both in terms of conceptual development and contribution, and in terms of operationalization and logistics. An explicit acknowledgment of the collective work is at the end of this chapter. This collective effort alone speaks volumes about the need for critical postcolonial reflection on the positionality of the self in this research process.
- 2 <https://nigerianfederation.wordpress.com/inicio/>
- 3 On the mapping phase, see Ceola and Roberts (2024).
- 4 The first project centered around performance and audiovisual composition, while the second focused on experimental mapping through paper folding. www.sciefestival.org/desire-paths; <https://tnocfestival2024.sched.com/event/1Z1VY/derives-of-migrant-landscapes-meeting-points-between-species-and-places>
- 5 This statement, however, should not be taken as a romanticization. The violence, frequency, and underpinning urban development agendas for community evictions and slum clearances in Lagos demonstrate that not all forms of urbanization are recognized as equally entitled to exist (Castro 2022; Olajide and Lawanson 2022; Sesan 2023).
- 6 A critical examination of the circulation of knowledge production from sites of (fieldwork) knowledge “collection” to “back in the lab” can be found in Latour’s (1988) discussion on “Centres of Calculation.”
- 7 A large body of anthropological literature addresses urban heat regulation (see Urban Microclimates Planning Regimes (<https://sfb1265.de/en/subprojects/urban-microclimate-planning-regimes-the-constitution-of-spaces-and-infrastructures-of-heat/>); Cool Infrastructure (www.coolinfrastructures.com; Venkat 2020; Oppermann, Walker, and Brearley 2020). It is not the novelty of the subject I am highlighting here but rather the unpredictability of the research process, specifically given its collaborative character, which points the researcher in directions and to results that are far from anticipated.

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FIGURE 5.1 Self-built housing made of vegetal fibers. Drawing: Pablo Quiroga Devia (2024).



FIGURE 5.2 Self-built housing made of mixed materials. Drawing: Pablo Quiroga Devia (2024).



FIGURE 5.3 Livelihoods under a bridge. Drawing: Pablo Quiroga Devia (2024).

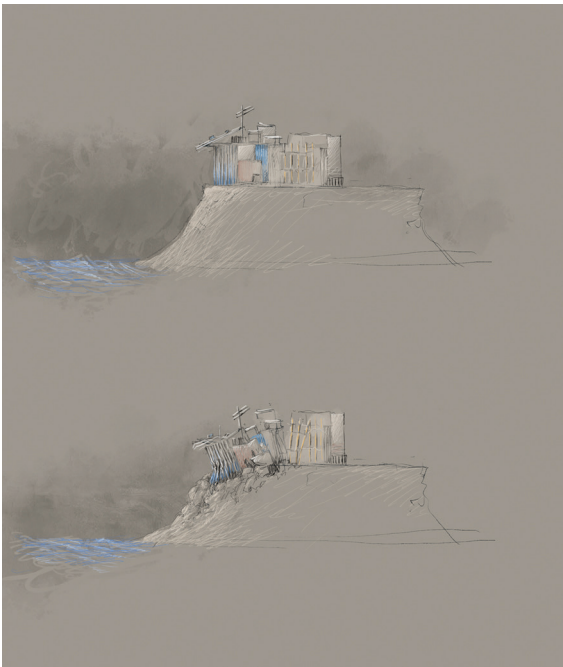


FIGURE 5.4 Space/time juxtaposition of coastal livelihoods. Drawing: Pablo Quiroga Devia (2024).



FIGURE 5.5 Waiting in the shade of street vendors' umbrellas. Drawing: Pablo Quiroga Devia (2024).

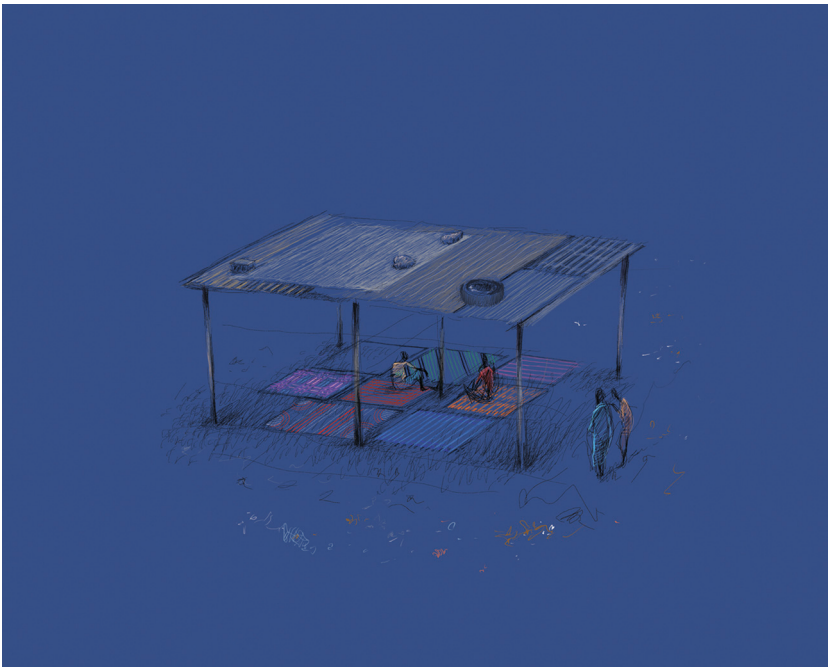


FIGURE 5.6 Resting on the veranda. Drawing: Pablo Quiroga Devia (2024).

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6

URBAN VIOLENCE, THE STATE, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

A conversation with Javier Auyero

Anthony Miro Born and Javier Auyero

Few academic books have made such an impression on me as *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown* (2008) by Javier Auyero and Débora Alejandra Swistun. I was a student in my second year of undergraduate study, looking for works relating to *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (1993) by Pierre Bourdieu and his team, when I stumbled across this volume of ethnography quite by chance. As soon as I began reading the pages of this intriguing work, I found myself being overwhelmed by the vivid individual narratives of the people who lived in this polluted place, bordering one of the largest petrochemical compounds in Argentina. What struck me most, however, was the way in which the two authors managed to bring about such a vivid sociological narrative—one that carefully analyzed very different voices and perspectives, without losing sight of theory, yet remaining deeply human. If academic work was able to produce such results, I wanted to be involved in it.

Flammable, though, is just one of the many impressive ethnographic books that the Argentine sociologist Javier Auyero has authored over the years. A Professor of Latin American Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin, his work has repeatedly paid attention to those who exist at the bottom of Argentina's urban class structure. Other than *Flammable* (which was published by Oxford University Press in 2008), his works include *Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina: The Gray Zone of State Power* (published by Cambridge University Press in 2003), *Patients of the State: The Politics of Waiting in Argentina* (a study that explores the realities of having to wait to access social and administrative services, published by Duke University Press in 2012), *In Harm's Way: The Dynamics of Urban Violence* (with María Fernanda Berti, published by Princeton University Press in 2015), and *The Ambivalent State: Police–Criminal Collusion at the Urban Margins* (with Katherine Sobering, published by Oxford University Press in 2019). In this interview, which was conducted in June 2023, I spoke with Javier Auyero about different forms of violence, the state, and intersectionality.

AMB: Javier, considering your work as a whole, it seems to me that a common thread running through your research is the desire to cast light on the dynamics of power and domination, especially in relation to those existing at the bottom of the urban class structure. Such an

approach involves challenging common sense and, to paraphrase Bourdieu, “revealing what is hidden.” To this end, you have covered a wide range of topics, and it could fairly be said that violence—including its various overlapping forms, functions, interactions, and experiences—has featured prominently throughout your work. How have these themes developed?

JA: I should make it clear at the outset that I do not usually look back on my work—so this is a rather difficult question for me to answer. Of course, I attempt to be very reflexive when I conduct my research. But unlike those academics who like to talk and think about their work as a whole, giving some sort of grand vision of what they have done, I usually attempt to avoid offering such a retrospective picture. Nonetheless, I recognize that it is true: violence has indeed played a kind of important and variable role in my work! And its place in my work has changed according to my own interests, the places that I have studied (which themselves have generally become more and more violent), and my dialogues with my co-authors. In *Poor People’s Politics* (2000), for example, violence was necessarily included as part of the surrounding context of the research, but I did not really address the question directly. Later, in *The Gray Zone of State Power*, I mainly perceived it to be the outcome of interactive and more or less clandestine processes. In *Harm’s Way* was the first book in which I put violence—interpersonal violence, in particular—at the center of the investigation, as something to be explained. Again, though, that was not the intention at the beginning of the project. However, the more that my co-author María Fernanda Berti and I delved into our analysis of this neighborhood, the more we decided to construct an object out of private as well as public forms of violence—since we realized that this division was more blurred than we usually think.

AMB: *The Gray Zone of State Power, Patients of the State, and The Ambivalent State—if we consider some of the titles and subtitles of your books, it is clear to see that one actor often receives special attention in your examination of urban violence.*

JA: When researching urban violence, the importance of the state is not only theoretical, because, as many authors have suggested, it holds a monopoly on the use of legitimate force. While my own work began with an attempt to address the question of how people are able to survive in the absence of state welfare (*Poor People’s Politics*), I began to see more and more that explosions of collective violence could not simply be understood as resulting from need, unemployment, or poverty. Thus, during my analysis of the food riots, a number of hidden processes became apparent, with violence emerging at the core of the state’s repressive role as well as at the core of the police’s role, with a number of grassroots political operatives also being linked to it. In *Harm’s Way* ultimately demonstrates that systemic violence cannot be understood without accounting for what the state is and what the state does, both in its repressive, punitive role, as well as in its more complicit role. For example, state actors either accept and tolerate or directly participate in the drug trade. I think it is very difficult to conduct a study of violence in the areas that I study without accounting for the state. In particular, my work has emphasized what might be called the clandestine hand of the state, which refers to the hidden or covert actions and activities that are carried out by state actors.

AMB: *Bourdieu once noted that the state is “the site par excellence of the concentration and exercise of symbolic power.” Although In Harm’s Way focuses on physical forms of violence, you have also—following Bourdieu—considered more symbolic forms of violence, perhaps most explicitly in Patients of the State, your ethnography of waiting. The*

*understanding of symbolic violence is very often bound up with questions of naturalization and misrecognition, with Bourdieu often being rather pessimistic about the ability of people to challenge or resist the dominant ideas, concepts, or categories. Even so, some authors have argued that the naturalization of dominant images is, in fact, less effective than he supposed—if not uneven, contradictory, and therefore inconsistent. It seems to me that your work—*Flammable*, for example—is more nuanced and ambivalent about the ways in which people legitimize the dominant forms of domination. To put it bluntly, then, when does symbolic power begin, and when does it end?*

JA: A lot of academics, especially in the US, like to say, “We call this so and so,” then that is the end of that particular inquiry. In my view, though, concepts should always invite us to think and explore further—they are not the end point; rather, they are the beginning of the investigation. So, when I was conducting the research for *Flammable*, for instance, I had a title in mind that was very much inspired by symbolic violence: “toxic doxa”—and yes, it sounded like a great title to me. But it was not only my co-author Débora (Alejandra Swistun) who forced me to think differently. When we were conducting the observations and interviews, the idea that the dominated think in the categories of the dominant—the very definition of symbolic violence—ultimately did not turn out as I thought. Indeed, it is in the field, with all its richness and variation, that objects become much more interesting to me. As a consequence, I think that the whole idea of symbolic violence should be used as an invitation to pay close attention to what aspects of the dominant social structure are being reproduced and how that is happening. To be honest, I do not see much value in just theorizing for the sake of theorizing and pronouncing *a priori* where the limits of symbolic violence are—I find it much more interesting to go into the field and get dirty. Concepts are tools; sometimes you have the hammer of symbolic violence, but you come across a screw—and it is only then that you realize that you cannot really use a hammer; you have to use a screwdriver.

AMB: *Another issue that relates to symbolic violence is that the researcher inevitably assumes a “position of mastery” when attempting to understand the lived experiences of people in the field. The sociologist is frequently seen as someone who is able to “see and represent the truth through the fog of cultural domination” (as Michael Burawoy recently put it, in critical terms), while the dominated are unable to comprehend their subjugation (in contrast to, for example, Gramsci’s approach to domination).*

JA: I agree; it has always been a very difficult struggle. Until very recently, quite frankly, you were able to get away with it—but we are now at a point when it is becoming increasingly difficult. And identity politics in academia has become part of the territory, too, making it even more fraught. Ultimately, though, I believe that we are the authors of our own work. If you do ethnography for a long time, and especially if you collaborate with others, it is very difficult to get away with the idea that “I know better than everyone else.” As sociologists, though, I also think that it is our job to explain and make sense of things that people can hardly see. It is our job to understand and explain processes—that is the nature of our business and that is what we get paid for, after all. There is no doubt that people have insights, but we, as trained researchers, are able to generate different insights—plus, we have also developed a set of tools to contextualize and understand things. Some people may find it very patronizing to think that researchers know better, but it is also patronizing to ask people in the field to become sociologists. To deny that sociologists have a specific knowledge of the social world—after all the reading, the discussing, and

the theorizing—would be, to put it bluntly, suicidal: because if we are not able to generate these specific insights, who needs us? I appreciate that this must sound almost like a corporate defense, but I would like to emphasize that we have some expertise that many others do not, and if you think about the reproduction of inequality or poverty, for example, you quickly realize that most accounts of “people” fall back on behavioral or culturalist understandings. I think—and I would defend this—that they are wrong. But that does not make me patronizing. By contrast, I have evidence that poor people are poor not because of what they do or what they believe, but because of the political and structural processes that shape them. And this applies to almost every single social phenomenon.

AMB: *How we write is crucial in this context, I suppose—and this is probably even more the case when considering questions of urban violence. In Flammable, for example, you adopt what you call a “cubist” approach, arguing that the essence of an object can be captured only by perceiving it from multiple points of view simultaneously. More generally, though, how is it possible to put a subject such as urban violence into written words?*

JA: Probably because I have been reading more and more fiction and non-fiction, and probably because I have been reading a lot of what in Latin America, we call *crónica*—that is, non-fiction accounts that are written by journalists—I have become more attentive to and have reflected on the ways in which we, as sociologists, tell our stories. While I had believed that stories may not have been the most optimal means of conveying social explanations, I am now more carefully considering how to convey the “how” and the “why” most effectively. Having initially adopted a “cubist” approach, involving several angles and perspectives, I have since considered what I call a “pointillistic” approach, where, in telling different stories, if you put the different dots in the right order, that should allow the reader to see the bigger picture. If the reason for violence has to do with the how, then the writing should also be about the how. To be very clear: when writing about urban violence, there is a danger of normalizing the issue by the very act of writing about it. As such, it is crucial to convey and document the suffering and pain that have been experienced, without resorting to a sanitized or idealized ethnographic narrative. Although I have yet to arrive at a straightforward resolution, my belief is that meshing analytical thinking with imaginative writing can help to avoid the pitfalls of depicting violence in ways that perpetuate stereotypes and demonize the people who are involved. Indeed, writing about violence in relation to marginalized individuals can often result in the perpetuation of negative stereotypes about the impoverished. However, a different approach can emerge, through a respectful, careful, and in-depth examination of the reasons behind such situations, as well as through experimentation with alternative forms of representation. Although it is not a flawless solution, this is my way of attempting to do it.

AMB: *It is important to emphasize that such writing is incredibly difficult—at least for non-tenured academics—in the contemporary academic system, with its pressure to publish, as well as its emphasis on journal articles. Let us not forget another strategy that you have used in your work, however: the inclusion of collaborators, who are very often from the field.¹ In Harm’s Way, for instance, makes frequent use of the powerful field notes of María Fernanda Berti, a primary school teacher who lives in the neighborhood in question. Flammable, similarly, is a collaboration with the anthropologist Débora Alejandra Swistun, who has spent most of her life in Flammable.*

JA: It is worth pointing out that my first collaboration with Débora occurred purely by chance—and I am not ashamed to admit that I did not start reading about native

anthropology until I had completed my research with Débora. At the beginning of my fieldwork for *Flammable*, the second key informant asked me: “Do you know Débora, an anthropologist who lives here?” My initial reaction was one of dismay—I thought, “Oh no, there’s already someone else here. There is no room for both of us.” Eventually, it turned out that even though she was an anthropologist, she was not, in fact, studying the area. Rather, she was a neighbor. It was this that led to our collaboration. To be honest, the literature on collaborative work did not help me, as there were no indicative models for my project. But just as there were no blueprints for the project, so there were no blueprints for the collaboration either. It occurred because I live far away from Argentina, because the fieldwork is very demanding, and because I realized that working with someone from the community or close to the community offered a means of gaining insights that would otherwise take a long, long time to emerge. At the moment, for instance, I am finishing a book about survival strategies in a squatter settlement with someone who lives about two blocks away from it. Again, working collaboratively is something that has worked for me, but I would refuse to say “Oh, this is what everyone should do.” Inspired by that, though, let me also say this. In the beginning, I decided to study sociology because I was an activist. When my parents told me that I had to go to university, I ended up studying sociology because, at the time of the transition to democracy, it was the closest thing to activism I could think to do in Buenos Aires. As such, I always thought of sociology as a political activity. Call me naive, but to take one example, the idea of public sociology did not surprise me, because I always thought—probably naively—that what I was doing was politics. And you do not do politics alone. You are not alone! So, I always see what we are doing as a collective enterprise! And we have to keep attempting to do that, even if we are not working directly with other researchers! This is where I hesitate because I am becoming too preachy—but I honestly think that in the very individualized world of academia, we need to think more about promoting a collective enterprise!

AMB: Many of the contributions to this book emphasize the intersectional dimensions of urban violence, and your work also explores very different forms of inequality and the ways in which they relate to one another. I was wondering why you never use the term “intersectionality” directly, though.

JA: This is a very interesting question—and you are quite right, I am quite sure that I do not use the term “intersectionality” directly in my work, even though I work with multidimensional perspectives. When you asked me this question, it caused me to consider why I have not used this term. I do not think that it is because I do not like the term or because I am particularly critical of it—rather, it has more to do with intellectual biographies. When I did my undergraduate degree at the University of Buenos Aires, it was, as I mentioned, during the Argentine transition to democracy—a time when Latin American social scientists were heavily influenced by Marxism and class analysis. Everything was about class! So, the first two years of my undergraduate studies were all about the mode of production, class determination, and Marx. Then I discovered the work of Giddens and, especially, Bourdieu, which was all about different fields. At the same time, I was reading more and more E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, who softened the class analysis and emphasized very different vectors and axes of the production of inequality—and that really stuck with me. And then, I read the work of my mentor, Charles Tilly, and of course, I realized that it was impossible to understand inequality without considering the interplay between different dimensions. When I was a graduate student reading about

intersectionality, then, it made sense to me, although it was not particularly new to me. So, I came to the United States—and to the study of marginality—with a very different theoretical baggage. It is very clear to me that the major themes of my work—such as waiting, urban violence, and environmental suffering—always involve intersections of class, gender, political power, marginality, and, although I paid less attention to it, race. Of course, this could be perceived as a very reductive understanding of intersectionality, but I think that you can promote a very similar perspective without necessarily using the term.

AMB: *Finally, I'd like to ask you briefly about your current projects. What are you working on at the moment?*

JA: Well, I am working on two pieces at the moment. The first project builds on the book *Invisible in Austin: Life and Labor in an American City* (2015), which was a collaborative work that I edited, the contributors exploring together the life stories of the people working at the bottom of the social order in the city of Austin. We have now taken this same approach a little further, to look at questions of marginality, poverty, suffering, hardship, and hope in Latin America. Working on this with some old and some new collaborators was a great help during the pandemic because we were still working via Zoom. My second project is another collaborative project, with Sofia Servián, which is inspired by a question that is very similar to the ones raised by Larissa Lomnitz in *Networks and Marginality: Life in a Mexican Shantytown* (1977) and Carol Stack in *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (1974), almost 50 years ago: how do the marginalized survive (as Larissa Lomnitz puts it in the title of the Spanish version of her study)? This interest goes back to the question that I asked at the very beginning of my academic career. In the book, we are attempting to shed light not only on the ways in which people survive, but also on the ways in which they make sense of their world and their communities through mutual aid, networks, and political action. In doing so, the work not only challenges common narratives and portrayals of the poor who exist on the urban periphery, but it also mixes academic writing with the more journalistic forms of *crónicas*—and I am very excited to see what the reviewers will say.

AMB: *Thank you for this conversation.*

Note

- 1 See also Á. Ortega, K. Jensen, and J. Auyero. 2023. "You Will Never Walk Alone: Ethnographic Training as Collective Endeavor." *Teaching Sociology*. Epub ahead of print: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X221147848>.



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PART II

The social life of urban violence



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7

“HALF BREAD IS BETTER THAN NONE”

Surviving in the Accra Airport City

Irene Appeaning Addo

Introduction

“Half bread is better than none.”

Male respondent (Accra Airport City, 2022)

This remark was made by a Ghanaian married male security officer at the Accra Airport City who has four children and recently returned from Nigeria after a 15-year sojourn. The remark was in response to a question about why he kept returning to work in the enclave, despite the low wages and high cost of living in the Airport City. His response, implying “half a loaf is better than none,” colloquially meant it was better to accept less or little than to have nothing at all. He was driven by the urge to survive and to provide for his family given that his first daughter was a secondary-level student who was shuttling from their home in Adenta to the Central Business District in Accra, about 15km away.

The reality for marginalized groups in African cities is that they attempt to survive the harsh urban environment and to meet their everyday needs by continually working in precarious situations, despite the unfavorable conditions and the policed and restrictive system (Huchzermeyer 2016). The sociocultural dynamics of the urban poor intersect with the forms of governance and management structures prevailing in restrictive spaces, resulting in socio-spatial restructuring and inequalities that shape a person’s experience (Ong 2006; Yeoh and Lam 2022; Bandaiko, Annan-Aggrey, and Arku 2021). The neoliberal planning of such restrictive spaces does not recognize the diversity among its users, creating obstacles that are often not understood in conventional ways. Users are influenced by the spaces in which they work or live, and the structures or processes operating within these spaces may intersect with the social characteristics of individuals to create barriers in their progression. Crenshaw (1991) argues that ignoring differences within groups contributes to tension among them. Thus, the marginalized have used innovative means, networks, and connections to navigate around the restrictive systems by “commoning” spaces. “Commoning” involves “acts of mutual support, conflict, negotiation, communication, and experimentation” blending “production (self provisioning), governance, culture, and personal interests” into an integrated system to manage shared resources (Bollier 2015, 2). Although commoning is a familiar

feature in African cities, “urban commoning” in African Airport Cities has not been studied. This chapter explores how Accra Airport City is undergoing such a process of commoning.

This paper unpacks the tensions and contradictions surrounding commoning processes by low-wage workers and informal food vendors within Accra Airport City through the intersectionality framework. Airport City is a capitalist urban enclosure with an emphasis on upmarket business, ensuring careful policing of the type of businesses that can formally occupy the space. Meanwhile, the invisibilized community of low-wage workers, who are necessary to maintain this high-end look, are excluded from actively participating in the activities of the urban space. The conundrum unfolds as the exclusivity of the space simultaneously guarantees some kind of stable, unsaturated employment for the workers and a captive market for street vending activities, thereby fostering both the creation of liminalities and provisionalities for low-wage workers’ survival.

A qualitative research approach was employed, purposively sampling low-wage and working-class individuals in Accra Airport City. The sample comprised security officers, cleaners, waiters and waitresses, hotel room attendants, and an assistant manager. Data collection involved a semi-structured questionnaire focusing on respondents’ sociodemographic profiles, access to everyday needs in the enclave, and the motivations for working there. A total of 23 interviews were conducted, which included 14 males and nine females. While some respondents permitted the research assistants to record the interviews, others declined, fearing that the divulged information could be used as evidence against them. However, we assured them that none of the information would be used in such a way and emphasized that this research was purely academic. The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded into themes.

The following sections discuss the intersectionality framework and the process of commoning African urban spaces as a counteraction to restrictive planning ideals. This is followed by a discussion on urban commoning in Accra.

Diversity and intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989), drawing from Black feminist activism, scholarship, and critical race theory, coined the term intersectionality to analyze the multiple ways that race, gender, and other social characteristics influence the vulnerabilities of women of color and inform the understanding of marginalization and inequalities in disadvantaged communities. According to Carbadó et al. (2013, 304), Crenshaw “exposed and sought to dismantle the instantiations of marginalization that operated within institutionalized discourses that legitimized existing power relations e.g., law” and placed “into sharp relief how discourses of resistance, e.g., feminism and antiracism, could function as sites that produced and legitimized marginalization.” Using intersectionality can expose systemic imbalances within institutions. This means that intersectionality could be a heuristic tool, a theory, or a methodology that examines the dynamics of sameness or difference within the power relations of a system or structure (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013).

Loden and Rosener’s (1991) diversity wheel has been used to elucidate the intersecting forces that produce marginalization and inequality in communities and systems. This wheel explains the diversity that exists in entities and how these different dimensions may intersect with each other to introduce inequalities in organizations. The diversity wheel is made up of three basic levels: level 1, the personality dimension or internal characteristics; level 2, the external dimension or social and cultural elements; and level 3, the organizational dimension. A fourth level that considers the events of the global era has also been included in the analysis by organizational scholars. According to Loden and Rosener’s diversity wheel, the internal dimensions of a personality

may be impacted by the external dimensions, which may in turn be impacted by organizational dimensions in a workplace. Within an organization, a person is influenced by the group or area in which they work and the structures or processes that operate within, which may include systemic barriers and bias (APS Group Scotland 2022). Historical, cultural, political, and global events may likely impact personalities and introduce some form of power dynamics. For example, neoliberal planning ideals and policies may shape the ways in which spaces are produced, and this, in turn, is likely to influence the experiences of personalities within those spaces. Understanding how the complex diversities intersect will enable us to appreciate the structural inequalities that exist in urban environments.

The marginalization and inequalities that persist in African urban spaces operate on several layers; they are structural, political, and cultural. The limited resources of marginalized groups place them in precarious situations. The vulnerability of such groups is exacerbated by the existing policies and laws that govern cities. For example, slum dwellers experience different forms of harm, abuse, eviction, and discrimination in African cities. Rigon (2022) asserts that slum interventions often assume that all residents living in informal settlements have similar aspirations and needs for better housing. As a result, the diversity that exists among the residents is not taken into consideration, hindering the possibility of interventions yielding just outcomes. Therefore, Rigon (2022) argues for an intersectional and relational approach that focuses on the relationships between residents and between different groups of residents. Similarly, an intersectional approach to the planning of the Accra Airport City would have highlighted the diversity among the users of the airport city space, thereby minimizing existing inequalities.

Commoning of African cities

The planning of African urban cities is underpinned by their colonial past and the contemporary neoliberal market-driven economy, intersecting with urbanization, globalization, and migration. This interplay produces social inequalities in the urban sphere. The hegemonic and pervasive neoliberal framing, in which “urban resources, such as land, are continually enclosed and access to resources for urban actors is facilitated by economic/wage relations” (Waliuzzaman and Alam 2022, 98) is constantly producing new forms of urbanism. According to Carmody and Owusu (2016), the development of neoliberal urban spaces in African cities is in response to the continent’s urban crisis. Neoliberalism was posited as a way out of Africa’s urban crisis (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Unfortunately, neoliberal reforms have led to state restructuring, rescaling, and inequalities, resulting in continuous dispossession, marginalization, and the privatization of new urban enclosures (Wijsman and Feagan 2019; Khanyile and Fatti 2022; H. Palmer, Da Silva, and Low 2017).

The neoliberal paradigm has thus produced contested and segregated spaces. Urban commoning is a counteraction to the current global trend of late capitalism and neo-liberal urbanism which proffers an extractive and exclusionary logic of the city over a more inclusive urban order (H. Palmer, Da Silva, and Low 2017). Commoning, as a social practice, serves as both a resource and a process. It is a practice that emancipates urban potentialities and actualizes them, thereby leading to urban transformations (Sohn, Kousoulas, and Buyns 2015). Urban commoning has transformed African urban cities by enabling the marginalized to inhabit the intermediate or “common” spaces between imposed planning ideals and popular change (H. Palmer, Da Silva, and Low 2017).

Commoning of Accra

Gillespie (2016) observed that “Accra is home to a large informal proletariat that is excluded from formal wage labour and housing markets and therefore has to create urban commons in order to reproduce itself” (66). Accra is a divided city increasingly characterized by inequality, segregation, and class struggles over urban space as the urban poor face dispossession. Urban dispossession in Accra occurs through privatization and new enclosures of communal land, clearing street hawkers from public spaces, and evicting squatters from city centers (66). In these examples, the activities result in expulsion and dispossession. However, the low-wage workers and food vendors in Accra have not been entirely dispossessed of common spaces; instead, these “common” spaces enable them to adapt while working in the exclusive Airport City, as I will return to below.

New forms of contemporary urbanism are occurring in Ghanaian cities. In response to the country’s failing macroeconomics in the 1990s, institutional restructuring encouraged public entities to venture into profit-oriented businesses. This shift led to privatization, new closures, dispossession, and marketization, resulting in the establishment of large private real estate developments and residential enclaves in Ghana. Developments such as the Accra Shopping Mall, West Hill Mall, Achimota Mall, China Mall, and gated residential communities exemplify these high-end developments. Accra Airport City is one such real estate development established through private-public partnerships to support the activities of Kotoka International Airport (Arthur 2018). These large-scale capitalist developments have promoted enclave urbanism and have been criticized for reshaping notions of modernity and promoting consumerism (P. I. Korah, Osborne, and Matthews 2021; A. Eduful and M. Eduful 2022; Yeboah, Asante-Wusu, and Arku 2023).

The process of commoning in Accra takes various forms—creating squatter settlements, taking government-reserved lands and green belt zones for agriculture farming, and sleeping in open spaces under bridges and in stations. Gillespie (2016) describes these everyday practices of appropriation as urban commoning where the marginalized groups establish a “claim over urban space through sustained use and appropriation” (69).

The historical development of Airport City

After the overthrow of Dr Kwame Nkrumah in 1966—the first president of the newly independent Ghana—the country experienced a series of economic challenges, marked by several *coup-d’états* and government overthrows between 1966 and 1981. This period of political and economic instability culminated in Lt. Jerry John Rawlings coming to power as the head of a military government in 1981. In 1983, Ghana sought relief from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, resulting in the implementation of an Economic Recovery Program (ERP) to mitigate the country’s distressed macroeconomic conditions.

The Economic Recovery Program (ERP) entailed economic measures such as “trade liberalisation, subsidy withdrawal, currency devaluation, job retrenchment and a reduction in parastatal activity ... [which] were meant, among other things, to stimulate production (especially of exports), discourage rent-seeking behaviour and correct budgetary and balance-of-payment problems” (Gyimah-Boadi 1990, 328). With the adoption of the ERP, Ghana’s economy began to improve, experiencing a steady rise in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 21% in 1995 to 25% in 2005 and 30% by 2015 (Huq and Tribe 2018, 33). The favorable economic growth prospects, the attractiveness of the market, and the macroeconomic and political stability after the ERP positioned Ghana for foreign direct investments (Asante 2006).

Following the favorable macroeconomic environment, the Ghana Airports Company Limited (GACL) acquired a piece of land in front of the Kotoka International Airport, the only international airport in Ghana at that time, as part of the Accra Planning and Development Programme in 1991. Ghana Airways, the only airline in the country, had been experiencing economic challenges, and the organization badly needed economic intervention. This was found in the public-private real estate establishment, Accra Airport City.

Airport City 1 is the commercial entity of the Ghana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) and is managed by the Ghana Airports Company Limited (GACL). It was commissioned in 1998 as a space for multinational businesses following a structural plan by the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) in 1991 to manage the future growth of the city. The urban planning paved the way for the development of the Accra Airport City 1 project. As a gateway city, it was anticipated that Accra would serve as a connecting node with the world economy and global capital and be the preferred location for foreign companies (Grant 2001). Hence, the development of the Airport City was seen as a viable project that would cater to international visitors arriving in the country by providing leisure, residential, and other services.

Findings

This section presents some findings from newspapers and respondents suggesting that Accra Airport City is home to major architectural masterpieces creating an architecturally pleasing environment and a place of work opportunities. At the same time, Airport City is a source of provisionality created through opportunities for unapproved food trading, hawking, and street vending. These activities are achieved through “commoning” and blurring of the lines between the formal hegemonic planned space and the informal food vending activities flourishing in the liminal spaces.

A glocalized urban space

Airport City is a glocalized space featuring both local and multinational businesses. In 2016, GhanaWeb described the enclave as “home to major architectural master pieces,” stating it was “one of the most sought-after business districts in the capital ... a reflection of the quantum of foreign investment into Ghana’s real estate sector” (GhanaWeb 2016, par 3). Currently, the airport city is an island with a concentration of high-rise buildings, featuring modernist architectural designs by “star architects” and local architects. The “frontier” real estate investment was developed through public-private partnership, although most of the investment capital came from local private real estate developers instead of global businesses (Arthur 2018; A. Korah 2020).

The enclave, situated along the Liberation Road between the Tetteh Quashie Interchange and the 37 Military Hospital, measures about 40 hectares and is subdivided into 29 plots. It is located within the high-income residential area of Accra known as the Airport residential area. Grant (2005) observed that the East Airport residential Community became the first gated development in the Greater Accra Region. In Grant and Yankson’s (2003) study of Accra, they found that the national liberalization policy supported private real estate development in Ghana, and the Airport residential area became a high-income community hosting a number of estate houses.

Interviews with the urban planner, GACL, workers within the enclave, media reports, as well as information shared on the websites of various businesses operating in the enclave, confirmed Airport City as a “world-class city” space. The urban planner was inspired by international airports

in Singapore, Malaysia, Schiphol, and Copenhagen. Multinational businesses like Ibis Style Hotel, Holiday Inn, Marriott Hotel, Pullman Hotel (under construction), KFC, and the Marina Mall are found in the enclave. Local private businesses made up of offices, banks, restaurants, car companies, telecommunication businesses, and many more are also located in the enclave. Quasi-public and public entities like the Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) and the National Communications Authority (NCA) are also located there.

The assemblage of international and national businesses presents Accra Airport City as a well-crafted and spatially-imagined glocalised enclave. The outcome is a space with competing architectural edifices, with one such design, the One Airport Square, winning an international award. The enclave appears detached and separated from the rest of urban Accra due to its location, lying adjacent to the Kotoka International Airport, the international entry and exit point to Ghana.

Accra Airport City had a mission to create an impression on the arriving guests, and this impression was confirmed by the users and workers when they described the enclave as beautiful, nice, amazing, clean, organized, and “one of the best-planned spaces” in Ghana. In contrast, a worker explained that although the buildings and the environment were nice, this was not reflected in their daily lives as workers, implying that the wages they earned were not commensurate with the general perception held by the public. The perception was that multinational organizations pay better than most local businesses.

However, several of the respondents were contract workers operating through contracted businesses. This meant that they did not have direct access to the management of the organization except through the company that hired them. Inside the Marina Mall is a supermarket that caters to household goods and meals. Other fast-food businesses, such as KFC and coffee shops, also provided meals that could be accessed by the workers. Yet, the workers explained that the prices of the items sold in the mall were exorbitant, and they were deterred from buying from these businesses.

Working in the enclave

The operation of the enclave requires that all income classes work within it. The low-wage workers mainly provided services to maintain the facilities; their salaries were very low, ranging between 400 GHS and 1800 GHS.¹ The highest-paid respondent had a bachelor's degree and worked as an assistant manager in a restaurant. The other respondents were mainly security staff, cleaners, waiters, housekeepers, and room attendants. Occasionally workers in the hotels and restaurants were provided with meals at their workplaces. Some of the security staff were picked up from their homes in the mornings and dropped off at night. Some of the women working in the Marriott hotel boarded in the warehouse of the hotel located outside the enclave on their free days. Aside from these formal workers, temporary construction workers were also found in the enclave.

One respondent remarked, “I sometimes feel shy disclosing my salary to people. When people hear that I work at the Airport City they think I am making a lot of money ..., but that is not true.” Another 34-year-old explained that the fact that they were working in Airport City did not mean they were earning good salaries. He explained,

If someone is earning GHS 2000, the person does not mind spending GHS 20. However, it is not fair for the security staff and the cleaners who are earning between GHS 500 and GHS 800 respectively, to buy food at the same price.... Besides, the condition of service in the job is not good, and yet you cannot complain. It is like someone stepping on your toes and asking you

not to cry out. The tariffs have been increased ..., but my salary has not increased. In a day, I spend more than GHS 50 on my family.

As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, another male respondent, in explaining his situation and how he survives on a meager salary, remarked, “Half bread is better than none” [half a loaf is better than none]. This colloquially means that it is better to accept less or little than to have nothing at all. But he had devised strategies for survival, and that was his religious belief in God. His faith in God led him to resign himself to the position he found himself in, hoping that one day, things would improve. He commented, “[As for] me, I am a bible student. I have hope in God, not human beings. ... I know God will make a way for me when there is no way. ... What can I do? I will [just] focus on God.”

The workers felt grateful for the stable income, but most of them were searching for better job opportunities or saving up to continue their education or start their own businesses. Others found different ways of earning additional income. For example, a security officer, who dabbled as a pastor, would preach on the buses he boarded to and from home so that he could receive some donations. He explained,

I preach on the bus when I am coming to work. Before I reach my workplace (Airport City), people say pastor take, pastor take, pastor take. It’s what I have been surviving on, and not the work I am doing.... Nobody will know how I get my daily bread to feed my children and take them to school.

A female respondent, who was formerly a security officer and a front desk person at a bank, used to receive tips from customers until she was redeployed to a different building in the enclave and the tips stopped. Another female respondent, who occasionally worked as a waitress, did cosmetic makeup for clients outside her official working hours and “entertained” guests at the restaurant where she earned tips from clients. When we probed further, she just responded that she ensures that the guests are satisfied. Studies have shown that hotel workers are faced with the challenge of keeping customers satisfied and returning. It was incumbent on her as a waitress to ensure that customers felt welcome. Due to the meager salaries, most of the workers were not on benefits such as health insurance or transport allowance. Very few workers received gifts during Christmas or Islamic celebrations from their bosses or the company.

Accessing everyday needs within the enclave

Food, shelter, and water are the basic needs of life. In this research, we identified food as one of the key everyday needs of the working class in Accra Airport City. The prices of food sold in the urban enclave were a deterrent to worker participation in the enclave. While the low-income workers earned salaries between 400 to 1200 GHS per month, the lowest-priced food item sold in the enclave was 25 GHS per plate. A 29-year-old male freight forwarder explained why he bought food from outside his workplace in the Aviation Cargo Handling yard,

The food sold in the Police Barracks is reasonably cheaper than the food sold at my workplace. I do not buy food from the Marina Mall or the enclave... Can I afford it? ... I also do not buy food from the hawkers and traders around and within the Airport City because they all inflate their prices, and it becomes expensive because of the location.... If I have the opportunity,

I will recommend to my association leaders that we need to take immediate action to solve the situation (to introduce a canteen).

Recognizing that food sold in the enclave was expensive, some workers brought food from home or bought food on the way to avoid buying food from the enclave. Others visited traditional eateries (chop bars) in the adjacent police barracks, the Aviance cargo handling yard, and the street in front of the Alliance Française Ecole, where food was sold in mobile vans or uncompleted buildings in the enclave. The workers became patrons of food joints that were located close to their workplaces because the security staff and cashiers could not leave their desks for a very long time. Although these eateries were mainly frequented by low-income workers, other income groups, including the middle-level staff, also visited the food vendors in the enclave or sent their subordinates to buy food for them. During the fieldwork, I encountered two male computer analysts who explained that although they could afford to buy food from the restaurants, they preferred to buy food from the vendors because they could enjoy *fufu*, a traditional staple food from the vendors.

Even though the workers felt that prices of food were generally high, both inside and outside the enclave, it was convenient to access food nearby rather than having to travel further from their workplaces. A 34-year-old said,

I have different places that I purchase food from when I come to work. The places are “aviation,” “makola,” it is just lower hill (Stanbic Heights), “barracks” and so many other places. My only worry is that they are all expensive. I buy beans and the least [cheapest option] is sold for GHS 5.... I buy from around because it is the nearest place. The nature of my work (as a car parking attendant) is such that you must always be present. You can be called at any time to come and assist security to park the cars. Because of that, you do not have enough time to go far to buy your food. You must return shortly. That is the reason why we buy our food from nearby places.

The workers were compelled to buy food from the mall only on Sundays when other places were closed. One of the respondents explained that it was mainly the politicians and celebrities who purchased goods in the malls because he could not afford to buy a pair of shoes selling for 1200 GHS. So, although they worked at the shop tills as cashiers and as security staff, they could not afford to consume the food and goods sold in Marina Mall.

Making a living in the enclave

Informal traders operated from an unfinished building on GACL’s land in the enclave. Others were also selling cooked food such as *waakye* (rice cooked with beans) from construction yards. The activities of the traders were not officially recognized and regulated; they were temporary and could be evicted at any time. They paid no rent or tax, but they served the needs of the low-income workers. Together, they maintained the surroundings of the unfinished building while the authorities seemed to turn a blind eye. The traders operating at the construction yards could be referred to as ephemeral traders who establish businesses when they see an opportunity to trade.

However, the traders in the enclave and on the streets had some confrontations with the Marriott Hotel and Marina Mall, respectively. A temporary metal fence had been used to cordon off the activities of that space from visitors to the Marriott hotel. The price of food in the unfinished building was reasonable compared to what is served in the hotel restaurants. Discussions held with the food vendors in the enclave revealed that they had made several requests to GACL to establish

a canteen in the enclave, but this had not been successful. GACL insisted that the initial planning and zoning of the enclave did not make provision for an informal canteen, and it was not their responsibility to cater to the workers. The official went further to state that he does not buy food from the enclave because he thinks he cannot afford it. His advice to the low-income workers was to bring their food and other needs from home. However, some of the workers report to work as early as 5:00 am and leave work as late as midnight. Others stay in the peri-urban areas of Accra and require about two hours to get to work.

Concluding remarks—exclusionary practices, intersectionality, liminality, and commoning: The blurring of boundaries

Exclusion unfolds in the everyday practices of the workers in terms of their access to resources, modes of consumption, and the formation of associations. Despite the efficient functioning of the enclave, which depended on the services provided by the workers, businesses were designed to target “high-earning clientele” and people staying in the surrounding residential neighborhoods. According to A. Eduful (2021, 9), “the neighborhoods closer to AM [Accra Mall] including East Legon, Cantonments, Airport residential area, Ridge, Spintex Road, etc., are generally expensive places that do not necessarily cater to the living conditions of the low-income staff.” Airport City is approximately a two-minute drive away from the Accra Mall.

The laws of Ghana prohibit discrimination against people, and the planning regulations are deemed to be inclusive. This impression was confirmed in a discussion with the secretary of the association of businesses in the enclave, who stated that they did not discriminate against anyone in the enclave. However, the security staff revealed that they could not form an association to relay their challenges to management. This is because they were deemed to be temporary workers and, therefore, must channel all their grievances through their hiring agency.

Research has shown the vulnerability and precariousness associated with temporary or casual employees in non-regulated employment arrangements, resulting in inequalities at work in terms of employment, wages, and working conditions (Burgess, Connell, and Winterton 2013). These workers were afraid to register any complaints because they feared losing their jobs. The absence of an organized union for the workers to channel their grievances represents a form of domination that creates insecurity and social inequality. Without union representation, the workers are unable to contribute to discussions concerning the operations in the enclave or negotiate for better conditions of service. Umbers (2023, 1417) argues that unions “help solve collective action problems that otherwise stymie workers’ attempts to take industrial action and compel employers to take better account of their interests.”

The workers’ mode of transportation also reveals exclusionary practices in the enclave. Public transport, such as *trotro*, is often used by the workers because of the reasonably priced fares. However, strict rules prohibit *trotros* from entering the enclave, forcing workers to disembark at bus stops located some distance away. Some back access points to the bus stops are locked and policed by security staff, as the entrances sit on the premises of individual companies such as SSNIT. Consequently, the workers are compelled to walk long distances to designated entrances to reach their workplaces. Only those in “private” vehicles and taxis are allowed to drive into the enclave. Kleibert (2018, 471) has observed that special economic zones or economic “islands” are “spaces of exception” that are globally connected, but locally disembedded, wealthy enclaves. According to her, these “spaces of exception” have laws, regulations, and the power to exclude and/or regulate the entry of different population groups.

The well-being of the low-income worker is affected in several ways. The intersection of minimal incomes, coupled with a lack of access to unionized groups that could advocate for their grievances, and a restrictive planning scheme that fails to address everyday needs such as access to affordable food, has introduced inequalities into life in the Airport City. Despite the recognition that the enclave is a “space of exception,” the low-income workers have found innovative ways to “common” the urban space. The social facade of the enclave is presented as inclusive; however, the pricing of goods and services prevents workers from fully participating in the activities of the urban space, resulting in an insider-outsider dynamic. This “insiderness” and “outsiderness” allows for constantly shifting social locations negotiated through the everyday actions of the workers. On the one hand, workers complain about insufficient wages, on the other, they simultaneously feel privileged to be working in the enclave.

Bresnihan and Byrne (2015) describe the creation of informal and in-between spaces in privatized urban space as “commoning.” Commoning becomes a multifaceted process through which common spaces are created and shared by all (Stavrides 2015). The building of social relations in the common spaces is based on sharing, cooperation, and solidarity while allowing for collective self-management (Stavrides 2015; Waliuzzaman and Alam 2022; Cobbinah 2023; Zoma and Sawadogo 2022). The commoning process unfolds in innovative and creative ways that support workers’ determination to survive, presenting a continuous struggle between authorities, low-wage workers, and food vendors. Food vendors “elude or slip” through the formal structures by hawking on the streets within the enclave or selling from the bus stops outside the enclave.

The low-wage workers in the enclave have creatively devised ways to common by creating liminal spaces that meet their everyday needs and ensure a reliable flow of job opportunities both within and outside the enclave. These strategies help them to cope with their vulnerabilities and ensure their survival. This achievement is facilitated through “a complex and entangled web of networks, relations, and interactions that often provisionally and situationally come to link together people working, surviving, and enjoying” (Di Nunzio 2022, 437) in a common space.

Turner (2017 [1969]) describes the space where these activities take place as a liminal space, the space between the formal and the informal. In liminal spaces, barriers break down, and *communitas*, or community sharing, transgresses and dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships of class, race, religion, and personality. *Communitas* refers to an unstructured community in which the people see themselves as equal or operating on an equal plane, and displaying the very spirit of community living. According to Downey, Kinane, and Parker (2016, 9), *communitas* could function as a “positive alternative to the often-problematic political concept of the nation-state and ideologies promulgated by the ruling elites.” Liminality and *communitas* challenge the hegemonic planning ideals of the enclave (Addo 2024a).

Thus, in the enclave, *communitas* are formed in liminal spaces where all income classes partake in meals sold by the food vendors. For example, *fufu*, a staple food made from cassava, is a delicacy that is eaten in most houses. Here, it is served with soup as patrons gather around communal tables at local “chop bars,” engaging in conversations ranging from politics to football, and everyday happenings. Normally, different income groups meet up, cross paths, or coexist, without necessarily mixing, but these liminal spaces afford them the possibility of interaction. Consequently, “liminality becomes not a source of alienation but a communally shared experience ... wherein everyone who participates ... shares and revels in the sacredness of the community” (Downey, Kinane, and Parker 2016, 8). Although participating in activities within liminal spaces may not necessarily create equality, certain barriers are temporarily dismantled in these spaces, enabling low-income and upper-income groups to engage in conversations about everyday

activities such as football. These conversations provide low-income workers with an opportunity to share their challenges and potentially gain support from others.

Liminal spaces, described as “transient spatialities” are increasingly becoming a common characteristic of contemporary African urban spaces, representing local manifestations of global market change and wider cultural shifts (Livingstone and Matthews 2017). Liminal spaces foster creativity and reveal practices of innovation, political renewal, and imagination. They also serve as negotiating territories to ensure collectivity and inclusivity, although they may simultaneously engender chronic feelings of fear, insecurity, invisibility, and a controlled existence (Thomassen 2016; O’Reilly 2018; Sletto and J. Palmer 2017). While the liminal spaces in Airport City allowed for creativity, the traders were also living in constant fear. The most pressing fear of the traders was eviction, which could happen at any time without notice.

Provisionality highlights the “temporariness, open-endedness and flexibility of urban lives, dwellings or livelihoods” (Guma 2021, 212) as it pertains to cities. Airport City is a place of provisionality, it provides a reliable source of job opportunities with very little competition. Both the low-wage workers and the food vendors make ample use of the sprawling spatial form of the urban enclave. Although the low-wage workers complained bitterly about their income, they also recognized that Airport City provided a regular source of job opportunities and income. Businesses in the enclave were always hiring to cater to the needs of customers. The buildings that were under construction also provided job vacancies that needed to be filled.

The organization of food vending in the enclave is built around a reliable micro-economy and self-governance that ensures the cleanliness of the surroundings, even around unfinished buildings. Guma (2021) calls for a reconsideration of provisional urban worlds in the Global South, arguing that recognizing the utility and possibilities of provisional urban worlds in city-making that transcend formal hegemonic urban planning is necessary for the survival of the urban poor. The temporariness, open-endedness, and flexibility surrounding the trading activities of food vendors, in spite of the formal planning rules, maintain a state of provisionality in the food vending business. Accra Airport City may be both restrictive and promote provisionality, with acts such as informal food vending and work opportunities functioning as platforms for critical engagement.

Non-responsive formal planning and piecemeal interventions often lead to the displacement and socio-spatial marginalization of poor households in urban spaces (Williams et al. 2022; Addo and Mba 2022). In response, the marginalized communities develop strategies to address their precarious situations, often circumventing or “going around” the formal system through informal means. Urban districts are acknowledged as sites of enduring transformations that mediate between residents’ needs and aspirations (Simone 2018). Moreover, research on mobilities has revealed the “variegatedness” and fluidity of the movement of people, goods, and information in African cities (Simone 2011).

Airport City, designed to attract a critical mass of foreign direct investment, is an urban space with formal and symbolic boundaries, hosting workers from different income classes in both multinational and local businesses. Irrespective of formal planning’s aversion to informality, the low-income workers subverted and invented ways to go around strict hegemonic planning. Operating on the periphery has become a scripted way of life for low-income workers as they seek to address their everyday needs. Despite its designation as a high-class business hub, informal food vending occurs on the peripheries and liminal spaces and outside the edges of the formal regulatory frameworks. The symbolic boundaries between formality and informality blur within these liminal spaces (Addo 2024b). Guma (2021) similarly observed that informal and transient structures offer viable alternatives that support the marginalized to operate in exclusionary neoliberal spaces.

The interlocking of wage disparity, limited access to resources, and dispossession of food vendors, mainly affecting women, exposes multiple power relations in Airport City. The situation highlights the spatial reproduction of inequalities in a space where food vendors, who are predominantly women, face structural oppressions within the legal and capitalist systems that are maintained, reproduced, and expressed through the management of Accra Airport City. There is a perception that allowing the female traders to operate in the unfinished building or overlooking commoning in the liminal spaces of the enclave implies inclusivity. However, while commoning is important, it does not necessarily eliminate stresses or remedy inequalities because the urban planning of the enclave has been aligned with the work and life patterns of men, neglecting the women's work. Commoning, then, is a key concept in relation to the notion of intersectionality, because it allows us to look critically at "socio-nature transformations [see Nightingale 2019] and, how these transformations, when viewed through a feminist intersectional lens, can expose issues of inequality, power and privilege" (Clement et al. 2019, 8).

This research has highlighted five dimensions of urban commoning in neoliberal capitalist development and how intersectionality as a method can expose the power dynamics at play in the urban space. The first is the interrelatedness between commoning and liminality in exclusive urban spaces. Second, urban commoning is identified as a survival strategy in these spaces. Third, it discusses provisionality as an outcome of urban commoning. Fourth, it examines the insider-outsider dynamics resulting from commoning. Fifth, it considers commoning as a form of critical engagement in urban spaces.

In order to have a clearer understanding of the structural oppression that affects the everyday practices and material realities of marginalized groups in neoliberal capitalist planning, and to ensure the creation of a more just urban space, there is a need for an intersectional approach to studying urban spatialities. As Mollett and Faria (2018) argue, the analysis of the spatialities of intersectional power is imperative as white masculinist nationalist supremacy is on the rise as a hegemonic formation, and we should not be tempted to lean towards universalism and a naturalized conception of either social categories or space. There is a need for further research on the practices of commoning in Accra Airport City in order to expose the coloniality of power using an intersectional approach.

Note

- 1 11 GHS = 1 USD as of 24 February 2023, according to the Bank of Ghana exchange rate. Meanwhile, according to the World Bank, the poverty headcount ratio in Ghana, a lower middle-income country, stood at \$2.15 a day in 2017. On 1 January 2023, the minimum wage in Ghana was revised to 14.88 GHS, bringing the minimum salary to about 450 GHS.

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8

NEGOTIATING EVERYDAY SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

Young Londoners imagining their futures from a deprived area

Christy Kulz

Introduction: Race, class, space, and symbolic violence

This chapter explores how race, class, and space intersect and converge to mark and position students, highlighting how symbolic violence impacts young people's lives. Fourteen-year-old British Indian Sanjit describes being selected by his school for a trip to Oxford University. He is told that Oxford is keen to recruit high-achieving students from “lesser areas” like Enfield. Through this Oxford visit, Sanjit comes to realize his marginal position in relation to elite spaces. His marginalization manifests not only through his ethnic minority and working-class background, but through living in a poor area of London. In British cities, urban regeneration policies often include programs—like pupils from deprived areas visiting Oxbridge—which are aimed at altering “the aspirations, outlooks and geographical imaginations of young people” (Raco 2009, 441). These initiatives foster aspirational citizenship, yet as Raco points out, these programs ironically focus on encouraging aspirational subjects to leave deprived spaces, rather than improving them (2009, 441). The subjectivities of residents from poor neighborhoods often feature as an explanation for low aspirations and poverty itself. Yet, contrastingly, students' narratives show the limits experienced by those who live in poor areas despite their aspirations.

The chapter contextualizes and situates these complex intersections while remaining mindful of feminist intersectionality's lineage within Black feminist theory. Mirza describes how intersectionality “enables us to knit together a complex array of unstable ‘mobile’ subjectivities which by imposition, choice or desire are written on and lived within the black female body” (2015, 4). Mirza writes specifically in reference to the Black female body, yet her assertion has purchase for a wide range of “marginalized” lives. Intersectionality is not just about how different phenomena relate to one another and interact, it is about the historical constitution of domination (Tate and Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2022, 2), whereby inequalities and different emotions are not individual characteristics, but sets of situated processes (Anthias 2002). Within student narratives, the production of race and class becomes closely intertwined with space and then tied to the production of symbolic violence. Rather than drawing on a political arithmetic calculation of class where people fit into pre-formatted classifications (Savage et al. 2013), I follow a Bourdieusian feminist class analysis where classification is a process and a struggle to claim and possess value.

It is also about being able to establish and define who and what has value, which carries an inherent moral judgment (Skeggs 2004). We have seen a move away from talking about class in the UK through the transition from industrial to financial capitalism, but this does not mean class has disappeared. While Britons may not describe or recognize themselves using this language due to the vilification of the working classes as valueless “chavs,” the struggle to possess and claim value continues unabated (Tyler 2008). We can see this through the narratives of young people as they seek to leave or try to defend their neighborhood.

Bourdieu’s concepts of symbolic power and symbolic violence are integral to the analysis, as processes of legitimation are exclusionary. It is not just about possessing the right capital; this capital must be recognized in order to carry symbolic capital. Bourdieu defines symbolic power as “...the power to constitute the given by stating it, to create appearances and belief, to confirm and transform the vision of the world and thereby action in the world, and therefore the world itself” (1977, 117). Symbolic power only produces these effects when both the speaker and their words are recognized as legitimate. Or, as Bourdieu (1991, 170) describes, symbolic power acts as “an almost magic power” that allows one to access resources that are usually only acquired by force. Unlike the visible brute force of physical violence, symbolic violence features a more insidious form of domination that is naturalized or misrecognized. This leads to power relations not being recognized “for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, xiii). Acquiring value is relational and dependent on the recognition of others; it is not just about getting objects and knowing what to do with them, instead “what matters is how they are conceptualized (objectified) by relations to others” (Skeggs 2015, 209).

Firstly, this chapter shows how the material deprivation and cultural devaluation of young people’s neighborhoods and schools impact students, particularly as more prosperous areas of London become increasingly aligned with white middle-classness. Secondly, the chapter examines how students discuss and defend against growing up and attending a school in a denigrated area, exploring how students often do not fully embrace aspirational individualistic narratives, yet struggle to find alternatives. Finally, I explore how students’ dreams of spatial mobility also act as a means of accessing social mobility while escaping the symbolic violence of judgment. The chapter maps the relationship between spatial and social mobility, arguing that social mobility can be regarded as “the recycling of inequality” that leaves inequitable structures intact while promoting a mythical belief in the notion of social justice (Reay 2013). While young people attempt to attain social mobility by leaving areas of “territorial stigmatization” (Wacquant 2008) or racially marked territories (Gilroy 1987), they can also experience pain and estrangement via social and spatial relocation (Lawler 2005). These intersectional positions highlight the symbolic violence wrought by social mobility dreams as promoted through dominant educational discourses in England, as persistent inequalities disrupt claims of a meritocratic society. Here, ethnic minority and working-class students must escape “urban cultures” positioned as lacking value in order to stop being “urban children” and achieve success (Kulz 2017).

While I do not have space to extensively describe the structure of the English educational system, schools are key sites of social categorization, reproduction, and exclusion. Since the late 1970s, Britain has moved from a Keynesian social welfare state model toward a mode of neoliberal governance whereby “neoliberalism is the pursuit of the disenchantment of politics by economics” (Davies 2016, 6). Education has not escaped this shift; it has followed a quasi-market logic through the implementation of academies and free schools by the New Labour government since 2000. Academies were modeled on Margaret Thatcher’s City Technology Colleges, with inspiration from

US Charter Schools and Swedish *friskolor*. They are part of a global policy trend where privately run, yet publicly funded institutions claim to drive up standards. Despite funding coming from the state, Multi Academy Trusts and academies are free from local democratic oversight. The ethos of the system places teachers, schools, and students in competition through extensive processes of testing and ranking evidenced by school league tables, performance-related pay for teachers, rigid ability setting, and school inspection reports (Ball 2012; Courtney and Gunter 2015; Kulz, Morrin and McGinity 2022). Students like Annalise and Justin describe how they feel they are “the product, not the consumers” of education, as they are “manufactured” by the institution through extensive testing and rules regarding behavior.

Urban space, stigma, and mobility

Feminist geographers like Doreen Massey have highlighted how space and our social subjectivities are a relationally developed phenomenon, constructed through interconnectedness (1994, 122). Valentine (2007) draws on feminist intersectionality in conjunction with a concern for space to show how space and context play a key role in how we come to understand and position ourselves. Our positioning is not static, but changes across different contexts and spaces. As subjects move between spaces, there are moments of disidentification and discontinuity, making intersectionality something “spatially constructed, constituted and experienced” (Valentine 2007, 19). This approach signals space’s more active role. Löw (2023) describes how space is often treated as a residual category rather than a key variable, highlighting how alterations in spatial arrangements can trigger social change, rather than spatial changes simply resulting from social changes.

Spaces can also become inscribed on the body. Referencing the spatial figure of place, Benson and Jackson (2013, 797–98) describe how “repeated discursive practices enact and re-enforce particular understandings of place; it is therefore through the practice of everyday life that space is remade and place re-inscribed on the individual.” The notion of place as written on the body is useful when thinking about how stigmatized urban spaces become attached to certain, often minoritized, and working-class bodies, to effectively classify and racialize inhabitants. Wacquant writes about the “potent stigma associated with living in a bounded urban area publicly regarded as a place of relegation, and widely equated with social failure, destitution, and crime” (2008, 147). Notably, he terms these areas both “penalized and penalizing,” highlighting how these spaces—regarded as territorial or bounded containers and located at the bottom of the “symbolic hierarchy of neighborhoods”—stigmatize their residents (149). This “*taint of place*” (238, his italics) is further reinforced by discourses of denigration like UK discourses separating the poor and racialized into deserving “strivers” versus benefit-scramming scroungers and shirkers (Tyler 2015). While a place can disqualify individuals from full acceptance in society in the sense described by Goffman, Wacquant goes on to assert that, unlike other factors, place can be negated to various degrees through geographic mobility (2008, 238). Yet, as Born (2023) has shown, those who grow up in denigrated spaces often carry this territorial stigma with them and employ different strategies to cope with the negative associations tied to their old neighborhoods.

My participants’ narratives connect spatial mobility with social mobility, something that has also been evidenced through lifestyle migration literature (Benson 2011; O’Reilly 2000). Middle-class migration outside of the UK can present a way to preserve the erosion of middle-class capital (Leonard and Walsh 2019). Yet, for more working-class mobile subjects, migration either within or outside of the UK is not a means to enact social reproduction, but a way to disrupt it. Spatial mobility is envisioned as a way to escape the social markers of the UK; however, social mobility

achieved either through migration abroad or movement within the UK to “better” areas is not without its costs.

Social mobility has been critiqued as a problematic solution to social inequality. Ingram and Gamsu’s analysis of UK agencies like the Social Mobility Commission (SMC), highlights how its “misguided agenda” promotes contradictory understandings of mobility that “compound and conceal existing inequalities” (2022, 189). The working classes are presented as lacking the appropriate qualities for success, with qualities like “resilience” and “grit” promoted by UK government-run character education programs (Bull and Allen 2018). Rather than the middle and upper classes benefiting from access to resources and power that are tied to structural and hereditary phenomena, they are positioned as simply possessing appropriate individualities. Mallman (2017, 2) describes how working-class university students’ feelings of illegitimacy were often attributed to their “flawed natural ability” rather than a lack of inherited symbolic and economic resources in comparison to middle-class peers. Meanwhile, celebratory social mobility narratives do not recognize the estrangement experienced via class movement, as cultural dispositions alter and create tension (Lawler 1999, 2005; Friedman 2014; Curl, Lareau, and Wu 2018).

The tension and pain caused by this mobility are highly intersectional. Cole and Omari’s (2003) research on socially mobile African Americans shows how the racialization they face is cut across by class, while Rollock and her colleagues’ text, *The Colour of Class* (2014), examines how the Black middle classes navigate UK educational structures. Black feminist bell hooks (2000) describes her journey from a working-class background to one of economic privilege as traumatic, as she gained class consciousness through contact with Black elites within the university setting. Yet UK mobility narratives and their focus on individual pathways to academic achievement overlook the plight of millions of Britons who will not attend Russell Group universities and who will continue to struggle to find steady, adequately paid employment (Ingram and Gamsu 2022, 202). This individual focus ignores the awkward fact that ensuring working-class upward mobility requires middle-class downward mobility to take place.

Context and methods

This chapter is based on research carried out for a project I conducted between 2016 to 2019 that examined how young people responded to the social mobility dreams promoted by neoliberal education policies in England. The project included student interviews and focus groups within two London schools: one based at the city’s periphery in Enfield, the other based in the more central borough of Southwark. For this chapter, I will focus solely on the data generated through the Enfield site due to its spatial particularities as peripheral; however, similar narratives emerged in Southwark. The outer London borough of Enfield has some of the highest income inequality in London, with 27 percent of adults and 37 of children living in poverty. Moreover, there is a stark geographic wealth divide in Enfield, with the side of the borough east of the A10 road that bisects it experiencing far higher levels of poverty than the western side. While 41 percent of homes live in poverty in areas like Edmonton Green, in Bush Hill Park, only 3 kilometers or seven minutes away by train, 16 percent of homes live in poverty (EPIC, 2022). The Enfield school that students attended was located on the poorer eastern side.

The data used in this chapter was generated through 22 interviews and 5 focus groups with Enfield students who ranged from years 7 to 10, and therefore, were between the ages of 11 and 15. Four students classified themselves as white British or white English, while 17 categorized themselves as having mixed backgrounds that included Turkish, Somali, Indian, Tunisian,

Jamaican, Zimbabwean, Hungarian, and Greek Cypriot—attesting to the diversity of the school. Seven students described themselves as coming from working-class families, ten students had no class affiliation, three asserted themselves as being from middle-class families, and one student positioned her family as being “normal.” This highlights how different terminologies are used to describe class and inequality in the UK through individualization and the vilification of the working classes (Jones 2011). The interviews with the young people were open-ended, flexible, and lasted between 30 minutes to one hour; they took place after the focus groups and a drawing exercise, so I had already met with the students several times by the time of the interview.

In comparison to the other London site, the Enfield school was comparatively relaxed, with the interviews taking place in a quiet room that was prebooked by a headteacher who was extremely helpful. I also took ethnographic notes while in the school as well as around the grounds and surrounding neighborhoods. The descriptions of the students are derived from their self-descriptions in our interview. I was reflexively aware of my position as a White middle-class woman from the US, and how this stood in contrast to their position as mostly working-class and minoritized students in London. Despite these gaps and power differentials, some of the students and I shared political viewpoints and perspectives that surfaced through the focus group discussions. As an academic, many students were curious to ask me about university and Oxbridge, and I assisted them with any information I could offer.

The interview was regarded as a collaborative process of meaning-making, while the focus group discussions produced a collaborative form of knowledge that departed from the individual as the sole unit of measure. Student focus groups explored how students felt about their schools, their area, how their expectations of secondary school fit with reality, and what sort of futures they imagined for themselves. Through the focus group, meaning was created through performative social interactions. This method explores attitudes towards cultural formations, what meaning belonging has in each site, and how a collective sense of belonging is negotiated (Tonkiss 2012; Munday 2006). Foucauldian discourse analysis was used to analyze the interview and focus group transcripts through a process of repetitive reading, collective development of codes, and the search for patterns, consistencies, and silences (Gill 2000).

Growing up in denigrated spaces: Nicer spaces, nicer people...whiter people?

Numerous students in Enfield were aware that they lived on the devalued side of the A10. Sanjit’s previously mentioned visit to Oxford highlights how multiple intersections related to race, class, and space converge to position students. Sanjit lives with his parents in Enfield, where he was born and grew up. While Sanjit feels his dad has a “good job” as a traffic engineer and his mother works in a pharmacy, he describes his family as working class. Sanjit realizes the section of Enfield where he lives is frequently demonized, remarking that “it could be better.” While he thinks his school is good, he describes Enfield as “not really a great area...because a lot of young people are just out not doing much, just messing around sometimes.” Sanjit realizes that Oxford is trying to recruit bright students from underprivileged areas, yet when he asked the Oxford students he met where they were from, they all came from the countryside or “nice areas.” This made Sanjit wonder if he would be disadvantaged or “held back” by coming from a poor area. He hoped the fact that he came from Enfield might be overlooked if he did really well academically; however, he felt he must do better than “kids from the nice areas” to gain admission. Sanjit feels he must compensate for the poverty and stigmatization of his neighborhood by achieving more than students from prosperous areas. Sanjit is not only differentiated from the majority of students at Oxford as minoritized and

working-class but he is also marked by where he lives through the “taint of place” and feels he must disassociate himself from space-based stigmatization through individualized achievement.

Sanjit is aware of his position within the micro geography of Enfield, as he lives on the eastern side of the A10. He visits his dentist occasionally on the western side and finds this area preferable, describing how: “There’s not as many ethnic people I would say [on the western side]. It’s just a lot nicer. There’s not as many council estates or anything like that.” Sanjit describes the area as having fewer ethnic minority residents, and less social housing, and this combination of less ethnic minorities and less poverty combines to make the area “nicer.” Whiteness becomes implicitly aligned with “niceness.” Although Sanjit admits that he “probably would prefer to live in that [the western] bit...I don’t know if I’d fit in as much, because here are people from similar backgrounds.” Being from a British Indian working-class background, Sanjit feels more comfortable on the east side as there are more ethnic minority residents like him. Yet simultaneously, Sanjit aspires to attend Oxford and, thus, enter a space dominated by the White middle classes that is even more radically different than the other side of the A10.

Rita also has a binary perception of the variation between different parts of Enfield: “Like in some areas, there would be like, maybe like, some like bad people might live there. But then like, other like places...like, really nice. It’s like really pretty. Like all the people are nice and things like that.” The people and the landscape become melded together to make something nice, while bad places are inhabited by bad people. Moral judgments are made through space. Fourteen-year-old Georgia is more defensive of Enfield’s value than either Rita or Sanjit. Georgia defines herself as British Greek Cypriot and also describes disparities between the different areas of Enfield:

...if you’re driving from Ponders End to Enfield Chase, you can instantly see that change, and so it’s a bit confusing, like why is this area like this? In this area, you have extreme wealth, and you have extreme poverty in some areas...quite close together as well, so it’s just...It’s a bit upsetting sometimes, but then I’ve grown up here most of my life so I’m kind of used to it. So I don’t really see this area as a very poor area, it’s just not as nice as the other side.

Georgia finds these highly proximate disparities of wealth disconcerting and looks for an answer as to why this is the case. Yet, she has spent her entire life in Enfield; she is accustomed to this contrast and rejects the notion that where she lives is “a very poor area.” Georgia also remarks on this wealth disparity on a wider London scale, as she notices a marked difference between the space of London Southbank and Enfield Lock. She comments on her experience of moving between the two:

In London, you see a lot of people in suits, you see mainly the same race I’d say; because I was on Southbank a few weeks ago, and it’s just all Caucasian people in suits. That’s all I saw! And very clean streets. Then I got on the train, and I got off at Enfield Lock, and then you see diversity and mess all over the floor! [Laughs] I mean, I’d rather have diversity and dirty floors than no diversity and clean floors, to be honest.

In comparison to Enfield, Georgia finds central London along the river Thames more monolithically White, or as she terms, “Caucasian,” with most people wearing business suits and walking along tidy streets. When she gets off the train in Enfield, she is greeted not only by more ethnic minority residents, but mess and dirt. However, Georgia defends her area by saying that to have diversity and dirty floors is better than the clean homogeneity of central London. This defense of Enfield’s

diversity and dirty floors attitude is also mirrored in Justin's defense of their school as "lively" and having students with "personality" in comparison to other schools deemed to be better performing. However, for Sanjit, we see the moral judgment of "nice" tied to wealth and whiteness, although it is important to note that Sanjit never mentions whiteness itself. As Nayak describes, everyday spaces are "whitened" via structural and repetitive processes and come to act as a "white territory;" or a "silent cartography of whiteness" (2010, 2370). Here, we see the association cemented between poverty, minoritized Londoners, and trash or refuse; these come together in the space of Enfield (Millar 2020).

Many headteachers I interviewed lamented how seldom Enfield children took the train into central London and how easy it was to do this, inferring that spending time in a more valued space would benefit them. As my previous research shows, neoliberal aspirational educational discourses continually emphasize that getting away from spaces of devalued, racialized, and working-class culture is necessary to transform and add value to "urban children." Yet, as Sanjit and Georgia show, their presence in affluent areas of London does not have this contagion effect. Instead, they feel somewhat alienated even whilst experiencing the pleasures of being in a "nice" place. Simply inhabiting an affluent area does not mean they belong there or become infused with new forms of capital. Students' movements—whether they travel to the western side of the A10, visit central London, go to Oxford, or remain in their own neighborhoods—evoke distinct subjective experiences and positions (Valentine 2007). They are not perceived in the same way within each space, i.e., they do not feel the same on the other side of the A10 compared to when they are in their neighborhood. This movement in and out of different spaces shapes their subjectivity within each space, and these subjectivities are shaped by the different dominant groups in each space.

Schooling in a stigmatized space

The narratives of students who were keen to leave their local area show an acute awareness of the hierarchies of value across London spaces, with wealthier areas like Southgate described as desirable in comparison to Enfield. Many students defended themselves against living in denigrated spaces of London or attending schools regarded as inferior. They were aware of their devalued position within the London geographical economy, as well as how gender, racial, and social inequality could impact their future. Urban locality's image is often bound up with images of inferior educational opportunities and decaying school buildings, yet this was not the case in either school. The Enfield school had a new building, yet the feeling of being devalued persisted (Hollingworth and Archer 2010, 589). A new building cannot necessarily overcome the negative representations of urban schools in the public imagination (see Butler and Robson 2003; Lucey and Reay 2002). This links to public housing, as Reay recounts being told she was 'scum' as a working-class child and refused a place in the local Brownie (girl scout club) pack because she lived on a demonized estate (2017, 4). Social class is not just an economic phenomenon but includes relational aspects like education, lifestyle, and where one lives (Bradley and Ingram 2013). Reay's (2017) relegation to the status of unworthy was determined by the space she inhabited as a child in the 1960s; this legacy of spatial contamination continues.

During a student focus group in Enfield, we discussed how students envisioned their futures. Justin, a White British 14-year-old boy, replied rather bleakly:

I don't like to think about it [the future] because it makes me depressed about how worthless my life is compared to rich people. ...They say we are more socialist; we are not. All the rich

kids get better education, better jobs, better money. Here [in Enfield] we are the working class, we get—education—not as bad as a lot of people, but the place is worse, everything is worse, someone is telling you what to do for your whole life. Nothing changes, that is just the system.

Justin is sharply aware of how his opportunities in life are shaped by being from a working-class family and a poor area. An impoverished physical environment is linked to the notion of an impoverished social environment, and young people see this as impacting their life chances and educational opportunities (Hollingworth and Archer 2010, 588). Justin positions “rich kids” as having access to a superior education, better jobs, and more money. We can see this value of life crudely reflected in life expectancy statistics between rich and poor areas of London, as there is an eight-year gap in life expectancy between the poorer area of Bethnal Green and the wealthy City of London and Westminster (Evans 2023). This also occurs on a micro-scale in Enfield, with a two-year life expectancy gap between Enfield North and Edmonton and the more affluent area of Enfield and Southgate. The privately educated, or “rich kids” that Justin references are twice as likely as state-educated children to get a place at a top university. While nine percent of the UK population is privately educated, privately educated students hold a disproportionate number of powerful positions in the UK: one-third of Members of Parliament, half of cabinet members and newspaper editors, and three-quarters of judges attended private schools (Sutton Trust 2019). While Justin recognizes his education is not the worst, in comparison to richer people, he feels their area is deprived and, ultimately, their lives are not as valuable as the wealthy.

When I interviewed Enfield’s headteacher, Ethan, he pointed out how geographical location worked to shape his students’ futures. He feels class is the greatest barrier to education, combined with space to define pupils: “It is about where you grew up, and it’s the street on which you grew up.” Ethan showed me a large map of London on his office wall and pointed out the “real dividing line” of the A10 road. No one from the other side of the A10 attended his school “because there’s a perception that all the schools in this part of the area are rough and difficult.” He also described how the school loses pupils to Hertfordshire, the county directly north of London, due to the perception that schools are better there. Meanwhile, Ethan described how he grew up in a small village in the West Country and recognized how his location, along with his whiteness and middle-classness, gave him more opportunities than his students. While he noted how many students at his school work much harder than he did, they do not have the same chances. Two-thirds of the cohort are classified as Pupil Premium students, which means they are eligible for free school meals because their parents earn less than £7,400, or €8,649, per year. Ethan described the general lack of activities for young people in the area, as local youth clubs have closed due to budget cuts. This disinvestment in public services is mirrored in the underfunding of his school by the Department for Education (DFE). Ethan expressed his frustration at declining resources:

I am being asked [by the DFE] to run a school on flat funding which means that last year I made people redundant that this school needed. So, in a school with high levels of child mental health problems, in a school in an area of social deprivation, I had to make my counselor redundant... In an area with low levels of literacy, I had to make one of my two librarians redundant, so I can’t do Community Outreach librarian work anymore which I used to. I used to have an award-winning library, and I don’t anymore because I can’t afford him. This year I’m going to have to make teachers redundant. I’m going to have to remove bits of the curriculum and reduce my offer to students of what courses they can take because every year I have to make a quarter

of a million pounds of cuts to stand still. So yes, I'm being asked by the DFE to flat-fund my school; I disagree fundamentally with that.

Students were keenly aware of the school's lack of financial resources, reflected in staffing shortages and shrinking extra-curricular activities. Georgia echoed these worries when she described the school as going downhill rather than up. She had decided not to stay for sixth form because there were not enough good teachers, and continual staff shortages would make it more difficult to get good GCSEs. Yet Georgia did not blame the head, but funding cuts. She spoke regretfully about some of her favorite teachers leaving the school in the past years:

Yeah, there's been a few of my favorite teachers that have left, it's been very upsetting and frustrating because it's like, why now? Can't you wait until I've finished my GCSEs?! And then, when we see their replacement, we're just very disheartened. So, are we going to pass this subject now? It's very disheartening.

The lack of material resources and staff turnover cause Georgia anxiety, as she fears it will impact her exam results. She fears that with lower quality and often temporary replacement teachers, she and her classmates may have a lesser chance of receiving good grades, which will affect their future educational pathways. When asked what she would do if she were in charge of education in England, 12-year-old Hungarian Deeta says that she would hire more teachers because the school did not have enough: "For example, like in Maths we don't have enough teachers so we have like, all like cover teachers that don't specialize in Maths."

Mixed-race Jamaican, Zimbabwean, and Irish 12-year-old Valerie also mentions this lack of consistent staffing and connects it to the availability of better-paid opportunities in the countryside. Headteacher Ethan confirms that inner London teachers receive better pay, making staff retention in poor outer London areas difficult. Working-class and Jamaican Mona also describes how some cover teachers do not really understand what they are learning or know what is going on in her philosophy class. Georgia also notes the lack of opportunities provided at their school in comparison to better-resourced schools. While previously, the school had opportunities to get the Duke of Edinburgh qualification or hosted external organizations, Georgia watched these initiatives disappear. These opportunities existed for her friends in other schools, but Georgia felt her school "ran out of money." This highlights the actual material limitations within the school, as well as the home, as seen through the large number of students eligible for FSM. These material relations and constraints combine with spaces and places' role as cultural objects to create "powerful associations and emotive resonances," as individuals come to understand themselves as successful or not at education through these psychic and spatial levels (Hollingworth and Archer 2010, 587, 589). Part of this process of understanding entails recognizing their position within hierarchies of value and classification within both London and the UK.

Disillusioned neoliberal subjects and symbolic violence

Despite the odds stacked against their capacity to freely craft their own biographies from positions of material and social disadvantage, working-class students often act as "good" neoliberal subjects, investing in narratives of individualization (Reay 2017, 96). Yet this investment was sometimes contested by my participants; many were skeptical that these meritocratic dreams would come true.

Justin firmly rejects any false notion that the UK is a socialist system; instead, he feels the system is about taking orders from those more powerful than oneself.

C: How does secondary school compare to what you thought it would be?

Valerie: I thought in primary that if I work hard and persevere, that I am going to get good grades, do well, get a good job.

Justin: Be an astronaut!

Valerie: But since I came here, I am thinking, I could get all As and still end up working in a school.

Students come to see the flaws in aspirational educational narratives through the poor labor conditions of their teachers. Beatrice describes how her teacher got nine A stars at A-level, but then ended up being a teacher in Enfield. This prompts her to conclude that just because someone receives all A stars, it does not mean that they will get the best jobs as they have been told. When I asked the focus group if becoming a teacher was appealing, no one responded positively. Mona said, “No, way, they are stressed out and by eight o’clock have had five coffees,” while Justin added that he felt sorry for some of them. Fourteen-year-old Afghani Dennis described how one of his teachers, Mr. Woodhouse, had been to a top university. Dennis had asked him why he decided to be a teacher; he said he wanted to do something helpful for society, and Dennis asked how his geography class contributed to society. For these students, entering the teaching profession is not a sign of graduate success but failure, which speaks to the deteriorating status and labor conditions of English teachers (Skinner, Leavey, and Rothi 2021).

Rather than embracing the notion of a meritocratic society where hard work and achievement will improve your life, many students in Enfield often expressed disillusionment with this story. There was a waning belief in this aspiration narrative; even if you try hard, this does not mean you will have an enjoyable life. Dennis describes a feeling of perpetual dissatisfaction, for “when you succeed, you probably have not succeeded enough.” This notion of succeeding, but then not succeeding enough, points to how widening participation in higher education had not necessarily led to more mobility or overall equality, but to sharper hierarchies within the field of higher education. Students describe the focus on Oxbridge and the most selective group of universities in the UK termed the Russell Group. Justin describes how it was not only about your grades but where you were from, that affected elite university admission. He was also on the Oxford trip, and while the Oxford spokesperson said it did not make a difference whether you came from Enfield or Central London, Justin did not believe this. Headteacher Ethan had shown them how fewer people from Enfield got into elite universities, even when they had the requisite grades. Mona describes how going to Oxford improved your job prospects, regardless of what degree you took. Justin chimes in, pretending to be two different people at a job interview, followed by the verdict: “I went to Oxford. I went to Enfield College. Oxford—you’re in!”

Despite the unlikelihood that many students could fulfill the meritocratic narrative and attend elite universities, students conceded that there was not really a viable alternative to these narratives. They must at least attempt to invest in projects of self-realization in the hopes of securing a stable future; the stakes of rejecting neoliberal selfhood entirely were too high. Mona describes their chances as “like a raffle, there was like a 1.1 percent chance [to get into an elite university] on a good day, so we at least have to try. If you just stop now, there is no chance, but there is a little fraction of a chance if you do well on your GCSEs.” There is also recognition that there is not really a better option—you have to try to do well, as not trying definitely leads nowhere. As Valerie

describes, “There is a small percentage [of students] that get in [to elite schools], but if people fight to get into this percentage, they will have a good life. Some don’t care, and if they don’t, they will be stuck in the same life as their parents before them.” To not try leads to being stuck in the life of one’s parents, and that life is automatically deemed to be lacking or deficient. This highlights how social mobility is not a simple trajectory, but an ambiguous process of loss, rejection, and in-betweenness. Allen and Hollingworth (2013) also describe how in neoliberalism, “immobility” features as a hindrance to life chances.

Bourdieu and Passeron argue that education exemplifies symbolic violence:

Schooling secures the active participation of students and teachers in the pursuit of credentials, which entails the learning of legitimate culture, while obscuring the reproduction of class domination that is the effect of such participation. Securing participation is education’s technical function (learning), while obscuring class domination is its social function (class selection).
(1977, 164–7)

We can see this active and earnest participation as students strive towards not only higher education but also towards more elite forms of higher education. Despite many students’ awareness of their potential failure to secure these credentials, they feel obligated to try. Yet will they be recognized by the elite, even if they succeed in getting to the Russell Group universities? There is little evidence that entering this space is a guarantee of success, for here they will be marked by their place of origin. Ingram and Gamsu describe how politicians do not want to acknowledge several uncomfortable facts, namely that education is no longer able to ensure or deliver social mobility, despite this message being drilled into students. While attending an elite university has become the “holy grail” of social mobility for the working classes in policy rhetoric, “it is no secret that many ‘top’ graduate employers are recruiting from small Russell-Group shaped graduate pools that are well-stocked with the country’s elite. The upshot of this is that universities that recruit students from higher social-class backgrounds deliver students with better chances on the graduate labour market.” (Ingram and Gamsu 2022, 197). Despite being high achieving, the odds remain stacked against disadvantaged pupils entering these elite spaces as universities are measured on labor market outcomes.

Burawoy describes how a central aspect of symbolic violence is “the combination of enthusiastic participation and systematic misrecognition” (2019, 97). Students experience the symbolic violence of living in a stigmatized area of London, attending an under-resourced school, and often coming from financially impoverished households. This is not only the violence of being relegated to denigrated positions, it is also the violence of having to leave behind forms of culture seen as working class and racialized and thus not in keeping with mobility dreamscapes to achieve mobility. Language like “unlocking talent” and “break out” serve to “construct the issue as one of personal escape, as if working-class people are held hostage in their communities and simply need to be shown the door and welcomed with open arms into the middle-class fold” (Ingram and Gamsu 2022, 202). However, through the migration narratives of students, I will now explore how spatial mobility could function as a way to escape this systematic misrecognition.

Migration and (social) mobility

Almost half of the students I interviewed imagined themselves living outside of Enfield in the future, with most of the students either aspiring to live in a more desirable area of London, to move

to a different part of the UK, or to move abroad. Only five of the Enfield students could imagine themselves staying in Enfield. Students who were keen to either leave the country or leave the area showed an acute awareness of the hierarchies of value between London spaces, with richer areas like Hampstead or Southgate being desired destinations in comparison to Enfield. Migration became a means of changing their future; it was about “getting out and getting away” (Lawler 1999) for students like Georgia who wanted to be an architect and dreamed about studying in Barcelona. She describes how she is motivated to work hard in school in order to leave Enfield, “My motivation is to... I want to get out of this country, but mainly this area. Maybe I’ve just been here for too long, but I just kind of want to branch out and see new things, new countries.” Justin says that he would obviously like to leave the area. Initially, he wanted to make money and move to America to become a forensic scientist, but with Trump in office, he was unsure. However, he definitely would like to move out and his parents shared this feeling. They were hoping to move to Hertford or Cheshunt which he regards as “nicer places” in the countryside.

Several students connect their desire to leave with poverty and economic uncertainty. Eleven-year-old Abdel, who describes himself as Tunisian and “only British when I am on holiday,” feels saddened by the poverty he sees daily on the streets of Enfield and connects this to the Conservative Party. He dreams of leaving the area and migrating to Canada: “I just like the politics [in Quebec] compared to the UK because Theresa May, Labour, UKIP, everything...like here the politics are quite... you can’t really get... it’s quite confusing. And in Canada the politics are quite good, I like the stuff inside it, lots of stuff.” Abdel imagines being more at home in Canada, yet he goes on to say that if he did not move to Canada, he would like to move to Manchester “because there’s cheaper houses, bigger houses.” Students are very aware of the cost of housing in London and already anticipate their future struggles.

Other students like 15-year-old mixed-race Kim, feel that a changing political and economic climate in the UK related to Britain leaving the European Union signals a financial threat to her future:

Most of the bad things seem to be happening because of Brexit and stuff. That’s going to affect our future so much because the value of the pound is dropping and it’s kind of making me consider wanting to leave when I’m older because that’s going to affect me working and my income.

Students were very concerned about being able to ensure they had financial stability. Mixed-race “well off” Kim mentions Brexit and the dropping value of the pound as key reasons to consider leaving as they affect her future earning potential. She had a keen interest in Korean culture and had been learning the language, and she could imagine herself moving there and teaching English. Mona suggests that she may return to Jamaica, where her family is from and where she attended primary school, while Black African and British Ana says she had had enough of England and would be interested in moving to Europe for her undergraduate study in order to avoid the high UK tuition fees. She hopes that the Labour Party will retain a connection with the EU and describes herself as “working class, but working towards middle class.” Meanwhile, Dina dreams of becoming a surgeon and attending Harvard Medicine School in Boston.

Other students would like to move to different locations within the UK or to other parts of London, frequently citing aesthetic reasons like nicer housing and prettier streets. White British Jemima describes wanting to move to Oxford: “It’s really pretty and it’s like, the houses are really nice and I just love it up there. Every time I go up there, I’m like, ‘Please don’t let me go home’.

I just love it up there.” When I ask British Turkish Nora if she will stay in Enfield, she replies, “No, I’m not going to hopefully,” adding that she wanted to travel around London and England. While Valerie describes herself as a dedicated Londoner and would like to move closer to the center, she plans on leaving Enfield as she does not feel it is part of London. Mona also expressed highly ambivalent feelings about Enfield. To her, it was “just a place that exists,” there was nothing to attract her to it or keep her there, and if she got into a good school far away, she would be happy to move.

While several students affirm or defend the area, this does not stop them from wanting to leave. Dennis says he does not think that people are that bad, and it is not as scary as people say. Still, he does not want to stay around Enfield but move to the more prosperous Southgate area on the other side of the A10 road. British Somali Suraya, like Dennis, defends Enfield by saying it is a nice place to live, but adds, “There could probably be a better place in London than Enfield, like education-wise. So when I have kids or something I’d probably live maybe outside of Enfield.” Similarly, Ana likes Enfield because it is friendly and everyone knows each other but then says she wants to leave. “I want to live in the City, because central, like the houses are quite nice and stuff...and there’s like the shops and sights to see, it’s very nice.” Beatrice also uses the word “nice” when she describes her aspirations to move: “I mean I would aspire to live in a nicer area, like maybe somewhere in Central London, but it’s really busy...So like not somewhere so posh, but not somewhere so run down. Like maybe modern, but in a nice area with nice people.” Once again, we see space and its aesthetic qualities being conflated with the type of people who live there; “nice,” modern, and well-maintained areas are seen as being home to “nice people.” This is tied to students’ desired self-image; British Turkish Aurora describes how she loves the sea and has set her sights on living in the Brighton area. She says, “I do not see myself living there [Enfield]” and “I have already made plans to move.”

Students seek different levels of mobility through their movement: from the macro-scale migration to a different country, to meso-level movement within the UK, to micro-level movements within London. Several students are motivated to move abroad as they worry about being able to afford a good quality of life in the UK; their fears of financial struggle have often been experienced through the struggles of their families to survive. Although students do not reflexively reference this, international mobility outside of the UK could make class markers like accent or place of residence less readily legible. Working-class Britons’ migration abroad could disrupt social reproduction. They are not “read” in their new homes so easily as working class, as these markers are decontextualized and thus have less marking power, yet racial markers persist, albeit in new ways.

Students deal with living in disadvantaged areas and fears of their future prosperity through planning their escape, as they are often “highly reflexively aware of getting a ‘bad deal’ in relation to children who live elsewhere” (Hollingworth and Archer 2010, 598). They wish to break this cycle, as Suraya describes moving when she has kids so they have a better education. Yet a small minority of the students found value in Enfield and wanted to stay due to family networks, developing what Hollingworth and Archer call “counter spaces of representation.” Students do not always assume the position of self-authoring neoliberal subjects by subscribing to mobility dreams, but instead seek to generate value through their neighborhoods and relationality (Skeggs and Loveday 2012). Although I do not have space to deal with these narratives and the relational stories of attachment to family and friends they show, it is important to consider that those who are marginalized and dominated do not necessarily think in the categories of the dominant. They can draw upon relational ways of thinking that reject neoliberal narratives while claiming value

for themselves and Enfield through their investment in family, friends, and the surrounding neighborhood despite its vilification.

Conclusion

Students develop ambivalent positions towards their neighborhood and school as vilified spaces; these are spaces they have a fondness for and seek to defend, yet many high-achieving students from working-class backgrounds describe crafting individualized pathways of escape. These pathways are developed in accordance with neoliberal narratives of social mobility promoted by policy rhetoric—even if there is limited belief in these narratives succeeding. This is evidenced by their teachers, who now labor under stressful employment conditions, despite their educational success. Their interaction with elite spaces like Oxford, conversations with pupils from other schools, and data on university admissions evidence the value that space confers or subtracts from pupils. This process of hierarchical evaluation and categorization is intertwined with race and class inequalities. Reay and her colleagues describe how despite polite nods to diversity, sameness is what is ultimately valued, as embodying whiteness and middle-classness gives one a position of value from which they can judge others (2007, 1042). The inherent value of middle-classness is also inscribed in aspirational policy narratives, as optimal well-being is perceived through the lens of consumption (Raco 2009, 446). A moral judgment is conferred, as whiteness and middle-classness hold hegemonic values and thus have the capacity to confer value (Skeggs 2004).

Recognizing their position as the valued rather than valuers of others, my sample of mostly working-class and minoritized students must move not only towards aspirational narratives steeped in white, middle-class values in order to become better subjects, they are compelled to move away from spaces deemed dirty, chaotic, and deficient. We can see how space and subjectivities become closely melded, as dirty spaces become tied to unappealing people, whereas “nice” areas and “nice” people fit together. Alterations to the working class, as well as the minoritized self, become necessary to accrue value, while others can remain as they are, for they already hold normative value (Kulz 2017). The recognition of legitimacy, as well as the refusal of recognition, is intimately tied to the production of intersectional hierarchies. Concurrently, symbolic violence results from the withholding of value and recognition. Bourdieu describes this withholding within the context of working-class denigration in terms of “the pre-emptory verdicts which... condemn to ridicule, indignity, shame, silence ... men and women who simply fall short, in the eyes of their judges, of the right way of being and doing” ([1984] 2010, 512).

As the chapter shows, many students anticipate these pre-emptive verdicts due to their social positioning, and while not all students actively refer to themselves as working class, they sense that they are judged. Tyler (2015) describes how there are differences in how class is talked about by different generations, yet the continuity of inequality is historic and continues to shape the present. Instead, she emphasizes that it is more about *what* class is describing that remains the key question. It is not only their bodies, accents, habits, or actions that mark or signal these students’ worth, it is also their spatial placement. The removal of this contagion of the self through mobility, both socially and spatially, is also a process of loss. Reay describes how social mobility fantasies “estrangle the working classes from any sense of personal worth or feelings of value if they remain as they are” (2013, 666). Finally, some students are left to experience the symbolic violence of exclusion as the ones who cannot afford a private education, private tutoring to pass exams, or who occupy a devalued area; despite their best personal efforts at transcending their social positioning. This is a form of violence that often goes unnoticed and unpunished, “and which is, in the last

analysis, the product of the ‘inert violence’ of economic structures and social mechanisms relayed by the active violence of people” (Bourdieu 2000, 233).

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9

ESCAPING TERRITORIES OF TERROR

Protective strategies against intersectional violence at checkpoints

Iryna Ignatieva

Introduction

Territories under military occupation are defined by urban infrastructure repurposed to instill terror against local citizens resisting this new regime. The only way out is by going through checkpoints, where civilians are regularly exposed to violence based on the intersection of different social axes. People preparing to flee are already aware of the risks of being exposed to violence, so they prepare themselves and their digital devices beforehand, expecting to be inspected and interrogated.

Intersection is used here as an analytical lens to analyze violence as a complex phenomenon constructed across numerous axes of social division that influence each other (Collins and Bilge 2016). The introduction of intersectionality aims to highlight the complex nature of violence that contributes to social inequality and injustice, as people are exposed to violence differently depending on their overlapping identities. The connection “between violence, intersectional power relations, and political resistance” (Collins 2017, 1460) is starkly evident at wartime checkpoints, where the power of those with weapons is unrestrained, embodying the limitless authority of the occupiers.

In this chapter, I aim to investigate wartime checkpoints as both sites of increased violence and places where migrants exercise their agency in attempting to flee safely. My focus is on the protective strategies that forced migrants use at checkpoints and how these strategies are influenced by the intersectionality of violence. In my exploration, I first look at how Ukrainian identity, which significantly increases the risk of violence, intersects with gender at checkpoints. Then, I explore the strategies used to mitigate the violence that arises from this intersection.

What distinguishes the Ukrainian case is that Ukrainian identity can be concealed at checkpoints, allowing individuals to present a “safe identity” instead of the real one. Moreover, Russia’s war in Ukraine stands out as the most digitized state-to-state war in history. Smartphone users create and share content that impacts the course of the conflict, creating a new ecology of warfare (Ford and Hoskins 2022). At checkpoints, where smartphones are routinely checked, digital footprint becomes a significant risk factor. Therefore, exploring the process of building “safe identities” is inseparable from investigating the digital practices implemented before and during the escape.

Gender-based violence at war

Intersectionality in war studies helps to grasp how deep structural inequalities are implicated in different forms of violence. In territories under occupation, where legal structures are lacking, the risk of physical, verbal, and psychological abuse rises significantly. Identities, ideologies, and practices come together to normalize domination and violence (Peterson 2007). War rhetoric often uses an “us” versus “them” mindset to justify violence. In each specific case, a distinct “they” group is defined by markers such as race, ethnicity, religion, or nationality, fostering a perception of an enemy to rationalize aggression.

In war studies, the power struggle is often depicted through the intersectionality of masculinity, militarism, and imperialism (Peterson 2007). Men are portrayed as “warriors,” while women are seen as needing protection, reinforcing traditional gender roles (Elshtain 1982). This dynamic can be converted into militarized masculinity, which is used to explain sexual violence during war (Zurbriggen 2010; Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2009). While this simplistic view ignores the relational and situational aspects of gender construction, it emphasizes that extreme gender differences intensified by the war can only be maintained through continuous violence (Chinkin and Kaldor 2013). Gender-based violence that was once unimaginable during peacetime becomes normalized when victims are dehumanized as “them” (Maiese 2003).

Individuals from the “them” group experience violence in war differently based on the gender roles projected onto them. Over 70 percent of women experience gender-based violence in crisis settings, with women and girls being particularly vulnerable to conflict-related sexual violence, even in post-conflict periods (UN Women 2017; Cohen and Nordås 2014). While male victimization is often overlooked (Kreft and Agerberg 2024), the data indicates that men are more at risk of being killed in direct armed conflicts, whether they are combatants or civilians (Ormhaug et al. 2009). Men in war face gender-based violence like sex-selective massacres, forced conscription, and sexual violence (Carpenter 2006).

Violence targeting LGBTQI+ individuals is part of the broader spectrum of gender-based violence and shares the same root causes. In conflict zones, especially those characterized by “strict enforcement of gender norms and rigid sexual morality as mechanisms of social control,” violence against LGBTQI+ individuals is sadly predictable (Outright International 2023, 8). During military conflicts, homophobia plays a fundamental role in the production of gender and sexual orders required by warfare and deployed by armed groups (Serrano-Amaya 2018).

In literature examining the spatial dimensions of military conflict, checkpoints are depicted as essential components of the occupation matrix, extending militarization and symbolizing territorial expansion (Tawil-Souri 2011). The spatial nature of checkpoints is tied to the dynamics of conflict. Studies examining checkpoint systems in Israel portray checkpoints as “nonplaces” (Tawil-Souri 2011) or as “states of exception” (Mansbach 2009). These studies illustrate the solidification and bureaucratization of borders during peace-building efforts in the long-term Israel-Palestine conflict, emphasizing that violence at checkpoints cannot be eradicated but rather shifts from physical to structural forms (Braverman 2012). Consequently, any exertion of power seeks to justify violence at checkpoints, whether in open military confrontations or during the peace-building process (Kotef and Amir 2011).

Recent studies define checkpoints as “gendered spaces,” where regulations on women’s mobility differ significantly from those imposed on men (Griffiths and Repo 2021). Kotef and Amir define checkpoints as “highly gendered military zones” that bring different forms of patriarchal power into motion. The gender binary at checkpoints sustains a distinct order associated with occupation (Kotef and Amir 2007, 993).

An investigation of incident reports from checkpoints in Iraq demonstrated that deadly outcomes are often the result of “bad feelings” of guards and that decisions to use force are not spontaneous but rather influenced by a set of gendered and racialized assumptions, particularly regarding the behavior of military-age males, which is often perceived as hostile (Gregory 2019).

Having elaborated on the existing literature, I now focus on Russia’s war in Ukraine, a recent military conflict that resulted in territories being occupied. This case provides an opportunity to examine the process of oppression and the accompanying violence at checkpoints in motion before the occupation regime becomes entrenched.

I argue that checkpoints are part of the urban infrastructure of terror in occupied territories. The Ukrainian case highlights that the system of checkpoints does more than mark the borders of occupied territories or restrict movement within these territories; it filters out individuals who deviate from the occupiers’ ideological vision or resist the regime. Checkpoints are spaces where the intersections of violence, rooted in the territorial regime, are clearly evident. To support this argument, in the next passage, I will briefly introduce the history of the occupation of Ukraine, explain how the regime of terror is established in these territories, and discuss the role checkpoints play in constructing “territories of terror.”

Russia’s war in Ukraine: Territories of terror

Russia’s war in Ukraine began with the 2014 annexation of Crimea and escalated when Russian and proxy forces seized parts of Donetsk and Luhansk. The conflict’s second phase started on February 24, 2022, with a full-scale Russian invasion, occupying significant areas in the Southeast and Northeast. As of 2024, the military confrontation continues with relatively static front lines.

The armed conflict led to significant migration flows, with 1.7 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) between 2014 and 2022 (IOM 2017). After the February 2022 invasion, this number surged to about 10 million forced migrants (UNHCR 2022).

There is a clear distinction between long-term occupied territories like Crimea, Luhansk, and Donetsk; short-term occupied areas such as Northeast Ukraine and Kherson (reclaimed after months); and territories under continuous occupation since 2022. While all these regions face oppressive regimes, the duration of occupation affects resistance. In long-term occupied areas, resistance diminishes as those labeled as “them” flee or face repression, leading to a more entrenched regime that justifies its presence.

The full-scale invasion escalated the conflict and exposed Russia as an aggressor, reinforcing ideology to justify the new military campaign. Before 2022, Russia’s rhetoric portrayed itself as a peacekeeper. The full-scale invasion redefined the conflict as a “special operation” to overthrow the “Kyiv regime.” Russia’s ideological narrative has shifted from the idea of “brotherhood nations” to a concept of “one nation” (Putin 2021a), implying Ukraine is an artificial nation and should be “denationalized” (Laruelle 2024, 15).

The Russian war narrative frames their invasion of Ukraine as a continuation of their historical fight against Nazism. This perspective labels Ukrainians as “Nazis” and calls for the “denazification and demilitarization” of Ukraine (Putin 2021b). The rhetoric used by Russian officials and state media employs dehumanizing language, depicting Ukrainians as “Nazis” and mortal enemies. This portrayal legitimizes or “justifies them as targets for destruction” (New Lines Institute and RWI 2022, 15–18). Anyone who identifies as Ukrainian is branded a “Nazi” simply for refusing to acknowledge being Russian (Snyder 2022). The twisted logic behind the violence against Ukrainians asserts that they do not exist, and if they disagree, they are either forced into re-education or killed.

Mass atrocities in liberated Ukrainian areas have sparked discussions about Russian actions in Ukraine as a crime of genocide (Azarov et al. 2023; Snyder 2022). Although proving genocide legally requires time, the documented violence in 2022-occupied areas appears deliberate rather than random. Numerous examples of violence committed by Russian occupying forces demonstrate that their actions align with the official rhetoric of targeting anyone identified as Ukrainian. In Bucha, Russian soldiers went door-to-door “hunting Nazis” (Human Rights Watch 2022a). Documented cases of ideologically motivated torture, mass executions, and rape in the Kyiv region are supported by reports from liberated areas in the Northeast (Chernihiv, Sumy) and Southeast (Kherson, Zaporizhzhia) (OHCHR 2022a; Amnesty International 2022; Human Rights Watch 2022b).

In preparation for the invasion, the Russian military compiled lists of influential Ukrainians, including officials, activists, and journalists, for targeted killing or imprisonment (Sabbagh 2022; Center for Civil Liberties 2022). Reports indicate that even teachers of Ukrainian history and language were targeted (Petruniok 2024). From day one, the regime in these occupied territories was built around the idea that any expression of Ukrainian identity was life-threatening.

Violence against civilians in 2022-occupied territories often targeted Ukrainian men, who make up the majority of those murdered or executed by Russian forces. These acts frequently involved detention and torture beforehand (Human Rights Watch 2022a; OHCHR 2022b). Most enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions also involve men who were arrested at home, at work, on the street, or at checkpoints (OHCHR 2023).

Corresponding with broader violence patterns in war, the primary civilian victims of rape and sexual violence in Ukraine are women and girls (UNHCR 2023, 12; U.S. Department of State 2024, 85). According to the UN Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, these documented cases show that rape was used deliberately by the Russian military to “dehumanize the victims” as part of their strategy (Ochab 2022).

As Russia considers the occupied territories of Ukraine to be part of its territory, it enforces Russian legislation that discriminates against the expression of LGBTQI+ identity (Human Rights Watch 2014). Occupation authorities use homophobic propaganda, and those identified as LGBTQI+ suffer insults, violence, extortion, freedom restrictions, and threats to their lives (Human Rights Watch 2014; U.S. Department of State 2023; ADC Memorial and Center for Civil Liberties 2016; Nash Svit Center 2022).

The terror in the occupied territories forced locals to flee, if they could, towards the west into Ukrainian-controlled areas or eastward, especially when the western route was cut off. In 2022, after the front line stabilized around the occupied territories once again, both sides set up systems of checkpoints. People attempting to reach Ukraine-controlled territories had to first navigate through Russian checkpoints and then traverse the “grey zone” or “no-man’s land,” where they faced the risk of being caught in the crossfire or encountering mines.

Those evacuating through the eastern route were sent to “filtration” sites, where many were interrogated, tortured, or killed (Khoshnood et al. 2022). Filtration involved collecting fingerprints, photos, and passports, seizing devices, and conducting security interrogations. The Yale Humanitarian Research Lab identified 21 such facilities used for holding, registration, and interrogation (Khoshnood et al. 2022).

The filtration process was not limited to the border crossing; eventually, it was implemented “on-site” in areas occupied after February 2022, with everyone there subjected to filtration (Lysenko 2023, 8). Civilians underwent filtration at all internal roadblocks within and between

cities. In Mariupol, all residents, even those not planning to leave, were required to carry a “filtration certificate” and passport to move within the city. Despite this requirement, filtration certificates were not always checked later, suggesting that “on-site filtration” was used not just for identification but also to target and suppress dissenters (Badyuk 2023).

In occupied territories, censorship, surveillance, political oppression, repression of free speech, and movement restrictions created a “climate of fear” (OHCHR 2024b). The regime adapted existing infrastructure to suppress resistance, using torture as an extension of “filtration.” Reports highlight a widespread network of “torture chambers” operating openly in every city where systematic torture is conducted (Petruniok 2024). The population is aware of these locations and the risks of arbitrary detention or torture. The infrastructure for detection and torture was reinforced by a comprehensive surveillance and control system. Street surveillance cameras were repurposed to monitor and identify potential resistance among locals, and their numbers significantly increased over time.

Russia’s efforts to isolate occupied territories have made it extremely hard for residents to leave or communicate with areas outside its control. Soon after the occupation, internet traffic was rerouted through Russian providers, and Ukrainian mobile infrastructure was co-opted, introducing Russian phone numbers and SIM cards. This control over telecommunications subjects civilians in occupied territories to Russian internet regulations, surveillance, and censorship, characteristic of a “networked authoritarian regime” (Lokot 2023).

A significant factor shaping the regime in occupied territories is the rise of “civil intelligence,” where civilians crowdsource location-based military information by sharing location pins, photos, and videos of military activities. This use of technology fundamentally changed the nature of war, putting anyone with a smartphone at risk (Schmitt and Biggerstaff 2022; Ford 2023). Consequently, Russians extensively tapped mobile phones and monitored electronic communications as part of their “filtration” efforts. Phones were confiscated during detentions, house searches, and encounters with Russian soldiers, who threatened death to those who resisted (U.S. Department of State 2023).

Attempting to conceptualize the regime under occupation, I refer to the concept of “refiguration of spaces” (Löw 2023), which effectively captures how social changes are reflected in social spaces. This concept is highly relevant for exploring the fundamental changes brought about by war and military occupation. Modern warfare, characterized by rapid digitalization, aligns with the vision of modern spatial order with increased mobility, concentrated knowledge, and digital mediatization (Knoblauch and Löw 2020). The “refiguration of spaces” framework identifies territory, trajectory, place, and network as key spatial figures, where place follows a logic of intersection, territory a logic of demarcation, trajectory a logic of transit, and network a logic of association (Hecht and Kirchner 2023; see Löw in this volume).

The spatial figure of territory is central to explaining the processes occurring post occupation. Checkpoints are not merely locations on the road that delimit the trajectories of forced migrants’ escape but are spaces that merge strongly with the logic of the territorial regime. Escaping “territories of terror” means confronting the regime in defined places, namely checkpoints.

The military occupation represents a violent intrusion into a pre-existing spatial order, and filtration is merely an attempt to assert control over this world. As a consequence of the occupation, old and new spatial realities collide, compelling all forms of resistance against the new order to go “underground,” forcing Ukrainian identity and any connection to Ukrainian spatial reality to be hidden. Checkpoints violently embody this spatial conflict, where any sign of belonging to another spatial reality must be erased to survive.

Violence at checkpoints

The role of checkpoints is central to the filtration process; they are a manifestation of filtration in space. Going through checkpoints leading east or west, or simply moving through the system of checkpoints inside occupied territories, means inevitable filtration. Guards at checkpoints are typically tasked with identifying individuals who may pose a threat to the regime. During an ongoing war, the stakes for this task are exceptionally high. Documented cases of violence at checkpoints demonstrate that the process of crossing checkpoints is highly subjective, arbitrary, and random. Checkpoints function as literal physical filters, exposing everyone to physical violence, detention, abduction, or even death.

The “filtration” process is enforced by blocking access to Ukraine-controlled areas. Early in the full-scale invasion, evacuating westward was dangerous, with Russian forces targeting civilians on foot, by bus, or in private vehicles. The OHCHR report highlights brutal killings of civilians trying to escape by car, even those with white flags or signs indicating children (OHCHR 2022a; Human Rights Watch 2022a). At Kramatorsk train station, the biggest transport hub in Eastern Ukraine, an attack on evacuees, mainly women and children, resulted in 66 deaths (BBC 2022).

Throughout 2022, routes into Ukraine were consistently cut off, with Russian forces imposing deadlines for those trying to leave. By October 2022, new requirements mandated a special permit for those seeking to leave, causing significant delays and expiration of permits before crossing. By August, ten people had died while waiting in line (U.S. Department of State 2023). By December 2022, the last exit corridor from occupied territories near Vasylivka (Zaporizhzhya Oblast) was closed. By October 2023, entry into the Russian Federation for Ukrainians was restricted to a single road checkpoint.

Occupying Russian authorities have pressured residents in occupied territories to obtain Russian citizenship and passports. Those without Russian passports faced intense scrutiny, prolonged questioning, and threats at border crossings and checkpoints (OHCHR 2024a, 17). Ukrainian passports and IDs have been confiscated during the “filtration” process (Filipchuk et al. 2022). For military-aged men, obtaining Russian passports poses a risk of forced conscription, with documented cases of men being conscripted at checkpoints while trying to leave occupied areas (OHCHR 2024a, 18).

Locals experience violence differently at checkpoints based on their gender, and Russia’s war in Ukraine exemplifies this disparity. Young men are the most targeted group in checkpoint crossings (von Löwis and Sasse 2021, 234), while young women are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence. During the initial phase of the war (2014–2017), the OHCHR documented instances of conflict-related sexual violence at checkpoints on both sides of the contact line, predominantly affecting young women (OHCHR 2017).

Checkpoints reflect a broader pattern of violence within “territories of terror,” where vulnerability intensifies at the intersection of Ukrainian identity and gender. For instance, men undergo routine strip searches as Russian authorities look for nationalist symbols or ties to the Ukrainian military. Adult men are frequently detained for extensive questioning at checkpoints, and their documents and mobile phones are often confiscated.

According to the Nash Svit report, the majority of documented war crimes targeting LGBTQI+ individuals occurred at checkpoints or in areas patrolled by the Russian military in the occupied territories. The primary pretext for homo/transphobic abuse was confidential information about the victims’ private lives found on their phones, and in some cases, their appearance or manner of behavior (Nash Svit Center 2022).

Checkpoint violence, moreover, disproportionately targets marginalized groups based on ethnicity and race. For example, Ukrainian Roma, who have been historically vulnerable, face increased discrimination while fleeing occupied territories, often waiting for weeks at checkpoints before being permitted to cross (Radchenko 2022). The intersection of Roma identity and pro-Ukrainian activism is particularly risky: a Roma activist was detained after a checkpoint phone search revealed anti-Putin messages (Panchenko 2023).

Since Russia's 2014 occupation, Crimean Tatars, an indigenous Muslim community, have been subjected to politically and ethnically motivated discrimination. The full-scale invasion worsened this, with Crimean Tatars, especially men, being systematically detained at checkpoints on suspicion of conspiracy (Council of Europe 2023, 5). Those with pro-Ukrainian views suffer heightened violence, as seen in the Kherson region, where an Imam was detained at a checkpoint and tortured for his political stance (Ombudsman of Ukraine 2023, 21).

People of Color, including international students, trapped in occupied cities faced significant challenges in escaping to Ukrainian-controlled territories. In Kherson, those attempting to flee were denied passage "without special agreement," repeatedly turned back, threatened with guns, and had their car tires deflated at checkpoints. Deutsche Welle (DW) reported that students were captured at a checkpoint, blindfolded, and held for hours before being released, likely to avoid suspicion if the taxi driver returned without them (Nasinde and Busari 2022; Ovuorie 2022). Due to the international attention, Russia saw foreigners as a valuable propaganda tool. An intercepted conversation revealed that Russians were planning to forcibly evacuate Vietnamese residents of Kherson to Crimea for a propaganda video (State Security Service of Ukraine 2022).

Crossing checkpoints after 2022 has become an even riskier endeavor than in previous years due to the absence of external oversight. Unlike checkpoints controlled by Ukraine, Russian-controlled checkpoints lack international monitoring or humanitarian presence. Without such external protection, individuals must rely solely on their resourcefulness and adaptability to avoid potential violence.

"Safe identity"

In the realm of Russian ideology, any displays of Ukrainian identity by residents attempting to flee occupied territories subject them to grave danger. This compels them to craft a "safe" identity as their sole means of passage. This is facilitated by the fact that Ukrainians and Russians are not easily distinguishable by appearance. While language and culture are the defining elements of Ukrainian identity, these can also be masked due to the widespread bilingualism among Ukrainians. Ukrainian bilingualism, where individuals switch between Ukrainian and Russian depending on their situation, social standing, and place of residence, becomes instrumental when passing through checkpoints (Portnov 2019).

Recent studies on the transformation of Ukrainian cultural identity define the dominant identity as "national-civil" or "political," a term coined as a result of slow and consistent transformation starting in the 1990s and crystallized with the full-scale invasion (Sasse and Lackner 2019; Golovakha et al. 2024). Civic national identity, based on unity, solidarity, and equality across regions and social groups, has prevailed over ethnic identity. Over the 30 years of independence, ethnic identity has ranked lowest in the hierarchy of identities, which includes citizenship, gender, religion, city residence, age, language, and occupation (Golovakha et al. 2024, 306). While the Ukrainian language and culture remain significant, belonging to an active civil society has taken precedence in shaping this identity. This has led to a more nuanced understanding of identity,

encompassing combinations like Crimean Tatar Ukrainian or Russian-speaking Ukrainian. Rapid digitalization and widespread volunteer movement have played pivotal roles in its development. It is no surprise that the generation of Ukrainians raised in independent Ukraine strongly embraces this sense of belonging (Melnikov, Ignatieva, and Nastoyasha 2024).

The impact of war on identity in occupied territories is evident when comparing studies from Eastern Ukraine before and after 2014. Beyond those with clear pro-Russian or pro-Ukrainian stances, residents living through the traumatic events of war and occupation have created a “safe hierarchy of identities.” They have blended in with societal expectations by avoiding traits that could attract unwanted attention and choosing basic, recognizable identities tied to their hometown or region. In this context, adopting a “Slavic,” “local-regional,” or “local-urban” identity has been seen as the safest bet (Golovakha et al. 2024, 304).

However, the shift in identities among Eastern Ukraine inhabitants may not entirely clarify the dynamics observed at checkpoints in the occupied territories. Those seeking passage must portray themselves as belonging to a “safe” group, regardless of their identity. This aligns with Goffman’s “dramaturgical approach,” wherein individuals strategically present themselves in specific situations to exert control over the interaction (Goffman 1959). In peaceful times, travelers often come across what is termed as “security theater” at checkpoints (Pütz 2012)¹. However, during war, routine interactions can suddenly escalate into something far more dangerous, where moving across checkpoints poses an existential risk. An illustration of how civilians try to mislead guards about their identity at checkpoints in Syria involves Sunni civilians carrying pictures of Shia Sheikhs to convince soldiers that they are Shia (Schon 2016, 289).

In *Masquerades of War*, Kevin McSorley explores the conflict in Chechnya by employing Goffman’s concept of “masking,” illustrating it as both a “symbolic and literal harbinger of filtration” (McSorley 2015, 131). There is a notable parallel between the terror inflicted on civilians by Russian forces in modern Ukraine and Chechnya. Filtration in Chechnya served as a “gateway practice to systematic terror and associated extortion,” (121) marked by “non-selectivity” and “universal suspicion for men between the ages of ten and sixty” (121). Thus, everyone confronted with the new lawless reality becomes a “conscious strategist of survival” (122).

Due to the fluidity of “civic national identity,” individuals fleeing occupied territories can still conceal their true identity. This implies that individuals with a strong Ukrainian identity can present themselves as belonging to the “safe” category. However, if suspected of deviating from this “safe identity,” individuals are automatically exposed to the risk of violence determined by both their Ukrainian identity and other social markers.

This analysis vividly reveals the role of checkpoints in occupied territories as not merely bureaucratic control points, but rather as manifestations of a broader system of fear and intimidation. Checkpoints become focal points where violence emerges from the intersection of “otherness” and gender. While the existing literature extensively covers the violence occurring at checkpoints, it often fails to acknowledge the resourcefulness and resilience of civilians. Despite the oppressive conditions, individuals demonstrate remarkable agency in devising strategies for safer passage. By examining the methods through which safety is ensured, I want to gain insight into the complex dynamics at play in occupied territories and the resilience of forced migrants.

Research objectives

This study examines how migrants use their agency to escape occupied territories through checkpoints, which symbolize a regime of terror. It builds on the idea that successfully passing

through these checkpoints requires adopting a “safe identity,” which involves concealing one’s true intentions and identity. As strategies for safer passage are often driven by the violence experienced at checkpoints, this chapter focuses on two key questions:

RQ1: How do people escaping occupied territories mask their real identity behind a “safe identity” at checkpoints?

RQ2: To what extent is the formation of this “safe identity” influenced by the threat of violence resulting from the intersection of Ukrainian identity and gender?

Participants and methodology

This study integrates documentary analysis with qualitative interviews. It uses NGO reports to examine intersectional violence and discriminatory patterns at checkpoints and incorporates online resources frequently used by individuals preparing for these crossings. To enrich the analysis, I conducted seven in-depth interviews to gather detailed insights, perspectives, and experiences regarding the construction of a “safe identity” at checkpoints. It is essential to acknowledge that the interview sample is limited and does not reflect the broader population.

The dominant identity of all participants could be defined as a “civil-national” Ukrainian identity. Six out of the seven interviewees chose to conduct the interview in Ukrainian, and one in Russian. The participants included three women and four men who had fled territories in southern Ukraine occupied in 2022, specifically from Kherson, Nova Kakhovka, and Vasilyevka (Zaporizhzhya region).

I focused on the southern regions under occupation for several reasons. These areas offer valuable data on checkpoint crossings, unlike the briefly occupied northern territories where such practices have not fully developed. Additionally, the rapid establishment of the occupation regime in the south, driven by the presence of Russian troops, contrasts with the long-term, more entrenched occupation in Eastern Ukraine (Malyarenko and Kormych 2024).

The majority of the population in these areas identifies as ethnic Ukrainians and shows minimal support for unification with Russia (Rating Group 2022). Notably, the southern occupied territories are distinguished by active resistance, reflected in the local elites’ reluctance to cooperate with occupation forces and street protests against occupation. This resistance has led to widespread terror, including over 300 documented cases of forced disappearances in Zaporizhzhya Oblast within three months of occupation (U.S. Department of State 2023).

Ethical concerns guided my decision to exclude those who fled to Russia to protect their safety. The interviews were conducted using video conference software, transcribed, and translated into English. The interviewees’ statements have been anonymized for publication.

Results

Based on interview data and supported by other documented cases, this section begins by introducing the general context of the escape, detailing the conditions under which it occurred and the factors influencing it. It then delves into specific strategies used to safeguard passage through checkpoints, examining how these strategies relate to the threats of violence associated with Ukrainian identity and gender. The analysis demonstrates how a “safe identity” was constructed within the specific time-space continuum at the checkpoints.

Escape journey

All participants escaped after spending one to two months under occupation. In some areas, like Nova Kakhovka, leaving the city was impossible during the first month. With no official evacuation, people typically self-organized into convoys of buses and cars. The first escapees faced deadly risks, with some losing their lives to landmines. Initially, escape routes were shorter and had fewer checkpoints, but as the occupation continued and the front line shifted, the number of checkpoints on routes toward Ukraine-controlled territories increased to 30–50. The destruction of bridges and the closure of roads, such as the one through the Kakhovka Dam, forced people to take long detours. Escaping often meant spending days in cars, waiting in lines, exhausted, and facing the possibility of death on the road.

T. from Vasilyevka escaped on foot with his family in the first weeks of the occupation before the checkpoint system became more complicated. He recalled fearing encounters with unpredictable and potentially dangerous Russian forces. When they spotted a military patrol approaching, they hid off the road, remaining hidden until it was safe to continue. However, circumventing and avoiding Russian forces became nearly impossible once the checkpoint system was better organized.

At every checkpoint, Russian guards routinely checked documents and inspected phones. Anything indicating Ukrainian identity or pro-Ukrainian/pro-Western sentiments could lead to interrogations and severe consequences. The rise of civil intelligence apps heightened the guards' suspicions, particularly at checkpoints leading to Ukraine-controlled territories. They were on the lookout for such apps, and any sign of sending data could be interpreted as sharing military information with the Ukrainian army. M. from Vasilyevka shared an instance where a guard checked the calculator app on his iPhone, suspecting it was used for noting coordinates. I. from Nova Kakhovka mentioned that guards checked if GPS was turned on at every one of the 35 checkpoints she passed, demanding it be turned off for "security reasons."

As documented in many sources and confirmed by participants, men were routinely stripped at checkpoints as guards searched for tattoos indicating any affiliation with the Ukrainian army or national symbols. They also checked for bruises and marks that might suggest combat involvement. Women could also be stripped, though less frequently than men.

Participants developed various strategies to pass through checkpoints safely. They accumulated information from local online groups and acquaintances who had managed to escape. Efforts to appear "safe" at checkpoints fell into two categories: preparing mobile phones and other electronic devices and adopting performative measures believed to aid in passing through.

Preparing devices

Mobile phones are capable of revealing sensitive information individuals wish to keep private. Consequently, all participants, before escaping, thoroughly "cleaned" their devices, including mobile phones, laptops, and tablets. They deleted any photos with Ukrainian symbols or indications of pro-Ukrainian or pro-Western sentiments. Any footage of war-related destruction in their city was also erased. Participants made sure to remove all pro-Ukrainian searches from Google and YouTube that could incriminate them.

Social media posed another risk, so they unsubscribed from pro-Ukrainian channels and deleted chats or correspondence that might reveal their views. Often, they went a step further and deleted the social media apps where they were most active. Participants were aware that having a phone

“too clean” could appear suspicious. To avoid this, they meticulously performed selective cleaning, leaving only neutral information. They partially cleaned correspondence with friends, keeping only messages unrelated to the war, everyday conversations, and personal photos, while ensuring nothing incriminating remained. As an additional measure, V., from Kherson put her phone in airplane mode, fearing that new messages might pop up during a search and incriminate her. A similar pattern of phone “cleaning” was revealed in interviews with victims of interrogation and torture in occupied territories, as reported by NGO “Zmina” (Petruniok 2024, 24).

A pattern emerged of people under occupation using neutral language in their day-to-day messages, fearing sudden mobile phone searches or interrogations. In certain contexts, this neutral conversation masked more important topics being discussed. As one of the participants shared, people in occupied areas used language, disguised as innocent everyday conversations, to send information about the location of Russian military equipment. Messages like *“Do you remember where we played football last year? That is a nice place.”* could indicate the presence of Russian military equipment in that location now. In line with this reasoning, participants communicated with their families while on the route, ensuring not to reveal details but simply confirming their safety and the start of their journey.

As language is a key identifier of Ukrainian identity and an expression of a pro-Ukrainian stance, all respondents communicated with guards in Russian. Some participants switched their mobile phone language settings from Ukrainian to Russian in preparation for the journey. This is how I. from Nova Kakhovka recalled the moment when she reached Ukraine-controlled territories with a group of cars:

When we passed through the last checkpoint into the “gray zone,” [there were] fields, fields. There was still the threat of shelling because they could break the agreement... Maybe the first village where we felt safe, where we stopped at a store, everyone was so happy, people were crying, and we cried too. We started speaking Ukrainian, even though we hadn’t spoken Ukrainian at home before the war.

Performance

Speaking Russian at checkpoints was the most straightforward protective strategy to pass safely and avoid suspicion of having a Ukrainian identity. However, the strategies employed to mitigate the threat of violence stemming from the intersection of Ukrainian identity and gender were far more complex.

Women resorted to presenting themselves as unattractive as possible to avoid unwanted attention from guards, fearing sexual violence at the checkpoints. V. from Kherson, who was escaping in a car with two other women and small children, shared that she decided not to wash her hair before the trip and put effort into “being invisible” after hearing from a friend who had witnessed women being pulled out of cars at checkpoints just a few days earlier.

O. from Vasiliyevka, took extreme measures to keep her family safe during their escape. They had to leave quickly after being informed by the mayor, who refused to collaborate with the occupiers, that Russian authorities had created lists of people with pro-Ukrainian stances and her family was on the list. They had only 30 minutes before the guards’ shift change at the checkpoint leading out of the city. At that time, the route to Ukrainian-controlled territories took days and involved passing through more than 30 Russian-controlled checkpoints. Their plan was to tell the guards they were visiting relatives in a nearby village and then cut across the front line through the fields. Later, they

realized the fields were mined and felt fortunate to have survived. This risky endeavor was driven by fear for their men, who were likely to be the primary targets of violence.

Not everyone passed through checkpoints, and the abuse inflicted on the men... well, you think about the men first of all. As for the women, they were examined but at least not undressed...It always depended on the guards encountered, O. explained.

In addition to their cover story, a certain performance was necessary to pass through before the lists were checked. O. recalled that to persuade the guards to let them through, the women in the car cried, explaining that their homes had been shelled and they could no longer stay in the basement, which was, in fact, true.

Safety perception

Despite the effectiveness of described protective strategies, these often lacked rationality. For instance, turning phones to airplane mode or switching off GPS were driven by fear and chaos among both escapees and guards. These measures could be reversed in seconds by guards inspecting the phones or by migrants after passing the checkpoint. V. from Kherson expressed valid concerns that merely “cleaning devices” was insufficient, as technologies could recover deleted data. Reports from Zmina indicated that in occupied territories, mobile phone checks were specialized and improving (Petruniok 2024). However, interviews with escapees revealed that advanced technologies and intelligence were not always used at checkpoints, giving those who passed routine checks a better chance of avoiding more specialized scrutiny.

The irrational reasoning at checkpoints and border crossings is further highlighted in digital migration studies. A study on asylum seekers in Germany noted significant subjectivity in evaluating surveillance risks at the border and checkpoints, stating that “the boundaries between actual risks and speculation are fluid” (Steinbrink et al. 2021, 14). This suggests that protective strategies are heavily influenced not just by objective factors, but by migrants’ perceptions of safety at checkpoints, which can vary greatly among individuals.

Knowledge of protective strategies was often derived from rumors, networks of escapees, and social media. However, over time, social media became unreliable as occupation authorities began monitoring it. Additionally, people were frequently stopped on the streets, and their phones were confiscated. For example, I.’s father from Vasilyevka had his phone taken at a checkpoint and was given the choice to either surrender his phone or face death. Consequently, he had to inform his contacts that his phone number was no longer his. Over time, online activity in occupied cities decreased significantly as Russians could impersonate familiar usernames and use direct messages for interrogations.

Discussion

In spatial terms, the occupation regime creates a “territory of terror,” compelling everyone to devise survival strategies, whether through cooperation, underground resistance, or adopting a “safe identity.” The occupation regime consolidates its authority by actively suppressing individuals who openly resist or fail to conceal their true identities. Checkpoints are the defining elements of the territorial regime of terror, both deeply integrated into the urban canvas and marking its boundaries. Checkpoints are everywhere, within cities and across occupied territories. Spatial

visualization of checkpoints and roadblocks would reveal occupied urban areas as a suffocating net, confining residents and restricting their movement. But most importantly, checkpoints serve as crucial points of filtration, making any movement within occupied territories a risky endeavor.

Checkpoints are places where civilians' trajectories intersect with the territorial regime of occupation, and this intersection determines a person's fate. For those unable to leave, this encounter is not the final one. The checkpoint is, therefore, a key infrastructure of the occupation regime. The conflict between spatial figures of trajectory and territory is not only defined by the regime's security measures but also by its policing of civic and gender identities suitable for the new spatial order.

Checkpoints are not fixed locations; their positions can change instantly. Some checkpoints are more static and supported by infrastructure, while others are simple roadblocks. Despite varying forms, checkpoints set up a "scene" in Goffman's sense, a space with defined roles and very limited ways to ensure a safe encounter. For forced migrants traversing territories of terror, the anticipation of violence at checkpoints is a constant reality, making preparation for these encounters essential. The survival strategy for those trying to leave the territory of terror lies in performance, donning a "safe identity" mask to survive. Understanding the real culture of occupation and guards' expectations, including their perceptions of who is Ukrainian and how men or women should behave, is essential for survival. Masking occurring at checkpoints is a natural response to the violence imposed by the occupying regime.

Research demonstrated that impersonating someone with a "safe identity" was not a permanent change but rather a temporary "mask" specifically crafted for checkpoints. For instance, two participants reported that, despite the need for elaborate performances at checkpoints, they were able to inform the Ukrainian Army about the locations of military equipment they saw on the way. This shows that escapees continued their resistance efforts even after putting on a "safe identity" mask.

The study also identified a pattern observed in digital migration studies: the inevitable symbiosis between migrants and their smartphones. In the Ukrainian context, distinguishing someone as Ukrainian solely based on their appearance or performance was impossible, thereby emphasizing the pivotal role of digital devices. The potential use of mobile phones for military intelligence made phone searches essential for guards, leading escapees to take stringent measures to secure their devices.

Interviews indicated that the intersection of gender and Ukrainian identity in relation to violence at checkpoints significantly influenced protective strategies. In women-only groups, fear of sexual violence was predominant, while in mixed-gender groups, the primary concern was violence against men. These fears shaped the strategies employed. And if concealing Ukrainian identity involved both "the cleaning of devices" and speaking Russian, gender-related measures have been mainly performative, like trying to look less feminine, less "conventionally attractive," etc.

Violence LGBTQI+ individuals experience at checkpoints is usually the result of phone searches. Similar to the Ukrainian "civil identity," LGBTQI+ people are exposed to violence at checkpoints based on the digital footprint they leave. This highlights the need for further investigation into the strategies implemented by this particular group.

As more people from occupied territories headed east are finding routes to exit Russia through third countries, interviewing them could reveal the unique safety strategies they employed compared to those fleeing westward. Furthermore, the exploration of intersectional violence could be extended by investigating how Ukrainian identity intersects not only with gender but also with factors such as age, ethnicity, race, disability, and social status. This chapter marks the beginning of

a discussion on how migrants can challenge the power dynamics of occupation regimes and protect themselves by mastering a “safe identity” for checkpoints.

Conclusion

This study is an attempt to investigate the agency of forced migrants as they navigate urban landscapes to escape the military occupation. Focusing on checkpoints as literal physical filters that embody the occupation regime offers a spatial perspective on how violence unfolds within “territories of terror.” Exploring the intersection of “otherness,” particularly Ukrainian identity, and gender as social markers unveils a complex reality of violence at checkpoints.

The research uncovers how individuals craft a “safe identity” specifically for checkpoints, not merely to comply with regulations but as a vital survival tactic. Mastering “safe identity” becomes crucial at checkpoints as existential spaces that define whether one can pass or become a victim of the territorial regime. With Ukrainian identity being fluid, measures taken by forced migrants to ensure their safety primarily focus on their digital presence. By meticulously cleansing digital footprints, people attempt to evade suspicion and ensure safe passage. Gendered role expectations imposed on those attempting to pass checkpoints also require them to perform the safest version of themselves. The war in Ukraine, like any other war, is characterized by deeply polarized gender roles, which lead to the adoption of protective strategies tailored to the unique risks of gender-based violence. This adaptive strategy reflects remarkable resilience in the face of pervasive violence and uncertainty.

Note

- 1 “Security theater” refers to performances at security facilities in airports aimed at increasing the travelers’ feelings of safety. Both travelers and terrorists try to appear normal while screeners perform a role.

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10

YOUNG, FEMALE, DISADVANTAGED

How parental guidance and societal gender stereotypes shape girls' and young women's spatial knowledge

Anna Juliane Heinrich and Angela Million

Girls' and young women's spatial knowledge in focus: An introduction

The first beacon study on spaces of childhood in Germany examined children growing up in the city of Hamburg in the late 1920s and early 1930s and revealed clear gender differences in the everyday use of spaces.

Especially the girls, as we have seen, are closely attached to their home district.... The boys, in contrast, are much more expansive; their activity spaces are therefore not only more comprehensive, but also more versatile.

(Muchow and Muchow 2012 [1935], 96; own translation)

Considering the period under study, this is hardly surprising. However, in conducting a qualitative meta-study of changes in the spatial knowledge of young people from the late 1960s, and early 1970s to the present (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024), we discovered that the observation is surprisingly timely. We found that very similar observations have been made for young people growing up in different contexts over the past 50 years.

Among young people growing up in suburban Calgary (Canada) in the mid-1970s, it was observed that “the use of the street and front area environments... [could be] differentiated by sex with girls being less and less involved in outdoor activities as they grow older” (Payne and Jones 1977, 5). Similarly, girls growing up in a self-built settlement on the outskirts of Bangalore (India) in the late 1990s generally “had fewer play opportunities than boys as they were typically...given less free rein to explore areas away from the home” (Bannerjee and Driskell 2002, 144). Moreover, in the early 2010s, boys growing up in the small town of Dapto (Australia) were “on the whole receiving much more freedom than their female counterparts” (Malone 2013, 385).

In short, a distinct gender bias runs through the 60 studies we analyzed on the spatial dimensions of growing up in diverse countries around the world dating back to the late 1960s. Against the backdrop of emancipatory movements and advances in gender equality in recent decades, this seems startling. Therefore, in this chapter, we take a closer look at the spatial knowledge of girls and young women. We will ask what distinguishes their spatial knowledge from that of boys and

young men, what formative influences shape it, and what consequences this has for girls' and young women's everyday lives and future prospects.

The argument we present here stems from a research project on the evolution of young people's spatial knowledge, which in turn was embedded in a research network oriented towards spatial theory: the Collaborative Research Center (CRC 1265) "Re-Figuration of Spaces."¹ The CRC 1265 proceeded from the observation that societies have experienced "radical social changes since the 1970s" (Knoblauch and Löw 2020, 282). This time frame marks a turning point with respect to diverse changes in the spatial organization of societies, including but not limited to, the increasing mobility of people and the global circulation of knowledge and goods, the development and proliferation of digital (communication) technologies, the resulting digital mediatization, and the intensification of transnational economic and political entanglements. We investigate these ongoing "spatial processes of change and the tensions involved conceptually and diagnostically as re-figuration of spaces" (Knoblauch and Löw 2020, 265). With the concept of refiguration, we acknowledge that societal changes do not only affect individuals but are also forged at the individual level, shaped by evolving knowledge and subjective interpretations of reality (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024, 12). Hence, one of our three project areas is dedicated to the exploration of *spatial knowledge*.

As a contribution to this, the aim of our research project was to describe and understand *changes in young people's spatial knowledge* since the late 1960s, beginning in the 1970s. The central component of this research endeavor was a qualitative meta-analysis of 60 studies on the spatial dimensions of childhood and youth.² Ultimately, we aimed to trace the characteristics of young people's spatial knowledge as well as the major trajectories of its development.

We understand *spatial knowledge* (see Figure 10.1) as,

the (socialized) experience of space and perceptions of space, as well as the emotions and affects associated with it. Subjectified spatial knowledge has to be physically, linguistically, or materially objectified to become the subject of investigation....[S]patial knowledge contains not only explicit and linguistic forms, but also implicit, corporal, and routinized practices. It is shaped by institutionalized stocks of knowledge as they in turn are produced and mediated by institutions such as family, science, school, standard regulatory systems (e.g., building regulations), or art.

(Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024, 12)³

Accordingly, this encompasses "the ways individuals think of and perceive spaces, how they construct and synthesize spaces, how they interpret specific spaces, and which actions they connect to such spaces. It shapes the way people act with and in relation to spaces" (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024, 12).

In studying young people's spatial knowledge, we distinguish between *embodied-experienced spatial knowledge*, "produced through corporal, physical, and sensorial explorations of the (natural/built) environment without any intermediating agency" (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024, 14/16), and *mediated spatial knowledge*, "acquired through an intermediating agency" (16) such as a peer, a book or the internet.

The key arguments that we will develop from our empirical data in this chapter are that, due to gendered parental guidelines and societal gender stereotypes, girls' and young women's daily lives revolve more around the domestic sphere of the home, with little opportunity for unsupervised play or independent mobility beyond the home and into more public spaces. These significant

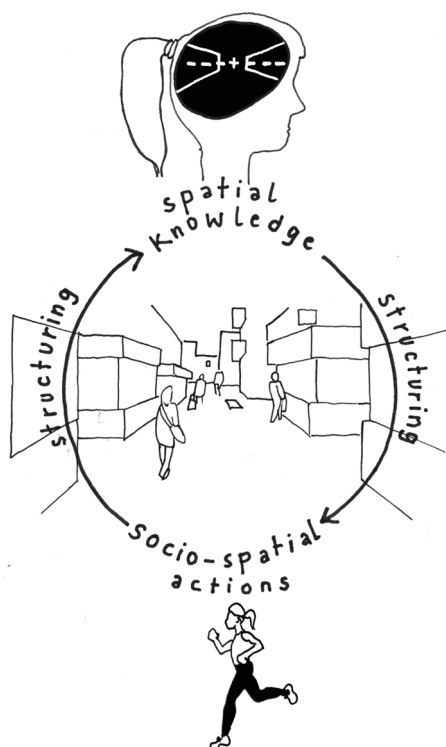


FIGURE 10.1 The mutually structuring relationship between socio-spatial actions and spatial knowledge.

Source: Castillo Ulloa et al. (2024, 13). Illustration: Grit Koalick, visuranto.de

influences on their everyday lives impact their spatial knowledge. Girls' and young women's limited opportunities to acquire embodied-experienced spatial knowledge bear negative consequences for their present as well as their future aspirations and prospects. Girls and young women from families with a lower socio-economic status are particularly negatively affected. In recent years, access to online spaces has provided girls and young women with new spatial practices that allow for intensive social interactions and the acquisition of mediated spatial knowledge from home. However, access to media is again rendered unequal along the intersecting lines of gender, class, race, and ethnicity.

Meta-analytic stance: Our database and methodology

With the aim of tracing the development of young people's spatial knowledge since the late 1960s and early 1970s, we took advantage of the historical and processual nature of synthesis research. Thus, methodologically, we chose to conduct a qualitative meta-analysis⁴ of empirical studies of young people's spatial practices, perceptions, experiences, and the ways in which they (re)arrange, appropriate, and interpret spaces. The research was conducted over four years (2018–2021) by an interdisciplinary team consisting of a professor, two postdoctoral researchers, a doctoral student, and a student assistant with backgrounds in urban and regional planning, architecture, and sociology.

Our ambition—admittedly not a modest one—was to draw insights that would apply to many young people growing up in different regions and contexts around the world. We meta-analyzed 60 articles, chapters, and monographs published in English, Spanish, or German, covering the experiences of young people growing up in 31 countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Oceania (see Figure 10.2). While the majority of the sampled studies referred to urban settings, we also analyzed studies referring to suburban settings (eight), small towns (three), and rural areas (nine), with some of these studies making a comparison with urban settings. We recognize that what is considered an urban setting in one context, may well be understood as a medium-sized town in another context. When we write about (sub)urban neighborhoods, small towns, or rural areas, we follow the terms used by the author(s) of the respective study and thus refer to the settings as they are categorized in their respective contexts.

We would like to emphasize that we did not focus explicitly on studies addressing girls or gendered aspects of growing up (although one of the studies, McNamee [1998], had a specific focus on this); rather, our study aimed to cover a more general scope of young people's everyday lives. We would also like to point out that all of the studies reviewed that conducted analyses and interpretations related to gender worked with a binary gender framework. None of the analyzed studies went beyond traditional binary gender categorizations. In concrete terms, this means that many of these studies made explicit statements about girls or young women and/or boys or young men. We can see two reasons for this: One reason is certainly the period of the older studies. Fifty years ago, feminist spatial research that explicitly focused on trans and non-binary gender identifications was just beginning to emerge. Secondly, to this day, there is still an urgent need for research in the field of geographies of childhood and youth that adopts a more inclusive and nuanced approach to trans and non-binary and diverse gender identities in order to better capture diverse spatial experiences. While one of the strengths of a meta-analysis is that it allows existing empirical research to be examined in a different light, thereby bringing attention to alternative interpretations of findings, our meta-analytic stance meant that we had to work from the interpretations of the authors of these studies. Thus, we could not move beyond binary gender categories. Although this is a limitation of our research, we see the findings presented below as a valuable contribution to a better understanding of the spatialities of young people.

In conducting our qualitative meta-analysis, we followed the general framework of a “meta-ethnography” proposed by Noblit and Hare (1988), along with the extensions suggested by Doyle (2003). We structured our work roughly along three phases: (1) case selection, (2) analysis, and (3) synthesis; these were by no means sharply delineated, but rather interwoven in iterative steps. The case selection phase involved the development of search terms to identify studies of interest (e.g., child and space, or youth and appropriation), a comprehensive search for texts (e.g., online library catalogs, scientific databases [esp. Web of Science], peer review journals, Google scholar, etc.), and the creation of a corresponding database. This phase included the definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria to filter the growing pool of studies (e.g., qualitative research design and content yield), and the subsequent selection of primary studies according to a theoretical sampling strategy (aiming for a balance between studies of childhood and youth, the five decades considered, and different world regions and geographical contexts). The analysis phase began with the successive development of a coding scheme based on multiple trial codings. Once a study had been coded, the findings for each code were summarized in a so-called *key descriptor*, which was both a concise and rich representation of the empirical material. We moved from the “first-order interpretation[s]” (Britten et al. 2002, 213) suggested by the author(s) of the respective meta-analyzed study to our own second-order interpretations by formulating so-called *key concepts*

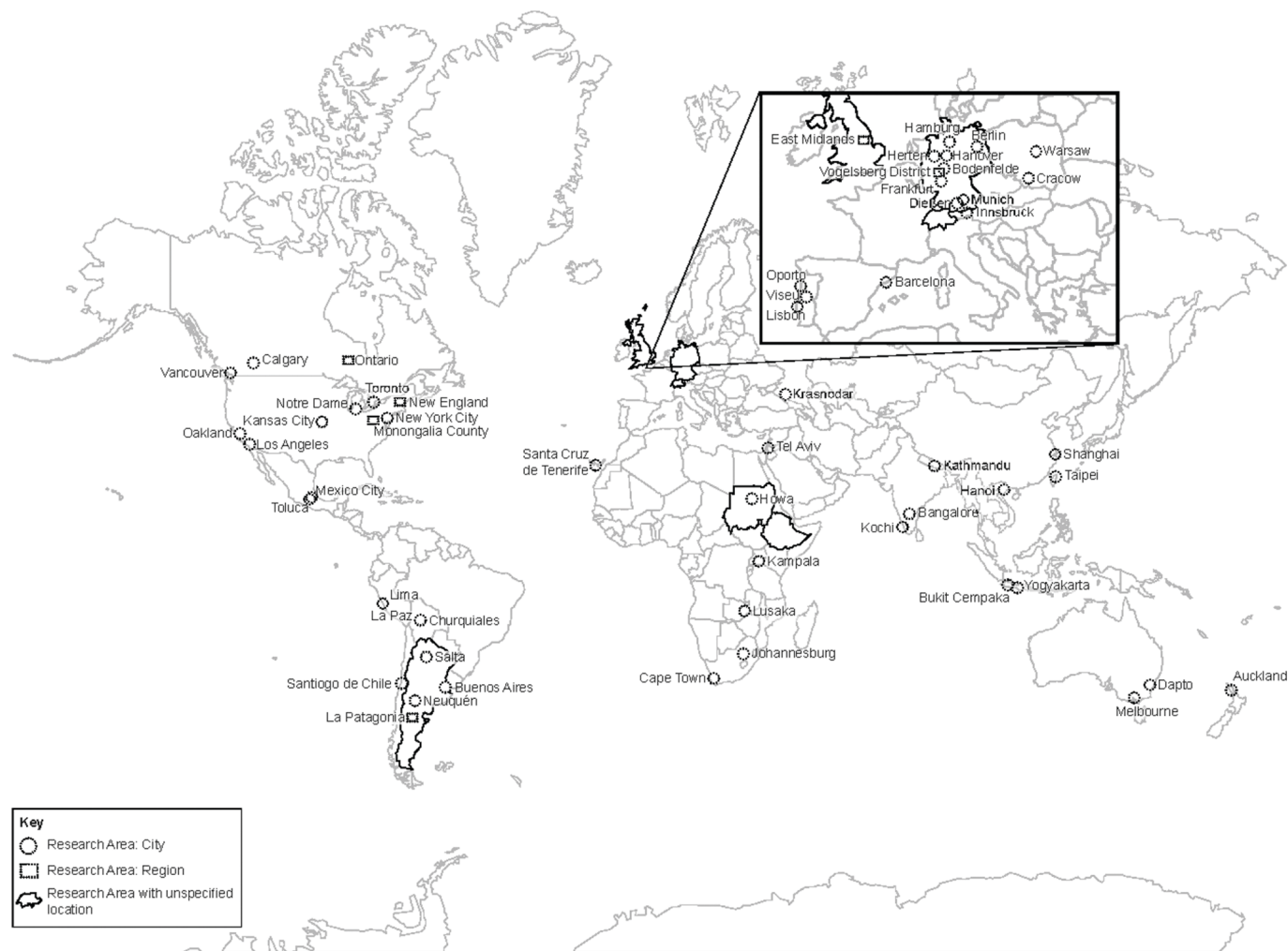


FIGURE 10.2 Overview of the geographic locations of the sampled studies.

Source: Castillo Ulloa et al. (2024, 35).

for each key descriptor. These were single sentences that summarized the quintessence in more abstract terms. To prepare for the final phase of synthesis, we then clustered the key concepts and their underlying key descriptors thematically along recurring themes and dynamics (e.g., social control or relevant spaces such as shopping malls). To initiate the synthesis, we related the different studies to each other by drawing out the main commonalities, contrasts, particularities, and nuances on the basis of the key concepts. Following Doyle (2003, 323), we engaged in a process of “reconceptualization across studies”. This involved the use of both an analytical (i.e., grounded coding) and an interpretive framework (i.e., a set of concepts not explicitly present in the primary studies). Methodologically, we were guided here by the concept of “countertopographies” by Cindi Katz (2004, xii), that is, we tried to discover “startling similarities” between how young people grow up around the world, despite all the differences that shape their experiences in very different places.

Our meta-analysis (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024) included studies that examined young people between the ages of three and 30, with most studies covering what can be considered primary and secondary school age. What is understood as *childhood* or *youth* is socially constructed and varies considerably according to historical, societal, and cultural contexts (Hörschelmann and Van Blerk 2012, 14). It is widely recognized in the social sciences that “[t]he perceptual (and other) boundaries between childhood, youth, and adulthood are becoming more blurred and...are vacillating” (Smith and Mills 2019, 5). However, without applying any universalizing attributes associated with the categories of *childhood* and *youth*, we would like to give the reader an idea of the age of the young people we are referring to. When we write about *girls* (or boys), we mean children up to the age of 14; when we write about *young women* (or young men), we mean youngsters who are 15 or older. With this differentiation, we follow the distinction made by the United Nations (UNDESA n.d.).

Girls and young women bear most of the burden: Gender-specific expectations and rules

With our meta-analysis, we delved into studies on the spatial dimensions of childhood(s) and youth(s) in order to trace changes in young people’s spatial experiences and perceptions as well as their uses and appropriations of spaces. In addition to broad lines of change (see Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024), a core finding of our research was a seemingly unchanging characteristic in young people’s spatial knowledge: a stable gender bias. In accordance with this, the key argument we make below is that girls and young women face a significantly heavier burden of supervision and much stricter rules than boys and young men. A strong gender bias in parents’ attitudes and decisions regarding their children, as well as societal gender stereotypes and gender-specific ascriptions, shape girls’ and young women’s everyday lives and more specifically their spatial practices, perceptions, and activity spaces in diverse contexts around the world.

An insight into girls’ and young women’s daily lives: Strict rules shaping spatial practices and experiences

Our meta-analysis revealed a concerning phenomenon: From the late 1960s to the present, parental guidelines and restrictions have exhibited remarkably stable inequalities between daughters and sons, placing girls and young women at a disadvantage in terms of their spatial practices and experiences. Despite anticipating progress in gender equality since the late 1960s, our findings from the meta-analyzed studies indicate that parents consistently impose stricter rules on their

daughters than on their sons, regardless of other influencing factors such as geographic context or socio-economic background. We can trace similar situations for girls and young women from the 1970s to the present: Due to gender-specific parental guidelines, their radius of activity is consistently smaller and their activity spaces are less diverse than those of boys and young men. There are more places where girls and young women are not supposed to be according to their parents' rules, and they are allowed to move significantly less far away from home.

Generally, many parents assert that their children spend a lot of time at home, and we observe that home-based activities characterize many young people's everyday lives (Schak 1972; Zeiher and Zeiher 1994; Buss 1995; Salvadori 2002; Serrano Birhuett 2015; Carroll et al. 2015). This development is referred to as "domestication" of childhood(s) and youth(s) and applies in principle to boys and girls alike. However, girls and young women still have to spend more time at home and are given fewer opportunities for unsupervised play. While boys are freer to roam and interact with peers without parental supervision, their sisters tend to stay closer to their homes and/or remain indoors (see Figure 10.3).

Our meta-analysis shows this pattern in cases of girls and young women who grew up during the late 1920s and early 1930s in Germany (Muchow and Muchow 2012 [1935]), in the 1970s in Argentina, Mexico, Poland (Lynch 1977), and Canada (Payne and Jones 1977), throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s in the USA (Van Staden 1984; Salvadori 2002), Germany (Hitzler 1995), India (Bannerjee and Driskell 2002), South Africa (Swart-Kruger 2002), Australia (Malone and Hasluck 2002), and during the 2000s in Sudan and Ethiopia (Hammond 2003), Bangladesh (Ahmed and Sohail 2008), and Zambia (Van Gough 2008). Finally, the pattern has been shown to persist into the 2010s in Russia (Ziemer 2011) and Australia (Malone 2013).

Accordingly, girls and young women in Lusaka (Zambia), in the 2000s, for example, were subject to much stricter parental curfews than boys and young men: "Many of the young women

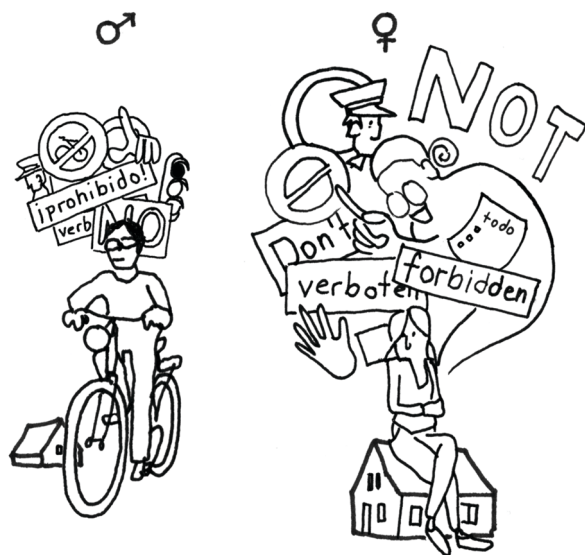


FIGURE 10.3 Parental guidelines shaping young people's spatial knowledge.

Source: Castillo Ulloa et al. (2024, 207). Illustration: Grit Koalick, visuranto.de

reported having to be home by 6 p.m. and some of the young men by 9 p.m. (though this mainly applied to the younger ones)” (Van Gough 2008, 250). Similarly, girls growing up in the small town of Dapto (Australia) in the 2010s were far less likely than boys of the same age to be allowed to walk home from school without parental supervision, to cross main roads alone, and to cycle alone on main roads (Malone 2013).

The differences described above are particularly evident when we look at nighttime spatial practices and perceptions, as these differ greatly by gender. While young men might go out to meet friends or visit bars and clubs, girls and young women living in Lusaka (Zambia) in the 2000s (Van Gough 2008), or in Barcelona (Spain) (Ortiz Guitart, Prats Ferret, and Baylina Ferre 2014) and Krasnodar (Russia) (Ziemer 2011) in the 2010s hardly ever went out at night.

The severe consequences of the gender bias described above are highlighted by extreme cases of certain groups of girls and young women (e.g., certain ethnic groups) becoming literally invisible—physically and socially—in public spaces and thus, at least to a certain degree, in society. An extreme case in this respect is the case of Vietnamese girls and young women growing up in Braybrook (Australia) in the late 1990s. Braybrook is a housing estate in Melbourne’s suburbs, and the authors of the study explain that the neighborhood is characterized by cheap building materials, problems due to high groundwater levels, poor infrastructural provision, and poor maintenance. In the 1990s, approximately two-thirds of Braybrook’s residents were Anglo-European Australians, nearly a quarter were of Asian origin, four percent were from South or Central America, and two percent were of African origin. The majority of Braybrook’s residents were affected by challenging circumstances, with one-third of adults unemployed and two-thirds of the residents living in poverty. The study’s authors explain that many young people growing up in Braybrook had “limited environmental experiences” because “most of the young people’s parents...[were] either very poor, working long hours or single, and therefore unable to provide their children with opportunities for extended discovery” (Malone and Hasluck 2002, 94). However, it becomes clear that social belongings in terms of gender and ethnicity reinforced this disadvantage: Vietnamese girls and young women remained practically concealed and secluded in the private space of their homes (Malone and Hasluck 2002). The authors link this to gendered cultural expectations, explaining that, “Asian girls are closely protected by their families and are rarely seen in public” (94). These girls and young women were expected to stay at home because of safety concerns. Furthermore, as parents in socio-economically disadvantaged families were often absent from home to earn a living, girls, in particular, were expected to care for siblings. But the authors also explore the intersection with ethnicity, explaining that experiences of racism in public spaces had led Vietnamese youths in particular to spend all their leisure time at home.

Similarly, girls and young women growing up in Dhaka City (Bangladesh) in the 2000s were largely absent from public space and rarely took advantage of available play and recreational facilities such as parks (Ahmed and Sohail 2008). The reasoning for restricting daughters more than sons was similar: Girls and young women from lower socio-economic backgrounds had to care for siblings while their parents worked long hours, and parents generally feared for their daughters’ safety. However, the study’s authors point out another gender-related aspect, namely the way in which recreational facilities predominantly cater to the needs of boys: “Another obstacle for girls’ play is negligence in identifying girls’ play needs—girls’ play is often viewed as playful preparation for motherhood. As a result, there has yet to be a serious effort to fulfil girls’ play needs in terms of play space design and play equipment” (Ahmed and Sohail 2008, 264). The intersectionality of gender and class is also evident for the girls and young women growing up in Dhaka City. While girls from high- and middle-income families at least occasionally had the

opportunity to enjoy fee-based amusement parks, their less privileged peers lacked the leisure time and financial resources to enjoy any recreational facilities.

Another example from the Global South shows how gender can strongly intersect with age. While most studies show that young people are given more freedom and fewer rules as they grow older, in some contexts, young women may become even more homebound as they mature. The experience of young Ethiopians growing up in a refugee camp in Sudan illustrates this. While the activity radius of boys increased as they grew older, the activity radius of girls and young women remained limited to the immediate neighborhood. Due to their domestic responsibilities after marriage, “girls became more tied to the home once they married” (Hammond 2003, 86). In all these examples, gender intersects with class, age, and ethnicity: Girls and young women from migrant backgrounds growing up in Dapto (Australia), their peers from a slum in Dhaka City (Bangladesh), and the young Ethiopian refugees in Sudan face additional challenges due to either their families’ comparatively low socio-economic status and/or their families’ ethnicity.

From these examples, we can conclude that the daily lives of girls and young women are governed and shaped by strict rules and that a pronounced gender bias has been a stable feature of their spatial practices and experiences in many contexts around the world from the late 1960s to the present. It has already become clear that societal attributions—namely attributions concerning the role and place of (married) women in the home—are one reason for the described disadvantages of girls and young women. In the following section, we will further explore the reasons and justifications for this stricter treatment.

“Being a good girl:” Societal and parental expectations and gender-specific ascriptions

All in all, our meta-analysis suggests that societal, cultural, and religious expectations and attributions of gender stereotypes are at the core of the gender bias described above. A closer examination of our empirical material illustrates this observation. The aforementioned home-centered daily lives of non-Anglo-Saxon girls and young women in Braybrook (Australia) are explained as follows:

[The] African and Asian girls who take on a caring role in extended families ... remain invisible (physically and socially) for cultural and religious reasons, and if encountered in the streets they shy away from entering into dialogue with others.

(Malone and Hasluck 2002, 96)

While some of the meta-analyzed studies explicitly relate restrictions imposed on girls and young women to social, cultural, and religious reasonings (Bannerjee and Driskell 2002; Hammond 2003; Cummins 2009), others convey gender-specific expectations and attributions indirectly (Payne and Jones 1977; Salvadori 2002). Some studies elaborate on these social, cultural, and religious reasonings in more depth: as noted above, girls and young women in Dhaka City (Bangladesh) were prohibited from using outdoor play and recreational facilities (Ahmed and Sohail 2008). The authors explain this as follows:

There are several reasons that parents are reluctant to allow their daughters outside—many girls are expected to care for their siblings; parents fear for daughters’ safety, as chastity and the

reputation of unmarried girls are crucial factors that determine her value in the eyes of potential husbands and in-laws.

(Ahmed and Sohail 2008, 264)

In the same vein, the stricter curfews imposed on girls and young women in Lusaka (Zambia) are openly justified on the grounds of “parents being concerned to try to reduce the chances of girls getting pregnant” (Van Gough 2008, 250). From these references to young women’s chastity and virginity, we can clearly see a sexual(ized) connotation of the arguments for stricter rules on girls’ and young women’s spatial practices and activity spaces. The considerations of Armenian girls and young women growing up in Krasnodar (Russia) reveal how such gendered ascriptions can be internalized. These girls and young women avoided public spaces because they considered their presence there inappropriate (Ziemer 2011).

The issue of care responsibilities, which is also mentioned in this context, can be found in several meta-analyzed studies (Bannerjee and Driskell 2002; Malone and Hasluck 2002; Swart-Kruger 2002; Hammond 2003; Ahmed and Sohail 2008). Parents, as well as the broader public, ascribe responsibility for domestic chores to girls and young women—significantly more than to boys and young men. An example is provided by children growing up in a squatter camp in Johannesburg (South Africa): “Parents said that the girls...needed to be on hand to help with tasks at home or to look after younger children” (Swart-Kruger 2002, 120). Though all children were expected to help with household tasks, girls carried a heavier burden than boys, resulting in fewer opportunities to expand their (already restricted) spatial practices. Similarly, a young woman from Braybrook (Australia) reports on her situation:

“...My mum works until late in the evenings and after school I’ve got to go home to look after my younger sister and my grandmother who lives in a flat at the rear of the house. I have to cook the meals while I babysit. I usually watch TV or talk to my friends on the telephone.”

(Malone and Hasluck 2002, 97)

Evidently, girls and young women are heavily involved in domestic chores and caring for siblings and other relatives, which the authors again attribute to religious and cultural expectations. The statement of a girl from a self-built settlement in Bangalore (India) shows that this can go as far as girls being berated for simply playing: “‘At home they scold me if I play. They say I am too grown-up for that...’ (Ghousiya, age 14)” (Bannerjee and Driskell 2002, 144). A response from her peer indicates how the imposition of domestic tasks is closely linked to a gender stereotype and a paternalistic ascription of her future: “‘If I go to my neighbour’s house, my mother scolds me. She says I should stay at home and learn house-work.’ (Lalitha, age 11)” (Bannerjee and Driskell 2002, 145). Finally, girls’ and young women’s safety is a recurring motive for restrictions on their independent mobility and unsupervised play. Parents of girls growing up in a squatter camp in Johannesburg (South Africa) generally assumed that “girls were safer close to home” (Swart-Kruger 2002, 120), without going into further detail. In the case of girls and young women in Lusaka (Zambia), restrictions imposed by guardians and family were justified by fears of assault and violence against girls in public spaces (Van Gough 2008). This fear is echoed by girls themselves in other contexts. A girl from a self-built settlement in Bangalore (India) explains why she and her peers avoid public spaces out of fear of sexual harassment: “‘The menfolk are very bad in Byapanahalli [an adjacent settlement]. They use indecent language...and tease young girls.’

(Maia, age 12)” (Bannerjee and Driskell 2002, 145). Similarly, girls and young women growing up in Barcelona (Spain)

feel very much observed in public space. They are well aware that their bodies are considered a sexual object and the discomfort, insecurity or fear that such alienating perception causes them impinges restrictive effects on their everyday use of space.

(Ortiz Guitart, Prats Ferret, and Baylina Ferre 2014, 53)

Finally, parents in small towns in Australia (Malone 2013) and Germany (Hitzler 1995) share traffic-related safety concerns. They restrict girls’ independent mobility to a greater degree than boys.

Overall, many of the reasons and justifications reveal a deeply ingrained notion that girls and young women are generally more in need of protection than boys and young men. Nevertheless, our meta-analysis reveals how access to new media can provide girls and young women with new spaces of their own and additional opportunities for their self-determined practices. Therefore, in the next section, we will look ahead and discuss online spaces and spatial practices.

A glimpse into the future: Online spaces and spatial practices as a potential for girls’ and young women’s liberation?

As we have outlined in the previous sections, girls’ and young women’s lives tend to be more home-centered than those of boys and young men; domestication and household chores affect them more than boys, and they generally enjoy little time and space outside of the supervision of guardians. However, in our meta-analysis, we found a development that might give a new direction to these considerations of girls’ and young women’s everyday lives: the simultaneous development, proliferation, and increasing accessibility of media, especially internet-based forms of communication.

In general, the popularity and increasing availability of various media (i.e., computers, gaming consoles, and television) draws many young people—boys and girls alike—indoors and extends the amount of time young people spend at home. In this sense, for children growing up in diverse urban and suburban neighborhoods of Auckland (New Zealand) “...to explore and have an adventure was, for some, an indoor and virtual experience” (Carroll et al. 2015, 15). Domestication is clearly reinforced by the lure of media. This trend is particularly pronounced in the Global North, where television and computer-based entertainment and communication have become an integral part of the home life of young people in general (McNamee 1998; Holloway and Valentine 2001; Carroll et al. 2015; Díaz-Rodríguez et al. 2015; Serrano Birhuett 2015; Arends and Hordijk 2016; Sander 2016) and girls and young women in particular (Malone and Hasluck 2002; Von Seggern et al. 2009; Ziemer 2011; De Almeida et al. 2014; Gräbel et al. 2015).

Since girls and young women spend more time at home than boys (not necessarily by choice), as discussed earlier, the issue of media use takes on particular relevance, raising the question of how the availability of (home-based) media and media consumption practices change girls’ home-centered daily lives. Generally, our meta-analysis clearly indicates that the home gains new affordances through access to media and, especially, the availability of devices connected to the

internet. For instance, girls and young women from migrant backgrounds living in Braybrook (Australia) described how the availability of television and computer access at home made staying at home and taking on care responsibilities less burdensome because they could connect with the outside world (Malone and Hasluck 2002). Similarly, their more privileged counterparts in Hanover (Germany) reported that they enjoyed spending time with their friends during sleepovers and engaging in activities such as watching TV and films (Von Seggern et al. 2009). Accordingly, media consumption is not just a means of entertainment, but access to media can actually enrich girls' homebound daily lives with new ways of communicating with the world outside the microcosm of their homes.

Armenian girls and young women in the city of Krasnodar (Russia) have even come to view their home apartments as adaptable spaces that they can share with family members with much more ease (Ziemer 2011). Technology has provided them with additional means to create a space for communication and interaction with others. If for some reason they could not socialize face-to-face, they could interact remotely via online chats. Likewise, their Portuguese contemporaries communicate online with peers and friends even when they live close to each other. This is illustrated by the example of a girl who regularly communicates online with her cousin, even though the cousin lives in the same neighborhood (De Almeida et al. 2014). Their German peers, again, describe how they intensify connections and friendships through online communication (Von Seggern et al. 2009), and girls and young women in Kochi (India) also use social media to make new friends (Saif 2019). Accordingly, digital devices allow girls and young women to communicate intensively while staying at home. They can experience new forms of privacy, even in the face of domestic overcrowding, and they can experience an adaptability of spaces to their individual needs.

The case of a 17-year-old Peruvian from Lima illustrates how essential online spaces and hybrid practices can become (Arends and Hordijk 2016). The young woman mentioned that she used to get bored in her offline life. However, since her parents restricted her from going outside, she found a new form of communication and connection through Facebook:

She explains ...: "Before, when I did not connect to Facebook, I always went outside and talked to people. But since my parents do not let me go out anymore, now the communication is different." "Now Facebook means everything to me."

(Arends and Hordijk 2016, 239)

Obviously, online spaces such as social network sites can become valued substitutes for local public spaces, which are regarded as too dangerous for girls and young women. Consequently, the increased utilization of digital devices and the internet have gradually become integral to their socialization practices. Media consumption not only serves as entertainment while meeting and interacting in offline spaces, but online spaces have become new domains for communication and interaction. This suggests that online spaces are relevant extensions of girls' and young women's activity spaces. Online practices can supplement or even substitute spatial practices that are otherwise denied to girls and young women.

Furthermore, the internet is not only used for entertainment and communication with friends but also allows young women to engage in practices that they would not be able to pursue with the knowledge of their families. The virtual space of a social network allows the aforementioned

young woman from Lima and her peers to experiment with identity claims that would not be acceptable in urban public space:

These young women are maneuvering online in making assertive identity announcements and they are adopting a more open sexual script. They do this within the virtual sphere among their peers, where it might be more acceptable. This can be interpreted as these young women's agency in the sense that they believe they are capable and morally strong enough to select a different identity than their culture dictates, at least online.... The showcasing of gendered sexual agency through online mediums must foremost be understood as a practice of identity experimentation and does not necessarily translate into immediate counter-discourse.

(Arends and Hordijk 2016, 240–241)

Online spaces seem to provide unsupervised spaces for practices that guardians of girls and young women would likely not approve of. Online practices allow them to escape their pervasive supervision and engage in self-determined practices related to identity formation. In this sense, the internet also allows girls and young women to get to know, experience, and create worlds for themselves beyond societal expectations and gender-specific attributions.

However, we must also note a gender bias in access to media. Girls and young women experience gender-specific restrictions in their access to media. In the early 1990s, cases of young people in Great Britain showed a clear difference between boys and girls in their access to and control over computers and video gaming consoles (McNamee 1998). The study indicates that control of video gaming consoles is often linked to negotiations of gender relations and space, particularly within sibling relationships. By controlling the use of and access to the devices, boys express their masculinity:

The physical ownership of computer and video games, and the physical control of space which arises from it, are also of *symbolic* importance to teenage boys in the domestic sphere. Young men are controlling and policing their sisters' access to computer and video games in the expression of their masculine identity.

(McNamee 1998, 204)

An example is given:

Tom appears from Amy's description to be policing her femininity by not allowing her to play with violent games, although Amy subverts his control by playing, and enjoying a game when he is not present. This subversion is not in any sense an act of power of Amy's part, however. Because she can only play when and at what she chooses *when her brother is not present*, she is both spatially and temporally on the margins. Girls, then, can only use domestic space on their own terms when boys are not there. (203)

The study sheds light on how ownership and control over media are shaped by and shape gender relations and the domestic space of the home. This shows how girls' and young women's access to technology can be subject to spatial and temporal constraints, relegating them to the margins of the domestic space. Two decades later, studies still indicate that boys and young men are more likely to use computer games than girls (Von Seggern et al. 2009; Díaz-Rodríguez et al. 2015; Gräbel et al. 2015; Sander 2016). The young Peruvian women in Lima were also more restricted in their

access to and use of the internet than young men due to “gender-based household chores and family duties of girls while present in the house” (Arends and Hordijk 2016, 238). In general, however, girls and young women have gained wider access to and more frequent use of the internet over the past decade (Gräbel et al. 2015; Saif 2019).

Overall, our meta-analysis allows us to trace a growing trend of home-centeredness among young people in the Global North due to the influence of media and technology. In the Global South, this media- and technology-enabled behavior remains rarer, as young people there use digital devices with internet access at home only when their families’ socio-economic conditions allow for its availability (Arends and Hordijk 2016; Saif 2019). One reading of this, then, is that girls and young women in both the Global South and the Global North, where families’ socio-economic conditions allow, have increasingly experienced additional and more self-determined opportunities for socialization over the past decade. Virtual spaces have become a means for them to connect with friends, providing alternatives to traditional face-to-face gatherings while still complying with parental mandates to stay at home.

At the same time, this underscores the importance of addressing the *digital divide* and its consequences. Young people, not only girls and young women, who do not have access to digital devices and the internet are excluded from opportunities that can provide new options and avenues for their personal everyday lives, for dealing with otherwise limited resources, and for coping with conflictual situations and living environments.

There are further challenges that need to be addressed: the fact that media availability makes being at home less burdensome should in no way be used as an argument to justify or even reinforce girls’ and young women’s homebound status. What we have provided here is a glimpse into the everyday lives of girls and young women, showing how they assume agency and make the best of their situation. For the individual—as the examples show—this is a great relief and sometimes acquires central importance. Nevertheless, further consideration must be given to the question of how girls and young women can experience equality with boys and young men, and not to the question of how limitations and confinement to the home can be masked or relativized by somewhat more pleasant circumstances.

Another aspect to be taken into consideration in future research is the development and proliferation of *mobile* devices, as they disconnect media consumption from the home. Since most of our meta-analyzed studies—due to the respective study periods and the corresponding technological developments—analyzed the role of homebound media such as television, home video game consoles, and computers (with one exception dedicated to mobile phones and smartphones: Hatuka and Toch 2016), we cannot make profound statements about the influence of mobile devices on girls’ and young women’s spatial knowledge. Laptops, smartphones, tablets, and the like separate access to the internet and the use of new media from the home and even allow for applications dedicated to outdoor activities. While this may contradict our findings of increasing domestication or suggest a future counter-development, in the light of our study findings, it seems likely that the further development of mobile devices will mainly benefit boys, as they are allowed much more mobility in their neighborhoods and beyond.

Moreover, with the current developments and features of smartphones, young people—and our findings suggest that this will affect girls and young women more than boys and young men—are already and will be increasingly monitored by their parents. Digital devices, especially parental control technologies, can be used to track young people’s every move and, of course, their online activities. While there may be arguments for some level of monitoring given the dangers associated with online practices (although *digital skills tutoring* seems more promising), the extent and

consequences of *digital fencing* need to be addressed through further research (for insights on *Social and Ethical Implications of New Technologies for Children and Young People* see Taylor and Rooney 2019).

Narrowing their horizons: Consequences for girls' and young women's spatial knowledge

Societal expectations, parental guidelines, and access to media exert a significant influence on girls' and young women's everyday lives. This has multiple consequences for their spatial knowledge. How these circumstances shape girls' and young women's spatial knowledge will be discussed in more detail in the following.

In our meta-analysis, we identified and divided spatial knowledge into three different categories (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024, 105): embodied-experienced spatial knowledge, mediated spatial knowledge, and prospective spatial knowledge. Based on this categorization, we will discuss how the previously described stable gender bias influences girls' and young women's spatial knowledge.

Embodied-experienced spatial knowledge involves the direct and sensory exploration of the physical environment. It encompasses the corporeal experiences, physical interactions, and sensorial perceptions that individuals gain through personal encounters with their surroundings. In this form of spatial knowledge, there are almost no intermediary factors between the individual and the built environment.

Mediated spatial knowledge encompasses all forms of understanding acquired through means other than direct sensory experience and bodily action. This type of knowledge can be acquired through various media, such as books, maps, videos, or virtual representations. Mediated spatial knowledge enables individuals to gain insight and information about the environment without being physically present in the space.

Lastly, *prospective spatial knowledge* relates to individuals' conceptions and anticipations of future spaces. It involves the capacity to envision and plan for spatial possibilities that may not yet exist or have not yet been directly experienced. Prospective spatial knowledge is crucial for imagining and shaping future environments, allowing individuals to envision and prepare for potential changes and developments in the built environment.

The key argument we will make in the following section is that the limitations that often result in girls and young women being more homebound than boys and young men have manifold negative consequences. They can acquire less embodied-experienced spatial knowledge, which fosters anxiety. This, in turn, shapes their neighborhood ideals and their aspirations for the future.

Less exposure, more anxieties: Girls' and young women's embodied-experienced and mediated spatial knowledge

Girls and young women enjoy fewer opportunities to be out and about than boys and young men. As a result, their activity spaces are smaller and more homogeneous than those of boys. This entails constrained environmental experiences. Being more homebound means being confined to limited and rather fixed resources for the production of embodied-experienced spatial knowledge. Accordingly, they can acquire less embodied-experienced spatial knowledge to draw on or relate to. This applies in particular to girls and young women of relatively low socio-economic status, regardless of the geographic context in which they grow up.

Such limited spatial experiences have a clear negative outcome. Girls and young women evaluate their living environment more negatively than boys and young men. In the case of children living in New York (USA) in the early 1980s (Van Staden 1984), it has been reported that since boys spent more free time exploring their neighborhood, their average evaluation of their neighborhood was more positive than that of girls. Moreover, girls and young women generally feel more insecure with regard to public spaces and display more anxieties about their neighborhood and their hometown than boys and young men (Van Vliet 1981; Van Staden 1984; Ortiz Guitart, Prats Ferret, and Baylina Ferre 2014; Arends and Hordijk 2016). In contrast, cases of young people growing up in Barcelona (Spain) during the 2010s illustrate the value of embodied-experienced spatial knowledge. The young Barcelonians were able to explore their neighborhood quite freely, as there were “not that many spaces that are perceived as forbidden in their daily lives: ‘As I live here, all the spaces in the neighborhood are familiar to me and I am always at ease’ (girl from discussion group A)” (Ortiz Guitart, Prats Ferret, and Baylina Ferre 2014, 51). Their extensive and detailed knowledge of their neighborhood had a positive impact on their sense of well-being and evaluation of their living environment.

Generally, girls and young women are almost ubiquitously under supervision and enjoy little independent mobility. The experiences of children growing up in La Paz (Bolivia) in the 2010s exemplify why this is problematic. As they started to undertake trips on their own, the children experienced a degree of independence and autonomy they had not known before. They spoke, with marked pride, about their experiences going to the store, market, or school by themselves. Interestingly, as a result, of this emancipatory mobility, the children began to perceive the public spaces they navigated on their own differently.

[For the children] going out by themselves entails bravery, for they are confronted with public space, which is signified as...dangerous.... The independence of mobility...allow[s] children to experience for, make decisions by and learn to take care of themselves, which represents a positively regarded important adventure and learning process.

(Serrano Birhuett 2015, 9; own translation)

Furthermore, being homebound and subject to ubiquitous parental supervision limits the range of activities available to young people. Lack of space in many cases precludes extensive active play. Furthermore, parents tend to restrict wilder play. Accordingly, domestication, which affects girls and young women in particular, leads them to engage in predominantly sedentary activities.

Until the 2000s, the use of internet-based media was primarily homebound, so we can assume that the spread and availability of diverse mobile devices will foster young people's acquisition of mediated spatial knowledge. While girls and young women can benefit from access to (new) media as we have shown above, our study also shows that mediated spatial knowledge tends to negatively impact young people's perceptions of public spaces. This reinforces young people's retreat from public spaces due to the spread of spatial discomfort and can even lead to a constant sense of insecurity among the young.

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that the home tends to be a focus and anchor point for girls, and that girls prefer to spend their time at home more than boys do (Malone and Hasluck 2002; Swart-Kruger 2002). Indeed, girls and young women growing up in the late 1990s in Braybrook (Australia) portrayed the intimate and private spaces of the home and home sites as their favorite places (Malone and Hasluck 2002). This also permeates girls' and young women's spatial imaginations. When asked to envision and draw their ideal neighborhoods, girls in suburban

West Virginia (USA) in the 1990s included much more residential land uses than boys: “The higher incidence of residential land uses among females is...reflecting perhaps a more home-centered view of the environment among girls” (Talen and Coffindaffer 1999, 326).

The ascribed and internalized home-centered daily life of girls and young women and their limited presence in public spaces has yet another consequence. The play needs of girls and young women are misjudged and underappreciated: “Another obstacle for girls’ play is negligence in identifying girls’ play needs—girls’ play is often viewed as playful preparation for motherhood. As a result, there has yet to be a serious effort to fulfil girls’ play needs in terms of play space design and play equipment” (Ahmed and Sohail 2008, 264). The planning of child- and youth-dedicated spaces, as well as urban planning and design in general, neglect girls’ and young women’s needs. The design of games and play spaces is strongly influenced by gender stereotypes (Ahmed and Sohail 2008; De Almeida et al. 2014). This can in turn reinforce the processes described above and influence girls’ and young women’s future aspirations, and thus their prospective spatial knowledge, which will be discussed next.

Gendered futures: Girls’ and young women’s prospective spatial knowledge

Media play a significant role in shaping (gendered) aspirations. An example of this can be seen in the case of homeless young people in Kampala (Uganda) who frequented video halls to watch movies (Van Blerk 2006). The stories in these films strongly influenced the young people’s narratives about their desired futures. For example, action-adventure films depicted power and control on the streets and appealed more to boys and young men. Girls and young women preferred romantic films that projected visions of marriage and leaving the streets behind (Van Blerk 2006).

Another influential factor in shaping young people’s aspirations is the impact of schooling and its importance as a vehicle for upward social mobility. Our research reveals a wide range of current realities and future aspirations that are gendered and promoted by parents: In the case of displaced young Ethiopians growing up in a refugee camp in Sudan, for example, the establishment of a primary school brought about significant changes in their future prospects (Hammond 2003). This transformation was facilitated by parents who gradually came to recognize the potential of education. However, they primarily encouraged their sons to attend school and continue their education, exerting an influence on their attitudes toward the future that was not evident among girls.

These examples all suggest that media, schooling, and parents play important roles in shaping young people’s (gendered) aspirations, with different results depending on specific contexts and environments. The gendered societal attributions analyzed earlier, as well as the gendered interactions of parents with their children, obviously also influence young people’s prospective spatial knowledge. Girls’ and young women’s reflections and imaginations about their future or possible futures are thus limited and reduced to gender-stereotypical perspectives. With our meta-analysis, we were able to identify different factors that influence future aspirations and prospective spatial knowledge. However, the study did not allow us to delve deeper into the intersecting complexities of identities and how they may affect girls’ and young women’s aspirations differently based on their societal positions and marginalization.

Conclusion: 50 years of stable gender inequality and a hint of optimism

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, major shifts have shaped global developments and brought about transformations of epochal significance. These changes include the reorganization of the

global division of labor, post-Fordism, neoliberalism, digitalization, the rise of knowledge societies, media transitions, and emancipation movements. In our qualitative meta-analysis, we expected to see the influence of some of these developments on young people's spatial knowledge. Particularly in the context of emancipatory movements, we assumed that girls' and young women's spatial knowledge (i.e., their spatial perceptions and experiences, their use and appropriation of space) should have changed over the past five decades. However, we observed a remarkable stability of social inequality disadvantaging girls and young women. Our meta-analysis reveals the persistent and primarily limiting influence of societal expectations, parental guidance, and the media on girls' and young women's everyday lives, spatial knowledge, practices, and aspirations.

As we delved into the study of spatial inequality in urban spaces, we discovered that girls' and young women's marginalization is by no means a phenomenon that is losing its relevance, but rather remains embedded and unfolds in specific contexts. We can observe a notable pattern of girls and young women being confined to the home with very limited opportunities for unsupervised play or even independent mobility and exploration of public spaces.

Parental fears for the safety of their daughters (e.g., maintaining their good reputation and traffic safety) and societal expectations and attributions regarding the specific role of girls and young women in the household, as well as a general alienation of unaccompanied girls and young women in public spaces, go hand in hand. Accordingly, supervision by parents and other guardians (such as teachers or relatives) and strong domestication, or more precisely, dedicated home-centeredness, are dominant features of girls' and young women's everyday lives. Due to pervasive gender stereotypes and biases, girls and young women tend to carry a heavier burden of domestic tasks and responsibilities than boys and young men from an early age; they are subject to supervision and control, a particularly rigid set of rules and guidelines, as well as limited opportunities, choices, and aspirations. As a result, they can acquire less embodied-experienced spatial knowledge to draw on as a resource. The intersection of gender and class is dominant in our findings, with girls and young women from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds experiencing even greater constraints than their more affluent peers. While parents work long hours to earn a living for the family, girls and young women—much more than boys and young men—are expected to take care of siblings and carry out household chores. This can be exacerbated by ethnicity, when experiences of racism in public spaces cause girls and young women to withdraw from the public sphere, reinforcing the process of domestication.

Media play an important role as alternative channels of communication and means of entertainment, adding affordance to the home. In this way, media can serve as a gateway to spatial knowledge. This dynamic shapes girls' and young women's everyday lives and can have a high individual relevance. However, it can also lead to a strong dependence on media, while access to devices can again be gendered and dependent on the socio-economic situation of the family.

Regarding the limitations of our findings, we must again emphasize that this chapter is based on a sample of studies that did not focus exclusively on girls' and young women's spatial knowledge. Thus, the reanalysis of the available data mostly revealed tendencies that should be weighed against the results of studies that explicitly focused on girls and young women. Furthermore, the meta-analyzed studies were all based on traditional binary gender categorizations, so we were not able to provide interpretations for more gender-diverse discussions. There is an urgent need for research on the spatialities and spatial knowledge of young people with a specific focus on non-binary gender identities.

In conclusion, our meta-analysis shows the complex and interconnected nature of spatial inequality and its impact on girls' and young women's spatial knowledge. Hence, despite global

democratization and feminist movements, an alarming stability of gender discrimination over the last 50 decades calls for further research in and beyond urban and spatial studies. It also calls for an ongoing search for interventions that promote equality and empower girls and young women to navigate, use, imagine, appropriate, and shape spatial environments on their own terms, and to allow them to independently shape their futures according to their needs and aspirations.

Notes

- 1 For further information on the Collaborative Research Center (CRC 1265) “Re-Figuration of Spaces” see <https://sfb1265.de/en/>.
- 2 A detailed account of our meta-analysis and the results of our research was published in a monograph entitled *The Evolution of Young People’s Spatial Knowledge* (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024).
- 3 Our understanding of knowledge is based on the German theory of the sociology of knowledge, inspired by Berger and Luckmann (1966) and further developed in Knoblauch’s (2019) communicative constructivism. We define knowledge as “socially mediated meaning” (Knoblauch 2019, 26), emphasizing its role in shaping and defining actions. In essence, our actions, interpretations, and experiences are deeply influenced by our subjective knowledge. While broadly shared in societies or groups, knowledge is also shaped by individual experiences, allowing for divergence between individuals (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024, 12).
- 4 For instructions on the method of meta-analysis see Castillo Ulloa and Schwerer (2024); for a detailed account of the methodological approach of our research project see Castillo Ulloa et al. (2024, 21–37).

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AGING AND INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE CITY

A critique of spaces of thrownapartness in Berlin (Germany)

Friederike Enßle-Reinhardt and Ilse Helbrecht

Introduction

Increasing diversity and aging populations are two parallel demographic processes that currently shape the population patterns of many European cities. While a remarkable range of research is dedicated to urban diversity, living with difference (Valentine 2008; Dirksmeier, Helbrecht and Mackrodt 2014), the complex nature of diversity (Vertovec 2007, 2010), segregation along ethnic and social lines (Andersen 2018), and political and institutional responses to urban diversity (Lähdesmäki and Wagener 2015; Raco and Tasan-Kok 2019), only a few studies address how increasing diversity is reflected in the older population and what this means for the position of different older people in urban society, their entitlement to rights, and their participation in shaping urban space. The intersection of growing diversity and societal aging remains a notable blind spot in current research on diversity and intersectionality (Enßle and Helbrecht 2018, 2020; McMullin 2000). Even more so, political institutions have not yet developed adequate strategies to address the growing diversity of the older generation and tackle the associated inequalities and processes of exclusion. This applies not only to the German context (for more advanced discussions in the US, see, for example, Seltzer and Yahirun 2013). Moreover, in the broader debates in critical urban studies on “urban violence,” where the harsh realities of social and cultural segregation in capitalist cities are intensely scrutinized (Pavoni and Tulumello 2020), the highly problematic physical and symbolic violence that older urban populations face on a daily basis is grossly overlooked.

Given the neglect of older people in research on urban conflict and intersectionality (for exceptions, see e.g., Buffel and Phillipson 2019; Genz 2020; Lager, Van Hoven and Huigen 2013), this contribution focuses on age-related inequalities experienced by older people in Berlin. To capture the fine-grained landscape of differences and needs in contemporary cities, where manifold differences, living experiences, and struggles over resources coexist, we start with Doreen Massey’s idea (2005) of “throwntogetherness” and enrich it with the concepts of superdiversity and intersectionality. Throwntogetherness, as developed by Massey, refers to the coming together of differences in urban settings in three regards: (1) the mingling of people with diverse backgrounds in urban space; (2) the co-existence of diverse and conflicting interests and ideologies that shape city spaces; and (3) the interaction of human and non-human components of the city. Although it accounts for positive aspects of urban diversity, the perspective of *throwntogetherness* also allows processes that are violent and oppressive towards minority populations to be captured (Fincher

2022; Gawlewicz and Yiftachel 2022). In this contribution, we focus on older age as a marker of difference and how institutions (fail to) respond to the diversity of older people in contemporary, “*thrown together*” cities. Doreen Massey explicitly addressed age as an important marker of difference in her reflections on the role of places as social sites where recognition of differences occurs: “What we want to emphasize is a notion of place as one of the arenas where people (of all ages) learn to negotiate with others” (Massey 2005, 199).

Aging adds a temporal, fluid dimension to notions of *throwntogetherness*. As people move through their lives, they enter different stages of age and positions of power. Given the twofold nature of ag(ing) as both a marker of difference and a process (Enßle-Reinhardt and Helbrecht 2022; Van Dyk 2015), age potentially cuts across hierarchies, shifts power structures, and creates new boundaries. When entering retirement, people find themselves thrown together in a distinctive social group and commonly homogenized as “the seniors” or “the elders.” In addition, their rich biographical experiences and memories render diversity in later life especially complex because they all impact identity formation and feelings of belonging. Diversity in later life has become multifaceted, encompassing intertwined layers of difference, such as gender roles, migrant biographies, non-heterosexual relationships, and increasingly individualistic ideas of later life among older people (Enßle and Helbrecht 2020). It is a particular challenge for institutions to offer inclusive urban spaces and infrastructures that older people from different backgrounds can appropriate, feel attached to, and in which they can age with dignity (Buffel and Phillipson 2017).

Given the variety and possibly conflicting ways of thinking in *thrown-together* cities, older people from minority groups are at risk of experiencing exclusion and disadvantage stemming from diverging conceptions of their place in urban society. First, older age in itself can be a matter of discrimination. Ageism is widespread and manifests itself in “elderly talk,” stereotypical images of later life, prejudices among care professionals, and calls to “stay young” as long as possible (Butler 1969; Nelson 2005; Walker 2002; Walker and Maltby 2012). At the same time, other ways of living in later life, e.g. working older people who support their families or an appreciation of old age as a life stage of wisdom, are rarely recognized (Enßle and Helbrecht 2020; Enßle-Reinhardt and Helbrecht 2022; King and Lulle 2016).

Second, in the wake of the continuing arrival of refugees from outside Europe, and currently from Ukraine, the public discourse on migration has become increasingly alarmist. Resentment against (ethnic) diversity is growing in many European countries (Raco and Tasan-Kok 2019), and populist mobilization by right-wing parties such as the *Alternative für Deutschland* (ADF) in Germany and nationalist groups is becoming more successful, not least due to a sense of multiple and enduring crises (Bobbà and Hubé 2021). Right-wing groups are pushing the boundaries of the sayable towards populism and nationalism, propagating racist and far-right positions in their election programs (Cremer 2021). This is particularly threatening for non-white communities, who are frequently targets of racism—especially in light of Germany’s fascist history (El Tayeb 2001) and discourses of being “undeutsch” (un-German) (El Tayeb 2016).

Against this backdrop of a slowly emerging but perceptibly hostile environment for minority groups, this chapter explores how public and social institutions working with older people, such as retirement homes, counseling centers, and housing companies, are responding to growing diversity among older people and aging processes. In view of the current institutional reluctance or inability to acknowledge diversity, as we found in our empirical data, we apply a complementary view of superdiversity, throwntogetherness, and intersectional perspectives to show, first, how institutions grant or deny older migrants physical space to grow old in and discursive space of recognition. Second, this contribution seeks to create much-needed awareness of the diversity among older generations. By bringing together diversity and older age, we think through later life as a diverse

but also deeply unequal stage of life. We consider institutional engagement with diversity in later life to be of particular importance, as, with increasing age, people may become more dependent on institutions (Townsend 2006) and more likely to face institutional discrimination (see e.g. Leyerzapf et al. 2018 on experiences of older LGBT people in nursing homes).

In what follows, we first discuss how the relational engagement of the three concepts, superdiversity (Vertovec 2007), throwntogetherness (Massey 2005), and intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989), allows for a fine-grained view of diversity in later life that is sensitive to power relations and sheds light on struggles over space in contemporary cities. We then draw on our own empirical research to show that institutions working with aging populations may experience diversity as a burden and refrain from addressing it. In doing so, we argue, institutions deny older migrants much-needed discursive, emotional, and physical space. We conclude by reflecting on how institutional practices create “spaces of thrownapartness” (Abuzaid and Yiftachel 2022) in aging, diverse cities.

Engaging the concepts of superdiversity, intersectionality, and throwntogetherness

In times of accelerating mobility, scholars have proposed various new terms to describe and analyze the increasingly complex and overlapping patterns of diversity. For example, the term *superdiversity*, coined by Steven Vertovec (2007, 2010), has gained significant attention. Superdiversity addresses “multidimensional shifts in migration patterns” (Meissner and Vertovec 2015, 541) and moves away from a sole focus on ethnicity or country of origin by taking more factors into consideration, such as immigration, labor market experiences, gender, and age, among others (Vertovec 2007). Despite acknowledging these variables and seeking to reflect on the complex everyday situations experienced by migrants, superdiversity has been criticized for neglecting questions of power, discrimination, and racism (see Back and Sinha 2016). As Suzanne Hall (2017) argues, there is a need to move beyond superdiversity as a descriptive term and a way of delineating social complexity and to relate it more thoroughly to the construction of diversity in the context of the current harshness of migration and border regimes. Only by “mooring” (Hall 2017, 1562) superdiversity to conditions of power and inequality can its value as a concept for analyzing patterns of suppression, especially in European cities and nation-states, be enhanced.

It is in this regard that the terms intersectionality and throwntogetherness provide a helpful complementary theoretical focus. Questions of power, discrimination, and racism have been at the core of *intersectionality* since its inception. Intersectional perspectives defend the idea that power relations do not unfold between one-dimensional groups based on, for example, gender or ethnicity, but rather in the interplay of ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, age, and so forth (Crenshaw 1989; McCall 2005). Engaging the concepts of superdiversity and intersectionality provides a useful approach to unpacking the fine-grained differentiations within a group and serves as a critical, complementary perspective to make power relations and inequalities visible at the micro-scale.

However, the engagement of superdiversity and intersectionality alone is not a satisfactory conceptualization of processes of encounter and negotiations of difference in the urban realm. It is here that Doreen Massey’s “global sense of place” with the notion of *throwntogetherness* is most fruitful. It reconfigures the notions of “society,” “community,” and “place” through a relational understanding of space and time (Massey 2018). The term reminds us of the political necessity to constantly renegotiate our terms of coexistence and living together in one place. Places are always sites of coexistence and, therefore, pose political challenges to negotiate different trajectories,

demands, and narratives. And most importantly, every place is—in Massey’s view—a site of learning and is constantly in the making.

All three concepts, *throwntogetherness*, intersectionality, and superdiversity, have strong practical ramifications and policy-oriented implications, as they—collectively, in our view—point to the necessity of new forms of societal identities and political actions in the face of increasing global and local inequalities. The term superdiversity focuses on demographic considerations and new migration patterns, whereas the notion of intersectionality draws our attention to questions of power and multiple discrimination. As a kind of framing, Doreen Massey’s conceptualization of *throwntogetherness* is more broadly situated in her ontological understanding of time and space and the fundamental role of emancipatory politics that she attributes to the geographical imagination—and here, especially to urban (public) spaces. It is precisely this “spatiality of the social” (Massey 2005) that the term *throwntogetherness* captures so vividly. Against this backdrop of the *throwntogetherness* of contemporary cities, we believe the complementary perspective of superdiverse and intersectional approaches to be a promising tool to unravel conflicting ideologies and trajectories within cities: We consider superdiversity useful for documenting fine-grained forms of difference, intersectionality helpful in pointing to multiple, overlapping forms of difference and discrimination, and *throwntogetherness* a theoretical anchor for conceptually unpacking the relational dynamics between people, places, and power structures in diverse and often conflictive urban worlds.

This threefold view on diversity is especially promising when scrutinizing diversity in relation to age(ing). Diversity in later life may differ from the diversity of other age cohorts as inequalities tend to accumulate over the life course (Dannefer 2003). Furthermore, memories and experiences of discrimination and/or privilege that people collect throughout their lives may multiply with increasing age (Ferrer et al. 2017). Hence, it is the accumulation of lived experiences that differentiates older people from other age groups (Andrews 1999). It is surprising that diversity in later life has, so far, not been the subject of much scholarly debate. However, this reflects a broader lack of critical reflection on age as a marker of difference. The construction of the middle-aged years as the norm and of younger and older age as “the other” stages of life has so far received little problematization (Enßle and Helbrecht 2018; Enßle-Reinhardt and Helbrecht 2022). How age is (re)made as a marker of difference and how ageist stereotypes affect the lives of older people has gained little attention compared to other markers of difference such as gender or race (Van Dyk 2016). In what follows, we use the combined framework of superdiversity, intersectionality, and *throwntogetherness* to explore how public and social institutions of elderly care in Berlin (fail to) respond to the growing diversity of older generations. In the discussion of our findings, we argue that three particular mechanisms of urban violence not only diminish the desired urban *throwntogetherness* but rather create a “*thrownapartness*” (Abuzaid and Yiftachel 2022) that prevents older people, especially those belonging to minority groups, from actively participating in *throwntogetherness* as a process of openness, tolerance, and coexistence (Massey 2005).

Case study and methods

We draw our findings from the qualitative research project “Superdiversity and ageing cities?” (2017–2020) conducted in Berlin (Enßle-Reinhardt and Helbrecht 2022). We chose Berlin as a case study because it well reflects the overlap of the demographic processes of aging and diversification in many European metropolitan areas. 18,9 percent of its inhabitants are aged 65 years and older (22 percent German-wide, see Statistisches Bundesamt), and in December 2022 over 38.6 percent of Berliners had a migratory background or a nationality other than German (Amt für Statistik

Berlin-Brandenburg 2023). Due to its history as a divided city, the diversity of older migrants is strikingly differentiated, combining migration histories of both East and West Germany. The former eastern part of Berlin attracted guest workers from Vietnam, Cuba, Mozambique, and further former socialist states, while West Berlin recruited guest workers from the Mediterranean region, such as Turkey, Greece, and Morocco, among others (Lanz 2007; Leitner 1986). Therefore, Berlin is well suited to scrutinize the interplay between aging and diversity.

Our research builds on 18 expert interviews and a group discussion with eight experts, which were conducted between 2017 and 2019. As there are hardly any empirical studies dealing with the diversity of the aging population, we followed a heuristic, qualitative approach to identify issues and challenges that arise from diversification. We selected interviewees who work on aging and (a specific aspect of) diversity in different contexts, from different perspectives, and in different positions of power, including self-organized initiatives, public institutions, meeting places, and counseling centers of social service providers (see Figure 11.1). Thereby, we tried to account for the spatial differentiation of Berlin by including actors from different parts of the city as well as representatives of the city as a whole, such as the Senior Citizen's Advisory Board elected by Berliners aged 60 years and over.

All interviews were conducted in German, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed following Mayring's (2000) qualitative content analysis. To compare our findings with those from other cities in Germany, we presented our main theses at an interdisciplinary expert workshop on aging and diversity with eight scholars from different universities and research institutions in 2019. Our empirical finding that institutions working with older people feel overstrained by the diversity of aging populations and simplify diversity in their work was widely agreed upon by the workshop participants. We discuss this finding and its implications for social inequality in contemporary cities below.



FIGURE 11.1 Overview of interviewed actors.

Source: Own illustration.

Simplifying diversity through imposition, ignorance, reductionism

In our case study area, Berlin, the government in principle acknowledges diversity in later life through its policy guidelines (Senatsverwaltung für Gesundheit, Pflege und Gleichstellung [SenGPG] 2021) and initiatives. The *Competence Center for Intercultural Care in Later Life* or the *Bridge Builders in Care*, which help older migrants access regular structures of care, are two examples of these initiatives. In conversations with these institutions working specifically with diverse aging populations, the multitude of intersecting social and cultural backgrounds was widely acknowledged (see Interview 16, Interview 17, Interview 15). For example, a staff member of the project *Bridge Builders in Care* distinguishes her clients according to their migration histories:

I would say that there are two kinds of my [Bosnian] compatriots: Those who came in the 1970s and the second wave who came because of the war. [...] The first, they have some knowledge, but those who came after, they are completely scared and traumatized. When I talk about nursing care, they become frightened and think they will lose their residence permit [if they accept care].
(Interview 16: 6)¹

As the quote illustrates, these organizations acknowledge differences and intersectional power relations within migrant populations. In doing so, they grant discursive space to the diversity of the older generation. While guest workers who migrated in the 1970s usually have a regular residence permit, the second wave of migrants who came as refugees are far more exposed to insecurity because of their immigration status. While the *Competence Center for Intercultural Care* and *Bridge Builders in Care* are aware of fine-grained diversity, they complain that mainstream care institutions² do not respond adequately to the diversity of older generations. They further report that mainstream institutions perceive diversity as a burden and are reluctant to work with diverging problems and experiences of aging. In their daily work, they tend to reduce diversity by focusing on just one factor of difference, thereby overlooking the multiple dimensions of diversity among the older population.

Imposition: Superdiversity as a burden

Franziska is the manager of a shelter home for refugees with a special need for protection, such as traumatized people, single mothers, refugees living with disabilities, and senior refugees. She recounts the problems her clients face when they leave the shelter and transfer to mainstream institutions such as retirement and nursing homes. Her narrative illustrates that the segregation of the majority population and vulnerable minority groups is deeply inscribed in the structure and conduct of mainstream nursing institutions:

[...] That is a huge problem! We do not need special nursing homes for refugees, but we need places for refugees in retirement homes or assisted living. But that is hard, it is incredibly hard. One thing are the bureaucratic barriers and finding a place, but then there is also the veto from the mainstream facilities that say 'We are overstrained anyways. And these languages and this and that, no, and these refugees, no, no.

(Interview 17: 11)

In light of the current care crisis in Germany and Western Europe, with far too few people working in the care sector, nursing homes and senior residences indeed experience increasing pressures. Understandably, these institutions *fear* diversity in language and culture as (another) burden. However, this conduct reinforces the segregation between groups and, thus, impedes the encounter with difference and the evolution and establishment of spaces of *throwntogetherness* for older people. It keeps older refugees in separate spaces and consolidates feelings of “us” and “them.” In fact, the refusal to take older refugees or migrants into mainstream care institutions not only renders diversity in later life invisible but also excludes older refugees from the physical space of care institutions and denies the complex living situations of the aging population.

Ignorance: Reluctance to work with intersecting aging experiences

A second strategy of how institutions react to diversity in the aging population is reported by staff members of the aforementioned project *Bridge Builders in Care*. They imply that some of the counseling centers and nursing homes they cooperate with tend to largely ignore diversity:

It is difficult. Where we see needs and where good support could theoretically be provided, we often observe ignorance. Either everything is made uniform and all are perceived as the same, or they emphasize the differences and culturalize the whole thing. They say, ‘Yes, they rejected that because of their culture.’

(Interview 16: 10)

This institutional attitude makes it difficult for older people to articulate their individual needs. Frequently, they are placed into preset categories without even asking whether, for example, an Arabic-speaking person adheres to the Muslim faith and wishes to receive care accordingly (Interview 15). By ignoring diversity altogether or by stressing (and essentializing) culture as the determining factor that affects all people from one country or language community, the existing diversity in the living and aging experiences is flattened (see Katz and Calasanti 2015)—and thus the position of older people in urban diversity is ignored.

Reductionism: Focusing exclusively on one target group

A third way in which institutions deal with the increasing diversity of the older generations is reductionism: they focus on only one characteristic. Maria, the social manager of a public housing company, speaks of a variety of people from different ethnic and linguistic communities living in the housing stock for which she is responsible, but she is skeptical about the growing popularity of cultural diversity in the public debate and instead stresses the importance of socio-economic inequality:

In my view, this term [diversity] is highly overemphasized. [...] we are not so much dealing with diversity in terms of cultural differences, but much more with diversity in terms of economic disadvantages. I believe that the needs of an older Turkish woman with a low income do not differ significantly from the needs of an older German woman with a low income.

(Interview 6: 1)

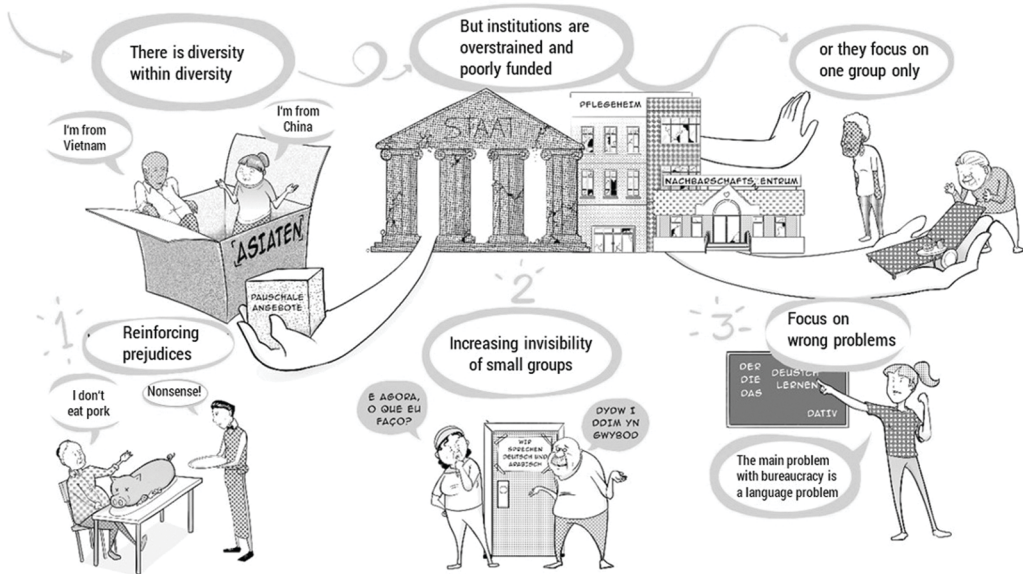


FIGURE 11.2 Diversity, old age, and institutions. Illustration: Mauro Rego (2020) as one dissemination activity of this research project. English translation by the authors.

Given her role in a public housing company, economic disadvantages are at the core of Maria's work. Hence, seeing economic groups rather than socio-cultural, linguistic, or religious diversity seems evident in her work environment. However, this perception disguises differing housing needs within the older generation, such as the desire for cohabitation with one's family. Neglecting these renders it impossible for older migrants to communicate possible needs for a place where they can grow old with dignity and well-being.

Consequently, the institutional overstrain caused by complex patterns of diversity, the reluctance to work with it, and the focus on only one distinguishing factor (Figure 11.2) seem to be well recognized by self-organized groups and initiatives of older people. The tendency to focus on one marker of difference, despite a considerable diversity within a group, has been taken up, for example, by initiatives of older-age lesbians and gay men that focus primarily on sexual orientation (Interview 9; 10), initiatives of particular linguistic communities that emphasize cultural and migration-related concerns (Interview 1; 2; 3; 5; 13), or a housing project for aging women that prioritizes feminist concerns (Interview 18). Our research indicates that highlighting just one marker of difference helps well-connected and large initiatives to communicate their demands and gain visibility, while others receive less attention. For example, initiatives of older gay men garner more visibility than organizations of older lesbians (Interview 10), and Turkish migrants are seen as extraordinarily successful in drawing public interest to their needs by groups of older Polish people (Interview 12) and the Association of Elders with African Roots (Interview 5).

Spaces of thrownapartness in aging, diverse cities

Our analysis revealed three institutional practices of handling older people's diversity: imposition, ignorance, and reductionism. In the following, we reflect on how these practices create obstacles

for urban throwntogetherness to fulfill its positive potential, especially among the older generation, and point to notions of thrownapartness. The term thrownapartness describes processes in urban spaces that separate less powerful, even unwanted, population groups from urban elites. Therefore, we would argue that thrownapartness can be understood as a specific form of urban violence (Pavoni and Tulumello 2020, 52). This urban violence can occur through spatial segregation such as gated communities or walls, but also through the denial of access to services and urban rights (Abuzaid and Yiftachel 2022; Fincher 2022).

First, the denial of urban space to older people, especially elders from minority groups, prevents a productive negotiation of throwntogetherness in cities. The establishment of nursing homes has fostered the “separation of old and young” (Hagestad and Uhlenberg 2005)—especially for frail older people who represent the uncomfortable sides of the aging process (Twigg 2004). Frail older people are excluded from urban society, and “thrown apart” in nursing homes. Thus, the engagement of superdiversity and intersectionality reveals that even within nursing homes, thrownapartness is fostered, as people from minority groups are seen by some institutions as a burden to be housed in separate homes. Thereby, the very throwntogetherness that was originally a hallmark of urban life is suppressed and erased from institutional spaces.

Second, the institutional responses of ignorance and reductionism deny discursive spaces of recognition to the diversity of the older generation. By culturalizing the needs of older migrants, differing desires that stem from individual multi-layered backgrounds are excluded from discourses. The majority population’s preset categories for everything that is different withdraw attention from some groups, requiring them to make great efforts to be visible in debates. As the Association of Elders with African Roots complains, “One does not hear us at all” (Dibelius and Seurei 2013). They state that as they are a rather small group of migrants in Germany, the needs of the aging population with African roots are regularly overheard. And they feel disadvantaged compared to, for example, Turkish elders (Interview 5). Here, the engagement of superdiversity, intersectionality, and throwntogetherness reveals patterns of unequal treatment, discrimination, racism, and exclusion from urban society within the larger group of “older migrants.” These patterns reinforce the ability of some groups to draw attention to their needs and the persisting invisibility of other groups. A lack of visibility was brought up by different groups of elders and seems to be caused by the intersection of different inequalities, stereotyping, and racism. Polish elders felt unheard because of being too similar to white Germans and thus invisible. African elders reported their small numbers as a reason for neglect and their Blackness as a subject of racism, while older people with an Arabic background perceived Islamophobia as a key obstacle to gaining visibility for their needs.

Third, the three problematic indications of imposition, ignorance, and reductionism contribute to the production and reinforcement of hostile environments towards minority groups. The simplification of diversity reproduces harmful stereotypes of minority groups (see Fanshawe and Srisakandaram 2010). Religious prescriptions or gendered requirements for bodily care, for example, are often brought up as problems by nursing homes in the context of intercultural care (SenGPG 2016), but pre-existing presuppositions are rarely validated against the actual needs of an older individual in a nursing home. Simplifying diversity thus overlooks problems that arise at the very intersection of categories. This is particularly true for older generations, as it is still rather unfamiliar to think of older generations as diverse (Enßle and Helbrecht 2018), and bodily conditions often become the key issue, overshadowing any other needs (Twigg 2004). Populism draws on stereotyping and simplistic argumentation patterns about “*the other*” to promote its agenda. Counteracting such patterns of thought requires taking diversity seriously and engaging

politically with the multi-layered causes of social realities and the destructive effects of denying (super)diversity in contemporary cities characterized by throwntogetherness.

Conclusion

Drawing on research in Berlin, this article shows that institutions working with older people tend to feel overwhelmed by the increasing diversity of the aging population. Thus, they simplify diversity through practices of imposition, ignorance, and reductionism. As a result, they often focus on only one marker of difference. As memories and experiences accumulated throughout the life course render diversity in later life especially complex, we suggest a complementary framework of superdiversity, intersectionality, and throwntogetherness to first unravel stereotyping narratives that deny physical and discursive space to the diversity of older generations; second, to work with the inequalities that arise at the intersections of various identities; and third, to acknowledge the importance of a global sense of place also in institutional spaces for the older generation.

Our contribution carries implications for conceptual debates on increasingly diverse societies as well as demands for urban governance to address the concurrence of societal aging and the diversification of the population in increasingly hostile environments. On the conceptual level, we present a complementary lens of superdiversity, intersectionality, and throwntogetherness to comprehend struggles over physical and discursive space in contemporary cities. Our analysis reveals that it is only through this fine-grained perspective that implicit mechanisms of institutional acknowledgment or ignorance of difference within the aging population become apparent. Age is a factor of difference that is often overlooked. It is the combination of superdiversity and intersectionality that makes visible how ageist and racializing stereotypes intersect and create hostile environments for older migrants. Making urban violence visible is an important research task as well as a societal and political challenge (Pavoni and Tulumello 2020, 60). It is with the notion of throwntogetherness that we come to a deeper understanding of the simply devastating role that institutions for the elderly can play as hostile environments that hinder both the recognition and liveability (or coexistence) of difference.

We suggest that public discourse and urban governments take the city seriously as a scale of action to counteract hostile environments for minority groups. As both the number of city dwellers and the share of older people are growing in contemporary European cities, the city scale, and even more so the neighborhood scale, are possible starting points to promote respect for difference through concrete actions and a more pluralized imagination of later life. Providing spaces of encounter between generations and people with different backgrounds can foster feelings of belonging and social cohesion. Yet for this to happen, it is necessary to take seriously individual diversity as well as questions of power that exist therein, in order to address and understand discrimination in later life and enable contemporary cities to become age-friendly.

Doreen Massey, who coined the term throwntogetherness, claimed that: “For me one of the most significant things about ‘space’ is that it is the dimension of the coexistence of others” (Massey 2018, 198). Thus, for Doreen Massey, “place is a meeting place” (199). Yet, if coexistence in the city is spatially organized as being thrown apart, then the city becomes a hostile environment—and this holds true not only for minority groups but for everyone—because we are **all aging and we are all different!**

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Data Accessibility. Due to the wish of our interviewees, supporting data is not openly available. For information about the data and conditions for access, please contact ilse.helbrecht@geo.hu-berlin.de

Notes

- 1 All interviews were conducted in German. They were translated into English by the authors. All names used in this text are pseudonyms.
- 2 With the term “mainstream care institutions,” we refer to nursing homes and senior residences that do not pay special attention to the diversity of older people, neither in their focus nor in their daily work. The overwhelming majority of care institutions for older people in Berlin can be classified as “mainstream care institutions.”

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AFFECTIVE VIOLENCE OF THE GAZE IN GENDER-SEGREGATED RESTROOMS

An intersectional analysis

Seoyoung Lee

Introduction

Modern Korean gender-segregated restrooms are seen as battlegrounds where the rights of safety of cisgender women collide with the rights of transgender individuals to excrete (Yoo 2021). Cisgender women experience anxiety and fear due to concerns about sexual violence by men in restrooms. Concurrently, transgender individuals often feel self-loathing and shame, anticipating the interactions that might occur when using or even approaching gender-segregated restrooms, leading them to avoid using such facilities (Gong et al. 2008; J. Kim and Choo 2023; S. Jang 2014; Park 2020; Lee et al. 2021). However, national efforts to address crimes against women in restrooms have primarily involved reinforcing the clear delineation between male and female bodies within these spaces.¹ During Korea's "feminism reboot"² period, the spread of TERF (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism) ideologies and conservative political propaganda³ have further cultivated hostility toward transgender individuals using women's spaces (B.-M. Kim 2020). Amidst the growing difficulty for transgender individuals to use public restrooms, there have been calls for the installation of gender-neutral restrooms. Yet, this proposal has faced criticism, as it is argued that such restrooms would merely expand unisex facilities where crimes against women are more likely to occur.

In this context, both groups, who seem to be in conflict, are exposed to affective violence—manifesting as fear, anxiety, and shame—in urban public restrooms. Nevertheless, the current discourse makes it difficult to examine how this violence is spatially conditioned and intersects. Several factors sustain these issues: First, the fear and anxiety experienced by cisgender women and transgender individuals in Korean restrooms have not been adequately discussed within a historical/processual context. Accordingly, cisgender women and transgender individuals perpetuate the belief that these bodily affections are inevitable. Second, when solutions like banning men from women's restrooms to eradicate crimes against women are proposed, restrooms are often conceptualized as mere container spaces. There has been little critical examination of the way women's bodies are constituted and how this can be correlated with affective violence through the repetitive interactions and relationships within these restrooms.

Therefore, this study focuses on the procedures in which the “spatial arrangement” (Löw 2016) of the gender-segregated public restrooms in Korea have been reproduced to understand how and in which historical conditions it has been constructed (Pavoni and Tulumello 2020). In order to reveal the way affective violence, such as fear, anxiety, and shame, in restrooms, is created, I will look into the process of how bodies identified or judged as women and transgender are located and represented in relation to spatial structures and the arrangement of objects in restrooms. By interpreting restroom experiences of trans men (assigned female at birth) and trans women (assigned male at birth) from an intersectional perspective, I inquire how the senses of being classified and socialized as women or men intersect with what they experience as transgender individuals.

As for the research methods, the study first involved a literature review on public restrooms in Korea. The newspaper search services of the National Library of Korea, Naver News Library, and other news databases were used to collect newspaper and internet articles related to public restrooms from the 1900s to the 2020s. Magazines, policy documents, and reports published by the Korean Restroom Association, as well as domestic and international prior research on restrooms and relevant legal statutes, were also reviewed. Additionally, from September 2022 to February 2024, I documented the objects within restrooms in Korea (Seoul, Gyeonggi, Gangwon, Jeju, and other cities) through photographs and recorded interactions between people and wrote field notes. Finally, in-depth one-on-one interviews were conducted one to three times with ten transgender interviewees⁴ to understand the emotions and meanings that their actions imply when interacting with physical spaces and other users in restrooms.

The civilizing project of “shameful” Korean restrooms and bodies

Currently, Korean restrooms follow the model of the water-flushed, gender-segregated restrooms that originated in Europe. The way users control and manage their bodies and bodily fluids within these restrooms is similar to European practices. Sheila Cavanagh (2010) explains that water-flushed, gender-segregated restrooms in Europe expanded through *modern* and *hygienic* urban planning. Through their sanitation, these restrooms framed excreting bodies and waste as pollutants that needed to be hidden from public spaces. As restrooms, which produced a modern body that removes pollution, were gender-segregated, *civilized* bodies were divided into female or male, and the idea that women’s sexuality needed to be protected and separated from men prevailed (Isaken 2002; Cavanagh 2010). European-style restrooms were introduced and spread to other countries through colonization and tourism. Patel (2017) reveals that this European restroom model was imposed on South Africa through apartheid, functioning as a tool of colonization. With the racialized division between purity-pollution and civilization-barbarism, water-flushed and gender-segregated restrooms were viewed as *civilized*, while indigenous restrooms were marked as *backward* and *barbaric*. This hierarchy also became a technique for racially stigmatizing non-white women’s excreting positions in Indigenous restrooms (Patel 2017).

In Korea, the flush toilet was first introduced by the colonial power of Japan (Lee 2012), which first encountered the flush toilet by importing British trains with European toilets (Yun 2013). Further accounts of water-flushed toilets during the colonial period (1910–1945) (*Dong-A Ilbo* 1921; *Maeil Shinbo* 1921; *Chosun Ilbo* 1932; *Dong-A Ilbo* 1933; Lee 2012) suggest that Japan introduced European-style restrooms to Korea in line with global modernization and colonization. After Korea’s liberation in 1945, public restrooms were expanded in public spaces in the context of state-led industrialization, urban development, and rural enlightenment movements such as the

Saemaul Movement in the 1950s-1980s. During this process of *restroom modernization*, which included the introduction of international restroom standards, gender-segregated public restrooms began to spread in urban spaces around the 1960s.⁵ In particular, in the 1980s, traditional toilets that were considered to harm public health and aesthetics were cleaned in preparation for the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Seoul Olympics, and toilets were changed to flush toilets and improved hygienically (*Chosun Ilbo* 1958; Choi 1962; Yeouju Cultural Arts Department, n.d.).

National records and the media discourse between the late 1990s and early 2000s clearly reveal that the sanitary improvement and gender segregation of public restrooms were driven by the imagined gaze of foreigners and the shame attached to it. During the 1990s, around the time of international events, particularly in preparation for the 2002 FIFA World Cup, the Korea Tourism Organization and the Citizens Coalition for Restroom embarked on restroom improvement. Korea's toilets, which revealed excrement both visually and olfactorily, were described as "shameful," "pathetic," "hateful," and "rogue," and foreigners from developed countries were said to judge Korea's toilets as filthy (Korean National Tourism Organization 2000; Yeom 2000a, 2000b). To raise the standards of Korean restrooms and their behaviors to match the "global era" and "advanced country standards," the restroom culture projects involved importing Western restroom styles or studying and referencing Japanese restrooms, which had actively imported Western styles during the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. In addition to individual water-flushed urinals and seated toilets, restroom interiors that hid toilets and excrement "to the point where one might not even tell if the space was a restroom or a café" became desirable (Choi 2000). Furthermore, mirrors that reflected users' bodies and signs stating "Beautiful people leave behind beautiful spaces" were placed at the eye level of excreting bodies, encouraging Korean users to view themselves through the *civilized* gaze of others. These changes in restroom spaces induced users to internalize the modern sensibility and everyday practices of making the excrement invisible and inaudible, not only from the space but also from the excreting body itself.

During the postcolonial process of civilizing restrooms in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, gender segregation of restrooms became essential alongside the expansion of women's restrooms. As a response to sexual harassment and fear of crime in unisex restrooms, as well as the lack of women's restrooms and toilets in public, the gender segregation of restrooms and the expansion of women's restrooms were introduced as an advanced, universal solution that could accommodate and protect women from embarrassment and fear. Thus, when the "Public Restroom Act" was enacted in 2004, Article 7 stipulated that public restrooms must be gender segregated. In 2006, it was added that women's restrooms must have more toilets than men's.

Notably, the spatial change of the women's restrooms had the effect of materializing gender norms that intersect with *civilization* in space. For example, while the 2000s saw the modernization and sanitation of restrooms in general, in women's restrooms, classical music was played, and perfume was sprayed, creating a more fragrant and elegant atmosphere. Additionally, the "etiquette bell"⁶ was installed, which played bird sounds or flushing noises to hide the sounds of excretion (Choi 2000). This reflects the gendered sense of embarrassment and shame for the appearance, sound, and smell of women's excrement being sensed by others. Furthermore, the arrangement of objects in the women's restrooms (re)produced a gendered sense of *civilization* and the practice of *civilized* restroom usage. The etiquette bell supported women in hiding their excretions while making them conscious of how others might perceive them. In this context, women's restrooms constituted women's bodies as objects to be sensed quietly and cleanly, with particular strictness in concealing feces and hygiene practices.⁷ As a result, the image of a woman who seemingly "does not even defecate" became an object of heterosexual male fantasy.⁸

Another change in women's restrooms was the introduction of dressing tables or *powder rooms* in department stores, hotels, and cinemas. Dressing tables were installed to provide convenience to women who used to fix their makeup in front of washbasins while putting on makeup in women's restrooms aligned with the notion that their makeup was a "duty to others" (Koo and Rha 2015; B. H. Kim and Joe 2023). The large mirrors and lights on the dressing tables in women's restrooms reflected users' appearances more brightly and prominently, encouraging them to view themselves more frequently through the eyes of others, mainly through the heterosexual male gaze directed at women's bodies. Furthermore, the public powder rooms not only reflect but also reproduce the idea that it is inappropriate to reveal one's bare face or the process of applying makeup in public spaces. When women's grooming processes were hidden from the public eye, the fact that they adjusted their appearance to serve others' gaze, especially the male gaze, became invisible.

Meanwhile, the cleaning equipment storage in women's restrooms was hidden within one of the restroom stalls. Thus, while women engaging in grooming were visible in brightly lit areas of public restrooms, cleaning women, who took care of both women's and men's restrooms early in the morning, remained largely unseen by users. An essay published in a 2001 *Korean Restroom Association Magazine* issue reveals the context behind these changes. The female author of the essay noted that while Korean restrooms had been improved so that they can "be showcased anywhere" (J. Kim 2001), women's restrooms had become a resting place and a storage space for female cleaning workers. She pointed out that there was no space for cleaning workers to rest other than women's restrooms but complained of discomfort that they "talk loudly and hang laundry everywhere" without caring about women's restroom users. This essay implies that women who are in close contact with pollution and who do not cater to other people's senses are regarded as bodies that hinder the establishment of *civilized* femininity and are subject to contempt. Therefore, in women's restrooms in places like hotels and department stores, the visibility of grooming behaviors to present oneself as a *civilized* woman and the invisibility of cleaning laborers close to pollution are actively deployed to reinforce the class status of female customers.⁹ Considering that female cleaning workers have less time and economic resources to groom themselves than female consumers, becoming a body that can occupy space in women's restrooms, but also being produced and presented as a *civilized* woman, occurs at the intersection of class and gender.

The paradox of safety: Gendered spaces and the anxiety of being seen in "women's restrooms"

Alexander Davis (2020) explains that women's restrooms in the United States were initially created to ensure female workers' equal rights to men. Nevertheless, paradoxically, these restrooms have also contributed to categorizing women's bodies as vulnerable to sexual assault. Similarly, in Korea, cisgender women are perceived as vulnerable bodies at risk of sexual violence, even in women's restrooms designed with their comfort in mind. In recent years, crimes of a sexual nature targeting women in restrooms—mainly digital sex crimes involving the illegal filming of women's bodies while excreting in public restrooms—have led to the perception that cisgender women's excreting bodies are vulnerable to sexual gazes and intrusion, thereby triggering fear of crime in restrooms (Cho and Baek 2022; Goh 2021; J. Kim and Choo 2023). Against this background, dissecting cisgender women's daily interactions with the arrangement of objects in restrooms helps to understand how their emotions are relationally and spatially constructed.

The emotions of shame associated with excreting female bodies and fear of crimes committed by men existed before being reproduced in women's restrooms and have influenced the gendering of restroom spaces. In response to the anxiety and fear that cisgender women feel towards men, the nationwide "Women-Friendly City Initiative" has sought to segregate women's restrooms from men's restrooms and visually separate their entrances, install emergency bells, and reinforce the locks on restroom stalls since the late 2000s (Seoul Foundation of Women & Family 2009; Gong et al. 2008; Siheung City 2013). The placement of objects in women's restrooms to address women's fear of crime was further promoted after incidents such as the 2016 Gangnam Station murder of a woman, restroom-related illegal filming crimes, and the 2022 Sindang Station restroom stalking and murder case. During this period, along with supporting the segregation of unisex restrooms, measures such as installing "safety screens" to block the gaps below stall doors¹⁰ and inspecting public restrooms for illegal spy cameras (*molka*) were implemented (Joint Ministries 2024). Additionally, the 2023 guidelines for the "Universal Design for Public Restrooms for All," developed by the Seoul Metropolitan Government, include provisions that restroom partitions between men's and women's restrooms should be made of translucent material and open at the top. Furthermore, safety mirrors should be installed in restrooms. Placed at eye level at the entrance to women's restrooms, this small mirror would let restroom users check if someone is following them, thereby preventing crimes (Nam 2023).

These new spatial structures and objects in restrooms aimed to physically block the intruders' gaze while assisting women's cautious gaze. Nevertheless, women's restrooms still harbor anxiety about the intrusion of (male) others. The experience of A (they/them), an agender interviewee who primarily uses women's restrooms and was assigned female at birth, offers insight into understanding this specific anxiety.

Interviewee A: The more I use women's restrooms, the more I think that in that moment [of excreting], it is a personal thing, so the fact that it is separated means that there is a possibility that someone might intrude or might not. Moreover, restrooms are often not completely sealed but open at the top and bottom. I think this is also an angle where people are most vulnerable. So, there is a fear that something might happen from this angle. ... Someone could easily peek in, jump over, or put his hand in from the angle at the bottom or top.

Interviewee A describes feeling vulnerable to being intruded upon and becoming the target of sexual violence through the gaps above and below the stall doors, even when most of their body is hidden behind the stall. Unlike users in men's restrooms, who expose their genitals while urinating in front of urinals, people in women's restrooms always place their bodies in a stall, lock the door, and excrete away from the gaze of others. If the stall door does not lock properly, they may keep it closed with their foot while excreting. Even if the stall is completely enclosed, women's restroom users may anxiously cover any holes in the stall walls with tissue paper, fearing the possibility of ultra-small cameras located somewhere in the stall. This daily practice naturalizes hiding women's bodies from others, while they embody the sense of feeling ashamed to show their bodies to others.

Not only do the bodies of those classified as women in the arrangement of the women's restroom develop a sense and feeling of whether they are seen and heard as "female," but as a result, the way they perceive others through eyes and ears is embodied in parallel. The following is a reconstruction of my own notes while observing feelings, thoughts, and bodily reactions when using women's restrooms.

One late night, I entered a women's restroom at a subway station in Gyeonggi Province with little foot traffic. The adjacent stall was locked when I entered the stall, indicating that someone was inside. However, when I began to excrete, I heard no sound from the adjacent stall. I felt a jolt of fear and tension. What if someone in the next stall watched me or filmed me through the gap? Although the "safety screen" covered the gap below the stall door, my gaze turned to the stall's top. And then I looked at my body. What should I do if my thighs, underwear, body, and face are captured through the gap above the stall? I became conscious of how I might appear in such a situation and fearing that a camera might be aimed at me, I lowered my head to avoid having my face recorded. I also listened intently to see if I could hear any sounds of excretion from the next stall. After pulling up my pants and leaving the stall to wash my hands, I kept glancing at the stall, considering the possibility that someone might emerge and grab me by the hair to drag me back inside. Even as I exited the restroom, I kept looking back to check if the stall door would open.

Like A, I was reminded of the possibility that my excreting body could be perceived as a sexual object and intruded upon by others. Although I did not identify my body with the vulnerable body of a cisgender woman, the presence of objects meant to hide my body from sexual danger made me conscious of how I might appear, leading me to feel anxious and shameful. Simultaneously, I found myself, without being fully aware, scanning for the presence of a potential intruder. This process of visually and aurally detecting and guarding against the presence of others becomes an embodied response, inscribed into the bodies of women's restroom users by the spatial arrangement of the restroom. Other women's restroom users I encountered during participant observation and interviews confirmed that they habitually and unconsciously glanced at others when entering the restroom, washing their hands at the sink, or when someone new entered the restroom. This heightened perceptual habit is particularly encouraged by the objects installed in women's restrooms in the late 2010s to prevent crimes against women.

When cisgender women only perceive those who appear to be women, women's restrooms are construed and synthesized as *safe spaces for women only*. In this context, cisgender women perceive themselves as being in a safe state, free from exposure to others. However, paradoxically, within the arrangement of women's restrooms, where interactions of seeing and being seen are manifested, women become more visible to others, even if the gaze is not from heterosexual men. The bodies in women's restrooms are constantly placed in a state of being seen, not only in stalls but also in interactions with other bodies. This gendered performance and embodiment normalize and naturalize the separation of restrooms based on sex category, as well as the division between women-men and cisgender-transgender (West and Zimmerman 1987), creating mechanisms that govern by distinguishing transgender women from cisgender women as "different."

Embodied exclusions: The intersection of heteronormativity, male centrism and cismativity in restroom spaces

Previous research explains that the identification and sanctioning of transgender individuals are issues rooted in cismativity, highlighting that these individuals are subjected to affective violence in the form of shame and humiliation. Cavanagh (2010) notes that in restroom interactions, transgender individuals experience "identificatory stigma" (62), feeling shame about being exposed and excluded in an inhumane way. Lain Mathers (2017) explains that an emotional hierarchy arises between cisgender women and transgender women in women's restrooms in that people who appear to be non-women are asked to express their apologies to cisgender female users who are surprised by them or prove that they are women.

Similarly, in Korea, transgender individuals report feeling shame and self-loathing when their bodies are problematized as unqualified to use the restroom as women or men and when they must present themselves in ways that differ from their lives and identities to meet the qualifications for using the space.¹¹ In women's restrooms, transgender individuals are often detected as *others* and firmly excluded. In men's restrooms, while visual observation of others is less frequent, verbal reprimands such as "This is the men's restroom" may be directed at those perceived as not being cisgender men. The shame transgender individuals feel in restrooms is not only related to being excluded from the *purity* of the female/male category. In restrooms, which are spaces that construct the sensory experience of a *civilized* body that properly controls contamination, transgender individuals hesitate even to enter, confronted by the animal nature of their bodies that cannot separate themselves from excrement and the urge to urinate. Thus, the shame transgender individuals experience when they are perceived as unqualified bodies in restrooms is amplified by the shame of being *uncivilized* bodies unable to control contamination. This affective shame reveals that the intersection of (*un*)*civilization* and cisnormativity places transgender individuals under dual exclusion.

The interaction that problematizes transgender people in restrooms begins with them being presented to cisgender people and identified as *others*. As a result, transgender individuals feel the need to avoid being visually noticed by others or to present themselves in a way that seems appropriate for the restroom. In this process, transgender individuals, like cisgender women, become keenly aware of how other restroom users appear and sound and how they might appear and sound to them. Especially when entering a restroom that does not correspond to their assigned sex at birth, transgender individuals try to *pass* to conceal their lack of qualification for using the space. In doing so, transgender individuals, like cisgender women, construct and perform bodies deemed desirable or natural within the binary gender system.

Thereby, the strategies transgender individuals use to pass are driven and performed differently in women's and men's restrooms, depending on the conditions of each space. The sensory experiences of bodies categorized and socialized as male or female, along with the spatial arrangements that result from them, not only contribute to the exclusion of transgender individuals but also intersect with their performativity.

In women's restrooms, the spatial arrangement operates on the premise that bodies identified as male pose a threat to women, and this premise is reinforced by law and public authority. The keen perceptual habits of cisgender women in women's restrooms quickly detect those who do not appear to be women and visually and aurally identify their gender (Skeggs 1999; Westbrook and Schilt 2014). The materialized vulnerability of women's restroom users binds them together under the category of *women* and, intersecting with discourses that criminalize transgender identities, empowers them to expel those who are perceived as threats to the safe space of the women's restroom.

The accounts of transgender women interviewees D and G illustrate how law and public authority can also enforce this exclusion. Transgender woman interviewee D said she was worried about being reported to the police and criminalized if she was seen as a biological male in a women's restroom. G said she thinks the Special Act on the Punishment of Sexual Violence Crimes,¹² which punishes those who enter the women's restroom for sexual purposes, will serve as the basis for legally sanctioning male-assigned-at-birth individuals, such as transgender women, who enter the women's restroom.

As a result, transgender women often adopted strategies to assimilate into cisnormativity. They sought to attain the status of biological/legal women to be perceived as non-threatening

bodies within the sexed discourse regarding gender violence, where *biological* women and men are positioned as victims and perpetrators, respectively. Transgender woman D (she/her or no pronoun) said that only after completing gender-affirming surgery and legal gender recognition did she finally obtain the ID number as a woman, which she saw as the only thing that could protect her from police reports or legal issues related to using women's restrooms. Those who had not undergone gender-affirming surgery or legal procedures tried to pass as women by visually and audibly blending into the women's restroom arrangements. However, transgender women's passing strategies had to be even more rigorously performed, intersecting with appearance norms for women. Transgender woman G noted that among her transgender women acquaintances, she advised them to "lose weight" and "take care of their appearances" to use women's restrooms.

Interviewee G: There were some people [among transgender women] who could not take care of themselves. Those people should not go to the restroom.

Researcher: For example?

Interviewee G: Those who are large, with masculine faces, who have not taken care of themselves at all. However, they identify as transgender, as MTF, and I tell them, "Lose some weight, go on a diet, take care of yourself. Don't just complain about *reality*." Even those who move freely always should be careful. For me and them, we might think we can get by, but others might be able to tell. We must be careful because others might recognize us.

Interviewee G's story reveals that the appearance norms required of cisgender women also exert pressure on transgender women. They not only have to be mindful of how they appear and sound in the women's restroom but also adjust their appearance to appropriately present themselves as women. Moreover, G expressed concern in a later interview about the potential criminalization of transgender women in general. This highlights how heterosexual, male-centered discourses that criminalize individuals assigned male at birth for entering women's restrooms reinforce cishnormative gender surveillance pressures, even within the transgender women's community.

Just as being a visible woman intersects with class for cisgender women, for transgender women, being seen as a woman is not an individual choice but a result of economic and social resources. To achieve a physical contour, voice, and appearance typically perceived as feminine, financial resources are necessary for gender-affirming surgery, cosmetics, and clothing. Furthermore, transgender women need people around them who understand how to embody femininity when grooming their appearance and modifying their behavior to appear female. For example, G learned how to choose clothes, apply makeup, and express emotions in a more *feminine* manner from her cisgender female friends. As a result, she was able to develop an appearance and behavior that did not identify her as male in the women's restroom. Conversely, G mentioned that "novice" transgender women, those just beginning their transition, struggle to dress like cisgender women, saying, "The most important thing is style. The 'novice' girls wear styles that women would never wear. You must correct that [*laughing as if she's embarrassed herself*]."

Meanwhile, transgender men who used men's restrooms to avoid being identified as *others* in women's restrooms reported that they were rarely identified as "not men" in the spatial arrangement of men's restrooms. In men's restrooms, transgender men did not have to apologize for their bodies being perceived as a threat to others, nor were they required to visually or aurally prove that they were men—men tend to pay less attention to others. Nevertheless, unlike cisgender men, transgender men were not entirely free from the pressures of the gendered gaze and had to continue

striving to pass. This pressure was driven not only by the shame of being transgender individuals but also by anxiety and fear that stemmed from having bodies categorized and disciplined as female. Interviewees C (they/them) and F (he/him) expressed anxiety that if their bodies were perceived as female or transgender in men's restrooms, they could become targets of sexual violence. As a result, transgender men tried to avoid being identified as "not men" by staying away from others in men's restrooms and felt pressured to appear and sound like men. Their anxiety was particularly heightened when their gender was visually and aurally identified at close range or through a mirror. Non-binary transgender man C avoided using men's restrooms with narrow entrances and mimicked the habits of cisgender men, such as roughly shaking off their hair when sharing a mirror with a cisgender male user. F also felt anxious when a cisgender male restroom user stared at their reflection in a public restroom mirror at a gym because he sensed a threat of hate violence.

In contrast, transgender women who used men's restrooms or stood at the entrance of women's restrooms, while aware of the possibility of sexual violence, did not imagine themselves as powerless to resist it. They speculated that cisgender men might be frightened by them as "freaks" rather than seeing them as weak. This suggests that the anxiety and helplessness felt by transgender men might be an embodied affect, shaped by the fear accumulated in women's restrooms, which has led transgender men to perceive themselves as more vulnerable bodies, potentially targets of sexual violence, compared to cisgender men in men's restrooms.

Offsetting or dismantling the affective violence of shame

Can transgender individuals safely excrete without experiencing affective violence? Would their bodies and perceptions be experienced differently if the restroom arrangements that produce affective violence were challenged?

Transgender woman interviewee E, who passes as a cisgender woman but has not legally changed her gender, typically uses men's restrooms. She quickly moves into a stall to avoid disrupting cisnormative arrangements. However, when other men's restroom users perceive E, the seemingly homogenous spatial arrangement becomes disrupted. When other men's restroom users tell E, "This is the men's restroom," she sometimes responds with, "Alright," and leaves the place. Meanwhile, if someone who seems harmless asks about her gender, she might mischievously reply, "I am a man," thus confusing the very assumptions about how a man should look and sound. Moreover, when cisgender men enter the stalls instead of using the urinals due to E's presence, the roles of the bodies and the gaze of women-men are inverted, placing the cisgender men in a position where their bodies are to be seen by a woman.

On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that E's actions, which superficially create gender disruptions, actually rely on the very gender relations that generate affective violence in restrooms. E felt ashamed as a teenager when she was ridiculed in the school's men's restroom for not being sufficiently masculine. However, as a transgender woman in her twenties now, she fears that if she is discovered to be legally male while using a women's restroom, she could face significant problems. Thus, E chooses to use men's restrooms but relies on her appearance and attractiveness to avoid the shame associated with being transgender, a feeling she compares to "undressing." She anticipates facing fewer issues if she is perceived as an innocent woman who mistakenly entered the men's restroom, leveraging the protectionism afforded to women. As a result, E has experienced shame and embarrassment both from being perceived as a problematic man in the past and from the current surprise of cisgender men when they see her. However, she can offset these feelings through the sense of efficacy she gains from being perceived as an

attractive woman and being treated as a “normal person” in the men’s restroom. Nevertheless, her actions do not dismantle the following conditions: the shame of being classified as an intruder in men’s restrooms, the criminalization of “others” in women’s restrooms, the perception of cisgender individuals as “normal” and “natural,” and protectionism towards women. Particularly, E’s attempt to conceal her transgender identity and pass as an attractive woman to ensure normalcy indicates that she remains vulnerable to shame and anxiety as a woman and transgender person subject to the cisnormative male gaze.

Then, under what social and material conditions can women and transgender individuals be free from viewing their bodies through the eyes of others in restrooms? An opinion from interviewee D about a restroom in a gay club could help answer these questions. The restroom in the gay club was a small, single-stall restroom where only one person could enter at a time. D described it as a place where “it would not be strange even if women just peed there with the door open,” and “such places do not seem likely to ask for an ID if you are transgender. It just felt comfortable.” D implies that when the space was occupied by male homosexual desire, the heterosexual male gaze on women’s excreting bodies might not operate. When the heterosexual male gaze loses its dominance, neither the women’s bodies nor the restrooms remain anxiety-inducing spaces. Therefore, the impetus to identify and expel other bodies based on *biological sex*, which conditions the heterosexual order, no longer needs to operate. D, who usually tried to avoid letting even the slightest cough be heard by others in women’s restrooms, said she could openly shout, “Excuse me?” in the gay club’s restroom when others impatiently knock on the door. She also could casually respond, “I am [trans] gender,” to anyone trying to determine whether she was male or female therein.

D’s story reveals that only when the heterosexual, male-centered gaze and the cisnormative gaze lose their power can the emotions and sensations of bodies be experienced differently. Therefore, discussions are needed on how to disrupt the material structures and interactions within spatial arrangements in restrooms that attach heterosexual, male, and cisnormative gazes to users’ bodies. Furthermore, cultural and structural changes are required in the locations where restrooms are situated to reconstruct the gendered visual relationships within these spaces.

Conclusion

This study explored how heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and male-centeredness are materialized, intersected, and reproduced through the spatial and bodily arrangements of gender-segregated restrooms. In Korea, public restrooms have been sanitized and modernized under the post-colonial pressure of being seen and judged by foreigners from *civilized* countries, leading to gendered arrangements of bodies and objects therein. Women’s restrooms and objects meant to protect women from crimes remind them of the male gaze and induce shame, fear, and a heightened sense of caution, urging them to act as *civilized* persons and to prevent sexualized crimes. Likewise, the heterosexual, male-centered order and sensory experiences reinforce the operation of cisnormativity, making transgender individuals assimilate to the spatial arrangements of women’s or men’s restrooms both visually and audibly. The way transgender individuals perceive and relate to their bodies in restrooms is influenced by the sensory experiences of being wrongfully categorized as female/male in the past and the spatial relationships of women’s/men’s restrooms. These conditions differently shape the restroom experiences of transgender women and men and their ways of assimilating into the cisnormative visual and auditory arrangements of women’s and men’s restrooms. As a result, the gender-segregated restrooms reproduce an arrangement in which

only cisgender women or men appear to be present, sustaining the heterosexual, male-centered belief that women's restrooms are safe spaces for women.

By denaturalizing the restroom debate, which has often been framed as a matter of the vulnerability of *biological* female bodies or *problematic* transgender bodies, this research proposes imagining alternative spatial relations that do not maintain existing power relations based on gaze. To gradually break free from a cycle in which the gaze upon cisgender women and transgender individuals is embodied in bodily perception and perpetuates affective violence, alternative thinking and practices are needed regarding how the material structures, objects, and bodies in these spaces can be differently positioned and related.

Notes

- 1 Since 2018, local governments have attempted to address restroom users' "inconvenience" and "safety issues" by distinguishing between women's and men's restrooms through the "Support for Gender Segregation in Private Restrooms Project." Additionally, in 2022, the Seoul Metro (Seoul Metropolitan Subway Corporation) announced a plan to trial an "AI-based gender analysis program" in women's restrooms to detect males entering the facility through AI technology. If the AI identified a person entering the women's restroom as a male, particularly a "man dressed as a woman", the CCTV footage would be displayed on screens throughout the station, and an announcement would be broadcast (Yang 2023).
- 2 "Feminism Reboot" refers to the resurgence of feminism that began in the mid-2010s, primarily led by young women of the digital native generation. This movement emerged mainly in digital subcultural spaces and the domain of popular culture and also manifested in protests and rallies advocating for women's rights in the streets and public squares (Sohn 2015; B.-M. Kim 2018; Kang and Shin 2024).
- 3 In 2021, an outdoor billboard in Songpa District, Seoul, advertised with the slogan "Women are at risk. Do you still agree? Stop the Anti-Discrimination/Equality Act!" Alongside this message was an image of a "person wearing a woman's mask, with a sinister grin, entering a women's restroom" (Yoo 2021).
- 4 In this study, the term "transgender" is broadly understood as "any form of variance from gender norms and expectations" (Stryker 2008; Ruin 2006). This approach allows for the inclusion of those who do not present themselves as the expected image of either a woman or a man in restrooms under the umbrella term "transgender."
- 5 In the late 1960s, expressions such as "women's restroom" and "men's restroom" began appearing in newspaper articles. By 1973, an article criticized the fact that most restrooms in public institutions and restaurants were not yet gender-segregated (*Dong-A Ilbo* 1962; *Dong-A Ilbo* 1963; G.-H. Kim 1984; Y.-J. Kim 1991).
- 6 The etiquette bell, created by a Japanese restroom company in 1988, was designed for women who would flush the restroom to cover the sounds of excretion. By pushing the bell instead of flushing the restroom, women could produce sounds of water and birds, thereby saving water in restrooms (H. Jang 2015). The etiquette bell began to be installed in women's restrooms in Korea around the time of the 2002 FIFA World Cup. The Central Committee of 2002 World Cup Cultural Citizens' Movement's restroom design guidelines introduced the etiquette bell as an essential device for women's restrooms (S.-J. Kim 2000; Central Committee of 2002 World Cup Cultural Citizens' Movement 2000).
- 7 The intersection of civilization and gender norms in Korean women's restrooms mirrors Cavanagh's (2010) explanation that the Victorian ideal of the modest woman was produced through the gender segregation of restrooms in modern Europe.
- 8 A 2012 Korean entertainment article reported that a boyband member said, "I do not like it when my girlfriend goes to the restroom" (*Sports Dong-A* 2012). His statement reflects the notion that a woman's act of excretion is perceived as conflicting with heterosexual attractiveness.
- 9 As of 2024, separating the employee restrooms from the customer restrooms has become common in high-end commercial facilities.
- 10 A local government project has been implemented to support the spatial and entryway separation of men's and women's restrooms in privately operated public restrooms (Gwangjin District Cleaning Department 2022; Seoul Metropolitan Government Citizen Health Bureau – Health and Medical Policy Department 2023).
- 11 These emotions, as explained in previous studies, are reinforced through encounters with the entryways, restrooms, stalls, pictograms, and interiors of gender-segregated restrooms, which rely on cisnormative

and heteronormative ideals. This reinforcement anticipates how one will appear to others in these spaces (Goffman 2007; Cavanagh 2010).

- 12 Article 12 of the “Act on Special Cases Concerning the Punishment, Etc. of Sexual Crimes” (hereafter the “Special Act on Sexual Crimes”) punishes those who “enter public facilities such as a restroom to satisfy their sexual desires,” or those who do not comply with a request to leave such a place. Interviewee G believes that even if transgender women do not enter women’s restrooms for sexual purposes, they could still be seen as having sexual intent simply because they are designated male at birth, thereby risking punishment.

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13

KREUZBERG IS A CONSTRUCTION SITE

A grounded theory in pictures

Céline Barry

Prologue

While attending a critical theory conference in Kassel in 2018, I became particularly interested in the topic of digital capitalism. I had buried myself in my (mostly analog) books and notes for some years while writing my thesis, and I wanted to know all about this emerging form of governmentality. With the comrades, I discussed the neoliberal recuperation of the internet, feminist and decolonial coding, the class effects of the platform economy, and the development of smart, liquid cities in which information, rather than matter, rules.

Saturated with new ideas, I walked through the streets of Kassel at night. I headed toward the district where my friend Pinar lives, right through the city's medieval center. A vast construction site obstructed my path: tram tracks were being restored. New cabling, billboards, and antennas indicate how the city is connected to the digital future. However, the scene also revealed that the liquid city is built on concrete. Steel, bricks, debris, torn-up roads, fenced-off grounds, construction workers, chainsaws, and tractors foregrounded how the digitized world is based on physical human labor, machines, and natural resources, on material grounds (Marx 1962). The Kassel construction site dramatized the entanglement of technology and nature (Haraway 1990).

Intrigued, I pulled my smartphone out of my pocket, switched on the camera, and shot my very first construction site photo.

I posted it.¹

It marked the beginning of my sociological exploration of the city through psychogeographic walks (Burckhardt 2021; Internationale Situationniste 1958) and through construction sites, which I understand as a shared (read: collective) everyday practice (Neubert 2023).

Learning from the ground

Back in Berlin, I wandered the streets of Kreuzberg with a heightened attentiveness to construction sites, concrete, and soil.

Kreuzberg is an old working-class leftist neighborhood. Many guest worker families, especially from Turkey, moved here in the 1960s; unlike other parts of the city, housing in Kreuzberg was

then accessible and affordable for migrants and workers. They contributed significantly to making poor, dilapidated Kreuzberg habitable and established the socio-economic, cultural, political, and religious infrastructures required for life and survival (Bürk and Höhne 2018; azozomox and Gürsel 2016; Togrul Koca 2019). From the 1970s onwards, Kreuzberg increasingly became a refuge for conscientious objectors and a magnet for “alternative” people searching for affordable anti-capitalist and anti-fascist spaces. They squatted empty houses and created autonomous structures for political work and collective forms of existence. Given the frequent counterposing of migrant guest workers and non-migrant (white/German) leftists, it should be emphasized that there have always been many migrants among the leftists. These migrants led the struggle for the right to the city (Lefebvre 1974a) as an integral part of the struggles of migration (Bojadžijev 2008) in which they resisted the structural racism they experienced as guest workers, migrants, and diasporas in Germany (Bojadžijev, Karakayali, and Zur Nieden 2014; azozomox and Gürsel 2016; Karakayali 2008; Kotti & Co. 2014; Türkmen 2015). At the same time, the rise of leftist scenes and subcultures led to anti-migrant displacement (Kil and Silver 2006); after the East-West unification of Berlin, this gradually turned the district into a “gentrification hotspot” (Döring and Ulbricht 2016)² in the “capital of displacement” (Rada 1997).

After the fall of the Wall in 1989, the district of Kreuzberg shifted from the periphery to the center of Berlin. Kreuzberg once stood in the shadow of the Wall, on the inner border of West Berlin and outside of the government’s political interest. However, as part of Berlin’s upgrading as the new capital of Germany and an EU metropolis, it was pushed to the center by the ruling classes (Holm 2014; Soysal 2004). In this process, the district gained a new symbolic value:

In the new spatial and narrative configuration of the city, Kreuzberg was no longer a desolate margin next to the Wall—a Gastarbeiter quarter, where the (Western) City literally met its borders. It has suddenly moved to the center, neighboring the historic Mitte (the mid-City) and the Government and Business Centers, under construction along the axis of the new Potsdamer Platz and Reichstag. With this move, Kreuzberg has become the ceremonial ghetto for the metropolis. In its ghetto guise, Kreuzberg is cast not as a zone of excessive criminality and utmost poverty but one of cultural pluralism and alternative lifestyles.

(Soysal 2004, 67)

Since then, neoliberal housing policymaking and securitization to make the place “clean” and “safe”—other words for “white, chic, and bourgeois” (Ban! Racial Profiling 2018a)—has invaded the district and its insecure, precarized, and racialized communities (Autor*innenkollektiv Gras & Beton 2018; Bouali and Gude 2014; Eick 2014; Holm 2014; Soysal 2004; Türkmen 2015).

Meanwhile, the arrival of white and bourgeois Germans, avant-gardists, and tourists provoked complex struggles over distribution and culture (Holm 2014; Polat 2020). In this context, race-critical urban scholars highlight how local diasporic cultural practices are exoticized and fetishized on the one hand and devalued and marginalized on the other, processes in which local migrant communities are themselves involved. Queer of Color critics, for their part, point to new articulations (Hall [1980] 2018) of white dominance culture (Attia, Köbsell, and Prasad 2015; Rommelspacher 1998) that is expressed, for example, in the fact that newly arrived white queer scenes engage in homonationalist discourse that criminalizes Kreuzberg’s migrant communities as patriarchal, homophobic, and dangerous for queers (Çetin 2018). The setting of queers against migrants is, thus, based on postcolonial orientalist legacies, which result in gendered racist panics and legitimize calls for surveillance (Bacchetta, El-Tayeb, and Haritaworn 2017; Haritaworn

2009). Racializing moral panics can also increasingly be observed in relation to Black and Arab migrants being associated with sexualized violence, drug dealing, and disease (Haritaworn 2021; Rakovsky 2018). This suggests that the gentrification of Kreuzberg is connected to colonial-racist processes of oppression and exclusion that have “crossed the boundaries of homo and hetero as well as left and right” (Bacchetta, El-Tayeb, and Haritaworn 2017, 43).

However, these racializing, gendered processes of gentrification collide with the continuous resistance and cultural production of glocal grassroots along intersectional lines (Speelmans 2018; Zscharnack 2018). Queer of Color locations and projects challenge homonationalist oppression by highlighting the value of anti-racist and anti-capitalist practice (Bacchetta, El-Tayeb, and Haritaworn 2017; Çetin 2018; Demir, Keppler, and Sabuha 2020; Haritaworn 2009). In this respect, the banners displayed in Kreuzberg’s shop windows are a reminder that:

You are not alone. Yalnız Degilsin. You are not alone.
Against Homophobia—Against Racism—Against Sexism—Against Fascists.

Local tenants’ initiatives stand up for the rights of those who are deprived of their habitat by the urban planning class, the rights of those that are “neither young, nor creative, nor rich, nor widely networked. It is about the right to stay in the neighborhoods where there is (still) a migrant infrastructure and where the majority of families have lived for decades” (Kotti & Co. 2014, 348). By putting the question of class back on the agenda, they repoliticize the housing question and, thus, ensure that protest does not degenerate into a mere branding of the city (Holm 2014). After all, it is the workers, the unemployed, and the poor, most of whom are People of Color and migrants, who are supposed to clear the fluid center of the neoliberal capital (Ban! Racial Profiling 2018b; Holm 2014; Kotti & Co. 2014). In 2018, many initiatives eventually coalesced around the struggle against the arrival of Google in the neighborhood (Niedriglöhner 2021).

<i>Protect the renters comprehensively!</i>	<i>Protection for small businesses now!</i>
<i>Chain up the real estate speculators!</i>	<i>Stop Google Campus!</i>
<i>Google is not a good neighbor!³</i>	

I have lived in Kreuzberg for many years and witnessed gentrification from the mid-1990s onwards. I know the neighborhood well, yet new angles emerge from my new research focus on the intersectional material gestalt of the “*Berliner Zustände*” (Berlin conditions) (Holm 2014, 25). While walking around, I usually listen to podcasts. In this way, I learned about Lucius Burckhardt’s strollology (2014, 2021) as well as about Situationist International’s psychogeography (Debord 1955, 1956)—two methods that would inspire me to embrace the walk and the *dérive* (the aimless roaming through the city) as the basis for a deep theoretical exploration of the relationship between nature and buildings, gentrification and surveillance, and oppression and resistance in gendered racial capitalism (Bhattacharyya 2018; Vergès 2019).

In the 1980s, Burckhardt declared the walk to be central to his critical research on urbanism, in which he had been investigating “planning and building in democracy” (Burckhardt 2014, 6) in relation to automobilization, mass production, and globalization since the 1950s. His goal was to practice sociology on the ground and not at the desk (7) and to be concerned with things that the conventional gaze usually conceals (Burckhardt 2021, 264), such as the invisible design of

objects, the taken-for-granted infrastructure of bus stops, or the social dimension of urban green spaces. Given that we “dutifully” (257) see what we learned to see (301), the science of walking intervenes in our perception of space and deconstructs it with reference to our expectations, which can be captured in insightful ways as we march or roll along without cars, trains, or airplanes. The situated experience of a walk to a place is reflected upon and elaborated on as a part of our cognition.

One concern of the science of walking, therefore, is to highlight the determinacy of forms of perception while we perceive, so that new and unfamiliar judgments of old familiar situations become possible.

(Burckhardt 2014, 259, own translation)

Burckhardt, thereby, inscribes himself in the Lefebvrian tradition, which poses the question of “the fundamentally political character of space and its design” (Burckhardt 2014, 11) and of the right to the city (Lefebvre 1974a, 1974b). Thus, walk studies are interested in both the disciplinary dimension of top-down urban planning and the

most direct forms of subjective uses of space, consumption, and appropriation. Squatting, repurposing, and DIY construction escape planning, refuse to be planned, or act without being solicited. Especially in the housing field, the experts’ will to plan and design clashes with users’ stubborn resistance.

(Burckhardt 2014, 14, own translation)

Likewise, the Situationist International, a leftist revolutionary group primarily active in France in the 1950s and 1960s, also aimed at a politicizing intervention into the perception of urban space through walking. It developed the psychogeographic inquiry, conceived as a materialist research practice, an emancipatory reflection process in which the entwinement of subjective experience and objective reality is considered.

Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. The adjective psychogeographical, retaining a rather pleasing vagueness, can thus be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any situation or conduct that reflects the same spirit of discovery.

(Debord 1955, translated in Knabb 2006, 5)

In contrast to Burckhardt’s walk to a specific destination, the *dérive* constitutes psychogeography’s central tool of inquiry. The *dérive* collects, documents, and potentially maps urban space’s ambiances and emotional zones (Coverley 2018, 117; Debord 1956). Thus, the Situationist International’s lexical entry of the *dérive* describes it as:

A mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of transient passage through carried ambiances.

(Internationale Situationniste 1958, translated in Knabb 2006, 46)

The *dérive* is to be understood as a “theory-led inquiry” that is strategic and that contains an “activist moment” (Baumeister and Negator 2007, 141). It critiques the divisive effects of urbanism and intends

to unpack the scope of subversive forms of practice, determine their bases, calculate their possibilities of incursion, and simultaneously map existing desires to awaken and discover new ones. Specifically, this can amount to, for example, appropriating the street and exploring its limitations brought about by spectacular urbanism. Revolutions, as we know, usually, and to a great extent, take place on the street.

(142, own translation)

What connects psychogeography and walk studies is that the act of traversing the city—on foot, in a wheelchair, virtually—becomes a subversive tool and is pursued consciously, with emancipatory intent (Burckhardt 2021, 254; Coverley 2018, 124).

The vertical reconstruction of the center

Thus, I learn more systematically and purposefully from the city (Benjamin 2017, 29) by walking and *dériving*. With my smartphone always in reach and with Benjamin’s (2017), Bernhagen’s (2009), and Beatt’s (1988, 2009) psychogeographies of Berlin, “the most frontier city of frontier cities” (Maspero and Frantz 2004, 19), in mind, I document my psychogeography of Kreuzberg and its bordering neighborhoods photographically, with all the epistemic, fetishizing, and phantasmatic risks modern mass photography entails (Sontag 2008). Over the years, I have taken countless photographs of different thematic strands. As an everyday sociologist, I render them analytically tangible through coding and saturation; I split them into codes and categories, which I weave together, contrast with each other, and condense into a grounded theory in pictures (Charmaz 2006; Mey and Dietrich 2016). From the coded pictures of the ground, I read up the structures (Mohanty 2003, 511) that order the neighborhood along complex intersectional lines (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2010; Crenshaw 1989; Hill Collins 2000). How do class, race, and gender intersect sociologically in this situated place at this specific conjuncture of neoliberal capitalism (Bohrer 2019)? Who takes part in the urban struggles? Who are the tenants, shopkeepers, and consumers? Who works on the streets, who gets surveilled, who sits in which café, who will move into the newly erected buildings, and who sleeps outside?

The pictures document a Kreuzberg under capital-driven reconstruction, a neighborhood turned into a metropolitan center where precarious and racialized communities are no longer welcome. My first recurring motif, the construction site, quickly became symbolic of the severe changes to urban space (Lynch 1992, 2) caused by gentrification.

Kreuzberg ist eine Baustelle (Kreuzberg is a construction site). And, as the district’s recent history shows, construction projects are usually preceded by displacement (Türkmen 2015, 127) and destruction (Figure 13.1).

My study of a construction project often begins when a new billboard is erected on an abandoned lot (Figure 13.2). A billboard offers a glimpse of the future: the building that will occupy the space and affect its social relationships. It displays the investors’ and urban planners’ visions of the future, of visions from above, visions of the sound, clean, and luxurious future for the propertied classes. Then begins a period of digging and dredging, then leveling the ground before the buildings are



FIGURE 13.1 Pre-construction destruction. Construction site on Mariannenstraße at Reichenberger Straße (1 August 2019). For a full-color experience, please consult the digital version of the publication.



FIGURE 13.2 *Aufwertungsphantasien* (upgrade fantasies) (Gennburg 2024). Construction site on Mariannenstraße at Reichenberger Straße (24 September 2019).

erected (Figures 13.3 and 13.4). In these moments, the presence of soil and other raw materials imported through globalized trade is tangible.

Together with the excavators, bulldozers, and cranes, my gaze slowly travels upwards, with the trees, toward the sky. Sometimes, the building complexes become vertiginously high, such as the skyscrapers at the old border area between East and West Berlin, where Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain meet: the vertiginous verticality of neoliberal dominance (Graham 2018, 149–173;



FIGURE 13.3 Processing soil I. Construction site on Adalbertstraße at Zentrum Kreuzberg (28 September 2020).



FIGURE 13.4 Processing soil II. Construction site on Ohlauer Straße (6 October 2019) at the former Gerhardt Hauptmann School, which was squatted for five years during the refugee protests and cleared of squatters in 2018.

Steyerl 2012, 26–28). At night, the vertical city is plunged into ghostly surveillance (Figures 13.5 and 13.6).⁴

My gaze exposes the “*vertical* accumulation and composition of the ground” (Graham 2018, 282) that hegemonic perspectives usually conceal. It senses that the troubling neoliberal city, which intensifies the gap between rich and poor, does not magically fall from the sky and is not eternal: It is manufactured and historical (Marx 1962).



FIGURE 13.5 Vertical city. Construction site on Mariannenstraße at Skalitzer Straße (27 October 2021).



FIGURE 13.6 Monstrous surveillance. Construction site on Mariannenstraße at Reichenberger Straße (16 June 2022).

Hence, *it is changeable*. Kreuzberg is vertical but perpetually messed up from below, too: Psychogeography reveals that the vertical city is not simply being accepted. Refugees, migrants, People of Color, residents, and antiracist and autonomous groups resist pauperization, displacement, and surveillance; they defend their right to the city (Autor*innenkollektiv Gras & Beton 2018; Holm 2014; Gruppe Panther & Co. 2021). Drawing on their interventions and their writings on the walls (Galimberti 2022), I tackle intersectional dynamics of neoliberal oppression in my photo series within threads such as, for instance, “Baustelle Migration” (construction site: migration) or “Blaulicht 36” (Police Light 36)—categories that I continuously saturate with transcripts, articles, talks, and documentation from politics, grassroots movements, media, and everyday conversations, contextualizing them with theoretical literature in the process⁵. The construction of categories echoes the dynamic shape of the construction site, calling the study to be reflective of its own situatedness, open-endedness, and contingency (Charmaz 2006; Haraway 1990). Consequently, the key category, the category that will become the overall umbrella and title of the study, is still under construction in this work in progress. The chances are good, nevertheless, that I will grant this special status to the category, “life is a construction site,” named after the film by Wolfgang Becker and Tom Tykwer (*Das Leben ist eine Baustelle*, 1997).

When Kreuzberg goes up the drain

One of the many themes that can be drawn from the material at this point is the story of the destruction and containment of convivial space-making as Kreuzberg is caught in an “*Aufwertungsspirale*” (upward spiral) (Holm quoted in Döring and Ulbricht 2016, 36). The categories “Construction Site: Migration” and “Blue Light 36” illustrate this. I use Construction Site: Migration as an in-vivo⁶ code referring to the O-Platz refugee movement based here, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2022 under this slogan. Spatially, the category mainly develops between Ohlauerstraße and Oranienplatz. Oranienplatz, and, shortly after, the Gerhard Hauptmann Primary School on Ohlauer Straße (see Figure 13.4), were occupied in the course of the massive refugee asylum strike between 2012 and 2014. The refugees drew attention to the necropolitics of the European camp and border regime and its entanglement with neocolonialism and heteropatriarchy (Barry 2021; Bhimji 2020; Kilian and Bendix 2020; Korvensyrjä 2017; Stierl 2019).

As part of the protest, the refugees experimented with intersectional and convivial practices of cohabitation that bridged or at least questioned and debated standard racialized schisms. With the eviction of refugees from the school in 2014, these practices were destroyed and with them the prospect of a remix of the gentrified neighborhood (Garcia Bergt 2021a, 2021b). As the squatters of the school reported in Garcia Bergt’s documentary (2021b), they had negotiated the establishment of a *Zukunftsort* (future place) after the eviction and submitted a corresponding concept to the administration. They mourned the loss of the squat and wondered what would happen to the site: For now, as one activist put it, “da ist dieses Loch” (there is this hole). As of early 2024 (Von Bodisco 2023a, 2023b), an emergency shelter for drug users and homeless people is to be built in the newly erected building. Addressing economically marginalized groups does meet one aspect of the refugees’ vision for the future. Yet, the space is being created in response to residents’ requests for safety from narcotics, which points to the gentrifying process of making Kreuzberg safe and clean. The more inclusive refugee and cultural center that the squatters envisioned will not be built. This and many other experiences of spatial and architectural renewal render the almost finished buildings hazardous, an aspect that is dramatized by the lighting at night (see Figure 13.6).



FIGURE 13.7 Demolishing old barriers. Construction site on Ohlauer Straße at Maybachufer (18 October 2020).

But, sometimes, there are also “good construction sites,” in the sense of being socially inclusive and convivial (Römhild 2018, 65; see also Gilroy 2009). One example is the gradual flattening of street curbs (Figure 13.7). This will allow wheelchairs and others for whom the curbs are too high to move more freely. For many, the old district is physically exclusive; in addition to problems with the sidewalks and paving stones, the old district generally lacks ramps, elevators, and wide entrances. As disability and class are intertwined and enough money for rent and living costs for the ‘good life’ are out of reach for many of the people who profit from these enhancements, the question remains of who will be at home on these new streets of Kreuzberg. Thus, I keep the question of capital and class relations at the center of all these intersectional reflections (Bohrer 2019).

In addition to economic exclusion, policing contributes to constructing a clean, safe, and chic city. As the above examples of queer gentrification or the establishment of the shelter show, security is not only imposed from above but also by residents. Critical voices note a change in taste and an increased desire for security (e.g. Amacher 2023; Singelstein and Stolle 2012). In conjunction with an intensified public securitization strategy (Ullrich and Tullney 2012), the police presence in Kreuzberg is becoming ever greater. I have been documenting police presence since 2018 as part of the Berlin campaign *Ban! Racial Profiling* that seeks to abolish so-called *Gefährliche Orte* (dangerous areas), where the police have special permission to stop people without cause. The experiences of People of Color show that racial profiling and police violence are disproportionately high in these areas, which are generally located in migrant neighborhoods (Weber 2018). Here, too, the presence of the monsters of racialized capitalism becomes very noticeable, especially at night, during the policing of migrantized, deportable (De Genova 2002; Transit Migration Forschungsgruppe 2007), and precarized people who can be, for instance, of African, Turkish, Arab, Romani or Eastern European origin. They may have been here for a long or a short time, and they are supposed to leave the center or at least be put under surveillance.

The intrusive police lights communicate with the surveillance spotlights of the monstrous construction sites: Kreuzberg is a “blue light district” (Bürk and Höhne 2018).

In 2023, the intensified police presence culminated in the establishment of a police station in the *Neues Zentrum Kreuzberg*, right in the heart of the district at Kottbusser Tor. Police-critical residents and groups joined forces and protested, recognizing that an increase in policing would not pacify the district. They drew attention to the connection between criminalization (of the poor and migrants), class relations, and neoliberalism, and they called for social solutions that were not based on the criminalization of racialized groups and places (Autor*innenkollektiv Gras & Beton and Basu 2018; Eick 2014; Rakovsky 2018; Weber 2018). For example, the group *Ihr Seid Keine Sicherheit* (you are no security) fought the structural violence committed by the police and security authorities and campaigned intensively against the police station:

We call for investment in the quality of life of groups or communities that are particularly policed. We call for investment in the health system, in psychological care and in the care of those affected by violence.

More non-governmental counseling centers and support services for victims of police violence are needed.

We want more local civil society structures that are involved in the negotiation of problems and conflicts in the respective districts and regions. We demand the opportunity for survivors of violence to decide for themselves what they perceive as justice—even if this does not involve punishment and prison, but transformative processes.

We want society to begin to question the construct of “criminality”.

We stand for the decriminalization of sex work, migration, drug trafficking, and consumption.

The concepts of collective responsibility and transformative justice must be discussed and disseminated as alternatives to the security authorities and criminal law in Germany.

We want to live in a society where everyone can feel safe, where exploitation, marginalization and oppression have been overcome, and where there are no police or state control systems.⁷

However, there were many advocates of the station among the local population, who hoped that the police station would remove the dealers and make Kottbusser Tor safer (in the hegemonic sense) (Singelstein and Stolle 2012). The inauguration of the station gave a new boost to the police presence, with officers and law enforcement becoming part of everyday life: Black people are taken away in handcuffs while others are having a drink in Café Kotti next to the station, once a place where people without papers could be safe. Officers get their lunch at the sandwich store and buy groceries after work in local convenience stores, occupying common infrastructures and space. Police presence becomes part of everyday life, an everyday state of emergency (Kampagne für Opfer Rassistischer Polizeigewalt 2016). As a symbol of the state of emergency, police in Kreuzberg are becoming normalized, turning into “good neighbors” (Zeit Online 2023). Is this a sign that the resistance against new neighbors (e.g., the police, Google Campus, and investment firms) is fading?

Over time, images of police presence in the neighborhood became redundant due to their abundance: The Blue Light 36 category is saturated. I take photos when the police are (rarely) absent, when police violence takes on specific intersectional patterns (such as with poor Women of Color or people in psychological crises), or when there are particular entanglements with other categories. It would also be interesting to record the “Sound of da Police,”⁸ as sirens, like blue lights, are becoming commonplace. Important intersections in the category Blue Light 36 are with other resistant and convivial categories such as *Lautes Kreuzberg* (Loud Kreuzberg), which collects graffiti relating to struggle, or *Slow Down*, which uses the bicycle as a symbol of a relaxed



FIGURE 13.8 Monster light. Policing at Lausitzer Platz (7 December 2019).



FIGURE 13.9 Everyday security. Görlitzer Park (9 May 2019). People play frisbee and chill next to their bikes at sunset; behind them, police officers patrol the “dangerous area.”

and resistant everyday life in the district, standing in stark contrast to the criminalization that Kreuzberg is subjected to (Figures 13.8 and 13.9).

Through the images, the ground reveals what is lost (Burckhardt 2021, 323) when “Kreuzberg goes *up* the drain,” as Lucian provocatively put it. The images, therefore, also illustrate the ongoing resistance, unrest, and critique of the grassroots, by people whose lives are shaken up along intersectional lines by the neoliberal reconstruction of the city, but who, nevertheless, uphold sustained practices of collectivity, solidarity, and care: soup kitchens, collective childcare, room

sharing, community accountability processes (Flückiger, Maaroufi, and Schilliger 2024; Fontanari 2018; Landry 2015; Thompson 2023). The images reveal Kreuzberg’s migrant, proletarian, and leftist political-cultural legacy, which is precious and full of hope (Barry forthcoming; Bloch 1959). They depict the sites where the protest against the vertical city concentrates (demos, assemblies, counseling centers, pubs, kiosks, theaters, concerts, and bookstores) in the form of polyphonic, intersectional, and creative banners, graffiti, and flyers (Galimberti 2022; Léger and Thomas 2017; Marcuse 1969). They reside in categories such as “Kreuzberg goes up the drain” (*Kreuzberg geht den Bach ‘rauf*), “Black politics in the district” (*Schwarze Politik im Bezirk*), or “Loud Kreuzberg” revealing the intricate connection between capital, globalized structural racism, fascism, and displacement.⁹

I will now close my chapter with a few examples.

<i>All of Berlin hates the police</i>	<i>Black lives matter</i>
<i>Stop deportation</i>	<i>Stop racial profiling</i>
<i>Kreuzberg remains impolite</i>	<i>Prevent forced evictions</i>
<i>Resist! Our home is in danger</i>	
<i>Lutta antifascista</i>	<i>Ain’t no border high enough</i>
<i>From Moria to Hanau: never forgive, never forget</i>	
<i>Leave no one behind</i>	<i>Refugees welcome</i>
<i>UNFAIR The UN Refusal Agency</i>	
<i>Justice for our brother—against the racist killing of William Tonou-Mbobda</i>	
<i>Oury Jalloh that was murder</i>	<i>Evacuate all camps</i>
<i>Open the borders</i>	<i>Achtung Polizei</i>
<i>Stop the BER (Berlin Brandenburg Airport) Camp</i>	

Notes

- 1 www.instagram.com/p/Bm2yRpBB21_2RUd6xdLn-eIcU6LOjGWCUB9GNI0/ (accessed 28 August 2024).
- 2 See also the map by Döring and Ulbricht (2016, 25) illustrating the intensity of gentrified displacement in Berlin in the first decade of 2000.
- 3 Source: Flickr-Account of the Initiative *GloReiche Nachbarschaft* for the social city and against displacement of residents and small businesses (www.flickr.com/photos/161126558@N03/with/29304183408 (accessed 15 June 2024), for more info see www.gloreiche.de/ (accessed 15 June 2024).
- 4 In the coding process, I refer to it as “monstrous” as it reminds me of the scary monsters of capitalism Antonio Gramsci identified. I usually reserve the terms “ghosts” and “specters” for the Marxist, revolutionary, and therefore positive, sense.
- 5 See more photos at: www.flickr.com/photos/cb_c_moi/
- 6 In-vivo codes refer directly to the vocabulary used in the data.
- 7 See the website: www.ihrseidkeinesicherheit.org/home/forderungen/
- 8 Song title by KRS ONE, from the album *Return of the Boom Bap*, 1993.
- 9 See Joseph Mondieu (2021) for a chronology of the Berlin working-class housing struggles including Luisenstadt, the former name of Kreuzberg, in the context of German proletarianization in the 19th century, and azozomox (2021) for an account of the anti-capitalist, antifascist, and anticolonial dimensions of Berlin’s squatting movement from 1969 to 2020.

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PART III

Challenging urban violence



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INTERSECTIONAL GEOGRAPHIES IN THE URBAN GRID

(B)ordering technologies and migrant agency and resistance

Paula Medina García and Ana Santamarina Guerrero

Introduction: Towards an intersectional understanding of urban spatialities of migration

The global tendency towards the urbanization of borders has accelerated since the beginning of the century (Balibar 2002; Walters 2011). This requires the re-centering of urban space in the theorizing of power and mobility. Cities have become key sites of negotiation of “power geometries” and mobilities (Massey 2005) in connection with the intersectional power regimes of sex-gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, disability, nationality, and creed. This chapter brings together some of the conclusions of our research work (Medina García 2020, 2021, 2022; Santamarina 2021, 2023, 2024) addressing the lived experiences of racialized, gendered, and classed mobile-migrant subjects grappling with multi-scalar configurations of power in Cali (Colombia), Glasgow (UK), and Valencia and Madrid (Spain).

Despite the heterogeneity of these urban contexts, we found common ground in terms of (b)ordering/othering technologies and practices as well as in forms of agency and resistance. The aim of the chapter is to reflect on how our academic trajectories and knowledge intertwine, pushing forward critical urban studies on the geographies of migration from an intersectional perspective that centers on questions of how migrant agency challenges the urban grid. By using the spatial trope of an unstructured grid, we show how bordering technologies are inserted in cities’ everyday functioning, interwoven with everyday practices of re/production and survival.

Drawing on political geography, both our studies revolved around power, space, and migrant agency, although our focuses and theoretical coordinates differed. While Ana’s work focused on migrants’ experience of challenging the “urban border”—addressing the border as a material and an epistemological device—Paula’s work highlighted how the experiences of people on the move are shaped by intersectional power regimes. Bringing these perspectives together and sharing our fieldwork produced a nuanced understanding of the relationships between intersectionalities and urban spatialities and the contested politics of im/mobility.

The work began by assembling a shared conceptual map, addressing the spatialization of intersectional regimes of power through multi-scalar geographies and emphasizing the role played by bordering technologies within these arrangements of power. This situates the urban as a key

scale (Herod 2010) to analyze these dynamics. The urban is understood, here, as an entanglement of power, the socio-spatial, economic, political, and cultural configuration where borders are experienced and embodied on a daily basis by multiple migrant subjects. Challenging the notion of the border as a wall, the chapter examines how racialized, gendered, and classed borders and boundaries (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992) are disputed, foregrounding the ambivalence of cities as spaces of control and contestation. It addresses how an intersectional approach to migrants' urban socio-spatial experiences of exclusion and struggle centers questions of re/production as constitutive of agency. These theoretical developments provide an analytical framework for the rest of the chapter, which discusses intersectional geographies in the urban grid emphasizing: (i) the multiple im/mobilities constituting the urban experience; (ii) the ambivalence of the urban, and the contentious and multilayered relations shaping it; and (iii) the particular forms of agency that emerge from intersectional embodied experiences of im/mobility and bordering in the city.

Our research draws upon a heterogeneous set of qualitative methodologies (observation, in-depth interviews, participatory action research, militant research, co-production of narratives, etc.) and fieldwork carried out in Cali, Glasgow, Valencia, and Madrid since 2016. All information was gathered after the signing of informed consent forms. Some research participants' names have been anonymized (using pseudonyms) to protect their identities and guarantee their safety and privacy; others preferred to use their real names as a way to appropriate their own narratives and share their lived experiences as a political statement. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish, depending on participants' language preferences. Interviews in Spanish were translated into English by the authors. The research draws on extensive qualitative materials, from which representative information from various participants was selected to support the analysis presented throughout the chapter.

From an intersectional feminist perspective, in her PhD research, Paula addressed the situatedness of multiple lived experiences of im/mobility, drawing upon the generative character of hidden/underground narratives of both ordinary afrodescendant women and well-known activists from the Colombian Pacific region. Because of the conflict and geographies of terror and fear (Oslender 2007) in the Colombian Pacific region, hard-to-reach subjects, and the deadly risk to participants involved in the research, Paula adopted an intersectional qualitative approach to her fieldwork, following in the footsteps of feminist political geographers (see Rodó-Zárate 2021; Moss 2002; Rose 1997; Staeheli, Kofman, and Peake 2004; Valentine 2007). The fieldwork in Cali ended up generating eight in-depth interviews and subject narratives, to which one from Spain was added as a result of the connection with *La Colectiva de Mujeres de Mujeres Refugiadas, Exiliadas y Migradas de Colombia* (The Collective of Refugee, Exiled, and Migrant Women of Colombia). Along with these nine narratives, different public oral discourses produced in Cali, Madrid, and Glasgow (2016–2019) by Afro-Colombian activists and human rights defenders were analyzed to bring together public and private accounts of the intersections of gender, race, class, age/life course, and the spatialities of mobility and immobility in the Colombian Pacific region.

In her research, Ana adopted a scholar-activist approach to the struggles of the No Evictions Network in Glasgow, a migrant-solidarity space that emerged to challenge the large-scale evictions of asylum seekers by the multinational company Serco, the UK Home Office's asylum accommodation contractor. Inspired by long-lasting trajectories of "militant research" in critical migration studies (see Dadusc, Grazioli, and Martínez 2019; Tazzioli and Garelli 2020), she became actively involved in the politics of the network and conducted 24 in-depth interviews with migrants navigating the border regime and the activists standing alongside them. Her work suggests a focus on learning with grassroots movements, foregrounding the role of social movements

as epistemological communities (Choudry 2020). Likewise, Ana has conducted research with neighborhood-based solidarity movements working in migrant minors' reception centers in Madrid, conducting seven in-depth interviews with neighbors and migrant activists. She is currently part of a project mapping the articulations between emerging digital platforms, borders, labor markets, social reproduction, and urban political economies in precarious migrant labor in the city, where she has conducted 20 interviews with migrants working on digital platforms in Madrid.

All this work demonstrates the heterogeneity of studies, approaches, and methods used in this research. We cannot avoid addressing certain methodological queries related to the heterogeneity of the participant subjects and the different locations where the fieldwork was conducted. To respond to these concerns, the chapter adopts a multi-scalar and intersectional approach to understanding the situated experiences and spatial "trajectories" (Schapendonk et al. 2020; Schwarz 2020) of each participant, shaped not only by contextual material and symbolic conditions but also by the changing spatial and temporal positionalities of the mobile subjects themselves.

We, therefore, want to pinpoint the productive yet challenging character of the differences between the participants of our research. We reject universal fixed categories, even though this can be challenging in terms of the systematization of our analysis. The difference and multiplicity present in our work is highly productive; it can be read not only as a result by itself but also as constitutive of space and the social as well as the very foundation of intersectionality. Furthermore, despite all the differences, there are commonalities in our work relating to: i) the drivers of mobility mentioned in all participant narratives being linked to war, conflict, economic and political instability; ii) the intersecting regimes of power (gender, race, age, class, creed/religion, and other factors) shaping the experiences of the participants; and iii) the ways in which participants navigate and defy the different regimes of mobility and bordering technologies in urban settings. To build our argument, we have systematized the information from interviews and narratives by categorizing and identifying infrastructures, processes, and agents related to borders, housing, and labor markets within urban spaces.

Following this introduction, the chapter is divided into two main sections: firstly, the theoretical section, which delves into the key concepts of the chapter; and secondly, the analytical section, which brings together the commonalities and multiplicities observed in our work.

Refiguring the urban space from an intersectional perspective: A theoretical approach

Aligned with the aim of this edited volume to consolidate and reassess the relevance of intersectionality to urban studies, the key concepts of this chapter are intersectionality, spatialities of power, urban bordering, and agency. Despite the lack of consensus regarding the definition of each of these concepts, the chapter provides key tenets of each while also addressing how they are intertwined and co-produced.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a highly disputed concept, precisely because difference and situatedness, rather than sameness and universality, are two of its key tenets. Crenshaw (1989) is considered the first scholar to coin the term, but the notion was already present in Black feminism (see, for example, Sojourner Truth's 2020 speech *Ain't I A Woman*). In this sense, the notion of situatedness served to pinpoint why the universal definition of woman/women provided by

hegemonic feminism excluded other subjects of feminism and how patriarchal discrimination was intertwined with racist and capitalist forms of oppression (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Davis 1981; De Lauretis 1990). In short, intersectionality can be understood as the co-constitution of different “regulatory hegemonies” that produce, in a Foucauldian sense (Allen 1999; Butler 1990), the norms of sedimented (power) regimes of gender, sexuality, class, race/ethnicity, age/life course, disability, creed or religion, legal status, etc. Thus, the intersectional gaze addresses not only the fact that “major systems of oppression [are] interlocking” but also how “the differential situatedness of different social agents” (Yuval-Davis 2011, 4) is produced. In other words, the differential situatedness of different social agents, understood as their different ways of being and becoming-in-the-world (Medina García 2022), not only responds to the relational and productive character of these regulatory hegemonies but also denotes the ways in which they are temporally and spatially inserted in society. Various decolonial and postcolonial feminists have already noted that these hegemonies have taken specific forms depending on historical and geographical context (see Lugones 2008; Mohanty 2003).

In spite of the definition provided above, intersectionality has been extensively debated over the years. The fact that it addresses the intersecting, interlocking, entangled, and co-constitutive character of power regimes, oppressions, and axes of social differentiation implies the recognition of separate yet inseparable power regimes and social categories (Gunnarsson 2015; Jorba and Rodó-Zárate 2019; Yuval-Davis 2011). Ultimately, intersectionality is understood as an “ontology of the social” (Medina García 2021, 61), a theoretical framework, a methodological tool for social research, an ethical and reflexive standpoint regarding social intervention, and a political praxis, with the potential to decode intricate and multifaceted socio-political phenomena (e.g., “racial capitalism,” “heteropatriarchy,” or “femonationalism”) crisscrossed by power in its fullest and most radical multidimensionality, relationality and productivity.

Spatialities of power

The multidimensional, relational, and productive character of power also needs to be thought of in terms of time and space, consistency, and contingency. That is to say, the ways in which the intersections between regulatory hegemonies of sex-gender, race/ethnicity, class, and others, but also of migration, mobility, nationality, or language, materialize and sediment differ in terms of time-space. For instance, the ethnocentric and binary regulatory hegemony of sex/gender at the core of European or Western modern societies has been forced onto indigenous populations all over the world since the beginning of the colonization process. This process of acculturation, assimilation, and repression eroded non-binary cosmologies, such as native American two-spirits, in which gender variance and fluidity were the norm (Roughgarden 2013).

As this chapter interrogates the relation between intersectionality and space, Massey’s (2005, 10–11) definition of space—as the product of interrelations and embedded practices; the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity; and an ongoing process radically open to the future—captures the idea that space is imbued by power, and power has its own spatialities (Massey 2009). Thus, in addition to the key notion of “situatedness,” the acknowledgment of multiple “spatialities of power”—ranging from the body to the home, the neighborhood, the city, the regional, the national, and the transnational—is useful to understand its multiscalar (Herod 2010) productivity and refiguration, especially when applying this notion to question how power manifests, not only in the politics of control of migratory and non-migratory subjects by using the border as a technology but also in the way in which people on the move defy this attempt at control.

Urban bordering

In sharp contrast to globalizing celebrations of a borderless world, this is a world in which borders shape the spaces and scales of global geometries of power (Massey 1993; Mau et al. 2012; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Million et al. 2021). Balibar's (2002, 71) claim that "borders are dispersed a little everywhere" gave rise to theoretical engagements discussing the polysemy, ubiquity, and complexity of borders. Concerned with issues of securitization, war, or global migration (Hyndman 2012; Walters 2006), critical border studies have moved beyond the notion of borders as walls to foreground the production of borders as well as the practices of (b)ordering/othering, which are meant to order the social by creating boundaries and producing "the other", in and across multiple scales (Casas-Cortés et al. 2015). Situated at the center of "the political," borders are productive, materially and symbolically, of contemporary social spaces. The notion of a border regime encapsulates the delocalization and externalization of border technologies and operations to multiple sites beyond the borderline, from foreign countries to everyday spaces.

Aiming to build a theoretical lens to address the different forms in which borders are constitutive of urban lives, literature has engaged with the notion of the urban border. Cities are sites of the daily experiences of social bordering and the quotidian space, where racialized, gendered, and classed trajectories converge (Dikeç 2017), transforming cities into border spaces within the organization of contemporary border regimes (Lebuhn 2013; Walters 2011)—a regime that, as previously stated, works as a spatialized power regime by itself. A rich body of literature has foregrounded how cities have become a privileged space in the delocalization and externalization of borders from the borderline to a multiplicity of spatial settings, particularly affecting public spaces (Casas-Cortés et al. 2015; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2019). Through top-down devolution, as well as through urban autonomy, cities are increasingly engaged in matters such as migrants' legal status, removal, and deportation. It is not only state actors who participate in these processes; private agents and even local communities are also involved (El-Enany 2020). At any rate, the relocation of borders in cities has led to the proliferation of bordering technologies and practices that not only shape migrants' everyday spaces but also accentuate gendered, aged, classed, and racialized asymmetrical urban landscapes (e.g., infrastructure, labor markets, housing, leisure spaces, consumption, commuting, and schooling).

Agency

Nevertheless, borders are porous, constantly challenged by border crossings (Paasi 2012; Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013), becoming "sites of constant encounter, conflict and negotiation" (Casas-Cortés et al. 2015, 69). The exclusionary geographies of the urban border are constantly contested and reshaped by daily socio-spatial struggles and acts of solidarity (Karaliotas and Kapsali 2021; Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013). In terms of the politics of space and mobility, migrant mobilities and strategies of survival in the city are essential forms of agency, although they can go unnoticed because they are the most invisibilized. Literature on migrant solidarity emphasizes the centrality of migrant community networks of support in the development of social and material infrastructures enabling movement and settlement within urban spaces, building geographies of care and support as an alternative to the exclusionary geographies of the border in cities (Dadusc, Grazioli, and Martínez 2019; Kapsali 2020). On the other hand, visible and notorious migrant mobilizations are on the rise, often staged by undocumented activists who are denied citizenship rights and so claim their right to the city (Lefebvre 2020 [1968]; Swerts 2021). In this sense, the

type of migrant agency and autonomy (De Genova 2017; Mezzadra 2011; Tazzioli 2020) discussed here is the product and expression, following Massey's definition (2005), of the possibility of multiple and relational spatialities of power, because power is not only *power over* (domination, control, discipline), but also *power to* (do, persist, resist) and *power with* (the power to do all of the above in a collective way, forging solidarity) (Allen 1999; Lukes 2007; Sharp et al. 2000).

How these multiple spatialities of power are entangled in the urban grid and people's lived experiences will be examined in the next section, offering a deeper insight into how (b)ordering/othering practices are disputed by individual and collective agencies.

Multiple and intersecting spatialities: Im/mobilities, borders, and agency in the urban grid

Im/mobilities despite and because of borders

Migrants cannot be discussed as a homogeneous collective subject, nor can they be reduced to statistics and figures. Rather, it is necessary to explore the multiplicities and singularities (Tazzioli 2020) of people on the move who often do not fall into fixed categories (migrant, forced displaced, asylum seeker, refugee, etc.). This is due to the fact that the borders between categories are rather diffuse, and the process of definition or categorization implies questions that are sometimes overlooked: self-recognition, multiple modalities of mobility, legal barriers, changing status, etc.

Overlapping types of mobility make it hard to pinpoint one category or another without reducing people's lived experience to a label. Socorro, an activist, single householder, mother, and afrodescendant woman with a complex trajectory of mobility, was internally displaced in Colombia with her family from the city of Buenaventura to the city of Cali. Later she had to leave some family members in Colombia to flee to Spain and seek international protection because her life was severely threatened. She fell into the category of internally displaced in Colombia but asylum seeker and migrant in Spain. She was constantly being othered as Black, Latina, or foreigner, because of her accent, her body, her culture, or her passport. In the same vein, Samir, whose case will be briefly addressed later on, was placed in different legal categories throughout his journey: an illegal migrant in Italy, a refugee in Denmark, and an asylum seeker in the UK.

Ultimately, the act of labeling is mostly done by others, *ex-post* or en route (e.g., by the Home Office in the UK or *Unidad para las Víctimas/Victims' Unit* in Colombia), and tends to reify and condition immigrants' processes of becoming due to how these categories have been socially and politically signified, overloaded with prejudices, stigma, and sometimes deemed as undesirable and even criminalized (e.g., undocumented migrants) by host societies. For example, in Colombia, the *Unidad para las Víctimas*¹ faces a huge problem of underreporting of acts of victimization due to: i) victimized people's lack of knowledge about the organization and its benefits in terms of rights recognition; ii) the draining administrative odyssey the institution imposes on people reporting acts of victimization; and iii) the fact that categorizing people as "displaced" or "victim" generates fear, suspicion and stigma. This underreporting is worst among victimized women, LGTBQIA+, afrodescendant, or Indigenous populations, which must deal not only with suspicion and doubt regarding their testimonies and reports but also with retaliation and even the impunity of the perpetrators.

In line with this, the "mobility turn" (Cresswell 2010; Hyndman 2012; Sheller and Urry 2016) has revealed how most categories do not entirely grasp the multiple temporalities and spatialities of mobile trajectories or how mobility goes hand in hand with immobility, confinement, and detention

(Mountz et al. 2013); an example of this is detention centers as part of the infrastructure of the border. The case of Socorro illustrates the ways in which the urban border is enforced. Spain was her destination in 2007, but upon her arrival in Madrid, the airport became a temporary detention facility. She was detained for four days and had to endure several interrogations, separation from one of her children because he was repatriated, and confinement in a hotel that served as part of the infrastructure of the border and the landscapes of immobility:

They scrutinized me. They investigated everything I said. They phoned to Bogotá, then to Cali. They took me out of the border after 4 days ... I was locked up in Barajas for 4 days. I had to seek legal assistance from CEAR² to demand accountability for whatever might happen to my son. I had to ask CEAR's lawyer to mediate on my behalf because they wanted to send me back to Colombia too. Afterwards, they confined us in a hotel in Madrid.

Moreover, these trajectories defy categorization. Movements that adhere to a unique and linear space-time trajectory (place-to-place) are rarely found. Instead, overlapping and assorted modalities of im/mobility parallel different scalar encounters with the border, whether internal, national, or transnational, and types of movement across spaces and places, such as urban, rural, or peri-urban, shaped by power geometries (Bélanger and Silvey 2019; Cordero, Mezzadra, and Varela 2019; Massey 1993; Oso, Grosfoguel, and Christou 2018). Coming back to the case of Samir, who is originally from Syria, it is clear that the exclusionary and ubiquitous presence of borders has led him to perceive his life as constantly on the move. Over the past three years alone, he has traversed Lebanon, Libya, Italy, Denmark, and the UK, not knowing where he would be tomorrow. When he was contacted in 2020, his whereabouts were uncertain, but since then, he has relocated to Ireland and is currently in Germany.

These experiences of mobility and immobility underlie how these people on the move navigate the process of being and becoming-in-the-world. Their identities, subjectivities, and sociabilities have been forged by intersecting power regimes of gender, race, class, and age, but also by mobility. An intersectional gaze sees, in these multiple experiences of im/mobility, the changing positionalities of subjects on the move. Graziella, a white middle-class Brazilian woman, recounted how her migration experience and the need to make a life through working on care platforms entailed a dual process of racialization and class relocation. Moreover, when the journey is undertaken in an extended time frame, encompassing multiple relocations, detours, and even returns, these narratives disclose how age and life course are directly linked to their changing positionalities regarding the very decision and act of moving.

In these cases of individual, family, and community im/mobility, in which the decision to leave or stay put has not always been made by the narrators, the decision to move is decoupled from the act of moving. The interesting thing is that, in spite of this, the experience and agency are still there; what changes is the signification of it. The decision to move, which for children can sometimes be seen as imposed by their parents, may later be justified when they grow up or become parents themselves. This happened, for example, to Cristina, an Afro-Colombian woman who experienced, at the age of 12, the intra-urban displacement of her entire family. In her case, the relocation from neighborhood to neighborhood was an emotional shock, something that was signified not only as forced—because they had been threatened by criminal groups asserting territorial control—but somehow also imposed by her own father on the rest of the family. Her process of meaning-making changed over time as she began to understand her father's decision.

Urban ambivalence: Hope, horizons, and lived injustices

This section questions the urban grid by engaging with the ways in which the “urban magnet” and the “imagined city” operate within the different imaginaries, narratives, and trajectories of people on the move. It analyzes how mobility has shaped powerful forms of agency amidst the technologies of exclusion within urban bordering processes. The discussion sheds light on how common dynamics of bordering are spatialized and reproduced in the everyday workings of the contemporary city, entrenched in the social, economic, and political organization of everyday life and contested by multiple forms of agency. It focuses on two pivotal aspects of urban injustice: The right to housing and the right to work.

Research in urban and critical migration studies has highlighted the double-edged character or ambivalence of urban spaces, serving both as realms of control and arenas for contestation (Darling 2017; Lebuhn 2013; Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1996). Cities are not enclosed, totalizing, and inexorable units, but relational, heterogeneous, and mutable settings in which everyday politics takes place. As hubs of economic activity and with dense populations, urban areas feature prominently in the imaginaries of people on the move, representing horizons of hope and escape, whether from armed conflict, persecution, intersectional discrimination and violence, climatic events, or economic restructuring. Cities work as magnets and are seen and imagined as spaces of opportunity, promising social mobility, educational and labor opportunities, family reunification, legal protection, and peace and safety. Furthermore, the anonymity inherent in urban settings enables mobile subjects to blend in, often relying on pre-existing kinship, social networks, and economic communities to navigate and sustain themselves within urban areas that operate as a pole of attraction.

The case of Gloria, an Afro-Colombian woman, bolsters this idea of the imagined city. The rural-urban displacement from Patía to Cali that she experienced when she was 17 years old occurred due to the displacement of her family unit. Prior to that, the death of her mother and the alcoholism of her father had led her to move in with her aunt’s family. The agricultural village they lived in was experiencing many problems: water scarcity, the growing of illicit crops, and armed groups recruiting young children and causing devastation. Her aunt, therefore, decided to move with the whole family and “escape from that violence,” viewing the city as the “space for the pursuit of job opportunities.” The fact that family and people from the village had already relocated to Cali contributed to their decision to move there, because “it was easier to get someone who could lend a helping hand.”

The city as an aspirational space for work and educational achievement is a prevailing theme across this fieldwork and is exemplified in how Karen, an Afro-Colombian woman, thought of “the rural” and “the urban”:

I always aspired to study, to move forward, to help my family, and also to do something for my village, to help people who have not had the opportunity to go to the city. Because, unfortunately, if someone in El Charco-Nariño wants to study, they have to leave because there are no conditions for a person to pursue a career or even to become a technician. They have to move to the city. They have to move, yes.

This portrayal of urban areas as symbols of opportunity is at odds with the reality of deeply embedded injustices and contradictions within cities (Dikeç 2017). As the environments in which migrants and non-migrants navigate their daily lives, cities represent the everyday battlegrounds

of intersectional social boundaries and institutional barriers. Consequently, migrant experiences in urban settings are characterized by a constant interaction of multiple forms and spatialities of power, from policing, co-option, and surveillance to survival, subversion, and autonomous transfigurative action. This ambivalence can be seen in how Alejandra, an Afro-Colombian woman who migrated to Cali from Buenaventura, reflects on the chasm between the imagined city and the lived city:

Coming to Cali had to do with the lack of opportunities and the search for a change. ... I imagined a city that would welcome us with open arms, but people are very inhumane, they do not even help you. ... I feel like everyone does their own thing.

The lived city and migrants' urban experiences are beset with legal obstacles. Along with the border technologies of detention, confinement, and repatriation, most people on the move have to deal with how multiscale migration governance controls not only their movement but also the places they are allowed to inhabit. The politics of dispersal are spatial, and governmental strategies are designed to gain control over mobile subjects (Tazzioli 2019). In the UK, dispersal has become a key tool to control migration; the no-choice housing system for asylum applicants is designed to monitor migrants' living conditions and ability to move around the country. In Socorro's case, following her detention in the airport and confinement in a Madrid hotel, she was relocated to an address in Valencia provided beforehand by the organization in charge of her asylum petition. She had no say in the decision, no power to decide for herself where she wanted to go.

Even if no official organization or institution mediates, sometimes urban spaces are already inhabited by spatial dynamics responding to this divisive logic. For example, in Cali, the district of Aguablanca—situated on the edge of the city, mostly populated by afrodescendant people and with some of the highest rates of inequality, poverty, and lack of public services—is an example of how this politics of dispersal works. The district is not only where most afrodescendant people in the city live but also where afrodescendant people on the move arrive and settle down due to the lack of institutional assistance and the city's exclusionary dynamics (Barbary and Urrea 2004; Cubides and Domínguez 1999; Restrepo and Rojas 2004). In Cali, as well as in other Colombian and Latin American urban landscapes, the difficulties are such that sometimes mobile subjects end up in peripheralized, deprived neighborhoods, peri-urban informal settlements, or makeshift dwellings.

A pivotal issue arises here, not only regarding mobility and migration politics but also in terms of urban politics: The right to housing. Access to housing for people on the move, and particularly for gendered, racialized, and classed individuals and families, is one of the major barriers they face in urban settings. This often leads to continuous relocation within the city, always in rented property with no possibility of ownership. Most of the migrants working in digital platforms for care and delivery that we interviewed in Madrid are forced into overcrowded housing in the southern periphery of the city due to formal and informal barriers to renting an apartment. Graziella, a Brazilian domestic worker, explained that “not having documents is a huge problem.” She ended up sharing a flat with four other families.

Barriers are also informal. Anna, from Peru, explained how she and her mother had to rent a flat through a friend in Madrid because landlords abruptly ended her phone enquiries on hearing her Latin American accent. In the UK, the Right to Rent policy requires private landlords to conduct immigration control checks on tenants. Failure to comply results in sizable fines and criminal prosecution effectively pushing private agents and homeowners to become border guards.

Another barrier observed in our fieldwork is related to the right to work. The connection between labor markets and border policies has been widely acknowledged in the literature (cf. Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Border regimes operate a system of “inclusion through exclusion” to include and subsume workers into labor markets according to the needs of capital, regardless of workers’ legal status. Sometimes, undocumented migrants are denied citizenship because they are seen as disposable workers. This interplay between migration and the right to work came up frequently in different research contexts. For example, once she arrived in Spain, Socorro, who worked for more than 12 years as a hospital nurse and was a union representative back in Buenaventura (Colombia), experienced another dimension of the border: The non-recognition of her career credentials forced her to repeat training courses in order to be able to enter the job market in Spain. Yet, despite this achievement, she continued to experience underemployment and racial and gender discrimination, particularly in the overly feminized domestic sector:

Sometimes they rejected me ... because I am a black woman. ... If it is already tough for black people to work in our country, here it is even harder. It is plain racism. Our culture is not recognized because we are black.

The racism and difficulties Socorro referred to in Colombia were also experienced by other participants. In Colombia, there were not only pre-market barriers (e.g., educational barriers and inequalities), but also discrimination in selection processes, such as feeling exposed to racism when they revealed their gender, race, age, or accent, either through photos in resúmenes or in in-person interviews. At work, they experienced mistrust, underappreciation, jokes, and other belittling behaviors based on their age, gender, race, and origin. Most of these barriers were also experienced by the migrant digital workers we interviewed in Madrid. These workers stated that work in precarious sectors such as delivery or domestic labor—was all that was available when they arrived in the city. Marta, a Glovo (delivery platform) rider, recalled how she could not access any job or open an app account due to her lack of documentation. She discovered that many undocumented migrants were resorting to subletting accounts: “In the beginning I rented an account where the owner was taking 40% of my earnings. I have to do this temporarily until I get my work permit.” While digital labor facilitated her survival in Madrid without documentation, navigating legal constraints to escape from such temporal labor also shapes experiences of immobility, exposing again the tensions between the imagined city and the lived city. In informal forms of labor, racialization intersects with gender and sexual oppression. Alejandra, a domestic worker from Colombia, noted how “sometimes people order a service, and it may not be exclusively for the service ... most people sexualize Latin American women, and they might hire your services with a different intention.” The predators often go unpunished, as reporting them to the police could risk these women’s chances of obtaining papers.

We have analyzed in a more detailed manner two of the barriers faced by people on the move; these were the ones most frequently mentioned by our research participants. However, there are many other material and symbolic aspects related to the spatialization of injustices and the “right to the city.” The bodily and emotional impact of im/mobility and dislocation; the lack of institutional assistance, healthcare, and psychological support; the vulnerability to police raids and racial profiling; the obstacles to movement across the city, such as access to public transport for commuting; the sexual and racial harassment and violence in public spaces; the invisible boundaries of the city, the exclusion from certain neighborhoods, squares, parks, streets, and other leisure spaces in which they feel out of place; these experiences are overly present in the accounts

of the participants, evidencing their own realization of urban ambivalence we have highlighted in this section.

Coping strategies: Repertoires of agency and resistance

The urban borders analyzed above operate in constant relationship with multiple forms of agency and coping strategies, both embodied and collectively articulated, in which migrants have changed their positionalities, (re)made their communities, and found ways to navigate the urban grid. The role of social re/productive politics in shaping migrant agency within the city, facilitating survival amid uneven, racialized, and hazardous geographies (Santamarina 2024), is key, encompassing the broad material and social efforts associated with sustaining production and social life (Katz 2008). In addition to the intrinsic agency underlying the trajectories of mobility, we observed urban coping and survival strategies unfold in many ways. Some of these ways include changing spatialized positionalities and mutable multi-scalar care chains; beyond family and kinship, neighborhoods became key scales in the reconfiguration of care. Solidarity, organized political action, campaigning, and future-making activism all challenge migrants' formal exclusion from the political realm in urban settings.

We observed that women in different moments of their life course exhibit strong agency, driving migratory processes and at the same time challenging patriarchal family structures. For example, Audelina, an afrodescendant woman, commuted for a whole year from a rural setting in Jamundí to her domestic work in the city of Cali. Many women migrated alone or with their children. In those cases, mobility became a substantial part of their identity, because they tended to assume the roles of both mother and father. It also reshaped their social reproduction and survival strategies, as their position as head of household, breadwinners, and caregivers turned into greater responsibility and challenge:

I decided to go to Cali because I got scared. ... I have two sons, and some of their friends, some little friends who were studying, about five of them were killed. [The guerrillas] used to leave flyers that said that they were going to kill those boys who were seen on the corner or around there. So I got scared for my sons, and that's why I came here to Cali. ... We had to eat, and to survive with the family, I had to work and make money. ... With my children, sometimes I had to endure hardships so they could have something to eat: I know what it's like to endure hunger to be able to provide them with food.

Very often, the reshaping of family, gender, and intergenerational relations was entangled in care chains that worked in multiple directions: Mothers like Socorro, Audelina, and Gloria, who wanted to provide a safe future for their children, and women like Adela and Anna (mother and daughter), who migrated to Madrid from Peru to take care of the grandmother who herself migrated thirty years earlier. While entwined in caring geographies, these experiences also denote gendered forms of agency and autonomy through mobility in the context of feminization of migration (Kofman 2019).

In cases of family reunification, women's prior agency also prompted the transformation of intra-family gendered power relations, especially between householders. Juan, a Glovo rider, noted how migration "flipped" their family situation since his wife migrated first and found a job for him once she was settled:

My wife arrived three years ago with my son. I stayed in Venezuela battling the situation, while they were stabilizing here and obtaining a work permit, residency, and everything else. ... Once

she got that, I came in April. ... She researched everything [about the Glovo platform where Juan started working], since she has papers, she opened the account for me ... I got sick and it caused me a horrible depression, crying and all ... the anguish of not being able to make money and the helplessness. ... In my house, I was the provider, my job provided for all of them, I always had the expenses. But the situation changed. So, since the situation flipped, of course, it's a problem ... a little bit of machismo. ... It hit me hard, I'm not going to lie.

In the case of the children who moved, with or without their parents, the gendered and intergenerational negotiation of the meaning and impact of the mobile experience tended to be mediated by their changing, yet situated, positionalities. Their experiences and the subsequent processes of meaning-making cannot be understood without their intersectional coordinates, as their gendered and age transitions, their processes of being and becoming-in-the-world, happened on the move. Karen explained how these processes of resignification and appropriation are part of the process of becoming for migrant children and young adults:

I didn't really understand why my dad and mom had decided to send me to live with my aunt. ... I started to think that maybe they had given me away, yes. I began to think that because, well, they sent me to live with my aunt. ... After two or three years of living in the city, I began to understand and have a different perspective on things. And then I realized that they hadn't abandoned me; they had done it for my own good, to protect me. ... While I lived with my aunts, let's just say that I didn't live very well because, well, they were very strict, and there was always an inequality between my cousins and me. However, I endured it because I knew what was happening and that I couldn't go back. Besides, I had set my mind on studying, and if I went back to my village, I wouldn't have any opportunities.

Networks constitute key social infrastructures and systems enabling migration and mobility across multiple spaces, and pre-established communities in urban settings function as "arrival infrastructures," providing mutual support, sharing economies, and community knowledge exchange. Research with migrants in our fieldwork revealed how family, kinship, and community ties facilitated the navigation of the multiple borders crisscrossing the urban grid. Linking to everyday geographies of resistance, these chains of care and social networks work as mechanisms of mutual support, whose value increases as they fill the gap produced by official institutions that fail to address the needs and demands of people on the move. This was the case for Gloria and Audelina, who explained how sorority and neighborhood's chains of care were crucial for their navigation of urban gendered and classed hurdles:

Gloria: I leave for work at five in the morning and my husband at six. Our daughter stays with Mariana, and she takes her to and picks her up from kindergarten. I didn't know Mariana until about a year ago when I looked for someone, a neighbor, to help me. She helps a lot here, and our daughter is happy with her.

Audelina: In the neighborhood where my children grew up [in Cali], the neighbors were helpful. They would come and inform me, "Your kids have come back from school and haven't left since." There was this elderly woman in my street who was very kind. She told me, "I keep an eye on them because I also had to raise my kids alone. ... I know you work, so I stay alert for them." ... Thank God, there were good neighbors who kept a close watch on them.

Shared popular knowledge and solidarity between migrants is actually a sort of power: Power to get a flat, get a job, get assistance, get emotional and other day-to-day support. For instance, Paula, a young Venezuelan migrant woman in Madrid, noted how she was able to find a job as a delivery worker due to the knowledge shared by the local Venezuelan community: “They told me that I could sublet a Glovo account and work although the authorities had not yet processed my papers.” Similarly, Paula and other migrant delivery workers observed how various tips regarding the platform circulated within the community, such as how to increase earnings or identify unfriendly restaurants.

Within migrant coping strategies, social reproductive politics are pivotal not only in the realm of everyday informal practices but also in activism and political organizing. Socorro is one of the people sharing this kind of coping with knowledge in Spain, helping others to get oriented, providing legal assistance for asylum applications, and even offering her own house as a safe place for other migrants. Additionally, perhaps influenced by her previous experience as a union representative, she joined *La Colectiva de Mujeres de Mujeres Refugiadas, Exiliadas y Migradas de Colombia*, an organization that aims to preserve the memory of the Colombian diaspora, contributing to forging a political activist agenda demanding respect for their human rights as exiled, migrant, and refugee women informed by an intersectional ethics of care. In the same vein, Juana, a 60-year-old Colombian in Madrid, explained how she went to *Territorio Doméstico*, a union of migrant domestic workers when one of her employers attempted to fire her because of a health condition. *Territorio Doméstico* offered not only legal support with her case but also functioned as a “group of friends” who supported her emotionally through the experience.

In Glasgow, during the pandemic, various self-organized grassroots migrant organizations, such as MORE (Migrants Organizing for Rights and Empowerment) or the Unity Centre collaborated on strategies to combat isolation, food insecurity, and limited access to healthcare (Santamarina 2024). The decision of the Home Office’s contractor to place migrants in hotels was challenged by Stop Hotel Detention, a political campaign in which campaigners like Samir used to spend time knocking on others’ doors, aware that mental health and isolation were major issues to confront. While gender was an important marker shaping the ways in which care was exercised, these experiences evidence migrant agencies challenging hegemonic femininities and masculinities, intergenerational relations, and family structures, showing how care is performed differently in strongly racialized migrant settings (Raghuram 2019).

These day-to-day practices and the renegotiation of power relations are also linked to wider forms of collective action and mobilization challenging migrants’ exclusion from the formal political arena. The Stop Hotel Detention and No Evictions campaigns in Glasgow, for instance, show how those denied citizenship rights articulated their political demands, claiming their right to housing through public demonstrations, neighborhood organizing, or passing their demands to the authorities. In this regard, an extensive body of literature on migrant politics has addressed how, in addition to the everyday politics of resistance, migrant mobilizations expand the boundaries of the political and challenge the dichotomies between legality and illegality, citizen and denizen or inclusion and exclusion as hegemonic ordering logics within contemporary border regimes (Dikeç 2017; Nicholls and Uitermark 2016; Swerts 2021). These forms of political action not only stopped the large-scale eviction of migrants in Glasgow but also triggered processes of solidarity-making and politicization among the affected.

Final remarks

To show how the urban border is embodied and experienced in an intersectional way, we have brought together situated narratives from a multiplicity of migrant subjects from various socio-spatio-temporal contexts. Navigating the methodological challenges that this posed, we illustrated how “the urban” has shaped the mobile trajectories of the research participants. The above narrative analysis reveals some of the ways in which navigating the urban grid turns into an embodied and lived experience of negotiation of separated yet inseparable regimes of power—of gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, age, dis/ability, nationality, and creed—that intersect with border and mobility regimes spatialized in the everyday functioning of cities.

This research, focusing on migrants and people on the move in the urban settings of Cali, Madrid, Valencia, and Glasgow, identified several common patterns of individual and collective agency used by migrants when faced with technologies of control in cities. Amid the tensions between the imagined city and the lived city, migrants find many ways to reshape urban spaces, places, and scales, from urban informality to everyday practices of re/production. In spite of how technologies of control steer movement and disperse people on the move in order to atomize them, migrants grapple with, and reconfigure, the urban grid through their politics of presence and belonging, their articulation of solidarity politics, and their future-making activism. Inserted in collective networks, these mobilities and coping strategies are the expressions of a type of agency that disrupts the regulatory hegemonies embedded in bordering practices. Placing the focus on the urban reveals the everyday battlegrounds where the struggles for life and “the right to the city” confront the material and symbolic violence of multi-scalar power geometries.

Notes

- 1 The Victims Unit, or Unit for Comprehensive Attention and Reparation to Victims, is an institution created in 2012 following Law 1448 (on victims and land restitution) and provides attention, assistance, and comprehensive reparation to victims of the internal armed conflict (see www.unidadvictimas.gov.co)
- 2 CEAR, *Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado*, the Spanish Commission for Refugee Assistance.

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15

THE MAKING OF KEUNG TO BAY

Fandom, urban space and affective alliance in Hong Kong

Lucetta Y. L. Kam and Carol P. H. Chow

Introduction

One of the most representative city shots of Hong Kong is the busy intersection outside the Sogo Department Store in Causeway Bay (CWB), where pedestrians and shoppers stream through the major road whenever the traffic lights turn green. CWB is located in the heart of the island side of Hong Kong. It has a high concentration of middle-brow department stores, shopping malls, high-end boutiques, and flagship stores of international brands, but also malls that sell affordable trendy goods targeting a teenage market. The central location and diverse array of shops in CWB contribute to its popularity among the middle to upper class as well as teenagers.

CWB is a prime area for billboard advertising. Buildings on major roads and small streets, as well as bus and tram stops, are used to display billboards of all sorts of products and services. In recent years, billboards in CWB have begun to be used by fans of popular culture to show support for their idols. On special anniversary days for the idols, billboards at different spots in CWB will show images and videos of the idol, and the streets will be occupied by crowds of excited fans holding smartphones to take selfies or photos of the billboards. What has attracted our attention is the birthday celebration of a local pop idol at CWB (Figure 15.1). Since 2021, on the last day of April—and days before and after it—CWB will be turned into Keung To Bay (KT Bay). Keung To (hereafter KT) is a local super idol who rose to fame at the age of 19 in 2018 soon after he entered a reality talent show broadcast by a local television channel and won. He later became a member of the new Cantopop boy band Mirror¹, and quickly developed into the most popular idol in Hong Kong. It is coincidental that KT lives in CWB. Unlike most idols, the fact that he is a resident of CWB is never hidden by him. He has shown up on the streets of CWB late at night, trying to experience how his fans wait for him, and even shared a photo of him standing on the back street of CWB on his social media. The music video of an earlier song, *The Love Without Words* (2020), was filmed in CWB featuring the iconic busy streets—a repeated scene in the video.

A typical view of KT Bay on the 30th of April features hundreds of fans, mostly middle-aged women, occupying the pedestrian area outside of the Sogo Department Store under the billboards of KT and other spots in CWB wherever there is a billboard of the young idol. It is a spectacular

scene because after 2019, the year of the Anti-ELAB Movement,² and the subsequent years of the global pandemic, public assembly has been virtually prohibited in Hong Kong. The first group of people who returned to the streets and occupied the urban space were fans of popular culture. They remake one of the most politically memorable city spaces into an affective fandom space to celebrate the rise of a local pop star.

In the post-colonial history of Hong Kong, CWB used to be a location of political significance. Victoria Park, located in the area, was the venue of the annual June 4th vigil³. The main road outside the landmark Sogo Department Store is the passage of most major political demonstrations and was an occupation site of the Umbrella Movement⁴ in 2014. Additionally, since 2010, East Point Road, adjacent to Sogo, has become a site where performance artists commemorate the June Fourth incident (Chan 2019). However, following the enforcement of the National Security Law (NSL)⁵ in 2020, activists and artists who continue to engage in civil disobedience have faced consequences. Some have been taken away by the police under allegations of sedition and public disorder (Hong Kong Inmedia 2022; Mok 2023). CWB's central location, dense population, and public protest history render it an area loaded with political tension and multiple forms of violence, be it physical, structural, or institutional.

In both social movements and the emerging affective alliance of KT fans, we can discern the intricate intermingling between gender and age, which leads to conflicts and tensions within these seemingly cohesive groups. The sharp division in value orientations, with youngsters emphasizing freedom as a core value and the parental generations stressing social stability, has resulted in serious inter-generational conflicts (Ting 2019). Even among the activists, it is not uncommon to find instances of gender-based online and offline sexual harassment within the social movements (Cho, Kam, and Lai 2018; Kam 2017; Kong, Jackson, and Ho 2023). In a similar vein, detractors who hold a negative view of KT and his middle-aged female fans derogatorily label them as “Auntie Keung” (姜嬸). To address these tensions, we employ the intersection framework to examine the interplay of age and gender within KT fandom and KT Bay, through which to investigate the continuities and discontinuities of various forms of urban violence behind the affective alliances in post-2019 Hong Kong.

Drawing on the concepts of “affect” (Ahmed 2014), “affective alliance” (Grossberg 2002), “emotional capitalism” (Lok 2020), and the body of works on politics and popular culture fandom, we aim to explore the following questions: 1) How can we understand the recent mass fan activities and mobilization in the post-NSL Hong Kong? Who are those proud and happy fans occupying the streets? 2) In what ways does fandom turn city space into affective space? 3) How do they give meaning to these space-making fan activities? 4) What are the implications of the intersection of age, gender, and fandom on spatial politics in particular and societal politics at large? We treat fandom in this chapter as a possible site and community of people who actively participate in the consumption and production of cultural texts and meanings, and the making and remaking of public space through “affective alliance” (Grossberg 2002) and the logic of emotional capitalism (Lok 2020). The remaking of CWB into KT Bay by popular culture fans shows how popular culture participates in the formation of new affective alliances in post-NSL Hong Kong, and how urban space is re-invented in a city during times of political repression. In other words, we are interested in exploring the political potential of popular culture fandom, and in the case of KT Bay, the affective politics of local fans against a spatial regime that forcefully prevents people from gathering at or using public space to voice their opinions.



FIGURE 15.1 Fan-led billboards of Keung To in Causeway Bay, celebrating his birthday in 2024 and transforming the area into “Keung To Bay.” Photograph: Carol Chow.

Research methods

For this study, we adopted a mixed-method approach that includes research on media coverage of Mirror and KT, a field study of KT Bay, and focus group interviews of fans of KT. In August 2023, the two authors of this chapter conducted three focus groups to interview fans of KT. The first two focus groups were conducted online via Zoom during the evenings. The third interview was conducted in person at one of the authors’ universities. Two of the participants opted to join by Zoom for personal reasons. Each focus group lasted about two hours. All focus groups were conducted in Cantonese. The criteria of focus group participants are those who identify as a “ginger candy” (the nickname of KT’s fans) and who have joined or taken part in the organization of KT Bay. We were open to the gender, age, occupation, ethnicity, and educational background of the participants. We first reached out through our personal networks to look for potential participants. Through a female fan who is a key organizer of KT Bay, we were able to reach a few more female organizer-fans. At the same time, we posted a recruitment notice on our personal social media accounts and got a few more participants through referrals by acquaintances on social media. The first two focus groups turned out to be all female. From them, we came to know that there are a small number of devoted male fans in the community. Therefore, we decided to conduct the third focus group mainly for male fans. All the male participants were referred by the female participants in the first two groups. Many of them have public fan accounts on social media and they know each other from fan activities. In this way, since we were introduced by fellow fans in the community, a preliminary trust was established.

The focus group discussions were recorded with prior permission and transformed into verbatim transcripts. Participants were invited to share their fan history, experiences related to KT Bay, views on CWB as a politically symbolic urban space, and the meanings they attribute to their participation in KT Bay. Since the number of participants is small, we would not make generalizations from the discussion. Instead, we treat every case equally as a significant source of information that can shed light on our research problem. The advantage of focus groups in generating interactive insights among participants is also constructive to fan studies when meaning production is understood to be both a personal and collective process.

On April 30, 2024, the authors conducted a field study in CWB to observe participants and conduct casual interviews with fans. This field study presented a unique opportunity to meticulously examine the composition of KT fans and discern the dynamics of interactions among diverse social actors across various groups. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how factors such as gender, class, and age intersect and shape the dynamics of affective alliance within this complex socio-cultural landscape.

Fandom and social mobilization

Popular culture and politics are related and mutually penetrative. This perspective has been adopted and explored by many scholars in fan and star studies (Jenkins 2012; Jung 2012; Kam 2022; Lavin and Zhu 2014; Li 2012; Livingstone 2005; Tsai 2008; Van Zoonen 2004). In Asian popular culture studies, fandom and pop stars are increasingly viewed as sites and carriers of nationalism, transnationalism, and all sorts of political ideologies (Jung 2012; Tsai 2008; Yang 2017). The participatory nature of a new generation of Asian fans, such as those of K-Pop (Korean pop music) and Boys' Love (a genre of animation, manga, or writing that depicts male homoerotic relationships; hereafter BL), is widely discussed by scholars (Chang 2012; Jung 2012; Liu 2009; Martin 2008; Lavin and Zhu 2014; Tsai 2008). Fans of popular culture are increasingly understood as organized communities of active consumers and producers. The popularity of reality talent shows in the past two decades in China and Hong Kong has created a new culture of active fans. They participate actively in the formation of online and offline, local and transnational fan communities, and invest deeply in the stardom of the idols they enthusiastically follow. Fan activities in China and Hong Kong have become highly organized, and the ways fans mobilize themselves resemble the model of political mobilization discussed by Van Zoonen (2004).

The social mobilization potential of popular cultural fandom is discussed by Van Zoonen (2004) in her article "Imagining the Fan Democracy." She compares fan practices and political practices and argues that there are aspects of equivalence between the two. Those similarities facilitate the connection between entertainment and politics, which are two domains that we would commonly separate. According to Van Zoonen, fans participate in practices that are essential for democratic politics. The three elements or customs that can be seen in fan practices are information, discussion, and activism (Van Zoonen, 46). Participatory genres such as reality talent shows and interactive technologies further enhance the physical and emotional engagement of fans. Van Zoonen's perspective contradicts the common perception of entertainment and politics as two independent domains and the belief that popular culture and its fans are intrinsically apolitical. In addition, she proposes that the emotional investment, or affective qualities of fans are actually the foundations of political strategization and decision-making. In other words, popular culture can be a site to nurture political subjectivity and agency.

In the context of Hong Kong, the growing visibility of participatory fan culture in the past decade has developed during times of declining political freedom. The participation of popular culture fans and pop stars in political movements has become more visible in this period. The connection between political agency and popular culture has become a significant topic in Hong Kong after the paradigmatic change in social movement dynamics and the involvement of fans and stars in political protests in recent years. For example, Anthony Wong and Denise Ho, two well-known Cantopop singers in Hong Kong, and their fans actively work to produce resistance discourses via popular music and their stardom (Kam 2022). Wong and Ho are also advocates of gender and sexual rights and are icons of queer singers in Hong Kong. Ho's androgynous gender

style and ambiguous sexuality, together with her gender-crossing performance, invited many queer fantasies from her fans. Her fan community is a location of the “idiosyncratic culture” of gender and sexuality (Li 2015), where alternative desires are imagined and circulated. The fan space of Ho provides an opportunity for the participants to produce alternative gender and sexual narratives and develop their political agency against the heteronormative culture in Hong Kong.

The phenomenal rise of the Cantopop boy band Mirror is another example that illustrates the connection between participatory fan culture and politics. Mirror rose to fame during one of the most turbulent times in Hong Kong’s history. The group first experienced the Anti-ELAB Movement in 2019, then the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the enactment of the NSL in 2020. The group rapidly became the most popular boy band in Hong Kong, and individual members each attracted a huge crowd of loyal fans. The group is acclaimed for its positive image and Hong Kong-oriented marketing strategy. A headline by The New York Times captures the core reason for Mirror’s success: “This Boy Band Is the Joy That Hong Kong Needs Right Now” (Wang and Dong 2021). Individual members, KT in particular, consistently made public remarks and utilized their songs to cheer up Hong Kongers during times of hardship caused by ongoing social tensions and the pandemic. For instance, during the encore moment of the last show of Mirror’s concert in 2021, KT passionately exclaimed, “Hong Kong, add oil; Hong Kong Music Scene, add oil.” Other members, Stanley and AK, offered equally poignant sentiments and stated: “These years really need hope, don’t give up, what you do will succeed,” and “Hong Kong people can still dream, and one day their dreams will come true,” respectively. These remarks resonated deeply with the broader community, especially in the context of the slang of “Hong Kong add oil,” having undergone a transformation from an encouraging phrase applicable to a variety of issues concerning the city, to a label that is deemed “seditious” by the authorities following its wide adoption and circulation by protesters in the 2019 social movement (Lam 2021). Moreover, their association with ViuTV, which is a Cantonese-language television channel in Hong Kong that has a reputation for producing entertainment programs with innovative and progressive content, also establishes Mirror as a local band with a local orientation.

Mirror also attracts the attention of scholars and cultural critics. Discussions of Mirror predominately centers on its fan culture and its connection with Hong Kong politics (Chiu 2022; Tang 2021, 2022). Tang (2021) claims that the disappearance of the public sphere in Hong Kong has not only dissolved the boundary between mass entertainment and the public but also turned entertainment into an alternative public space to carry out and respond to the social emotions of the public (Tang 2021). Emotion, whether it is personal emotional needs or collective pains, is a key aspect of the analysis of scholars or cultural critics about the Mirror phenomenon (Chiu 2022; Chiu et al. 2022). The pandemic and the tightening of political control have greatly limited the space for collective actions and public gatherings. Many people in Hong Kong have felt the effect of isolation as a result of public health policies and political control. Through the affective connection between the idols and their fans, and between the fans themselves, fan practices partially address the emotional needs arising from the symbolic grief such as the disappearance of freedom, justice, humanity, and basic security of life (Chan 2024), or depression caused by Anti-ELAB Movement in 2019 (Hou et al. 2021). Furthermore, these practices play a crucial role in building an affective public that counters the prevailing sense of political powerlessness in post-NSL Hong Kong.

Fandom and affective alliance

Fans of KT are highly organized and individually motivated. They participate actively in their idol's public events, commercial activities, and the building of KT's public image through fan-initiated practices such as charity donations. Fans in this study generally model themselves after K-Pop fan practices, which usually include bottom-up fan mobilization, active involvement in causes that relate to social welfare, and a well-organized internal division of labor. They demonstrate features that are similar to the "fancom" (fan company) in K-Pop fan culture (Jung 2012). A fancom consists of fans that are more assertive and engaged in the stars' career development. In addition to taking up a supportive role, they participate in the very production of stardom and even in the commercial decisions of the stars' company. Activities organized by a fancom are larger in scale. Therefore, with all these characteristics, we understand KT's fans in this study as not only active audiences but also active producers of the stars. They are a fancom that possesses the knowledge to apply various social tools and resources to organize large-scale fan events.

Furthermore, KT fans' activities share some aspects of fan activism. There are different definitions of what constitutes fan activism among fan studies scholars. Some use the term generally to refer to all bottom-up and assertive fan activities with certain messages to deliver that are related to social causes. For example, fans participate in campaigns for social justice in an organized manner. In Li's (2012) study of the queer fandom of Denise Ho, a pop singer in Hong Kong, she distinguishes between fan activism and fan activity. According to Li's definition, an active fan is a participant in conventional fan activities and fan spaces, while an activist fan "behaves strategically in specific events and contexts to achieve a specific goal" (Li 2012, par. 1.2). In Li's study, that specific goal refers to the achievement of sexual citizenship for queer people in Hong Kong. In our formulation, we understand KT's fans as having the potential and techniques to become activist fans, while the socio-political context of Hong Kong under the COVID-19 pandemic and the NSL prevents them, or any collectives in general, from transforming into activists. We suggest that the physical and affective isolations that are imposed on individuals by the COVID-control measures and the new mode of political control could be seen as a form of symbolic violence that works to depoliticize the urban space through the erasure of possible collective actions in the public (including the digital publics). We will have more discussion of the nature of the fan activities of KT in later sections.

As discussed in the last section, Van Zoonen stresses the importance of the affective qualities of fans in political mobilization and decision-making. Affect is increasingly seen as an essential part of contemporary political struggles and fan activism alike. In the context of postcolonial Hong Kong, affect has been used by scholars to understand the changing society and emergent politics of social movement (Hui 2018; Lok 2020). A politics of affect, which emphasizes affective connection and practices, is imagined to be a way out for Hong Kong people to survive and resist political control (Lok 2020). One example of this politics of affect in social movements is the "Lennon Wall," a mosaic wall created by protesters in the Occupy movement in 2014 and which became a major symbol of the Umbrella Movement. The very naming of the "Lennon Wall" affectively connects memories of protests against authoritarian regimes in different places and times (Lok 2020). According to Lok, the Lennon Wall represents a kind of "inter-textuality" that hyperlinks cultural signs of democracy and human rights from other societies or historical times (2020, 192–193). The protesters artistically transform the urban space into a poetic and utopian space that is collectively owned by the people.

Attending to this critical line of inquiry into the affective politics of contemporary Hong Kong, we investigate the affective investment of fans in turning CWB into KT Bay and the formation

of affective alliance at times when collective actions in Hong Kong are disenabled. Thereby, we use Ahmed's framework to understand emotions as social and cultural practices (Ahmed 2014). Emotions are essential in the mutual formation of the individual and the social.

What is the role of emotions in the community of KT fans, and how do they develop an "affective alliance" that remakes urban space into a fan space that connects the personal and the social? By "affective alliance," we draw on Grossberg's (2002) discussion of fans in popular culture to refer to the affective context of popular culture within which all relations are defined affectively, and fans invest affectively in all sorts of activities, practices, and identity construction inside this context. Grossberg moves on to suggest in some affective alliances, "dominant relations of power can be challenged, resisted, evaded or ignored." (Grossberg 2002, 59). To Grossberg, affect is "the feeling of life" (Grossberg 2002, 56). It is not entirely personal. Rather, feeling is "a socially constructed domain of cultural effects" (Grossberg 2002). Grossberg stresses the importance of "affective sensibility" in the meaning production and mode of engagement of fans of popular culture. As the following analysis will demonstrate, affect is a crucial part of understanding the involvement of fans in a particular cultural context and the ways fans organize and identify themselves.

KT Bay: An affective fan public

KT Bay, the renaming of Causeway Bay on the birthday of Cantopop idol Keung To, first appeared in 2021 when the city was still under the social gathering ban⁶ as a preventive measure for the COVID-19 pandemic. On this day, and the days before and after, a large number of KT's fans, who self-proclaim as "ginger candies" (as Keung has the same pronunciation as ginger in Cantonese), gather at some central spots of CWB to celebrate their idol's birthday. Numerous billboards showing KT at different spots, snapshot locations, and the signature birthday tram will be arranged to turn the area into a KT theme park. We suggest that the fan event of KT Bay transforms CWB into an affective fan public, where fans use various ways to participate affectively in the self-organized event and connect with each other affectively. The affective fan public of KT Bay is a decentralized and organic formation within which fan organizers, anonymous fans, and non-fans or passers-by as well work together to accomplish an emotionally charged public space. In this part, we will explain the reasons behind and the various ways fans participate in the KT Bay celebration, and next, how fans articulate the meanings of this large-scale public event.

The primary reason why fans organize and participate in KT Bay is to celebrate the birthday of their young idol. It is also understood by fans in our study as a public event to promote their idol to the local people and the global audience. The scale and visibility of KT Bay successfully drew the attention of passers-by and the local and international media. The birthday tram, which is decorated with KT's photograph, runs through Hong Kong Island to extend the KT Bay celebration to the other parts of the city. It has become an iconic part of the event, and a unique form of fan support later adopted by other fans in Hong Kong. Fans demonstrate their loyalty and support to their idol through a collective presence at KT's home district and the transformation of the area into a spectacular birthday party. KT Bay is also a major event for KT's fans to physically meet and socialize with each other. While commercial activities or other public performances may attract individual fans, KT Bay is an event that fans feel obliged to participate in. If the day falls on a workday, many fans will take a day off from their work to go to CWB. Being physically there at CWB on the 30th of April is the most important thing for them.

Regarding the organization of the event, fans in our study stress their bottom-up or decentralized model. Although there is an official fan club, many KT fans participate in the event individually or

through their own personal fan groups. Self-motivated fan organizers start planning the event many months in advance to rent the billboards at different spots and the outdoor screens of major malls, line up charity groups, produce fan products, contact shops at CWB, and design snapshot locations. On the day of KT Bay, KT's photographs and videos are seen at the tram stops, bus stops, subway stations, outside different buildings, on the big screens of shopping malls, and at various street locations for people to take snapshots. Fans wearing the fan club tee distribute fan products they made by themselves to passers-by. Some shops in CWB are transformed into KT-themed interiors. Charity booths are set up in a major shopping mall to collect donations for the charity groups that are lined up by fans. The highlight of the event is fans waiting to see the passing of the birthday tram. Fans shout the birthday greeting together at the tram as if the tram is the personification of KT. The day ends with a large dinner gathering of groups of fans in a restaurant in CWB. The dinner organizers may be fans who run a popular fan page on social media and have the means to reach and mobilize other fans.

At the time of our study, KT Bay has been organized for four consecutive years. Fans have accumulated some experience and are able to identify a "fan route" to navigate KT Bay and reach fan sites. CWB is spatially re-mapped into a fan space flagged by fixed and floating fan spots. Fans participate in creating this fan space collectively and organically. Fans liken the event to a carnival and a festival like Christmas. The fact that they feel obliged to participate in this annual event makes it like a ritual through which they can be transformed or even empowered. This ritualistic nature of the event is reflected in its other name, Keung To Dan (Cantonese, 姜濤誕). "Dan" in Chinese usually means the birthday of holy gods. The naming implies the god-like status of KT to his fans, and also the scale of the birthday celebration. The large-scale public celebration is understood by the fans as a way to spread happiness and positive energies to Hong Kong, and to build bonds between fans. As mentioned above, KT rose to popularity during a time when Hong Kong was preoccupied with pro-democratic protests and later the pandemic. Many fans in our study stress that they are inspired by KT's positive image and his songs, and they want to spread happiness to people in Hong Kong. The affective bonding that many fans experience in KT Bay relates to how some of them describe the fan space on that day as a utopia, where fans help and support each other like a community. Sally⁷ describes how this affective bonding matters to her:

On the day of April 30, as I just said, when you saw the birthday tram passing through, the group of candies [the nickname of KT fans] don't know each other, but all of us will scream in joy together, happy together. It feels like... finally... it's comforting, in the sense that we're happy again, and not always feel anxious. Perhaps many friends are planning to migrate and will finally leave. And on that day of 430 [April 30], regardless of whether they are candies you know, or new ones, at that moment we have built a kind of bonding.

In our focus group interviews, two mother-fans shared similar experiences of building bonds with others in the process of becoming ginger candies. Ally (late 30s) is a busy full-time mother of two young children. During the focus group meeting on Zoom, she was doing dishes and preparing for the family trip the next day. She was still emotionally overwhelmed when she recalled how KT had saved her from a depression caused by heavy domestic duties as a full-time mother. Ally is a well-known organizer in the fan community. She told us she sees KT as her oldest son, and she takes pride in this son. Sandy (early 40s), a single mother of two kids, also shared how the participation in fan events helped her overcome the sadness of a broken marriage and the challenges of the pandemic. Although the number of informants in our study is very limited, the cases we analyzed

suggest that women with a middle-class background, who possess the knowledge and techniques to organize public events, handle media relations, conduct advertising campaigns, and fundraise, are key actors in the fan community. They have the economic and cultural capital to organize large-scale fan events. The experiences of Ally and Sandy are typical examples showing that being a fan provides them with a public role that can temporarily allow them to escape from the domestic duties and the heteronormative role imposed on women in a family context.

At the time when KT Bay was gradually developing into a large-scale public fan event, Hong Kong was overshadowed by the newly introduced National Security Law and the pandemic measures. Public gatherings of citizens and any forms of bottom-up organizing were prohibited. KT Bay is a rare occasion where people can organize themselves to participate in a public event. Fans reinvent a politically sensitive and heavily regulated urban area into an emotionally charged fan space. The fan public they create allows the people to return to the street not as protesters, but as happy participants of a utopian community to celebrate a sense of togetherness. The fact that KT is a local Hong Kong star fuels the affective energy of this fan event.

KT Bay: A space of emotional capitalism

While the deliberate de-politicization attempt of the “ginger candy” fan community might imply very weak political subjectivity, the transmission of an ethos of care and love for others via fan objects and other altruistic practices has elevated KT Bay from a purely emotion-commodified space into a “transitional space” that engenders co-individuation amongst members of a wounded community. This spirit resonates with the co-habitation experiment in the occupied zone during the Umbrella movement, of which CWB is one of the sites.

Using black as the color for fans-tees, the appearance of a massive number of ginger candies in CWB easily reminds people of the iconic images of rallies over the years, as protesters always wear a particular color to signify collectivity. During the Anti-ELAB Movement, black had become the symbolic color, especially after the black bloc was used as a dress code for the group of Valiantism (勇武派). In fact, KT was once checked by police in CWB during the period of the Anti-ELAB Movement because of his black outfit. This piece of news, together with the lyrics of some of Mirror’s songs that insinuate a spirit of non-compliance, and the general image of ViuTV as a progressive and Hong Kong-oriented media group, has rendered KT’s star text a political association.⁸ Against these contexts, the presence of a large number of ginger candies in black in CWB—the usual starting point of social movements since the colonial era—can contain a strong political connotation.

In our focus group, our participants nevertheless expressed a strong denial of any political linkage or meaning of their “assembly” to the political movements. They emphasized that the celebration activity took place in CWB only because Keung lived there and that his appearance in all-black during the 2019 movement, which led to the police check, was also a natural outcome of his habitation in that district and young people’s preference for black clothing. One participant stated in a serious manner during the focus group discussion that we should not make any political affiliation with KT since this would affect his career negatively. Fans’ avoidance of any political linkage can be seen as a protective act for their idol from political oppression, as Hong Kong artists involved in political activism were suppressed in an overdetermined manner. Probably, the apolitical or depoliticization tendency of ginger candy provides a good explanation for the police’s tolerance of a massive scale of public assembly in an overtly sensitive zone for the past four years, even at times when lockdown measures were being implemented. As one young male participant

said, when he went to CWB on July 1, 2023, to take a photo of an advertisement that features KT, he was checked by a police officer. After learning he and a few other male fans came just to support KT, the police left them in peace. Since the mass demonstration in 2003, July 1st became not only the anniversary date of the Hong Kong-China reunification but also a day people rally to voice out their opinions and demands. With the implementation of the National Security Law and the determination of the government to eliminate any potential anti-government collective actions, this tradition was put to an end in 2021. Even though tactics were employed by some protesters to counter the authority, in 2023, the police imposed even more stringent measures to crack down on dissenting voices and subversive actions. While the presence of a few ginger candies wearing black (the color of KT's fan club T-shirt) and taking pictures with their idol's advertisement in the highly sanctioned space of CWB can be seen as a form of limited "negotiations" between the state apparatus (the police) and its citizens, it is difficult to classify the actions of ginger candies as fan activism.

Does it mean that the carnivalesque, utopic KT Bay that forms an affective alliance between fans is merely a spatial product of emotional capitalism founded upon the exploitation of fans' labor and even monetary capital? Lok's (2020) thesis on the relationship between the politics of affect and emotional capitalism, and his analysis of various types of affective spaces in Hong Kong, provide a useful framework to address this question. Drawing upon the theories of Han (2017), Stiegler (2010), Levinas (1991), and Butler (2004), Lok argues that everyday life spaces such as eateries, markets, churches, or volunteer organizations can also serve as public spaces for the reception of others in times of precarity, vulnerability, and despair. Furthermore, consumption spaces can also be transformed into spaces of redemption when governed by an ethos of caring for others.

Undeniably, the formation of KT Bay depends largely on the commodification of emotions and space, as the celebratory campaign builds principally upon fans' purchase of a critical mass of advertisement billboards, whether an outcome of coordination or spontaneity among ginger candies. It is worth noting that apart from billboards, fans also design and produce a lot of KT-related objects, giving them as gifts or selling them for charity purposes. In our focus group, several participants shared how they were moved by Keung's virtue and call for caring for others. He always asked his fans not to buy him gifts but to donate the money to those in need instead. Answering his call, Amy has set up a pop-up store in one of the malls at CWB and donated all profits from fan-objects she made to Ming Gor, a well-known grassroots philanthropist who gave away free meals to the elderly on a regular basis in Sham Shui Po, an old district of mainly low-income households. Another participant, Sally, contacted four bubble teashops and placed fans-objects to raise funds for the Children's Cancer Foundation. Participant Sunny said she made photo albums with other fans in one year and 300 lollipops by herself in another year. The income was donated to organizations that assist women and kids in need. In addition to the widely reported charity walk and free tram on KT's birthday, there are many other philanthropic practices organized spontaneously by different ginger candies in and beyond the CWB district. Even though no political demands are advocated, the concerted effort and philanthropist spirit of KT fans have successfully turned the commercial CWB into a civil space that facilitates what Simondon (2020) proposes as psychic and collective co-individuation. Simondon sees that the biological individual arises as the resolution of a problematic that can be resolved only through both physical and psyche individuation, the later refers to the creation of a subject-world relationship that in turn informs a new kind of interiority that shape the directions of actions which affect one's becoming. Collective co-individuation refers to the co-independence of one's individuation in a milieu that consists of other individuals seeking similar needs. In our research, many participants shared similar views on

how they had been transformed first by KT's kind-heartedness and later by other ginger candies' collective efforts. Common to their sharing is the lack of motivation to do charity services when it is done on an individual basis. But now, they have a stronger urge to do these on a continuous basis, as goals are more easily achievable with orchestrated efforts. During the process, fans are *affected* but are also *affecting* others.

Central to the production and circulation of affect in KT Bay is the spreading of love and happiness. In different interviews, the suffering of Hong Kongers due to both the social movements and the pandemic in recent years was brought up. The charity sale, fan-made gifts, and free tram rides are all seen as vehicles to bring joy to others. As Susan said:

Through performing different charity work, we do not only want to make us—ginger candies—happy. We want to deliver the message that we wish the people of Hong Kong happiness. We hope even people around the world can feel the joyfulness. Fans are not only taking photos (with idols), buying postcards. I really had strong feelings for the past two years. At first, I did some charity for the sake of Keung To's birthday. But I have learnt a lot in the process. For example, we sometimes did not only do charity on singular basis. We have once spent nearly a year to serve a charity organization. We involved in the services besides fund-raising. Sometimes you would have strong emotional reactions. For example, once the sick children we served finally passed away. I learnt a lot throughout the journey.

When I was distributing 300 self-made lollipops to people on 430 [the 30th of April], what makes me happy is that we can see how Keung To's birthday has brought about many smiles, no matter one knew or understood him or not. This is what I want to see in Hong Kong, through Keung To Bay.

Ginger candies believe that the happiness KT brought them and that they created is not ephemeral and superficial but is capable of spilling over to the whole community. As one fan shared, she was profoundly touched by the sense of community at the KT Bay. The warmth and happiness she experienced instilled in her a hopeful perspective on humanity.

Rather than seeing the loss of the self, we can interpret ginger candies as a we-community exercising the ethical spirit and ethos of care for others. Despair is rechanneled into hope and action. With altruistic practices and fans-objects, KT Bay resembles Joseph Beuy's social sculpture in which the lost sense of aesthetics and sensations is redistributed. It is a transitional space where the collective co-individuation processes are put into force (Zumdick 2015).

Intersectional dynamics at KT Bay: The politics of love and hate in post-2019 Hong Kong

Space is imbued with power, as noted by Lefebvre (1991), and the same can be said for KT Bay, which is formed through the affective alliance of KT fans driven by their love, whether it be for their idol or for Hong Kong itself. Meanwhile, our field study revealed that the majority of KT fans involved in constructing KT Bay are women ranging from 30 to 60 years old. This implies that KT Bay is influenced by power dynamics at the intersection of gender and age. Whether they are single or married, housewives or juggling the dual roles of working women and caretakers at home, this predominantly female fan community symbolizes a reclamation of women's right to the city, reminiscent of Korean young female fans' appropriation of Seoul Metro for idol celebrations through fandom-sponsored advertisements (Fedorenko 2021). The overwhelming presence of a

large group of women in public space, united in pursuit of a common goal, is a rare sight in Hong Kong.

On KT day, not only do these “ginger candies” find temporary liberation from their domestic roles, but the *public* space they create allows some of them, who are otherwise confined to the private sphere of their homes, to engage in social life. As one nearly 60-year-old female fan we encountered at KT Bay expressed, “Housewives my age find it difficult to make new friends if they don’t participate in community workshops. Through KT fan activities, I have met new friends and expanded my social circle. I have also started to learn how to use Telegram and other social media platforms.”

During a focus group interview, another ginger candy shared her experience of acquiring video production and editing skills after becoming a ginger candy. In an era where fans must actively support their idols through voting, viewing, and leaving comments on social media, possessing digital and social media literacy has become an integral part of fandom. The middle-aged ginger candies’ acquisition of such technological knowledge not only facilitates their fan practices but also allows them to extend their personal sphere from the private to the public domain, both in virtual and physical realities. The empowerment of these female fans is further augmented by their ability to channel maternal care and love from the domestic arena into the larger community when they engage in philanthropic activities to spread love and happiness. Additionally, the economic and cultural capital required for the production of KT Bay and fan-objects vividly exemplify women’s transformative capacity to create significant economic and social impact.

The labor of love of ginger candies, however, is contested with continuous conflicts of age and gender, which have been present in previous social movements. Specifically, ginger candies are often referred to as “ginger aunties,” a derogatory term used to stereotype middle-aged women as old-fashioned, unsophisticated, and nosy. It is common to see hostile comments directed at the age and gender of ginger candies under news stories or music videos of KT on social media. These ageist and sexist labels serve two purposes: Firstly, they imply the demeaning and belittling of women of a certain age who would turn into over-excitement when they encounter their beloved idols, as is often observed among ginger candies during the passage of trams and buses adorned with KT’s birthday celebrations. Secondly, the ageist and sexist attacks seem to be a continuation of the gender inequality and injustice that was prevalent during the city’s mass pro-democracy movements in the past decade, where the underlying sexism and misogyny inherent in Hong Kong’s social movements not only went unchallenged but were reinforced. (Kong, Jackson, and Ho 2023). Such tensions are reflected in KT fans’ responses to comments of “haters” through a reiteration of the strong bond between the fans and the idol. They relate to each other as family members. For instance, one fan left a comment saying “We are the Keung family” in response to the negative remarks under one of KT’s music videos on YouTube⁹. The maintenance of solidarity through reference to family bonds highlights how gender stereotypes influence the passionate love that ginger candies have for their idol, revealing the ageist and sexist undertones present in the disparagement they endure.

Drawing on Jackson’s (1993) concept of the sociality of love, Jónasdóttir’s (1994) theorization of “love power,” and Hochschild’s (1983) conceptualization of “emotion management” and “feeling rules,” Kong, Jackson, and Ho (2023) highlight the social, contextual, cultural, and historical nature of love. They argue that the boy band Mirror, of which KT is a core member, provides a platform for the female activists to channel their protective and passionate love, which they practiced during the social movement in 2019. It is passionate because their songs express

fierce pride in Hong Kong and a sense of belonging to home, while their protective nature owes much to the vulnerability and humility of the boy band members.

Ironically, the contextual, historical, and cultural nature of the sociality of love also explains the growing disdain of KT, Mirror, and their fans, including the ginger candies. In 2021, as KT and Mirror gained wider recognition in the city, most non-fans assumed an observant role regarding the emergence of these new “stars,” although some people and opinion leaders criticized the standards of their performances, particularly their singing skills, especially when they won the top prizes at the most respected music award ceremonies in Hong Kong. A significant turning point in the perception of the boy band and its members occurred when a giant LED screen dropped during Mirror’s 2022 concert, which resulted in a serious injury to a dancer. This incident marked a notable shift in the popularity of the boyband. ViuTV and the Mirror management were criticized as profit-driven entities that exploit the resilience desire associated with the post-trauma ethos of Hong Kongers, thereby contradicting their imagination of justice. Additionally, the slow progress in Mirror’s performances has generated more criticism of the boy band and KT. As for the specific case of KT, his underwhelming performance in the 2023 award ceremony and significant weight gain further tarnished his image as a top star. “Haters” commented that his popularity is a result of the blind support of their fans through popular votes and the consumption of products featuring KT as a spokesperson. Instead of being seen as “passionate love” for Hong Kong, ginger candies’ over-protective love for their idols is regarded as hampering the local popular cultural scene in the long run. Anti-fans see such affective alliance as an exercise of economic capital that the younger generation lacks and despises. More importantly, the use of economic power to buy someone a privileged status is contradictory to the principle of justice that many pro-democracy Hong Kong citizens uphold.

Thus, there is a further dimension to controversies surrounding KT Bay’s “fantopia.” While the criticisms often make use of sexist and ageist prejudice against women of a certain age, thus enacting intersectional violence to a certain degree, the debate is also a continuation of various conflicts prevalent in the city. The affective alliance built by KT’s fans is received with love and hate by the general public in Hong Kong. While the presence of ageism and misogyny towards KT’s female fans is prevalent on social media, along with the criticism of how ginger candies use their economic power to push KT to the top, Mirror and KT also represent the revival of local popular culture and the voice of Hong Kong people. Paradoxically, the tensions underlying different forms and interpretations of love or justice that have been shaping the city’s pro-democracy movement once again fracture the society.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we used KT Bay as a case to explore the relation between fandom and the formation of affective alliances in Hong Kong during a time when bottom-up public events and mobilizations were almost impossible due to tightened political control. In addition, we investigated how fans reinvent a politically sensitive urban space into a fan space. We suggest that the banning of collective gatherings and actions during the pandemic and later political control is a form of urban violence that works to depoliticize the urban space and forms of public expression. Resourceful fans, such as ginger candies, use their cultural and economic capitals to transform CWB into a “fantopia” where a new form of public culture and collectivity is developed amidst the highly controlled urban space in post-NSL Hong Kong. We drew on the theoretical concepts of “affective alliance” and “emotional capitalism” to discuss the nature of the fan-make space in CWB and suggest

that KT Bay is an affective fan public where an ethos of care and love for others is practiced, and a spirit of connectedness is reignited in this collective celebration of Hong Kong popular culture. For many, KT Bay is the rebirth (or transformation) of the utopian Hong Kong they once imagined. Concurrently, the sexist and ageist labeling of KT fans reveals the divisions caused by divergent views on love, justice, and Hong Kong as a whole among citizens still in society. Taking an intersectional perspective to study a fan-made space of KT Bay in Hong Kong, we hope our discussion could offer a case of how gender, class, and age interplay in the building of affective fandom, as well as how urban violence (and resistance) manifests in the context of popular culture.

Notes

- 1 Mirror is a Canto-pop boy band formed in Hong Kong in 2018. It has twelve members and each has their own fan groups. It is currently the most popular boy band in Hong Kong.
- 2 The Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement is a city-wide pro-democracy protest that started in June 2019 and ended a few months later.
- 3 The memorial event was held annually in Hong Kong Victoria Park from 1990 to 2019.
- 4 The Umbrella Movement refers generally to the occupation movement that happened in Hong Kong in 2014, demanding a more democratic election of the city's political leaders.
- 5 The National Security Law was enforced in Hong Kong on June 30, 2020.
- 6 During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Hong Kong government issued a series of social gathering bans to control the number of people in public venues and areas.
- 7 Pseudonyms are used for all informants.
- 8 As journalist Thomas Chan (2023) points out, some locals have come to associate ViuTV with the pro-democracy movement due to the station's departure from the politically conservative approach of TVB, Hong Kong's dominant television broadcaster, and ViuTV's occasional inclusion of elements suggesting social activism.
- 9 It is one of the comments left by KT's fans under the music video of his song "You're out of this world" (好得太過份) that was released on his birthday in 2024. www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaQNNnU1DA4. Accessed 8 June 2024.

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16

RISKY MIGRANTS AND CITIZENS IN NEED OF PROTECTION

The transformation of safety on the conjuncture of pandemic and protest¹

Jin Haritaworn

Introduction

This moment of precarity and disaster reminds us that we cannot rely on the state for our well-being. The legacies of imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy undergird forms of violence that unevenly expose many in our communities to further risk, rendering people disposable. Yet, at this moment, we also see how revolutionary love and care can reshape our world. We see the urgency, necessity, and radical possibilities of de-carceration, language justice, healthcare, and housing access, economic redistribution, and mutual aid. Our dreams, visions, and desires for an alternative world and future can be realized. We are made of communities with deep collective knowledge of how to care for each other and the earth around us. Together, we can survive and build interdependent communities of resistance (Bhaman et al. 2020).

In the wake of the global protests following the police murder of George Floyd, concepts such as police racism and abolitionism have also gained public ground in the German-speaking world, drawing on an existing legacy of local movements (Bruce-Jones 2012; EOTO 2021; Thompson 2021). Simultaneously, the COVID pandemic has rekindled the question posed by abolitionists of what makes us safe (Brazell 2018). This is the subject of the 20 qualitative interviews I conducted in early 2021 with people in Berlin who are active in various self-organized contexts—including as queer, migrant, Black, or people of color. We discussed the ways in which COVID safety is practiced in marginalized spaces: from creative engagements with the state's COVID regulations, whose household definition prescribes a white, cis-heteronormative concept of the family, to the formation of pods, bubbles, and care collectives,² to the organization of protests where safety is fundamentally transformed. What the organizers of these diverse projects have in common is not only that they operate on the margins of what is sanctioned by the state—they do not always adhere to state regulations and at the same time invent new ones that also offer protection to marginalized people. What is common to these projects, furthermore, is that they are prefigurative (M. Brown 2017). They act as if a better future were already within reach and work to bring it closer.

The models presented by the participants contain echoes of abolition as a vision of a world beyond prisons, white supremacy, and racial capitalism (Davis and Rodriguez 2000; Gilmore 2007; Melamed 2015). They are part of transnational conversations that have been severely

underestimated by the German-speaking Left, and whose common denominator is the search for alternatives to the carceral state.³ This includes Black feminism, queer/trans of color politics, Indigenous decolonization, and Disability Justice, a movement founded by disabled queers of color that defines disability, illness, and well-being as always already intersectional (see, for example, the newsletter of the Migrationsrat Berlin Brandenburg e.V. from December 2010⁴; Popoola and Sezen 1999; Incite! 2006; FSIS, NMS, and NYSHN 2014; Haritaworn 2015; El-Tayeb and Thompson 2019; Dixon and Piepzna-Samarasinha 2020).

The theories of community accountability and transformative justice developed in these transnational conversations offer practical solutions and visionary concepts for the future. In their special issue on community accountability, Clarissa Rojas, Mimi Kim, and Alisa Bierria (2012) explain the genesis of this approach in the context of ongoing police violence against Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities. They emphasize the importance of informal and often undervalued sites and practices such as “family oral histories [,] intimate kitchen table and backroom storytelling” in devising strategies against interpersonal violence that often bypass the police altogether (5). They explain the context of this practical and theoretical development as follows: “People have responded to gendered violence within conditions of specific, sustained, and violent alienation from police[.] That community work remains unnamed, unwritten, and outside the boundaries of political institutions” (Rojas, Kim, and Bierria 2012, 5).

In addition to collectively demanding accountability from those who cause harm and responsibility towards those who experience harm, community accountability (CA’s) also aims to expand interpersonal capacities. This goal seems particularly relevant in the context of COVID-19, where many felt abandoned by the state. It wrests power from the neoliberal carceral state over criminalized communities and restores resources that have been taken from us in the course of capitalist development. The same is true of CA’s sister movement, i.e., transformative justice, which experiments with alternative notions of justice and reclaims the power to define what justice, and safety, entail—a question that is central here. The resulting strategies, which are often experimental, contested, and still emerging, bypass police, courts, and prisons and prioritize the well-being of people and communities experiencing violence. In an interview about their edited volume on transformative justice (2020), Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha describe this as follows:

Ejeris: I think of transformative justice as a framework that includes strategies on how we prevent and intervene and hold people accountable and heal from violence and harm. And also, how we transform the social context and conditions that fuel and feed a culture of violence. And how we do all of those things without relying on state systems—police, prisons.

Leah: ... I’m coming from more of a harm reduction place where I often describe TJ as “anything that creates more safety, justice, or healing for people who have survived violence, abuse, or harm that doesn’t rely on the cops or courts.” It could be that the perpetrator transforms, or it could just be that the survivor got out alive.

(M. Brown and A. Brown 2021)

In addition to the question often raised by abolitionists, of how to deal with individuals whose actions genuinely harm others, transformative justice also asks how these actions relate to broader systemic power relations. This question is particularly relevant in the context of COVID-19, where non-white people are often demonized as contagious rule-breakers. My chapter explores

the transformation of safety in the context of the social, political, economic, and ideological conjuncture of pandemic and protest (Hall and Massey 2010). I refer to three media and political debates: firstly, about the high number of migrant COVID patients in German intensive care units; secondly, about the vaccination campaign in the so-called urban hotspots, and thirdly, about the protests against anti-Black racism and in remembrance of the victims of Hanau, which politicians and journalists discussed as superspreader-events. In these debates, non-white people appear as degenerate bodies that endanger the safety of others whose lives are worth protecting and whose social participation is normalized, often on the basis of white and heterosexual privilege.

This is countered by the analyses and practices of activists who create alternatives to the state's COVID policies. This chapter focuses on the example of demonstrations whose emphasis, in addition to active resistance, was placed on practicing alternative safety strategies that disengage from neoliberal and carceral logic and open up horizons of abolitionist care and collectivity.

Risks vs. risk groups

During the COVID pandemic, a distinction was drawn between those who belong to the high-risk group worthy of protection and those who *pose* a risk. This distinction follows the same lines through which chances of life and premature death have been distributed. It is the product of capitalism that has been racialized since its inception. In his book *Black Marxism*, first published in 1983, Cedric Robinson (2020) described the origins of racial capitalism (a concept that has often been attributed to him but stems from transnational conversations).⁵ According to his historical analysis, which sets out in Europe, the accumulation of capital required fictions of difference from the outset (see also Melamed 2015; Pulido 2016). These fictions were first tested on intra-European minorities and then globalized through the colonial dispossession of Indigenous lands and the enslavement of Black bodies. In the context of the financialization of capital, speculation with numbers and risk minimization have moved to the forefront—in the discourse around COVID, this takes the form of incidence rates, the R-value, hospitalizations, infections, vaccination rates, and ICU beds. At first glance, these statistics may appear to be neutral biopolitical technologies. However, both the older finance capitalist discourse of risk (Martin 2007) and the discourse of risk *groups* that emerged during COVID-19 are deeply racialized (Haritaworn 2015). As such, the division between groups deemed worthy of protection and those deemed unworthy reiterates long-rehearsed distinctions, the maintenance of which serves the continued accumulation of capital in this most recent crisis. In this context, the state functions as a risk manager whose role is to protect “risk groups” while ensuring the uninterrupted functioning of the economy. Non-white people, on the other hand, embody the risk that must be managed to this end.

In *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others*, I described the reduction of non-white people to degenerate bodies in degenerate places whose criminal, homophobic orientation and impulsive propensity to violence threaten public safety (Haritaworn 2015). As I will now show, the context of COVID-racism similarly revolves around degenerate bodies whose scripts, settings, and characters are familiar as a result of decades of debates about failed integration, Islam, and youth crime: From problem neighborhoods like Kreuzberg and Neukölln to archaic-patriarchal extended families whose failed heterosexuality reproduces not only homophobia, educational underperformance, and violence, but now COVID as well. On this terrain, non-white people are not worthy of spaces, resources, and life chances because they always already constitute a threat to society.

In addition to the abolitionist theories described above, I also revisit Foucault's (1978) ideas of the "dangerous individual" whose degenerate life, unlike that of the properly alive, is not legible as worth living and protecting (see Haritaworn 2015). Racism cannot be named in the biopolitical, life-affirming discourse because it serves to protect the so-called society. Foucault's biopolitics, which is mostly evasive of racism⁶, was radicalized in Mbembe's concept of necropolitics (Mbembe 2003; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco 2014). This concept describes the unabashed deadliness of modern forms of governance: "[I]n the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of deathworlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjugated to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living-dead" (Mbembe 2003, 40).

The zombie-like figure of the living dead uncannily resonates with the treatment of non-white people in discussions of vaccines and ICU beds. As I will argue below, their higher-than-average incidences of infection, morbidity, and mortality seem noteworthy only because they pose a threat to the properly alive. At the same time, these discussions divert attention from the deliberate scarcity of health care and other resources resulting from decades of neoliberal austerity.

Our abolitionist analysis cannot be limited to penal institutions alone (see also Thompson 2021). Many institutions traditionally associated with welfare have historically operated in a differential manner. While they reserve resources and life chances for white citizens, they function for many non-white individuals as arms of a necropolitics that turns them into living dead. The German healthcare system, which—long before the debate on triage—hardly prioritized racialized lives, is a good example of this entanglement of "caring" and carceral institutions.⁷

This medical racism became evident in early March 2021, when newspapers highlighted the disproportionately high number of migrants among COVID-19 patients in German intensive care units (e.g., Althoff 2021; Harbusch 2021; Brandes 2021; Schattauer 2021). In addition to Jens Spahn (Federal Minister of Health until November 2021), the head of the Robert Koch Institute, Lothar Wieler, who played a central role in public safety during the pandemic, was quoted as saying that the majority of "intubated, seriously ill patients" were not white Germans and that "well over 50 percent" of them were Muslim (Althoff 2021, own translation).

Nevertheless, the opportunity to acknowledge the vulnerability of non-white people to COVID, as had been recognized early on elsewhere (e.g., Public Health Ontario 2023; Amberber, Iveniuk, and McKenzie 2021), was missed in Germany, leaving intact an academic culture of racism-evading research (M. A. Aikins et al. 2021). According to the above-cited articles, the German government withheld information "out of fear of a racism debate" (Brandes 2021, own translation; see also Althoff 2021; Schattauer 2021). At the same time, this so-called taboo was accompanied by a deluge of racializing statements. For example, Wieler described the problem as one of "parallel societies," where nothing could be achieved without "rigorous social work in the mosques" (Brandes 2021, own translation). A doctor who "preferred to remain anonymous" told the German news magazine *Focus* that certain cultural groups believe "Corona isn't so bad—you just have to pray well" (Schattauer 2021). In an interview with the *Berliner Zeitung* daily newspaper, a politician from the conservative CDU party representing the racialized district of Berlin-Neukölln described the problem as "linguistic and cultural barriers" leading to COVID rules "not reaching people or not being complied with". In addition, "family systems" ("Familienverbünde") were often much stronger (Brandes 2021).

The same *BZ* article addresses several factors often referred to in progressive health research as social determinants. According to this perspective, illness does not naturally emanate from racialized bodies but is socially constructed and created through toxic working and living conditions, racist ascriptions, and healthcare exclusions. The article echoes the concept of social

determinants in mentioning a study by the Berlin Senate that concludes that cramped living conditions in neighborhoods with higher immigrant populations lead to higher incidence rates. However, this constructivist explanation of the crisis still feeds seamlessly into the narrative of a pathology that seems inherent to racialized individuals and places.

Two months later, in May 2021, the same essentialist discourse found its way into the vaccination campaign in the so-called COVID “hotspots.” Compared to countries where race and class were criteria for prioritization from the start, this campaign was implemented with a significant delay. In Canada, for example, Indigenous people were part of the first phase of eligibility for vaccination (Public Health Agency of Canada. n.d.). In Germany, by contrast, non-white people were often not vaccinated, even when they belonged to established priority groups. A rare report from *ÄrzteZeitung*, a newspaper for doctors in Germany, states:

At a ministry event on 4 May, the mayor of Mannheim, Dr. Peter Kurz, reported that vaccination rates in certain districts were three times lower than in areas with more favorable social data.

Particularly alarming was the fact that during the first six weeks of the vaccination campaign in Mannheim, almost no elderly people over 80 with a migrant background were vaccinated, although they make up a quarter of this age group in the city.

(Staeck 2021, own translation)

Not only is racism not a prioritization criterion, but as the quote indicates, the over-80 priority group excluded migrants who should have been eligible on account of their age. Furthermore, according to the influential definition of Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007), racism, by its very nature, leads to premature death. Cila Yakeca, a Black and Indigenous person whom I interviewed, describes how this affects the COVID safety of Black people:

The life expectancy of Black folks is lower than for white people. So Black people are not only the ones hit hardest by COVID but also vaccinated less, since they decided to vaccinate older people first.

Is it a coincidence that the nostalgic figure of the elder in need of vaccination often appears as white and cis-heterosexual? Another interviewee, Ahmad Awadalla, then an advisor for migrants at the Berlin AIDS Support Centre (Berliner Aids-Hilfe), contrasted this figure with the queer migrant, who is not seen as worthy of protection, but rather only perceivable as a “risk to others.”

As a person whose life is always affected by these issues [laughs], it’s interesting how people who are vulnerable to viruses become the vectors, super-spreaders or risks to others. For example, queer men who have sex with men, as science likes to call it, are more affected by HIV and other STIs. But larger society sees us as dangerous. ... And this whole idea that vulnerability is reduced to age, I find that very problematic. Because at the end of the day I don’t know what will happen to my body if I get coronavirus. I have no idea if I will survive it, I mean I would assume so, but do I really know that? ...

My experiences with the medical system in Germany, in Berlin, are horrible [laughs]. And I am lucky because I have health insurance. A lot of people in the queer community that I meet don’t have health insurance and don’t know how to navigate the system at all. Why is that not being discussed as a vulnerability?

In the “hotspot” vaccination campaign, racialized people were eventually discovered indirectly—as symbolically charged residents of problem neighborhoods. However, the campaign was not framed as one of prioritization, but as special treatment. Already, Health Minister Spahn’s announcement of the new campaign on the television news program *ZDF Heute-Journal* seemed to put it up for debate by opening with the defensive statement “Nothing will be taken away from anyone” (“Weggenommen werden soll niemand etwas”) (ZDF 2021a). In the media coverage, the campaign was coded through images and scenes of pop-up vaccination centers amidst high-rise social housing buildings, as well as through comments and snippets of speech that described migrants as unwilling to be vaccinated, as potential COVID deniers, and as speaking broken German (ZDF 2021a; Quarks 2021). Once again, racialized people appear as a risk rather than a risk group. Even in reports that, contrary to expectations, confirm their willingness to be vaccinated, their entitlement to the vaccine is questioned from the outset.

Meanwhile, anecdotal reports suggest that non-white and other precarious population groups often receive the least effective and least safe vaccines. In her interview, B.A. (a pseudonym), who is active in a Black-led grassroots organization in Berlin, reported that undocumented people typically rely on pro bono doctors who work for free and without state support, and therefore receive the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, the cheapest and least safe option. According to B.A., African people also bear the risks of COVID health policies as the guinea pigs on whom the vaccines were to be tested.⁸

The fact that non-white people bear (rather than are) risks is also evident in the social construction of the essential worker (in Germany translated as “systemic relevant”). Critiques of this category, which allows some to work from home while others are left to face the risks of the pandemic, have rarely mentioned its racialization. This is also often the case when insecure housing and working conditions are identified as a COVID risk factor. As shown above, these conditions are, indeed, mentioned in mediated landscapes of risk. Nevertheless, the question of how fictions of difference create precarity remains the real “taboo” of the so-called “racism debate” that politicians invoked when faced with evidence about the higher morbidity and mortality of racialized populations (Althoff 2021). Newroz Miran, who describes themselves as a Kurdish transgender person and podcaster living in Neukölln, illustrated the daily risks that workers labeled “essential” faced during the pandemic:

What you do for a living has a lot to do with how a pandemic affects you. I work as a nursing assistant, which means that my work never stopped. I used to go to work at certain times, and you can see on the subway who can’t work in the home office. And those are almost exclusively older people of color from the guest worker generation (of the first generation of labor migrants recruited for menial jobs in Germany). And there are a lot of people who can just work from home and don’t have to think about what it means to go to work during a pandemic. Because, of course, it’s a risk to use public transportation. Not everyone has a car and not everyone can work from home.

(own translation)

The taboo surrounding the risk that non-white working-class people regularly face in racial capitalism can be traced back to older medical racism that constructs disease as an attribute of racialized bodies. Nayan Shah (2001) examines the history of Chinatowns since the late nineteenth century, showing how Chinese people became infectious bodies whose perceived degeneracy

threatened the entire nation. This was repeated in the rhetoric of COVID-racism, whose first targets were Chinese. While people read as East-Asian continue to be disproportionately affected, as highlighted in the hashtag campaign #IchBinKeinVirus (#IamNotAVirus), other people of color are not immune to COVID-racism either. Since its mythical origins in the “Far East,” the so-called “China” or “Wuhan virus” has undergone several cultural mutations and found local hosts in the significant others of the German labor migration regime: From young partygoers and troublemakers to Ramadan celebrations, funerals by Muslim “family clans,” and “illegal wedding parties,” which, unlike Christmas or Easter, are always already considered superspreader events. In addition to anti-Muslim racism, anti-Roma racism increased epidemically in 2020, as evidenced by the prison-like closure of entire housing blocks associated with Sinti and Roma residents (Memarnia 2020). Another example of this racialized discourse on infectiousness can be found in Health Minister Jens Spahn’s statements on the daily news show *ZDF Heute-Journal*: “[Last summer], travel abroad, often in connection with visits to relatives in Turkey and the Balkans, caused about 50% of new infections in our country. We must prevent this from happening this year” (ZDF 2021b, own translation). Ironically, this statement was made shortly following reports that Spahn himself had met with a dozen party donors for dinner while he had COVID.

These debates form the context against which I formulated my central research assumptions. In designing the project, my first assumption was that the power to define what protects or endangers us cannot be left to the state. My second assumption was that those whose intersectional vulnerability is not currently considered a scandal *deserve safety*. The 20 semi-structured interviews focused not only on critiquing state responses but also on actively seeking alternatives, starting with the intersectional negotiations of those producing organic knowledge and emergent theories in the conjuncture of pandemics and protests. The interviews were conducted via Zoom and lasted 40–90 minutes. They included questions about how the COVID crisis affected oppressed groups, how interviewees perceived the role of the state in producing safety in relation to COVID, and their own practices and visions of creating safety.

Participants identified as queer, migrant, Black, Indigenous, people of color, Muslim, Kurdish, Vietnamese-German, lesbian, trans, or non-binary, and some wished to be quoted with their full real names, while others used pseudonyms or first names. A queer intersectional perspective was essential for me, especially in the Berlin context, where new queer migrant and queer of color formations have arisen and have reached a critical mass in spaces such as the *Cutie BIPOC Fest Network* (www.facebook.com/qtbpocfest, since 2014), but have received little attention in existing political and academic contexts. At the same time, you did not have to identify as queer, migrant, or of color in order to participate in the research project—a perspective critical of racism and supportive of queer issues, encompassing a sense of solidarity and curiosity about the intersectional power dynamics related to COVID safety, sufficed.

COVID and police violence

No state authority symbolizes the *unsafety* of the state’s COVID policy more clearly than the police. Commenting on this, Newroz Miran said: “This pandemic showed once more that the state is there to protect property, to protect rich people. Yes, I don’t think I have ever felt protected by the state. I don’t think it’s the job of the state to protect me” (own translation). Cassandra, a lecturer living in Brandenburg and a practitioner of Embodied Social Justice, responded to the question of whether the police promise protection as follows:

Don't get me started talking about the popo. I'm sorry, you're asking the wrong person, I'm telling you right now [laughs]. I'll never forget, in one of my social justice courses, I had a Danish student and a Chicano student. We were talking about the police. She was like 'I feel safe with the police', and his face turned to stone, he was like 'Oh my God'. And you see how your positioning, your experience colors and forms, or 'co-forms', as Paola Bacchetta says, your ideas about things, and how you move through the world.

In the Black radical tradition cited by Cassandra, the abolition of police and prisons is often described as the completion of the abolition of slavery. In the United States, the latter was accompanied by the addition of the 13th Amendment, which states that punishment for "crime" remains a legitimate form of forced labor and captivity. Thus, while it is illegitimate to confine people and subject them to forced labor outside of prisons, it is explicitly allowed within prisons. At the same time, it is no coincidence that Black people continue to be disproportionately deprived of their freedom. Cassandra, therefore, described the role of the US police in suppressing Black resistance as originary: "Slavery, slave catchers, that was the first police."

For anti-racist activists and theorists worldwide, the police continue to be a significant factor in the premature deaths of Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and migrants. In Germany, examples include the state-sanctioned police killings of Oury Jalloh, whose body was burned in a police cell, and Christy Schwundek, who was shot in a job center; the close police ties to the National Socialist Underground, who between 2000 and 2006 killed at least ten, predominantly racialized people, and the lack of prevention and investigation of the racist killing spree in the small town of Hanau in February 2020, which took the lives of nine racialized people (Bruce-Jones 2012; Karakayalı et al. 2017; Cholia and Jänicke 2021; Thompson 2021).

According to my participants, the power of the police continued to grow during the pandemic. In response to my question about whether the police provided safety from COVID, Sula, who introduced herself as a Black woman, mother, and policy worker, replied:

[Chuckles] Well, there were actually a lot of discussions in my bubble at the beginning, where some were already calling for a lockdown, and others were saying, 'I don't want even more police controls on the streets'. (own translation)

B.A., too, saw the Corona rules as yet another excuse for racial profiling:

It's just one more pass to stop Black people, to ask for documentation and to pull you over. So I don't think there's any safety role that the police are playing, more just enforcing the same discriminatory practices, and they have one more green light for doing it and justifying it.

Maryam described herself as queer, 25, a student, and active with Migrantifa, a new movement of predominantly young migrant-identified activists which formed in protest against the police cover-up of the mass murder in Hanau, in conjunction with the pandemic and the protests. Maryam shared her impression that "the police often used the COVID rules as a pretext to attack or pull people aside, claiming that 'You didn't wear your mask'. Even though this would have happened if it wasn't for COVID, too" (own translation). Sanchita Basu, who is the director of ReachOut, a support organization for victims of violence in Berlin, confirmed this, stating that non-white people who forgot their masks risked arrest rather than a warning, which "often includes the use of

handcuffs” and other disproportionate force. Mona El Omari, a certified pedagogue and systemic consultant working with incarcerated people, provided the following context for the expansion of police powers:

In the summer [of 2020], it quickly became clear who was being policed. From what I anecdotally observed here in Berlin, there was a significantly higher police presence in Kreuzberg and Neukölln (traditionally areas associated with a large migrant presence). In Friedrichshain (the predominantly white neighboring area), the Volkspark was packed with people during the summer. There was much less policing than in other neighborhoods, and the approach was much more polite and discreet. COVID put the existing conditions on steroids. There were lots of reports of Turkish weddings and celebrations in Roma families, and whole blocks were cordoned off. And now, in the fall, they go skiing in Tyrol. As far as I know, Tyrol was the first COVID hotspot in Europe. Yet we spent months discussing the so-called Chinese virus. Everything that’s problematic about policing has intensified, and new crimes have virtually been added. Things like loitering—if a group of Black and POC boys are just hanging out in the street, they are more likely to be approached by the police than some white hipsters. Any gathering of people has become even more suspicious if they’re non-white.

(own translation)

In addition to the streets and so-called “problem neighborhoods,” private homes and parks, including gay cruising spots, also became targets of racial profiling. According to interviewees, racist policing often occurred at the intersection of the state and civil society. Ahmad Awadalla reported a brutal attack on the apartment of a queer Brazilian friend who had guests at the time, prompting neighbors to call the police. Alex Rodriguez, an activist living in Neukölln, had a similar experience when their neighbor called the police while Alex was exercising in the garden with friends, some of whom lived in the same building, and were part of their COVID-conforming bubble. This encounter highlights the vulnerability of queer families of choice and support networks during the pandemic. In state definitions of COVID safety, most notably the household rules, which defined who was able to socialize with whom, the heterosexual nuclear family home became reified as the morally hygienic kinship unit, giving rise to both formal and informal surveillance. Alex’s report further underlines a transformation of safety that occurred in queer, including queer of color communities, during the pandemic, where friends and chosen kin kept each other safe and in the community even though it transgressed the state’s household rules and increased vulnerability towards queerphobic neighbors. These strategies for safety outside of the system remain underexplored in abolitionist discussions.

A major target of policing was the anti-racist protests. In 2020, the world witnessed the largest anti-racist demonstrations in history under the banner of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which was formed in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. In Germany, tens of thousands of people demonstrated on June 6, 2020 alone, including at least 15,000 in Berlin’s Alexanderplatz (*Zeit Online*, June 6, 2020).

In addition to BLM, another anti-racist movement was formed in Germany at the beginning of the pandemic: Migrantifa. As mentioned above, this was in response to the racist mass murder in Hanau on February 19, 2020, which took the lives of nine people and initially disappeared from the headlines with the outbreak of the pandemic. Since 2020, Migrantifa has organized demonstrations in several cities (<https://migrantifaberlin.wordpress.com/>). In Hanau, relatives and

survivors founded the “February 19 Initiative” to commemorate the victims (<https://19feb-hanau.org/>). Say their names:

Gökhan Gültekin, Sedat Gürbüz, Said Nesar Hashemi, Mercedes Kierpacz, Hamza Kurtović, Vili Viorel Păun, Fatih Saraçoğlu, Ferhat Unvar, Kaloyan Velkov.

Besides the BLM and Hanau protests, interviewees also mentioned the so-called riots that took place in Stuttgart and other West German cities, often in response to police harassment in the name of COVID regulations. For Horst Seehofer, Federal Minister of the Interior until November 2021, who is known for more than one racist statement against migrants and refugees, the so-called riots were a reason to reject a study on police racism, which had long been demanded by activists, and to commission a study on violence *against* the police instead (Kretschmar 2020).

Unsurprisingly, the protests organized in the name of Black Lives Matter (BLM) in June 2020 were treated as a threat to COVID-19 safety. Political and media responses were shaped by anti-Black images of resistance. According to Spahn, the BLM protests “destroyed” the “trust that pragmatic compliance to the rules would be ensured” (Merkur 2020, own translation). Karl Lauterbach (who would become the Health Minister of the new government coalition led by the social democrats a year later) saw them as a “nail in the coffin” of the regulations—“too many people, too few masks, too little distance—the ideal superspreader event!” (Merkur 2020, own translation). The normalized inside, which had to be shielded from the infectious outside of the demonstrators, was characterized by Spahn as follows, as quoted in the tabloid Bild:

The middle in our country is behaving in a very disciplined and patient manner with regard to the COVID regulations, even though they have special burdens to bear. They are the first to suffer when others are too careless. This is the case, for example, if schools have to be closed again.

(Bild 2020, own translation)

In the image of the nation that is conjured up here, Black protesters do not belong to its disciplined, domesticated inside. The “middle in our country” is represented, *pars pro toto*, by the autochthonized and heterosexualized figure of the family with school children. The latter are described as patiently staying at home. Their reproductive burdens are acknowledged, and their privacy is defined as deserving of protection. Black protesters, like the extended families invoked in the debate about migrant intensive care patients, cannot be part of this national homeliness that is worthy of protection. Rather, they constitute its constitutive outside. They are configured as a viral, undisciplined, and uncontrollable mass, whose reproduction takes place in the street rather than at home and is always already a threat to the national body. This is all the more remarkable when we consider the public discussion about seriously ill migrants that occurred three months earlier: According to the articles quoted above, Spahn already knew at the time of the demonstrations that people of color were disproportionately affected by the COVID crisis.

Contrary to their portrayal as irresponsible, Black activists have demonstrated how a solidarity we is possible even in times of COVID, especially when this we is constituted through difference, for example in relation to disability and sexual or gender identity. This is exemplified by the protests against anti-Black racism that took place in Toronto and elsewhere in Canada in late May 2020. Regis Korchinski-Paquet, a young Black and Indigenous woman, fell from the 24th floor of her Toronto apartment building, in the presence of police, after she had experienced an emotional

crisis and her family had called the police for help. Disability justice was a crucial principle in the organization of the protests, attributable in no small part to the central role of queer disabled and mad Black people in BLM Toronto and other local Black groups. In addition to calling for people to wear masks and maintain distance, organizers also provided opportunities for those who were unable to be physically present due to illness or disability to participate—through donations or as emergency contacts for marchers (see also Vision Change Win 2020). This is just one example of how many anti-racist demonstrations during the COVID-19 pandemic became sites of care rather than recklessness.

BLM groups around the world reacted differently to the COVID crisis. BLM Berlin, following medical recommendations, completely suspended demonstrations and other in-person events from May 2020 to July 2021 (BLMB 2020). Despite this, BLMB developed an internationally recognized safety protocol for those who still wished to protest. In addition to masks and distancing, this protocol also addresses issues such as contact tracing, arrests, tear gas attacks, and surveillance of cellphones and Facebook profiles (BLMB n.d.). This multidimensional concept of safety was also reflected in the first official BLMB demonstration since the beginning of the pandemic, which took place in July 2021. According to B.A., the planning team not only paid attention to masks and distancing; the gathering was spread out with multiple stages and starting points to reduce congestion. Moreover, testing and cars were provided for people in high-risk groups.

That the decision to protest during a pandemic is hardly egoistic, and that staying home does not guarantee safety for Black people, is illustrated by Marc Lamont Hill's (2020) reflection on the Uprisings for Black Lives in his hometown of Philadelphia:

I had to make a calculation... If I went to a protest and was exposed to the virus, would I survive? Would I wake up alone on a hospital ventilator, fighting for my life? ... The thing that we have to do to keep alive could also be the thing that kills us... This conundrum in many ways represents what it means to be Black in America: In what way am I going to resist death today?
(10–12)

According to Hill, Black protesters in the summer of 2020 took on a compounded risk by taking to the streets despite COVID and police violence. In contrast, the German state's discourse on COVID safety cast non-white demonstrators primarily as a risk from which others needed to be protected.

This became clear once again on September 19, 2020, two months after the BLM debate and six months after the attack in Hanau. To the shock of activists, the planned demonstration to commemorate the attack, despite having a detailed hygiene plan, was prohibited due to "rising [infection] numbers" (Jakob 2020)⁹. At the same time, protests by COVID deniers, who in Germany call themselves "Querdenker," took place on a regular basis and were largely tolerated by the state. In addition to their extreme right-wing and openly anti-state tendencies, these protests demonstratively refused to adhere to the state's COVID regulations. Hamza, who identified as Kurdish, Muslim, and non-binary/trans, and was involved in organizing the prohibited Hanau demonstration, described this contradiction as follows:

What was also shocking was that there was this really big COVID deniers' protest going on at the same time. It was so incomprehensible why this demonstration was allowed to take place, but people were not allowed to process their grief. It would have been so important to allow that

so that the relatives could see that they are not alone and that many people came from different cities just to show them: Hey, we are in this together.

(own translation)

In contrast to anti-racist protests, where the wearing of masks, as described in the next section, is one of many strategies used to collectively practice a mode of safety oriented toward shared survival, the Querdenker mobilizations are characterized by the active rejection of masks, vaccinations, and other protective measures, as well as the intimidation of those who follow them. According to a study by the Leibniz Institute Mannheim and the Humboldt University Berlin, the Querdenker demonstrations were indeed superspreader events that contributed to the second wave of the pandemic in the winter of 2020/21 (Lange and Monscheuer 2021). Nevertheless, they were policed to a much lesser extent than the anti-racist protests.

Like Hamza, other participants also highlighted the contradictions of a state-led safety discourse that watched on as unmasked right-wing demonstrators would regularly gather by the thousands, while at the same time banning the commemoration of the victims of right-wing violence. From a broader perspective, the unequal enforcement of COVID-19 measures can be understood as the latest episode in a German security tradition that has always treated anti-racist resistance as a greater threat than right-wing violence (Nobrega, Quent, and Zipf, 2021).

However, the figure of the intubated patient in intensive care that I examined above shows that racialized bodies are not only considered dangerous when they take to the streets. The diagnosis “risky” is attached to racialized bodies even when they are simply trying to breathe. As Vanessa Thompson explains, this has been the case for Black people since before the COVID pandemic:

I can't breathe as an impossibilization of breathing (Fanon, 1965), which is currently becoming pandemic, is a metaphorical as well as material condition and experience that runs through the historical and lived knowledge archives of Black and other racialized deprived people.

(2020, own translation)

In addition to the police killings by asphyxiation of Eric Garner, George Floyd, and countless other Black people, police strategies such as the use of tear gas and other chemical weapons targeting the lungs during the protests come to mind. Far from creating safety from COVID at demonstrations, police in many cases used the coronavirus as an ally.

Many of those whom I interviewed did not see police racism as a problem that could be reformed by removing a few bad apples, as is often suggested in the ongoing scandals involving right-wing extremists within the police. Maryam is “increasingly convinced that the police are not there to protect us:”

Of course, it would be really nice if the state would intervene as well, but I don't think that's going to happen, and that's why so it's up to us to protect each other and to protect others. Because I do not see a future where I can rely on the state and the police.

(own translation)

What really makes us safe (Brazell 2018)? The police, my interlocutors, and I agreed, do not—on the contrary. However, the intersectional relations of violence underlying the COVID crisis once again show that we need and deserve safety. As the next section illustrates, alternative visions of safety already exist abundantly.

The transformation of safety

My concept of the transformation of safety is inspired by the transformative justice movement described earlier. It also resonates with Anthony Giddens' (1992) acknowledgment, however, race- and gender-evasive, that queer activists during the AIDS crisis have brought about a "transformation of intimacy" that has also benefited cis-gender and heterosexual people (see also Jamieson, 1999). I see a similar process in the current pandemic, but one that goes beyond changes in romantic and sexual relationships. Not only are marginalized people once again demonstrating the possibility of sociality in the face of a virus that may not go away, but the transformation of safety that is taking place today is occurring at all levels, even and especially in the declared danger zones of the streets.

My conversation partners mentioned a variety of safety strategies, to which I only have space to allude here. In addition to safety at protests, which I will discuss more below, interviewees were also actively involved in creating new networks of mutual aid that consciously moved away from the hierarchical paradigms of charity and towards a world of interdependent communities (Hwang 2019; ASA 2020). Furthermore, there was a digitization of existing spaces and events whose accessible principles had forerunners in disability justice (e.g., CUTIE.BIPOC Festival, November 14–December 13¹⁰). Moreover, pods, bubbles, and care collectives deserve mention and warrant a more in-depth discussion, which I plan to address in future publications. These models draw on queer traditions that again proved crucial in this crisis to support each other and sustain life (Ocasio-Cortez and Kaba 2020; Haritaworn 2020). For example, one person living alone recounted how friends provided food and medicine when they had contracted COVID. As mentioned above, queer networks and chosen families rarely adhere to state contact and household rules and were de facto criminalized during the lockdown. At the same time, they are crucial spaces where norms and rules are created that offer alternatives to the logic of racial profiling inherent in the state responses to COVID. As such, they should be taken seriously as abolitionist acts.

These and other strategies are grounded in principles of disability justice, which, as already mentioned, also influenced the organization of many anti-racist protests during the pandemic. In the last section, I discussed how anti-racist demonstrations were demonized as superspreader events. In the following, I will return to the demonstration as a space where oppressed people, after a long history of patronage, took the question of collectivity into their own hands. Interestingly, it is in the space of the demonstration where labels as "risky" to the contrary, forms of safety and care are rehearsed that do not rely on carceral distinctions.

The demonstration is a space where transformation is not only fought for but also prefigured. The activist concept of prefiguration describes our collective power to shape the spaces we already have at our disposal *as if they were the world* we want to live in. The demonstration is an ephemeral place, usually ending on the same day it begins, and yet its interconnectedness allows for the rehearsal of new forms of relationships and behaviors that hold potential for bigger impacts.

The creation of this space follows a desire that demands different methods and pursues new visions. It is precisely the impermanence of the demonstration that allowed many to leave the privatized isolation of #StayHome and venture into physical contact in the presence of a virus that, until the start of the vaccination campaign, spread with few impediments. At the demonstration, alternative concepts of safety and care were explored that went beyond the conservative hygiene of the private sphere and the commercialization of public spaces. These concepts were abolitionist in that they rejected the control of the carceral state and rehearsed relationships and forms of survival that were not based on hierarchy and exploitation.

At the basis of these rehearsals was an awareness of and competencies rooted in the intersectional, anti-racist strategies of the disability justice movement. Maryam referred to this as “a basic understanding of safety and access: ‘I’m doing this so you can be here, too’” (own translation). The safety described by Maryam mirrors the transformations that the demonstration is fighting for. It is neither obvious nor automatic, but contested. In fact, it is the result of political work: Damage done, mistakes made, lessons learned, consequences dealt with, and behaviors changed. Hamza recounted a chain of infection that led to a radical rethinking within the movement and ultimately to the creation of new safety practices, such as online plenaries and community-organized contact tracing. At first glance, these may resemble state-imposed COVID measures, but they are based on values and goals that are often at odds with those of the state. Hamza cited the use of masks as an example:

Everyone had to wear a mask at the demonstration; that was definitely mandatory. But we, as organizers, also had extra masks that we could hand out to people who were interested in joining the demonstration. For example, there was a situation where one person, who I read as non-white, walked into our demo and thought it was really cool, but didn’t have a mask. And [so] you don’t have to say that you’re excluding people who don’t have a mask on them right now but want to be a part of it. It’s about paying attention to things like that.

(own translation)

In contrast to the state discourse, the request to wear masks was not an instruction. It was clear to the organizers that an unmasked person at an anti-racist demonstration (as opposed to the COVID deniers’ rally happening on the same day) would put themselves and others at risk—both from COVID and racial profiling. Recognizing that safety is socially constructed (where the threat is not just the virus, but also those who are supposed to protect us from it) does not make it any less important. There are clear rules. We learn that we have to wear masks so that as many people as possible can come and no one gets arrested. At the same time, our practice is redistributive: We know that masks and disinfectants cost money and that their use requires collective learning. These rules, norms, and practices are neither abstract nor universal. They are consensual rather than patronizing, creating space rather than isolating or excluding. They are grounded in an abolitionist understanding of care that gives rise to practices and relationships that could not be further from the punitive logic of the state’s COVID-19 measures. They rehearse a future in which there is room for everyone.

Conclusion

In this article, I have described the racialization of COVID-19 through three figures: The impulsive protester, the vaccine-refusing migrant, and the intubated patient in intensive care. In the debates examined here, people who experience racism are perceived as a risk rather than as an at-risk group. They appear as an irrational mass or as self-inflicted patients who are not entitled to attention, care, resources, and life chances. Even, and especially, in their most vulnerable moments—their last breath, the mourning of their children—they are portrayed as a danger from whom society must be protected.

The racialization of COVID-19 is no accident. It follows centuries of medical racism, as well as decades of neoliberal health policies that have fatally constrained life-saving resources, from intensive care beds to vaccines. In Germany, this coincided with a major election year, amid

scandals. There were scandals over the pervasive right-wing extremism in the police and military, over corruption in the awarding of contracts for masks involving Spahn and other political figures, and over a COVID policy that, at the time of writing, has claimed the lives of more than 100,000 people.

The degenerating danger posed by non-white people is juxtaposed with the barely nameable forces that ensure normal life: The state that protects, the heterosexual family whom it protects, and the economy that must continue to go on. As I have argued in this chapter, this “natural environment” has *others* in those who must be instructed about the benefits of this society—from queer and trans people whose networks and chosen families are once again criminalized to “essential” working-class people who are exposed to the virus to ensure the uninterrupted accumulation of capital. The safety promised by this normality serves only a few.

Against this disempowered world stands the transformation of safety that is unfolding in many places, as I have illustrated with the example of anti-racist demonstrations. The abolitionist discourse of safety that is prefigured in the world of the demonstration has implications beyond the COVID crisis. In the world that emerges here, a person whose consciousness is still in the process of formation in a time of rapid change deserves not only to be included, but to be part of a community where we learn with, from, and for each other, to reimagine life from the ground up.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is a translated and slightly modified version of the article “Riskante Migrant*innen und schützenswerte Bürger*innen. Die Transformation der Sicherheit in der Konjunktur von Pandemie und Protest” which was published in *BEHEMOTH A Journal on Civilisation*, 2021, Volume 14 Issue No. 3.
- 2 Pods, bubbles, and care collectives grew out of Disability Justice, a movement founded by disabled queers of color that collectively reimagines care beyond ableist, racist, and cis-heteronormative structures and based on principles such as interdependence and abolition (e.g., Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018). The term “pod” was invented within this movement as a tool for transformative justice (see Mingus 2016).
- 3 The carceral state refers to punitive institutions such as the police, prisons, and courts. As I will outline in this chapter, it should also be understood in relation to institutions typically associated with the welfare state, such as the education and health care systems (Haritaworn 2015; Thompson 2021). These institutions are also regularly involved in the surveillance and criminalization of non-white and migrant communities. For an abolitionist perspective on social work, see Chapman and Withers (2019).
- 4 www.yumpu.com/de/document/read/47193630/leben-nach-migration-migrationsrat-berlin-brandenburg-ev
- 5 Robinson’s theorizing was indebted to South African debates in the 1970s and 1980s about the relationship between racism, colonialism and capitalism, such as No Sizwe’s (1979) *One Azania, One Nation*. This preempts an understanding of racial capitalism as parochial to the US, or of Black European thought as foreign to Europe (Thompson, Facebook update, May 13, 2022, see also Thompson 2021).
- 6 I describe discourses as “racism-evasive” when they make it impossible to name racist processes and relations, thus perpetuating logics of white supremacy and entitlement.
- 7 Thompson (2020) illustrates this with the death, likely as a result of COVID, of Kayla Williams, a Black Londoner, in March 2020. Williams’ death was not due to the taking of a life, as is often the case with the police, but rather to the paramedics letting her die by refusing to take her to the hospital, even without formal triage, on the grounds that she was “not a priority.” The fact that medical racism remains largely unspoken, especially in Germany, was highlighted in the controversy surrounding a tweet by Ferda Ataman in the same month that Williams died. The co-founder of the “Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*innen”, a network of journalists committed to diversity in reporting and the media workforce, had simply tweeted: “I somehow have an idea which population groups will be treated first in hospitals when ventilators become scarce” (Snethlage 2020, own translation). In response, “1,200 people [...] replied to the tweet to date, including editors-in-chief, doctors, and self-proclaimed integration researchers who see Ferda Ataman as an agitator, divisive figure, and hate preacher” (Bozdoğan 2020, own translation). Yet medical racism has a long history in Germany (e.g., Bonhomme 2020). On the differential treatment of migrants and refugees in Germany by various institutions, see Bendel, Bekyol, and Leisenheimer (2021).

- 8 One indication of this was a TV interview with two French doctors who stated that COVID vaccines should first be tested on people in Africa, similar to what was done with AIDS, since there were no masks or intensive treatments available there anyway. Bonhomme (2020) points to the continuity between this statement and the experiments conducted by Robert Koch on East Africans during the colonial period.
- 9 Like Black Lives Matter Berlin, the February 19 initiative also formulated specific safety protocols. For example, after the memorial demonstration was banned, events were held in several German-speaking cities under the motto “Hanau ist überall!” (“Hanau is everywhere”) to commemorate the victims (Initiative 19. Februar, 2020). Vanessa Thompson describes this as a decentralized safety protocol followed by many anti-racist organizations in the German-speaking world (2021, personal feedback).
- 10 <https://cutiebpcfestblog.wordpress.com/>

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STRUGGLES IN SEARCH OF A GROUND

Protests after lockdown

Karim Murji and Steve Pile

The worldwide impact of the COVID-19 virus and lockdown created an event at once seemingly global—an apparently shared experience—and relentlessly local, as manifested in divergent responses at national and city levels. While claims that the world changed forever after COVID-19 seem to be a bit of a stretch (given the long histories and dispersed geographies of plagues, epidemics, and pandemics), for London, the pandemic created a sense of the surreal time of lockdown and, afterward, a moment of re-adjustment to “normality” (as the anticipated “new normal” turned out to be surprisingly like the “old normal”). Lockdown itself was politically paradoxical: it was often the left that called for longer, more intensely policed, restrictions on the public, while the right called for freedom from state intervention and heavy-handed policing. Either way, “normal” politics was forced online or into private spaces. But neither state lockdowns nor the violence of the virus arrested people’s desire to protest, in public, together.

Shortly after the first pandemic lockdown ended in late May 2020, *Black Lives Matter* protests, following the death of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer in Minneapolis, took place outside the US Embassy in London and, a couple of days later, in Peckham, South London. Momentum built into mass protests a few days later in Trafalgar Square and in Hyde Park. As if in a dark mirror, these protests against the lethal brutality of policing were reflected in the increasingly severe enforcement of lockdowns in late 2020 and early 2021 in Britain, which were justified by the need to ensure public health and safety. In particular, the enforcement of “social distancing,” designed to regulate the proximity of bodies to prevent the spread of the disease, had direct consequences for the (non)expression of public protest. This time, perhaps inevitably, also saw the highly uneven, sometimes chaotic, nature of enforcement as when the London Metropolitan police failed to ensure public health and safety: the vigil to pay tribute to murdered Sarah Everard in March 2021 organized by *Reclaim These Streets* went badly wrong when the police overreacted to a gathering of more than 400 women. Arguably, the police failed to understand the meaning of both social and distance.

In the liminal times of lockdown/post-lockdown/re-lockdown, the pandemic emergency measures themselves caused numerous protests—the most prominent being against the vaccination as well as against the restriction of freedoms under lockdown under the extra powers given to the police to enforce lockdown and social distancing. Yet, these “anti-vax” protests were themselves

locked down (until the end of lockdown). On 26 June 2021, less than two weeks after then Prime Minister Boris Johnson confirmed that restrictions on public gatherings would be eased, a bewildering range of groups took the opportunity to take to the streets. Thousands marched through London. In Westminster, Lambeth, and Southwark people protested the lockdowns, while others demonstrated against climate change. The streets around Downing Street were packed with people carrying uncomplimentary messages for the Prime Minister. Tennis balls were hurled at the Houses of Parliament. Campaigners for the NHS, Palestine, and against austerity jostled up against one another. Protestors on a diversity of marches flowed through Regent Street. In a strange yet revealing coincidence, Anti-Lockdown protestors literally rubbed up against “Kill the Bill” marchers, who were campaigning against the government’s plans to curtail the right to demonstrate or take direct action.

In this short visual essay¹, based on our ongoing observations as long-standing Londoners, we are interested in these intersections between people and places of protest. Consequently, our central question explores the ways that London is, or more acutely not, a site of intersecting struggles and political actions, where protests are more in search of a ground for the political than seeking to defend, occupy, or take ground, that somehow has already been constituted as political or as a site of political action. That is, conceptually, we are interested in interrogating the *non-intersectionality* of the city and political expression, to better see how political actions assume, make, or seek a ground in the city. We see intersectionality—whether as geography or matrix of domination, whether as a weapon of political awareness or resistance—as having to be produced. Consequently, we believe that intersectionality itself cannot be presumed or taken for granted: ontologically, socially, or politically.

Using the example of two protests, one against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, another in Finsbury Park, North London, that is less easy to define as “a” protest, we pose a question about what it means to think of the city as a site of protest in search of a ground for struggle. Broadly, in our two examples, two different kinds of “ground” are in evidence. Our first instance occurs in the grey zone that is not quite pandemic or post-pandemic time, Russia invaded Ukraine in early 2022 (see Kuptsova in this volume), prompting protests in cities across Europe. In some ways, protests against the invasion are “classic”: there is a clear ground (London, Trafalgar Square) and a clear target for the protests (Putin, Russia), drawing a mass crowd. Yet, the ground becomes less obvious and secure when viewed from the different perspectives of the city and the nation. Indeed, the struggle itself begins to disappear and re-appear on other, trickier grounds. In contrast, our second instance was, in scale, a tiny protest that took place in Finsbury Park on 30 August 2021, during a brief respite from the COVID-19 lockdown. Our interest in this protest is that the park was used as a gathering point for four distinct protest groups, distinct yet also overlapping. The protest was noisy, yet quiet. Each group represented a single issue, yet also with concerns that could (perhaps, should) intersect, albeit in partial and asymmetrical ways, with the others. Puzzling, despite an apparently shared ground and shared struggle, they also appear, in moments, indifferent to one another. Here, the ground is also less certain. Groups such as Extinction Rebellion (XR) have used London’s sites as grounds to highlight the climate emergency and the lack of a political and cultural response. Yet, these protests seemed not to be targeted or aimed, but rather in search of a place of action, of political action. The slow violence and social murder of climate change often produce a too diffuse sense of what exactly is causing the problem, especially when solutions take on technocratic guises, such as carbon offsetting or rewilding. Just as the harm is evident within slow violence and social murder, there are also quiet grounds and slow protests, where theatrical and silent protest moves through sites and spaces, leaving behind little evidence of either a struggle or

a ground of struggle. Our examples are deliberately disparate and “stretched,” they are not intended as comparative or contrasting but as ways of illuminating and examining what thinking of the city as a struggle for space/space for struggle can entail.

Slava Ukraini/Slava UK

In the time after the ending of lockdown, London, like many other cities, witnessed numerous forms and sources of protest. Picking anyone can be used to make various points, but one of the largest of these is interesting precisely because it sheds light on the city as a struggle for space/space for struggle. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 was condemned across much of the world and prompted many acts of solidarity, including the welcoming of Ukrainian migrants and refugees—via visible and central reception activities—in cities across Western Europe. Dissensus, in the form of noting that the UK government adopted a wholly different attitude to refugees from Ukraine to the way it seeks to restrict other refugees, was certainly voiced but remains entirely marginal in public and political debate. The argument that the whiteness of the former contrasts with the “raced” migrants from, say the Middle East and North Africa, is evident, but this is more than a matter of skin color: the hostile environment to migrants in the UK, including political rhetoric and newspaper headlines, is applied extensively to (white) Romanian and Albanian refugees.

The Ukraine case provides more than one hole in the fabric of politics. It was a moment of seeming national unity in Britain. On 26 March 2022 demonstrations in support of Ukraine took place across Britain, with London as one of the main centers where numbers were in the tens of thousands. On a sunny day, people marched through central London carrying Ukrainian flags in a protest organized by the Mayor of London, supported by politicians from all sides, and with prominent media and entertainment celebrities either on the march or sending expressions of support. The British flag and the otherwise derided—due to Brexit—European movement became symbols of consensus.

The blue and yellow Ukrainian flag became a prominent symbol, appearing in places that probably few would have predicted. UK government buildings along Whitehall displayed the flag and a year, later they are still there. The gates of Downing Street were festooned with the flag. Prime Minister Boris Johnson wore a Ukraine pin on his lapel as did many other politicians. British newspapers frequently hostile to immigrants, and in which commentators scoff at liberals who had previously offered to house migrants in their own homes, were this time, cheerleading for British public support for Ukraine.

The March 2022 protest headed to Trafalgar Square, the symbolic scene of so many demonstrations and events in the history of the city. Here, in addition to the Mayor of London’s website banner that “London stands with Ukraine,” were banners that directly linked the city to Ukraine.

In this scene, London stands as a city “twinning” with a nation. The city seems like a state; it is coterminous and fully aligned with it. But this is not the same thing as claiming the city is the state. Unlike the latter, it has no army or any special role in national foreign policy. The Mayor’s banner at the main protest illustrates this point. Yet, note the ways in which the poster for the demo links—and elides—the UK with the Mayor of London, just as, one year on from the start of the war, it is the UK flag that is twinned with Ukraine (see picture below). In this moment, London easily stands in with, and for, the nation. Whereas, at other times (such as during the Migrant Crisis and the Brexit debate), this elision is far less comfortable, and even thoroughly discomfiting. The



FIGURE 17.1

capital city expresses a—and for some narrow and elitist (the place of the Westminster and media “bubbles,” gentrification, and multiculturalism)—in relation to the rest of the country.

Of course, it is not London itself that is at war with the invaders of Ukraine; the displays and tone are more about expressing solidarity. This is a form of politics that has its own value. Positioning London as the ground for protests, as the Mayor did, does, however, bring out the curious counter-image of a city that has something missing, like a role in a war. The overlap and consensus across political parties (Labour London and Conservative UK) make for quite an arid, almost post-political, debate in which there is limited scope for contestation or opinion diversity. By this, we do not mean that voices opposed to the war, or ones that point to issues and problems in Ukraine (such as its very high ranking in the world corruption index, or even the racist chanting by some of its football fans) do not exist, rather that these are both marginal and treated as marginal. They attempt to intervene in and politicize an issue, but by being ruled out of court, they display the closure of any politics. This is evident in the way that the mainstream media simply ignored the “Stop the War” protest on 25 February 2023, which called on the British Government to stop supplying arms to Ukraine. Ignored, despite the protest being backed by renowned anti-war organizations such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Stop the War Coalition (which organized massive rallies in opposition to the invasion of Iraq in 2003). While Ukraine generates such a level of consensus, the politics are less a ground for struggle than a ground without a war.

The symbolic spaces of the city—such as Piccadilly Circus, Parliament Square, and Trafalgar Square—that have witnessed many protests, and numerous scenes of violence and destruction, instead become a place of consensus. Symbolic buildings—Government Departments, the Houses of Parliament, Downing Street—all carry the Ukraine flag without any controversy. The flag becomes a prominent symbol across the city, displayed on churches and other public buildings, and evident across the city in seemingly ordinary household spaces. It becomes an un-contentious



FIGURE 17.2



FIGURE 17.3



FIGURE 17.4

object, its meaning and purpose seemingly universalized and self-evident. Yet, of course, placing the same object in a different location, even in the same city, carries other less consensual meanings. When, before the war, Ukrainian fans displayed the flag in a football match at Wembley against the England team, the British press drew attention to the times when black English players had been booed by Ukraine fans. Thus, while there are voices that are not aligned with the national consensus in support of Ukraine, they are limited to short-lived and easily erasable guerrilla actions, such as stickers and graffiti, as in this picture linking Ukraine to Zionism.

Rebellion in the Park

Thus far, we have sought to show how London can, strangely, become a peaceful ground for protests about struggles, including those against wars and all forms of violence, that are taking place elsewhere (reminiscent, perhaps, of demonstrations against Apartheid South Africa in the 1960s–1980s, as well as the 2022 and 2023 protests in support of Palestine, and of women in Iran). Next, we wish to look at the ways that protests might have less of a common ground—perhaps, be less of an opportunity for joining up struggles—than it may at first appear.

Extinction Rebellion (XR) is a self-declared global environmental movement, formed in an English rural town in May 2018. Their first actions took place soon after, in October 2018,



FIGURE 17.5

when they occupied the London offices of Greenpeace. This was followed by a “Declaration of Rebellion” on 31 October outside the Houses of Parliament. Taking their inspiration from the direct action of The Suffragettes, the US Civil Rights Movement and (the brief flowering of) Occupy, XR has instigated a series of high profile, highly disruptive protests as well as spawning offshoot protest groups such as Just Stop Oil. Without any apparent evidence, it is rumored that Extinction Rebellion has its roots in the Wood Green neighborhood of north London by locals (even though the widely accepted account of XR’s foundation directly contradicts this, the rumor persists). So, it was no surprise when Extinction Rebellion’s famed pink yacht suddenly appeared outside Turnpike Lane tube station (just to the south of Wood Green) in August 2019. Even so, rumor notwithstanding, it is a mystery why Turnpike Lane had suddenly become the ground upon which to stage a self-identified global protest. On the surface, there was no special reason to pick Turnpike Lane. Indeed, the protest seemed squeezed in, ill-fitting, and in between a main road and a small park (Ducketts Common).

A global struggle had found micro-local expression. Cars stopped for a theatrical march. Leaflets were handed out. Micro-local, yet the stakes could not be higher: life, or death. There didn’t seem much dispute over which is the best option. Car drivers tooted support. Leaflets were read and tucked into pockets. Or they were thrown in bins—the protests ignored—a scene both present and absent simultaneously. Still, there were other things to do, perhaps less oppositional. There were places to exchange clothing and food, recycling in action. Extinction Rebellion had found a way to “ground” its global struggle but perhaps had not found a site of oppositional political action.

Two years later, in August 2021, Extinction Rebellion returned to Turnpike Lane. If it was a mystery why XR was there in the first place, its return embellished the mysterious connection between the global climate emergency and a usually unremarkable north London crossroads. Nonetheless, it was from Turnpike Lane that Extinction Rebellion Unity decided to march upon and



FIGURE 17.6



FIGURE 17.7



FIGURE 17.8



FIGURE 17.9

gather at, Finsbury Park, a couple of miles to the south. Walking through Finsbury Park on Sunday 30 August 2021, you would be forgiven for thinking that the police were holding a massive picnic in the park. Dozens of police vans lined the roads interior to the park. Sat inside, perhaps a hundred police, looking bored, but obviously capable of responding to an outbreak of political violence: riot shields at the ready, should it be necessary. But it wasn't. Non-violence is also political.

Rather, in the gloom of a typical London summer day, a small crowd of around about 400 had gathered. Most had walked the two miles from Turnpike Lane, a diverse group, some proclaiming the rights of indigenous peoples, a group of dancers wanted to "save the Amazon," XR Buddhists were there, while others were against fossil fuels (a progenitor of now notorious Just Stop Oil). One banner simply read "unfuck the world." There was even a white elephant, named HS2 (a mega infrastructure project to build a new train line). All gathered seemingly under the banner of XR



FIGURE 17.10



FIGURE 17.12

Unify. This was not, it turned out, one protest, but four. Four grounds for a struggle, coordinated, co-located, but unified?

Each protest had its own tent. XR Unify. Just Stop Oil. Kill the Bill. Black Lives Matter. Each tent gathered its own crowd, expressing itself through different means. A small stage drew speakers from each of the tents. Each speaker talked of urgency, emergency, the need for action, and the need for radical change. Yet, the crowds drifted in and out, never quite merging into a unified whole. Each speaker was enthusiastically greeted. Call/response moments passionately engaged.



FIGURE 17.11

But not by everyone all of the time. It felt like the ground should unify, the calls to action would galvanize (as the police anticipated) into direct action. It didn't happen.

A number of different struggles, all in one place, but not on the same ground. Seemingly unified under a Unify banner, fellow travelers in allied struggles, but not. The Kill the Bill speakers talked of police brutality, calling up a history of deaths at police hands in nearby Tottenham. Chiming strongly with demands of Black Lives Matter. Yet worldwide migrant deaths had a different traction. The destruction of the Amazon rainforest called in a different set of protestors. Global and local struggles refused to fuse together; each tent, somewhat symbolically, drifting away at different times, one while the speakers were still rallying the troops. Political Action. Ground. But no single struggle. And, sometimes, it felt, too peaceful to be a struggle.

The “taking place” of struggle(s)

This short contribution is designed to raise questions about the relationship between the city and protest, the ground and the struggle. In each of our examples, there's a disconnect between the city and the protest, between the ground and the struggle. The “local” and the “global” are not quite aligned; they do not quite work up and down the scales of politics smoothly. The global is never fully global and the local is never just local. The ground and the struggle do not (therefore) always have to be in the same place. Indeed, the ground can carry histories of earlier struggles that can be easily overlooked or forgotten, and this is true of very well-known sites such as Trafalgar Square, as well as overlooked or less prominent ones, such as Finsbury Park (even though it has its own microhistory as a site of protests).

Hence, there can be multiple disconnects between past and place, between protest and city, and a highly uneven connection to what is global and local. The events we have looked at occurred in the perhaps anomic time of lockdown/post-lockdown when many of the normal rules and practices of social interaction had been interrupted, disrupted, or dislocated. The emergency nature

of the pandemic produced a very large degree of political consensus across parties, yet this did not prevent dissensus, only its expression in public (see Haritaworn in this volume). Yet, protest is not always dissension. We have shown that the city can afford a site through which to express people's alignment with national geopolitics. In this, no ground is taken; it remains exactly where it is. No violent political action is offered, or accepted. On the other hand, it is easy to over-read the coherence of protest, or worse, to romanticize the affinities and solidarities implicit in any protest. Often protests are highly heterogeneous, even where there is apparent common ground, stated solidarity, and apparent shared affective energy (rage, righteousness, grief, disgust, or the like). Our "Unity" example, thus, does not occupy a single coherent ground, and therefore, does not stem from, or emerge into a single coherent struggle. Rather, there is something far more do-it-yourself, almost banal. Thus, we have highlighted the routine and everyday performance of protest, including flags and banners, chants, and drumming, that rehearse the cozy familiar repertoire of demonstrations. Drawing from these examples, we suggest the use of "the struggle" and "the ground" should be problematic, creating an analytical lens to question the practice and expression of protest in the city. In this way, we suggest that it is productive to also think about how the spaces and times of grounds produce or do not produce protest. Sites of struggle are, therefore, not just where the struggle takes place, but about how places make struggle—about how struggle *takes place*.

Note

- 1 Image sources: First image: © European Movement UK (www.instagram.com/euromoveuk/), Image two to six: Steve Pile; Image seven to twelve: Karim Murji.

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