exploring the transnational neighbourhood perspectives on community-building, identity and belonging

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Exploring the Transnational Neighbourhood:
Perspectives on Community-Building, Identity and Belonging

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Exploring the Transnational Neighbourhood

An Introduction

STEPHAN EHRIG, BRITTA C. JUNG AND GAD SCHAFFER

The Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin once described the relationship between a place and the people inhabiting it as a dialogical matter, attesting a certain reciprocity between the two through which they affect and transform each other.[1] Given the fact that we are living in an age of unprecedented human mobility,[2] it hardly comes as a surprise that global mass migration deeply affects this very relationship. The reasons for today's human mobility are manifold and encompass the personal and professional choices of a globalised operating workforce, as well as warfare, persecution and economic destitution. Climate change is yet another factor causing the displacement of millions of people. The associated loss of home and the making of a new one, the challenge of integrating migrants and transmigrants,[3] and the conflicting notions of identity and belonging are perhaps some of the most acutely felt transcultural predicaments of the 20th and 21st century. This applies to migrants and transmigrants, as well as those remaining in their place of origin throughout their lives who feel the loss of life-long members of their community and/or are confronted with the newcomers. As a result, terms such as identity, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, plurilingualism and globalisation, as well as colonialism and postcolonialism, play a central role in our media and in political discourse.

Geographically and socially closely defined, the urban neighbourhood in particular has come to occupy the public imagination as a litmus test of migration and how it affects local communities. Urban neighbourhoods with a high percentage of migrants have been both hailed as multicultural success stories and condemned as ethnic hotspots and ghettos. Whereas New York City's Williamsburg, Singapore's Holland Village, São Paulo's Liberdade, London's Brixton, Berlin's Kreuzberg and (more recently) Tallinn's Kalamaja have become known as trendy multi- and transcultural neighbourhoods characterised by creativity and a newly affluent cosmopolitan class, others seem indeed troubled by disenfranchisement, discord, social dislocation, crime and radicalisation, with Molenbeek in Brussels and the Clichy-sous-Bois banlieue in Paris being perhaps the most notorious (Eu-

ropean) examples in recent years. Building on the controversial, albeit histori-
cally persistent stereotype of the criminal immigrant, which – in turn – is based
on the premise that many immigrants lack financial resources and experience
blocked pathways to social and economic mobility,[4] immigrant neighbourhoods
such as Molenbeek and Clichy-sous-Bois have become increasingly suspicious to
those outside. Labelled as "vessels of a set of social problems" (Wiard, Pereira),[5]
"badlands" (Dikeç),[6] and "no-go zones"[7] (e.g. De Vries) in (inter)national news
media, Molenbeek was seen as a breeding ground for Islamist terrorism after the
bombings in Paris and Brussels in 2015 and 2016. Clichy-sous-Bois, on the other
hand, gained notoriety during the highly mediatised 2005 riots that erupted af-
ter the death of two local teenage boys, Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré, and the
subsequent spread to other disadvantaged neighbourhoods throughout France,
prompting a national state of emergency.[8] "Depending on the politics of observ-
ers," Gillian Jein remarks, "the events were interpreted as evidence of the threat
these neighbourhoods posed to the [French] Republic, or as signs of the Repub-
lic's abandonment of its poorest and postcolonial populations."[9] Jein further notes
that transnational neighbourhoods such as Clichy-sous-Bois are frequently de-
picted as an Other and "deviant terrain".[10] However, voices from within often em-
phasise different perceptions and have the potential to challenge and counter nor-
mative discourses of national membership, as Jein's example of acclaimed French
'photograffeur' JR illustrates.[11] In an act of grassroots reframing from within
the neighbourhood, JR's complex 2017 mural *Chroniques de Clichy-Montfermeil*
charted the 2005 riots by encompassing 750 portraits of the neighbourhood's
ethnically diverse residents. This act of spatial and historical localisation, i.e. the
incorporation of the neighbourhood's face(s) at a specific point in time, is then
counteracted by the mural's stylised references to modern France's revolution-
ary founding myth. Specifically, it quotes the canonical revolution paintings by
Jacques-Louis David, *Le Serment des Horaces* (Oath of the Horatii, 1786) and *Le
Serment du Jeu de paume* (Tennis Court Oath, 1794), as well as Eugène Delacroix's
La Liberté guidant le peuple (Liberty Leading the People, 1830). JR's work thus
transgresses conventional concepts of French identity and belonging by present-
ing the Othered as an integral and diverse part of French society. His reading and
mediatisation of the Clichy-sous-Bois riots powerfully illustrate what Mustafa
Dikeç oberserves with regard to the banlieues and – as this volume argues – other
comparable urban neighbourhoods around the world, i.e. that "despite their nega-
tive stereotype as 'badlands', banlieues are also sites of political mobilization – or
of 'insurgent citizenship' to use Holston's notion – with democratic aspirations,
drawing on a vocabulary of justice, citizenship and equality."[12]

   The public sphere is often used as a canvas for both political mobilisation
as well as communal identity building. Accordingly, this simultaneity not only

underpins JR's mural but is also, for example, echoed in the *Make Shift* project of the art duo LxsDos (consisting of the artist couple Ramon and Christian Cardenas), who work in the US–Mexican twin cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, and whose 2015 mural *Sister Cities/Ciudades Hermanas* in El Paso's El Segundo Barrio adorns the cover of this volume. Historically part of a fluid borderland, the El Paso–Juárez transborder agglomeration – and particularly the disadvantaged neighbourhoods adjacent to the border – encompasses communities with a shared heritage and cultural identity divided by ever-hardening migration regimes.[13] With the support of local business and property owners, as well as local art councils and members of the community, LxsDos' attempts to "make art available to poor neighborhoods or people who don't have the opportunity to go to the city museum" and thereby to empower local "communit[ies]" and the "normal people" on the streets.[14] Accordingly, *Make Shift* plays on various local art traditions, iconographies and themes, but also colourfully and positively reappropriates the cultural hybridity of the border neighbourhoods that are often framed as "no-go" migrant areas.[15] In doing so, LxsDos' art is inherently political: through its location and artistic expression it transcends and renegotiates territorial and cultural borders and boundaries, celebrates the shared heritage and ingenuity of the people, and advocates for individual and communal sustainability. Yet the cities' and their neighbourhoods' shared heritage and local identity is by no means exclusionary. In fact, as an immigrant himself, Ramon Cardenas is part of a minority in the US but also in the US–Mexican borderland. Born and raised in the Philippines, Cardenas relates to the shared Spanish influences and to certain socio-economic and cultural similarities to his homeland within the local communities, particularly in the poorer sister city, Ciudad Juárez.[16]

Clichy-sous-Bois and El Segundo Barrio (and JR's and LxsDos' artistic engagement with their respective neighbourhoods) capture in a succinct manner Bakhtin's dictum of a certain reciprocity between a place and the people inhabiting it and the transformative power it often entails. Indeed, an ever-increasing body of research suggests that immigrant settlement in urban neighbourhoods, many of which still suffer from the population declines and economic disinvestment of the 1970s, has rejuvenated some of these places.[17] Although terms such as *banlieue*, *ghetto*, *favela*, *barrio*, *township* and *inner-city* are frequently associated with migration and ethnic minorities, and have become a shorthand for disenfranchisement, discord, social dislocation, crime and radicalisation, it is their rootedness in place and community and creative potential to renegotiate conflicting notions of identity and belonging that makes them particular – and often simply a matter of framing. After all, neighbourhoods such as Williamsburg, Liberdade, Brixton, Kreuzberg and Kalamaja already attest to the fact that they can – in the public imagination – be both: relatively closed and static as well as dynamic, innovative and transgressive.

What Is a Transnational Neighbourhood?

The present volume, hence, seeks to engage with – and reframe – neighbourhoods such as Clichy-sous-Bois, El Segundo Barrio and Williamsburg and explore the concept of the *Transnational Neighbourhood*. The volume was preceded by two events that were jointly organised by the Institute of Modern Languages Research (IMLR) and the UCD Humanities Institute and sought to shift the focus away from othering multicultural and multi-ethnic environments by exploring transcultural encounters in the urban neighbourhood from a grassroots perspective: a workshop on *Transnational and Translingual Urban Writing* at the IMLR in London in June 2018, which was followed by a larger, interdisciplinary conference on the *Transnational Neighbourhood* held at the UCD Humanities Institute in Dublin in September 2019. Both events led to the conclusion that analysing the social microcosms of urban neighbourhoods allows for a more nuanced discussion of transculturality as lived practice.

Thanks to its multi- and interdisciplinary nature, the volume examines the relationship and interplay between different societal discourses and national narratives within a decidedly broader inter- and transnational context. Reflecting on the epistemological flaws of approaching mnemonic phenomena that undercut the combination of territorial, ethnic and cultural collectivity, Astrid Erll explains that this entails "looking beyond established research assumptions, objects and methodologies."[18] Erll points to the "sheer plethora of shared *lieux de mémoire* that have emerged through travel, trade, war, and colonialism" as well as the "great internal heterogeneity of cultural remembering."[19] Similarly, Michael Rothberg and Dirk A. Moses have also drawn attention "to the palimpsestic overlays, the hybrid assemblages, the non-linear interactions and the fuzzy edges of group belonging."[20] Yet, on the other hand, Aleida Assmann rightly reminds us that within the realm of the transnational "we need to acknowledge some borders that continue to exist and are even resurrected by some communities."[21] Ann Rigney and Chiara de Cesari suggest that we must recognise "the significance of national frameworks alongside the potential of cultural production both to reinforce and to transcend them".[22]

We therefore propose to define the transnational neighbourhood as follows. In the transnational neighbourhood, transculturality is performed as lived practice, emerging around the simultaneity of three key focal points of spatiality, temporality and agency. We wish to frame the urban neighbourhood as local but not provincial; as a fluid space in which various temporal and spatial axes intersect; as the locus where diverse trans/cultural practices can engender togetherness as well as differences and conflict. As a translocality, as Brickell and Datta argue, the neighbourhood is a reinscribed place of "grounded transnationalism"

– a space where otherwise deterritorialised networks of transnational social relations take shape through migrant agency.[23] It is a densely packed contact zone where disparate cultures meet in often highly asymmetrical relations, fostering processes of hybridisation, creolisation and neoculturation. The neighbourhood is open to the type of multi-scalar perspective that, according to Rigney and de Cesari, avoids entrapment in a binary discourse.[24] As the chapters in this volume demonstrate in their approaches to different neighbourhoods, transnational neighbourhoods comprise comparably condensed, often peripheral spaces and places. They can be both urban and rural, and are often multiterritorial, re-/deterritorialised places/spaces for transmigrants, in an artificial and partially even forced setting. As liminal, overlapping and entangled spheres, these neighbourhoods foster mobility across different 'scales' and are constantly translated or in translation. They are spaces/places that contain a simultaneity of temporalities, spatialities and agencies: they produce a constantly shifting local and cultural knowledge that emerges from repetitive spatial experience and an exposure to kaleidoscopic cultural and communicative mnemonic practices, both of which are grounded in everyday experiences; moreover, they are transnationally mediated through technology. Most importantly, these neighbourhoods foster a productive social and cultural friction in their *throwntogetherness*.[25]

The simultaneity of temporalities, spatialities and agencies can take different forms whose interpretation and analysis afford different methods. Thus, by using an interdisciplinary focus combining sociological, ethnographic, anthropological, literary and geographical foci, the chapters in this volume observe how this simultaneity is being culturally employed, explored and manifested throughout the different case studies.

Gathering case studies that cover a multitude of aspects, this volume draws on current debates on the translocal and transcultural turn in the humanities and social sciences, and builds on more recent explorations in urban studies that, individually and primarily, take a narrow disciplinary perspective towards sustainability, climate change resilience and social policy (urban planning, marketing, economics, law).[26] The volume's interdisciplinary nature sheds light on the question of transnationalisation from different disciplinary and interdisciplinary angles, combining a variety of research methods (including human geography, ethnography, and the interpretation of literary texts and the visual arts), and exploring it in the physical as well as the virtual, social and cultural world. The proposed sections differentiate the three different levels of discourse, i.e. the virtual, the physical (trans)local and the transnational-global, offering a first starting point for a future engagement with the concept.

Examining the multidimensional quality of the transnational neighbourhood, the contributors to this volume shift the perspective on migration away from na-

tionalised and politicised discourses and explore the transnational and transcultural dynamics of global neighbourhoods as multifaceted environments whose own voices and perspectives are rarely represented and compared through urban cultural studies. As the topic of migration has become particularly contentious in national and international debates in recent years, the various contributions address one of the key questions of our time: how do people create the feeling of community within an exceedingly globalised context? By focusing on the neighbourhood as a central space of everyday lived experience, this volume explores practices of community-building alongside cultural, social and historical obstacles, in often overlapping geographical spaces and cultural settings, and virtually interconnected through the World Wide Web and social media.

Crucial as a background for the discussion of transnational neighbourhoods is their intertwined nature of space/place with social habitus on the one hand, and their multifaceted encoding of the built environment with cultural meaning on the other. The large body of theoretical work on urban space and spatial perceptions since the 1960s has been fundamental for understanding how urban neighbourhoods are being perceived through human minds. Urban space has been approached as psychologically mapped,[27] "imageable",[28] and as corporeally experienced atmospheres,[29] while the French Marxist tradition understands it as produced, appropriated through everyday life, shaped by power structures and habitus.[30] Martina Löw, in her influential study *The Sociology of Space* (2018) describes the construction and perception of urban space as a dialogical process of *spacing* and *operations of synthesis* in contexts which are defined by class, gender and milieu-specific schemes.[31] Although the 'spatial turn' has shaped much humanities research, little emphasis so far has been put on grassroots perspectives on the dimension of cultural difference. For the transcultural perception of an urban neighbourhood, this consequently means that, on top of that, several simultaneous, overlapping and even contradictory cross-cultural processes of spatial perception need to be added. These, then, provide meaningful transcultural experiences of the urban neighbourhood within a coexistence of parallel and intertwined temporalities, spatialities, and social and cultural agencies.

This very coexistence is defined by blurring and complicating the clear lines of migration, ethnicity and culture – hence we speak of *trans-* and not *inter-* or *multi-*national neighbourhoods. This very 'trans-ness' calls for both a new terminology and a new methodology. The new transnational neighbourhoods have been described and analysed as intersectional cultural hybrids (Bhabha), *thirdspaces* (Bhabha, Soja) and even transcultural heterotopias, whose kaleidoscopic semantic encoding of the urban neighbourhood creates new acculturated forms of culture, social life, and notions of identity and belonging.[32] In her seminal book *For Space* (2005), the geographer Doreen Massey rejects the idea

of a historically grown place or neighbourhood as the source of a fixed identity within an ever-changing world. Instead, she understands space dynamically and pluralistically as a product of our daily "interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny."[33] Or, put another way, as something that is created through chance encounters and what she calls *throwntogetherness*, i.e. the being "set […] down next to an unexpected neighbour."[34] Accordingly, Massey perceives space "as the sphere of the possibility […] in which distinct trajectories co-exist; as the sphere […] of coexisting heterogeneity." Space is, therefore, "always under construction" and it is constituted by social practices, evolving narratives, and inevitable (re-)negotiations.[35] And, as Anne Fuchs notes in her reading of Massey in this volume, this "relational politics of place" also makes the case for a "politics of connectivity" in response to globalisation.[36]

Moreover, the rise of the World Wide Web and the continuous digital connectivity as part of a drastically changed global mediascape have impacted on the way in which the experience of cultural identity, transmigration, but also displacement, is resignified and transformed by new digital affordances from different vantage points – allowing for the creation and sustenance of multiple social relations that link together and deterritorialise societies of origin and residence.[37] On a different level, this shift in highly diverse neighbourhoods, furthermore, has in many cases not found its way into political and planning policy decisions, impacting on a strong regime of social and spatial injustice that ignores the complexity of the sociocultural milieu (Soja, Harvey).[38]

Theoretical Diversity: Spatialities, Temporalities, Agencies

The volume's overall concept is interdisciplinary and comparative in nature, bringing together chapters featuring different methodological approaches whose overlappings best unfold when studied in combination. While the volume, as a whole, is structured around the meta-structural complexes of how the contemporary transnational neighbourhood is virtually constituted and interconnected ('Virtual Neighbourhoods'), how they often consist of several overlapping geographical and mnemonic layers ('Overlapping Neighbourhoods'), and how their mobile residents negotiate strangeness ('Negotiating Strangeness and Mobile Neighbourhoods'), the aspect of simultaneous and intersecting spatial, temporal and agency-related factors features throughout the chapters and requires a general discussion and exploration of the chapters' theoretical and methodological diversity.

Literary texts provide one major source and mode of expression for transnational neighbourhoods that will be analysed in this volume. Building on spatial practices to further explore translocal and transcultural dynamics within the

spectrum of spatiality and temporalities impacting on agency, Anne Fuchs' chapter in this volume, 'The Translocalisation of Place: Sectarian Neighbourhoods, Boundaries and Transgressive Practices in Anna Burns' Belfast' analyses the topography of segregation and the performance of subjectivity through boundary crossing in Anna Burns' Booker Prize-winning novel *Milkman* (2018). The novel is set in a fictionalised version of a 1970s Belfast, i.e. a city ripe with sectarian strife and violence, but Fuchs argues that the novel's thematic and aesthetic features as well as its spatial focus of the working-class, Catholic neighbourhood echo the transnational urban reality and its literary depiction we have come to associate with the 21st century. She uses Talja Blokland's discussion of a neighbourhood as "a geographically circumscribed, built environment that people use practically and symbolically."[39] Blokland's definition points to three important features: firstly, a neighbourhood is a bounded place in a predominantly urban setting; secondly, neighbourhoods engender social relations through practices and rules; thirdly, neighbourhoods accrue symbolic meaning and capital which – depending on social and economic factors – can go up and down. As a locality within an urban setting, neighbourhoods require other adjacent neighbourhoods for their self-definition. Quoting Arjun Appadurai, neighbourhoods can appear as "simply a set of contexts, historically received, materially embedded, socially appropriate, naturally unproblematic."[40] This, in return, directly impacts on a sense of neighbourhood that is defined by constant migration and mobility. Fuchs employs Paul Watts' and Peer Smets' argument that, while in our own era of hypermobility neighbourhoods are "spatially fixed and determinate places", they are, however, "also simultaneously being constantly made and remade via flows of people as they circulate in and out of, within and around these residential locales."[41] Furthermore, Fuchs quotes Ulrike Hanna Meinhof's description of the contemporary city as a space of "negotiation and encounter between culturally diverse people", which is "in principle and practice disruptive of the often monocultural imaginary of the nation-state."[42] Finally, Fuchs suggests the useful term *elective belonging* for forms of residential attachment that are no longer rooted in and authorised by historical ties to a particular locality.[43]

In a similar vein, Maria Roca Lizarazu's literary chapter '"We will be ephemeral": Encounter, Community and Unsettled Cosmopolitanism in Senthuran Varatharajah's *Von der Zunahme der Zeichen* (2016)' examines how the dis-located, disembodied *non-place*[44] of the World Wide Web affects the possibility of witnessing, recounting and transmitting histories of flight and expulsion, while also exploring what kinds of connection and community might arise in their aftermath. Transposed to the virtual dimension of the internet, Roca Lizarazu suggests that the concept of the transnational neighbourhood implies a tangle of issues having to do with coexistence, on the one hand, and transnationalism and

cosmopolitanism, on the other. In her reading, the transnational neighbourhood brings these various topics together, urging us to explore transnational convivialities and everyday cosmopolitanisms in a "densely packed contact zone".[45] Here, the transnational neighbourhood is a space of chance and fleeting encounters, unwanted proximities, a virtualised urban microcosm defined by everyday interactions and intermingling, inviting us to reconsider what the term 'transnational' actually means. Roca Lizarazu argues here that the notion of the transnational neighbourhood can usefully complement the prevailing focus in transnational studies on border-crossings, thus allows for an exploration of a transnationalism or "cosmopolitanism of connections".[46] Questions of strangeness and familiarity, of inside and outside are thus central to cosmopolitanism as well as to the transnational neighbourhood.

Spatialities and, specifically, cultural production of the perception and employment of spatial practices are the specific focus of different chapters in this volume, providing their own spatio-cultural definitions of the transnational neighbourhood. In her chapter 'Transnational Neighbourhoods in Barbara Honigmann's *Das überirdische Licht* (2008) and *Chronik meiner Straße* (2016)', Godela Weiss-Sussex analyses two autofictive texts by the German author of Jewish faith who lives in Strasbourg. Straddling various cultural identities as an author, Honigmann's autofictive texts focus on her experience as writer in residence in Manhattan and the multicultural world of the author's local neighbourhood in Strasbourg, and shows how the author-narrator establishes a balance between distance and belonging in these neighbourhoods, illustrating that the notion of belonging and familiarity is compatible with a notion of openness, constant mobility and change. Weiss-Sussex defines the concept of the urban neighbourhood in spatial and relational terms – as based on space, but without fixed or even describable borders, constantly changing over time, and constituted by social practice and encounters between different, at times even antagonistic, city dwellers: "localized everyday life".[47] Heterogeneity and fluidity are characteristics of all neighbourhoods understood in this way, but the transnational neighbourhoods investigated here bring these constitutive elements to the fore. She regards cultural production, and specifically writing, as an expression of deterritorialisation and of not-quite-belonging, and goes on to explore how literary writing can capture and support the idea of a successful, vibrant transnational neighbourhood. How can it reflect – and what possibilities does it have to reflect upon – the constantly shifting spatial and relational characteristics that make up these neighbourhoods? How can it provide a sense of the "productive social and cultural friction [of the] throwntogetherness"[48] that constitutes them, while resisting expectations of cohesion and notions of harmonisation? The texts in her case study both evoke and celebrate the freedom of the stranger in a new city; the deterri-

torialisation of the self is seen as a productive and energising force. Such a state is – by definition – transitory, and fittingly, all groups of belonging described in this text on New York are transitory, too; they are temporary, constituted with the awareness of their impermanence, and they are conscious of their heterogeneity.

On the other hand, Emilio Rodriguez Maceda's ethnographic study 'All Saints Catholic Church in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, NYC: From Religious Space to Transnational Territory of Multiterritorial Mexican Immigrants' takes a sociological-ethnographic approach and explores what happens when the same territory is appropriated by various social groups with different cultural, social, economic and political practices. In the church, the immigrant community is territorialised, deterritorialised and reterritorialised. The fact that different groups coexist in this same space, and that each one contributes its own characteristics at the time of territorialising it, makes this church a multiterritorial and transnational space, since the links that immigrants have built with their places of origin influence the activities that take place in the church. He uses the writing of Rogério Haesbaert who, critiquing the way in which the concept of deterritorialisation has been understood as destruction or abandonment of a territory, instead suggests that it should be thought of as a process where the territory is reconsidered, reterritorialised, and where at the same time multiple territorialities emerge simultaneously.[49] In this sense, deterritorialisation is not only seen as negative, but it also raises the positive meaning where not only the idea of destruction is present, but also the reconstruction and construction of new territories. These subaltern groups are territorialised in spaces where, usually, they do not have the concrete and definitive domination of the territory but can have a more symbolic and experiential appropriation of the space, as migrants are one of the groups that experience the appropriation of space based on multiple territorialities, since, when travelling through different territories, they accumulate experiences and feelings on their way. With this, migrants manage to develop multiterritoriality, where they have the possibility of having simultaneous experiences in different territories. In this context of migration, there are some migrants who manage to establish strong ties with other members of their community, even in different countries; other migrants develop the possibility of travelling through foreign territories, especially those who live in precarious conditions and are forced to enter or transit through territories that belong to others. They are very conscious that they belong to multiple spaces, and that they have appropriated those spaces, not only symbolically, but also physically. Haesbaert defines this as successive multiterritoriality, while Ulrich Beck describes this as topopolygamy, i.e. being married to several places at the same time.[50]

The downside to this development is a strong regime of social and spatial injustice, as Anna Marta Marini discusses in her chapter 'The Materiality of the

Wall(s): Mural Art and Counterspace Appropriation in El Paso's Chihuahuita and El Segundo Barrio', which brings in cultural studies and critically examines the street art and visual representation of a transnational community at the US–Mexican border. Marini traces the community's connection with both the border itself and the other side, embodied in the hybrid reproduction of Mexican traditions and iconography. Exploring Edward Soja's works, she argues that the necessity to fight for spatial justice evidences that space and its (re)arrangement are strictly related to the sociocultural milieu.[51] A differential development of urban planning and the implementation of unequal urban policies evidently have a role in (re)producing social injustice. The tentative counter-appropriation of the neighbourhood and the creation of spaces that represent the community allow the minority population to assume a position that is simultaneously marginalised by the dominant society and centred within the neighbourhood.

Gad Schaffer's chapter, 'The Quiet Unification of a Divided City: Jerusalem's Train-Track Park', adds then a human geographical perspective and takes a closer look at the redevelopment of a derelict railway track into a new urban park by the City of Jerusalem, which was inaugurated in 2012, examining how, over time, borders shape space and consequently influence people. In this case, the physical and mental borders of eight demographically diverse Jerusalem neighbourhoods are displayed. Segregated by socio-economic and ethno-religious differences as well as legal status, the park passes through the neighbourhoods in an attempt to transform them into an area of transnational movement and encounters between the neighbourhoods' residents, allowing for a quiet unification. Since sustainable development is commonly seen as the right way to promote development that simultaneously enhances social equality and protects the environment,[52] Schaffer's analysis focuses on one feature of sustainable development, i.e. the social aspect, in particular by examining whether the new park promotes environmental justice and whether it has created a process of gentrification, which is often associated with such new redevelopment projects.

Social and spatial practices between different neighbourhood communities are also played out in a simultaneity of different temporalities, both as mnemonic practices as well as cultural and semantic encodings that allow for different communities to coexist in the same space. In her literary chapter 'Territories of Otherness: Genoa's Prè Neighbourhood as a Deviant Terrain and Exotic Counterspace in Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer's *La Superba* (2013)', Britta C. Jung explores the Dutch author's depiction of Genoa and, particularly, its migrant neighbourhood Prè. She takes a lead from Massey's and Wendy Wolford's conclusion that we need to move beyond the social construction of space by also incorporating the spatial construction of the social, i.e. the extent to which the physical environment of a city or its neighbourhoods is, as Wolford puts it, "internalized, embodied, imag-

ined, and remembered."[53] Employing the term 'spatial imaginaries', Wolford goes on to define the spatial construction of the social as "cognitive frameworks, both collective and individual, constituted through the lived experiences, perceptions, and conceptions of space itself".[54] Jung argues that Pfeijffer (re)charts the Mediterranean spatial imaginary by casting the port city of Genoa as a gateway to Europe and a migratory junction in both a spatial and a temporal sense. As a result, Genoa becomes a multiterritorial, geographically and socioculturally ambiguous non-European Other and a counterspace to northern European urbanity, with Prè the focal point of – or a valve for – the narrator's colonial gaze.

Similarly, Naomi Wells' linguistic chapter 'Networking and Representing the Transnational Neighbourhood Online: The Linguistic Landscapes of Latin Americans in London's Seven Sisters' delves into the ephemeral qualities of transcultural places and uses the example of commercial spaces in London neighbourhoods such as Seven Sisters to illustrate how Latin American communities construct and sustain a highly localised identity through a wider transnational network of online communications and spatial representations. Due to their associations with trajectories of mobility, transnational neighbourhoods may risk being perceived as inherently transitory and temporary spaces, and while in practice it may be true that all spaces are as Massey explains always in a process of "becoming",[55] such a fleeting spatial identity can pose a real risk to those who inhabit these spaces and leave them without the means by which to sustain their continued existence within them. This points to the contradictions of political discourses that both seek to demonise *ethnic enclaves* and *parallel lives*, while simultaneously fostering a system whereby it becomes necessary to adopt a single and unified 'ethnic' identity to gain visibility and recognition.[56]

Daniela Bohórquez Sheinin's anthropological chapter 'Ruins and Representation: Remembering Flushing Meadows–Corona Park in Queens, New York City', on the other hand, traces the shifting formations and understandings of the transnational neighbourhoods that surround Flushing Meadows–Corona Park in Queens, New York City. By exploring the shifting populations in the vicinity of the park following the World Fair in 1964–1965, the chapter frames it not only as a physical space for the convergence for generations of immigrants from around the world but also as memory, exploring spatial imaginaries in the context of overlapping temporalities attached to the same urban environment by different communities. While neighbourhood demographics have shifted over time, the physical environment has remained, suffused each day with multi-national and multi-ethnic meanings by its diverse occupants who refashioned the space in their neighbourhood's image. The transnational neighbourhood, from this lens, operates in different modes of identity formation for different populations. Discussing New York's Flushing Meadows–Corona Park in Queens, her

interviews show that, for ethnic whites, the park has come to operate as a material buttress for memory, a touchstone for the specific transnational constellation of communities the park and its neighbourhoods once housed decades ago. For many first- and second-generation Latin American immigrants, however, Flushing Meadows–Corona Park became a material and symbolic marker of the present and the future, with all of the opportunities, anxieties, harmonies and contestations implied thereby.

Lastly, the many chapters in this volume explore whether cultural production – be it street art or a literary text – can be regarded as a direct form of expressing and performing agency within the transnational neighbourhood, as well as providing a congenial medium to capturing it. Emma Crowley's chapter '"Your Allah can't see you here": Moscow's Subterranean Spaces and Dissimulated Life in Svetlana Alexievich's *Vremya sekond khend* (2013)', for instance, examines how Alexievich's polyphonic representation of urban Moscow challenges the way the Soviet past and the post-Soviet neighbourhood are entwined, focalising the oft-forgotten imperialist legacies of Soviet modernity and the particular transnationalism that it has produced. Employing Bakhtin, Crowley analyses how *polyphonic storytelling* is one mimetic mode to encapsulate the simultaneity of spatial and social agency, arguing that the technique of counterpoint illuminates the relational quality of divergent and opposing voices, creating a dialogic structure that can reveal the distinct forces at play in the structure of a novel.[57] She suggests that such a composition can also invoke a paratactic style, which, borrowing from the literary critic Edward Said, places together words or phrases independently, in a neighbourly manner, as it were, without coordinating them or subordinating them through the use of conjunctions.[58] For Said, parataxis as a literary device invites comparison while maintaining an ambiguous distance from the meaning of relation. In Crowley's analysis, the transnational neighbourhood is not so much a space of connection as a stifled multiplicity in which barriers mark out linguistic, ethnic and economic differences.

In addition to representation, Christina Horvath's chapter 'Challenging Accusations of Separatism: Transnational Neighbourhood and Vernacular Cosmopolitanism in Insa Sané's *Comédie urbaine* (2006–2017)' provides a literary analysis of one of Europe's most well-known banlieues, Sarcelles, which is located in the northern outskirts of Paris and home to a substantial number of *pieds-noirs*,[59] Assyrians, Sephardic Jews, and Caribbeans. She shows that culture can counter negative preconceptions about multiculturalism. Instead of the often-evoked conflict, these neighbourhoods are liminal spaces or contact zones in which heterogeneous populations tend to negotiate their differences on a daily basis while producing a new, vernacular form of cosmopolitanism. In her chapter, she analyses how the transcultural neighbourhood as narrated in novels is used to chal-

lenge dystopian representations of French banlieues and dismantle the myths of separatism and ghettoisation by proposing a vernacular cosmopolitan vision of banlieues as contact zones in which, despite the frictions resulting from the residents' exposure to economic hardship and different forms of otherness, the ideal of *mixité sociale* [localised social diversity] is at least partially accomplished. The transnational neighbourhood, in this case, is represented as a translocal space in which the networking and negotiation of different belongings and allegiances is continually in progress. As opposed to the imagined harmony which characterises the republican ideal of *mixité sociale*, the banlieue of Sarcelles is depicted as a contact zone where tensions and frictions exist and require constant mitigation. Defined by Mary Louise Pratt as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today",[60] contact zones are territories in which the coexistence of different languages, religions, culinary traditions can be occasionally chaotic or conflictual. Raised in such a contact zone, Sarcellois youths learn to co-habit with the Other from an early age and acquire thereby a vernacular cosmopolitan orientation.

Mary Mazzilli's chapter 'Transnational Neighbourhood and Theatrical Practices: The Concept of Home, Negotiating Strangeness and Familiarity, and the Experience of Migrant Communities in North Essex', on the other hand, takes both a theoretical as well as a creative approach and introduces community theatre as a performative space that can transform strangeness into familiarity. Mazzilli's *Human Side of Migration* project has involved migrant communities from the North Essex region in a research process that informed the writing of her stage play *Priority Seating*. On a theoretical level, her investigation of the reality of migrants in North Essex as a transitional urban network moves away from the definition of transnational neighbourhood as the 'other', but implies interconnectivity among different migrant communities and between migrant communities and local non-migrant communities. Mazzilli analyses agency arising from the tension of strangeness/familiarity as connected to the migrant experience, the concept of home and their interrelations, and argues that these can be brought to the fore through the theatrical medium. In particular, Mazzilli focuses on the question of space and place, employed as an educational tool to affect young people's understanding of migration and home. She uses Sanja Bahun and Bojana Petric's works on the connection between home and community, who describe the "close interaction, indeed co-formation, of (the ideas of) home and community" and proposes the notion of home as an affect, which has capacity to be experienced as polycentric, thus, as attached to a point of origin as well as of destination. The emotional dimension of home and home-making

considers home "as it interacts with human values and human rights in various communities".[61] Mazzilli applies this notion to the migrant experience and suggests that, in their building up a sense of home, while assimilating the host culture, this describes the potential for migrants to form multidimensional emotional ties not only with the host community. Furthermore, it also applies to the many communities in the host country and with communities in their country of origin, thus generating further and extended communities that live and develop beyond national boundaries and geographies. Thus, Mazzilli argues that transnational neighbourhoods imply connections between communities at the micro level of communities rather than at macro level of cultural and national systems, where a sense of home as affect is formed and informs much of the migrant experience. Working at a micro level, her theatre project further empowers this microcosm of interactions, creating a shared place, a common ground facilitating the polycentric and multidimensional discourses and interactions among communities.

Structure

Engaging critically with the transnational, translocal and transcultural turn, the present volume filters these debates through the lens of geography, ethnography and anthropology, as well as literary and cultural studies. It investigates, analyses and presents its findings through close readings of cultural phenomena that always reflect broader theoretical and socio-political issues, and thus establish a multidisciplinary conceptualisation for the transnational neighbourhood. Indeed, the volume is the first to establish the *transnational neighbourhood* as an innovative concept through which recent debates around transnationalism and transculturality can be approached. As such it is a key intervention in the areas of transnational and transcultural studies that allows for a range of fresh perspectives and enables us to move past dominant binaries (global/local, flows/frictions, borders/borderlessness, etc.).

The volume was conceived as an interdisciplinary and comparative whole that best communicates its transnational design when read as one piece, thus allowing the different case studies to intertwine their overlapping characteristics, while each individual chapter will mainly zoom into one specific urban neighbourhood and explore the concept of the transnational neighbourhood through a monodisciplinary lens. However, we alternatively envisioned that the volume can be used by readers choosing to read the introduction and then those chapters that concern phenomena, areas or disciplinary, theoretical and methodological approaches they are interested in.

The volume opens with a first introductory chapter (Horvath) that explores one of Europe's most well-known banlieues, Sarcelles, just north of Paris. Horvath's analysis of Insa Sané's cycle *Comédie urbaine* (2006–2017) shows how the novels subvert some of the prejudices which surround stigmatised banlieues in the French spatial imagination as hubs of delinquency, Islamic radicalisation, discrimination against women and hatred for the republican law and order, and instead explore different aspects of a transnational neighbourhood marked by ethnic and religious diversity, colonial legacies and the residents' ambiguous feelings about the French capital.

The volume's first section, 'Virtual Neighbourhoods', examines how the World Wide Web as a global information medium has transposed the notion of neighbourhood into a simulated or the virtual world throughout the World Wide Web. Since its inception in 1989, it has become an integral part of transnational communities, connecting people, territories, cultures and ideas, irrespective of their physical-geographical location. On the one hand, the dis-located and dis-embodied non-space of the internet allows for migrant encounters as a coping mechanism for the multiple layers of the migrant experience, while on the other hand it facilitates the multiterritorial simultaneous interconnectedness linking different geographical regions, as well as space mapping the different linguistic communities within geographical neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the continuous digitised connectivity as part of a drastically changed global mediascape impacts on the way in which the experience of cultural identity, migration, but also displacement, is resignified and transformed by new digital affordances from different vantage points.[62] Finally in this section, the volume critically engages with linguistic landscape studies, which have become a primary method in sociolinguistic research for investigating the multilingual makeup of specific neighbourhoods, with emplaced public signs often treated as indicators of a place's transnational or 'superdiverse' identity. However, whilst neighbourhoods are often conceptualised as physical, offline spaces, much of what we observe offline – including public signs – is connected to and/or premised on the online presence of these spaces.[63] These virtual neighbourhoods therefore challenge common perceptions of spatiality and placeness, and simultaneously foster new forms of agency and temporality.

The second section, 'Overlapping Neighbourhoods', explores the cultural, historical and mnemonic semantics of bordering neighbourhoods. These are characterised by a simultaneity of visible and invisible borders that demarcate a hybridity of social and historical layers of segregation, the neighbourhoods that are performed through social ethnic codes, cultural identity markers and different overlapping space-claiming practices. The chapters in this section explore the spatial-geographical overlapping of neighbourhoods inasmuch as they can both

coincide and clash with temporal perceptions, appropriations, as well as spatial practices through transcultural users.

The third section, 'Negotiating Strangeness and Mobile Neighbourhoods', gathers polyphonic perspectives and strategies of the migrant experience by negotiating the correlating binaries of distance and belonging as well as familiarity and constant mobility while attempting to appropriate a place of one's own, build a new community, and create visibility within hegemonial and hierarchical social settings. Hence, the focus of the chapters in this final section is directed towards the agency of migrants putting their spatio-temporal experiences into transcultural practices, for which the transnational neighbourhood represents the central space of action and negotiation.

Bringing together these different disciplinary and interdisciplinary angles on the transnational neighbourhood, combining a variety of research methods and exploring it in the physical as well as the social and cultural world, this volume aims to make a contribution to transnational, transcultural and translocal neighbourhood studies by focusing on the neighbourhood as a central space of everyday lived experience and community-building alongside cultural, social and historical obstacles. With the 'Transnational Neighbourhood', the volume proposes a concept that lends itself to further exploration both in a theoretical sense as well as applied research. With the proposed sections differentiating the three different levels of discourse (i.e. the virtual, the physical (trans)local and the transnational-global) emerging around the simultaneity of three key focal points (spatiality, temporality and agency) we hope to offer a first starting point for a future engagement with the concept.

Notes

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2. In January 2020 the World Economic Forum estimated that 272 million people or 3.5% of the world's population were international migrants, tripling the number of people living in a country other than they were born in since 1970 and already surpassing some projections for 2050. Cf. Edmond, Charlotte (2020): Global Migration, by the Numbers: Who Migrates, Where They Go and Why, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/iom-global-migration-report-international-migrants-2020/.

3. Generally speaking, the term 'transmigrant' refers to an emigrant passing through a country en route to another one where they will settle as an immigrant. Cf. e.g. Merriam Webster's definition. However, Nina Glick Schiller and others have come to use the term 'transmigrant' more specifically to describe mobile subjects that create and

sustain multiple social relations that link together their societies of origin and residence. These mobile subjects are viewed as transnational migrants or transmigrants to distinguish them from migrants and immigrants. Cf. Glick Schiller, Nina, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1995): From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration. *Anthropological Quarterly* 68(1), 48–63; Basch, Linda G., Nina Glick Schiller, and Blanc Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994): *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. London: Gordon and Breach.

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6. Dikeç, Mustafa (2007): *Badlands of the Republic: Space, Politics and Urban Policy*. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell.

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8. Indeed, the 2005 riot in Clichy-sous-Bois follows in the tradition of banlieue revolts such as the 1990 (and 1992) riot in Lyon's Vaulx-en-Velin which – as a neighbourhood – remains a major reference point in debates around urban planning and banlieues. Cf. Dikeç (2007), 14.

9. Jein (2021), 222. Cf. also Koff, Harlan, and Dominique Duprez (2009): The 2005 Riots in France: The International Impact of Domestic Violence. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35(5), 713–730.

10. Jein, Gillian (2015): (De)Facing the Suburbs: Street Art and the Politics of Spatial Affect in the Paris Banlieues. *The DS Project: Image, Text, Space/Place, 1830–2015*, http://thedsproject.com/. Accessed 28 June 2021.

11. Jein (2021), 235ff. JR's self-descriptive term *photograffeur* is a portmanteau of *photographer* and *graffeur*, i.e. the French word for graffiti artist.

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