

The background of the cover is a complex architectural line drawing in white on a dark blue background. It features various geometric shapes, including circles, arcs, and straight lines, suggesting a plan or section of a building. The drawing is dense and intricate, with many overlapping lines and patterns.

The Refiguration of Space

SPATIAL CONFLICTS AND CONFLICTUAL SPACES

THE DYNAMICS OF REFIGURATION

Edited by Hubert Knoblauch,
Vivien Sommer, and Barbara Pfetsch



Spatial Conflicts and Conflictual Spaces

This volume explores the refiguration of space as a theoretical framework, presenting empirical studies on spatial conflicts and emerging conflictual spaces across different regions and scales. It contains contributions which follow varied theoretical threads and represent different geospatial standpoints, but which relate to the thesis of the refiguration of space as a new phase after globalization.

By adopting a spatial lens, the book offers insights into the dynamics of social order in the post-globalization era, examining how conflicts arise within space and how spatial dynamics shape social tensions. The chapters unpack the interplay between human aspirations and geographical limitations and use the concept of (re)figuration to underline the trans-scalar dimension of most social conflicts, which is massively expanded by digital mediatization, public communication and its refigured infrastructures. While emphasizing the empirical analysis of conflicts in space, the edited volume also seeks to identify general principles of the spatial dynamics of social conflicts. It is this “spatial logic” underlying conflictual situations that the book addresses with the term “spatial conflicts.”

This volume will be of interest to students and researchers in sociology, anthropology, geography, urban studies, communication studies, political science, and globalization and peace studies.

Hubert Knoblauch is Professor for General Sociology/Theories of Modern Society at the Technische Universität Berlin and Co-Chair of the Collaborative Research Center (CRC 1265) “Re-Figuration of Spaces” with Martina Löw. His main research areas include Sociological Theory, Sociology of Knowledge, Religion, Language, Qualitative Methods, Videography. He recently published the monograph *The Communicative Construction of Reality* (2020).

Vivien Sommer, Dr is a sociologist researching knowledge, practices, and memory with a focus on European borders. Since 2023, she leads the

Emmy Noether Junior Research Group on socio-spatial memory at the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space and is part of the Collaborative Research Center (CRC 1265) “Re-Figuration of Spaces” at Technische Universität Berlin. Her work focuses on empirically grounded theory development in the fields of Sociology of Knowledge and Space, as well as the development of innovative qualitative methods.

Barbara Pfetsch is Professor of Communication Theory and Media Effects research at Freie Universität Berlin and a principal investigator at the Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society. Her research and publications focus on comparative political communication, online communication and digital issue networks, and transnational and European public spheres.

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.

Series Editors

Hubert Knoblauch is Professor of Sociology at Technische Universität Berlin, Germany.

Martina Löw is Professor of the Sociology of Planning and Architecture at the Technische Universität Berlin, Germany.

Titles in the series

Intersectionality and the City

Exploring Violence and Inequality in Urban Space

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

Spatial Conflicts and Conflictual Spaces

The Dynamics of Refiguration

Edited by Hubert Knoblauch, Vivien Sommer, and Barbara Pfetsch

For more information about this series, please visit: <https://www.routledge.com/The-Refiguration-of-Space/book-series/ROS>



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Spatial Conflicts and Conflictual Spaces

The Dynamics of Refiguration

**Edited by Hubert Knoblauch,
Vivien Sommer, and Barbara Pfetsch**



ROUTLEDGE

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2026
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2026 selection and editorial matter, Hubert Knoblauch, Vivien Sommer, and Barbara Pfetsch; individual chapters, the contributors

The right of Hubert Knoblauch, Vivien Sommer, and Barbara Pfetsch to be identified as the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

The Open Access version of this book, available at www.taylorfrancis.com, has been made available under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

Any third party material in this book is not included in the OA Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. Please direct any permissions enquiries to the original rightsholder.

Supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG) - project number 290045248 - SFB 1265 and the Open-Access Publication Fund of the Technische Universität Berlin.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 9781032868165 (hbk)

ISBN: 9781032894317 (pbk)

ISBN: 9781003542810 (ebk)

DOI: [10.4324/9781003542810](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003542810)

Typeset in Sabon
by KnowledgeWorks Global Ltd.

Contents

<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xv</i>
1 Introduction: Spatial conflicts and conflictual spaces in the age of refiguration—Current research perspectives	1
HUBERT KNOBLAUCH, VIVIEN SOMMER, AND BARBARA PFETSCH	
2 Containing or acting on conflict through space: A heuristic of conflict–space interplay	27
ZOZAN BARAN AND BARBARA PFETSCH	
PART I	
Macroregimes and spatial conflicts	47
3 Regional free movement: Ongoing spatial conflicts between macroterritorial and national levels—A case study of ECOWAS, the EU, and Mercosur	49
ZOÉ PERKO AND DOROTHEA BIABACK ANONG	
4 Conflicts of modernities: The spaces of health care in French-speaking West African popular culture	71
SÉVERINE MARGUIN AND DADDY DIBINGA	

PART II	
Tensions in digital spaces	95
5 Borders on the internet? The RIPE debate about the internet in the wake of the war in Ukraine	97
SEZGIN SÖNMEZ AND HUBERT KNOBLAUCH	
6 From safe(r) space to safe(r) spacing: Queer spatial conflict in Cape Town and Berlin	121
NICOLAS ZEHNER, INGO SCHULZ-SCHAEFFER, DANIEL GRÖNEFELD, AND PHILIP BAUMBACH	
7 Algorithmic regulation across physical and digital spaces: Analyzing Airbnb's marketplace in US and European cities over time	140
STEFAN KIRCHNER AND SIMON C. POHL	
PART III	
Land rights and conflictual spaces	165
8 Notions of land—Figurations of conflict: Spatial forms of conflicts and the making of Kaloleni and Makongeni	167
MAKAU KITATA AND JOCHEN KIBEL	
9 The (re)making of conflictual spaces: New urban frontiers and infrastructure-led development in Nairobi	191
ALEXANDER KOHRS, LINDA HERING, AND JOHN K. SHADRACK	
10 Spatial tensions and conflict: Forcibly displaced people in Lagos and Amman	213
QUSAY AMER, REBECCA ENOBONG ROBERTS, AND FRANCESCA CEOLA	
PART IV	
Social exclusion and spatial knowledge	235
11 Spatial conflict containment in Singapore: Pacifying conflictual spaces by (in)visibilizing them in urban infrastructure	237
NINA BAUR AND ELMAR KULKE	

12 Growing up (un)knowingly in a cage: Youths’ conflictive spatial knowledge	264
IGNACIO CASTILLO ULLOA, ANNA JULIANE HEINRICH, ANGELA MILLION, AND LUDOVICA TOMARCHIO	
13 Beyond remembrance: Spatial dynamics in commemorating racist violence in Solingen and Rostock	286
KÜBRA GENCAL, EMMA LUNA BRAHM, AND DANIEL KUBIAK	
PART V	
Struggles over ecology and space	307
14 Socioecological transformation and conflict: Arenas, topics, and dimensions	309
MIRIAM SCHAD AND BERND SOMMER	
15 The spatial dimension of climate justice conflicts and solidarities: A conceptual model	330
DANIELA STOLTENBERG, BARBARA PFETSCH, ZOZAN BARAN, AND ANNIE WALDHERR	
16 Conflicts along the “fresh air corridors” of Stuttgart: The figurational politics of climate adaptation	352
INDRAWAN PRABAHARYAKA AND IGNACIO FARIÁS	
<i>Index</i>	373

List of Contributors

Qusay Amer is an architect and PhD candidate at the Habitat Unit research group of the Technische Universität Berlin. He is a research assistant in the CRC 1265 subproject “Architectures of Asylum,” in which he studies the production of physical spaces for and by migration, refugees’ urban agency, and trans-local (urban) spatial governance.

Dorothea Biaback Anong is a PhD candidate and research associate at the Department for Social Sciences at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. In the subproject “The Borders of the World II” at the CRC 1265, she studies selectivity in regional mobility regimes in Mercosur, ECOWAS, and the EU.

Zozan Baran is a PhD candidate and a research associate at Freie Universität Berlin, Institute for Media and Communication Studies, and the CRC 1265. Her research interests include social movements, space and place in contentious politics, digital activism, and climate justice.

Philip Baumbach is a student assistant at the CRC 1265. He studies sociology with technical specification at Technische Universität Berlin. In his work, he focuses on the effects of digitization processes on our daily lives, especially regarding strategies of urban development and the constitution of different spatial realities.

Nina Baur is Professor for Methods of Social Research at Technische Universität Berlin and PI in the subproject “Knowledge and Goods II” at the CRC 1265. Her research fields include social science methodology, process sociology, spatial sociology, and economic sociology (including sociology of consumption and sociology of work).

Emma Luna Brahm is a research associate in the DeZIM project “Spaces of Migration Society” at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (IKG) in Bielefeld. Her research focuses on the

memory of racist violence, particularly on the spatial-material dimensions and conflictual negotiations that emerge in this context.

Ignacio Castillo Ulloa, PhD, is a researcher and lecturer at the Chair of Urban Design and Urban Development at Technische Universität Berlin, a member of the CRC 1265, and scientific coordinator of the Global Center of Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability (SMUS).

Francesca Ceola is a geographer and PhD candidate at the Habitat Unit research group of Technische Universität Berlin. She is a research assistant in the CRC 1265 subproject “Architectures of Asylum” and focuses on mapping the intersections between forced displacement, makeshift urbanisms, and socio-political ecologies in shifting landscapes in Lagos.

Daddy Dibinga is a researcher in film studies and a PhD candidate in the subproject “Streaming Series: Spatial Stories and Production Regimes in Afronovelas” at the CRC 1265 at Technische Universität Berlin.

Ignacio Farías is a professor of Urban Anthropology at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and leads the CRC 1265 subproject “Urban Microclimate Planning Regimes”. His research addresses current ecological and infrastructural transformations of cities and the experimentation with ethnography as a mode of city-making performed with others and by multimodal means.

Kübra Gencal is a research associate at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (IKG) at Bielefeld University. Her research interests include social inequality, the experience of racism and discrimination, and urban and migration studies.

Daniel Grönefeld completed his BA in Sociology at Technische Universität Berlin and is currently pursuing a master’s degree at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. His bachelor thesis was based on empirical data of the CRC project and focused on the negotiation of uncertainty in the initiation of sexual encounters between physically co-located Grindr users.

Anna Juliane Heinrich, PhD, is a researcher and lecturer at the Chair of Urban Design and Urban Development at Technische Universität Berlin. She is PI of the project “The Spatial Knowledge of Young Adults” and co-head of the graduate school at the CRC 1265.

Linda Hering is a sociologist and postdoctoral researcher at CRC 1265, at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her main areas of interest are agrifood studies, the sociology of space, and sustainable transformation.

Jochen Kibel is a research associate at the Institute of Sociology at Technische Universität Berlin and PI at the CRC 1265. His research examines

the relationship between subjectivation, colonial architecture, and spatial planning. In 2023, he was a visiting fellow at the University of Nairobi.

Stefan Kirchner is Professor for economic and labor sociology. His research focuses on social orders brought about digital platforms and the emerging empirical opportunities that come with platform data.

Makau Kitata teaches literature at the University of Nairobi. He is a collaborating researcher with Technische Universität Berlin's CRC 1265. His research connects literature and popular culture, space, and architecture to the history of decolonization in Kenya. In 2023 and 2024, he was a visiting research fellow at Technische Universität Berlin.

Hubert Knoblauch is a professor for General Sociology/Theories of Modern Society at Technische Universität Berlin and Co-Chair of the CRC 1265 with Martina Löw. His main research areas are sociological theory, sociology of knowledge, religion, language, qualitative methods, and videography.

Alexander Kohrs is a research associate and PhD candidate at CRC 1265. He is currently working in the field of urban geography, exploring the development of food markets and urban food consumption in fragmented urbanization processes at Nairobi's periphery.

Daniel Kubiak, Dr., is a social scientist at the Berlin Institute for Empirical Integration and Migration Research at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. He is conducting research and published on post-reunification identity, East German migration society, and the politics of memory. He is also co-host of the podcasts Berlin.Ost.Migrantisch and Musi*Sociology.

Elmar Kulke is Professor for Economic Geography at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. He is the spokesman of the working group Retail Geography and director of the EAGER Trans Net. His areas of research are geographies and internationalization of retailing, food systems, and commodity chains of agricultural products.

Séverine Marguin, Dr., is a cultural sociologist and head of the Methods Lab at CRC 1265 at Technische Universität Berlin. She leads the subproject "Streaming Series: Spatial Stories and Production Regimes in Afronovelas." Her main areas of interest are the spatial sociology of cultural production, design-based methods, and nature-culture relationships.

Angela Million is Professor of Urban Design and Urban Development and co-director of the Global Center of Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability (SMUS) at Technische Universität Berlin. She is PI of the subproject "The spatial knowledge of young adults" at the CRC 1265.

Zoé Perko is a PhD candidate and research associate at the Department for Social Sciences at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. She is a researcher in the subproject “The Borders of the World II” at the CRC 1265, focusing on conflicts emerging around regional free movement in Mercosur, ECOWAS, and the EU.

Barbara Pfetsch is Professor of communication theory and media effects research at Freie Universität Berlin and a principal investigator at the Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society. Her research and publications focus on comparative political communication, online communication and digital issue networks, and transnational and European public spheres.

Simon C. Pohl is a doctoral candidate and research associate at the CRC 1265. His research focuses on the socio-spatial dimensions of the platform economy, especially in relation to regulatory efforts by state actors and platform operators.

Indrawan Prabaharyaka is a postdoctoral researcher at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and a research associate in the CRC 1265 subproject “Urban Microclimate Planning Regime”. He has been studying the application of climatology in urban planning in Stuttgart.

Rebecca Enobong Roberts is a development economist and PhD candidate at Technische Universität Berlin’s Habitat Unit. Her dissertation examines the intersectionality between internal displacement and forced migration in the context of sustainable and inclusive urbanization through a case study of migration from Nigeria to the metropolis of Lagos.

Miriam Schad, Dr., is postdoctoral research associate at the Faculty of Social Science at TU Dortmund. Her previous experience includes working in the field of climate culture at the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI) in Essen, and studying sociology at Philipps University in Marburg.

John K. Shadrack is an urban geographer with research interests in nature-based solutions, urban agriculture, and urban livelihoods. He is currently exploring the role of green roofs in mitigating modern climate issues in Nairobi.

Ingo Schulz-Schaeffer is Professor of sociology of technology and innovation at the Technische Universität Berlin. He is an editor of the “Zeitschrift für Soziologie” and the managing editor of the “Soziologische Revue.” He has a long-term interest in the social theory of technology with a focus on technological agency.

Bernd Sommer is Professor for Environmental Sociology and Transformation Research at the Faculty of Social Science at TU Dortmund. After

obtaining his Dr. Phil. in Sociology from Leibniz University Hannover in 2010, he conducted research in various positions in the fields of sustainability, socio-ecological transformation, and on the societal dimensions of climate change.

Vivien Sommer, Dr. is a sociologist researching knowledge, practices, and memory with a focus on European borders. She leads the Emmy Noether Junior Research Group on socio-spatial memory at the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space and is part of the Collaborative Research Center (CRC 1265) “Re-Figuration of Spaces” at Technische Universität Berlin.

Sezgin Sönmez, Dr., is a research associate in the project “Control/Space” at the CRC 1265 at Technische Universität Berlin, where he analyzes the spatiality of digital infrastructures in contextures, maps, and discourses.

Daniela Stoltenberg is a postdoctoral researcher at Freie Universität Berlin, Institute for Media and Communication Studies, and the CRC 1265. Her research interests include digital public spheres and the relationship between communication and the construction of space, as well as computational research methods.

Ludovica Tomarchio, PhD, is a postdoctoral researcher at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK), focusing on the intersections of architecture, social media, and spaces.

Annie Waldherr is Professor of computational communication science at the University of Vienna. She studies the changing structures and dynamics in today’s digitized public spheres, combining computational and conventional empirical methods.

Nicolas Zehner, PhD, is a postdoctoral researcher at the CRC 1265 at Technische Universität Berlin, as well as an associated researcher at the Weizenbaum Institute. He holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Edinburgh. His research investigates the co-constitutive relationship between science, technology, and urban development.

Acknowledgments

This book was supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG)—project number 290045248—SFB 1265 as well as by the Open-Access Publication Fund of the Technische Universität Berlin.

The editors would like to thank Inès Gartlinger for her invaluable support in putting this book together.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

1 Introduction

Spatial conflicts and conflictual spaces¹ in the age of refiguration—Current research perspectives

*Hubert Knoblauch, Vivien Sommer,
and Barbara Pfetsch*

Refiguration and conflicts

“The Re-Figuration of Spaces” is the title of a Collaborative Research Center and at the same time its main hypothesis. This volume and a number of the contributions in this issue are the result of projects and collaborations within the Research Center as well as of other researchers studying conflicts in space. With the concept of refiguration, we want to address, first, how contemporary social changes, and the conflicts, crises, and uncertainties they entail, affect people’s relationship to spaces, their spatial practices and knowledge, institutions, and structures; second, how people communicate, negotiate, and powerfully construct spatial orders; and third, how changes in spatial actions and formations affect the social order and its transformations. These three questions presuppose some basic reflections on social theory and the communicative construction of space, which we have also elaborated elsewhere (Löw [2001] 2016; Knoblauch 2020; Christmann, Knoblauch, and Löw 2022). In our introduction to this volume, we attempt to articulate the basic theses that emerge from our reflections on refiguration, space, and conflict.

One of our main theses is that space is the medium in which the refiguration of any society takes place (Knoblauch and Löw 2020). We assume that what is social always takes on spatial forms. While this view has become generally accepted in scientific discourses following the so-called “spatial turn” (Soja 1989; Löw [2001] 2016; Waldherr, Klinger, and Pfetsch 2021), it still overlooks a crucial point: that the current crises, conflicts, and insecurities are also inherently spatial. They affect the relationship between people and spaces, influence spatial practices, and shape how people negotiate and construct spatial orders. That is, they do not just happen in space, they are also spatial. It is the idea of refiguration of space that is meant to describe the conflictual dynamics between these intertwined elements and dimensions that underlie this societal transformation.

2 *Spatial Conflicts and Conflictual Spaces*

Before reviewing the state of the art and empirical studies on conflict and space, we first seek to clarify how we understand the sociality of space in general. We do this by drawing on Martina Löw's (2016; first published in 2001) relational theory of space. Her approach to a sociology of space is based on the idea that spatial structures or "arrangements" are constructed in the objectifying social actions of individuals, which in turn affect the subjects' knowledge, imagination, and "sense of space." Löw understands space as a "relational arrangement of living beings and social goods" (Löw [2001] 2016, ix). Space emerges in human action—that is, in the arrangement of things—and is at the same time a spatial order that precedes action. According to Löw, spatial orders are formed primarily through the development and institutional consolidation of routine actions. With regard to space, Löw makes an analytical distinction between two different aspects of spatial formation, which are empirically interdependent: "spacing" and the "operation of synthesis" (Löw [2001] 2016, 135). Spacing means erecting, setting up, or positioning social goods and living beings (including oneself) in places. Social goods are then the result of material and symbolic actions. They can be divided into primarily symbolic goods (such as songs, values, and rules) and primarily material goods (such as houses, tables, and chairs), with both components being empirically combined in almost all cases. Löw argues, however, that an arrangement created through acts of spacing only becomes effective as a space when the person actively fuses the arranged elements into spaces through processes of perception, imagination, or memory. Löw calls this the operation of synthesis, that is, "goods and people are amalgamated to spaces by way of processes of perception, imagination, and memory" (Löw [2001] 2016, 135).

This notion of space provides the background for most of the empirical studies in this volume. Apart from their focus on conflict, to which we turn in the following, the empirical studies of most of the contributions to this volume are oriented toward this general framework of "refiguration". This approach aims to address the still unresolved question and research gap of whether and how we can understand the current transformation of society, as well as social change in general, as a process of refiguration that fundamentally emerges from the spatiality of the social (Knoblauch and Löw 2017). With this question in mind, we want to challenge theories of social change in general, but also for the diagnosis of contemporary societies we consider the theory of refiguration as a valid alternative, especially for theories of globalization as well as the opposing theories of de-globalization (Boatcă 2020).

For a long time, the globalization of the economy, politics, and information was seen as an unstoppable social development (Robertson 1992; Knoblauch and Löw 2024). In recent years, however, we have witnessed a resurgence of geopolitical thinking and spatial conflicts, for example,

around issues of borders, national territories, and sovereignty (Meunier and Nicolaidis 2019). The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which had a strong impact at the time of writing this introduction, is a clear example of this trend, attracting international attention and raising concerns about the stability of established borders (Mau 2022). This conflict, based on historical, ethnic, and political factors, has intensified and reinforced pre-existing debates about the sanctity of national borders, the principles of self-determination, and the potential consequences for regional and global security (Starr 1991).

While the empirical analysis of such a conflict is addressed by *conflictual spaces*, it is this social “logic” of spatial figures underlying conflictual situations that we want to address with the term *spatial conflicts*. Spatial conflicts as well as conflictual spaces constitute the main dynamics of the social change we call refiguration in general and of the kind of refiguration we are currently witnessing. Before explaining these basic concepts, which are at the heart of this volume, we situate the studies within some relevant strands of social science research. Given the enormous complexity of social conflicts and the richness of studies on the issue, we cannot address important aspects, such as power, interests, or resources, satisfactorily in this short introduction, but will focus throughout on their relation to space.

Refiguration and conflict in space

As a diagnosis of contemporary social change, the idea of refiguration space seeks to integrate the various processes described above, especially when it comes to conflict and space. Instead of a reduction to territoriality, as in geopolitics, it allows for different spatial logics that can come into conflict. However, by suggesting at least four spatial logics, it avoids the opposition between globalization and de-globalization, or, as Brenner (1999, 42), Swyngedouw (2004), or Harvey (2005) call it, between territorialization and (networked) de-territorialization. On the one hand, the “territorial-geopolitical logic” of nation-states tends to violently stabilize, defend, or increase their power against a background of global economic dependency, conflict, and fragmentation. On the other hand, the capitalist logic is oriented toward an ever-increasing globalization of production, consumption, and value accumulation.

The notion of refiguration is relational, building on Elias’s (1982) concept of figuration. Elias defined figurations as connections of interdependence that exhibit more or less unstable balances of power. In addition to their relationality, an important feature of figurations is their transscularity. Accordingly, refiguration encompasses what are often assumed to be separate scales, ranging from territorial, centralized nation-states to subjects, their bodies, and affects (Knoblauch and Löw 2020). For example,

4 *Spatial Conflicts and Conflictual Spaces*

in his historical studies of pre-modern societies, [Elias \(1982\)](#) shows how the disciplining of subjects is related to the way power is territorially centralized as the modern state. With its increasingly rationalist–bureaucratic organization, the modern state territorializes as “violence directed at space” ([Lefebvre \[1974\] 1991](#), 280) to control relations between subjects and institutions. This control over individuals is an example of the persistence of hierarchy, which [Ferguson \(2017\)](#) sees as historically at odds with the creative principle of networks, as exemplified by the networks of the Enlightenment or modern science. In this way, with the concept of refiguration, we can also see how conflicts related to bodily regimes or local environments (e.g., urban spaces) are connected to conflicts in national environments (i.e., borders) as well as to transnational relations (as in the EU, TTIP, etc.) and thus to the global.

Since Elias did not clarify how the processuality of figurations comes about, we understand their constitutive “interdependencies” to result from embodied, relational, communicative actions that are objectified not only by signs and symbols, but also by institutions, objects, and socio-material spatial arrangements such as infrastructures ([Knoblauch 2020](#)). Through objectivations, social actions become communicative; they are temporally ordered, and as embodied social actions and practices, they construct space to which they are subjectively oriented ([Löw \[2001\] 2016](#); [Knoblauch and Steets 2022](#)). Based on this combination of relational social action theory and space theory, we propose to distinguish four typical spatial figures that guide the orientations of social actions and practices: place, territory, trajectory, and network. The figures define, on the one hand, the logics of spatial actions and spatial knowledge and, on the other hand, the institutionalized and objectified figurations they constitute.

As a process driven by different logics of spatial action, refiguration can result from negotiations, adjustments, and tensions and conflicts. One example is the tension between the above-mentioned tendency toward flat, networked, and egalitarian social relations, institutions, and institutional orders and the territorial logic exemplified by hierarchical and centralized nation-states. While the latter characterizes modernization, the former tendency is associated with the opening up and transgression of “global spaces” that become “placeless, distanceless, and borderless” ([Scholte 1996](#)). While globalization theories have assumed the decline, erosion, or disempowerment of the territorial state ([Brenner 1999](#), 61), we have also found a renewed emphasis on national and regional borders and identities, which [Harvey \(2005\)](#) or [Mau \(2022\)](#) identify as a dialectical process. These tensions certainly allow us to understand some of the conflicts we are addressing; yet, the concept of refiguration extends the model beyond two logics and underscores the simultaneity of different spatial figurations at different scales, out of which interconnections or mixtures as well as

tensions and conflicts unfold. Refiguration accounts for social change based on the logic of spatial figures and figurations and how they relate to each other, and it is this relation that not only causes conflicts but also their containment. Before discussing the four spatial figures in more detail, we will outline the concepts of conflict and containment proposed for this volume.

Studies of conflicts in space

Across the different research fields, conflicts are considered as social phenomena: verbal arguments, discursive disputes, legal proceedings, strikes and demonstrations, economic competition, physical confrontations, and military warfare. To touch on some of the research areas represented in this volume, there is a range of studies focusing on planning conflicts (see [de Satgé and Watson 2018](#)) or, more specifically, on the conflictual tension between planning and the environment (see [Kumnig, Rosol, and Exner 2017](#); [Berr and Jenal 2019](#)). In another set of studies, economic aspects dominate (cf. [Meier, Steets, and Frers 2018](#), 55), for example, in empirical studies on rental and housing issues ([Alami 2017](#)) or on questions of distribution in (urban) space in general (see [Hüttermann 2018](#)). In the fields of economic geography and sociology, there is a strong focus on territorial conflicts, especially between the Global North and the Global South ([Reiher and Sippel 2015](#)). However, we also see studies on how potential conflicts in urban housing are algorithmically managed by digital platforms ([Kirchner and Pohl](#) in this volume).

One focus of research on conflict over and in communication is the study of social movements and their communication (e.g., [Knüpfer, Hoffmann, and Voskresenskii 2020](#); [Stoltenberg et al.](#) in this volume) and conflictual forms of public communication such as hate speech in social media (e.g., [Paasch-Colberg et al. 2021](#)). The concept of conflict also plays an important role in theoretical considerations of public communication. For example, for [Neuberger \(2014\)](#), conflict is one of three central modes of interaction in Internet-based communication. Communication between information infrastructures and people's social structures is extended to material and technological systems that are connected in real time and also connect virtual and physically defined space. This connection enables communication through signs as well as the control of technical systems or the production and spatial circulation of goods (e.g., in Industry 4.0, autonomous vehicles) and infrastructure in logistics. These connections can form tension-filled "megastructures" ([Bratton 2015](#)), while systems of network communication also raise the question of boundaries and regulatory regimes ([Sömmez and Knoblauch](#) in this volume).

In public sphere theory, (political) conflict is seen as a central condition for deliberation ([Friess and Eilders 2015](#), 325), all the more so as

6 *Spatial Conflicts and Conflictual Spaces*

digitalization undermines the separation of private and public spheres (Habermas 2022) and leads to increased tensions and dissonances in public debate (Pfetsch 2018). The incongruity between transnational public spheres emerging from digital networks and political territories is also the subject of these studies (Fraser 2007; Volkmer 2014): The entangled network patterns of global communication encounter legal boundaries (e.g., EU legislation vs. Facebook) or boundaries drawn by authoritarian controlled territories (e.g., China, Turkey, Russia), leading to violations, border crossings, and violent conflicts in digital communication (Couldry and Hepp 2023; Sönmez and Knoblauch in this volume). The expansion of the logic of networks (Castells 2009, 2013) has challenged the hegemony of territoriality on the one hand, and the economic and technical data monopolization of network communication by quasi-monopolistic companies, the expansion of their infrastructures and their data colonialism on the other (Mejias and Couldry 2019).

Historically, war and the military have been closely linked to geography and space. Thus, in peace and conflict studies, as well as in violence and war studies, space has long been understood primarily as the territory of a state, as “geopolitical” conflicts between states have been a primary focus of research (Flint et al. 2009). Alternatively, space has been equated with the place where conflicts manifest themselves, e.g., in research on domestic violence or neighborhood violence (for a summary, see Bretschneider et al. 2020). Chojnacki and Engels (2016, 32) criticize conflict studies for often referring to spatial categories without a theoretical analysis of space, and focusing on material conditions such as natural resources as natural triggers for social action and conflict.

Many studies have focused on particular spatial units, such as cities, to examine the regional dynamics of war and peace (Oldenburg 2010; Doevenspeck 2013). In recent years, the focus has shifted from the link between territorial space, violence, and conflict (see Kirby and Ward 1987; Starr 1991) to a multidimensional perspective on space and violent conflict (Korf and Schetter 2015). For example, Gregory (2011) describes how the “war on terror” is socially constructed across territorial spaces, and Gleditsch (2020) discusses the role of quantitative data on war casualties in building models of conflict, its temporal dynamics, and its spatial distribution. The spatial construction of gender roles in times of war is analyzed by Dowler (2005) as ideologically constructed spaces of difference for men and women in relation to nationalism and armed conflict. The spatial construction of memory is discussed also in the study by Gencal, Brahm, and Kubiak (in this volume), who emphasize that the spatial expression of coping with racist incidents depends on sociopolitical legacies and discourses. Space as an analytical category also allows to focus on the production of violent conflict as well as in peace processes

(see [Kobayashi 2009](#); [McConnell, Megoran, and Williams 2014](#)). For conflicts between human actors, Koloma Beck proposes the category of “space of violence” to highlight the pre-reflective, embodied, and habitual structures ([Koloma Beck 2020](#), 343) that are constitutive of the everyday experience of violence.

Conflicts can be spontaneous or highly institutionalized, they can take different social forms, and they occur at all levels, fields, and dimensions of sociality. Theoretically, Marxist dialectical theories constitute one of the main references to explain conflict in space. For example, [Lefebvre \(1972\)](#) and [Harvey \(2013\)](#) have developed sophisticated approaches to explain social class conflicts over (mostly urban) space. Many studies in this volume also draw on [Simmel \(2009\)](#), who emphasized that conflict should not be seen as destructive or even “asocial”; rather, conflict can be seen as an agonistic form of social interaction (“Wechselwirkung”) that is highly productive, as is also the case with, for example, sporting or economic competition. While Simmel saw competition as a peculiar form of social interaction among others (imitation, hierarchy, division of labor), there is a long tradition in social philosophy as well as in social theory which sees conflict and even war as the very basis of any form of sociality. This position was famously taken by [Hobbes \(1651\)](#), who assumed that in the absence of a common power (such as the state), everyone would be “perpetually” at war with everyone else. Later, this assumption was prominently shared by philosophers such as Nietzsche and right-wing political scientists such as Schmitt, but also forms the basis of influential social theories such as Foucault’s work. He sees war as an embodiment of the dynamics of power that govern social relations, discourses, and knowledge ([Foucault 2003](#)). While Foucault focused more on the role of power, the idea of conflict as a major dynamic of social change has been elaborated in sociological theory. Against the view that societies can be seen as social systems oriented toward stability and “homeostasis,” authors such as Coser and Dahrendorf developed the view that social systems need conflict in order to change ([Coser 1957](#)), or even more, that society is conflict and sociological theory is conflict theory. [Dahrendorf \(1959\)](#) argues that the economic conflict between social classes has been transformed into a conflict over power and authority.

Globalization and de-globalization

While Dahrendorf argued that these conflicts occur and are institutionally resolved mostly at the national level, globalization theories argue for the declining relevance of nation-states, but also of spatiality in general. Thus, globalization theories claimed a “compression of the world” ([Robertson 1992](#), 8), as well as an increasing “deterritorialization” ([Featherstone 1990](#);

Appadurai 1996), the death of distance (Luhmann 2012, 2013), and “time-space compression” (Harvey 1989). More specifically, in terms of space, globalization tends to overemphasize a single spatial scale, the global scale. However, even if concepts such as “globality” (Beck 2000; Kühnhardt 2019) assumed that globalization would transcend political or economic processes through the expansion of worldwide communication, it early exhibited a tension captured by the term “glocalization.” “The local/global opposition has not been conceptually resolved. In various forms—local/global, national/global—it continues to structure both debate and research” (Connell 2007, 374). These tensions have been increasing recently. Especially, Stein Rokkan’s historical analysis of conflicts between local, regional, and national levels within national territories (Mjoset 2000) has shown that international, transnational, and global conflict lines (“cleavages”) are increasing. In this vein, Piketty (2020) argues that globalization, in terms of the expansion of neoliberal capitalism, has led to increased socio-economic inequality based on a massive redistribution of wealth. On these grounds, globalization results in a political paradox: The new political potentials of “winners” and “losers” created by the process of denationalization are most likely to be articulated and dealt with at the national level (Kriesi and Grande 2012). Despite the establishment of powerful supranational, transnational, and international political institutions, the number of territorial nation-states has doubled from 1950 to 2010 and they continue to exert a strong influence on such processes. Kriesi and Grande (2012) stress that globalization’s “losers” are more likely to resort to forms of action closely linked to the national container and that global conflicts are likely to be filtered through national contexts and “internalized” or “domesticated” by actors’ strategies (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005).

The resulting “backlash” against globalization has been accompanied by increasing political polarization. As Piketty (2020) has shown, ideological and legitimating principles are changing or rather reversing at the global level. While political parties that represented the working classes tend to represent the new knowledge classes, formerly conservative parties turn to “nativist” ideologies that enforce territoriality-based identities. It is probably on this basis that Mouffe (2013) proposes to understand the new conflict between these positions as “agonism.” In contrast to antagonism, which presupposes some common ground, agonism is a conflict between hegemonic projects that do not allow for the creation of a consensus, as in Dahrendorf’s (1988) model.

Against the backdrop of theories that posited advancing globalization and the declining relevance of space, these tendencies have been labeled de-globalization (Walter 2021). On the one hand, de-globalization refers to what Butollo and Staritz (2022) call a “reconfiguration” of the expansion and intensification of globally distributed production and consumption

into nationally and regionally bounded units. This more economic notion of de-globalization has recently been supported by world systems analysis, which suggests that in addition to economic interactions, transnational commodity chains, and other forms of “connectivities,” other levels of “structural globalization” are also affected: including the political level, communication, social relations (intermarriage), and mobilities (migration) (Urry 2007; Chase-Dunn, Álvarez, and Liao 2023).

As a result of the renewed emphasis on the nation-state as an actor and on the restriction of territories against migration, geopolitics has once again become ubiquitous. This shift contrasts with earlier debates on globalization, where geopolitics was almost anathema (Osterhammel and Petersson 2005). Despite its Darwinist origins, essentializing tendencies, and prominent ideological role in Nazism, geopolitics is now re-entering social theory as a major analytical category. It is probably the return of modern forms of warfare that has contributed to the “geopoliticization” (Meunier and Nicolaidis 2019), namely, the revival of “geopolitics.” The concept is also used to address the sphere “where states exist in a geographical space and face have security economic and domestic dilemmas arising from interactions in multiple spheres between states and non-state actors in this space.” It is certainly an advantage of this approach that it addresses the materialities of space, for example, “where oil and gas are physically located” (Thompson 2021, 86). However, although they consider the materiality of space (usually in essentialist terms), geopolitical approaches tend to reduce it to a clearly bounded territorial container, linked to utilitarian rationality and political competition between territories, which always seems to include the possibility of war. On this basis, Münkler (2023), for example, sees the neoliberal wave of globalization as leading to a unipolar hegemony of the USA. Because of its “costs,” he argues, this unipolar world is giving way to a multipolar order tending toward three or five poles (USA, China, Russia, Europe, India).

Multipolarity in this context can refer to a territorially based political system (ten Brinke and Bartill 2019), but it has also been proposed in a broader sense by postcolonial thinkers to refer to the consequences of the cultural, political, and economic “decentering” of the West. Mignolo (2018), for example, identifies the centrifugal tendency of former peripheries and semi-peripheries to become global centers, and with it the move away “from states of governance, from the economy of accumulation, and from the ego-centered personalities that both enacted and reproduced Westernization” (Mignolo 2018, 14). In his view, therefore, the progressive understanding of globalization depends on a “geopolitical” Western standpoint of knowledge. It is the affirmation of “non-Western” standpoints that leads to the decentering of the West and to global multipolarity. At the same time, Mignolo seems to exaggerate and even essentialize

the difference between cultural macroregions and to underestimate the extent to which they are the result of the relational kind of processes that [Randeria \(2009\)](#) calls “entanglement.”

Spatial conflicts and conflictual spaces

Spatial conflicts can be found at different scales. They range from interactional conflicts between embodied actors to mid-level urban conflicts or conflicts between individual actors about space. They also include conflicts that occur at national, international, and transnational levels and are concerned with the delineation of space and its meaning. The term (re)figuration highlights the trans-scalar nature of many social conflicts, which are significantly amplified by digital mediatization ([Knoblauch and Löw 2020](#)). These conflicts may concern specific systems or globalized spheres, but they also tend to cut across functional systems.

In the classical, socio-economic representation, spatial conflicts include conflicts over ownership and, based on this, the symbolic, economic, and cultural representation of spaces ([Dörre 2023](#); see also Baran and Pfetsch in this volume). Conflicts over land, housing, protection, or the naming of places can be examples of this type which often relate to struggles over space as a resource. They can occur in a variety of ways along the lines of conflict between groups of social actors such as landowners vs. renters, and they can also be limited to specific fields of conflict, such as territorial, economic, or discursive issues. It is important to note that spatial conflicts can also be symbolic when the definition of what is a relevant space is disputed or who should have power over space (see Baran and Pfetsch in this volume).

Conflictual spaces arise when certain spaces become the sites of contentious encounters between different social actors. The form of conflict can also vary, ranging from arguments in conversations to street fights, disputes in mediated discourses or cyberwarfare, and violent attacks on material infrastructure. Correspondingly, the spatial form may differ, e.g., between groups of people settled in neighboring regions, between mobile people trespassing through territories, or between people technically connected via the Internet (as in Twitter, see Stoltenberg et al. in this volume). One can think of city centers, squares, or other public spaces where vigils and protests are held and counter-protests are organized. Conflictual spaces can also be related to issues of environmental sovereignty and claims-making ([Schad and Sommer](#) in this volume): If spatial disputes are the reason for movements and counter-movements.

Spatial conflicts as well as conflictual spaces exist in both latent and manifest forms. Especially, in the case of direct confrontation between groups with opposing demands about spaces, the spatial conflict is manifest. When spaces are underlying social differences or tensions without

open confrontation (although the potential is almost always there), the conflict is a potentiality, hence latent.

Conflictual spaces are spatially marked sites of contention within which spatial or other forms of social conflicts are enacted. As Baran and Pfetsch (in this volume) argue, social and institutional arrangements—both spatial and non-spatial—are often about developing tools to “contain” and “manage” conflict. Conflict containment means that conflicts are not manifest; rather, they seem to be frozen by latent conflicts. Thus, the spatial conflicts may be indirect or hidden, meaning that they remain invisible over a long period of time or it is the case that spatial claims do not contradict each other openly, but coexist in tension.

Spatial conflicts may imply the clash of the logics of spatial figures which then drives the refiguration in different ways. When individual or collective actors orient themselves to different or overlapping spatialities with their different logics—such as a territory, a trajectory, a network, or a place—this can lead to conflicts, but it can also lead to new spatial figurations through and with these conflicts. For example, pipeline projects, where the logic of trajectory clashes with the logic of territory (or the logic of place), or migration regimes, where two competing territorial logics (nation-states vs. transnational, regional bodies clash (see Perko and Anong in this volume), are good examples of the second manifestation of spatial conflicts. Spatial conflicts can also arise when nation-states seek to exercise their power over local communities, where the logic of territory and place (as an emotionally and practically attached entity) prevails; or when places are destroyed for routes, roads, highways, pipelines (see Kohrs, Hering, and Shadrack in this volume).

As mentioned above, different spatial logics do not necessarily lead to conflict. Although the spatial figures guiding the dynamics of social change are different, they can escape the dialectical logic of two opposing, contradictory, antagonistic, or agonistic elements that is at the core of conflict theories of *stricto sensu* (Mouffe 2013). Indeed, contradictions play a crucial role in conflict theories that see conflict as a fundamental driver of social dynamics. At the beginning of our research on refiguration, we assumed a logic of conflict between two basic social figures. Parallel to the historical study by Ferguson (2017), who analyzed historical cases of conflict between hierarchical and networked social orders, we had assumed that the conflict between network (as a spatial figure) and territory would be one of the driving forces of refiguration (Knoblauch and Löw 2017).

Spatial figures and the refiguration of conflict

Territorial spaces, for example, follow a logic of placing and arranging, resulting in clear external boundaries and internal restrictions on diversity

(Middell 2019, 14; Mau 2022, 142). By framing territorial space through borders, differentiations are provided in terms of the construction of one or more “other” or outside spaces (Löw and Weidenhaus 2017). Mau (2022) shows how spaces are refigured by borders. On the one hand, this refiguration manifests itself quantitatively, in that borders have multiplied; on the other hand, it also manifests itself qualitatively, in that circulations are prevented or regulated through the diversification of border regimes. The latter has become most explicit in the recent turn to geopolitical thinking (Genz et al. 2021; Thompson 2021). As much as this line of thinking is mostly implemented by authoritarian regimes, the opposing tendencies to maintain a globalized order suggest that geopolitics consists rather in the attempt to theoretically and practically reduce spatial logics to territoriality and thereby (re)impose this logic on other forms of spatial logics, such as networks.

In contrast, *network* spaces place radically heterogeneous elements into a materialized figuration. Rau (2017) therefore defines network space as “space with a topological structure” (151, own translation). Unlike territorial space, which clusters elements tightly with boundaries, network spaces relate distant elements and distinguish them from one another (Mol and Law 1994, 643). Just as the figuration of the network is associated with a flat, heterarchical social space, the figuration of connectivity follows a logic of interconnectedness of heterogeneous elements. At the same time, networks are inherently fluid and unstable, as they connect and disconnect at any moment.

Unlike networks, *places* are spatial figures that are relevant as inherently stable entities marked by a particular spatial and social identity. The globalization debate, but also the relevance of networks in social science and humanities research, has increased attention to places that derive their relevance from their position as a central node in the network (for example, an airport that serves primarily as a transfer point). Here, the focus of analysis is not on the quality of uniqueness, but on the possibility of creating punctual condensations generated by the logic of the network. Nodes in networks can have a homogenizing effect, but at the same time, they can generate conflicts, as is the case with competing data centers.

Finally, *trajectorial* spaces (in German “Bahnenraum,” i.e., space of “routes”) are not usually counted among the relevant spatial figures, although few phenomena of modernity can be understood without the spatial figure of the trajectory (Löw 2020). While railroads, streams, and rivers are often thought of as channels in networks, urban analysis draws attention to the autonomy of the figure of trajectory space. In the construction of a trajectory, all actions are subject to the logic of origin and destination. The trajectory space is the route along which the construction of a surface space (even an empty perceptible one) is possible.

Trajectorial spaces, though less discussed, are crucial for understanding modern phenomena. Often thought of as channels in networks, urban planning analysis highlights their autonomy, where actions are driven by the logic of starting points and destinations (de Satgé and Watson 2018). This space allows for the construction of a perceivable surface space along its path. Trajectories are inherently divisive and, as such, have the potential to generate conflict or provoke conflictual situations (see Kohrs, Hering, and Shadrack in this volume).

Shifting to the subjective perspective of the actors reveals a complex challenge in everyday life. The growing diversity of spatial constitutions, under conditions of heterogeneous and tension-filled spatial figurations, complicates everyday actions. This challenge is as significant as the increased complexity caused by the acceleration of time (Rosa 2013). Here, spatial knowledge can be guided by different figures depending on the life situation. A possible pattern according to which subjectively relevant spaces are arranged can be described as a network. Different place-spaces are made relevant at the same time and are constantly compared with each other, without being able to place one place above the other. In order to be able to live in different places, biographies can depend on trajectory spaces. For their lives, however, neither a central place nor a trajectory is perceived as an independent space, but rather the solidified network space. This experience is in no way shared by people who are very place-bound (Weidenhaus and Korte 2022).

Conflict containment

Looking at space through the concept of refiguration reveals how different logics of spatial figures can account for tensions, conflicts, and social change. Because the demarcation of conflicts always carries the potential for eruption, many political and economic systems develop strategies to contain or de-mark these conflicts. Baran and Pfetsch (in this volume) propose this notion thereby drawing on the work of Dahrendorf (1986), who argues that social conflicts are hardly resolved, but instead are settled by institutional arrangements. Conflict containment can work through the institutionalization of conflict management which can take the form of “hiding” one of the actors or groups in order to avoid potentially conflictual interactions. For example, making an undesirable group invisible can be a conflict containment strategy, especially in contexts where containment is not institutionalized. For example, Baur and Kuhlke (in this volume) show how migrant domestic workers are literally rendered socially invisible by living in backstage storerooms. While class and ethnic differences are visible in the public sphere, those between citizens and specific migrant groups are contained in this way.

The containment of conflicts is possible because the “logic” of spatial figures is neither exclusively contradictory nor dialectical. For example, as economic complexity increased in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the constitution of the nation-state territorial space simultaneously strengthened global networking and promoted the formation of a network space that was considered global. The special economic zone is also a new form of territorial space, effective because it serves as a platform for international circulation. However, as soon as the fear of global networking becomes more pronounced, for example, among groups with a lower level of education and older age than other social groups, the figure of the closed territory can be built up into a dominant major figuration (de Vries and Hoffmann 2016). Network and territorial space share the feature that they can homogenize processes and events—typically in modernity—but they differ decisively in the position that difference occupies in the figure. While territorial space is constructed in such a way that difference is outsourced (e.g., to other countries) or sometimes encapsulated in an insular way (in individual cities, but not in the countryside), network space is based on the connection of different elements/places/locations. These nodes are not necessarily (perhaps even rarely) addressed as different in circulation, and the boundary is undecided and constantly shifting.

The empirical observations in the studies of this volume suggest that a theory of conflict based on mostly binary contradictions is too narrow to understand and explain the multiple spatial processes observed in the projects. There are good reasons to assume that various forms of interplay are the driving forces behind the refiguration of conflict. The logic of spatial figures can lead to new spatial forms and orders, even to a material “rearrangement” of social spaces. The logic of spatial action is not only the cause of conflicts, but can also synthesize in spatial rearrangement (Knoblauch and Löw 2024). Various examples are provided in this book, such as the merging of network and territorial logics into “centralized networks” (Sönmez and Knoblauch in this volume) or the digital platform as a new form of organization (Kirchner, Dittmar, and Ziegler 2022). A similar refiguration can be seen in the relationship between global migration and national borders. Focusing on borders, Zoe Perko and Dorothea Biback Anong (in this volume) show that the conflict between territorial figures and networked migration leads to the fragmentation of macroterritories. Another example is provided by Indra Prabharyaka and Ignacio Farías (in this volume): Conflicts over fresh air in the city of Stuttgart, Germany, are manifested in protest movements, legal disputes, and public discursive controversies as a result of the conflict between a densifying car-centric city and the movement of the breeze. In terms of spatial figures, the conflict between the topological figures of

territory and route results in a form of trajectory constructed as an “air corridor.” Place can also lead to new forms. When the identity of place is strongly emphasized, it can come into conflict with the circulations of networks or territorial spaces, or it can merge into a constant flow of trajectorial space. Based on sensual, bodily, affective, and communicative actions, places are those spatial figures that have an immediate experiential effect, as they are intertwined with subjective feelings such as anxiety and fear. The study of Castillo et al. (in this volume) about the movements of youth in Berlin and their perception of the subway space illustrates this tension vividly.

Fields of conflicts in refiguration and the structure of the contributions to this volume

The contributions of this volume have been written in the course of an intensive process of communication which included an Authors’ Conference and reviews. Previously, the editors were engaged in ongoing conversations with the researchers of the individual projects and conducted what we call Sensitizing Visits (see Pfetsch and Baran in this volume). This close contact has been facilitated by the fact that most of the authors have been engaged in the Collaborative Research Center 1265. This research environment allowed to work on and overcome the differences in perspective between disciplines, methodological traditions, theoretical orientations, and other aspects of the “epistemic cultures” (Knorr 1999).

In the writing up of their studies, the researchers were guided by the conceptual frame of the book which had been sketched in the beginning in a way to sensitize the analysis of the empirical data (Blumer 1954). At the same time, the conceptual frame has also been adapted, corrected, and extended (e.g., by the concept of containment) in the face of the various empirical findings. In this reiterative process of (theoretically informed) grounded theory (Charmaz 2017), the editors could establish how the concepts of our sensitizing theoretical frame (conflictual space, spatial conflicts, containment, spatial figures) resonate with the findings of the various research projects. The process of resonance between empirical analysis and theory construction is built on the idea of reflexive methodology and the empirical theory of science (Knoblauch 2021).

The mutual focus on the question of conflicts about space, in space and through space also allowed to carve out some commonalities between the projects which had not been anticipated in the initial discussions in the CRC. These commonalities are not geared toward general social theory but rather concern particular cleavages or problem areas in the analysis of contemporary societies (Knoblauch 2020). The common focus as to how space and conflict are approached in the empirical studies is expressed in

the clustering of the studies in five parts of this volume. The titles of these parts therefore are not accidental, but hint at the main fields of conflicts in refiguration. The contributions in the first part demonstrate that refiguration affects regions struggling with the political and social consequences of macroregimes or postcolonial cultural heritage (Part I). Thus, fundamental rights such as free movement of people and individual self-expression are precarious in conflictual spaces. The refiguration approach underscores the resilience of the spatial figure of territoriality, countering the once-dominant neoliberal economic notion of transnational globalization. This conflict also affects the imaginations, the governance and the sociomateriality of infrastructures, particularly of digital mediatisation. Despite of their tendency towards network spaces, they get in permanent tensions to other spatial figures, most prominently territories and places (Part II). This territorial persistence concerns, of course, most directly legal, political, and social struggles over land rights and urban development, especially in the Global South (Part III). Another perspective related to conflicts in and about territory takes a social and cultural dimension and is deeply engrained in the spatial knowledge of individuals and collectives (Part IV). The studies in this part of the volume show that conflict-ridden territories and places are controlled and pacified to avoid open controversy about issues typically related to pluralist societies. Social inequality and exclusion are closely linked to spatial structures that shape social relations and guide behaviors. Finally, it is the ecological transformation which points to the tensions among the physical, geological, biological, and political notions of nature and the exploitation of the material resources of land such as oil, gas, and water for economic purposes (Part V).

After all, the studies collected in this volume demonstrate that the principle of territoriality yields new forms of spatial conflicts, and even wars which appear so unexpected if one followed the line of globalization theories (Knoblauch and Löw 2024). This book therefore underlines that the tension between the transgressing principle of the globalizing network and the boundedness of territoriality leaves its marks on the social structure, its forms of social inequality in the liberal self-affirmation of globalized world views and the exclusionist tendencies of territorially which defines social groups and their identities.

Topics of the individual chapters

In a conceptual introduction, Zozan Baran and Barbara Pfetsch provide an overview of conflict research, spanning multiple disciplines, methodologies, and focuses. A model based on the refiguration of space approach is introduced to integrate these diverse perspectives and

demonstrate how conflicts are shaped by, and in turn shape, spatial structures. The chapter identifies “conflictual spaces,” where conflict is inherently embedded in space, and “spatial conflicts,” where space and its logic are directly contested. Additionally, it discusses how various arrangements aim to manage and contain conflict.

Part I Macroregimes and spatial conflicts

The chapters in [Part I](#) explore spatial expressions of conflict linked to macroeconomic development and mediatized modernities across regions like West Africa, South America, and the European Union. They investigate how cultural and political values shape conflict-prone spaces.

Zoé Perko and Dorothea Biaback Anong examine how regional frameworks for free movement in ECOWAS, the EU, and Mercosur generate spatial conflicts, framing borders as contested spaces marked by tensions across different spatial scales. By focusing on security and economic concerns, they highlight diverse conflict dynamics and note the uneven assertion of state territorial logic. They further illustrate how macroterritories are disrupted by the movement of marginalized citizens, resulting in fragmentation and discontinuity in supranational regions.

Séverine Marguin and Daddy Dibinga analyze West African soap operas in the context of a conflictual duality between modernity and tradition. Using healthcare as a central theme in postcolonial series, they identify several translocal cultural frameworks: one driven by the French state, a local-regional identity framework shaped by regional production firms, and a globalizing influence shaped by multinational corporations. Their study demonstrates a negotiation process between African modernities, African traditions, and Western modernities. The diverse portrayals of spatial narratives reveal the often agonistic or conflictual coexistence of these various modernities and their ongoing transformation.

Part II Tensions in digital spaces

The authors of the studies in [Part II](#) deal with tensions in digital spaces. The first example is the study of Sezgin Sönmez and Hubert Knoblauch who investigate the Russian internet as a case of potential discrepancies between the governance of the network space of the web and the constraints provided by the territorial demarcation set by the Russian Ukrainian war. The researchers find that the war resonates as a conflict between the openness of the network and the territorial demarcation of the Russian internet. They find however that despite tendencies toward a fragmentation of the internet, the figures of the territory and the network remain autonomous since the openness of the internet is preserved.

Nicolas Zehner, Ingo Schulz-Schaeffer, Daniel Grönefeld, and Philip Baumbach explore in their study how location-based technologies shape the experience and constitution of queer urban space, thereby accounting for the complex cyber-physical constellations of conflictual spaces. Based on comparative empirical research of the use of the dating app Grindr in Cape Town and Berlin, the authors argue that increasing digital mediatization changes existing understandings of safe(r) space. With their particular focus on conflictual space as the potential clash of logics inscribed in different spatial figures, they highlight three safe(r) spacing practices that showcase prevailing logics of digitally mediated spatial conflict. However, these different logics may also complement each other and result in new arrangements of safe(r) space indicating a shift from “safe(r) space” to “safe(r) spacing.”

The network pattern of the internet is also subject to the study by Stefan Kirchner and Simon C. Pohl who highlight how digitally enabled network spaces stir up conflicts in places, forcing authorities to balance different spatial logics to uphold territory as their domain. Conflicts differ significantly due to algorithmic regulation between European cities such as Amsterdam, Berlin, and London and US–American places such as New York and San Francisco. Analyzing the supply of Airbnb listings, the researchers find that cities with algorithmic regulation in a confrontative approach prove most effective, yet algorithmic enforcement intertwines the territory as a domain with the logic of the network space. With respect to conflictual spaces, the study highlights how *varieties of refiguration* arise from the arrival of a platform’s centralized digital network space, which introduces a globalizing, capitalist logic to different places.

Part III Land rights and conflictual spaces

In many countries, the right and legislation of land as a material resource belongs to the most conflictual issues in society. The studies in [Part III](#) highlight different constellations in the contention about territory and its multiple implications. Makau Kitata and Jochen Kibel demonstrate this vividly in their study of two neighborhoods in Nairobi which exhibit different figurations in terms of their legal, socio-economic, and cultural aspects and even in their material layout. Starting from the legal framework that creates conflicts over space to start with, they consider the intricacies of legal, economic, material, and cultural aspects which eventually turn the neighborhoods into conflictual spaces. At the core of these controversies are different socio-spatial logics that impose on the relation between the dwellers and their material spaces and eventually refigure the urban landscape of Nairobi.

In another study located in the capital of Kenya Alexander Kohrs, Linda Hering and John K. Shadrack focus on inequality in urban space. They investigate the peripheral informal settlement of Gituamba which despite significant investments in infrastructure and urban development remains marginalized. The researchers thus highlight the stark contrast between wealthy neighborhoods and informal settlements and explores the “transversal logics” used by the urban poor to navigate and reshape their space. The findings portray Gituamba as a conflictual space and reveal refiguration of urban spaces amidst growing socio-spatial inequalities.

Spatial tensions and conflicts arising from the interaction between forcibly displaced populations and urban environments in Lagos, Nigeria, and Amman, Jordan, are the focus of the study by Qusay Amer, Rebecca Enobong Roberts, and Francesca Ceola. They investigate how refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) create and navigate spaces amidst techno-managerial norms governing their lives. Using the spatial figures of territory, place, network, and trajectory, the study analyzes how spatial practices and conflicts shape urban landscapes and the experiences of displaced individuals. In Lagos, the focus is on neoliberal urbanism’s impact on space and resource conflicts, while in Amman, it examines institutionalized conflict containment and spatial negotiations.

Part IV Social exclusion and spatial knowledge

The studies in [Part IV](#) deal with spatial implications of social cohesion, mainly in form of social exclusion and how it is internalized in spatial knowledge and practices of individuals and collectives. Social inequality is a central theme in the contribution by Nina Baur and Elmar Kulke, who explore how Singapore, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, has enforced social mixing through the architecture and design of urban spaces. Their study shows how potential conflicts between class and ethnicity are managed by regulating spaces to minimize markers of inequality. While class differences remain visible in public spaces, other social distinctions, such as those between citizens and migrant groups, are made invisible. Recently, conflicts have been contained within housing, food, consumption practices, and public spaces. Singapore exemplifies a society that has transformed violent social and ethnic conflicts into nonviolent resolutions through spatial containment.

The chapter by Ignacio Castillo Ulloa, Anna Juliane Heinrich, Angela Million, and Ludovica Tomarchio examines how young people incorporate conflicts encountered in their daily spaces into their spatial knowledge. Drawing on case studies in Berlin and Lima, it explores how adult-imposed control and regulation shape their experiences in public and private spaces, often restricting their autonomy and opportunities. The study

reveals that while some young people develop coping mechanisms, others struggle to navigate these controlled environments, limiting their ability to internalize and spatialize conflicts. The authors argue for a need to foster more conflict-prone and inventive spatial knowledge, enabling young people to envision and create alternative realities in their urban environments.

Kübra Gencal, Emma Luna Brahm, and Daniel Kubiak explore how commemoration practices unfold in two German cities marked by racist violence. Tensions arise as groups debate the construction of memorials and the organization of public events, with different meanings attached to these sites. Over the past thirty years, new memorials have reshaped the urban landscape, but competing narratives create conflicts over their significance. In both Solingen and Rostock, various groups have distinct relationships with these spaces and the power dynamics among political actors, civil society, and affected communities shape what is remembered and how it is memorialized.

Part V Struggles over ecology and space

The studies in [Part V](#) address conflicts inherent in the transformation of the ecological sector in response to the global challenge of climate change. The chapter by Miriam Schad and Bernd Sommer illustrates the range of social conflicts that arise from organized efforts to achieve climate and environmental goals. Their analysis of the conflictual potential within the social-ecological transformation reveals how spatially defined areas of conflict—such as energy, housing, and food—are deeply intertwined with social tensions. Consequently, spatial conflicts intersect with prevalent societal divisions, including class, age, gender, social and political values, and the disparities between the Global North and Global South.

Climate change exemplifies the complex spatial patterns of contemporary social issues as it spans across scales from global to local, is unevenly distributed regarding responsibilities and impacts, and connects heterogeneous actors. Daniela Stoltenberg, Barbara Pfetsch, Zozan Baran, and Annie Waldherr discuss how climate justice highlights these uneven spatialities. Their study argues, first, that local climate justice conflicts can be interpreted as spatial conflicts arising from the tensions between different spatial figures. It also shows that spatial dimensions shape solidarity and conflict in climate justice movements. The authors propose a conceptual model of the actor and issue spaces of climate justice movements.

The study of Indrawan Prabaharyaka and Ignacio Farías examines conflicts surrounding climate adaptation in Stuttgart, Germany, as a key process in the contemporary refiguration of urban spaces. They illuminate the figurational politics of climate adaptation which involves three types of spatial conflicts in the controversy over the fresh air corridors in Stuttgart:

demonstrations, litigations, and controversies. Despite differences among these conflict types, they are conflictual spaces revolving around a common opposition between two modes of figuring urban space: One figures the city as a compact, bounded territory with internal homogeneity, while the other figures it as a zone intersected by various trajectories and flows that connect the urban core with spaces beyond its boundaries.

Note

- 1 The text is based on theoretical and empirical work developed since 2018 in the Collaborative Research Center (CRC) 1265 “Re-Figuration of Spaces,” funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation)—project number 290045248—SFB 1265. It is supported by the Open-Access-Fund of the Technische Universität Berlin.

References

- Alami, Ilias. 2017. “Money Power of Capital and Production of ‘New State Spaces’: A View from the Global South.” *New Political Economy* 23 (4): 512–529. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2017.1373756>
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Beck, Ulrich. 2000. *What Is Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berr, Karsten, and Corinna Jenal. 2019. *Landschaftskonflikte. RaumFragen: Stadt – Region – Landschaft*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-22325-0>
- Blumer, Herbert. 1954. “What Is Wrong with Social Theory?.” *American Sociological Review* 19 (1): 3–10.
- Boatcă, Manuela. 2020. “Thinking Europe Otherwise. Lessons from the Caribbean.” *Current Sociology* 21 (3): 389–414. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392120931139>
- Bratton, Benjamin H. 2015. *The Stack. Software and Sovereignty*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Brenner, Neil. 1999. “Beyond State-centrism? Space, Territoriality, and Geographical Scale in Globalization Studies.” *Theory and Society* 28 (1): 39–78.
- Bretschneider, Falk, Ariane Jossin, Teresa Koloma Beck, and Daniel Schönpflug, eds. 2000. *Gewalt vor Ort. Violence située*. Frankfurt: Campus.
- Butollo, Florian, and Cornelia Staritz. 2022. “Deglobalisierung, Rekonfiguration oder Business as Usual. Covid-19 und die Grenzen der Rückverlagerung globalisierter Produktion [Deglobalization, Reconfiguration or Business as Usual. Covid-19 and the Limits of the Relocation of Globalized Production].” *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 32: 393–425. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11609-022-00479-5>
- Castells, Manuel. 2009. *Communication Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Castells, Manuel. 2013. The Impact of the Internet on Society: A Global Perspective. In *Ch@nge. 19 Key Essays on How the Internet Is Changing Our Lives*, edited by BBVA, 127–148. Madrid: BBVA.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 2017. “The Power of Constructivist Grounded Theory for Critical Inquiry.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 23 (1): 34–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800416657105>

22 *Spatial Conflicts and Conflictual Spaces*

- Chase-Dunn, Christopher, Alexis Álvarez, and Yuhao Liao. 2023. "Waves of Structural Deglobalization: A World-Systems Perspective." *Social Sciences* 12 (5): 301. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12050301>
- Chojnacki, Sven, and Bettina Engels. 2016. "Overcoming the Material/Social Divide: Conflict Studies from the Perspective of Spatial Theory." In *Spatializing Peace and Conflict. Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies*, edited by Annika Björkdahl, and Susanne Buckley-Zistel, 25–40. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137550484_2
- Christmann, Gabriele, Hubert Knoblauch, and Martina Löw, eds. 2022. *Communicative Constructions and the Refiguration of Spaces. Theoretical Approaches and Empirical Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Connell, Raewyn. 2007. "The Northern Theory of Globalization." *Sociological Theory* 25 (4): 368–385. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2007.00314.x>
- Coser, Lewis. 1957. "Social Conflict and the Theory of Social Change." *The British Journal of Sociology* 8 (3): 197–207.
- Couldry, Nick, and Andreas Hepp. 2023. "Necessary Entanglements: Reflections on the Role of a 'Materialist Phenomenology' in Researching Deep Mediatization and Datafication." *Sociologica* 17 (1): 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/15793>
- Dahrendorf, Ralf. 1959. *Class and Class Conflict in Modern Industrial Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Dahrendorf, Ralf. 1986. "Die Funktion sozialer Konflikte [The Function of Social Conflicts]." In *Pfade aus Utopia: Arbeiten zur Theorie und Methode der Soziologie* [Paths from Utopia: Works on the Theory and Method of Sociology], 4th ed, 263–277. München: Piper.
- Dahrendorf, Ralf. 1988. *The Modern Social Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Della Porta, Donatella, and Sidney Tarrow, eds. 2005. *Transnational Protest and Global Activism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- de Satgé, Richard, and Vanessa Watson. 2018. *Urban Planning in the Global South: Conflicting Rationalities in Contested Urban Space*. London: Palgrave.
- de Vries, Catherine, and Isabell Hoffmann. 2016. *Globalisierungsangst oder Wertekonflikt? Wer in Europa populistische Parteien wählt und warum* [Fear of Globalization or Conflicting Values? Who Votes for Populist Parties in Europe and Why]. Eupinions. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.
- Doevenspeck, Martin. 2013. "An Impossible Site? Understanding Risk and Its Geographies in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo." In *The Spatial Dimension of Risk: How Geography Shapes the Emergence of Risksapes*, edited by Detlef Müller-Mahn, 137–153. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Dörre, Klaus. 2023. Land Seizure, Land Grab. In *Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism*. Historical Materialism Volume 294, edited by Wolfgang Fritz Haug, Frigga Haug, Peter Jehle, and Wolfgang Küttler, 482–504. Leiden: Brill.
- Dowler, Lorraine. 2005. "Amazonian Landscapes: Gender, War, and Historical Repetition." In *The Geography of War and Peace: From Death Camps to Diplomats*, edited by Colin Flint, 133–148. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Elias, Norbert. 1982. *The Civilizing Process*. Volume 2. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Featherstone, Mike. 1990. *Global Culture*. London: Sage.
- Ferguson, Niall. 2017. *The Square and the Tower*. London: Allen Lane.
- Flint, Colin, Paul Diehl, Jürgen Scheffran, John Vasquez, and Sang-hyun Chi. 2009. "Conceptualizing Conflict-space: Toward a Geography of Relational Power and

- Embeddedness in the Analysis of Interstate Conflict.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99 (5): 827–835. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045600903253312>
- Foucault, Michel. 2003. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*. New York: Picador.
- Fraser, Nancy. 2007. “Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 24 (4): 7–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407080090>
- Friess, Dennis, and Christiane Eilders. 2015. “A Systematic Review of Online Deliberation Research.” *Policy & Internet* 7 (3): 319–339. <https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.95>
- Genz, Carolin, Lucas Pohl, Janina Dobrusskin, and Ilse Helbrecht. 2021. “Geopolitical Caesuras as Time-Space-Anchors of Ontological (In)Security: The Case of the Fall of the Berlin Wall.” *Geopolitics* 28 (1): 392–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2021.1912021>
- Gleditsch, Kristian Skrede. 2020. “Advances in Data on Conflict.” In *Computational Conflict Research*, edited by Emmanuel Deutschmann, Jan Lorenz, Luis G. Nardin, Davide Natalini, and Adalbert F. X. Wilhelm, 23–40. Wiesbaden: Springer Open.
- Gregory, Derek. 2011. “The Everywhere War.” *The Geographical Journal* 177 (3): 238–250. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4959.2011.00426.x>
- Habermas, Jürgen. 2022. *Ein neuer Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit und die deliberative Politik* [A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Deliberative Politics]. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Harvey, David. 1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harvey, David. 2005. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, David. 2013. *Rebel City. From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. London: Verso.
- Hobbes, Thomas. 1651. *Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme, and Power of a Commonwealth*. London: A. Crooke.
- Hüttermann, Jörg. 2018. *Figurationsprozesse der Einwanderungsgesellschaft: Zum Wandel der Beziehungen zwischen Alteingesessenen und Migranten in deutschen Städten* [Figuration Processes of the Immigration Society: On the Transformation of Relationships between Long-Established Residents and Migrants in German Cities]. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Kirby, Andrew M., and Michael D. Ward. 1987. “The Spatial Analysis of Peace and War.” *Comparative Political Studies* 20 (3): 293–313. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414087020003002>
- Kirchner, Stefan, Nele Dittmar, and Emilia Sophie Ziegler. 2022. “Moving Beyond Uber: Two Modes of Organization and Work in the German Platform Economy.” *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 74(S1): 109–131. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11577-022-00830-x>
- Knoblauch, Hubert. 2020. *The Communicative Construction of Reality*. London: Routledge.
- Knoblauch, Hubert. 2021. “Reflexive Methodology and the Empirical Theory of Science.” *Historical Social Research* 46 (2): 59–79. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.46.2021.2.59-79>
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2017. “On the Spatial Re-Figuration of the Social World.” *Sociologica* 11 (2): 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.2383/88197>
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2020. “The Re-Figuration of Spaces and Refigured Modernity – Concept and Diagnosis.” *Historical Social Research* 45 (2): 263–292. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.2.263-292>

- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2024. "The Refiguration of the Global: Globalization and the Spatial Logics of Digitalization." *Critical Sociology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205241262304>
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Silke Steets. 2022. "From the Constitution to the Communicative Construction of Space." In *Communicative Constructions and the Refiguration of Spaces*, edited by Gabriele B. Christmann, Hubert Knoblauch, and Martina Löw, 19–35. London: Routledge.
- Knorr, Karin. 1999. *Epistemic Cultures. How the Sciences Make Knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Knüpfer, Curd, Matthias Hoffmann, and Vadim Voskresenskii. 2020. "Hijacking MeToo: Transnational Dynamics and Networked Frame Contestation on the Far Right in the Case of the '120 Decibels' Campaign." *Information, Communication & Society* 25 (7): 1010–1028. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1822904>
- Kobayashi, Audrey. 2009. "Geographies of Peace and Armed Conflict: Introduction." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99 (5): 819–826. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045600903279358>
- Koloma Beck, Teresa. 2020. "Auf der Suche nach dem 'Gewaltraum'. Ethnografisch-soziologische Forschung in Kabul, Afghanistan, 2015 [In Search of the 'Space of Violence': Ethnographic-Sociological Research in Kabul, Afghanistan, 2015.]" In *Gewalt vor Ort. Violence située*, edited by Falk Bretschneider, Ariane Jossin, Teresa Koloma Beck, and Daniel Schönplflug, 339–370. Frankfurt: Campus.
- Korf, Benedikt, and Conrad Schetter, eds. 2015. *Geographien der Gewalt. Kriege, Konflikte und die Ordnung des Raumes im 21. Jahrhundert* [Geographies of Violence: Wars, Conflicts, and the Order of Space in the 21st Century]. Stuttgart: Borntraeger.
- Kriesi, Hanspeter, and Edgar Grande. 2012. "The Transformative Power of Globalization and the Structure of Political Conflict in Western Europe." In *Political Conflict in Western Europe*, edited by Hanspeter Kriesi, Edgar Grande, Martin Dolezal, Marc Helbing, Dominic Höglinger, Swen Hutter, and Brund Wüest, 3–35. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Kühnhardt, Ludger. 2019. "Globality: Concept and Impact." In *The Bonn Handbook of Globality*, edited by Ludger Kühnhardt, and Tilman Mayer, 19–33. Cham: Springer.
- Kumnig, Sarah, Marit Rosol, and A Andreas Exner, eds. 2017. *Umkämpftes Grün: zwischen neoliberaler Stadtentwicklung und Stadtgestaltung von unten* [Contested Green: Between Neoliberal Urban Development and Grassroots Urban Design]. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Lefebvre, Henry. 1972. *Die Revolution der Städte* [The Revolution of Cities]. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat.
- Lefebvre, Henry. (1974) 1991. *The Production of Space*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Low, Setha. 2016. *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*. London: Routledge.
- Löw, Martina. (2001) 2016. *The Sociology of Space. Materiality, Social Structures, and Action*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Löw, Martina. 2020. "In Welchen Räumen Leben Wir? Eine Raumsoziologisch Und Kommunikativ Konstruktivistische Bestimmung Der Raumfiguren Territorialraum, Bahnenraum, Netzwerkraum Und Ort [In What Spaces Do We Live? A Space-Sociological and Communicative Constructivist Definition of the Spatial Figures: Territorial Space, Trajectory Space, Network Space, and Place]." In *Grenzen Der Kommunikation - Kommunikation an Den Grenzen*, edited by Jo Reichertz, 149–164. Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft.

- Löw, Martina, and Gunter Weidenhaus. 2017. "Borders that Relate: Conceptualizing Boundaries in Relational Space." *Current Sociology* 65 (4): 553–570.
- Luhmann, Niklas. 2012. *The Theory of Society*. Vol. 1. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Luhmann, Niklas. 2013. *The Theory of Society*. Vol. 2. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Mau, Steffen. 2022. *Sorting Machines: The Reinvention of the Border in the 21st Century*. London: Polity.
- McConnell, Fiona, Nick Megoran, and Philippa Williams, eds. 2014. *The Geographies of Peace*. New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Meier, Lars, Silke Steets, and Lars Frers. 2018. *Theoretische Positionen der Stadtsoziologie* [Theoretical Positions in Urban Sociology.] *Grundlagentexte Soziologie*. Weinheim: Beltz Juventa.
- Mejias, Ulises, and Nick Couldry. 2019. "Datafication." *Internet Policy Review* 8 (4): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1428>
- Meunier, Sophie, and Kalypso Nicolaïdis. 2019. "The Geopoliticization of European Trade and Investment Policy." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 57 (1): 103–113. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12932>
- Middell, Matthias. 2019. *Raumformate – Bausteine in Prozessen der Neuverräumlichung*. Working Paper No. 14, SFB 1199. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2018. "Introduction." In *Constructing the Pluriverse. The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, edited by Bernd Reiter, ix–xvii. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mjoset, Lars. 2000. "Stein Rokkan's Thick Comparison." *Acta Sociologica* 43: 381–397. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000169930004300411>
- Mol, Annemarie, and John Law. 1994. "Regions, Networks and Fluids: Anaemia and Social Topology." *Social Studies of Science* 24 (4): 641–671. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030631279402400402>
- Mouffe, Chantal. 2013. *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London: Verso.
- Münkler, Herfried. 2023. *Welt in Aufruhr. Die Ordnung der Mächte im 21. Jahrhundert* [World in Turmoil. The Order of Powers in the 21st Century]. Berlin: Rowohlt.
- Neuberger, Christoph. 2014. "Konflikt, Konkurrenz und Kooperation: Interaktionsmodi in einer Theorie der dynamischen Netzwerköffentlichkeit." *Medien & Kommunikationswissenschaft* 62 (4): 567–587. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5771/1615-634x-2014-4-567>
- Oldenburg, Silke. 2010. "Under Familiar Fire: Making Decisions During the 'Kivu Crisis' 2008 in Goma, DR Congo." *Africa Spectrum* 45 (2): 61–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971004500203>
- Osterhammel, Jürgen, and Niels P. Petersson. 2005. *Globalization. A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Paasch-Colberg, Sünje, Christian Strippel, Joachim Trebbe, and Martin Emmer. 2021. "From Insult to Hate Speech: Mapping Offensive Language in German User Comments on Immigration." *Media and Communication* 9 (1): 171–180. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v9i1.3399>
- Pfetsch, Barbara. 2018. "Dissonant and Disconnected Public Spheres as Challenge for Political Communication Research." *Javnost – The Public* 25 (1–2): 59–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2018.1423942>
- Piketty, Thomas. 2020. *Capital and Ideology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Randeria, Shalini. 2009. "Entangled Histories of Uneven Modernities: Civil Society, Case Councils, and Legal Pluralism in Postcolonial India." In *Comparative and Transnational History*, edited by Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, and Jürgen Kocka, 77–104. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Rau, Susanne. 2017. *Räume: Konzepte, Wahrnehmungen, Nutzungen* [Spaces: Concepts, Perceptions, Uses]. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag.
- Reiher, Cornelia, and Sarah Ruth Sippel. 2015. *Umkämpftes Essen. Produktion, Handel und Konsum von Lebensmitteln in globalen Kontexten* [Contested Food: Production, Trade, and Consumption of Food in Global Contexts]. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Robertson, Roland. 1992. *Globalization. Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: Sage.
- Rosa, Hartmut. 2013. *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Scholte, Aart Jan. 1996. "What are the New Spaces?" *Environment and Planning* 28 (11): 1965–1969. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a281965>
- Simmel, Georg. 2009. *Sociology. Inquiries into the Social Construction of Social Forms*. Leiden: Brill.
- Soja, Edward W. 1989. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso.
- Starr, Harvey. 1991. "Joining Political and Geographic Perspectives: Geopolitics and International Relations." *International Interactions* 17 (1): 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629108434767>
- Swyngedouw, Erik. 2004. "Globalisation or 'Glocalisation'. Networks, Territories and Rescaling." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17 (1): 27–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0955757042000203632>
- ten Brinke, Lisa, and Benjamin Bartill. 2019. *Coping with Multipolarity. EU Values and the Stability of the International Order*. Working Paper no. 11. Berlin: Dahrendorf Forum.
- Thompson, Helen. 2021. "The European Geopolitical Space and the Long Path to Brexit." *Government and Opposition* 56 (3): 385–404. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2021.1>
- Urry, John. 2007. *Mobilities*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.
- Volkmer, Ingrid. 2014. *The Global Public Sphere: Public Communication in The Age of Reflective Interdependence*. London: Polity.
- Waldherr, Annie, Ulrike Klinger, and Barbara Pfetsch. 2021. "Spaces, Places, and Geographies of Public Spheres: Exploring Dimensions of the Spatial Turn." *Media and Communication* 9 (3): 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v9i3.4679>
- Walter, Stefanie. 2021. "The Backlash Against Globalization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24: 421–442. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102405>
- Weidenhaus, Gunter, and Eva Korte. 2022. "Searching for a Middle Class in Nairobi and Berlin." In *Middle Class Identities and Social Crisis: Cultural and Political Perspectives on the "Global Rebellion"*, edited by Alejandro Grimson, Menara Guizardi, and Silvina Merenson, 155–175. London: Routledge.

2 Containing or acting on conflict through space

A heuristic of conflict–space interplay

Zozan Baran and Barbara Pfetsch

Introduction

Many Western university campuses witnessed a wave of radical student mobilization in the spring of 2024, materializing through encampments and campus occupations. The demonstrations against the war in Gaza at Berlin universities in May 2024 exemplified the spatial dimensions of conflict and political action. On the one hand, the protests echoed the long-standing *spatial conflict* over land rights between Israel and the Palestinians. On the other hand, the war in Gaza has sparked a series of protests on university campuses, which in Berlin took the form of building occupations and encampments. On May 7, 2024, Freie Universität Berlin became a *conflictual space* where interpretations of the situation in Gaza, political identities, and the moral obligations of the intellectual and academic community were negotiated. As demonstrators physically blocked yards, hallways, and seminar rooms in their protests, a new *spatial conflict* emerged. The university, asserting its jurisdiction over the premises, called the police to dismantle the occupation, while the students defended their right to protest on-site.

The clashes on the campus of Freie Universität epitomize different constellations that emerge when social or political conflicts is expressed *in*, *over*, or *through* space. In this chapter, we explore these patterns in their variations and social contexts, drawing on empirical observations from the research context of the Collaborative Research Center “Refiguration of Space” (CRC 1265). Collaborative research centers are interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research units in the German academic system, where various subprojects work within the same conceptual framework theoretically and empirically. Using the records and reconstructions of space from the different subprojects of the CRC 1265 framework (see Knoblauch, Sommer, and Pfetsch for more details in the Introduction to this volume), our objective in this chapter is to carve out the constellations of the interplay between conflicts and space in different social, cultural,

and political contexts and to develop a heuristic that allows us to sort out typical features of spatial patterns in conjunction with conflict.

In our inquiry into the interplay between space and conflict, we started with differentiating spatial conflict and conflictual spaces. *Spatial conflict*, as we define it, refers to conflicts over space, focusing on how space becomes the object of conflictual interaction. We analyzed and reconstructed the patterns of these interactions as they developed along different lines of conflict. *Conflictual spaces* were recorded in constellations when social, political, or cultural conflicts were playing out *in* particular spaces and in the process transforming the space itself through antagonistic relations. For both dimensions, we asked whether the conflicts were manifest—explicitly expressed through actors’ actions—or latent, where the potential for conflict was recognized but had not yet led to confrontation between opposing parties.

The crucial insight of our study is that the twofold heuristic distinguishing spatial conflicts from conflictual spaces, as depicted in [Table 2.1](#), does not fully encompass all the constellations observed in our empirical cases. As we organized the patterns from various empirical studies, a third dimension of the conflict–space interplay emerged: Space is not always employed to mark or manifest conflict; sometimes spatial arrangements serve to “contain” conflict by separating antagonistic actors or demarcating the boundaries of conflict. Moreover, containment is not solely achieved through spatial boundaries or physical limitations—conflicts can also be enclosed through institutional, legal, or cultural frameworks. In our analysis, we concede that the constellation of conflict and space is highly dynamic and depends on the subject position and point of view of the researcher.

This chapter is structured in three parts. First, we revisit theoretical approaches to conflict in social science to clarify the nature of social struggle and relate them to space and spatial figurations. As the spatial theories of conflict are discussed in more detail elsewhere (see Knoblauch, Sommer, and Pfetsch in this volume), we focus only on the particular dimensions that guide the development of our heuristics. In the second

Table 2.1 Constellations of the space/conflict interaction

<i>Conflict/Space</i>	<i>Spatial Conflict</i>	<i>Conflictual Space</i>
Latent	Conflict Type A	Conflict Type B
Manifest	Conflict Type C	Conflict Type D

Source: Own representation.

part of the chapter, we discuss the empirical case studies from the CRC projects, detailing how we conducted the “sensitizing visits” and engaged with the researchers to assess their findings in light of the categories of conflict and space. In the third part, we present our heuristic on spatial conflicts and conflictual spaces, emphasizing the newly identified dimension of conflict containment. We illustrate the different types of conflict–space interaction by drawing on the findings from CRC research projects and insights from field researchers. The chapter concludes with reflections on the broader applicability of our heuristic beyond the specific case studies of the CRC.

Theoretical framework: Approaches to conflict in social science

Three trajectories to conflict

Conflict is one of the central concepts in sociology that spans a wide range of social and political meanings, depending on the theoretical background within which it unfolds. Here, we review the major trends and strands of research on conflict. First, we examine traditional theories that relate conflict to struggles over socioeconomic status and power. Second, we explore theories that underline the symbolic dimension of conflict and address the recognition of social groups. Third, we discuss conflict within the process of interaction and communicative exchange. Each of these approaches sheds light on different objects of social contention (material, symbolic, and processual struggles) and therefore allows us to capture conflict as a multidimensional category that can appear in many different expressions and relate to a broad range of spatial relations.

In classical theories, conflict revolves around Marxist and Weberian frameworks, whereas conflict in empirical studies describes clashes of interest ranging from interpersonal disputes between individuals on the microlevel to situations of war and civil war on the macrolevel of analysis (cf. Turner 2015, 956–958). Although Weberian and Marxist theories have been serving as “meta-narratives,” modern conflict theories range from analytical (Turner 2015, 956) or non-Marxist structuralism of Dahrendorf (Siregar and Zulkarnain 2022) to comparative–historical perspectives such as Theda Skocpol’s (1979) and structural social movement theories (Tilly 1978) and microlevel analysis of Randall Collins (2008). Also, the concept of conflict has been used in the various disciplines of social and behavioral sciences (Wieviorka 2013), such as psychology, political science, and human geography. Conflict here is a category for empirical research into situations of tension, interest collisions, and outbreaks of violence, such as wars, civil wars, and intergroup violence (Sanderson 2007, 665), urban social movements (Harvey 1996; Soja 2011), territorial clashes

between nation-states (Miller 2024), or intergroup disputes, delinquency, and criminality.

In sociology, Marxian and Weberian theories, and some combinations of these two, are the forefront of conflict studies and the theorization of conflicts (Turner 2015, 956). Scholars such as Dahrendorf and Simmel (Turner 2015, 956) relate to these trajectories of thought to some degree. Weberian sociology and Marxian approaches are also utilized to explain gender- and race-related conflicts, often in combination with other dimensions of social struggle (Turner 2015, 956).

In contrast to Marxist theories, which focus on class conflict, Weberian theories place conflict in the political sphere, highlighting multiple conflicts related to class and status within the framework of the modern state, which is viewed as autonomous from the economy (Sanderson 2007, 663). Dahrendorf (1961) identifies authority and its inequitable distribution as the basic sources of conflicts and locates the resolution of conflict in the political sphere rather than the economic one. In this regard, Dahrendorf's and Weberian approaches share a common emphasis on political power and authority (Dahrendorf 1961). Relatedly, conflict theories differ with regard to whether they see conflict as a positive or negative force with respect to social change (Wieviorka 2013, 698). Weberian and Dahrendorf's conflict theories link it to the institutional management of conflict (Dahrendorf 1961; Hayward 2015, 590–591); hence, “containment” of conflict becomes a positive coping mechanism. In Marxist analysis, the structures leading to conflict must be acted upon in order to achieve positive social change.

For our analysis, structural conflicts are relevant when spatial figuration is linked to contention about *political and social power and social status*. Whether the conflict is acted upon or managed becomes particularly relevant when we lay out the management of conflict as containment of conflict.

The second trajectory in conflict studies focuses on the cultural or symbolic aspects of conflict, as opposed to struggles over political or economic power. These theories emphasize the focus on rights and recognition-based approaches (Honneth 1994). Honneth (1994) explains social conflicts as reactions to the denial of recognition in three dimensions: the use of violence (attack on physical integrity), disenfranchisement (negation of social integrity), and degradation (disregard for self-esteem). From this theoretical perspective, social conflicts appear as moral struggles, and they can provoke social resistance movements (Honneth 1994). From a feminist theory perspective, the aspect of recognition is further developed. For instance, Nancy Fraser (2013) proposes a model that integrates both the demand for recognition (identity-based politics) and redistribution (class-based politics). In relation to the interplay between conflict and space, these theories suggest that space or spatial configurations may feature

symbolic struggles. Social recognition may be symbolically expressed through claims over spaces, or struggles for recognition may be tied to or enacted within particular spaces.

The third trajectory of conflict theories relates to the literature on symbolic interactionism. It emphasizes the processes of microlevel meaning-making that come to the fore in conflict (see [Carter and Fuller 2016](#)). It contrasts with the functionalist and structuralist interpretations and maintains that individual meaning-making processes do not necessarily reflect the structural positions of actors. Instead, this perspective ([Stryker 1980](#)) highlights autonomy at the individual level (see [Blumer 1969](#)). [Knoblauch \(2017\)](#) emphasizes the communicative and interactive (or relational) aspects of this meaning-making process, suggesting that social reality is shaped through continuous communicative acts. Approaches to conflict-based symbolic interactionism consider conflict as a permanent aspect of the social world that is engrained in individual meaning-making processes and communicative action and exchange. With respect to the relation of conflict and space, the subject position of actors becomes relevant in emphasizing the relationality of conflict: individual interpretations and expressions of identity.

The outlined approaches to conflict help us sort the objects and nature of conflict that are addressed in empirical case studies. Thus, conflicts may evolve around issues of power and social status, the moral recognition of social groups and identities, as well as clashes that evolve in processes of communication and meaning-making of individuals. These objects and issues of conflict may be linked in various ways to space and spatial figures, as we will establish in our case studies.

Intensity and forms of conflict

In empirical research on conflict, violent situations on various levels, from individual delinquency to intergroup struggles and situations of war, are objects of study. However, while research highlights the actual conflictual situations, it tends to exhibit an observational bias. Questions such as where a conflict begins and ends, as well as the degrees of conflict, are often overlooked. The exact beginning and end of conflict is a conceptual problem of conflict research. While we know a conflictual situation when we see one, we do not always know what a non-conflictual situation looks like or how it evolves. Even though many studies in social science concentrate on open situations of coercion, the intensity and forms of conflicts vary and therefore prevent us from seeing conflict as a clear-cut social category. For our analysis, two points are significant.

First, we note that conflicts are not always open situations of intended action but can be unrecognized imputations of coercion. In classic functional sociological theory, [Merton \(1949\)](#) differentiates between manifest and

latent functions of social action, which can also be applied to conflict. Thus, conflictual situations are not necessarily open. Even though the distinction between the latent function of behavior versus recognized social action is not easy to draw (Campbell 1982), we note that conflicts vary in their intentionality and manifestation from open situations of physical clashes to social action underlying tensions of grievances. For the analysis of the relation of space and conflict, it is important whether the conflict is acted upon or not.

Wiewiorka (2013, 699) stresses the relational character of conflicts, suggesting that conflict describes the antagonistic relationship between two or more actors, which can be distinguished from a crisis, “a *situation* in which individuals and groups react.” He advocates examining different stages of conflict to understand how conflict evolves from relational, yet antagonistic, claims-making to a complete breakdown of consensus. A similar approach has been applied in social movement research by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001), who suggest that various forms of contentious politics and similar mechanisms and processes can be at play and yet create different outcomes of protest (from institutional change to revolution). Thus, we can view these periods of contentious action as a continuum rather than as completely different situations. Moreover, this continuity can manifest as a temporal shift in tactics by actors, the involvement of new actors, or a change in the arena of conflict. In addition to recognizing the temporal dynamics of conflicts, it is important to set them apart from neighboring concepts such as crisis and persisting violence.

Against this backdrop, we acknowledge that conflicts and non-conflictual situations are not binary social realities but exist on a continuum with potential for both. However, for analytical purposes, we suggest differentiating between two broadly defined categories: manifest, namely, visible conflicts, and latent, namely, hidden conflicts for two reasons. On the one hand, we classify situations in which the potential for conflict is recognized but not acted upon as latent conflicts. On the other hand, we describe conflicts as manifest when they are expressed through deliberate intended actions, such as protests, legal disputes, or violent encounters. Thus, for our purposes to relate conflict and space, we link the latency of conflicts to their visibility in space, through space or of space.

The approaches and qualities of conflict discussed so far deal with ongoing and visible antagonisms in various degrees, which are acted upon in one way or another, and in their expression can be linked to space. In our reading of the literature, we recognize that some conflicts in society are so deeply ingrained in the social structure, history, and demography of a society that they are frozen in the structure and institutions of a given society. Hence, within the paradigm of a given social structure, they cannot be solved but need to be managed. This approach reveals that the management of conflicts through institutions also bears spatial dimensions.

Cleavages and the institutionalization of conflict

The institutionalized conflict lines relate to the concept of cleavages. In classical sociological theories, it is understood that some conflicts are deeply rooted in the social structure and demography of society. Usually, these conflicts evolve around the long historical and structural divisions of societies. In modern societies, these cleavages can be viewed as political reflections of class and socioeconomic divisions (Zuckerman 1982). Cleavages as conflict lines can appear not only along class or social status dimensions but also along gender, religion, center vs. periphery, or regions (Rokkan 1970). Dahrendorf (1961), in his conflict sociology, maintains that modern societies cope with these structural conflicts by enclosure, meaning that society develops mechanisms through which such deep-rooted conflicts are managed and contained within specific institutional frameworks. To contain and regulate conflicts, societies institutionalize conflicts within specific arenas such as legal systems, political institutions, labor unions, or civil society organizations or movements. These institutions provide structured channels for expressing grievances and negotiating solutions, reducing the likelihood of conflicts antagonizing society.

However, not all conflictual situations emerge in these institutionalized settings and on long-lasting cleavage lines. In some cases, new cleavage lines might emerge, which in turn can lead to wider societal clashes until they are integrated into the institutional settings. The anti-nuclear power movement, which eventually merged into the Green party, comes as an example here. In other cases, it might be difficult for the socially weaker parties in the conflictual interaction to put forward their demands or protect their interests when no legal or institutional means are available to them, and they feel too weak for a conflictual confrontation through mobilization or violent confrontation. In these situations, these parties might seek ways to become invisible to avoid conflictual encounters. Such situations bear a significant spatial aspect, such as invisibilization, which can, in most cases, mean spatial demarcation. We will detail these situations below in our discussion of conflict containment.

The recognition of space in conflict studies

The recognition of space in so-called conflict studies has been a quite recent phenomenon over the last 20 years. The field is characterized by empirical studies in different academic disciplines (Chojnacki and Engels 2016, 25) rather than by theoretical work. The bulk of this literature concentrates on war and political violence and relates predominantly to territorial space (Nnabuihe 2020) with the nation-state-dominating research as a core unit of analysis (Chojnacki and Engels 2016, 26–29). However, recent work on the “spatial turn” in conflict studies emphasizes the processes of

detritorialization in peace and conflict research. In this context, research opens up to a broader spectrum of spatial figures, such as places and networks (Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel 2016, 5–6).

Literature in conflict studies also emphasizes the relational and social character of space (Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel 2016, 6). Chojnacki and Engels (2016) call for overcoming narrow perspectives that focus on materialistic and physical conditions of space and conflict, e.g., whether issues of natural disasters or weather conditions such as heavy rainfalls or draughts cause conflict between social groups or states. As conflict studies recognize space as an important social category based on Lefebvre (1991), they argue that the social reproduction of space is about controlling resources and people; hence, it is marked by inequalities and is a conflict-ridden process (Soja 2011; Chojnacki and Engels 2016, 32).

From this perspective, conflict studies share with the refiguration of space approach a relational and communicative understanding of space (see Löw 2016; Knoblauch 2017): Spatial construction and production are inherently conflict-ridden processes, as social actors involved in these processes have potentially diverging and clashing interests, and the more powerful ones are able to push these processes according to their own desires (Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel 2016, 4). Moreover, the refiguration of space has been suggested as a conflict-laden process (Löw and Knoblauch 2019). The different aspects of the refiguration approach will be covered in various chapters in this volume, and the underlying theoretical structures will be carved out in another chapter (cf. Knoblauch, Sommer, and Pfetsch in this volume). In this chapter, we use the perspective of refiguration and the theoretical approaches to conflict to review empirical cases of “space–conflict” interaction and develop a heuristic that allows us to conceptualize the typical constellations of how conflicts are enacted over, in, and through space. As a third option, we recognize that the containment of conflict can be achieved through the management and regulation of space.

Conclusion of the theoretical framework

Building on the literature on conflict in social sciences and the refiguration of space approach, we aim to develop a model that can account for different dimensions of space–conflict interplay. As a baseline, we concur with Wieviorka’s (2013, 696–697) definition of conflict as an antagonistic relationship between two or more actors. This antagonistic relationship is built when three principles are met. First, a shared sphere of action must exist, where actors relate to each other, albeit antagonistically. Second, the parties should also define themselves and their interests first to identify the antagonistic aspect. Third, for a situation to be conflictual, the actors must

above all define their interest in opposition to one or several other groups (Wieviorka 2013, 699–700).

In our conception of space, we work with Löw's relational approach (2016, 135), which sees space as constituted through two processes of spacing and operation of synthesis. Bringing together these two strands of thought, we argue that conflict and space shape and reshape each other through two mechanisms: On the one hand, spatial processes of synthesis and spacing can take an antagonistic character, which in turn creates conflictual spaces. On the other hand, through the conflictual characteristics of refiguration, tensions may emerge between actors with diverging spatial and social logics and demands. This would then lead to spatial conflicts.

Sensitizing visits as an empirical approach of meta-analysis

Interdisciplinary research is key to overcoming the long-standing divides between disciplines. However, it also presents challenges, particularly in bridging theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary differences, both across and within fields, and across diverse cases. Collaborative research centers (CRCs) represent one such interdisciplinary structure in the German academic landscape (cf. Marguin and Knoblauch 2021). These centers are organized around interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration, integrating subprojects from various disciplines and epistemological approaches. They also include cross-sectional groups that bring together subprojects with similar topical focuses. CRCs adopt a theoretical and conceptual meta-framework, which in our case is the refiguration of space approach, fostering dialogue between the overarching theoretical framework and the subprojects (Löw and Knoblauch 2019; see also Knoblauch, Sommer, and Pfetsch in this volume for more detail). The research conducted in CRC 1265 critically examines theories of social transformation through the lens of refiguration (see the Introduction in this volume for more details).

The fundamental principle of CRCs is to apply central theoretical concepts within subprojects, while their findings contribute to the advancement of the overarching meta-theory. One effective tool for this process is sensitizing visits, which aim to facilitate dialogue between foundational theoretical concepts and mid-range theories, that is, the epistemological and methodological approaches employed by the various subprojects (for a more detailed discussion of sensitizing visits, see Marguin and Knoblauch 2021). This chapter is based on such visits to the subprojects of CRC 1265, conducted between spring 2023 and winter 2023/2024, following the initial data collection phase of each project. This stage is particularly conducive to fostering dialogue between the central themes and the subprojects, as the initial conceptualization of the interplay between conflict

and space can be re-examined in light of empirical findings. Methodologically, these visits integrate both deductive and inductive approaches: deductive in applying the refiguration of space theory to analyze conflict–space interactions within subprojects, and inductive in revisiting theoretical assumptions based on empirical observations. To this end, we posed the following questions:

- When, how, and under what conditions do space and conflict appear in the study, and how are they interrelated?
- How do space and conflict shape each other through interaction, and what different constellations emerge from this relationship?

The visits were transcribed, and the authors initially discussed emerging themes and constellations of space and conflict. Early formulations of spatial conflicts and conflictual spaces were reviewed within the context of each subproject and subsequently revised. Simultaneously, we observed that some empirical cases did not align with the original concepts but instead introduced a new constellation—containment. This was incorporated into the space–conflict constellations. To further analyze these constellations, the authors examined the transcripts through three dimensions:

- How is conflict embedded or enacted in space?
- How does space delineate or mark conflict?
- How does space contain, organize, or manage conflicts?

These dimensions were then discussed in terms of their specific manifestations and intensities. We distinguished between manifest and latent conflictual spaces and spatial conflicts, drawing on [Merton's \(1949\)](#) framework. In the case of containment, we differentiated between spatial strategies and cultural/institutional strategies.

The visits revealed key commonalities and differences across the projects, as well as between the subprojects and the central concepts of the CRC. At the same time, they provided opportunities to bridge these differences and refine the CRC's concepts and approaches. The resulting heuristic aims to generalize spatial dimensions within conflict studies beyond the CRC 1265 framework. However, the empirical cases highlight the context-dependent nature of the space–conflict interaction. Therefore, we recommend that researchers remain attuned to the specific constraints of their cases and the positionality of both the researchers and the social actors involved. For detailed discussions of the individual CRC 1265 subprojects, readers should refer to the relevant chapters in this volume and other publications.¹

Conflict in refiguration of space: Toward a heuristic of conflict–space relations

Space–conflict interaction relates to how space shapes/marks conflict and how conflict in return shapes and marks the space. It is important that this interaction can go both ways; hence, we have conflictual spaces where conflicts are spatially marked, and spatial conflicts where spatial logic is marked as conflictual. Moreover, the interaction of space with conflict does not always create constellations in which conflict is expressed in action. On the contrary, as we find out in the empirical case studies—reported in the next sections—spatial and cultural/institutional strategies are often about developing tools to “contain” and “manage” the conflict. Therefore, space–conflict interaction can lead to conflict containment as a distinct constellation and a new dimension of analysis.

In developing the heuristics, we proceed in two steps. First, we use empirical cases to illustrate the conflict–space interaction, starting with spatial conflicts and moving to conflictual spaces and conflict containment. Here, we can only provide a synopsis and a single example for each dimension due to the restriction of space. Second, we conceptualize these empirically developed dimensions with a refiguration of space approach. Third, we conclude by sorting out the theoretical constellation from the categories that evolve from our theoretical framework.

Spatial conflicts

Two projects are selected to illustrate spatial conflicts in their latent and manifest forms. The first case stems from one of the CRC subprojects that investigates the spatiality of digital infrastructures² as many stakeholders such as states, regional institutions, civil society, and market actors with different goals are involved in controlling and (de)regulating the internet. This multistakeholder environment also marks different spatial logics, a network of users and market actors for whom the internet should be protected from the power and territorial logic of nation-states as well as regional actors who envision a controlled digital environment. This leads to a latent spatial conflict around the ownership of material infrastructure, influencing decisions about where cables and server infrastructure are located and how the network is utilized in different places and for various purposes. This spatial conflict is also related to economic and political cleavages around the ownership of digital space and infrastructure. However, it remains latent, as it is mostly negotiated through formalized and institutionalized channels with industry professionals. Other dimensions of the space–conflict interaction of this project are elaborated elsewhere in this volume (see Sömnez and Knoblauch in this volume).

Conflicts around ownership or control of space do not always remain latent. On the contrary, spatial conflicts such as land rights often give way to manifest conflictual encounters, such as wars, or intergroup violence. One such situation emerges in the home-making practices of the middle classes in Kenya.³ Home-making is closely related to land and ownership, hence conflicts in land ownership. In Kenya, land ownership is complicated by the clash between customary law and state law, each of which provides different rules for ownership. This clash, coupled with overlapping claims to the same piece of land—often resulting from corruption and inconsistencies in state bureaucracy—leads to frequent land disputes. These disputes are solved through court trials, but as this process is not always effective or is not accepted, it often leads to the employment of violence against other parties. Such conflicts have both ethnic and social cleavage dimensions, as they can be between different tribes or ethnic groups as well (for a more detailed discussion of the case, see Kitata and Kibel in this volume).

The two cases indicate refiguration processes marked by clashes between different spatial and social logics (Knoblauch and Löw 2020). Moreover, they also demonstrate that conflicts can stem from the spatiality of the social arrangements, where spaces are marked as conflictual. In both cases, clashes of sociospatial logics and tensions emerging from sociospatial arrangements are defined as *spatial conflicts*. In this vein, spatial conflicts can be identified in two distinct forms. In the classical socioeconomic sense, spatial conflicts refer to conflicts over the ownership and symbolic, economic, and cultural representation of spaces. Land conflicts, accommodation, sheltering, or the naming of places—issues explored in CRC subprojects—exemplify this type of spatial conflict, which often manifests as struggles over space as a valuable resource.

Yet, what is specifically relevant within the refiguration framework is that the cases illustrate how spatial conflicts can arise from the clash of logics associated with spatial figures or figurations. This indicates that conflicts emerge from sociospatial logics related to the evolution of (post) modern society (Löw and Knoblauch 2021; Knoblauch, Sommer, and Pfetsch in this volume). In addition to this meta-process, spatial conflicts can also result from concrete clashes of spatial figures, such as an encounter between network logic and place-based considerations.

When the same spatiality is constructed by social actors as territory, trajectory, network, or place, these actors take up different logics of actions, which can give rise to conflictual interactions. Pipeline projects where trajectory logic clashes with territory logic (or place) or migration regimes when two competing territorial logics (nation-states vs. transnational, regional bodies) clash are good examples of the second manifestation of spatial conflicts (see Perko and Biaback in this volume). Spatial conflicts can also emerge when nation-states want to exert their power on

local communities, where the logic of territory and place prevails (as an entity attached emotionally and practically), or when places are being demolished for routes, roads, autobahns, pipelines, or coal mining sites (see Stoltenberg et al. in this volume).

In spatial conflicts, the relationship between space and conflict is most evident *when conflict arises directly from spatial arrangements*. However, these conflicts do not always manifest openly. Many spatial conflicts are indirect or hidden, meaning that they remain latent over a long period of time. Often, the claims related to space do not openly contradict each other but *coexist in tension*, as suggested by refiguration processes. Moreover, these conflicts can relate to different kinds of cleavages, such as class or race. The boundaries between latent and manifest conflicts are best observed empirically, as each case may differ in how the conflict develops. Theoretically, latent conflicts become manifest when actors decide to act upon them in a confrontative manner, taking forms of violence, legal battles, or contentious actions such as protests.

Conflictual spaces

Projects relating to young adults' spatial practices and informal settlements in Nairobi illustrate conflictual spaces in latent and manifest forms. One of the CRC subprojects focuses on how young adults navigate spatial practices by building spatial knowledge in Berlin and Lima.⁴ Such practices are informed by young adults' evaluations of encountering conflictual situations, hence avoiding these spaces. Young adults in Berlin experienced particular urban areas—such as the subway, which they use daily on their way to school—as potentially conflictual spaces since they encounter diverse identities and social classes that they perceive as threatening (homeless, sick, etc.). Such perceptions shape their spatial knowledge and at the same time mark the public transport of Berlin as a potentially conflictual space where socially heterogeneous passengers may engage in violent situations at any time (For other dimensions of conflict–space interaction in this case study, see Castillo et al. in this volume).

Another subproject examines the everyday practices of queer people in Seoul at the intersection of contestation and the renegotiation of sexual identity.⁵ Since 2015, the annual celebration of Pride in Seoul Plaza—a central plaza of the city with historical and cultural significance—marks an important occasion for queer people to go public. However, Christian and other anti-LGBTQ groups protest the pride simultaneously, meaning that Seoul Plaza is divided spatially through police barricades and politically via pride on the one side and the counter-protest on the other. These practices of contestation and confrontation mark Seoul Plaza as a manifestly conflictual space where queer politics and rights are negotiated on-site.

Conflict–space interplay is not always about clashing spatial logics turning into conflicts. It can also be that the spatiality of social relations takes a conflictual character. As stated above, Löw (2016) defines spatiality through two processes: spacing and synthesizing. Conflictual spaces then emerge when these two processes are marked by antagonistic claim-making. Social, political, economic, cultural, or symbolic conflicts can turn spatial figures, where this antagonistic relationality is expressed, into conflictual spaces. As Löw (2016, 106) suggests, spatial figures, but not space, can be empirically investigated. Similarly, conflictual spaces can be observed and analyzed through concrete spatial figures in conflictual encounters. Therefore, in this constellation, we attempt to understand how *different forms of conflicts are managed, or marked spatially*.

More specifically, conflictual spaces emerge when certain spaces become an arena of encounters between different social actors, especially when some of these actors demand actions that are perceived as damaging to other actors, or when they contradict other actors' demanded actions. One can think of city centers, plazas, or other public places where vigils and protests are held and counter-protests are organized.

Conflictual spaces can emerge when spatial precautions, such as segregation, are taken to ensure the perceived and demanded safety and well-being of one group at the expense of another. In these situations, the spatial separation is not intended to ensure containment of the conflict, as we will explain below. On the contrary, the separation becomes a direct expression of the conflict—as in the case of barricades on Seoul Plaza—and often also marks one or more groups that are segregated as “problematic.” One can think of ghettos, racially segregated neighborhoods, poorly funded working-class, or migrant neighborhoods with inadequate social infrastructures as conflictual spaces (Kohrs, Hering, Shadrack in this volume; Uitermark, Nicholls, and Loopmans 2012). Cities are marked as contested spaces as they host groups with different identities, and identity-based expectations and conflicts (Soja 2011; Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel 2016, 10).

As demonstrated, conflictual spaces can exist in latent and manifest forms. When spaces underline social differences without open confrontation (although the potential is almost always there), the conflict remains a potentiality and is therefore latent. However, especially in the case of confrontation of groups with conflicting demands, conflictual spaces are clearly manifested as conflictual.

Conflict containment

Unlike spatial conflicts and conflictual spaces, conflict containment cannot be conceptualized as manifest or latent; by definition, it means that it is about being less visible. Instead, we think of it as spatial and cultural/

institutional conflict containment, as we demonstrate below. Although we started the sensitizing visits with the aim of highlighting how conflict is manifested through space—among other things—experiences from researchers made it clear that what often happened was not a manifestation of the conflict but a containment of it. During the visit to the CRC subproject on urban asylum architecture,⁶ we were confronted with this fact. The researchers observed in Lagos, Nigeria, that internally displaced people (IDPs) actively sought to become spatially invisible. They did this by crowding into small, overlooked spaces and relocating from the city center to areas where they could find acceptance. Their homes were often constructed from temporary, easily movable materials, further contributing to their invisibility in the eyes of city planners and government officials. This strategic invisibility helped them avoid unwanted attention and interference from the authorities. Hence, IDPs often spatially arrange their existence in the city to avoid being visible and confronted with hostile attitudes and to be ready to leave when they do (for other dimensions of space–conflict interaction, see Amer, Roberts, and Ceola in this volume).

The concept of containing conflict is essential for understanding various sociospatial and cultural contexts. During our visit to the CRC subproject, where anthropological approaches to micro-climatic heat adaptations are investigated,⁷ the researchers emphasized this aspect by challenging our very notion of conflict and referring to linguistic and legal means to “dissipate conflict” in Japan. Notably, they pointed out that the Japanese language lacks a specific word for the kinds of social conflicts typically studied in European sociology. Instead, it has numerous terms for situations that Western sociological thinking would classify as conflict. We understand this as a linguistic strategy to contain conflict as a social phenomenon.

Does spatiality always signify conflict? We claim that, quite often, spatial arrangements can be used to contain the conflict. This is, however, not a discussion over whether the social world is always conflictual. Rather, we are addressing conflictual social realities where the potential for conflict is contained. In the literature (cf. [Hayward 2015](#); [Turner 2015](#)), it is stated that conflict emerges—potentially—when relations are marked by inequality or imbalances of power. Given that most, if not all, social relations in the contemporary world exhibit such imbalances, it may seem surprising that conflicts are not constantly present. We argue that strategies such as conflict containment might be the reason for this. Because the demarcation of conflicts always bears in it the potential for outbursts, many political and economic systems develop strategies to contain or demark these conflicts. [Dahrendorf \(1961\)](#) explicates institutional strategies of this sort. Here, we claim that spatial containment is a crucial and understudied strategy. Therefore, the space–conflict interaction can also mean that space is utilized to avoid the outburst of violence.

A differentiation between containing a conflict and marking a conflict should be made first. Similar to conflictual space constellations, in the case of conflict containment, too, conflicts are spatially managed. As stated above, conflicts emerge from power imbalances and inequalities. When these imbalances are enforced in one direction by powerful actors upon less powerful ones—such as in cases of racial segregation or institutionalized dominance by labor groups, racial groups, or genders—this marks the imbalance and, consequently, the conflict. When imbalances are managed or accounted for, conflicts are contained. Dahrendorf (1961) gives the example of unions, a compromise solution between labor and capital, where labor gains certain power to push for its demands. Spatially, one can think of situations where underprivileged groups would work on ways to invisibilize themselves when the threat of repercussion emerges. We should pay attention to the fact that this is a process enforced by the “oppressed” group itself; hence, the subject position must be essential to the strategies of containment vis-à-vis segregation.

However, it can be further scrutinized—theoretically and empirically—whether spatial containment is more at work where it is not yet institutionalized. In our empirical examples, in welfare regimes, conflict containment is often part of a “democratic compromise.” Political and economic rights and resources are distributed across diverse groups in order to decrease the level of discontent and the potential for conflict (Dahrendorf 1961). However, this can also work spatially when, for example, spatial infrastructures are distributed among the poor or migrant neighborhoods in a way that alleviates their grievances. Containment can be a self-protection strategy for vulnerable groups. In the context of hostility toward queer people, for example, some queer people might avoid going to visibly queer places or dating “queer bodies” or “looking queer” (see B03 publications). As illustrated above, when a group of citizens are equalized with problems or violence, they might prefer to move away from city centers in order to avoid visibilities. Conflict containment might require that these groups are ready to move and hence are always in a semi-mobile state; once conflict emerges, they are ready to “disappear.”

Synthesis and conclusion

Based on the empirical investigation of the subprojects through sensitizing visits, we identified six distinct conflict–space constellations. These constellations reflect how space–conflict interactions can reshape and refigure both spatial and social phenomena. When spatial processes of synthesizing and spacing social relations take on antagonistic forms, spatial figures delineate conflictual spaces. Moreover, the refiguration process inherently carries conflictual dynamics, as differing sociospatial logics and demands

Table 2.2 Constellations of the space/conflict interaction—Revisited

<i>Conflict/ Space</i>	<i>Spatial Conflict</i>	<i>Conflictual Space</i>	<i>Containment</i>	
Latent	Conflict Type A	Conflict Type B	Conflict Type E	Spatial
Manifest	Conflict Type C	Conflict Type D	Conflict Type F	Cultural/ Institutional

Source: Own representation.

coexist in the contemporary world. This coexistence often leads to the emergence and intensification of spatial conflicts. Perhaps most importantly, the empirical investigation we carried out revealed many spatial and cultural/institutional processes in which societies attempt to contain, manage, and hinder conflicts. We put forward some initial ideas about how this process looks in the context of CRC subprojects. We believe seeing space–conflict interaction through the conceptual lenses of conflict containment can sensitize researchers in recognizing how crucial spatiality is indeed for social phenomena and processes.

The heuristic depicted in Table 2.2 is an ideal type that helps outline typical constellations of conflict–space relations, while acknowledging that these representations may vary in social reality. This social reality is highly context dependent in at least two ways. First, the interpretation of the conflict–space interaction as we present it here depends on subject positions in two ways. On the one hand, conflict can only emerge as a social phenomenon if actors recognize their counterpart as a legitimate, albeit antagonistic, party in the interaction. This proposition emphasizes conflict as a highly subjective phenomenon, which is in many cases informed by a subject’s social position or perception of identity. On the other hand, subject position also matters on the side of the observer, which influences whether the same conflictual situation is perceived as spatial conflict or conflictual space in latent or manifest representations.

Particularly, in the case of conflict containment, the subject position is highly relevant. This is particularly so because where we draw the line between containing a conflict and marking a conflict (segregating) through spatial demarcation also depends on the subject’s position. Moreover, the conflict itself can relate to power, moral recognition of identities, or processual interaction of meaning-making. For example, when actors with fewer resources and in danger of violence and discrimination isolate themselves spatially, we may interpret this behavior as conflict containment. However, when conflict is marked through separating two groups and the

powerful one succeeds in pushing through its interests, this would be considered as marking the conflict.

Second, the context dependency of conflict refers to how the nature, intensity, and resolution of conflicts are influenced by the specific circumstances of the social world in which they occur. Factors such as cultural background, historical relationships, socioeconomic conditions, and individual personalities play crucial roles here. For instance, disagreements in spatial conflicts or antagonist claims about land ownership might be exacerbated by differing communication styles and cultural norms, while the same issue in a more homogeneous setting might be resolved quickly by legal arrangements.

Finally, power dynamics and the presence of external constraints, such as economic instability or political tension, can significantly affect the escalation and outcome of conflicts and consequentially also affect the expression in space or through space. Understanding the context within which a conflict arises is essential for interpreting conflict–space relations and for sorting out the constellations in our heuristics.

Notes

- 1 Information on projects and the publications lists can be found here: <https://sfb1265.de/en/projects/subprojects/>
- 2 <https://sfb1265.de/en/subprojects/control-space-the-spatiality-of-digital-infrastructures-in-contextures-maps-and-discourses/>
- 3 <https://sfb1265.de/en/subprojects/being-home-living-spaces-and-self-images-of-the-kenyan-middle-class/>
- 4 <https://sfb1265.de/en/subprojects/the-spatial-knowledge-of-young-adults-the-constitution-of-online-offline-and-hybrid-spaces/>
- 5 <https://sfb1265.de/en/subprojects/smart-people-queer-everyday-life-in-digitalized-spaces/>
- 6 <https://sfb1265.de/en/subprojects/architectures-of-asylum-ii-circulation-of-governance-approaches-planning-knowledge-design-practices-and-materialities/>
- 7 <https://sfb1265.de/en/subprojects/urban-microclimate-planning-regimes-the-constitution-of-spaces-and-infrastructures-of-heat/>

References

- Björkdahl, Annika, and Susanne Buckley-Zistel. 2016. "Spatializing Peace and Conflict: An Introduction." In *Spatializing Peace and Conflict*, edited by Annika Björkdahl, and Susanne Buckley-Zistel, 1–22. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Blumer, Herbert. 1969. *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Campbell, Colin. 1982. "A Dubious Distinction? An Inquiry into the Value and Use of Merton's Concepts of Manifest and Latent Function." *American Sociological Review* 47 (1): 29–44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095040>
- Carter, Micheal J., and Celene Fuller. 2016. "Symbols, Meaning, and Action: The Past, Present, and Future of Symbolic Interactionism." *Current Sociology* 64 (6): 931–961. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116638396>

- Chojnacki, Sven, and Bettina Engels. 2016. "Overcoming the Material/Social Divide: Conflict Studies from the Perspective of Spatial Theory." In *Spatializing Peace and Conflict*, edited by Annika Björkdahl and Susanne Buckley-Zistel, 25–40. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Collins, Randall. 2008. *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dahrendorf, Ralf. 1961. *Gesellschaft und Freiheit: Zur soziologischen Analyse der Gegenwart* [Society and Freedom: On the Sociological Analysis of the Present]. München: Piper.
- Fraser, Nancy. 2013. *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*. New York: Verso Books.
- Harvey, David. 1996. *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hayward, Katy. 2015. "Conflict and Consensus." In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, edited by James D. Wright, 589–593. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Honneth, Axel. 1994. *Kampf um Anerkennung: Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte* [The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts]. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Knoblauch, Hubert. 2017. *Die kommunikative Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit* [The Communicative Construction of Reality]. Heidelberg: Springer.
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2020. "The Re-Figuration of Spaces and Refigured Modernity—Concept and Diagnosis." *Historical Social Research* 45 (2): 263–292. <https://doi.org/10.12759/HSR.45.2020.2.263-292>
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Löw, Martina. 2016. *The Sociology of Space: Materiality, Social Structures, and Action*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Löw, Martina, and Hubert Knoblauch. 2019. *Die Re-Figuration von Räumen: Zum Forschungsprogramm des Sonderforschungsbereichs "Re-Figuration von Räumen"* [The Re-Figuration of Spaces: About the Research Program of the Collaborative Research Center "Re-Figuration of Spaces"]. <http://doi.org/10.14279/depositonce-9236>
- Löw, Martina, and Hubert Knoblauch. 2021. "The Refiguration of Space, Circulation, and Mobility." In *Spatial Transformations*, edited by Angela Million, Christian Haid, Ignacio Castillo Ulloa, and Nina Baur, 17–27. London: Routledge.
- Marguin, Séverine, and Hubert Knoblauch. 2021. "Empirische Wissenschaftstheorie: Wissenschaftsethnografie, experimentelle Methodenentwicklung und Sensitizing Visits im SFB 1265 'Re-Figuration von Räumen' [Empirical Theory of Science: Science Ethnography, Experimental Method Development and Sensitizing Visits in the CRC 1265 'Re-Figuration of Spaces']." In *Re-Figuration von Räumen*, edited by Martina Löw, Volkan Sayman, Jona Schwerer, and Hannah Wolf, 445–472. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Merton, Robert King. 1949. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Macmillan.
- Miller, Benjamin. 2024. "Nationalism and Conflict: How Do Variations of Nationalism Affect Variations in Domestic and International Conflict?." *Political Science Quarterly* qqae01. <https://doi.org/10.1093/psquar/qqae014>

- Nnabuihe, Onyekachi E. 2020. "Spaces of Conflict and Conflict of Spaces: Territory and Communal Conflicts in Jos, North Central Nigeria." *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 76 (4): 535–551. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928420961731>
- Rokkan, Stein. 1970. *Citizens, Elections, Parties: Approaches to the Comparative Study of the Processes of Development*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Sanderson, Stephen K. 2007. "Conflict Theory." In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, edited by George Ritzer. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Siregar, Iskandarsyah, and Zulkarnain. 2022. "The Relationship Between Conflict and Social Change in the Perspective of Expert Theory: A Literature Review." *International Journal of Arts and Humanities Studies* 2 (1): 9–16. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijahs.2022.2.1.2>
- Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Soja, Edward W. 2011. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso.
- Stryker, Sheldon. 1980. *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version*. San Francisco: Benjamin/Cummings.
- Tilly, Charles. 1978. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. 1st ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Turner, Jonathan H. 2015. "Sociological Theory." In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, edited by James D. Wright, 954–964. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Uitermark, Justus, Walter Nicholls, and Maarten Loopmans. 2012. "Cities and Social Movements: Theorizing Beyond the Right to the City." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 44 (11): 2546–2554. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a44301>
- Wieviorka, Michel. 2013. "Social Conflict." *Current Sociology* 61 (5–6): 696–713. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392113499487>
- Zuckerman, Alan S. 1982. "New Approaches to Political Cleavage: A Theoretical Introduction." *Comparative Political Studies* 15 (2): 131–144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414082015002001>

Part I

Macroregimes and spatial conflicts



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

3 Regional free movement

Ongoing spatial conflicts between macroterritorial and national levels— A case study of ECOWAS, the EU, and Mercosur

Zoé Perko and Dorothea Biaback Anong

Introduction

Various supranational regions¹ worldwide engage in the creation of common spaces to achieve shared objectives related to economic prosperity, political integration, and the cultivation of a common identity, often through mechanisms such as customs unions or common markets. This integration process involves member states relinquishing aspects of their sovereignty in favor of supranational goals, aiming to facilitate the movement of people and goods within the common territorial space (Nita 2017, vii). This phenomenon is described as macroterritorialization, which is defined as the creation of territorial spaces with unified mobility regulations spanning multiple national territories (Mau 2021, 122). Consequently, regional mobility, migration, and border governance are not solely under the purview of nation-states but are also subject to regional agreements, indicating a global trend marked by the regional clustering of mobility rights (Mau et al. 2015; Gülzau, Mau, and Zaun 2016). Thus, it is increasingly apparent that nation-state borders must be understood internationally and polycontextually.

One prevalent mechanism within regional integration projects is the implementation of free movement frameworks, granting regional citizens' rights pertaining to entry, residency, and establishment, while forbidding discrimination based on nationality. Despite shared objectives pursued by member states, the establishment of a macroterritory through such frameworks is subject to spatial conflicts, tension, and regress. This chapter explores, from a sociological perspective, the spatial conflicts that arise in regional free movement, focusing on how these conflicts manifest at internal borders through the mobility of regional citizens within the macroterritorial space. It examines borders as conflictual spaces and illustrates how these conflicts stem from the ongoing latent tensions between different spatial scales.

To investigate spatial conflicts and their manifestation in regional free movement frameworks, three regional integration projects were selected based on geographical diversity and advanced frameworks: the *Economic Community of West African States* (ECOWAS), the *European Union* (EU), and the *Southern Common Market* (Mercosur) in South America. While the EU, with its free movement framework and border opening measures through the Schengen agreements, is one of the most famous examples of free movement, such frameworks can be found in different world regions. Each region, along with three illustrative member states per region, was thoroughly examined through document analysis and 96 interviews involving 104 stakeholders from regional and national institutions, civil society organizations, and academia (Table 3.1).

The EU, created in 1951 through the Coal and Steel Treaty, which forbids discrimination against coal and steel workers from other member states, has evolved its free movement framework over time. Directive

Table 3.1 List of cited interview partners

<i>Region</i>	<i>Interview</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Stakeholder</i>
Mercosur	I1.1	Argentina	Governmental Institution
	I1.2	Argentina	Policy Advisor
	I3	Argentina	Governmental Institution/policy actor
	I5	Argentina	Frente Social Migrante (FSM)
	I6	Argentina	Commission for Refugees and Migrants (CAREF)
	I8	Argentina/ Mercosur level	Ministry of the Interior/Specialized Migration Forum (FEM)
	I10	Regional/Uruguay	Mercosur Social and Labor Commission/Ministry of Labor
	I17	Brazil	International Migration Observatory, University of Brasilia (OBMigra)
	I18	Brazil	Federal Police of Brazil
	I19	Brazil	Governmental institution/policy actor
	I20	Mercosur level/ Brazil	Working Subgroup Nr° 18 (SGT N° 18)/Ministry of Foreign Affairs
I25	Argentina (online)	Ministry of Labor	
ECOWAS	I27	Ghana (online)	Academic
	I28	Nigeria	Centre for Youths Integrated Development (CYID)

(Continued)

Table 3.1 (Continued)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Interview</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Stakeholder</i>
	I30	Nigeria	National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and IDPs (NCFRMI)
	I31	Nigeria	Confederation of Ghanaian Organizations in Nigeria
	I33	Nigeria	Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment
	I35	ECOWAS Level/ Nigeria	National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP)
	I36	Nigeria	Civil Society Network on Migration and Development (CSOnetMADE)
	I39	Nigeria	National Association of Nigerian Traders
	I43	Ghana	Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations
	I46	Ghana	Trade Union Congress (TUC)
	I53	Senegal	Migration and Development Network (REMIDEV)
	I54	Senegal	Forum Social Sénégalais (FSS)
EU	I59.1	EU Level	Directorate General, Justice and Consumers, Unit C4 (Democracy, Union Citizenship and Free Movement)
	I60	EU Level	Directorate General Migration and Home Affairs, EU Commission
	I62	EU Level	Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, EU Commission
	I65	EU Level	European Network Against Racism (ENAR)
	I66	Belgium	Federal Migration Center (Myria)
	I67	EU Level	European Citizen Advice Service (ECAS)
	I70	EU Level	European Parliament 2
	I71	EU Level	European Council
	I72	EU Level	European Trade Union Congress (ETUC)
	I74	EU Level	BuisnessEurope
	I76	Netherlands	European Studies Department, University of Amsterdam
	I82	Belgium	State Secretariat for Asylum & Migration
	I86	Germany	AmaroForo
	I91	Germany	Minor Projektkontor für Bildung und Forschung

2004/38 is the key legal text governing the free movement of EU citizens, ensuring rights such as healthcare, education, and family reunification. The Schengen Agreement further facilitates the unhindered circulation of citizens by eliminating border controls between signatory states.

The ECOWAS, comprising 15 member states in West Africa,² is committed to facilitating intraregional mobility to create a “borderless region” (ECOWAS 2010, 24). Its free movement protocol grants rights of entry, residence, and establishment, aiming to integrate its market and to restore a united precolonial space with fluid mobility patterns undisrupted by arbitrary colonial borders (Adepoju 2007; Awumbila et al. 2015). Thus, the ECOWAS is only one of the many building blocks of the Pan-African integration project approached by the African Union.

Mercosur, consisting of full members Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, and Paraguay, along with six associated members, initially focused on economic integration but has shifted toward a human rights-oriented approach to mobility and migration since the 2000s (Hernández Granja and del Carmen Villarreal Villamar 2017, 68; Brumat and Acosta 2019, 58). The Residence Agreement of 2002 grants temporary residence to citizens of member states with a clean criminal record, along with rights to civil equality, family reunification, social security, and education access. Border integration measures have further facilitated the circulation of regional citizens and migrants with residency rights in any Mercosur state.

Regional free movement: An ongoing spatial conflict between macroterritorial and national levels

In the Westphalian model, nation-states asserted political authority “based on territory, mutual recognition, autonomy, and control,” exercised authority over defined geographic spaces, and regulated movements across borders and within their territories (Krasner 2001, 18). Yet, in the process of macroterritorialization, nation-states are required to cede parts of their sovereignty. Necessitating deregulation and the facilitation of free circulation, the formation of economic and political unions like the European Union challenges traditional sovereignty arrangements by establishing supranational authority structures (Mattli 2000, 149). Such developments are facilitated through “sovereignty bargains,” where states accept limitations in exchange for specific benefits, reshaping norms of sovereignty (Litfin 1997, 170), often motivated by anticipated economic gains (Mattli 2000, 150). Consequently, member states’ autonomy is partially constrained through imposed obligations, leading to a transformation of classic sovereignty (Sassen 1996, 18–19).

However, institutional frameworks within macroterritories afford nation-states partial power to counteract regional projects. This dynamic is

observed both in intergovernmental integration projects, where states retain decision-making authority, often requiring unanimity, and in supranational integration projects, where common institutions possess binding authority over individual states. The process of macroterritorialization thus exhibits a nonlinear trajectory, characterized by a latent tension between the territorial, sovereign understanding of nation-states, and networked, regional entities with their associated border regimes, resulting in a continual refiguration of spaces. Thus, control over member states' territories, including the regulation of trajectorial movement across internal borders, as well as access to residency, labor markets, and social rights of regional citizens within the macroterritorial space, remains a conflictual aspect. Protectionist measures, which are partly unlawful and are aimed at asserting control over space and mobility, contribute to the fragmentation of supranational regions, undermining the macroterritorialization process and impeding the trajectories of mobile citizens.

These conflicts are organized, as we argue, along primary conflict lines. Several scholars have identified central conflict lines or “dilemmas” driving discourses, policymaking, and governance practices around migration. Four main conflict lines around human mobility have been identified: security (or “danger”), economy (or “markets”), culture and identity, and rights (Bauder 2006, 2008; Hollifield 2004, 2021). While all four dimensions also come into play in negotiations around regional free movement, in this article, we focus on economy and security for several reasons.

First, the integration process in regional economic communities is typically driven by the aim of *economic* integration to boost national and regional economies through trade liberalization within the network. Other aspects of integration, such as free movement rights, often follow as trickle-down effects of trade and economic liberalization, with the human labor force as an important factor of production that is supposed to flow freely within an integrated market (see, e.g., Panke 2017). From a rationalist and utilitarian perspective, states aim for more integration to maximize economic benefits through the reduction of economic barriers in the creation of a common market. Regionalization and restructuring into macroregions then compensate for governments' weaker control over the forces of the market (Pellerin and Overbeek 2001). The regional integration project then economically follows a network logic of association, relating nation-states and their markets to each other and creating intense connectivity between labor markets.

However, various free movement frameworks continue to attract criticism for prioritizing economic goals over the social dimension and access to rights regarding human mobility (for Mercosur, see, e.g., Grimson 2012; for the EU, see Hansen and Hager 2010). Even though economic

interests are a clear driver of integration and the implementation of free movement frameworks, cost–benefit considerations can also lead to national protectionism, conflicting with free movement. As [Bauder \(2008\)](#) notes, “economic utility” or “market considerations” in migration policy debates can both support and oppose immigration. These considerations include expected costs, such as dependency on the welfare state and potential labor market competition ([Bauder 2008](#); [Paul 2015](#)). While most analyses focus on migration policymaking outside free movement agreements, for example, governing the migration of extra-regional migrants, this article shows that anticipated economic costs also play a key role in conflicts between national closure interests and the regional aim of integration and the promotion of free movement rights for citizens of member states.

Second, from a *security* perspective, various regional integration projects have cooperated in regard to external and internal security, addressing issues such as domestic political stability, terrorism, human trafficking, and migration ([Börzel 2016](#)). Similar to economic developments, the region adopts a network logic, associating different nation-states that previously followed a territorial, sovereign logic.

However, regarding security and migration beyond free movement frameworks, the dominant rationale in migration policies is usually to minimize entry and maximize control of migrants, except when economic, civil, or tourism interests intervene. This approach is not in line with free movement measures, which advocate for unrestricted mobility (except under specific circumstances) within the macroterritory ([Mau 2021](#), 78). In regional integration and macroterritorialization processes, nation-states have to delegate border control, impacting their capacity to independently protect their territories from potential threats and changing the ability of nation-states to control and secure their territorial boundaries (see [Sassen 1996](#)). Therefore, most regions introduce safeguard measures in free movement agreements, which ultimately can hinder the trajectory of regional citizens within their own macroterritory. These articles serve as ambiguous mechanisms through which member states can ensure national security interests within their respective territories while participating in regional frameworks promoting free movement in the macroterritory. However, the discretionary powers retained by nation-states set the stage for the prioritization of national security considerations over the objectives outlined in free movement agreements, underscoring the tension between overarching regional aspirations and the exercise of discretionary powers by member states.

Therefore, we will focus on “security” and “economy” as the main conflict lines regarding regional free movement, followed by an empirical analysis showing their manifestation at intraregional borders.

Borders as conflictual spaces: Evidence from three regional integration projects

The latent spatial conflict between regional and national levels of mobility governance in the context of regional free movement manifests into conflicts at nation-states' borders as conflictual spaces. In the process of regional integration, nation-states delegate parts of their sovereign power to control and manage mobility at their territorial borders to the macro-territorial level. This process involves negotiations of competencies and conflicts of interest, using national borders as their reference points.

In this chapter, we draw on [Guild's \(2001\)](#) border considerations for Europe, viewing "borders as regards their function as a line of differentiation for the movement of persons." Borders serve as places where controls are exercised, with access to territory "controlled by a network of bureaucracies" that operate through cross-recognition of decisions (1–2). This conceptualization allows borders to be understood legally beyond their physical aspects (67). Similarly, [Newman \(2003, 17\)](#) emphasizes that borders are not only cartographic lines but "also the rules and regulations which determine the existence of difference."

Borders, in this context, are understood as places of control and demarcation. National regulations and institutions exercise selective practices of inclusion and exclusion that transcend territorial lines and extend across national territories. Specifically, regarding free movement, borders—viewed from a functionalist perspective—refer to practices by which national laws and institutions control or grant access to entry, residency, and/or establishment rights to noncitizens on their territory. For instance, a national border still fulfills its function in regard to access to social rights or labor markets.

In the following section, we analyze how the spatial conflict between the macroterritorial and national levels manifests at national borders along the conflict lines of economy and security.

Economic conflicts: Asymmetries and protectionism

The economy, a key driver of regional integration, presents a conflictual aspect regarding intraregional mobility. Despite the aspiration for an interconnected economic network, the following section will demonstrate that this conflict extends to regional integration and free movement.

ECOWAS

The ECOWAS, established to promote economic prosperity among its member states, faces challenges in realizing its goals due to significant economic disparities. Despite the free movement protocol designed to

facilitate seamless mobility, national economic interests and protectionist measures hinder regional aspirations. Examples of such hindrances include expulsions, labor market protectionism, and border closures. These issues are exacerbated by high unemployment rates in some member countries, perpetuating a long-standing tradition of regional mobility as individuals pursue “greener pastures” (e.g., I30, I35).

In this context, migrants, in this context, are frequently held responsible for job displacement and the economic downturn experienced by specific nation-states (I27), as illustrated by the Ghanaian Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations:

There is that competitiveness, I mean, coming to our country and coming to take our jobs at times brings a challenge.

(Interview 43, Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, Ghana)

Consequently, economically advanced countries within ECOWAS, like Ghana, prioritize their citizens’ employment through a “national-workers-first-mentality” (e.g., I33, I39). However, this protectionist stance restricts migrants’ access to job opportunities or the ability to establish businesses (e.g., I36, I53). This complex interaction between economic factors and protectionist policies highlights the ECOWAS region’s challenge in reconciling national interests with regional integration and free movement objectives.

A significant example of challenges is the longstanding “cold war” between Nigeria and Ghana, marked by historical conflicts, including episodes of mass expulsions, cultural rivalry, and trade competition. For instance, the 1983 “Ghana Must Go” program led to the deportation of approximately one million Ghanaians from Nigeria (Childs Daly 2023). This measure was ostensibly in response to allegations of Ghanaians displacing Nigerian jobs, which contradicted the principles of ECOWAS free movement (e.g., I31, I46). Currently, Nigerians also face significant barriers in the Ghanaian labor market. The high costs of business registration in Ghana force many to operate without official certification, making them vulnerable to government-led shutdowns (I31). Additionally, certain sectors, such as retail and small-scale mining, are reserved exclusively for Ghanaian citizens (I27).

Moreover, member states have resorted to protectionist measures, including border closures, often linked to extensive informal work and smuggling activities in the macroterritory. For example, Nigeria closed its borders with Benin and Niger in 2019 for approximately two years to curb smuggling and increase revenue from agricultural goods (Omalea, Olorunfemib, and Aiyegbajejec 2020, 3–5). The Nigerian president contended

that neighboring countries had inadequately policed their borders (Mehouenou 2019, in [Igwe, Ochinanwata, and Madichie 2021](#)). However, unilateral border closures undermine the ECOWAS free movement protocol by restricting both the movement of persons and economic activities. Furthermore, such closures challenge the traditional practices of citizens accustomed to moving and trading across borders, as highlighted by [Igwe, Ochinanwata, and Madichie \(2021\)](#). In response, the ECOWAS appealed to the Nigerian government to reopen its borders in 2020, leading President Buhari to order the immediate reopening of four critical land borders on December 16 ([Nan 2020](#)).

EU

Since its inception in 1951, the role and content of national economic interests in the EU have evolved significantly, leading to potential conflicts. Initially, the freedom of movement for coal and steel workers in 1951, and later for all workers with the Treaty of Rome in 1957, addressed labor shortages in the Northern member states, while benefiting Italy as a surplus labor force country serving both the Italian labor market needs and the Northern destination countries. This period saw minimal conflict regarding labor market considerations until the early 2000s, marked by the Eastern Enlargement. The accession of eight Middle and Eastern European countries, along with Cyprus and Malta, raised concerns about the high inflows of migrant workers. Therefore, with the exception of Sweden, Ireland, and the UK, temporary labor market restrictions were imposed on the new member states—and mirrored a few years later with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria. This enlargement coincided with record-high unemployment rates in countries like Germany since World War II ([Statistisches Bundesamt 2024](#)).

Currently, the discourse surrounding free movement and national labor markets has shifted, with concerns now focusing on labor and skill shortages in most member states (I62, I70, I74). In this context, free movement is seen as aligning with the labor market needs of member states rather than conflicting with them. However, limited intra-EU labor mobility is being problematized ([EU 2021](#)). Nevertheless, the persistent labor shortage in Eastern European countries, coupled with significant East–West mobility within the EU, has raised concerns about brain drain in sending states (I72, I74). This situation can lead to friction with EU free movement regulations, particularly when national programs aimed at retaining or reintegrating skilled workers clash with the principle of nondiscrimination of EU mobile workers in national labor markets (see I62).

Conflicts over potential labor market competition by EU mobile workers have largely dissipated, with another conflict emerging as the primary

concern regarding the free movement in the EU: EU migrants' access to national welfare systems. The Treaty of Maastricht of 1992 introduced the concept of EU citizenship and extended free movement rights to all citizens, not just workers. The Citizenship Directive of 2004 consolidated these fragmented rights, establishing a framework for free movement. Directive 2004/38 highlighted the fundamental tension between EU free movement and national welfare systems. While EU citizens enjoy unconditional free movement for three months, their rights thereafter are conditional on being economically active and not posing an "unreasonable burden" on national welfare states for up to five years of legal residence. Access to national welfare thus results in being the central conflict surrounding EU free movement, including related issues such as coordination and responsibility for contributory social security benefits (e.g., unemployment benefits) and especially access to noncontributory social assistance.

The tension and fear around free movement and welfare were highlighted by a senior EU commission official responsible for free movement policy in 2024:

If the Commission were to come up with a proposal to get rid of conditions for the stay between three months and five years, I fear that you could forget Free Movement. [...] It would be suicidal to open it.
(Interview 59.1, DG Just of the EU Commission, EU Level)

Interviewed civil society organizations at the EU level, as well as counseling institutions in Germany and Belgium, unanimously confirmed access to welfare benefits for EU citizens and the potential loss of legal residency upon claiming social assistance as a central barrier to free movement rights (I82, I86, I91). Within a regional legal framework that has largely eliminated nation-states' ability to control intraregional movement through control and established equal treatment in the labor market, welfare institutions remain the last means of control to restrict economically noncontributing EU mobility.

Mercosur

In Mercosur, instances of conflict between the economic interests of member states and regional free movement are rare. Initially, the inclusion of the free movement of people in the Mercosur framework was part of the free circulation of "means of production," without specific social rights attached to human mobility within the region; established rights remained limited to the freedom of services (Mercosur 1991). However, with the 2002 Residence Agreement, extensive rights for regional citizens were

established, including the right to work, engage in legal activities, and receive equal treatment in social security benefits (Mercosur 2002).

Despite the comprehensive rights to work and establishment, including exemption from work permits for regional migrants, the inclusion of regional migrants into national labor markets did not lead to major conflicts or national protectionist reactions, except for some complications in Brazil due to high formal standards in certain sectors (I10, I19). Instead, member states face high levels of informality in their national labor markets, involving both national and nonnational workers, and the Mercosur free movement framework is seen as part of a broader strategy to formalize national labor markets (I1.2, I3, I25), as noted by an Argentinian policy advisor:

That is the spirit of the residence agreement. It establishes the nationality criterion, so that a person can have a temporary or permanent residence without proving the status as a worker. Afterwards, the person will obviously work to survive. [...] Now, the state must create the conditions for a migrant worker to be employed legally, this is the struggle for the whole economy.

(Interview I1.2, Policy Advisor, Argentina)

Unlike the EU, the Mercosur Agreement does not require proof of work or sufficient financial means as a precondition for legal residency. While such proof may be required for permanent residency, countries such as Argentina and Uruguay have completely waived such requirements. The condition of being a net contributor in terms of work or financial means for mobile citizens in the region is therefore not a significant source of conflict regarding legal residency. This may be due to several factors: the prioritization or regularization of informal markets, the fact that access to noncontributory welfare benefits and social protection for nonworkers remains under national legislation, and the Mercosur agreement on social security, which primarily covers the portability of social security contributions (Mercosur 1999). Additionally, the general understanding of migration as a human right in the region may further reduce potential conflicts over residency requirements.³

However, Mercosur does not establish a general right to entry for regional citizens; it only provides visa waivers for tourists from member states, which reinforces national territorial borders as separation lines with a specific economic function. Regional migrants can be rejected at the border if border agents suspect that they are not tourists, for example, due to a lack of financial means. This is particularly evident in Argentina, where a specific regulation was passed in 2014 to refuse entry to “pseudo-tourists” (Baiadera 2018). This law has led to discrimination against Bolivians and Paraguayans, who enjoy free movement and equal treatment

rights as regional citizens but face rejections based on suspicions of being poor and thus not qualifying as tourists (I5, I6).

Comparison of regions

Research on the macroterritorialization processes of ECOWAS, Mercosur, and the EU reveals the ambivalent role of economic goals in the liberalization of human mobility under their respective free movement frameworks. The regional aim of achieving economic interconnectedness and development through the network logic of free movement of regional citizens within their macroterritory, thereby partially relinquishing territorial logics of demarcation, is partly undermined by national protectionist measures. These measures manifest as territorial closure against specific citizens, filtering, controlling, and demarcating economically “unwanted” mobile citizens either in terms of labor markets or welfare states. Economic asymmetries across member states in all three regions, with differing wage levels and labor market opportunities defining the destination and sending countries of mobile citizens within the regions, further complicate the liberalization of the free movement of people. These heterogeneous references of actions reveal the polycontextual conditions encompassing regional free movement, while also revealing subregional cleavages of different states or national clusters within the macroterritory.

In ECOWAS and, to some extent, Mercosur, the territorial land border remains a focal point where the conflict between national economic interests and the free movement of people crystallizes. This is evident through the actual border closures to prevent traders from entering the country, as seen in Nigeria, or through the rejection of regional migrants based on a suspected lack of means in Mercosur. In ECOWAS, the most conflictual issue regarding free movement is labor market competition, with conflicts between national and migrant workers or traders, as well as restrictive national labor codes conflicting with the regional aim of freedom of work and establishment. In the EU, however, the free movement of workers aligns with the labor force needs of most EU countries and is not a source of conflict. Additionally, the general right to entry and the deconstruction of border infrastructure inhibit the mobility control of economically “undesirable” migrants by member states. The latent conflict between national economic interests and regional free movement rights in the EU manifests at the legal borders of national welfare states, where EU citizens may lose their right to residence and become deportable upon applying for social assistance.

Security conflicts: Addressing national security threats

As described above, security is a contested issue between nation-states and regional bodies, particularly at territorial borders. Nation-states regularly

introduce sovereign measures—even at internal borders of the macroterritory—to secure their national territories against perceived threats, which will be illustrated in the following section.

ECOWAS

The impetus behind ECOWAS aspiring to achieve a borderless region stems from a historical tradition of unrestricted movement predating colonization, coupled with economic ambitions. However, the region faces demanding security challenges, particularly in the Sahel region. States such as Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire have grappled with armed extremist groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP). Additionally, the pervasive insurgence of trafficking and the smuggling of goods and humans within the region further shape the landscape of regional free movement. These security and socioeconomic challenges highlight the complex dynamics involved in pursuing borderless aspirations within the ECOWAS framework and significantly influence decisions surrounding regional free movement.

These challenges extend to specific national territories, leading member states within the region to adopt defensive measures, despite the imperative for collaborative regional solutions (I53, I54). ECOWAS incorporates a provision in Article 4 of the 1979 Free Movement Protocol, granting member states the authority to deny entry to regional citizens deemed inadmissible under domestic legal frameworks. Therefore, extensive border controls and screening practices are implemented to identify suspicious individuals (e.g., I35). These measures conflict with regional free movement objectives, as they can be disproportionate and excessive (e.g., I28).

A member of the Ghanaian Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations illustrates this tension:

Sometimes it is difficult to manage your borders in relation to the protocol (...) because you are seeing other countries having terrorist activities and so then so you ask yourself: should we continue enforcing the protocol by letting people come in?

(Interview 43, Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, Ghana)

On the other hand, these measures are strongly influenced by external pressures from the EU, which employs extraterritorial border control strategies (e.g., [Bisong 2019](#); [Mukhtar 2020](#); [Zanker, Arhin-Sam, and Jegen 2020](#)). The EU seeks to impede the mobility of individuals from West Africa with potential routes to Europe, despite only 19% of West African migrants actually going to Europe ([United Nations 2020](#)). Motivated by a

combination of positive and negative incentives dictated by the EU, certain nation-states such as Senegal (and Niger⁴) institute new policies and measures, funded by the EU, including the reinforcement of border infrastructure, personnel, and technological capabilities. However, these initiatives often align more closely with European interests, impinging upon the free movement rights of approximately regional migrants, who constitute 85% of the movements (Bisong 2019). An example of such an initiative is the “Migration Information and Data Analysis System” (MIDAS). Despite its intention to provide member states with the capacity to collect, process, analyze, and share biometric traveler information, the faulty implementation of biometrical identity documents within ECOWAS has impaired regional movements (I36).

EU

The EU aims to deinstitutionalize internal borders to facilitate free movement for regional citizens across member states, with the condition of external borders being strictly controlled. However, this model has been challenged by recent phenomena.

After temporary border controls were reinstated because of terrorist attacks in 2015 in France and 2016 in Belgium, as well as in Germany and Austria (Trauth 2018), the main reason shifted to the strong pressure felt by national authorities regarding the effectiveness of external Schengen borders since 2015 (e.g., I71, I76). As a result, many countries have reinstated internal border controls to hinder the movement of third-country nationals (TCNs), while simultaneously hindering internal movements. These controls are often justified as a security measure, with the narrative framing migratory movements as a potential risk to internal security. This has normalized prolonged internal border controls, becoming “the new normal” rather than an exceptional and proportional last resort (Gülzau 2021). Although temporary border controls are legally limited to certain periods,⁵ many countries have extended them beyond the legal timeframe. For example, Austria installed a temporary border check and a 3.7-km fence at its border with Slovenia from 2016 until it was deemed unlawful in 2022 by the European Court of Justice (Quell 2022). Despite their widespread use, these controls are not considered effective and are often symbolic gestures or even “scapegoats” (I71) by nation-states to reassure citizens about border control and sovereignty, while compensating for the shortcomings at the EU level (I76, I60).

Furthermore, other forms of internal border control (I60, I66, I71, I76), such as random identity checks by police officials, have also been reinstated in certain areas, for instance, at the border between the Netherlands and Belgium, as well as Germany. In these zones, Dutch authorities have

the authority to request identification and resident permits within a 20-km area beyond the border, while German authorities can do so within a 30-km zone (Van der Woude 2019).

Moreover, numerous cases of racial profiling at internal border checks have been reported to various citizens' services. Mainly TCNs with family reunification rights, People of Color, Roma, and other marginalized groups are targeted by authorities while affecting the movements and family reunification of EU movers (I65, I67, I76), highlighting a selective regime that leaves the majority of cross-border traffic unaffected (Casella Colombeau 2019, 2269). This tendency strongly contradicts Schengen regulations, as it creates security regimes shaped by notions of social order and belonging, leading to the exclusion of perceived nonmembers within the territory (Van der Woude 2019, 125–126).

Summarizing these recent tendencies, a member of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) stated in an interview:

Even outside of the legal parameters, we've already seen a practice of excessive control of borders, and especially on racialized migrants.
(Interview 65, ENAR, EU level)

Mercosur

Mercosur also faces security concerns, albeit to a lesser degree, compared to the ECOWAS and the EU. For instance, the triple frontier between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay has been characterized as a “place of global concern” (Grimson 2012, 202) and one of the largest “illegal economies in the Western hemisphere” (Devia-Garzón and Ortega-Avellaneda 2019, 11). This characterization is attributed to various illicit activities, including terrorism, drug trafficking, and smuggling, emanating from its strategic geographical location. While organized crime is acknowledged as a significant issue within Mercosur and relevant agreements also incorporate security provisions, the approach to addressing it differs from the other regions. Insights from stakeholder interviews reveal three principal reasons for this discrepancy.

First, the challenge is recognized as a collective issue demanding a regional approach, reflecting mutual trust among member states, wherein security concerns are taken as an incentive for greater (for instance, police) cooperation and regional integration (I1.1, I17). Second, a realistic assessment of border control capacities is considered, with the expansive length and geographical intricacies of the borders—often characterized by oceans, dense vegetation, and sparsely populated areas—making control inherently challenging or even impossible (I8, I18). Consequently, institutions do not focus on the impossible task of controlling these borders, but

rather on the regularization of movements within the region (Acosta and Freier 2023, 603). Third, Mercosur institutions are committed to mitigating security concerns without impeding the free movement of regional citizens, emphasizing the avoidance of hindrances to mobility (I20).

When asked about the way security is approached in regard to intraregional mobility, a member of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, as well as of Subgroup 18 of Mercosur working on border integration in the region, answered in a surprised way:

Security? It is not our main focus, our main focus is the issue of facilitation, integration [...]. It is an issue [...] we have dealt with it a few times [...] there is violence associated with illicit activities, that is, smuggling, drug trafficking mainly, (...) but it is not the main topic of the working subgroup. We deal with it mainly from the point of view of [...] finding ways so that it does not impede the facilitation work that we try to do there. (...) It is a matter of finding a balance point so that the efforts to combat illicit activities do not imply the creation of more obstacles, either to trade or to the border circulation of neighbors or tourists.

(Interview 20, Working Subgroup Nr° 18 (SGT N° 18)/Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mercosur Level/Brazil)

Hence, security concerns generally do not conflict with free movement within the Mercosur framework. However, certain nation-states within the bloc present exceptions to this trend. A notable instance is evident during the legislative period of Mauricio Macri in Argentina from 2015 to 2019 (Andolina 2021). His administration declared a public security state of emergency, accompanied by the militarization of counter-terrorism efforts and proposals for heightened border surveillance. Two years later, immigrants were identified as a security risk, leading to expanded deportation criteria focusing on individuals from Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru.⁶

Comparison of regions

The empirical findings highlight the complexity of the security conflict line within the regional free movement. Despite partial delegation, nation-states remain tied to their sovereignty by persistent security concerns. This tension is evident across all three regions, where free movement agreements include provisions to safeguard national security interests, and different national clusters isolate themselves from potential threats within the macroterritory. Particularly within the ECOWAS and the EU, security measures often disproportionately hinder free movement, driven by challenges such as terrorism, trafficking, and smuggling. It becomes apparent

that practices at internal borders must be understood polycontexturally. In contrast, Mercosur adopts a distinct approach, emphasizing a collective strategy that acknowledges the impracticality of effective border control. Despite occasional opposition from certain member states, the regional approach remains robust and integrated, ensuring that security measures do not undermine free movement. Mercosur distinguishes itself as the sole regional case adhering mostly to a network-based paradigm of integration with respect to borders and security, in contrast to traditional territorial logics, which emphasize border demarcation. Conversely, in the remaining two cases, the prevailing logic remains territorial, national, and sovereignty-centric.

Discussion and conclusion

In conclusion, the regional integration process toward macroterritories with their own mobility regimes has resulted in member states delegating aspects of their sovereignty and territorial control concerning mobility. This process signifies a transition toward common supranational goals, where nation-states extend their objectives to a macroterritorial level, following a logic of association, collaboration, and interconnectedness that partially diminishes national territorial demarcations. However, in an ongoing power struggle between the supranational level and member states, the latter seek to reaffirm their national interests and sovereignty.

This chapter has examined three regional integration projects—ECOWAS, the EU, and Mercosur—through document analysis and stakeholder interviews, revealing a latent spatial conflict between the macroterritorial level and member states regarding regional free movement. Thus, Mercosur stands out by following a networked and integrated approach at the macroterritorial level, with punctual exceptions. This shift can be attributed to several factors: the commitment of stakeholders to deeper macroterritorialization, the limited impact of usual conflict lines on regional goals, the pragmatic approach to the uncontrollability of borders by employing regularization as a control mechanism, and the robust human rights framework concerning migration. In contrast, in the EU and ECOWAS, economic and security conflicts hinder the realization of regional free movement frameworks within the respective regions, manifesting at territorial border demarcations and beyond, where the belonging of regional citizens is contested.

The spatial conflict materializes at intraregional borders, conceptualized as networks of bureaucracies that control, differentiate, and demarcate migrant trajectories. Nation-states regularly display restrictive tendencies at these borders, seeking to regulate and sometimes impede migrant trajectories within their regional integration projects by imposing territorial

demarcations within macroterritories, contrary to regional free movement agreements.

Economic asymmetries leading to labor market or welfare protectionism, coupled with security concerns, contribute the most to these tendencies. Therefore, a territorial logic is not uniformly asserted across all regions, both in terms of areas and the intensity of restrictiveness. However, network macroterritories are disrupted by territorial logics prompted by the trajectories of unwanted citizens, causing fragmentation and discontinuity of the supranational space. The process of macroterritorialization is thus polycontextual, referring to diverse and simultaneous references to different spaces with different logics. It is nonlinear, with spaces continually refigured, giving rise to spatial conflicts on different scales instead of straightforward progress toward an integrated union. Thus, depending on the specific conflictual topic, different constellations of subregional clusters of states emerge, revealing not only a discontinuous integration and macroterritorialization process of the supranational territories but also the necessity to contemplate different scales to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of spatial conflicts within the regional free movement.

Notes

- 1 In this article, by referring to regions, we mean supranational regions encompassing several countries. According to [Nye \(1968, vii\)](#), regions can be understood as a group of states connected by independence and geographical proximity. In the realm of this article, “regional” is mostly used in the context of regional integration projects.
- 2 On January 28, 2024, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso declared their immediate withdrawal from ECOWAS due to the alleged lack of support of nation-states in their fight against terrorism and sanctions by the regional integration project, as well as the influence of foreign powers such as France leasing the community to have betrayed their founding principles ([Bröll 2024](#); [Diallo et al. 2024](#)). The withdrawal still has to be accepted by the ECOWAS. In the meantime, the countries are faced with suspension and sanctions. These developments could potentially have significant impact on regional free movement; however, the specific trends are not yet foreseeable.
- 3 In Argentina, for example, migration being a human right is enshrined in the constitution.
- 4 Most of the tensions between EU policies and free movement in the ECOWAS have been registered in Niger (e.g., [Bisong 2020](#)). Yet, the country is not the focus of this article because it has declared its withdrawal from ECOWAS.
- 5 The Schengen Borders Code (SBC) ([EU 2016](#)) affords EU member states the prerogative, under exceptional circumstances, to reintroduce border control measures at internal borders in instances where there exists a threat to public policy or internal security. The measures, however, should not jeopardize the principle of the free movement of persons within the Schengen Area according to the commission.

- 6 The recent election of Milei as Argentina's president in November 2023, with his promise to withdraw from Mercosur, further creates uncertainty about the future trajectory of free movement within the Mercosur bloc (I71).

References

- Acosta, Diego, and Luisa Feline Freier. 2023. "Expanding the Reflexive Turn in Migration Studies: Refugee Protection, Regularization, and Naturalization in Latin America." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 21 (4): 597–610. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2022.2146246>
- Adepoju, Aderanti. 2007. "Creating a Borderless West Africa: Constraints and Prospects for Intra-Regional Migration." In *Migration Without Borders. Essays on the Free Movement of People*, edited by Antoine Pécoud and Paul de Guchteneire, 161–174. Paris: UNESCO.
- Andolina, Robert. 2021. "Argentina's Enigmatic Wall on the Paraguayan Border." In *Borders and Border Walls: In-Security, Symbolism, Vulnerabilities*, edited by Élisabeth Vallet and Andréanne Bissonnette, 49–68. London: Routledge.
- Awumbila, Mariama, Yaw Benneh, Joseph Kofi Teye, and George Atiim. 2015. *Across Artificial Borders: An Assessment of Labour Migration in the Ecowas Region*. Geneva: IOM.
- Baiadera, Angélica Alvites. 2018. "Extranjeros Bajo La Lupa: La Figura Del 'falso Turista' En Argentina [Foreigners under the Spotlight: The Figure of the 'Fake Tourist' in Argentina]." *Horizontes Decoloniales* 4 (2018): 39–62. <https://doi.org/10.13169/decohor.4.0039>
- Bauder, Harald. 2006. *Labor Movement: How Migration Regulates Labor Markets*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bauder, Harald. 2008. "Neoliberalism and the Economic Utility of Immigration: Media Perspectives of Germany's Immigration Law." *Antipode* 40 (1): 55–78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2008.00571.x>
- Bisong, Amanda. 2019. "Trans-Regional Institutional Cooperation as Multi-level Governance: Ecowas Migration Policy and the EU." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45 (8): 1294–1309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1441607>
- Bisong, Amanda. 2020. "Migration Partnership Framework and the Externalization of European Union's (EU) Migration Policy in West Africa: The Case of Mali and Niger." In *Regional Integration and Migration Governance in the Global South*, edited by Glenn Rayp, Ilse Ruysen, and Katrin Marchand, 217–237. Cham: Springer.
- Börzel, Tanja A. 2016. "Theorizing Regionalism: Cooperation, Integration, and Governance." In *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*, edited by Tanja A. Börzel, and Thomas Risse. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bröll, Claudia. 2024. "Warum drei Militärregierungen aus der ECOWAS austreten [Why three military governments are leaving ECOWAS]." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 29. Accessed June 18, 2024. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/burkina-faso-mali-und-niger-kuendigen-ecowas-austritt-an-19482690.html>
- Brumat, Leiza, and Diego Acosta. 2019. "Three Generations of Free Movement of Regional Migrants in Mercosur: Any Influence from the EU?" In *The Dynamics of Regional Migration Governance*, edited by Andrew Geddes, Marcia Vera Espinoza, Leila Hadj Abdou, and Leiza Brumat, 54–72. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

- Casella Colombeau, Sara. 2019. "Crisis of Schengen? The Effect of Two 'Migrant Crises' (2011 and 2015) on the Free Movement of People at an Internal Schengen Border." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46 (11): 2258–2274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1596787>
- Childs Daly, Samuel Fury. 2023. "Ghana Must Go: Nativism and the Politics of Expulsion in West Africa, 1969–1985." *Past & Present* 259 (1): 229–261. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtac006>
- Devia-Garzón, Camilo Andrés, and Dina Alejandra Ortega-Avellaneda. 2019. "Características y desafíos del crimen organizado transnacional en la Triple Frontera: Argentina-Paraguay-Brasil [Characteristics and Challenges of Transnational Organized Crime in the Tri-Border Area: Argentina-Paraguay-Brazil]." *Revista Criminalidad* 61 (1): 9–28.
- Diallo, Tiemoko, Boureima Balima, Felix Onuah, MacDonald Dzirutwe, Bate Felix, William Maclean, and David Holmes. 2024. "Three West African Junta-Led States Quit Ecowas Regional Block." *Reuters*, January 28. Accessed June 18, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/niger-mali-burkina-faso-say-they-are-leaving-ecowas-regional-block-2024-01-28/>
- ECOWAS. 2010. *Ecowas Vision 2020: Towards a Democratic and Prosperous Community*. Abuja: ECOWAS Commission.
- EU. 2016. *Regulation 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on a Union Code on the Rules Governing the Movement of Persons Across Borders (Schengen Borders Code) (Codification)*. Strasbourg: European Parliament.
- EU. 2021. *Impacts of EU Rules on the Free Movements of Workers and Services: Intra-EU Labour Mobility as a Tool to Match Labour Market Needs and Skills*. Strasbourg: European Parliament.
- Grimson, Alejandro. 2012. "Nations, Nationalism and "Borderization" in the Southern Cone." In *A Companion to Border Studies*, edited by Thomas M. Wilston, and Hastings Donnan, 194–213. Hoboken: Blackwell.
- Guild, Elspeth. 2001. *Moving the Borders of Europe: Inaugural Lecture*. Nijmegen: Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, Faculteit der Rechtsgeleerdheid.
- Gülzau, Fabian. 2021. "A "New Normal" for the Schengen Area. When, Where and Why Member States Reintroduce Temporary Border Controls?." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 38 (5): 785–803. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2021.1996260>
- Gülzau, Fabian, Steffen Mau, and Natascha Zaun. 2016. "Regional Mobility Spaces? Visa Waiver Policies and Regional Integration." *International Migration* 54 (6): 164–180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12286>
- Hansen, Peo, and Sandy Brian Hager. 2010. *The Politics of European Citizenship: Deepening Contradictions in Social Rights and Migration Policy*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Hernández Granja, Lorena, and María del Carmen Villarreal Villamar. 2017. "Mercosur migrante: enfoques y evolución del tratamiento de la movilidad humana en el Mercosur [Migrant Mercosur: Approaches and Evolution of the Treatment of Human Mobility in Mercosur]." *Revista Terceiro Milênio* 8 (1): 49–78. <https://revistaterceiromilenio.uenf.br/index.php/rtm/article/view/3>
- Hollifield, James F. 2004. "The Emerging Migration State." *The International Migration Review* 38 (3): 885–912. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2004.tb00223.x>
- Hollifield, James F. 2021. "General Perspectives on Membership: Citizenship, Migration and the End of Liberalism." In *Handbook of Citizenship and Migration*, edited by Marco Giugni, and Maria Grasso. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

- Igwe, Paul Agu, Chinedu Ochinanwata, and Nnamdi O. Madichie. 2021. "The 'Isms' of Regional Integration: What Do Underlying Interstate Preferences Hold for the Ecowas Union." *Politics & Policy* 49 (2): 280–308. <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12396>
- Krasner, Stephen D. 2001. "Rethinking the Sovereign State Model." *Review of International Studies* 27 (5): 17–42. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210501008014>
- Litfin, Karen T. 1997. "Sovereignty in World Ecopolitics." *Mershon International Studies Review* 41 (2): 167–204. <https://doi.org/10.2307/222667>
- Mattli, Walter. 2000. "Sovereignty Bargains in Regional Integration." *International Studies Review* 2 (2): 149–180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1521-9488.00208>
- Mau, Steffen. 2021. *Sortiermaschinen Die Neuerfindung Der Grenze Im 21. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: C.H. Beck.
- Mau, Steffen, Fabian Gülzau, Lena Laube, and Natascha Zaun. 2015. "The Global Mobility Divide: How Visa Policies Have Evolved over Time." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41 (8): 1192–1213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1005007>
- Mercosur. 1991. *Tratado para la constitución de un Mercado Común entre la República Argentina, la República Federativa del Brasil, la República del Paraguay y la República Oriental del Uruguay* [Treaty for the Constitution of a Common Market between the Argentine Republic, the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Republic of Paraguay, and the Eastern Republic of Uruguay]. Asunción: Consejo del Mercado Común.
- Mercosur. 1999. *Acuerdo Multilateral de Seguridad Social del Mercado Común del Sur* [Multilateral Social Security Agreement of the Southern Common Market]. Montevideo: Parlamento del Mercosur.
- Mercosur. 2002. *Acuerdo sobre residencia para nacionales de los Estados Partes del MERCOSUR, Bolivia y Chile* [Agreement on Residency for Nationals of the MERCOSUR Member States, Bolivia and Chile]. Brasilia: Consejo del Mercado Común.
- Mukhtar, Ibrahim Muhammad. 2020. "Ecowas Free Movement Area: Interference of European Policies and Remedies." Paper Presented at *Externalisation of Borders: Detention Practices and Denial of the Right to Asylum*, Lagos, February 25–26.
- Nan. 2020. "Border Closure, Effects and Curbing Recurrence." *The Guardian Nigeria*. Accessed March 4, 2024. <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/border-closure-effects-and-curbing-recurrence/>
- Newman, David. 2003. "On Borders and Power: A Theoretical Framework." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 18 (1): 13–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2003.9695598>
- Nita, Sonja. 2017. "Free Movement of People Within Regional Integration Processes: A Comparative View." In *Migration, Free Movement and Regional Integration*, edited by Sonja Nita, Antoine Pécoud, Philippe De Lombaerde, Paul De Guchteneire, Kate Neyts, and Joshua Gartland, 3–44. Paris: UNESCO.
- Nye, Joseph Samuel. 1968. *International Regionalism; Readings*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Omalea, Musa Godwin, John Funsho Olorunfemib, and Femi Ola Aiyegbajec. 2020. "Legal Viable Options to Incessant Closure of Nigeria's International Borders." *African Identities* 21 (1): 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2020.1828037>
- Panke, Diana. 2017. "Der Neue Regionalismus [The New Regionalism]." In *Regionen Und Regionalismus in Den Internationalen Beziehungen: Eine Einführung* [Regions and Regionalism in International Relations: An Introduction], edited by Simon Koschut, 21–37. Wiesbaden: Springer.

- Paul, Regine. 2015. *The Political Economy of Border Drawing: Arranging Legality in European Labor Migration Policies*. 1st ed. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Pellerin, Hélène, and Henk Overbeek. 2001. "Neo-Liberal Regionalism and the Management of People's Mobility." In *Social Forces in the Making of the New Europe: The Restructuring of European Social Relations in the Global Political Economy*, edited by Andreas Bieler, and Adam David Morton, 137–157. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Quell, Molly. 2022. "EU Top Court Declares Austrian Border Controls Unlawful." *Courthouse News Service*. Accessed June 18, 2024. <https://www.courthouse-news.com/eu-top-court-declares-austrian-border-controls-unlawful/>
- Sassen, Saskia. 1996. *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Statistisches Bundesamt. 2024. "Arbeitslosenquote der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in den Jahren 1950 bis 2023 [Unemployment Rate of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1950 to 2023]." January 4, 2024. Accessed June 21, 2024. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1127090/umfrage/arbeitslosenquote-der-bundesrepublik-deutschland/>
- Trauth, Martin. April 5, 2018. "Frankreich Verlängert Grenzkontrollen [France Extends Border Controls]." *Tageblatt LËTZBUERG*. Accessed June 18, 2024. <https://www.tageblatt.lu/headlines/frankreich-verlaengert-grenzkontrollen/>
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2020. "International Migrant Stock 2020." United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2020.
- Van der Woude, Maartje. 2019. "A Patchwork of Intra-Schengen Policing: Border Games over National Identity and National Sovereignty." *Theoretical Criminology* 24 (1): 110–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480619871615>
- Zanker, Franzisca, Kwaku Arhin-Sam, and Leonie Jegen. 2020. "Free Movement in West Africa: Juxtapositions and Divergent Interests." MEDAM Policy Brief 2020/1. Mercator Dialogue on Asylum and Migration.

4 Conflicts of modernities

The spaces of health care in French-speaking West African popular culture

Séverine Marguin and Daddy Dibinga

Introduction

In our research project, we investigate the production of spatial stories in West African popular culture using the example of streaming series. Over the past few decades, television series have emerged as influential mass media, boasting a wide range of products from vibrant new industries in the subregion (Jedlowski 2019; Sawadogo 2023). These series tell us stories about, in, and through the world, thereby contributing to the creation of collective spatial stories and offering their own interpretations of current spatial changes worldwide.

In this project, we investigate West African soap operas that stage everyday stories of families and thematize current social, political, and social issues in the narratives of the main characters. As shown elsewhere, the main controversy in what are known as “Afronovelas” is the negotiations between modernities and traditions as competing sets of dominant values in the intrigues (Dibinga and Marguin forthcoming). Following an interdisciplinary approach between film studies and sociology, we embed filmic analysis in an analysis of the economic, cultural, and social conditions of the production (Banks, Conor, and Mayer 2016). Since the 2010s, audiovisual productions in French-speaking West Africa—which have been historically closely linked to the French cinematographic sector (Ndoye 2019)—have become increasingly diverse through the emergence of a postcolonial series landscape, within which various production repertoires coexist: (a) a translocal civilizational repertoire dominated by the French state, (b) a local–regional identitarian repertoire shaped by local production firms, and (c) a global standardizing repertoire shaped by global corporatist firms (Marguin and Dibinga forthcoming).

In this paper, our aim is to highlight variations in spatial stories about the same context, specifically in West African spaces of health care, according to different production repertoires. Focusing on health care allows us to concretely address not only the conflictual duality between modernities

and traditions but also their actual shift. Therefore, we ask the following questions: Which kinds of spaces of health care are shown in these soaps, and what are their social-spatial qualities? How are they constructed through the scenario and materially staged on the film set? What do they tell us about the refiguration of modernities in French-speaking Africa? The sociological film analysis reveals conflictual spatialities of health care (*spatial juxtaposition*, *spatial segmentation*, and *spatial uprooting*) depending on the respective production repertoire. Caught in a renegotiation among African modernities, African traditions, and Western modernities, these differentiated stagings of spatial stories tell us much about the understanding of modernities, especially regarding their agonistic or much more conflictual coexistence. To do so, we use spatial analysis of “staged” moral conflicts (Honneth 1994), which helps contribute to the analysis of multiple spatialities (Knoblauch 2022).

We begin with a short introduction to the topic of modernity in West Africa, before clarifying why we are working empirically with series material. After a discussion on our sociospatial approach, in which we also present our sample, we present the comparative analysis of the three considered series and the findings, which show the conflictual coexistence of different spatial articulations between modernity and tradition. We end the paper with some reflections on the questions regarding multiple spatialities.

Popular stories about modernities in West Africa

In this paper, we reflect on how modernities are an object of ongoing polarized debate in West Africa by focusing on the narrative dimension of these discourses. Through the analysis of Afronovelas, we aim to make visible which narratives of African modernities are conveyed within this mass medium.

Multiple modernities in African humanities

The question of modernity in Africa is a widely debated subject in the humanities—particularly in and between the disciplines of philosophy, history, anthropology, and sociology. A consensus holds that this is a problematic debate, as modernity as a watchword anchored in the values of Western civilization has been at the heart of colonialism. In the counter-current to theories of Eurocentric diffusionism, discourses based on a cultural theory approach emphasize the *situated* (Diagne 1992) character of African modernities, which has unfolded in relation to and entanglement with other modernities, first and foremost Western modernity, and “opens up the possibility for polycentric modernities and modernisms at different points of time and in different locations” (Friedman 2006, 426).¹

In his central essay “The Future of Tradition,” Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne (1992) points to the constructed nature of values as a function of the sociocultural dynamics at the heart of the concept of modernity. His identification of the main conceptual pairs in West African discourse on modernity—notably, rootedness/openness, tradition/modernity, and authenticity/alienation (Diagne 1992, 281)—clarifies for this context the conflicting lines that structure the debate on multiple African modernities. In these discourses, different dimensions are recurrently highlighted in the process of reinterpreting West African modernities—whether this concerns challenging scientific-technical progress (Aron 1969), which has already been denounced by proponents of negritude as dehumanization who have instead argued for the reconciliation of technical innovation and life (Senghor [1948] 2015), or whether it regards the supremacy of the written word, which has been said to be constitutive of modernity but weighed in the balance by the culture of African orality (Diagne 2005) and currently reinterpreted in the light of the more figurative dimensions of communication (Descola 2021).

Following the thinking of Senegalese philosopher Felwine Sarr (2016) in *Afrotopia* and that of Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembé (2005) in “Afropolitanism,” questions of plurality and syncretism form the essence of African modernities. By engaging with issues of “cultural reappropriation, deconstruction of the modernist narrative and the imagination of a new relational anthropology” (Arnold 2021, 25), Sarr and Mbembé emphasize dispersed continuities rather than ruptures with the past. In contrast to the miserabilistic visions of Africa as a “world apart” or “beyond the world” conveyed by the West (Mbembé and Sarr 2017, 8), the authors think of Africa as a plural, open, flexible body that contributes to “an expanded definition of the world” (12).

Sarr (2016) theorizes plurality in terms of *syncretism* as the main characteristic of African modernity. He defines Africanity in terms of its “capacity for intermingling [*capacité de brassage*]” (Sarr 2016, 136), which is based on the practice of synthesizing, recycling, and remodeling different systems of thought that are epistemologically mutually exclusive (notably a rational–logical system of thought, a system of thought based on the religion of the book, and an animist system of thought) but coexist or even overlap in their everyday performance. Mbembé (2013) calls for Africa’s identity to be rethought in terms of multiple circulation. This underpins the essential character of Afropolitanism—“broad-mindedness”—which enables creative and critical thinking with relevance for local and global contexts. He claims that people on the African continent always have mixed elements of different cultures, beliefs, and ways of being. For him, this refers to the “capacity of Africans to inhabit several worlds” (Mbembé 2013, 151), echoing Sarr’s idea of syncretism (2016). Mbembé (2021)

insists that movements (to, from, and across the continent) are constitutive of the African identity, which is a planetary project. These theories argue in favor of decentering and recentering, and deconstructing and refounding the idea of modernity, which takes “hybrid or cosmopolitan forms in life, politics, culture” (Mbembé 2021, 3).

Stories and series

Following Garnier and Tomiche (2009), we argue that the conflictual understandings of multiple modernities are the object of powerful *narratives*. Thus, series seem to be relevant material for decrypting these current narratives. As fictionalizations of everyday life, Afronovelas raise moral societal issues through the staging of familial sagas that evoke domestic conflicts, work–life balance, family’s reconfiguration, or actual forms of romances—which are all spheres of life caught in the shifting dialectics between tradition and modernity. These series orchestrate conflicts, doubts, and emotions regarding the life aspirations of West African subjects in a refiguring world (Weidenhaus and Korte 2022; Mock and Weidenhaus 2022).

We see the as-yet undiscovered potential in this cultural mass medium as a complement to the ambitious program of philosophers such as Mbembé and Sarr, who have argued that the arts, aesthetics, and literature play a special role in societal transformations and the recognition of the multiplicity of modernity. While, over the past years, both have focused primarily on the role of museums (in the frame of the *restitution debate* for Sarr and the idea of *antimuseum* for Mbembé), we believe that series, with their broad democratic distribution across all strata of the population, have an unrivaled power to tell stories.

Indeed, in recent years, series have emerged in sub-Saharan francophone Africa. Once dominated by films and series from elsewhere, French-speaking Africa saw, toward the end of the 1990s, a shift in television programming with the promotion of local sitcom productions, such as *A Nous la Vie* by Dani Kouyate (1998), *Kady Jolie* by Idrissa Ouedraogo (1999), and *Ma Famille* by Akissi Delta (2002) (Sawadogo 2023). In the course of the digitalization of the West African audiovisual sector (Jedlowski 2018), these sitcoms were soon followed by an explosion of productions at the beginning of the 2010s, especially in Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal. Broadcasted in prime time on the main TV channels and digital platforms throughout the whole (French-speaking) subregion, these series have been hits. Inspired by highly topical social phenomena, these series are seen as mirrors of a future-oriented African society. Against the backdrop of the often-decried miserabilist (Sarr 2016) and nostalgic (Lachenal and Mbodj-Pouye 2014) perspectives on the “past futures” of African

independence or declining African cities, these series show an idealized version of the everyday life of the inhabitants of a West African metropolis, with resources and capital of all kinds, which has proven thrilling for understanding the current negotiations of desirable values.

Carrying a strong decolonial vision (Dibinga 2024), these series offer a vision of a renewed Africa through the formulation of an “Afrocontemporary aesthetic” (Sarr 2016, 136). Of course, this aporia of the series certainly should not mask the heterogeneity of the discourses they convey, as this is what makes them a fascinating and relevant object of research for understanding the representations negotiated around the various moral conflicts (Honneth 1994) that run through the portrayed West African societies.

Health care and sorcery in West Africa: Moral issues

We argue that a topical focus on the staging of health care within series can reveal the conceptions of African modernities conveyed within the stories. Depending on the definition and practices of healing, different sets of values embedded in sociocultural dynamics are mobilized. The topic of health, healing, and illness in the African context is obviously a very broad field of research. It has been structured over the past century as the heritage of colonization, along with the strong uneven duality between Western modern medicine and African traditional healing. However, how should healing practices be conceived beyond the solely civilizational injunctions of others (Sarr 2016, 40) or without following the legacy of the “colonial library” (Mudimbe 1988) that still shapes the vision and imaginaries associated with (West) Africa?

In the historical and anthropological literature on African health care, the legacy and permanence of the duality² between Western modern medicine and African traditional healing has been widely questioned over the past few decades. Malowany (1997) and Lee (2021) both investigate the concept of *medical pluralism*: “In most African communities several kinds of healers work side by side: physicians or medical assistants, specialists in sorcery or spirit possession, Christian or Muslim religious healers, and others” (Feierman 1985, 73). Multiple authorities coexist alongside each other. On the one hand is Western modern medicine, based on medical models focusing on the diagnosis and treatment of specific health conditions using pharmaceuticals and medical procedures, and on the other hand is African traditional healing as a holistic approach that considers the social, psychological, and spiritual aspects of health and illness. The traditional African approach often includes the use of traditional herbs, rituals, and community support to promote health and wellness (Dzoyem, Tshikalange, and Kuete 2013).

In more recent discourse, authors have discussed *medical syncretism* (Moshabela, Zuma, and Gaede 2016) as a further step toward grasping the coexistence in a more entangled way. In the summer of 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) organized the first Traditional Medicine Global Summit to decide on an evidence-based framework to integrate the benefits of traditional medicine into universal health care. Efforts have indeed been made to develop new regulations and policies around traditional, complementary, and integrative medicine. This includes reflections about the need for jurisprudence regarding nonconventional medicine to deal with the increased number of charlatans roaming the towns (Kamgoui Kuitche 2017).

Closely linked to the issue of health care is the question of sorcery, as the “marabout” is a central figure in specific traditional healing practices. A marabout is an important spiritual figure in West African societies and is a common term for a spiritual guide³ and priest, as well as for a wise man, judge, educator, guardian, storyteller, and transmitter of myths, traditions, and knowledge, such as herbal medicine, the making of magic potions, the use of medicinal plants, and alternative medicines. In anthropological literature, there has been an interesting debate for the past few decades about the relationship between sorcery and modernity, with authors showing that sorcery is “not only contiguous with, but constitutive of modernity” (Moore and Sanders 2001, 12).⁴ As summarized by Henry and Tall, there is a new paradigm in which “authors such as Meyer (1999) and Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) see the use of witchcraft as a local response to the imperialism of international capitalism and globalization” (Henry and Tall 2008, 15, own translation). This debate is inseparable from the debate on health care practices and therefore needs to be considered from an entangled perspective in order to understand the fractures created by the colonialist project of Western modernity and the epistemological framework within which the renaissance of an African modernity or modernities is taking place.

The sociospatial approach to refiguration

Following a sociospatial approach (Jessop, Brenner, and Jones 2008; Christmann and Ibert 2012; Baxter et al. 2021; Marguin and Pelger 2022), we look at the constitution of space to understand the social. To do this, we borrow a relational approach to space (Löw [2001] 2016), which allows us to take into account its materiality, its performativity in social action, and its imaginative dimensions. We are convinced that the spatial lens sheds relevant light on current shifting conflicting phenomena and allows for considering complex entanglements in the analysis, as stated by the theoretical framework of the refiguration of spaces (Löw and Knoblauch 2022).

Investigating spatial stories

Deciphering the *mise en intrigue* of spaces (especially spaces of health care) helps us understand the ways in which current West African societies, especially Senegalese, are told and culturally constructed in a series. In doing so, we are part of the *topographical* (Böhme 2004) or *spatial* (Buschmann and Müller 2009; Hallet and Neumann 2009; Gajdis and Manczyk-Krygiel 2016) *turns* in literary studies since the late 2000s, in which narrated spaces are theoretically considered both as representations of culturally dominant spatial orders and as constitutions of (new) cultural orders (Hallet and Neumann 2009, 16). Michel de Certeau's (1988, 345) concept of *spatial stories* offers a useful heuristic for this, because spatial stories, as narrations of space, not only describe space but also produce it. In this approach to the dynamization of space, like Jörg Dünne (2009), we pursue a topological and topographical analysis of spatial narratives in which the relationship between subjects and objects in narratives is described as constitutive constellations of space or the world and in which the mediality and materiality of these spatializations are considered. Based on the literature of Madhu Krishnan (2018, 3), we want to ask, "How does [series production], as a material artefact comprising part of a far wider system, contribute to the production and performance of space across time?"

Following Dünne's (2014) approach, we look at what he calls the "scenario of spaces"—the coherent and intentional assembly of all the spatial stories told in a series. The consequence of this is that a particular spatial story (e.g., the spaces of health care inhabited and performed by the characters) is always inscribed in a relationship (whether one of distinction, resemblance, comparison, etc.) with the other spaces of health care presented in the fiction. The scenario of space is the result of a coordinated intention; it is not just the result of the inspired gesture of the director but rather the result of collective work that follows a process of alignment with the spatial knowledge of the production team members. The particularity of our approach is that it deeply focuses on the orchestration of the spatiality—that is, how space is materially "staged" (Baxter and Marguin 2024)—and reconstructs the process of staging through our ethnographic data.

Corpus of three Senegalese series for different perspectives on health

The originality of our approach lies in its combination of film analysis and an approach that investigates the sociology of cultural production by deconstructing the production processes at work (Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell 2009; Banks, Conon, and Mayer 2016). While the phenomenon of West African series is still relatively unexplored, there is a long-standing

discourse on francophone cinema in West Africa (Forest 2018; Ndoye 2019; Caillé and Forest 2019). Nguéa and Bell Yemmel (2020) and Jedlowski (2018, 2019) even more explicitly discuss the shift to video formats and the resulting digitization as a mode of production and reception that is spreading rapidly. Within the upcoming industry, we have distinguished three competing production repertoires (Marguin and Dibinga forthcoming) that differ according to the degree of the translocation of the production teams' composition, the financial participation of private and public production capital, and the distribution possibilities (national television channels, online platforms, YouTube):

- 1 The *civilizational translocal production repertoire* is subject to the exclusive technical and financial tutelage of France through public support for cultural cooperation, and functions as a relic of the colonial era.
- 2 The *identitarian local production repertoire* is based on the emergence of an intraregional private audiovisual production sector, along the lines of Nollywood (Haynes 2007), in which West African fiction is produced by West African production companies for West African audiences, following a regionalization dynamic.
- 3 The *standardizing global production repertoire* highlights the involvement of large private Western media groups (notably online platforms) seeking to reach a global audience through translocal coproductions of African fictions.

The research design of our project is therefore based on a comparative case study of the West African series—that is, a series whose narrative is inspired by West African reality and in which West Africans participate in the production. As the production regimes are intended to be contrasted, the other dimensions should, as far as possible, be homogeneous, particularly with regard to the genre of the series (soap opera), taking place in a major West African city (in this paper, Dakar), and being successful over several seasons. Based on these criteria, we chose the following three series to be included in the study: *C'est la Vie!*, *Karma*, and *Yaay 2.0* (Figure 4.1a–c and Table 4.1).

Combinatorial methods of film analysis and ethnographic investigation

This project adopted a multimodal qualitative approach consisting of two integrated work modules: a film analysis and an ethnographic investigation of the film set of the series. In the first work module, the audiovisual product was analyzed qualitatively to highlight spatial narratives. As a qualitative hermeneutic method, the sociological analysis of films aims to interpret the formation of meaning in films or series while including the

Table 4.1 Three series under study



C'est la Vie!: This series, which falls under the production regime of French tutelage, has been produced since 2014 by the Franco-Senegalese production company Keewu Productions and is cofinanced by French subsidies and nongovernmental organizations (notably Rias) in the field of health.



Karma: This series has been produced since 2020 by Marodi TV, the leading Senegalese production company in the West African series sector, representing the local production regime.



Yaay 2.0: This series has been produced since 2021 by Kalista Productions, an up-and-coming production company in Dakar founded by Kalista Sy, a script writer and producer of Afrofeminist series.

historical and cultural contexts (Reichertz and Englert 2011; Peltzer and Keppler 2015; Mikos 2018). We carried out a focused film analysis, primarily concentrating on the spatial dimension. To this end, we produced mappings of the filmic spaces (see below in the analysis) that reconstructed the spaces of health care in the series.

The second module consisted of an ethnographic study of the process of constructing fictional filmic spaces. During a field trip lasting several weeks in Dakar, we were able to observe the construction of filmic spaces by the teams from the Keewu and Marodi production companies. Shooting and editing require a process of spatial translation of the *mise-en-scène*, the set dressing, and the reconstitution of certain locations on the set. We conducted expert interviews (Thierbach 2021) with the series teams, including those responsible for the story (e.g., the scriptwriters), those responsible for the physical and material contexts of the fictional spaces (e.g., the set designers or location scouts), those responsible for the visual translation of the profilmic space into the represented space (e.g., the cameramen or the director of photography), and, of course, the directors as the conductors of the entire shoot.

Staged moral conflicts regarding African modernities

In the third part of this paper, we present the results of our empirical investigation of spatial stories from Afronovelas. First, we reconstructed the spatial qualities of these specific spaces through the visual film analysis of the chosen sequences. Second, we put this spatial constitution into perspective by embedding it into their context of production to understand the meaning-making intended by the production team. With this research design, we aimed to take into consideration and bring together the different perspectives, depending on the context of the production of the series—that is, depending on their position within the production regime of Afronovelas in West Africa. The comparison of the different spatial stories allowed us to work out the *multiple spatialities* orchestrated in the series—that is, the entanglements of the various modernities—through the analysis of their spatialization (Knoblauch 2022, 107).

Spatial juxtaposition in C'est la Vie!: The secularization of health care

The series *C'est la Vie!* stages the everyday life of a health center in a fictive West African town called Ratanga. It presents the personal stories of the employees and their extended families. For this paper, we chose a sequence (see Figure 4.2) staging a conflict involving a midwife, Tiada, who is employed at the medical center. In this scene, Tiada unofficially provides traditional healing care for men suffering from impotence. She welcomes them into her consultation space, where she normally treats the women, and this leads to many men waiting in front of her room. She conceals her herbs in a drawer in her desk. Her practice, so far tolerated by the leader of the health center, is challenged by the arrival of her colleagues, Assitan and Korsa, who practice conventional Western medicine



Figure 4.2 Collection of stills as data basis for the interpretational mapping of health care scenes in the series *C'est la Vie!*.

Source: Stills from *C'est la Vie!*, Season 3, Episode 2, accessed on YouTube.⁵

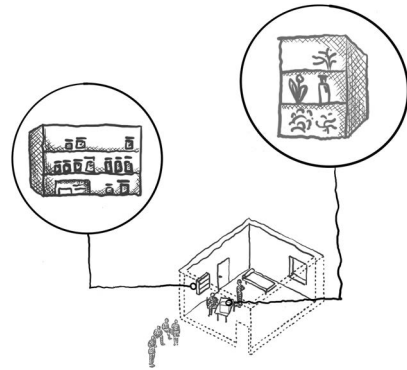


Figure 4.3 Mapping of the midwife's consultation room using traditional plants in the westernized health center in the series *C'est la Vie!*.

Source: Drawing by research team members Inès Gartlinger and Séverine Marguin.

and are shocked by the coexistence of the two approaches in the very same consultation room.

The spatial analysis (see Figure 4.3) of this sequence shows a *spatial juxtaposition* of two medicinal approaches performed alongside each other. The “polycontextural” dimension of the situation (Knoblauch et al. 2021), represented as the simultaneous overlapping of the logic of Western medicine and that of traditional African healing practices, leads to conflicts between the employees of the health center. This shows how the opposition between the two healing practices is an object of negotiation.

Produced by the French production firm Keewu Production and founded by the nongovernmental organization Reis, active in the domain of health sensibilization, the series conveys the paradigm of *medical pluralism*, in which multiple authorities coexist. The series shows how this paradigm is a source of conflict among the employees of the center, even if there is a consensus among different generations—as shown by the portrayed men outside the door waiting for the consultation. This is coherent with the positioning of the WHO on the African continent and its plea for accelerating the registration and circulation of standardized African traditional medicines within the WHO African Region, based on the criteria of pharmaceutical quality, safety of use, and therapeutic efficacy (WHO 2010).

In the *C'est la Vie!* series, which is produced within the civilizational repertoire, the opposition between Western medicine and traditional healing practices is emptied of any spiritual substance—there is a clear separation of the medical spheres from the religious/spiritual sphere. In this sense, the use of plants to regulate male impotence is itself rationalized on the basis of the plants' active agents for the intended treatment. In this way, the series offers a secularized version of the moral conflict over what medicine should be used in modern society. In this sense, the series is the bearer of Eurocentric diffusionism, reinforcing the epistemological primacy of Western modernity. This correlates with the way Keewu's producer states the framing of *C'est la Vie!* as an attempt to “topicalize” good recipes used in French series toward the West African audience (from an interview with the Keewu producer in Dakar, December 2022). This spatial juxtaposition is derived from a Westernized take on the tension between a modern Western understanding of health care and African healing traditions and drives this opposition within the series.

Spatial segmentation in Karma: The syncretic understanding of health care

The *Karma* series depicts the tribulations of several families facing daily difficulties in the metropolis of Dakar. For this paper, we chose a sequence staging a conflict revolving around a sick baby. The baby was born with a heart defect, which requires surgery. How the child should be cared for sparks a conflict between the different generations of caregivers in the extended family—and, as we learn, this is not the first case of a child's heart defect in the extended family. The young parents plead for a heart operation, following the precepts of Western medicine, whereas the grandparents are heavily against it, as they want to seek the help of the family marabout to cure the child. The conflict evolves dramatically, with the grandfather kidnapping the child just before the operation and bringing him secretly to their village of origin, Bakel, to see the marabout. Here, the scenario takes an interesting twist. On the one hand, the child is cured by the marabout; on the other hand, the heart disease is revealed to have been caused by ingesting a potion made from traditional herbs that pregnant women in the family are accustomed to drinking (Figures 4.4 and 4.5).

The spatial analysis of the sequence shows a *spatial segmentation* of the two conflictual medicinal approaches. The visits to the doctor for the child's heart disease take place at a modern hospital, situated in the center of the metropole Dakar. It is staged as an anonymous, labyrinthine, and vast space. The doctor's consultation room is structured around his desk, which creates a barrier between the two parents, who are desperate and emotional, and the doctor, who is cold and stiff. The marabout is shown in the family's native village, more than 600 km from Dakar,



Figure 4.4 Collection of stills as data basis for the interpretational mapping of health care scenes in the series *Karma*.

Source: Stills from *Karma*, Season 3, Episode 0 and 6–8, accessed on YouTube.⁶

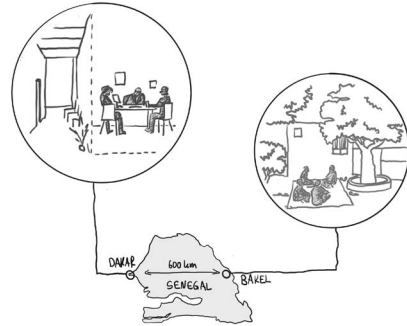


Figure 4.5 Mapping of the relations between health care situations in the series *Karma*.

Source: Drawing by research team members Inès Gartlinger and Séverine Marguin.

in the Tambacounda region in the far east of Senegal on the border with Mauritania. The grandfather meets the marabout under the village tree, surrounded by members of his extended family. The people are seated close together, gathered around the marabout, who exudes a warm nobility. In this polarized spatial *mise-en-scène*, dividing lines emerge, notably between the urban and the rural and between the foreign and the familiar. This representation of the opposition between modernity and tradition runs precisely along the conceptual couples defined by S.B. Diagne (1992, 3)—such as openness and rootedness, or alienation and authenticity. In this sense, the production of the series follows the same patterns as popular African literary works, which expose tradition and modernity (Garnier 2009, 34).

Karma is produced by the local production firm Marodi Production, whose producer, Mass Ndour, is keen to produce stories that sound like his people—in other words, stories that are “authentically” Senegalese (from an interview with the Marodi producer in Dakar, December 2022). *Karma* puts forward the idea of *medical syncretism*. It is not about choosing sides but about navigating these different worlds inhabited in everyday life. However, the orchestration is not without criticism of both approaches. For example, the hospital is staged as impersonal and dehumanizing, and even though the marabout is the one who saves the child, the series still

addresses sharp criticism of the treatment of pregnant women with toxic traditional remedies. This mirrors the existing criticism of charlatans who abuse people and their families, while also making the child's rescue by the marabout's spiritual force credible. Indeed, the marabout draws on his charismatic power through his positioning toward the extended family. It is a tale of "integrative sorcery," which "as part of the symbolic logic that organizes power relationships is rooted in lineage structures and expresses gender and generational relationships" (Henry and Tall 2008, 24). This nuance between marabout and charlatan shows the constant negotiation and reinvention of traditions (Meinhof 2012) and their projection into the future through the implication of the new generation. The *Karma* series, produced within the identitarian repertoire, conveys a strong sense of syncretism in which the medical spheres coexist with the religious and spiritual spheres. In this sense, the series bears an African modernity, rooted in tradition (i.e., rooted in the family).

Spatial uprooting in Yaay 2.0: The syncretic understanding of urbanized health care

The series *Yaay 2.0* depicts the tribulations of several women as they become mothers (*Yaay* means "mother" in Wolof). For this paper, we chose a sequence staging a conflict around the infertility of two couples. Both couples are desperate to have children, but despite all the measures taken, especially by the women, both remain childless. The series shows how the parents-in-law interfere in the couples' lives and give advice after advice to the young women. The mothers and mothers-in-law in particular provide them with beverages and amulets to help them procreate. The two women are more or less receptive to these methods. However, one of the women rejects the mother-in-law's help, and on the advice of her gynecologist, who offers a Western medical follow-up, she insists that her husband be tested—a taboo in Senegalese society. This scene presents a feminist critique through the breaking of this taboo. The other woman decides to go by herself to the marabout to receive counsel and answers (Figures 4.6 and 4.7).

The spatial analysis of this sequence shows a *spatial uprooting*. As in *Karma*, *Yaay 2.0* presents a segmentation between a more Western-orientated medicine and the healing practices of the marabout—and yet, the orchestration of this segmentation has a refiguring quality. The gynecologist's practice is built on a human scale, which allows for more intimate interactions than at the *Karma* hospital, for example. The care personnel are shown as empathic and engaging with caring gestures toward the women and especially the men. Even more interesting is how the marabout is staged. The sequence opens with an indoor view of what looks like a tent, arranged around a carpet with the same objects and artifacts one



Figure 4.6 Collection of stills as data basis for the interpretational mapping of health care scenes in the series *Yaay 2.0*.

Source: Stills from *Yaay 2.0*, Season 1, Episode 1 and 5, accessed on YouTube.⁷



Figure 4.7 Mapping of the relations between health care situations in the series *Yaay 2.0*.

Source: Drawing by research team members Inès Gartlinger and Séverine Marguin.

would find under the tree where a marabout traditionally meets those seeking their help. The marabout is young and not that charismatic, and above all, he has no ties to the people coming. They do not know each other; the marabout is a stranger—which is shown by the husband’s rejection of what he calls a “charlatan.” The next view is striking, as it becomes clear that the “tent” is pitched in the middle of Dakar, surrounded by tall buildings.

Yaay 2.0 is produced by the local production firm Kalista Productions, whose producer, Kalista Sy, is an emblematic figure in the series scene. Describing herself as “Afrofeminist,” she is concerned with showing the complexities of the women’s situation and being caught between traditions and modernities. In *Yaay 2.0*, as in *Karma*, the series recounts a *medical syncretism* and stages the new problematics in a way that leads to a refiguration of this coexistence of different belief systems. This concerns the processes of urbanization and family nuclearization. The staging of the marabout in his isolated tent, drowned in the Dakar metropolis, represents its uprooting from the lineage structures of the village. This is reinforced by the fact that the couple is visiting him alone without any other family members. Researchers in the humanities describe this phenomenon as “sorcery on the loose” that is no longer integrative within a fixed community (Henry and Tall 2008, 24). As in *Karma*, the *Yaay 2.0* series, produced

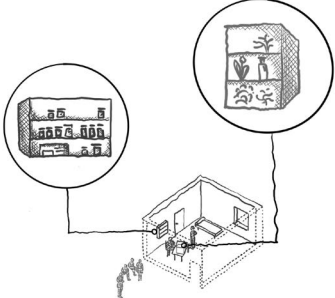
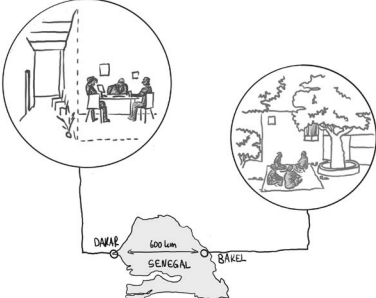

within the identitarian repertoire, conveys a strong sense of syncretism in which the medical spheres coexist with the religious and spiritual spheres and shows the radical transformations due to the rural exodus, urbanization, and family transformation that Senegalese society is undergoing. It makes a plea to reflect on the articulation between traditions and modernities in societies in full transformation.

Conclusion: Multiple spatialities of health care in Afronovelas

Comparing the spatial stories of health care in the three considered Afronovelas shows the conflictual coexistence of various spatial figurations about modernities and traditions. The first series, *C'est la Vie!*, whose production follows a translocal civilizational production repertoire, stages the oppositional duality between traditional African medicine and Western medicine, which is resolved through spatial juxtaposition. This means that the two ways of healing can share the same space but are in clear subordination to one another. Western medicine is considered the official practice and has the power to “tolerate” African healing medicines if they are hidden. The plain hierarchical spatial juxtaposition is a manifestation of *medical pluralism* through the recognition of the virtues of plants but only in a secularized way.

The second and third series, *Karma* and *Yaay 2.0*, whose production follows a local identitarian production repertoire, instead plead for a *medical syncretism* by staging the coexistence of various healing practices as spatial segmentation in different coexisting worlds. The characters circulate very freely, although not without conflict, between these worlds, which show the same degree of ontological legitimacy. For example, in *Yaay 2.0*, there is no spatial hierarchy between the marabout’s tent and the gynecologist’s office. In contrast, in *Karma*, this segmentation follows the duality between city and countryside by spatially grounding the power of each healing practice within a specific spatial setting (the urbanized context of the hospital for Western medicine practices *versus* the rural context of the marabout’s family tree for traditional ones). In *Yaay 2.0*, the classical duality between city and countryside is overcome, and the staging of modernities and traditions becomes more complex as the segmentation turns into a spatial uprooting; that is, the spatial arrangement of the gynecologist is humanized, almost familiar, while the one staging the marabout is looser and estranged. In this spatial refiguration of familiarity/strangeness, we see a renegotiation of the dualities (e.g., rootedness/openness and authenticity/alienation) that, for S.B. Diagne (1992, 281), grounds the very core of the futures of African traditions. This shows, with great accuracy, how Afronovelas, through their meticulous staging, thematize and perform these complex struggles over modernities (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Comparative analysis of the spatial stories of health care in the three considered Afronovelas.

	<i>C'est la Vie!</i>	<i>Karma</i>	<i>Yaay 2.0</i>
Production repertoire	Translocal civilizational repertoire	Local identitarian repertoire	Local identitarian repertoire
Understandings of health care	Oppositional duality between traditional African medicine and Western medicine; no marabout	Syncretism: marabout, Western medicine, religion	Syncretism: ambivalent relationship between marabout and Western medicine
Spatialities			
Understanding of modernities	Spatial juxtaposition Western modernity	Spatial segmentation African modernity, following syncretism and pluralism	Spatial uprooting Refigured African modernity, following syncretism and pluralism from an Afrofeminist perspective

Comparing the entangled translocal and local cultural productions allows for an analysis of the power relations and dominance at stake in the production and the circulation of such spatialities. Following Edward Said (1978, 49), the construction and dissemination of the “imaginative geographies” of colonialism, especially regarding the understanding of modernity, is and has been a central aspect of the West’s control of the former colonized world. By investigating the construction of the imaginative spaces as a “geoaesthetic category” (Mbembé 2021, 221), we reveal the struggle and conflicts between different actors of the audiovisual production regime over the controversial and coveted influence of the series on the construction of spatial imaginaries of health care in West Africa. The three different spatialities (spatial juxtaposition, spatial segmentation, and spatial uprooting) that emerge from the analysis convey a respective variation on this tension between African traditions and modernities.

This detailed analysis of the spatial stories about health care in *Afronovelas* reveals the virulence of “staged” moral conflicts (Honeth 1994) within this industry and reflects the struggles within Senegalese society—from an enforced universalist modernity by the colonial power, through a legitimate syncretism at the foundation of African modernity, to a syncretism refigured in the course of urbanization and family change. In line with refiguration theory, these conceptions are clearly shown to coexist and be in moral conflict with each other. Moreover, these multiple modernities can be analyzed spatially because they are manifest in multiple spatialities.

Notes

- 1 As such, this echoes the theories of *multiple* (Eisenstadt 2000; Wohlrab-Sah and Burchard 2012) and *alternative* (Gaonkar 2001) modernities.
- 2 I use the words *traditional* and *traditions* here not as substantializations (for something that has always existed), but because this is how the debate is conducted by different scholars. As such, the word *tradition* is much more common than before modernity, or precolonial, because it stresses the continuity of traditions in modernities (Diagne 1992).
- 3 Not to be confused with the Muslim marabout, which refers to a Sufi religious leader.
- 4 This is similar to the “reinvention of tradition” in light of modernity (Meinhof 2012).
- 5 *C’est la Vie!*, Season 3, Episode 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFnWCGBJkwU&t=2s>
- 6 *Karma*, Season 3, Episode 0: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqCdHTYcna8&t=3142s>; *Karma*, Season 3, Episode 6: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pizOe88spgg&t=702s>; *Karma*, Season 3, Episode 7: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lt6YhWVqhKc>; *Karma*, Season 3, Episode 8: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hO_wZn7rZpA.
- 7 *Yaay 2.0*, Season 1, Episode 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T33-XXl-UIR8>; *Yaay 2.0*, Season 1, Episode 5: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Mzpt-HW-ro>.

References

- About, Marguerite, Alexandre Rideau, Charli Beleteau, and Mbatio Diaw, dirs. 2018–2023. *C'est La Vie!*. Dakar, SN: Keewu Productions and RAES NGO.
- About, Marguerite, Alexandre Rideau, and Charli Beleteau, dirs. 2020. *C'est la vie!*. Season 3, Episode 2, “De Bonnes Habitudes.” Aired July 16, 2020, on YouTube. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfNUeTKBmBE&t=125s>
- Arnold, Markus. 2021. “Entre Créolisation, Afropolitanisme et Afrotopia: Résonances et Lignes de Partage Entre Trois ‘Stylistiques du Monde’ [Between Creolization, Afropolitanism, and Afrotopia: Resonances and Dividing Lines Between Three ‘World Styles’].” *French Studies in Southern Africa* 51 (1): 25–43.
- Aron, Raymond. 1969. *Les Désillusions du Progrès: Essai Sur la Dialectique de la Modernité* [The Disillusions of Progress: Essay on the Dialectic of Modernity]. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.
- Banks, Miranda J., Bridget Conor, and Vicki Mayer, eds. 2016. *Production Studies, the Sequel! Cultural Studies of Global Media Industries*. New York: Routledge.
- Baxter, Jamie Scott, and Séverine Marguin. 2024. “The Refiguration of Conservation: Introducing the Concept of ‘Staging Nature’ in the Case of Botanical Gardens.” *Museum and Society* 22 (1): 14–33.
- Baxter, Jamie Scott, Séverine Marguin, Sophie Mélix, Martin Schinagl, Ajit Singh, and Vivien Sommer. 2021. *Hybrid Mapping Methodology: A Manifesto*. Working Paper no. 9. Berlin: SFB 1265 Re-Figuration von Räumen. <https://doi.org/10.14279/DEPOSITONCE-12060>
- Böhme, Hartmut. 2004. *Topographien der Literatur. Deutsche Literatur im transnationalen Kontext* [Topographies of Literature. German Literature in the Transnational Context]. DFG Symposium 2004. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler.
- Buschmann, Albrecht, and Gesine Müller, eds. 2009. *Dynamisierte Räume. Zur Theorie Der Bewegung in Den Romanischen Kulturen* [Dynamized Spaces. On the Theory of Movement in Romance Cultures]. Beiträge der Tagung am Institut für Romanistik der Universität Potsdam. Potsdam: Universität Potsdam.
- Caillé, Patricia, and Claude Forest, eds. 2019. *Pratiques et Usages du Film en Afriques Francophones: Maroc, Tchad, Togo, Tunisie* [Practices and Uses of Film in Francophone Africa: Morocco, Chad, Togo, Tunisia]. Arts Du Spectacle – Images et Sons. Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses Universitaires de Septentrion.
- Christmann, Gabriela B., and Oliver Ibert. 2012. “Vulnerability and Resilience in a Socio-Spatial Perspective: A Social-Scientific Approach.” *Raumforschung Und Raumordnung [Spatial Research and Planning]* 70 (4): 259–272. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13147-012-0171-1>
- Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. 2000. “Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming.” *Public Culture* 12 (2): 291–343. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-12-2-291>
- de Certeau, Michel. 1988. *Die Kunst des Handelns* [The Practice of Everyday Life]. Berlin: Merve.
- Descola, Philippe. 2021. *Les Formes Du Visible: Une Anthropologie de La Figuration* [The Forms of the Visible: An Anthropology of Figuration]. Paris: Seuil.
- Diagne, Mamoussé. 2005. *Critique de La Raison Orale. Les Pratiques Discursives En Afrique Noire* [Critique of Oral Reason: Discursive Practices in Black Africa]. Paris: Karthala.

- Diagne, Souleymane Bachir. 1992. "L'Avenir De La Tradition [The Future of Tradition]." In *Sénégal. Trajectoires d'un État*, edited by Momar-Coumba Diop, 279–298. Dakar: Codesria.
- Dibinga, Daddy. 2024. "La Décolonisation Spatiale dans les Séries Sénégalaises: L'exemple de Karma de Marodi Prod [Spatial Decolonization in Senegalese Series: The Example of Karma by Marodi Prod]." *Revue d'études Esthétiques (Special Issue Art et Decolonialité)*.
- Dibinga, Daddy, and Séverine Marguin. forthcoming. "Stereotypical Home Making. Deconstructing the Production of Spatial Stories in West-African Afronovelas." In *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies*.
- Dünne, Jörg. 2009. "Geschichten im Raum und Raumgeschichte, Topologie und Topographie: Wohin geht die Wende zum Raum? [Stories in Space and Spatial History, Topology and Topography: Where Is the Turn to Space Going?]." In *Dynamisierte Räume. Zur Theorie der Bewegung in den Romanischen Kulturen*, edited by Albrecht Buschmann, and Gesine Müller, 5–26. Potsdam: Universität Potsdam.
- Dünne, Jörg. 2014. "Scénarios d'espace Entre Guide Touristique et Récit: Tentatives d'épuisement d'un Lieu Marocain [Spatial Scenarios Between Tourist Guide and Narrative: Attempts to Exhaust a Moroccan Place]." In *Scénarios d'espace Littérature, Cinéma et Parcours Urbains*, edited by Jörg Dünne and Wolfram Nitsch, 177–196. Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal.
- Dzoyem, Jean P., Emmanuel Tshikalange, and Victor Kuete. 2013. "Medicinal Plants Market and Industry in Africa." In *Medicinal Plant Research in Africa*, edited by Victor Kuete, 859–890. London: Elsevier.
- Eisenstadt, Shmuel N. 2000. "Multiple Modernities." *Daedalus* 129 (1): 1–29.
- Feierman, Steven. 1985. "Struggles for Control: The Social Roots of Health and Healing in Modern Africa." *African Studies Review* 28 (2/3): 73–147. <https://doi.org/10.2307/524604>
- Forest, Claude. 2018. "Quelles Salles de Cinéma en Afrique sud Saharienne Francophone? [What Movie Theaters Exist in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa?]" *Cinémas* 27 (2–3): 11–30. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1045365ar>
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. 2006. "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies." *Modernism/Modernity* 13 (3): 425–443. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2006.0059>
- Gajdis, Anna, and Monika Manczyk-Krygiel, eds. 2016. *Der Imaginierte Ort, Der (Un)Bekannte Ort* [The Imagined Place, The (Un)Known Place]. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar, ed. 2001. *Alternative Modernities*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Garnier, Xavier. 2009. "Modernités Littéraires en Afrique: Injonction ou évidence? [Literary Modernities in Africa: Injunction or Evidence?]." *Itinéraires* 2009 (3): 89–101. <https://doi.org/10.4000/itinéraires.487>
- Garnier, Xavier, and Anne Tomiche. 2009. "Modernités Occidentales et Extraoccidentales [Western and Non-Western Modernities]." *Itinéraires* 2009 (3). <https://doi.org/10.4000/itinéraires.417>
- Hallet, Wolfgang, and Birgit Neumann. 2009. "Raum und Bewegung in der Literatur: Zur Einführung [Space and Movement in Literature: An Introduction]." In *Raum und Bewegung in der Literatur. Die Literaturwissenschaften und der Spatial Turn*, 11–32. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.
- Haynes, Jonathan. 2007. "Nollywood in Lagos, Lagos in Nollywood Films." *Africa Today* 54 (2): 130–150. <https://doi.org/10.2979/AFT.2007.54.2.130>

- Henry, Christine, and Emmanuelle Kadya Tall. 2008. "La Sorcellerie Envers et Contre Tous [Witchcraft Against All Odds]." *Cahiers d'études Africaines* 48 (189–190): 11–34. <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafricaines.9612>.
- Honneth, Axel. 1994. *Kampf Um Anerkennung. Zur Moralischen Grammatik Sozialer Konflikte* [The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts]. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Jedlowski, Alessandro. 2018. "African Videoscapes: Southern Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Côte d'Ivoire in Comparative Perspective." In *A Companion to African Cinema*, edited by Kenneth W. Harrow and Carmela Garritano, 291–314. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Jedlowski, Alessandro. 2019. "Afriques Audiovisuelles: Appréhender les Transformations Contemporaines au Prisme du Capitalisme Global [Audiovisual Africas: Understanding Contemporary Transformations Through the Lens of Global Capitalism]." *Politique Africaine* 153 (1): 7–27. <https://doi.org/10.3917/polaf.153.0007>
- Jessop, Bob, Neil Brenner, and Martin Jones. 2008. "Theorizing Sociospatial Relations." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26 (3): 389–401. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d9107>
- Kamgoui Kuitche, Victorine. 2017. *Médecine Traditionnelle et Droit de la Santé. Pour une Intégration du Droit dans le Système Traditionnel* [Traditional Medicine and Health Law: For the Integration of Law into the Traditional System]. Paris: l'Harmattan.
- Knoblauch, Hubert. 2022. "Multiple Säkularität, Multiple Räumlichkeit oder Multipolarität [Multiple Secularities, Multiple Spatialities, or Multipolarity]." In *Verstehen Als Zugang Zur Welt: Soziologische Perspektiven*, edited by Uta Karstein, Marian Burchardt, and Thomas Schmidt-Lux, 99–115. Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag.
- Knoblauch, Hubert, Martina Löw, Jörg Stollmann, and Gunter Weidenhaus. 2021. "Guest Editorial." *Sozialraum.de* 13 (1). <https://www.sozialraum.de/guest-editorial.php>
- Krishnan, Madhu. 2018. *Writing Spatiality in West Africa. Colonial Legacies in the Anglophone/Francophone Novel*. Suffolk: James Currey.
- Lachenal, Guillaume, and Aïssatou Mbodj-Pouye. 2014. "Restes du Développement et Traces de la Modernité en Afrique [Remains of Development and Traces of Modernity in Africa]." *Politique Africaine* 135 (3): 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.3917/polaf.135.0005>
- Lee, Rebekah. 2021. *Health, Healing and Illness in African History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Löw, Martina. 2001) 2016. *The Sociology of Space. Materiality, Social Structures, and Action*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Löw, Martina, and Hubert Knoblauch. 2022. "The Refiguration of Space, Circulation, and Mobility." In *Spatial Transformations. Kaleidoscopic Perspectives on the Refiguration of Spaces*, edited by Angela Million, Christian Haid, Ignacio Castillo Ulloa, and Nina Baur, 17–27. London: Routledge.
- Malowany, Maureen. 1997. *Medical Pluralism: Disease, Health and Healing on the Coast of Kenya, 1840–1940*. PhD diss. Montréal: McGill University.
- Marguin, Séverine, and Daddy Dibinga. forthcoming. "Refiguring the Production Regime of Soap-Operas. The Case of Afronovelas in francophone West Africa" *Space and Culture*.
- Marguin, Séverine, and Dagmar Pelger. 2022. "Art-Based Commoning? On the Spatial Entanglement of Cultural and Urban Politics Through the Example of

- Project Spaces in Berlin.” *Documenta Fifteen—Aspects of Commoning in Curatorial and Artistic Practices, Notes on Curating* 54: 103–111.
- Mayer, Vicki, Miranda J. Banks, and John T. Caldwell, eds. 2009. *Production Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Mbembé, Achille. 2005. “Afropolitanisme.” *Africultures [Online]*. <https://africultures.com/afropolitanisme-4248/>
- Mbembé, Achille. 2013. *Critique de La Raison Nègre* [Critique of Black Reason]. Paris: La Découverte.
- Mbembé, Achille. 2021. *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mbembé, Achille, and Felwine Sarr. 2017. “Penser Pour Un Nouveau Siècle. [Thinking for a New Century].” In *Écrire l’Afrique-Monde*, edited by Achille Mbembé, and Felwine Sarr, 7–16. Dakar: Jimsaan.
- Meinhof, Marius. 2012. “18 Gedanken Zu ‘Bericht aus der Ferne: Erfahrungen und Eindrücke eines Asienmigranten’ [18 Thoughts on ‘Report from Afar: Experiences and Impressions of an Asian Migrant’].” *SozBlog: Blog Der Deutschen Gesellschaft Für Soziologie*, December 1. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://blog.sozioogie.de/2012/09/bericht-aus-der-ferne-erfahrungen-und-eindruecke-eines-asienmigranten/>
- Meyer, Birgit. 1999. *Translating the Devil. Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Mikos, Lothar. 2018. “Methoden der Film- und Fernsehanalyse [Methods of Film and Television Analysis].” In *Handbuch Qualitative Videoanalyse*, edited by Christine Moritz, and Michael Corsten, 89–100. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien.
- Mock, Claudia, and Gunter Weidenhaus. 2022. “‘I Want My Child to Become a World Citizen.’ Raum, Zeit Und (Re)Produktion in Kenianischen Mittelschichtsbioographien [Space, Time, and (Re)Production in Kenyan Middle-Class Biographies].” In *Göttinger Beiträge Zur Soziologischen Biographieforschung: Biographie Und Raum*, edited by Johannes Becker, Gunter Weidenhaus, and Nicole Witte, 135–173. Göttingen: Universitätsverlag.Göttingen.
- Moore, Henrietta L., and Todd Sanders, eds. 2001. *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*. London: Routledge.
- Moshabela, Mosa, Thembelihle Zuma, and Bernhard Gaede. 2016. “Bridging the Gap between Biomedical and Traditional Health Practitioners in South Africa.” *South African Health Review* 2016: 83–92.
- Mudimbe, Valentin-Yves. 1988. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge (African Systems of Thought)*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Ndour, Mass dir. 2020. *Karma*. Dakar: Marodi Production.
- Ndour, Mass dir. 2022a. *Karma*. Season 3, Episode 0, “Renaissance.” Aired June 24, 2024, on YouTube. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqCdHTYcna8&t=3142s>
- Ndour, Mass dir. 2022b. *Karma*. Season 3, Episode 6. Aired November 12, 2022, on YouTube. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pizOe88sppg&t=702s>
- Ndour, Mass dir. 2022c. *Karma*. Season 3, Episode 7. Aired November 15, 2022, on YouTube. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lt6YhWVqhkC>
- Ndour, Mass dir. 2022d. *Karma*. Season 3, Episode 8. Aired November 19, 2022, on YouTube. Accessed December 5, 2024. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hO_wZn7rZpA

- Ndoye, Mame Rokhaya. 2019. *Le Cinéma Ouest-Africain Francophone: Et Pourtant, Ils Tournent!* [Francophone West African Cinema: And Yet They Film!]. Collection Logiques Sociales. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Nguéa, Annette Angoua, and Jacques Merlin Bell Yemba. 2020. *Le Cinéma Camerounais à l'ère Du Numérique* [Cameroonian Cinema in the Digital Age]. La Collection Théories et Critique. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Peltzer, Anja, and Angela Keppler. 2015. *Die Soziologische Film-Und Fernsehanalyse: Eine Einführung* [Sociological Film- and Television Analysis: An Introduction]. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Reichert, Jo, and Carina Jasmin Englert. 2011. "Die Videoanalyse [Video Analysis]." In *Einführung in Die Qualitative Videoanalyse*, edited by Jo Reichert, and Carina Jasmin Englert, 48–116. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Sarr, Felwine. 2016. *Afrotopia*. Paris: Éditions Philippe Rey.
- Sawadogo, Boukary. 2023. *African Film Studies: An Introduction*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Senghor, Léopold Sédar. 1948) 2015. *Anthologie de La Nouvelle Poesie Nègre et Malgache de Langue Française: Précédée de "Orphée Noir" Par Jean-Paul Sartre* [Anthology of New Black and Malagasy Poetry in the French Language: Preceded by 'Black Orpheus' by Jean-Paul Sartre]. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Thierbach, Cornelia. 2021. "Zum Einsatz von Leitfadeninterviews in der Raumforschung [On the Use of Guided Interviews in Spatial Research]." In *Handbuch Qualitative Und Visuelle Methoden Der Raumforschung*, edited by Anna Juliane Heinrich, Séverine Marguin, Angela Million, and Jörg Stollmann, 183–194. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Toure, Boubacar, and Khadija Ndiaye. 2022a. *Yaay 2.0*. Dakar: Kalista Production and Raw Rec Studio.
- Toure, Boubacar, and Khadija Ndiaye, dirs. 2022b. *Yaay 2.0*. Season 1, Episode 1. Aired May 29, 2022, on YouTube. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T33-XXIUIR8>
- Toure, Boubacar, and Khadija Ndiaye, dirs. 2022c. *Yaay 2.0*. Season 1, Episode 5. Aired June 16, 2022, on YouTube. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Mzpt-HW-ro>
- Weidenhaus, Gunter, and Eva Korte. 2022. "Searching for a Middle Class in Nairobi and Berlin." In *Middle Class Identities and Social Crisis. Cultural and Political Perspectives on the "Global Rebellion"*, edited by Alejandro Crimson, Menara Guizardi, and Silvina Merenson. London: Routledge.
- WHO (World Health Organization). 2010. *Guidelines for Registration of Traditional Medicines in the WHO African Region*. Geneva: World Health Organization. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://www.afro.who.int/publications/guidelines-registration-traditional-medicines-african-region>
- Wohlrab-Sahr, Monika, and Marian Burchardt. 2012. "Multiple Secularities: Toward a Cultural Sociology of Secular Modernities." *Comparative Sociology* 11 (6): 875–909.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Part II

Tensions in digital spaces



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

5 Borders on the internet? The RIPE debate about the internet in the wake of the war in Ukraine¹

Sezgin Sönmez and Hubert Knoblauch

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, caused global outrage and led to extensive international sanctions against the Russian Federation. Alongside economic and political sanctions, a debate emerged in the months that followed on whether and to what extent parts of Russia's internet infrastructure could be sanctioned. Once again, the question of territorial demarcation of the internet was explicitly raised and discussed.

This discourse event is part of the ongoing debate about the fragmentation, territorialization, and instrumentalization of cyberspace that has been happening for several years. It weaves through the short but eventful history of the internet in a way that is particularly interesting for examining the refiguration of spaces. The internet serves as a prime example of what is referred to in this context as a “network.” The idea of capping parts of the internet also brings into question the “logic” of spatial figures. Despite the internet being traditionally seen as “spaceless,” potential sanctions on the internet highlight the materiality of its infrastructure, which is deeply rooted in technical and spatial structures.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine had widespread consequences for the warring parties, the international security order, and the global economy. The ongoing war in Europe has resulted in thousands of deaths and millions of displaced persons. From the perspective of the West, Russia has transitioned from an autocracy to a dictatorship, leading to unprecedented economic sanctions imposed by the international community. Politically, Ukraine has finally moved closer to the West and Europe and is receiving extensive economic and military support from numerous countries. On the battlefield, the Russian war of aggression does not stop at Ukraine's critical infrastructure. Power lines, power plants, gas pipelines, and bridges are considered legitimate targets and are systematically destroyed. In addition, the internet, as essential communications infrastructure, has also

been significantly affected by the war. Stas Prybytko, a representative of the Ukrainian Ministry of Digital Transformation, has described the situation in the occupied territories as follows ([Bergengruen 2022](#)):

The first thing that the Russians do when they occupy these territories is cut off the networks, [...] Then the people living there don't know what's happening in Ukraine, they can't call family to describe the situation, they don't know whether their relatives are alive or not.

In the course of the war, Russia has captured or destroyed over 4,000 base stations of Ukrainian telecommunications operators and over 60,000 km of fiber optic cable ([Bergengruen 2022](#)). The website "TOP10VPN," which gathers data on digital rights violations in Ukraine, has documented the following damage and outages, among others:

Internet Infrastructure Damage

- Ukrainian internet has shrunk by at least 16% nationwide
- Accessible IP addresses in Kherson have reduced by 81%, 59% in Donetsk and 56% in Luhansk since the invasion
- 17% of all network-connected devices previously detectable via internet scans appear to have been lost

Internet Outages

- There have been as many as 276 internet disruptions in Ukraine of varying severity, totaling almost 19,000 hours
- At least 45 severe outages lasting over 3,800 hours have affected the country
- Kherson has suffered the longest period of the most severe outages, with almost 1,500 hours in total

Digital Censorship

- 13 digital censorship initiatives have occurred in the occupied regions, including the blocking of Google, YouTube, and Viber
- 17 measures aimed at taking control of Ukrainian telecommunications infrastructure have occurred ([Woodhams and Migliano 2022](#))

Ukrainian telecommunication providers are working diligently to repair the damage to infrastructure as quickly as possible by fixing fiber optic cables, rebuilding base stations, and setting up temporary Wi-Fi spots. However, in areas occupied by Russia, Ukrainian internet providers are facing systematic attacks. Connections to the rest of Ukraine are frequently severed rapidly, and instead, a connection to the Russian network is established. The strategic spatial control of fiber optic cables and access to internet infrastructure are therefore central focuses of the armed conflict between the warring parties.

Fragmentation, “weaponization,” and the reconfiguration of the internet

The refiguration of spaces is a process that we fundamentally associate with the digital mediatization of communicative action (L^öw and Kno^blauch 2021). While mediatization characterizes the spatial mediation of actions, the knowledge that guides them and the resulting institutions and objectifications, digitalization, which began in the 1960s (initially as “informatization”), has now permeated all areas, systems, and fields of action. It is essentially based on a technical infrastructure that has now been developed across large parts of the world, enabling new forms of global communication. This infrastructure and the communication it supports were primarily seen as a new form of global networking. More recently, however, massively opposing processes have become apparent, which also have to do with the fact that the infrastructures of the internet are not only network-like. These tensions form the core of the concept of the refiguration of spaces, for example, between the open, unbounded, and decentralized (global) figuration of the network and the limited, centralized, and access-controlled figuration of the (national) territory, as in the case discussed here. The internet itself seems to have been central to the dissemination of the network figure, which was closely linked to neoliberal globalization and associated with globally active corporations. However, the idealized nature of these ideas about the internet as a network brings up the question of how they are actually put into practice.

In order to understand the “network” as more than just a “neoliberal ideology” (Bory 2020), as critical media theory does, it is necessary to examine its materiality. This materiality is characterized by cables, servers, routers, nodes, and other complex technical systems and devices. Associated with this materiality is the spatiality of the internet, which has often been overlooked. Although the internet, like networks in general, has been viewed as something “virtual,” where physical space loses importance or does not have a distinct “place” (Lambach 2020, 489), the infrastructures are spatial in a very clear sense. They unfold underground,

on the earth, and even in space. The intercontinental submarine cables that run through the oceans, for example, can be compared to railroads, as [Starosielski \(2015\)](#) demonstrates, following well established highly sedimented, historical maritime trade routes. There are local spaces, such as small and large data centers and internet exchange points, that are highly localized in specific locations but interconnected like nodes. In addition, their connection to the end devices of internet users highlights the internet's strong network characteristics, which are increasingly mobile and dynamic due to the proliferation of portable computers and cell phones. Through these end devices, the material space of the internet is conceived as a network that always includes the social actors connected to it, as well as the institutions linked to the infrastructure, technological regulation, and services offered within it. Along with these social actors, another space comes into play, often referred to as virtual, which consists of primarily two-dimensional surfaces of visual, linguistic, and other signs through which the users communicate (which are also located in physical space, along with the devices used for communication). Their communication can be described as "digitally mediatized," as physically localized actors connect with each other and with the technology through communication technologies across different spaces. Following [Voelsen's \(2019\)](#) suggestion, we can distinguish at least four levels of digital infrastructure:

- 1 *End Devices* and their *Users* (smartphones, laptops, individuals, and institutions);
- 2 *Internet Services* (everyday applications, digital platforms, and software services);
- 3 *Logical Infrastructures* (standardized protocols for the transmission of data between the different layers); and
- 4 *Physical Infrastructures* (cable connections, routers, servers, and data centers).

Even though technical descriptions of infrastructures differentiate between multiple layers, collectively referred to as the internet's protocol stack, it is crucial from a social science perspective to understand how social institutions influence and modify this stack materially and spatially. For example, the physical infrastructure of cables, transmitters, and both older and newer satellites is owned primarily by large private and partially state-owned companies, such as global telecommunications services that have arisen from privatization processes. The fact that large operators of internet services have recently created physical infrastructures (AWS, Google, etc.) or even new infrastructure systems (Starlink) demonstrates that the four levels are not clearly separable and are in a constant state of flux.

The social aspect of material infrastructure is also reflected in the fact that technical regulations are always linked to social norms. For example, the normative demand for openness and accessibility is technically implemented by the fact that the use of the internet is, in principle, open to everyone and that everyone can participate in technical developments (Deibert and Crete-Nishihata 2012, 342). Several organizations have been formed over the past two decades to ensure these regulations. In political science terms, they are usually referred to as part of a global field of “internet governance,” as they have the power to decide on technical standards and the distribution of network resources. The connection of such organizations to the normative network concept becomes clear in the special form known as *networked governance* (Stoker 2006; Cowhey and Mueller 2009; Kahler 2011; Hollstein et al. 2017; Kapucu and Hu 2020). This form of governance is not organized hierarchically, does not require formal membership, has no prerequisites for participation, and makes decisions based on consensual communicative actions (Mueller, Schmidt, and Kuerbis 2013). Therefore, it follows a “multistakeholder” model as opposed to “multilateral” organizations, in which nation-states hold more dominance.

Both types of political control play a role in our case, which deals with the access of individual end devices to the entire network. The main issue is the regulation of what we know in digitalized everyday life as an “IP address.” IP addresses are based on the technical assignment of a series of numbers, including a network address and a host address, which can control access (DeNardis 2009).

The task of assigning IP address blocks and subnet numbers (autonomous system numbers or ASNs), known as Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) functions, was initially managed by a single person from 1972. This person was the internet pioneer Jon Postel, who at that time still kept a handwritten list of the internet’s port numbers in his office. Jon Postel was employed at the Information Sciences Institute at the University of California, which was one of the founding institutions of NSFNET² and was funded by the US Department of Defense until the 1980s. During the transition from ARPANET to the internet in 1988, the term IANA was first mentioned in the document RFC 1083.³ Joyce Reynolds was named as the responsible contact person, with Postel as Deputy Internet Architect (IETF 1988). For a long time, addresses were allocated according to the egalitarian *first-come, first-served* principle. Finally, the *Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers* (ICANN) was created in 1998. As a civilian non-profit organization, it was entrusted by the US Department of Commerce with the allocation of domain names and address resources, thus taking over the IANA functions but remaining under the control of the US government. This changed, at the latest, in the aftermath of the

Snowden scandal, which had far-reaching consequences for the public perception of US-dominated internet governance (Flonk, Jachtenfuchs, and Obendiek 2020, 380). ICANN was finally released from the control of the Department of Commerce in 2014,⁴ and the management of IANA functions was handed over entirely to the global multistakeholder community.

The mass surveillance of internet data by state intelligence agencies such as the NSA revealed by Snowden ultimately made the public aware of what Ortiz Freuler (2023) refers to as the *weaponization* of the internet, that is, the strategic instrumentalization of internet infrastructure data by state bodies. The resulting conflict between state actors and the internet is reflected in the uneven spatial distribution of internet addresses. In 1989, for example, there were already 159,000 hosts with over 600 million addresses, with Stanford University having more addresses than the People's Republic of China. The explosive expansion of the internet soon led to another problem, as the 32-bit system of the first IP address version (IPv4) was limited to 4.3 billion addresses, less than the growing world population. This led to a conflict regarding the switch to the 128-bit number sequence, the "IPv6" solution. The introduction of IPv6 was preceded by a long dispute, mainly driven by China, over whether these addresses should be assigned by ICANN. Some countries believed that the ITU, which is strongly shaped by a nation-state governance model, should be responsible for this. Founded in the 19th century to regulate telegraph communication, the supranational ITU is still one of the classic multilateral telecommunications organizations. The dispute was finally settled in 2003, and ICANN was able to continue managing address allocation, relying in particular on its *regional internet registries* (RIRs) responsible for the individual regions of the world (including RIPE, which is responsible for Europe, Russia, and the Middle East and which is discussed below).

This conflict over the political management of the internet was not the only one at the time. In 1995, during the G7 summit, a "Global Society of Information" was announced, while Russia and China had already been advocating for a ban on "information aggression" at the UN since the late 1990s. They also launched an initiative against what they referred to as "information terrorism" coming from the West (Deibert and Crete-Nishihata 2012, 346). As a result, a series of developments can be observed that describes a *reterritorialization* of the internet, which refers to the confinement of the internet within territories controlled by states or territorial states. One example of this is the Chinese "Great Firewall," through which China has been asserting sovereignty over the Chinese internet using its own standards since 2015. Another example is Russia's Sovereign Internet Bill, which has established national control over Russia's internet infrastructure since 2019. These boundary measures are not exceptions. According to the OpenNet initiative, more than 40 countries were

already filtering access to the internet within their territorial borders in 2011 (Deibert and Crete-Nishihata 2012, 343).

As the introduction of borders on the internet is not limited to nation-states, there is talk of a fragmentation of the internet. For example, many private companies and corporations engage in “border management by defining the level of access other corporations have to their territories, data, and users” (Lambach 2020, 498). This also includes so-called *walled gardens*, digital ecosystems, password-protected intranets, clouds, metaverses, and ubiquitous digital platforms. In addition, fragmentation is exacerbated by the development of proprietary infrastructures (such as cable and satellite) by major internet service providers.

Pohle and Voelsen (2022) challenge the idea of fragmentation by arguing that the perception of disintegration only occurs when we consider a liberal market order of the internet that is primarily controlled by the United States. Instead, they propose that from a more pluralistic viewpoint we are witnessing a “disruptive reconfiguration of a culturally highly differentiated network at the application level” (Pohle and Voelsen 2022, 481). The potential separation of the Russian internet serves as a relevant case study to test this concept of refiguration.⁵

ICANN, RIPE, and the discourse surrounding the shutdown of the Russian internet

Four days after the Russian attack, on February 28, 2022, Mykhailo Fedorov, the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine (and Minister for Digital Transformation), sent a letter to ICANN requesting the temporary or permanent revocation of the Russian domain addresses “.ru,” “.рф,” and “.su” along with the associated SSL certificates. He also called for the deactivation of two DNS root servers in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Fedorov justified this request by citing the violation of Article 2.4 of the UN Charter (which guarantees the territorial integrity of nations) and the Russian attacks on Ukraine’s civilian infrastructure, which he argued constituted a violation of the Geneva Convention. Two days later, a letter was sent to the RIPE Network Coordination Centre (NCC) with almost identical wording, except that a fourth request was added, namely the withdrawal of the right to use IPv4 and IPv6 addresses from all Russian RIPE members. Both letters were published a few days later by both organizations on their homepages.

As the role of ICANN has already been briefly outlined, it is necessary to explain at this point what RIPE stands for in order to understand the further course of the discussion. RIPE is one of the five global *Regional Internet Registries* mentioned above, which are responsible for the allocation of IP address blocks in a specific supranational territory. Since 1992, RIPE

has been responsible for a geographically defined area of the internet that includes Europe, the Middle East, Ukraine, and Russia. The organization is based in the Netherlands and is therefore subject to both Dutch and EU jurisdiction. RIPE follows the multistakeholder model already mentioned, which was developed in the context of the UN in the 1990s and established within internet governance at the *World Summit on the Information Society* (WSIS) in 2005.⁶ Deliberative forms of communication, in which decisions are made with the involvement of all stakeholders, are essential for multistakeholder organizations of internet governance. Within internet governance organizations, working groups and mailing lists play a central role, in which proposals on specific topics are introduced, discussed, checked, and reviewed. Using various (online) voting procedures, proposals are then either rejected or, if a so-called *rough consensus* is reached, accepted, and recorded in writing as a standard or guideline. Perhaps even more important, however, are the numerous conferences and regional meetings of the various internet governance organizations. In addition, meetings and workshops open to the public are held regularly at various locations, organized by these organizations, at which topics, problems, and projects related to the internet are presented and discussed.

It was within this organizational context that the Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister's appeal to shut down parts of the Russian internet was made. His call sparked a series of discussions at ICANN and RIPE, both of which are responsible for the region, and we would like to analyze it as a discursive event.⁷

Just one day after Fedorov sent his letter to ICANN, to initiate this discussion, the Executive Board of the RIPE NCC published a general resolution guaranteeing the provision of critical internet services to *all* its members (RIPE NCC 2022):⁸

The RIPE NCC provides critical services to its membership spread across a diverse geographical and political region [...] The RIPE NCC will publicly document all its efforts to ensure that the registry is not negatively affected by laws, regulations or political developments. It is crucial that the RIPE NCC remains neutral and does not take positions with regard to domestic political disputes, international conflicts or war [...] It also means that the information and data provided by the RIPE NCC can be trusted as authoritative and free from bias or political influence. Failure to adhere to this approach would jeopardize the very model that has been key to the development of the Internet in our service region.

This resolution makes RIPE's self-positioning clear: The organization sees itself as a *neutral* actor that makes its services available to all its

members (including those from Russia and Ukraine).⁹ Neutrality here refers to a *supranationality* that defines national legislation and regulations as negative influences and to an *impartiality* that is understood as being free from (geo)political influences. This neutrality appears here as a central basis for legitimizing RIPE's authoritative power. Any deviation from this approach would jeopardize the basis for the development of the internet in this region.

On March 2, 2022, Göran Marby, president and CEO of ICANN, responded to Fedorov's letter and published it on the ICANN homepage. After expressing his condolences and sympathy for the attack on Ukraine, Marby addressed ICANN's self-positioning as follows (Marby 2022):

ICANN is an independent technical organization that manages the Internet's unique identifiers. ICANN is a facilitator of the security, stability, and resiliency of these identifiers with the objective of a single, global, interoperable Internet. In our role as the technical coordinator of unique identifiers for the Internet, we take actions to ensure that the workings of the Internet are not politicized, and we have no sanction-levying authority. Essentially, ICANN has been built to ensure that the Internet works, not for its coordination role to be used to stop it from working.

In addition to the self-determination as a neutral or independent organization already postulated in the RIPE NCC resolution, an additional positioning is added here: ICANN sees itself as a *technical* organization whose goal is to keep the internet running. The term "technical" is used here to distinguish it from the political sphere. The internet itself is understood as a *technical system*, ideally defined as *uniform, interoperable, and global*. The role of ICANN is defined in terms of *technical mediation and support*. Furthermore, it is pointed out that ICANN as an organization has no sanctioning power, but is merely responsible for the functioning of the internet. In the following paragraph, Marby expands on his explanations of the internet (Marby 2022):

As you know, the Internet is a decentralized system. No one actor has the ability to control it or shut it down. ICANN's primary role [...] is to ensure the consistent and unique assignment of Internet identifiers in line with global policies. These policies were developed by a multistakeholder community [...] It is a model that has allowed the Internet to flourish over decades, and this broad and inclusive approach to decision-making fosters the global public interest and makes the Internet resilient against unilateral decision-making."

He now adds another dimension to the description of the internet, which he sees as a *decentralized* system that cannot be controlled by individual players. He then goes on to discuss ICANN's field of activity, which includes the allocation of internet identifiers and is *in line with global policy*. This global policy is legitimized by him through the *multistakeholder process*, which includes various groups of people in society who try to solve the technical *and* political challenges in a collaborative and consensus-oriented manner. This model is described as a successful approach that promotes *global political interest* and prevents unilateral decisions. This already reveals an initial tension between self-determination as a *technical or apolitical organization* on the one hand and the simultaneous *political representation* of a global public interest legitimized by the multistakeholder process on the other.

In the following part of the letter, Marby addresses Fedorov's three demands point by point and rejects them. The request to block the Russian domain names is rejected, as ICANN is responsible only for validating domain names, not revoking them. The request to deactivate the two DNS root servers (where the names and addresses of all top-level domains are stored and queried by name servers) could not be fulfilled either. This is due to the root server system being comprised of many geographically dispersed points managed by independent network operators. Lastly, the last request regarding SSL certificates – which securely bind the domain names to organizational identities and enhance data security – was denied on the grounds that ICANN does not have the authority to revoke them. SSL certificates are issued by third-party providers and ICANN is not involved in their issuance.

The RIPE NCC replied to Fedorov's letter on March 10, 2022. Managing Director Hans Petter Holen also expressed his condolences and sympathy. He rejected RIPE's request for the withdrawal of IPv4 and IPv6 addresses in the following terms (Holen 2022):

We regret to inform you that we cannot comply with this request. We do not have a mandate to take such actions, and as an organization governed by community-developed policy and Dutch law, we cannot take such action unilaterally. We further believe that Internet number resource registrations should not be used as a means to enforce political outcomes, and that doing so would have serious implications for the Internet, not just in the Russian Federation but also for the rest of the world.

In contrast to ICANN's more technically based rejections, Holen argued more strongly on the basis of political and legal concepts.

However, he also made a value-rational argument when he wrote that *internet registries* should not be misused as a political tool. This aligns with the risk assessment that unilateral sanctions would endanger the global internet. Following this rejection, Holen described his view of the function of RIPE within the field of internet governance (Holen 2022):

We are the authoritative source of information on who holds the right to registration of IP addresses and ASNs in our service region. Internet operators use this registry to make their own decisions on how to route Internet traffic, resulting in an open Internet in which everyone can connect on their own terms. Blocking or withdrawing resources from our registry would be unlikely to have immediate impact on interconnection or traffic in Russia, but it could have unpredictable consequences in terms of harming the global coordination that is necessary for stable Internet operations.

RIPE is positioned as an *information authority*, serving as a public register that does not assign the rights to use IP addresses, but simply publishes them. The decision-making power for routing data traffic lies with internet operators, who network on their own terms. Blocking or withdrawing resources would violate the conditions of global internet coordination and jeopardize the *openness* of the internet. Openness, in this context, refers primarily to the accessibility of the network, as well as the absence of binding specifications.

Fedorov's two letters to ICANN and RIPE, but above all the public replies from the two directors, illustrate several aspects of internet governance: Fedorov ascribes authoritative or organizational power to both organizations, which, in his view, potentially allows them to sanction parts of the Russian internet infrastructure. ICANN and RIPE both declare their solidarity with Ukraine but reject Fedorov's demands with similar statements. Their self-definitions as neutral (or technical) organizations, which must fundamentally reject certain processes of political appropriation to protect the openness of the internet, serve as a basis of legitimacy for their refusal of Fedorov's demands. At the same time, both organizations *are* located in the field of internet governance and are politically legitimized through the multistakeholder process. The question now arises as to whether Marby's and Holen's statements are based on a general consensus within the respective communities or whether there are voices within the field that question these interpretations. In this context, we now turn to two further statement events that took place immediately after Marby's and Holen's responses.

Classificatory patterns of ICANN's and RIPE's self-positioning and othering in Fedorov's letters:

Problem definition: sanctions, political instrumentalization, loss of trust, compromising of public control possibilities regarding research and monitoring of the internet

Problem handling: none (as not responsible for the problem at hand)

Self-positioning: neutral, technical-political, community-oriented, multistakeholder-oriented, supranational, impartial, mediating, supportive, public, free, transparent, scientific

Othering: political, closed, controlling, centralizing, censoring, blocking (but legitimized at the level of internet providers)

Interpretation patterns of cyberspace: openness, uniformity, decentrality, interoperability, globality, (systemic-technical) health, freedom

On March 10, 2022 (the same day as RIPE's reply to Fedorov), two multistakeholder petitions were published online dealing with the issue of potential internet sanctions against Russia. The first petition is a letter to US President Joe Biden signed by a total of 41 human rights and digital policy organizations.¹⁰ In it, the organizations call on the US government to keep an eye on the possible consequences of internet sanctions against Russia for Russian civil society and the Russian opposition ([Access Now et al. 2022](#)):

However, we write to express our concerns about growing calls to interfere with the Russian people's access to the internet, which we fear will hurt individuals attempting to organize in opposition to the war, report openly and honestly on events in Russia, and access information about what is happening in Ukraine and abroad. These measures could also unnecessarily facilitate further repression by the Russian government.

The letter also warns of the unintended consequences of sanctions, which must always be in line with international human rights ([Access Now et al. 2022](#)):

We urge all actors considering steps that would limit internet access in the Russian Federation to carefully consider the full impact of such measures and their possible unintended consequences, and to act in a targeted, open, and strategic manner, consistent with

international human rights principles of legality, legitimacy, necessity and proportionality.

In order to ensure the free flow of information for Russian civil society, the signatory organizations call for the granting of a general license for the use of internet services in the context of individual internet communication. The letter also mentions the reason for the recommendation: In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Cogent, one of the world's largest providers of fiber optic capacity, suspended its services within Russia on March 4, citing the Russian invasion and US sanctions. Lumen, another major internet carrier, followed suit on March 8, also citing US sanctions. The actors behind the petition therefore suspect *over-compliance* with sanctions, which should be directed only against restricted state targets and national institutions and should not include civilian communication. The organizations refer to a public interest that explicitly excludes access to communication technologies from potential future sanctions.

In order to contextualize this petition in relation to the demands of the Ukrainian government, it is important to consider the positions of the organizations and recipients of this demand. This petition is from civil society organizations and directed toward the US government (and like-minded governments), advocating for the interests of Russian civil society in the light of the potential, unintended consequences of government sanctions. The authority to impose sanctions is therefore attributed solely to governments. They are called upon to collaborate with civil society actors and technology companies to comprehend the implications of potential sanctions and to implement them in a targeted manner and in accordance with human rights principles. This necessitates a transparent and coordinated approach with civil society that reduces the repercussions of poorly thought-out sanctions and offers ISPs a clear understanding of the objectives of sanctions to minimize the effect on civil communications infrastructure, which is deemed a human right. From this perspective, the primary threat to the internet seems to originate from the US government and its allies.

The second petition, also published on March 10, was signed by a group of 37 *individuals* (along with their institutional affiliations). These include members of the European Parliament, ICANN, RIPE, DE-CIX, IT security companies, and research institutions. The summary of the petition reads as follows (ten Oever et al. 2022):

The invasion of Ukraine poses a new challenge for multistakeholder Internet infrastructure governance. In this statement, we discuss possible sanctions and their ramifications, lay out principles that we

believe should guide Internet sanctions, and propose a multistakeholder governance mechanism to facilitate decision-making and implementation.

The letter is therefore not addressed to a specific organization or government, but rather to the public or the field of internet governance. In contrast to the first petition, the letter presents very specific and technical arguments, directly referencing the demands made by Fedorov and evaluating the *effectiveness* of the sanctions requested. The measures demanded by Fedorov are all deemed ineffective as sanctions.

As in the first letter, it is made clear that the civilian population of a sanctioned state should not be a legitimate target of sanctions and that sanctions measures must be carried out in accordance with multistakeholder governance. What is new, however, is the fundamental openness toward *targeted, focused, and precise* sanctions. For the first time, potential legitimate targets of internet sanctions are now mentioned (“military and propaganda agencies”). The challenge would therefore be to create a new (sub-)political sanction mechanism that would have to adapt the transnationality of the internet and the multistakeholder system – still considered deficient in this field – to the new challenges of war. The letter refers to *blocklisting* as the only efficient sanction measure, which is already being used to combat spam and phishing attacks (ten Oever et al. 2022):

Our conclusion is that blocklisting of IP addresses, Autonomous Systems, and domain names upon which the multistakeholder community can establish consensus is effective and carries no inherent danger of being over-broad. Once decided upon, it is easily invoked and equally easily rolled back once the problem is resolved. Most important, it carries no significant costs or risks and is aligned with the Internet’s multistakeholder governance values and principles.

The discursive realization of an already established and legitimized procedure for restricting internet communication, which is commonplace in the field of cybersecurity, is of interest here: the blocking of IP addresses and networks that are considered fraudulent or criminal, which are then filtered out of data traffic as part of regularly updated lists. This is especially relevant since the signatories of this petition include individuals who professionally deal with IT security as part of their business activities, for whom managing restrictions on data traffic is a daily task. In contrast to the first petition, this demonstrates a more pragmatic approach to the issue of sanctions and their implementation in the context of technical control and regulation of data flows.

Classificatory patterns of self-positioning and othering of the two civil society petitions:

Problem definition: restriction of internet access, unintended consequences for civilian population, collateral damage, unilateral actions, ineffective sanctions, increase in repression by the Russian government, over-compliance, censorship of Russian opposition media, difficulty in documenting human rights violations, undesirable legal precedents

Problem handling: general licenses for civilian internet services, consultation with civil society and technical organizations, targeted/open/strategic/focused sanctions, transparent and clear formulation of sanctions, blocklisting of military targets and propaganda sites

Self-positioning: civil society, individual, human rights-based, internet governance community, deliberative

Othering: governmental, military, propagating, sanctioning, violating, suppressing, cutting off/dividing, revoking, inefficient

Interpretation patterns of cyberspace: free flow of information, transnational, multistakeholder-governed, personal communication infrastructure, unprecedented, modern, source of information, vital

Following the two petitions, several experts within the RIPE community commented on the topic, putting forward their perspectives on the internet sanctions debate. These individual positions do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the RIPE NCC. As experts, they represent their own positions and thematic focuses and argue from different and sometimes ambiguous field roles.

On March 16, Farzaneh Badiei published an article on the online forum *RIPE Labs* and on the homepage of the *Digital Medusa* initiative. At the beginning of her contribution, she addresses another public request from Fedorov¹¹ to AWS and Cloudflare, in which he asked the companies to suspend their services in Russia. Badiei then addresses the role of *content delivery networks* (CDNs), which improve the performance of websites or streaming providers by storing content and data on servers close to the respective users. Here, Badiei addresses the geoblocking (the regional blocking of certain content by various internet providers) that is already taking place, simultaneously warning of the consequences of potential sanctions (Badiei 2022a):

CDNs allow their customers to decide ‘what content’ is served to ‘which users’ [...] Often, this is used to enforce various content licenses or to conform to distribution restrictions, such as when a

video is available in one country but not another. Sometimes, however, site operators use geoblocking so as not to serve any content to users in sanctioned countries. It's a blanket compliance with sanctions that is probably not even required by law [...] Website operators have already been discriminating based on geographical location for years, including against users in Russia.

Here too, geoblocking initially appears to be a standard procedure that is commonly used in the context of copyright issues, for example. However, the problem arises when companies apply sanctions too broadly in a blanket over-compliance of sanctions, resulting in a complete refusal to provide data in certain countries where it is not legally required. This is viewed as a discriminatory practice that companies internally justify, as providing content in sanctioned countries could pose a legal risk. Companies fear prosecution if they violate state sanctions, so they tend to over-comply and unlawfully exclude users in certain countries (Badiei 2022a):

When it comes to compliance with sanctions, many industries over comply [...] But over compliance with sanctions at the Internet infrastructure level can have a devastating effect on ordinary people's access to the Internet while not having the optimal deterrent outcome on States and their decision-makers. Perhaps we need to rethink the sanction regime for the Internet to keep the Internet global and open, facilitate free flow of information and discuss meaningful remedies during wars and conflicts.

Badiei calls for a rethinking of past internet sanction mechanisms, such as those used in Cuba, Iran, and Syria. She emphasizes the importance of maintaining a global and open internet, ensuring the free flow of information even during times of war and crisis.

The subsequent solutions proposed by Badiei (2022b) reveal several issues with the global internet infrastructure. These include a lack of clarity and transparency regarding how RIRs and internet service providers can comply with sanctions, which specific services and transactions are affected by sanctions, and which services are exceptions to sanctions (licenses). Badiei suggests better coordination within the industry, a change in internet governance structures, and improved political communication about the critical need for internet infrastructure.

Chris Buckridge, long-time member and advisor to the RIPE NCC, also published an article on RIPE Labs on March 22, 2022. He begins his text with a quote from Jon Postel (Buckridge 2022): “Be conservative in what you do, be liberal in what you accept from others.” He then goes on to discuss the *technical* characteristics of the internet and the tasks of

the *technical* internet community, including ICANN and RIPE, emphasizing what he regards as a special technical characteristic of the internet, namely, its *connectivity*, which has enabled its rapid growth. The aim of the technical community should be to *promote* new connections, *reduce* friction, and *integrate* approaches, platforms and technologies. With regard to Postel's quote, he warns against individual and dogmatic solo efforts that could jeopardize the network's connectivity (Buckridge 2022):

The robustness principle has served as an important normative framework in all this; but it also serves as a warning about the fragility of connection. It warns that a careless attitude to your own actions, or a dogmatic rigidity in what you're willing to accept from others, jeopardizes the very mechanisms that facilitate interconnection. That's true of technical standards and protocols, but it can apply equally to the structures and processes that we have developed to govern and administer connection.

The danger of unilateral action is connected to both the process of developing technical standards and protocols and governance of interconnectivity. Such recklessness jeopardizes the connectivity of the network, which is described as a *fragile relationship*. In this sense, Postel's quote can be understood as an appeal for more cooperation, which is crucial in the development of internet standards. Finally, he addresses the Russian invasion of Ukraine, warning the reader of the potential political *lever* or *vector of aggression* that poses a major risk to the network (Buckridge 2022):

But at the root of each decision is a larger reality, which is that politically-driven changes to the Internet's core registries (such as the RIRs or the DNS) present a significant risk to the global Internet itself - even if the underlying political positions have very broad support. This is an argument that the RIPE NCC has been making for some time now in a slightly different context: that of state-imposed sanctions.

Here, too, *politically* motivated change is seen as a major source of danger for the global internet. The danger relates above all to a shift in the functions of the RIRs, which are located as functional-technical *cores* within cyberspace. The solution to these political dangers is a focused multistakeholder process that enables clear and coherent policy recommendations and can help governments achieve their goals without compromising the core function of the network. Buckridge ultimately argues in favor of Postel's conservative approach to the sanctions discourse and warns against making rash decisions in the midst of *moral outrage* during the conflict.

**Classificatory patterns of self-positioning and othering by
Farzaneh Badieli and Chris Buckridge**

Problem definition: over-compliance, sanctions complicate inter-RIR transfer of IP addresses and finance/software services/memberships, outsourcing of due diligence obligations, de-peering, politically motivated changes to the core structures of the Internet

Problem handling: mediation, transparency, industry networking, change in governance structures, public advocacy for an open Internet, focused multistakeholder process, connectivity

Self-positioning: scientific-analytical, technical/global community, protective, robust, clear, legal-judicial

Othering: historical, ruthless, dogmatic, blunt (sanctions), moral, leveraging

Interpretation patterns of cyberspace: access, connections, connectivity, unparalleled growth, fragile, global, core functions of the internet, network of networks

Conclusion: The refiguration of the internet

The sanctions debate that unfolded within the RIPE and ICANN community shortly after the Russian attack clearly highlights the problem definitions and interpretation patterns of the actors involved. They always legitimize their arguments and perspectives using a normative logic of the network as an idealized space. This clearly demonstrates that the qualities of the internet as an interpretation pattern are positioned against the “othered” positionings of territoriality and fragmentation and instrumentalization of the internet. These spatial semantics structure the discourse on sanctions with precision. The classificatory terms can be condensed into a more general *interpretive framework of the internet* that is essential for the political actors involved in the discourse. This framework emphasizes and publicly legitimizes the central social value of the internet as an open, decentralized, global, and neutral space. By using spatial semantics and concepts of internet infrastructure, the sanctions debate also refers to broader socio-political conflicts about the spatial refiguration of the internet. This is especially evident in the overlapping of opposing spatial logics and figures. While territorial spaces tend to adhere to a logic of centralized placement and arrangement, clearly demarcated and fostering forms of homogenization within, network spaces are characterized by a configuration of largely heterogeneous and distanced elements that are interconnected (Lów and Knoblauch 2021, 36). In this discussion, the spatiality of

the network and the spatiality of state actions are argued to be in opposition, yet they also reflect current global shifts in the political organization of internet infrastructure by state, economic, and civil society actors.

The analyzed discourse on the shutdown of the Russian internet takes place against the backdrop of developments described as *fragmentation*, *reterritorialization*, and *weaponization* of the internet's infrastructure. We have provided clear indications above of the demarcations in the internet and its fragmentation, which is also reflected in the institutional framework in which this discourse was conducted. RIPE itself is only responsible for a territorial section of the global network. The importance of territoriality is further emphasized by the central question of the discourse. It is not about shutting down an abstract state, but a territorially delimitable sub-network of the internet. In the context of Russia's recent military invasion of Ukraine, the request for a shutdown in the sense of weaponizing the internet can be seen as contributing to the fragmentation and reterritorialization of the internet. However, the case examined here also shows opposing tendencies to these processes of spatial closure. The notion of the internet as a global, open network accessible to all remains crucial. It forms the central interpretive framework that ultimately leads to the decision of the responsible organizations not to shut down the Russian internet. There are three aspects of this decision that are relevant to our topic.

First, we are dealing with an "imaginary" concept when it comes to the internet, which shapes the discussion as an interpretive framework shared in the discourse. This imagination should not be seen solely as tool to legitimize the "data imperialism" of states and corporations, as highlighted by critical media theory (Musso 2016). While this function can hardly be refuted, the interpretive framework allows for a consensus that can be considered normatively binding within the organization. These powerful legitimizations of actions and decisions within internet governance are a crucial aspect of the processes of change and conflicts surrounding the internet.

A *second* important aspect of this form of consensus-building should be highlighted. The discourse being analyzed should not be seen as a mere expression of statements without a clear subject. Instead, as the data indicate, it resembles a discourse in the Habermasian sense; specifically a discussion rather than a practical discourse in which various parties share their opinions to reach agreement on the correctness of norms and even fundamental values such as openness and equality. The nature of this discourse, more accurately described as a discussion, as outlined by Habermas, is further supported by its communicative structure based on the multistakeholder model. In principle, participation is open to all interested parties, who simply need to align themselves with a stakeholder group to join the discussion. The contributions are presented as opinions and are

open for discussion, following special rules that allow for complex strategic forms of communicative action. This highlights a characteristic that we have already emphasized. Just like the territory, the network is not merely a material spatial figure but has socio-spatial dimensions through the communicative actions it constitutes, both in terms of interaction and organization.

Third, when discussing discourses, it is important to note that these discourses should not be viewed as separate from the material processes of change at the infrastructure level. Public-oriented and egalitarian discussions take place within the framework of a formal organization that ultimately makes key decisions regarding the structure and form of the internet. While these decisions may manifest as “communications” in [Luhmann’s \(1996\)](#) sense, providing binary answers to questions in a positive or negative manner, it is crucial to recognize that they are more than mere “processes of meaning.” The key point is that these organizations are directly responsible for the political and technical management of parts of the internet. Discussing the internet (on the internet) is closely connected – just a click away – to the physical reality of the internet and its infrastructure.

The reconstructed decision is highly consequential for internet infrastructure. This is because the discussion led by the network imaginary prevents the decision to separate parts of the Russian internet. The decision against such a separation and its material, technological, and social consequences make it clear that there are also opposing tendencies toward fragmentation that are oriented toward the model of the network and subsequently realize it. The opening of the network and its closure are processes that can be observed simultaneously. We have referred to the simultaneity of these opposing developments with the concept of refiguration ([Löw and Knoblauch 2021](#)). In fact, the case under investigation is a prime example of the tension between the spatial figure of the network and that of the territory. We recognize its social dimension, its embeddedness in communicative action, and its cross-scale significance. This significance operates from individual speech contributions to the global internet infrastructure and its maintenance of openness.

However, we are not dealing with a historically new refiguration process here. Even though the internet may have been characterized by the underlying tension between these two figures since its foundation as a “network” within the framework of the militarily and centrally organized US program ARPA, it has since undergone massive changes. These changes have been reflected in its technological materiality in a way that cannot simply be altered within the framework of situational negotiations. The expansion of demarcated sub-networks driven by corporations and nation-states, the relocation of data to local data centers, the clouds they

enable (with 5G), or the planning of new “digital railroad” spaces (such as China’s Silk Road project and the EU’s Global Gateway strategy) can be seen as further, ongoing processes of refiguration. The concept of refiguration extends not only to forms of subjective knowledge, communicative actions, or institutional orders, but also to spatial sedimentation processes that are realized and consolidated through technological and material forms. The retention of the network model demonstrated in this case, along with simultaneous processes of territorial and socio-technical closure, supports the thesis of a refiguration of the internet.

Notes

- 1 We would like to thank Silke Steets and René Tuma, who contributed to the development of the analysis and arguments of this text, as well as Lucie Bernroider, Nina Elsemann, and Martina Löw for important information and comments. An earlier version of this article has been published in German (Sönmez and Knoblauch 2023).
- 2 The early internet of the National Science Foundation (NSF) connected academic research institutions in the USA from 1985 to 1995. The NSFNET can be regarded as the successor to the military-oriented ARPANET and the forerunner of the World Wide Web.
- 3 *Request for Comments* (RFC) is an important digital publication format in the field of internet governance, which is used today primarily by the *Internet Engineering Task Force* (IETF) and the *Internet Architecture Board* (IAB). Each RFC is assigned a fixed number and cannot be changed or adapted retrospectively. The document is discussed in the network community via a public peer review process and can then be revised or withdrawn by the authors as a new document. The first RFC (RFC 1) goes back to Steve Crocker and was published in 1969 in the context of ARPANET.
- 4 At the same time, however, *law enforcement agencies* (LEAs) joined ICANN and the RIRs, which influenced the search for domain names, resulting in legal regulations such as the *Registrar Accreditation Agreement* and thus increasing politicization (Deibert and Crete-Nishihata 2012, 347).
- 5 The term “reconfiguration” is not explained by Pohle and Voelsen but can be understood as refiguration (Löw and Knoblauch 2021), with an additional emphasis being placed on the socio-technical infrastructures, as elaborated by Suchman (2012), for example.
- 6 Initially, a distinction was drawn between three stakeholder groups: *governments*, the *private sector*, and *civil society*. Over the years, two further stakeholder groups were added, namely, the *technical community* and *academia*. Recently, however, a debate about their legitimacy has emerged at the bodies of the UN (Gleckman 2023).
- 7 The publicly available data used in this analysis were collected as part of the field research at RIPE and selected from a corpus of public online documents. We also conducted interviews with several people in the field. The data were analyzed as a discourse using Reiner Keller’s *Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse* (2007). Florin Keuneke, Nadine Schabét, and René Tuma were also involved in the survey and analysis, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank them as well.

- 8 The underlining in this section and in the following sections was added by the authors and is intended to emphasize the formulations and terms relevant to our analysis.
- 9 While China and Chinese internet service providers are still present within the various internet governance organizations, players from Russia appear to have largely withdrawn from these fields of internet governance, even before the war in Ukraine.
- 10 These include, among others: Access Now, the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), the Center for Democracy & Technology, Freedom House, the Human Rights Foundation, the Internet Society, the Wikimedia Foundation, and the World Wide Web Foundation.
- 11 This public request was made via Fedorov's Twitter account. We do not know whether specific requests were also made to the respective companies or whether they responded.

References

- Access Now, ARTICLE 19, Azerbaijan Internet Watch, Beam Reports, Center for Democracy & Technology, Committee to Protect Journalists, Dangerous Speech Project et al. 2022. *Letter to U.S. Government: Do not Disrupt Internet Access in Russia or Belarus*. March 10. Accessed November 23, 2023. <https://www.accessnow.org/press-release/letter-us-government-internet-access-russia-belarus-ukraine/>
- Badie, Farzaneh. 2022a. "Sanctions, Global Internet Connectivity and Content Delivery Networks." *RIPE Labs*, March 16. Accessed November 23, 2023. <https://labs.ripe.net/author/farzaneh-badie/sanctions-global-internet-connectivity-and-content-delivery-networks/>
- Badie, Farzaneh. 2022b. "How Do Sanctions Impact the Internet?" *RIPE Labs*, November 28. Accessed November 23, 2023. <https://labs.ripe.net/author/farzaneh-badie/how-do-sanctions-impact-the-internet/>
- Bergengruen, Vera. 2022. "The Battle for Control Over Ukraine's Internet." *TIME*, October 18. Accessed November 23, 2023. <https://time.com/6222111/ukraine-internet-russia-reclaimed-territory/>
- Bory, Paolo. 2020. *The Internet Myth: From the Internet Imaginary to Network Ideologies*. London: University of Westminster Press.
- Buckridge, Chris. 2022. "A More Robust Approach to Sanctions." *RIPE Labs*, March 22. Accessed November 23, 2023. <https://labs.ripe.net/author/chris/a-more-robust-approach-to-sanctions/>
- Cowhey, Peter, and Milton Mueller. 2009. "Delegation, Networks, and Internet Governance." In *Networked Politics: Agency, Power, and Governance*, edited by Miles Kahler, 173–193. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Deibert, R. J., and Masashi Crete-Nishihata. 2012. "Global Governance and the Spread of Cyberspace Controls." *Global Governance* 18: 339–361.
- DeNardis, Laura. 2009. *Protocol Politics: The Globalization of Internet Governance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Flonk, Daniëlle, Markus Jachtenfuchs, and Anke S. Obendiek. 2020. "Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereignists?." *Global Constitutionalism* 9 (2): 364–386. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045381720000167>
- Gleckman, Harris. 2023. "The UN's Stakeholder Approach Is Dangerous for Democracy." *Democracy Without Borders*, April 13. Accessed November 23, 2023.

- <https://www.democracywithoutborders.org/27333/the-uns-stakeholder-approach-is-dangerous-for-democracy/>
- Holen, Hans Petter. 2022. "RIPE letter Holen to Fedorov." *RIPE*, March 10. Accessed November 26, 2024. https://www.ripe.net/media/documents/Response_to_UA_Gov_-_10March.pdf
- Hollstein, Betina, Wenzel Matiaske, Kai-Uwe Schnapp, and Michael Schnegg. 2017. "Networked Governance: A New Research Perspective." In *Networked Governance*, edited by Betina Hollstein, Wenzel Matiaske, and Kai-Uwe Schnapp, 247–269. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- IETF. 1988. "IAB Official Protocol Standards (Request for Comments RFC 1083)." *Internet Engineering Task Force*. <https://doi.org/10.17487/RFC1083>.
- Kahler, Miles. 2011. *Networked Politics: Agency, Power, and Governance*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Kapucu, Naim, and Qian Hu. 2020. *Network Governance: Concepts, Theories, and Applications*. London: Routledge.
- Keller, Reiner. 2007. *Discourse Analysis in the Sociology of Knowledge: Foundations of a Research Program*. Cham: Springer.
- Lambach, Daniel. 2020. "The Territorialization of Cyberspace." *International Studies Review* 22 (3): 482–506. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viz022>.
- Löw, Martina, and Hubert Knoblauch. 2021. "Raumfiguren, Raumkulturen und die Refrigeration von Räumen [Spatial Figures, Spatial Cultures and the Re-figuration of Spaces]." In *Am Ende der Globalisierung*, edited by Martina Löw, Volkan Sayman, Jona Scherer, and Hannah Wolf, 25–58. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Luhmann, Niklas. 1996. "Die Funktion der Massenmedien [The Function of Mass Media.]" Chap. 13 in *Die Realität der Massenmedien*, 169–182. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-663-01103-3_13
- Marby, Goran. 2022. "ICANN letter Marby to Fedorov." ICANN, March 2. Accessed July 25, 2022. <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/correspondence/marby-to-fedorov-02mar22-en.pdf>
- Mueller, Milton, Andreas Schmidt, and Brenden Kuerbis. 2013. "Internet Security and Networked Governance in International Relations." *International Studies Review* 15 (1): 86–104. <https://doi.org/10.1111/misr.12024>
- Musso, Pierre. 2016. "Network Ideology: From Saint-Simonianism to the Internet." In *Pierre Musso and the Network Society*, Vol. 27, edited by José Luis Garcia, 19–66. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45538-9_2
- Ortiz Freuler, Juan. 2023. "The Weaponization of Private Corporate Infrastructure: Internet Fragmentation and Coercive Diplomacy in the 21st Century." *Global Media and China* 8 (1): 6–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20594364221139729>
- Pohle, Julia, and Daniel Voelsen. 2022. "The Network and the Networks. On the Transformation of the Internet and the Global Digital Order." *Berlin Journal of Sociology* 32 (3): 455–487. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11609-022-00478-6>
- RIPE NCC. 2022. RIPE NCC Executive Board Resolution on Provision of Critical Services. *RIPE Network Coordination Center*, March 1. Accessed November 23, 2023. <https://www.ripe.net/publications/news/announcements/ripe-ncc-executive-board-resolution-on-provision-of-critical-services>
- Sönmez, Sezgin, and Hubert Knoblauch. 2023. *Grenzen im Internet? Die RIPE-Debatte um das Internet Anlässlich des Ukrainekrieges*. Working Paper no. 13. Berlin: SFB 1265 Refiguration von Räumen. <https://doi.org/10.14279/depositonce-19598>

- Starosielski, Nicole. 2015. *The Undersea Network*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Stoker, Gerry. 2006. "Public Value Management: A New Narrative for Networked Governance?." *The American Review of Public Administration* 36 (1): 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074005282583>
- Suchman, Lucy. 2012. *Human–Machine Reconfigurations*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- ten Oever, Niels, Bart Groothuis, Ihab Osman, Mike Roberts, Jeff Moss, Marina Kaljurand, Eva Kaili et al. 2022. "Towards the Multistakeholder Imposition of Internet Sanctions." *Tech Policy Press*, March 10.
- Voelsen, Daniel. 2019. *Risse im Fundament des Internets: die Zukunft der Netz-Infrastruktur und die Globale Internet Governance* [Cracks in the Foundation of the Internet: The Future of Network Infrastructure and Global Internet Governance]. Vol. 12/2019 SWP-Studie. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit. Accessed November 23, 2023. <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/62982>
- Woodhams, Samuel, and Simon Migliano. 2022. "Russian Digital Rights Violations in Ukraine." *TOP10VPN*, September 21. Accessed November 23, 2023. <https://www.top10vpn.com/research/digital-rights-violations-ukraine/>.

6 From safe(r) space to safe(r) spacing

Queer spatial conflict in Cape Town and Berlin

*Nicolas Zehner, Ingo Schulz-Schaeffer,
Daniel Grönefeld, and Philip Baumbach*

Introduction

Urban sociality is increasingly shaped by the strong interleaving of the digital and the physical. Notions such as “hybrid space” (De Souza e Silva 2006) and “hybridization” (Miles 2021) pay tribute to the collapsing and overlaying of digital and physical realities and challenge existing understandings of spatiality. One empirical phenomenon that epitomizes the increasing digital mediatization of urban life constitutes what is now referred to as “locative media.” This term denotes mobile apps that access the geolocation features of smartphones to locate their users in physical space and display web content tailored to their current location. Locative media come in different shapes and forms. Examples include recommendation apps (e.g., Foursquare), augmented reality games (e.g., Pokémon Go), or dating apps (e.g., Tinder and Grindr).

In this chapter, we explore how location-based technologies shape the experience and constitution of queer urban spaces. Zooming in on the use of Grindr, the world’s largest social networking app for LGBTQ+ people,¹ we investigate the effects of the routinization of locative media on spatial realities constituted by spatial knowledge and its impact on everyday actions. We conducted 27 semi-structured qualitative interviews with queer dating app users in Cape Town and Berlin. Arguably, one of the most important issues when performing queer identity is safety (Blackwell, Birnholtz, and Abbott 2015; Corriero and Tong 2016). In what follows, we adopt the concept of “safe(r) space” (Hartal 2017; Hilger 2023b) as an analytical starting point to interrogate how Grindr shapes “conflictual spaces” (see Knoblauch, Sommer, and Pfetsch in the Introduction to this volume).

Based on comparative empirical research in Cape Town and Berlin, we argue that increasing digital mediatization changes existing understandings of safe(r) space. Rather than constituting a static and spatially fixed

category, safe(r) space must be conceptualized as a spatial *practice*. Grasping the relationship between queer urban dating and safety through the notion of “safe(r) *spacing*” allows us to better understand social conflict as a phenomenon that fundamentally emerges from the spatiality of the social.

Advancing this line of argumentation, we make three analytical moves. First, we engage with existing accounts in sociology, queer, and media studies that explore the relationship between locative media and queer (safe) spaces. Doing so, we challenge two dominant empirical claims and argue for adopting a spatial perspective on queer urban dating. Second, we suggest a shift from “safe(r) space” to “safe(r) *spacing*,” thereby accounting for the complex cyber-physical constellations of conflictual spaces. We then substantiate this claim by illustrating three safe(r) spacing practices that showcase the prevailing logics of digitally mediated spatial conflict.

Literature review

This chapter builds on existing research in sociology, media studies, and queer studies that investigates the “hybridization of space” (De Souza e Silva 2006), the emergence and diffusion of locative media in relation to (queer) dating (Bumgarner 2013; Ghaziani 2014; Blackwell, Birnholtz, and Abbott 2015; Stempfhuber and Liegl 2016; Licoppe, Rivière, and Morel 2017; Renninger 2018; van den Akker 2018; Miles 2021), and the constitution of queer safe spaces (Hanhardt 2013; Roestone Collective 2014; Pascar et al. 2022; Hilger 2023a, 2023b; Mader 2023).

De Souza e Silva’s (2006) concept of “hybrid space” reflects the observation that the use of cell phones in the public space as “social devices” dissolves boundaries between the physical and digital spaces. This is due to the fact that social networks previously located within the “fixed internet” are now finding their ways into the physical space. Thus, locative media, represented by mobile phones, enable targeted networking with other users in the same location. The particular forms of urban sociality that characterize these hybrid social networks have received great academic interest (Sutko and De Souza e Silva 2011; Licoppe and Inada 2012; De Souza e Silva and Gordon 2014; Frith 2015). While De Souza e Silva’s early work is primarily concerned with mobile games, hybrid usage practices can now be found in various areas of life. Focusing on the case of Foursquare as a prominent location-based social network, Lettkemann and Schulz-Schaeffer (2022) and van den Akker (2018) point to a restructuring of users’ spatial perceptions that consists of two shifts. On the one hand, perceptual awareness is enhanced to the extent that places and users can appear in users’ consciousness, even if they are not within reach of users’ bodily senses. On the other hand, locative media draw attention to either already known or

at least familiar places and people. According to [Crawford \(2008\)](#), this effect undermines what she describes as the core characteristic of urban life: the enriching experience of being confronted with different lifestyles.

Similar observations have also been made in the context of queer online dating. In this context, Grindr has received particular academic interest. Grindr represents a queer dating app with a specifically strong *locative* structure, as other users are ordered in a catalog-style interface based on their current proximity by displaying their real-time distance in meters. The characteristic spatiotemporal synchronicity is mainly deployed for the search for quick and ephemeral connections ([Race 2015](#)). The ease with which interested flirting partners can be identified in the immediate vicinity via Grindr and similar apps has led to the emergence of two prominent empirical hypotheses. One claim often put forward is that Grindr can transform any bar into a queer bar or any place into a queer space ([Stempfhuber and Liegl 2016](#); [Koch and Miles 2021](#)). However, whether and how this redefinition of space succeeds in practice has so far remained empirically underexplored. The second thesis is directly related to the empirical observation that traditional queer bars and neighborhoods are in a state of decline. Research about this phenomenon has given rise to the claim that queer places have not been simply dissolved by Grindr but rather decentralized ([Ghaziani 2014](#); [Blackwell, Birnholtz, and Abbott 2015](#); [van den Akker 2018](#); [Renninger 2018](#)). Challenging these claims, we argue that queer safe(r) spaces are not simply spatially rearranged but rather form part of spatial practices.

The existing literature tends to treat safe(r) spaces as (perceived) safety for marginalized groups associated with a particular fortified place. For example, [Hassan et al. \(2018\)](#) explored the experiences of queer men in Cape Town who visit health care centers located in townships. They argue that “failure to secure a private and stable venue for MSM [men seeking sex with men] to gather poses serious challenges in relation to their safety, sense of belonging, and the development of cohesive queer communities” ([Hassan et al. 2018](#), 98). [Hartal \(2017\)](#) puts a similar emphasis on the importance of fixed places when she describes measures used by a queer community center in Jerusalem to shield itself from queer-hostile environments. Both accounts assume that the creation of safe(r) spaces is typically achieved through materially solidified spatial structures. In doing so, [Hartal’s \(2017\)](#) empirical analysis remains rooted in what she refers to as the common understanding of safe spaces, namely, protected and inclusive *places*.

Methods

We conducted 27 in-depth interviews with queer dating app users from Cape Town and Berlin. Almost all of the Berlin interviews were conducted

via video conferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, the interviews we conducted in Cape Town in November 2023 were mostly face-to-face interviews. A majority of the Cape Town participants were bachelor students, with some older participants who were graduate students or were working. A majority of the Berlin participants were graduate students or were working. Important to our study, the interviewees covered a broad spectrum of gender identities. In this chapter, we will focus (although not exclusively) on the 13 interviewees who use Grindr. The interviews were conducted as problem-centered interviews (Witzel 2000) based on a semi-structured questionnaire and iteratively coded without using a predetermined code set. The interview study was accompanied by participatory observations, area walks, and interviews with bar operators. These additional data proved indispensable as contextualization during our analysis of the interviews with app users.

From “safe(r) space” to “safe(r) spacing”

We suggest moving beyond static understandings of safe(r) space by conceptualizing it as a spatial practice. By shifting and extending the analytical focus from physical places, such as gay bars, to locative media, such as Grindr, we arrive at practices of safe(r) spacing, thereby accounting for the multiplicity, fluidity, and simultaneity of queer urban dating.

The existing academic literature largely conceptualizes safe(r) spaces around notions of *place*. Hartal’s (2017, 4) definition of safe space serves as a helpful example:

A safe space is supposed to be a protected place, facilitating a sense of security and recreating discourses of inclusion and diversity. It is a metaphor for the ability to be honest, take risks, share opinions, or reveal one’s sexual identity (Hartal, David, & Pascar, 2014) [citation from original source]. Safety in this sense is not merely physical safety but psychological, social, and emotional safety as well.

Zooming in on LGBTQ+ individuals in Jerusalem, Hartal (2017) identifies five dominant framings of queer safe space: fortification, anonymity, inclusivity, separation, and control. While adding much-needed nuance to the diversity of safe spaces and their meanings for queer individuals, her analytical focus remains confined to location and place as the dominant spatial figures of conflict. In similar fashion, Hanhardt’s (2013) study on the history of gay neighborhoods in New York and San Francisco traces the interdependent relationship between LGBT activism, urban development, and US policy responses to poverty and crime predominantly in relation to *place*. This finding is also in line with Hilger’s (2023b) account on

safe spaces as an inherently context-specific, historicized, and multilayered phenomenon.

One important exception in existing academic accounts on safe(r) spaces is the Roestone [Collective's \(2014\)](#) call to reconceptualize safe spaces as “relational work.” Rather than treating safe(r) spaces as static and acontextual, the authors advance an understanding of safe(r) spaces as inherently uncertain, imperfect, paradoxical, and more-than-human. Crucially, they recognize safe spaces as “simultaneously safety from and safety for” (The Roestone [Collective 2014](#), 1361). This qualification points to the emancipatory potential lurking in notions such as safe(r) space.

In what follows, we build on these contributions and additionally draw on the concept of refiguration of spaces ([Knoblauch and Löw 2020](#)). The concept emphasizes the reordering of spaces as a result of tensions between different spatial figures (place, trajectory, network, and territory). It emphasizes that digital mediatization constitutes both a driving force of the current refiguration of space and, in turn, takes on specific spatial forms. Thus, locative media, such as Grindr, do not simply shape the construction of safe(r) space but also impact the ways in which individuals move in, with and through space.

Developing the notion of safe(r) spacing, we need to engage with the following overarching research questions: What constitutes safe(r) spacing as a spatial practice? How does safe(r) spacing differ across local contexts? What are the ways in which Grindr and similar applications shape safe(r) spacing practices? We zoom in on three safe(r) spacing practices showcasing digitally mediated spatial tensions and conflicts: (1) eventization, (2) location sharing, and (3) territorialization.

Eventization

One empirical phenomenon that became apparent from talking to queer individuals in both Cape Town and Berlin can be summarized as “eventization of queer space.” Eventization constitutes the practice of creating and using events as temporary locations for the queer community. To understand the role of these event-based places, one has to relate them to two other kinds of queer meeting places: queer places and queer-inclusive places. The differences between these three kinds of places were more pronounced in Cape Town than in Berlin. One of our interviewees described the situation in Cape Town as follows:

There's a couple of queer-designated places. So, usually places would be like Pink Candy, which is a queer nightclub. Cafe Manhattan, which is like a queer restaurant. And then usually, there's not really a lot of queer places, but there's queer events that happen at places.

So, like, Evol will have a Pink Party, which is very much like a queer event. Then you'll have, what was it, Death of Glitter, which is also another queer event that happens at different clubs. They always do it at different venues. Botanik is also another queer event [...] But there's a lot of queer events that happen, which is quite nice.

(I4: 117–118, CT 2023)²

Most of our interviewees from Cape Town said that they prefer queer-inclusive places and events over designated queer places. The two most important reasons for this were related to two opposing realities of the social context of living as a queer person in Cape Town.

On the one hand, South Africa was one of the first countries in the world to grant same-sex couples the right to marry (Tucker 2009). It is more liberal than all other sub-Saharan countries, some of which still penalize homosexuality today. Additionally, Cape Town, being the most liberal and cosmopolitan city in South Africa, is considered the most queer-friendly city in South Africa. On the other hand, homophobia rooted in a culture of heteronormativity is still prevalent in South Africa, as in all of sub-Saharan Africa (Mkhize and Mthembu 2023, 379). The daily realities of many queer South Africans—especially black queer individuals—are still steeped in marginalization and violence (Tucker 2009).

There are neighborhoods and districts of Cape Town, such as Stellenbosch or the Townships, with a more conservative or even homophobic population. At the same time, there are very cosmopolitan neighborhoods in districts such as Green Point, Gardens, or Observatory. Consequently, there were two opposing views on Cape Town from the perspective of our interviewees: Cape Town as a queer-friendly city and Cape Town as a city where you have to be careful not to fall victim to hate crimes. These opposing perceptions translate in different ways into preferences for queer-inclusive places and events over designated queer places.

From the perspective of Cape Town as a queer-friendly city, designated queer places are not so important compared to meeting places for the queer community since there are many other cafés, restaurants, clubs, and public places where queer people can go. Several of our interviewees shared this view. One of them, a person who moved to Cape Town from a sub-Saharan country where same-sex sexual activities are punished by law, expressed it most clearly:

There are queer spaces in Cape Town. I generally don't really go to them because I don't really feel like I have to in Cape Town. Like, I came to Cape Town from [a sub-Saharan country] because [this country] prosecutes queer people. Like, they are very violent against queer people. So, I'm here for my own safety. So, I thought when I came here, I would go to every gay bar and try to be as queer as possible.

But I never really felt that I have to in Cape Town. So, I don't really go to queer places. I just go to Modular [a queer-inclusive club] and other. I just go to places. Yeah. Queer people are everywhere in Cape Town. So, I don't really feel I have to go to a queer place.

(I1: 88, CT 2023)

This view of Cape Town as a queer-friendly and diversity-embracing city where there is no need for safe spaces provided by designated queer places is similar to how our interviewees from Berlin perceived their city. In the following quote, the interviewee explains the decreasing importance of safe(r) spaces with how the queer lifestyle has developed into an integral part of urban life in Berlin. They point out that this is a development that affects younger queer people more than older queer people:

I rather have the feeling that this scene [the queer community] is fraying a bit, because this standard life of the gay lifestyle, which is shaped as a contrary lifestyle to another, is slowly disintegrating a bit. It's growing more and more socially into everything else in various points. And that's why my feeling is that this safe space, [the gay bar], which seems important to many people who are older than me and who I know from the scene [...] that they also need this safe space for themselves and their life development and that this is particularly relevant for them. This is something I notice less in my case. And I notice it even less with people who are younger than me. So, these gay and lesbian life stories that then take place in such safe spaces, I think they become less the younger people are.

(I12: 299, B 2023, own translation)

From the perspective of Cape Town as a city where you have to be careful not to fall victim to hate crimes, the main reason that queer people prefer other places over designated queer places is that they consider designated queer places not to be safe—in contrast to queer events:

We get, like, within the queer community, we get like cautionary tales of certain places. [...] We always hear about cases of, like, people trying to prey on, like using, like going to those specific areas [De Waterkant] and knowing that they're going to find queer people either to exploit them or like try to prey on them. So, yeah, I feel like that is why we go to, like, queer events more than, like, queer specific places because then it's also, like, a part of safety, I guess, because people wouldn't like assume that: "Oh, that building is like filled with like just like a bunch of gay people." [...]. But with a queer event, it's like a place where typically anyone might go. But, like, it's an event. Obviously,

not everyone is going to know about the event. If it's a queer event, only queer people will probably know about it. And there's kind of like a little bit of, like, safety in that kind of secrecy and, like, us being able to occupy different spaces as a community than just like sticking to one place, because that can get like pretty dangerous.

(I2: 56, CT 2023)

Most of our interviewees from Cape Town are affected by both of the two opposing realities of queer life in Cape Town. Even those who value Cape Town as a queer-friendly city are aware of the existence of homophobic people and of neighborhoods, which they would want to avoid. Even those who feel the need to always be cautious acknowledged that Cape Town provides a much safer environment than most other places in sub-Saharan Africa. In everyday encounters, there is always a certain risk that they will come across homophobic people in Cape Town. Those queer people who do not conform to heteronormative expectations in a more visible way are also more exposed to harassment in everyday life. This may explain why interviewees from Cape Town who identify themselves as trans persons particularly emphasized the need to be cautious. In contrast, the perspective of Cape Town as a queer-friendly city was predominantly taken by interviewees who describe their gender expression as compatible with heteronormative expectations.

The eventization of queer space reflects these two opposing realities of queer life in Cape Town. Queer-inclusive places are of crucial importance in both respects. Many queer events our interviewees told us about take place at venues that they described as queer inclusive—for example, Modular Club, Waiting Room, Evol, or Botanik Social House, to name just the clubs already been mentioned above. The queer-inclusive clubs, restaurants, and cafés are located in neighborhoods that our interviewees also described as queer inclusive:

I also do feel that young Capetonians have a very queer culture though, anyways, because a lot of the spaces feel queer, even though they aren't designated queer spaces. So Kloof Street [located in Gardens], the street that I was talking about, is kind of like the street that everyone goes to for drinks. [...] And there's a place called Blondie there—that's a really big bar that everyone goes to—and I think those spaces are very, yeah, that street is in general. Like the fashion, and the way that people present themselves, and queer couples are really open on that street. I think, yeah, it definitely feels a lot more integrated into that culture than just that's a space for queer people, you know? Definitely find a lot of the straight people in those spaces also just like have no issue with queer people.

(I4: 37, CT 2023)

Queer-inclusive places and neighborhoods facilitate the eventization of queer spaces, to the extent that queer life becomes integrated into the culture of urban life in these neighborhoods, and at these clubs, restaurants, and cafés, queer events become integrated as well. It follows that queer events do not differ significantly from other events aimed at specific urban milieus or subcultures. This is the case not only with privately owned clubs or cafés but also with public places, such as Kloof Street or public parks. Two of our interviewees, for instance, mentioned a monthly picnic at Company's Gardens, an urban park adjacent to the Gardens district:

There's, like, a picnic for, like, trans people. And then that's, like, um, an event that, like, I used to go to a lot. Um, so it would be, like, meet-and-greet events, where you just, like, you just go, you just hang out. It's just, like, it's like a safe-space event, basically. You just go there to, like, be queer with other queer people. And just, like, escape a bit from, like, other people.

(I7: 43, CT 2023; see also I2: 42, CT 2023)

As queer life is an integral part of a diversity-embracing cosmopolitan urban culture, queer events do not stand out at the queer-inclusive places and neighborhoods of Cape Town. This is different at the designated queer places located in De Waterkant, which stands out on its own. De Waterkant is South Africa's first gay village (Visser 2003, 130). It came into being in the 1990s and soon became an internationally renowned leisure space for wealthy white gay men. Over the years, De Waterkant has become more diverse and less white. However, it is still an enclave, although a queer enclave rather than the gay enclave of earlier days (Rink 2016, 21–22). Being the most visible and well-known queer space in Cape Town (and far beyond) is what makes De Waterkant and what makes the designated queer locations there dangerous in the view of our interviewees who perceive Cape Town as a city where queer people should watch out for harassment. In this context, the eventization of queer spaces is a way to become less visible for possible offenders.

The eventization of queer spaces thus constitutes a “temporary queering” of urban spaces. Rather than sticking to one physical place, for instance, a gay bar, the queer space becomes fluid by only briefly stabilizing in specific locations. This temporary queering presupposes the integration of queer life into urban culture and the emergence of queer-friendly locations and neighborhoods. It thus builds on a development that already has made designated queer places become less important for the queer community and reinforces this development. Eventization thereby contributes to a paradoxical reshuffling of visibility. Queer life becomes, at the same

time, more visible and less visible—more visible to insiders and less visible to outsiders. To be more precise, it becomes more visible to insiders and regulars and less visible to tourists and strangers. We refer here to a distinction introduced by [Unruh \(1980, 281–282\)](#) between different degrees of involvement in social worlds, a distinction that also applies to the places where a social world’s activities take place ([Lettkemann and Schulz-Schaeffer 2021, 40–42](#)).

For regular participants in cosmopolitan urban life in Cape Town, queer life becomes more visible since it constitutes an integral part of the city. To insiders, that is, members of the queer community, queer life becomes more visible because eventization needs and uses personal or digitally mediated networks as information infrastructures to make the times and locations of the events known. These information networks, in turn, amplify the visibility of the queer community to its members. The following interview quote illustrates this dynamic:

Q: How do you know about these events? [...]

A: Yeah, so I got quite a lot of queer friends. So, either I’ll get told by them, or on Instagram, there’ll just be a post. If you go to one event, usually that event will advertise other events. So, my first-ever event was Pink Party, went to Pink Party. And then from there, I met people, got their Instagram and all that. And then from there, they were advertising another queer event, which was Death of Glitter. So, then I went to Death of Glitter, met people there. And from Death of Glitter, they’ll be like, “Okay, cool, now there’s this other place called Botanik.” (I5: 119–120, CT 2023)

To tourists, queer life becomes less visible since it is predominantly associated with the existence of De Waterkant. Moving away from the queer enclave and dispersing into queer-friendly cosmopolitan urban areas and places makes the queer community less visible to this group. Tourists can be described as “irregular visitors of social worlds who may acquire superficial knowledge” ([Lettkemann and Schulz-Schaeffer 2021, 40](#)). Accordingly, the visibility of the queer community to this group depends on the kind of superficial knowledge that this group acquires. Thus, for Capetonians or visitors of the city interested in the cosmopolitan urban life and its places, the queer community may become more visible, while it may become less visible to visitors who are focused on Cape Town’s main tourist attractions.

Eventization thus points to the amalgamation of at least two spatial figures: place and network space. Grindr (a network space) enables queer individuals to connect with each other and to select temporary locations (places), which, in turn, results in the liquification of spatiality. As such, this form of safe(r) spacing mobilizes and aligns the different spatial logics

of identifying, marking, and connecting. Crucially, this form of safe(r) spacing comes with a “politics of (in)visibility.” That is, queer individuals and groups mobilize spatial arrangements depending on the threat of violence and discrimination. It follows that queer people might “eventicize” their spatial practices to avoid conflict, thereby decreasing visibility from other groups of society. Platforms such as Grindr thus constitute a key means of eventicizing queer safe(r) spaces.

Location sharing

A second form of safe(r) spacing constitutes the sharing of locations—both live locations and/or the final date location—with friends and family. Comparing empirical evidence from Berlin and Cape Town, this form of spatial action depends on a range of factors, including (a) the person one meets, (b) distance, (c) the availability of (digital) public infrastructures, and (d) expression of sexual identity.

Particularly prevalent in Cape Town, a city with limited public transportation provisions, interviewees consistently pointed to Uber as a crucial element in queer dating. In addition to using a pin security app that allows one to confirm that the Uber driver matches the number plate of the car (cf. I2: 70, CT 2023), the selection of a specific date location depends on the ability of the individual to afford the way back:

I always make sure that the place that I’m going to I’m going to be able to afford as a student with my student budget. I’m going to be able to afford to come back to be able to Uber myself. I always make sure that I have money with me just in case even if the person is like insisting on Ubering for me.

(I12: 155, CT 2023)

In addition to deciding on a date based on calculating the distance and money, location sharing is strongly linked to the familiarity of a person with a specific place. Distinguishing between known and unknown destinations, this queer individual remarked:

But I was going to my girlfriend already. But she was in the Western Cape, but not within Cape Town. So I shared my location with her throughout the trip because I didn’t know where I was going. It was my first time visiting her. So, yeah, I did share it with her so she can track where I’m at and direct me if I’m getting lost. And then, in terms of going out to meet someone and sharing my location, I don’t think I’ve done that. I do tell my friends, though, that I’m going to this place. Maybe in some cases, I could even send them the address and

ask them to request for me from that place to wherever I'm going next. But I don't normally share my location.

(I3: 148, CT 2023)

Furthermore, taking an Uber and sharing location allows for hiding sexual identities from strangers on the street. Asked about the safety measures adopted when going on a date or meeting queer friends, this individual from Cape Town pointed out:

Especially because of my gender expression and my gender identity, like, I try not to, like, walk places when I'm dressed like a certain way. [...] Sometimes, when it's, like, nighttime or something like that, and I'm going somewhere, I'm going to friends or whatever, like, I would much rather Uber than walk; unless like I have the time to, like, put the outfit I authentically want to wear in a bag and, like, wear something that is completely not me and then do the walk. And then when I get there, then I change. But that all depends on, like, where I am financially as well.

(I2: 68, CT 2023)

Thus, taking an Uber from place A to place B represents much more than simply traversing in space. By sharing the location, it allows the temporary creation of a safe(r) space by controlling visibility to potentially hostile groups.

Importantly, location sharing constitutes a spatial practice that directly responds to the (un)availability of (digital) public infrastructures. The latter points to significant discrepancies between South Africa and Germany in terms of the development of (digital) public infrastructures. Besides a lack of public infrastructures, such as trains and buses, queer dating in Cape Town is heavily shaped by the country's ongoing energy crisis, commonly referred to as "load shedding." The latter describes spatially distributed and scheduled blackouts of electricity supply, which began in 2007 and, to this day, negatively impact economic growth, health care, and crime rates. Load shedding constitutes a case in point for different modes of digital mediatization. Compared to Berlin, locative media usage in Cape Town is significantly influenced by the (un)availability of electricity. This, in turn, directly shapes perceptions of safety. Asked if and how load shedding affects spatial practices, this interviewee remarked:

Because especially, like when it happens at night, like let's say load shedding from 10 till 12 pm. So, like all the lights will go out, and like the lights, the street lights as well, will go out. So that's like when, like, there's a high likelihood of, like, someone breaking in

and stuff because no one would see them. So also, like when you know, okay, it's going to be load shedding at night, then like, you know, okay, I mustn't walk out in the streets and stuff. Like. I must stay at home.

(I11: 87, CT 2023)

Thus, public infrastructures, such as transport and electricity, determine spatial practices in general and safe(r) spacing in particular. Crucially, concerns for safety do not simply start with opening apps such as Grindr but are built into everyday identity-making as a result of the fragility of public infrastructures. Finally, location sharing varies considerably with regard to the person that one meets. Respondents in both Berlin and Cape Town pointed to the adoption of different safety measures depending on meeting someone identifying as male or female. Asked if there are differences when going on a date with a woman or a man, this individual pointed out:

A: The fact that my friends have my location at all times is definitely a safety measure. And then telling people. So, I actually went on a date with a guy, not through Tinder, just through meeting him, in the beginning of the year, and then told everyone, you know, this is what's happening. I'm supposed to be back at Rez at 6, make sure I'm back.

Q: And would you have acted differently if it would have been a date with a woman?

A: Yeah, I think so. I think I would have just told people, "Hey, look, this is what's happening. Check my location if you want to see where I am." But you would still have... Yeah, I would still tell people, you know, I would never go on a date without telling anyone.

(I9: 221, CT 2023)

Similarly, this interviewee from Berlin stressed the following:

Well, back then I always shared my location with a flat mate when I went on dates, as I still lived in Wiesbaden. She also knew who I was seeing. But apart from that, to be honest, I took fewer precautions when I met up with women than I used to with men.

(I1: 116, B 2023, own translation)

To sum up, perceptions of safety involve not only *place* but also *trajectorial space*, as epitomized by location sharing as a safe(r) spacing strategy. "Successful" safe(r) spacing in this case amalgamates *connecting* in the network *space* and *traversing* cheaply and safely in the *trajectorial space*. This insight is relevant because it illuminates the importance of *route* or

trajectorial space in orchestrating more traditional spatial figures, such as *place*. Comparing Berlin and Cape Town, there are significant differences in terms of (digital) public infrastructures, which, in turn, shape the use of location sharing to create and/or maintain safety.

Territorialization

A third form of safe(r) spacing pertains to the amalgamation of *place* and *territorial space* and can be described as “territorialization.” This particular configuration of spatial figures echoes Hartal’s (2017, 4) definition of safe space as a “protected place, facilitating a sense of security and recreating discourses of inclusion and diversity.” Knoblauch and Löw (2024, 9) point out that “the spatial figure of place follows the logic of identity and heterogeneous, dynamic encounters.” Examples of places range from sights to cities to homes. What these places have in common is that they can grow and shrink without losing their identity. In contrast, territories “follow the logic of demarcation and boundaries, creating an inside and an outside of territorial space, and a tendency toward homogenization within the territory” (Knoblauch and Löw 2024, 9). Keeping these different forms of spatialization in mind, the practice of “territorialization” constitutes acts of homogenization—that is, drawing boundaries around places in order to temporarily create and maintain safety. Given its history of socio-spatial segregation and ongoing marginalization of queer individuals, we observed stronger territorialization efforts in Cape Town than in Berlin.

Territorialization of places for safe(r) spacing of queer people comes in different forms. With Nollendorfkiez in Berlin, a queer neighborhood, it is territorialization via cultural demarcation; with the university campuses of the University of Cape Town and the Stellenbosch University close to Cape Town, it is territorialization via membership protection; and with our interviewees’ homes, it is territorialization via personal control over a place.

Nollendorfkiez in Berlin illustrates territorialization via cultural demarcation. It is an example of a queer neighborhood where queer life concentrates in its different spatial manifestations in bars, stores, and services of different kinds to a degree that queer culture defines and demarcates the whole area, like in a biotope—a characterization used in the following quote by a queer individual:

Well, I mean, Nollendorfplatz [...] you go into the antique store and he knows —the guy next door who sells leather clothes—and he knows someone at the driving school who knows someone who treats STDs [sexually transmitted diseases]. And the dentist knows the beautician around the corner, and one is lesbian and the other is gay. [...] You can go anywhere, and above all, it’s open and

everywhere. At least I have the feeling, you have the opportunity to connect to this homosexual world, whether I'm in the delicatessen or the wine bar or the dentist or the restaurant or the fetish store, everywhere I have the feeling that there are points of connection to this homosexual biotope, because everyone in the neighborhood is somehow connected to it.

(I12: 265, B 2023, own translation)

Territorialization via membership protection and membership privileges is a practice of safe(r) spacing that we observed with the university campuses in and by Cape Town. All of our queer interviewees who were students consider these university campuses as safe harbors, offering protection through the presence of security personnel and by providing safe environments where people can move around freely without having to hide their gender identity. Reflecting on the reasons that helped them choose the university campus as a location for a queer picnic, this individual pointed out:

So, it's much easier to do things on campus because you don't need to worry about transport. You also don't really need to worry much about safety because we have campus protection services here and everyone is familiar with campus. And everyone can access campus using the bus and stuff. [...] So, I think also as the planning committee, it's much easier here on campus because we can account for everyone on campus. But in public spaces, it's difficult to make sure that everyone is protected because we can't say, "Stay here. You can't go outside this line," because people are there to have fun.

(I3: 191, CT 2023)

Particularly interesting are responses to the use of Grindr on and off campus. Off campus, queer individuals sometimes take additional safety measures, including bringing activated charcoal and tasers (cf. I2: 111–115, CT 2023). On campus, however, individuals seem to act more confidently, changing the radius of the app to close proximity and appraising uncertainty as an opportunity, rather than a source of danger.

With homes, territorialization is primarily about a person's control over a place. The following interviewee made this clear by comparing the lack of control in public places with his home, which he explicitly characterized as "my territory":

I also have a friend, also, who was mugged via Grindr because he met with someone and they took his phone, so it's genuinely not safe even in a public space because this happened in a public space. Hence, I

say for me rather you come here, then I then decide because I know that once you are here then you are kind of in my territory. So in that, in that case, I am then able to decide if I want to go with you, or even if I want to allow you to come into my residence, or even if I want to just sit in your car so I feel like I have much more control.

(Interview 12, CT 2023)

The territorialization of homes is an obvious feature of middle-class housing in Cape Town. The vast majority of middle- and upper-class residences are turned into territories by walls, electrified fencing, CCTV cameras, and security personnel. Living in a home that is territorialized in such a way adds to the feeling of control when interviewees meet people from online dating at their home:

Because it was student accommodation, so when we get downstairs, we sign in with the security. So, the safety factor was fine.

(I3: 157, CT 2023)

As well as, um, the nice thing is that I do live in like an apartment. So, I feel like there's a situation, there's like security downstairs or something. So, I do feel quite safe in my home. That's why, usually, I always bring people to my place or invite to my place because I feel safe at my home rather than going to theirs.

(I5: 188, CT 2023)

Keeping the spatialization logic of territorial space—or delimiting—in mind, we can identify stronger and weaker forms of boundary drawing. While physical control enforces clearly defined areas with an “inside” and “outside,” membership and cultural dominance exhibit more porous boundaries.

Conclusion

This chapter explored how location-based technologies shape the experience and constitution of queer urban spaces. Based on empirical research conducted in Cape Town and Berlin, we argued that increasing digital mediatization changes existing understandings of safe(r) spaces. Rather than constituting a static and spatially fixed category, a safe(r) space must in fact be conceptualized as spatial *practice* that aligns different spatial figures and temporarily stabilizes social action. Digital platforms such as Grindr shape safe(r) spacing practices by revealing the polycontextuality—the interweaving of simultaneously unfolding contexts and spaces—of communicative action. Traditional queer safe(r) spaces, such as bars,

neighborhoods, and homes, become part of digital infrastructures and, in turn, subject to different logics of spatialization. Rather than observing a transformation of queer safe(r) spaces from one state to another (e.g., from the home to the digital), we identified three practices that underline the increasingly digitally mediated nature of spatial action: eventization, location sharing, and territorialization.

In many ways, this chapter seeks to start a conversation on how to conceptually grasp the tension-ridden interplay of a variety of spatial figures. Suggesting a shift from *place* to *practice*, we contend that digital mediation can be studied more productively through the notion of safe(r) spacing. Moving forward, we want to build on this insight by further exploring how locative media, such as Grindr, shape varieties of refiguration. It seems particularly intriguing to study the relationship between uncertainty and safety, thereby moving beyond accounts that rely on the assumption that uncertainty is intrinsically negative. Keeping the emancipatory quality of safe(r) spacing practices in mind, it seems promising to interrogate if and how Grindr triggers spatial imaginaries of unknown and alternative queer futures. Furthermore, more work needs to be done to identify both the conditions that allow for the emergence of varieties of refiguration and their subsequent spatial unfolding.

Notes

- 1 With more than 13 million active users in 2023, Grindr is among the four most popular dating apps worldwide. This figure is particularly impressive when considering that Grindr is mainly used by gay and bisexual men, thus making it the most popular dating apps aimed specifically at queer users.
- 2 The interviews were labeled as follows: “I” (Interview), “x” (Number of interview), “x-y” (Lines), “CT” (Cape Town), “B” (Berlin), “xxxx” (Year).

References

- Blackwell, Courtney, Jeremy Birnholtz, and Charles Abbott. 2015. “Seeing and Being Seen: Co-Situation and Impression Formation Using Grindr, a Location-Aware Gay Dating App.” *New Media & Society* 17 (7): 1117–1136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814521595>
- Bumgarner, Brett A. 2013. “Mobilizing the Gay Bar: Grindr and the Layering of Spatial Context.” Paper presented at the Conference of the International Communication Association, London, UK, June 17–21, 2013.
- Collective, Roestone. 2014. “Safe Space: Towards a Reconceptualization: Safe Space: Towards a Reconceptualization.” *Antipode* 46 (5): 1346–1365. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12089>
- Corriero, Elena Francesca, and Stephanie Tom Tong. 2016. “Managing Uncertainty in Mobile Dating Applications: Goals, Concerns of Use, and Information Seeking in Grindr.” *Mobile Media & Communication* 4 (1): 121–141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157915614872>

- Crawford, Alice. 2008. "Taking Social Software to the Streets: Mobile Cocooning and the (An-)Erotic City." *Journal of Urban Technology* 15 (3): 79–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10630730802677970>
- De Souza e Silva, Adriana. 2006. "From Cyber to Hybrid: Mobile Technologies as Interfaces of Hybrid Spaces." *Space and Culture* 9 (3): 261–278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331206289022>
- Frith, Jordan. 2015. *Smartphones as Locative Media: Digital Media and Society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Ghaziani, Amin. 2014. *There Goes the Gayborhood? An In-depth Look at America's Changing Gay Neighborhoods*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hanhardt, Christina B. 2013. *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence*. Perverse Modernities. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hartal, Gilly. 2017. "Fragile Subjectivities: Constructing Queer Safe Spaces." *Social & Cultural Geography* 19 (8): 1053–1072. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2017.1335877>
- Hassan, Neil Ryan, Leslie Swartz, Ashraf Kagee, Anneliese De Wet, Anthea M. Lesch, Zuhayr Kafaar, and Peter A Newman. 2018. "There Is Not a Safe Space Where They Can Find Themselves To Be Free": (Un)Safe Spaces and the Promotion of Queer Visibilities Among Township Males Who Have Sex with Males (MSM) in Cape Town, South Africa." *Health & Place* 49: 93–100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2017.11.010>
- Hilger, Janna Mareike. 2023a. "Awareness und Safe(r) Spaces: Eine politische Verteidigung." *Leviathan* 51 (4): 635–653. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0340-0425-2023-4-635>
- Hilger, Janna Mareike. 2023b. *Safe Space: Sorge und Kritik nach Michel Foucault und Eve Sedgwick*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2020. "The Re-Figuration of Spaces and Refigured Modernity—Concept and Diagnosis." *Historical Social Research* 45 (2): 263–292. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.2.263-292>
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2024. "The Refiguration of the Global: Globalization and the Spatial Logics of Digitalization." *Critical Sociology*. Advance online publication. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205241262304>
- Koch, Regan, and Sam Miles. 2021. "Inviting the Stranger In: Intimacy, Digital Technology and New Geographies of Encounter." *Progress in Human Geography* 45 (6): 1379–1401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132520961881>
- Lettkemann, Eric, and Ingo Schulz-Schaeffer. 2021. "Transit Zones, Locales, and Locations: How Digital Annotations Affect Communication in Public Places." *Media and Communication* 9 (3): 39–49. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v9i3.3934>
- Lettkemann, Eric, and Ingo Schulz-Schaeffer. 2022. "Annotating Places. A Critical Assessment of Two Hypotheses on How Locative Media Transform Urban Public Places." In *Spatial Transformations: Kaleidoscopic Perspectives on the Refiguration of Spaces*, edited by Angela Million, Christian Haid, Ignacio Castillo Ulloa, and Nina Baur, 192–203. London: Routledge.
- Licoppe, Christian, and Yoriko Inada. 2012. "Timid Encounters': A Case Study in the Use of Proximity-Based Mobile Technologies." In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 2759–2768. New York, NY: Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2207676.2208675>
- Licoppe, Christian, Carol Anne Rivière, and Julien Morel. 2017. "Proximity Awareness and the Privatization of Sexual Encounters with Strangers: The Case

- of Grindr.” In *Place, Space, and Mediated Communication*, edited by Carolyn Marvin, and Hong Sun-ha, 45–65. New York: Routledge.
- Mader, Esto. 2023. *Queere Räume: Handlungsfähigkeit, Affekte und Praktiken von Un_Bestimmtheit prekärer Subjekte*. Queer Studies 36. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Miles, Sam. 2021. “Let’s (Not) Go Outside: Grindr, Hybrid Space, and Digital Queer Neighborhoods.” In *The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods*, edited by Alex Bitterman and Daniel Baldwin Hess, 203–220. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66073-4_9
- Mkhize, Sthembiso Pollen, and Anele Mthembu. 2023. “Unpacking Pervasive Heteronormativity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Opportunities to Embrace Multiplicity of Sexualities.” *Progress in Human Geography* 47 (3): 377–391. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325231166402>
- Pascar, Lital, Yossi David, Gilly Hartal, and Brandon William Epstein. 2022. “Queer Safe Spaces and Communication.” In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, edited by Lital Pascar, Yossi David, Gilly Hartal, and Brandon William Epstein. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.1197>
- Pertsch, Sebastian, ed. 2023. *Vielfalt – Das Andere Wörterbuch*. Berlin: Duden Verlag.
- Race, Kane. 2015. “Speculative Pragmatism and Intimate Arrangements: Online Hook-up Devices in Gay Life.” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 17 (4): 496–511. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2014.930181>
- Renninger, Bryce J. 2018. “Grindr Killed the Gay Bar, and Other Attempts to Blame Social Technologies for Urban Development: A Democratic Approach to Popular Technologies and Queer Sociality.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 66 (12): 1736–1755. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1514205>
- Rink, Bradley. 2016. “Quartering the City in Discourse and Bricks: Articulating Urban Change in a South African Conclave.” *Urban Forum* 27 (1): 19–34.
- Souza e Silva, De, and Eric Gordon. 2014. “The Urban Dynamics of Net Localities. How Mobile and Location-Aware Technologies Are Transforming Places.” In *Mobile Technology and Place*, edited by Rowan Wilken and Gerard Goggin, 89–103. Vol. 9 of Routledge Studies in New Media and Cyberculture. New York: Routledge.
- Stempfhuber, Martin, and Michael Liegl. 2016. “Intimacy Mobilized: Hook-Up Practices in the Location-Based Social Network Grindr.” *Österreichische Zeitschrift Für Soziologie* 41 (1): 51–70. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11614-016-0189-7>
- Sutko, Daniel M., and Adriana De Souza e Silva. 2011. “Location-Aware Mobile Media and Urban Sociability.” *New Media & Society* 13 (5): 807–823. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810385202>.
- Tucker, Andrew. 2009. *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*. RGS-IBG Book Series. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Unruh, David R. 1980. “The Nature of Social Worlds.” *The Pacific Sociological Review* 23 (3): 271–296.
- van den Akker, Robin. 2018. “The Social Production of Hybrid Space.” *Repub*, June 28. <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/108991>.
- Visser, Gustav. 2003. “Gay Men, Leisure Space and South African Cities: The Case of Cape Town.” *Geoforum* 34 (1): 123–137.
- Witzel, Andreas. 2000. “The Problem-Centered Interview.” *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1 (1): 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.17169/FQS-1.1.1132>

7 Algorithmic regulation across physical and digital spaces

Analyzing Airbnb's marketplace in US and European cities over time

Stefan Kirchner and Simon C. Pohl

Introduction

Airbnb plays a key role in debates about the platform economy (Kenney and Zysman 2019), raising questions about the scale and social impact of this new digital system (Kirchner and Schüßler 2019). Globally, Airbnb has allowed amateur hosts to rent out their properties for extra income, while also attracting professional hosts with multiple listings. Although Airbnb promotes itself as a way for amateurs to utilize unused space, support cultural exchange, and boost local economies, critics claim that the platform fuels housing crises, disrupts neighborhoods, and harms the urban middle class. These unintended consequences, or overflows, on the social and material fabric of a destination, are frequently connected to an increasing presence of professionals operating on the platform (Bosma and van Doorn 2022; Gil, Martínez, and Sequera 2023).

The rise and professionalization of Airbnb have led cities to regulate the platform. Some cities encourage tourism by allowing the platform to grow, while others enforce strict rules using “algorithmic regulation” (Yeung 2018). However, little is known about the long-term effects of these regulations on amateur and professional hosts or how they affect listings in different cities.

Studying platforms like Airbnb is challenging due to the growing data and the reliance on broad concepts such as “platform capitalism” (Kirchner 2022). To address this, we use the “refiguration of space” approach (Knoblauch and Löw 2017, 2020), which allows us to conceptualize conflicts and regulations around Airbnb as sociospatial issues. In this view, Airbnb's global digital network space collides with traditional territorial spaces regarding the control over places like neighborhoods (Kirchner and Pohl 2025). This clash disrupts established neighborhood dynamics and increasingly commercializes spaces for tourism (Ioannides, Röslmaier, and van der Zee 2019).

Although much research has been conducted on the regulation of Airbnb worldwide, these studies tend to suffer from various shortcomings. Some discuss how existing regulations may apply to Airbnb and suggest new policies (Miller 2016), while others focus on political processes in reaction to harmful overflows (Nieuwland and van Melik 2020). Still, both strands tend to disregard how regulation impacts places in the local market. Another line of research views Airbnb as a new data source for analyzing hosts' listings, covering topics such as changes in tourism (Kadi, Plank, and Seidl 2019) and discrimination (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020). However, a few studies have combined regulation analysis with Airbnb data; however, they notably lack a theoretical foundation (Furukawa and Onuki 2019; Uzunca and Borlenghi 2019; Hübscher and Kallert 2023). Research suggests that Airbnb often avoids effective regulation and that regulation varies across cities and evolves as regulators adjust their strategies over time (Miller 2016; Briel and Dolnicar 2020). These studies tend to focus on the United States, cover limited timeframes, or fail to distinguish between amateur and professional hosts. As a result, we know little about how changing regulations affect different types of Airbnb listings in US and European cities.

This paper examines the relationship between regulations and professional Airbnb listings. Using web-scraped data, we study the supply of listings over time in five cities (Amsterdam, Berlin, New York, London, and San Francisco). Applying the concept of regulatory regimes, we find that cities vary in their regulatory approaches and enforcement strategies. While there is a trend toward algorithmic regulation, the cities differ in how willing and able they are to confront platform operators. Our research shows how the introduction of Airbnb's global digital network space disrupts local orders, forcing official bodies to either regulate or accept the platform within their territory by creating new legal frameworks and enforcement strategies at various governmental scales. It highlights how *varieties of refiguration* result in locally contingent *multiple spatialities*.

Theory and extant research

In line with the theme of this edited volume and the concept of the refiguration of spaces (Knoblauch and Löw 2017, 2020), we analyze Airbnb through its different spatial dimensions. Airbnb connects three ideal types of spatial logic, each tied to a specific social order.

First, physically located *places* are the main products traded on Airbnb. These places are constantly negotiated through their material features, assigned meanings, and practical use (Löw 2016; Massey 2012). Together with trajectory spaces, they form basic spatial units that serve as a foundation for network spaces and territories, integrating them into more formal social structures.

Airbnb's digital marketplace operates as a *network space* that connects users and living spaces globally. Through mediatization, these living spaces and their surrounding neighborhoods become symbolic "digital doubles" within Airbnb's market place (see also [Knoblauch 2020](#)). This mediatization aligns with the platform's values, as shaped by users' and operators' actions ([Ametowobla and Kirchner 2023](#); [Kirchner and Pohl 2025](#)). Platforms, as providers of frameworks for socioeconomic transactions, are often viewed as state-like entities ([Lehdonvirta 2022](#); [Törnberg 2023](#)). Their regulatory power comes from what [Evans \(2008\)](#) calls "bouncers' rights"—the ability to control access to the platform, justified by the promise of greater welfare through network effects ([Evans 2008](#); [Cutolo and Kenney 2019](#)).

However, the places listed on Airbnb also exist within politically defined territories. *Territories* create internal homogeneity by inclusion under the same rules and differentiate themselves from external spaces and elements through borders ([Löw and Weidenhaus 2018](#); [Knoblauch and Löw 2020](#)). As the spatial embodiment of states, a territory represents the geographic extent of a state's monopoly on violence, allowing state actors to create legitimate order within their borders ([Weber 2004](#); [Storey 2012](#)). While network spaces treat places as commodities, territories impose political and legal control over them. This rule of law gains legitimacy by balancing the economic and social interests of various groups to establish authority within geographic borders through systems of classification and measurement ([Gottmann 1973](#); [Elden 2010](#)).

The Airbnb challenge: Investigating negative effects and regulatory responses as spatial conflicts

This juxtaposition of the spatial logics connected to Airbnb highlights its inherent conflict potential. Places are sites of multiplicity and are thus prone to conflict ([Massey 2012](#)). Network spaces and territories exert power over places through their regulatory mechanisms, which are realized or countered in practices bound to these places. These interactions lead to both positive and negative overflows as these spatial logics and their associated social orders clash.

Highly touristic areas face economic pressure from Airbnb's network space, as they are increasingly dominated by professional hosts. An estimated 40–60% of Airbnb's supply and income comes from professional operators ([Kirchner and Pohl 2025](#); [Adamiak 2022](#)). Professional accommodations are connected to reduced housing availability, rising rent, and increasing real estate prices ([Benítez-Auriolo and Tussyadih 2020](#); [Duso et al. 2020](#)). However, Airbnb is sometimes viewed as an economic booster. In the Global South and post-colonial regions, it is seen as a tool to reduce poverty and attract new tourist markets ([Lorde and Joseph 2019](#); [Henama](#)

and Apleni 2020; Lerena Rongvaux and Rodriguez 2023). Hotels must follow strict health, safety, liability, and zoning laws, while Airbnb often operates in a legal gray area, as it initially often operates without clear legal frameworks (Guttentag 2017; Nieuwland and van Melik 2020; Briel and Dolnicar 2020). Places relevant to Airbnb, such as neighborhoods and apartment buildings, are typically more or less *institutionalized spaces* (Löw 2016) with established practices. The influx of tourists can introduce behaviors that clash with local expectations, leading to conflicts over security, noise, and the loss of neighborhood identity (Pinkster and Boterman 2017; Richards, Brown, and Dilettuso 2019).

Overall, Airbnb challenges territorial governance. Its global reach and deterritorializing effects create “smooth spaces,” where global capital flows threaten to erase local specifics (Castells 2000; Hardt and Negri 2003; for a critical position on this, see also Sönmez and Knoblauch in this volume). Airbnb’s digital network undermines the traditional governance function of territory, which relies on calculability and statistics (Elden 2005) since it usually remains invisible in places unless concrete conflicts arise.

In response, many cities have introduced targeted regulations to maintain control, appease key stakeholders, and integrate Airbnb into the local socioeconomic order. Thus, Airbnb’s presence often turns neighborhoods and cities into *conflict spaces*, leading to *spatial conflicts*. Airbnb’s digital network space clashes with the territorial control of local administrations, which leads to a refiguring of established order.

Existing research offers insights into regulations on Airbnb and its hosts but often has a narrow focus, limited in scope or geography. Studies examining regulatory responses (Guttentag 2017; Briel and Dolnicar 2020; Nieuwland and van Melik 2020) rarely analyze direct changes in the Airbnb marketplace or rely on indirect data. Studies on the market effects of regulation are limited in geographic focus and often use snapshots, ignoring frequent changes in regulatory regimes over time (Furukawa and Onuki 2019; Uzunca and Borlenghi 2019; Hübscher and Kallert 2023). Many questions remain about how regulation affects Airbnb’s marketplace activities.

Understanding official responses as regimes: Regulatory stance and enforcement mode

While Airbnb is a novel empirical phenomenon, the emerging literature has documented diverse regulatory responses. We argue that the claims over place stemming from the logics of territory and network space manifest in the decided social order (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011), highlighting the role of rule deciding, monitoring, and sanctioning. Hence, we organize the diverse insights from extant research along two dimensions: (a) the general *stance* as

the general tone in which rules are decided and (b) the *enforcement* of regulation as the way in which official bodies monitor and sanction decided rules.

Regulatory stance

The stance taken by regulators describes the general orientation toward Airbnb. Here, the literature proposes three basic approaches, ranging from prohibitive to *laissez faire* (Kirchner and Schüßler 2020; Nieuwland and van Melik 2020).

- In an *accommodate-and-hope approach*, official bodies follow a liberal market orientation, allowing Airbnb to operate either by loosening or abandoning existing regulation or by refraining from passing regulatory frameworks altogether. This assumes that self-regulation by market organizers suffices to ensure sustainable practices.
- In contrast, a *trim-and-adjust approach* comprises moderate actions that allow for certain areas of activity while restricting others. This aims to counteract the most severe negative externalities while allowing Airbnb to operate within clearly defined boundaries.
- A *ban-and-restore approach* prohibits Airbnb from operating and bans the marketplace. This approach upholds existing standards and protects the vested interests of incumbents.

Enforcement

Besides their regulatory stance, cities also vary in their enforcement modes, that is, in the ways in which they implement their general orientation toward Airbnb by monitoring and sanctioning activities. Many authors have highlighted the practical obstacles to applying conventional regulatory strategies (Miller 2016; Guttentag 2017; Uzunca, Rigtering, and Ozcan 2018). Three modes of enforcement add a layer to regulatory diversity:

- A *permissive self-regulation mode* either tolerates the violation of existing regulations, makes de minimis exceptions to it, or establishes an environment that fosters self-regulation (Miller 2016; Engels et al. 2018; Frenken et al. 2020).
- A *command-and-control mode* utilizes, for example, door-to-door raids, sets up specific enforcement bodies, and sanctions activities deemed illegal. This can also include educational and persuasive work undertaken by official bodies (Miller 2016; Guttentag 2017).
- An *algorithmic mode* accesses platform data. However, platforms have a strong incentive to obscure host and booking data. Therefore, some regulators force platforms to provide data access. Other regulators enable an algorithmic mode by cooperating with platforms on certain issues,

most notably by delegating registration or the collection of taxes to the platform (Finck and Ranchordás 2016; Guttentag 2017; Frenken et al. 2020). In other cases, official bodies have implemented independent web-scraping services or proprietary software to track accommodation sharing on the platform (Ferreri and Sanyal 2018; Briel and Dolnicar 2020).

Data, variables, and methods

Our investigation uses a multiple-case (Yin 2007) mixed-methods design with two units of analysis: the regulatory regime of a city and its Airbnb listing data. After a preliminary review of regulatory regimes in 2019, we selected five cities—Amsterdam, Berlin, New York, London, and San Francisco—that varied in regulatory stances and enforcement methods. All of these cities followed a trim-and-adjust stance, but New York, Berlin, and Amsterdam leaned toward “ban-and-restore,” while San Francisco and London leaned toward “accommodate-and-hope.” Our study covers 2015 to 2023, including the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022.

Airbnb dataset and variables: Information on the supply side

We analyzed web-scraped data from Airbnb, accessed through the data activist website insideairbnb.com, run by Murray Cox. This site provides datasets for various cities using publicly available Airbnb listing information, allowing researchers to replicate the findings. Each dataset includes detailed information on all listings at the time of scraping, effectively serving as a census of Airbnb accommodations. Several studies have confirmed the reliability of these data (Furukawa and Onuki 2019; Törnberg and Chiappini 2020).

Data scraping began sporadically in 2015 and became consistent by 2016, with some gaps (e.g., March 2016 for all cities; August, September, and December 2017 for London). We downloaded all available datasets from 2015 to 2023 and combined them into a panel dataset for each city. The datasets for Amsterdam, Berlin, London, New York, and San Francisco contain several million observations, thus allowing for a detailed analysis of Airbnb market trends.

Using existing research, we classified listings as either amateur or professional. The most common method for this is to count listings by the same host (Oskam and Boswijk 2016; Li, Moreno, and Zhang 2019). Other approaches focus on room type, amenities, availability (Proserpio, Xu, and Zervas 2018), or estimated occupancy rates (City and County of San Francisco 2015). Many studies have used mixed approaches (Wachsmuth and Weisler 2018; Ioannides, Röslmaier, and van der Zee 2019).

We adopted a mixed approach based on availability and whether the host offered other listings. Our analysis focused only on two pertinent modes of

listings¹: amateur listings (one listing per host, available less than 120 days per year) and professional multi-listings (at least one other listing available). We aggregated these categories into monthly counts for each city.

Methods

This empirical investigation applied the concept of regulatory regimes to the selected cities and examined their impact on Airbnb market activity over time. We have reported monthly listing counts and analyzed patterns using the R-package “strucchange,”² which tests for structural changes in linear regression models (Zeileis et al. 2002). If the trend was linear, the regression accounted for small fluctuations. If disrupted, strucchange calculated breakpoints, identifying distinct phases of development and accounting for nonlinear trends.

To account for each city’s regulatory regime and identify local laws, we gathered information from the literature, media, and Airbnb’s responsible hosting page (Airbnb 2024). We sourced laws, ordinances, and policies from official websites or alternative sources when needed. We processed this information using Mayring’s (2014) method for deductive category assignment based on the three regulatory stances and three enforcement modes (see Table 7.1).

To track Airbnb activity, we categorized listings by type and calculated their numbers for each date. This approach accurately reflected the distribution of Airbnb listings in each city.

Table 7.1 Description of regulatory stances and enforcement modes

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Short description</i>
Regulatory Stance (deciding on rules)	
Accommodate-and-hope	Define no or very limited restrictions
Trim-and-adjust	Define substantial restrictions to limit operations
Ban-and-restore	Prohibit activities, no legal operation possible
Enforcement mode (monitoring and sanctioning)	
Permissive self-regulation	Official bodies desist enforcement, expecting self-reliant governance
Command-and-control	Traditional on-site enforcement instruments, e.g., door-to-door raids, fines
Algorithmic	Enforcement by platform data, either cooperation or forced confrontation

Source: Own representation.

Results

We combined information on regulatory regimes and listing types over time to determine their relationships. The next five subsections analyze each city individually. First, we describe the city's regulatory regime during the study period, highlighting key changes in regulatory stances and enforcement modes. Second, we map the supply patterns and trends of amateur and professional listings. Finally, we relate the regulatory regimes to the listing activity data for each city.

Amsterdam

Regulatory regime

When hosting began in Amsterdam in 2008, authorities had introduced lenient regulations for accommodation sharing with hosts present, allowing the rental of up to 40% of a premises floor space to four people a night. By 2009, the city had begun licensing short stays for rental periods of seven days to six months. The enforcement of rules was carried out through a public-private partnership that included civil society and state actors.

Later, Amsterdam became more oriented toward the accommodate-and-hope pole, with a policy allowing citizens to sublet their entire home for up to 60 days per year, thus enabling residents to legally profit from the city's growing touristic appeal. Algorithmic enforcement began in January 2015 with a cooperation agreement between the authorities and Airbnb, which was expanded by a municipal scraping program in April 2016. This agreement was renewed in January 2017, with the addition of an algorithmic night cap for entire-home rentals carried out by the platform.

In late 2017, Amsterdam's regulations began to shift toward ban-and-restore again. New reporting requirements and fines for violations were introduced in October 2017. In January 2019, the rental period for entire-home listings was reduced to 30 days, with Airbnb refusing to adjust its night cap after a newly elected municipal government did not renew the cooperation agreement.

Anticipating a national short-term rental law in 2020, further restrictions were introduced. January's Housing Ordinance prepared a ban for entire-home listings in central Amsterdam and instituted a quota system for bed-and-breakfasts, with a six-year transition period for existing ones. Due to lawsuits, the local ban on vacation rentals was retracted in June 2020 and replaced with a permit system.

In 2021, reforms required registration numbers in short-term rental ads and adjusted the fining system. A 2022 amendment required platforms to ensure the display of registration numbers. In addition, authorities gained discretionary power over the night-cap system requiring

platform operators to recognize the 30-night limit. Fines for platform operators accompanied these measures. Still, Airbnb did not officially adjust its rental limit.

In summary, after 2017, Amsterdam focused on enforceability by strengthening algorithmic enforcement and maintaining a firm trim-and-adjust approach despite temporary COVID-19 bans.

Supply patterns and regulatory regime

Until 2016, all listing types grew, with professional single listings dominating (see [Figure 7.1](#)). Between 2017 and 2019, the proportions remained fairly stable, with amateur listings prevailing at a similar level. In 2019, professional multi-listings rose slightly above professional single listings, which continuously declined over time. During the observed period, the trim-and-adjust regulatory regime changed its orientation from leaning toward accommodate-and-hope to increasingly gravitating toward ban-and-restore. Coinciding with the start of the municipal scraping program, amateur listings dominated the Airbnb marketplace in Amsterdam.

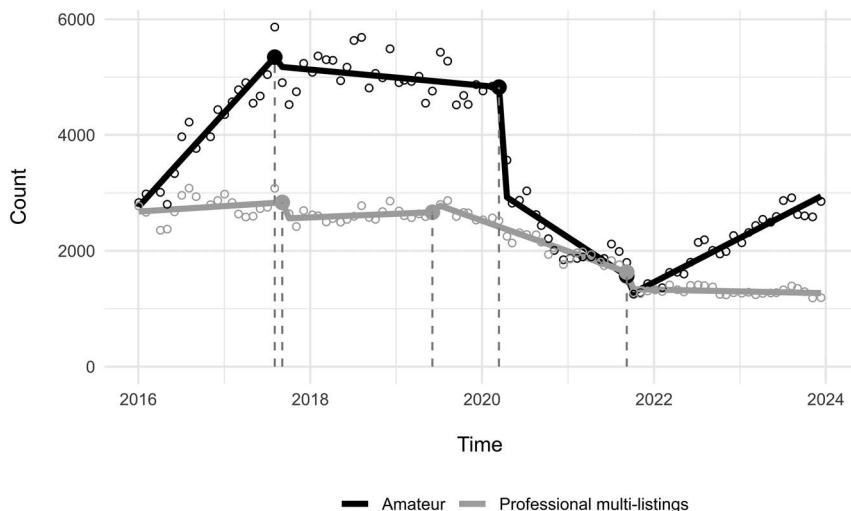


Figure 7.1 Types of listings in Amsterdam across time. Gray points indicate the measured values. Colored lines indicate fitted values computed using the *strucchange* package, with colored points and vertical dashed lines denoting computed breakpoints in linear regressions. The figure is based on our own depictions and calculations, sourced from web-scraped Airbnb data.

Source: Own representation.

Professional listings remained steady at lower levels. The shift in orientation toward ban-and-restore advanced in 2017, relying partially on expanded cooperation with Airbnb and *algorithmic* enforcement, which led to the stabilization of supply patterns. As Amsterdam was starting to introduce greater shifts in its regulatory regime in 2020, COVID-19 also arrived in the city. The resulting uncertainty and quarantines created major shifts in the local Airbnb marketplace. However, different groups of hosts were affected differently, with amateurs exiting the market and professionals tending to remain. With the obligation to display registration numbers, both amateur listings and professional multi-listings were reduced in late 2021. Coinciding with the end of lockdowns and renewed international travel in January 2022, we observed a marked recovery in amateur listings, albeit at an overall lower level. In contrast, the number of professional multi-listings remained stable. This indicates the successful containment of Airbnb in Amsterdam due to the mixture of a comparatively strict trim-and-adjust stance and extensive algorithmic enforcement.

Berlin

Regulatory regime

Following a period of minimal regulation, official bodies in Berlin implemented a strict trim-and-adjust approach with command-and-control enforcement in 2013. Shared and private-room listings were allowed within defined limits, while almost all entire-home listings required special approval. Commercial properties in residential buildings, such as former shops or offices, were exempt from these regulations by omission. Existing listings had a grace period until May 2016. In April 2016, data-sharing obligations for platforms were introduced, with a shift to algorithmic enforcement. A legal battle ensued, with platform operators objecting to the most recent changes with the argument that they were subject to more rigid Irish data privacy laws. In July 2017, the city's administrative court upheld these provisions with a preliminary injunction.

In April 2018, official bodies relaxed their regulatory stance regarding amateur hosting practices and strengthened their approach to enforcement by introducing basic provisions for more advanced smart enforcement. Requirements for permits enabling hosts to rent out their apartments during their own absences were relaxed. In contrast, the rental of second homes was capped to 90 days per year and was limited to hosts whose primary residences were outside Berlin, thereby emphasizing efforts to relax the situation of the city's housing market. Starting August 2018, displaying a registration number in listings became mandatory for entire homes and certain private and shared rooms. Fines for violations were increased, and

platforms faced a fine of 250,000€ for noncompliance in removing proven violators. Airbnb questioned the legitimacy of the mandatory display of registration numbers, in particular, and highlighted legal gray areas regarding the short-term rental of commercial property in its communications.

After another lawsuit by Airbnb regarding data sharing and a final decision on the 2017 lawsuit, legitimizing data requests made in other jurisdictions, which had been escalated to the highest responsible jurisdiction in the meantime, Berlin amended its short-term rental laws in 2021. This introduced an additional ban-and-restore aspect, allowing the short-term rental of second homes only under special circumstances. Commercial properties were included for the first time in the mandate to display registration numbers or contact details. Algorithmic enforcement was further enhanced with expanded data-sharing obligations, requirements to delete listings if platforms refuse to share data, and the introduction of the legal basis for a municipal scraping program to identify listings in violation. Further targeting platform operators, official bodies included provisions to enforce penalties even for violations occurring outside their jurisdiction. By and large, this overhaul of previous regulations addressed all major points of contention that platform operators introduced in the preceding legal conflicts. Subsequently, Airbnb mandated that all new listings include registration numbers in 2021 and that all existing listings do so by March 2023, unless minimal rental periods were changed to at least 92 consecutive days.

Supply patterns and regulatory regime

A major shift occurred in Berlin in the first half of 2016 (Figure 7.2), with large numbers of listings across hosting types exiting the market at the beginning of the year. While amateur listings rebounded during the same year, professional listings exhibited slow growth for the following period. Amateur listings steadily dominated beginning in mid-2017. However, professional multi-listings remained at a stable level throughout the rest of the observation period. Only amateur listings exhibited a sudden drop in August 2018. This drop coincided with the date when displaying the official registration number became mandatory. The following recovery was cut short with the arrival of COVID-19. Similar to the other cases in our sample, amateurs were hit the hardest by the pandemic, while the levels of professional listings remained mostly stable. Subsequently, Berlin's marketplace was dominated by professional hosts, albeit on a lower level overall. Even after the end of anti-COVID measures in 2022, this remained true, despite a rather strict regulatory regime. Due to the exemptions for commercial properties, this does not necessarily indicate a failure but could also mean a successful containment of the misuse of places of living.

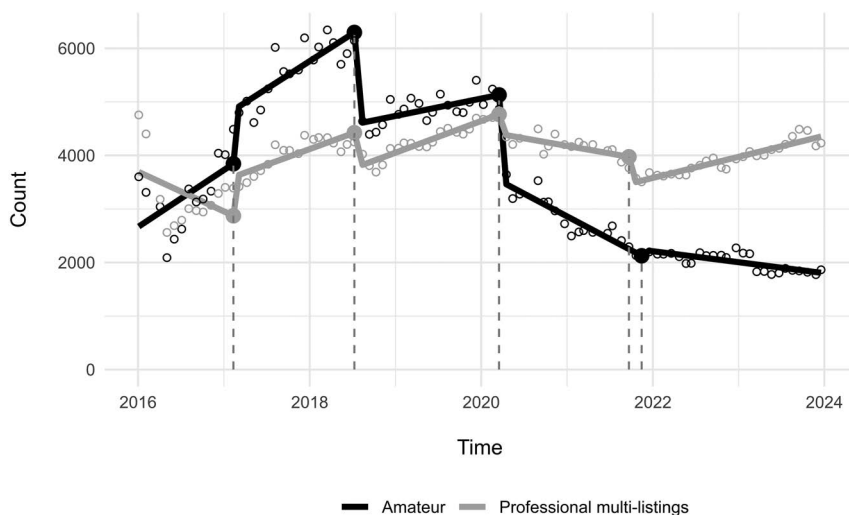


Figure 7.2 Types of listings in Berlin across time. Gray points indicate the measured values. Colored lines indicate fitted values computed with the *strucchange* package, with colored points and vertical dashed lines denoting computed breakpoints in linear regressions. The figure is based on our own depictions and calculations, sourced from web-scraped Airbnb data.

Source: Own representation.

London

Regulatory regime

At the time Airbnb started, London followed a ban-and-restore approach, prohibiting the rental of residential premises for less than 90 consecutive nights without a change-of-use permit. Later, official bodies changed toward an accommodate-and-hope stance with various enforcement modes. Through the Deregulation Act, official bodies created an exception for the previous regulation in March 2015, necessitating a change-of-use permit only if the cumulative rental period exceeds 90 cumulative days per year. Official bodies carried out enforcement by utilizing publicly available Airbnb data and conducting door-to-door raids. However, with the responsibility left to the individual boroughs, no unified enforcement approach was instituted. Additionally, effective April 2016, accommodation sharing was fostered on a national level by raising 1992s “rent-a-room-relief” tax-free income to £7,500 for the rental of a room within a primary residence. In January 2017, Airbnb added *algorithmic* enforcement

by introducing an algorithmic night cap. With the introduction of a new national tax break for accommodation sharing in secondary homes in April 2017, London's regulatory stance drifted even further toward accommodate-and-hope. This approach was kept up during the COVID-19 pandemic, when subsidy programs, tax breaks, and loan schemes were introduced, mostly benefiting hosts of commercial properties.

Supply patterns and regulatory regime

Like other cases, we noticed a market upheaval early in 2016 (Figure 7.3), with fluctuations of professional listings in particular. Coinciding with the increase of tax-free income from accommodation sharing in April 2017, trajectories stabilized again. Professional listings steadily increased until COVID-19. Amateurs initially faced a similar development. However, as Airbnb introduced its algorithmic night cap, growth became stifled. Between 2017 and 2020, amateur numbers only marginally increased.

Overall, the London regime allowed for the continuous growth of professional listings, while amateurs continued at more or less steady levels after 2017. Again, COVID-19 presented a major disruption, with large

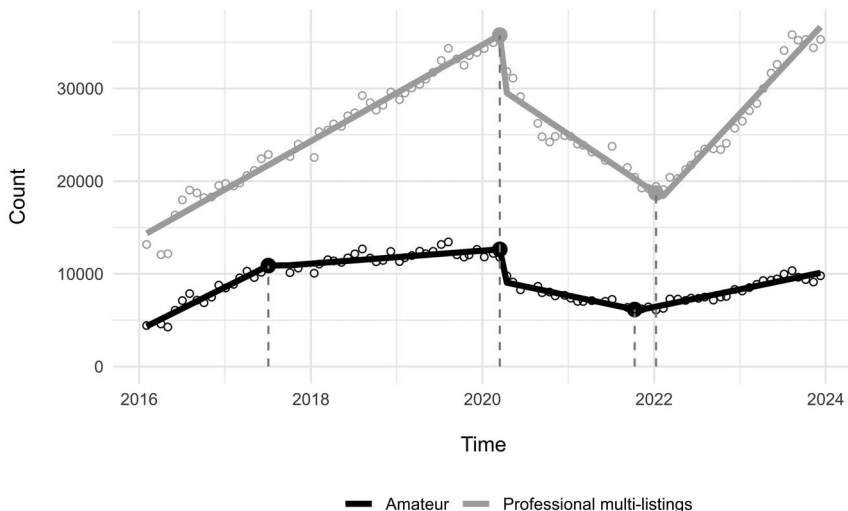


Figure 7.3 Types of listings in London across time. Gray points indicate the measured values. Colored lines indicate fitted values computed with the strucchange package, with colored points and vertical dashed lines denoting computed breakpoints in linear regressions. The figure is based on our own depiction and calculation, sourced from web-scraped Airbnb data.

Source: Own representation.

numbers of amateurs and professionals leaving the market. This event roughly coincided with Brexit taking effect, prohibiting an examination of the resulting travel limitations. However, following the end of containment, professionals recuperated, reaching pre-pandemic numbers in mid-2023. This speaks to the affordances made by the London regulatory regime for professional hosting and indicates no lasting impact of COVID-19 on Airbnb supplies.

New York City

Regulatory regime

When Airbnb's diffusion in New York commenced in 2008, the city and state relied on a strict trim-and-adjust regulatory stance. Regulated by the interplay between the state's multiple-dwelling law (MDL) and the city's building and maintenance codes (BC and MC), each household was allowed to lodge up to two guests with the resident present the entire time. In contrast, unhosted accommodation sharing was not explicitly regulated and took place in a legal gray zone for multiple-dwelling units. Enforcement against illegitimate tourism accommodation practices has been carried out by the Mayor's Office of Special Enforcement (OSE) since 2006 through a command-and-control enforcement mode. Following a 2009 court decision acknowledging legitimate opportunities for unhosted short-term rentals in multiple dwellings, official bodies reaffirmed the regulatory stance by closing the loophole, effectively banning the practice. The enforcement mode and regulatory stance were further strengthened by an October 2016 amendment prohibiting the advertisement of illegal listings. To settle a lawsuit filed by the platform, official bodies entered into an agreement with Airbnb, staying the enforcement of the law against Airbnb but not its users. In August 2018, official bodies attempted a shift toward an *algorithmic* enforcement mode with Local Law 146. This legislation would have forced Airbnb to share extensive user and rental data on a monthly basis with the OSE. However, Airbnb again filed a lawsuit against the enactment, ending in another settlement. Subsequently, Airbnb and official bodies agreed to share data on listings obviously violating the MDL provisions (e.g., for rentals of entire units or with more than three guests). The terms of this agreement were codified shortly thereafter. In 2022, New York introduced its first comprehensive short-term rental law. Thereby, official bodies turned to a ban-and-restore stance by defining short-term rentals as rentals for less than 30 days, including both private and Class A multiple dwellings. While the law did not prohibit short-term rentals outright, it was tied to provisions in all other relevant codes. Therefore, all legal gray areas for unhosted stays and rentals to more than

two people in places of living were eliminated. Finally, the city's algorithmic enforcement mode introduced a registration system, with platforms being liable for illegal activities conducted through them. Enforcement commenced in September 2023, with Airbnb intermittently blocking all short-term bookings.

Supply patterns and regulatory regime

Mirroring the unstable regulatory situation, listings of all types fluctuated significantly at the beginning of our observation (Figure 7.4). Still, the numbers of both professional and amateur listings increased overall. With the first agreement between city officials and Airbnb in December 2016, the market's composition began to consolidate. In early 2018, the number of amateur listings began to decline. Preceding the introduction of Local Law 146, many professional multi-listings entered the market. Following this event, their share grew only marginally until 2020. Overall, the New York City regime allowed amateur and professional listings to continue at steady levels after mid-2018. As with all of our cases, Airbnb's New

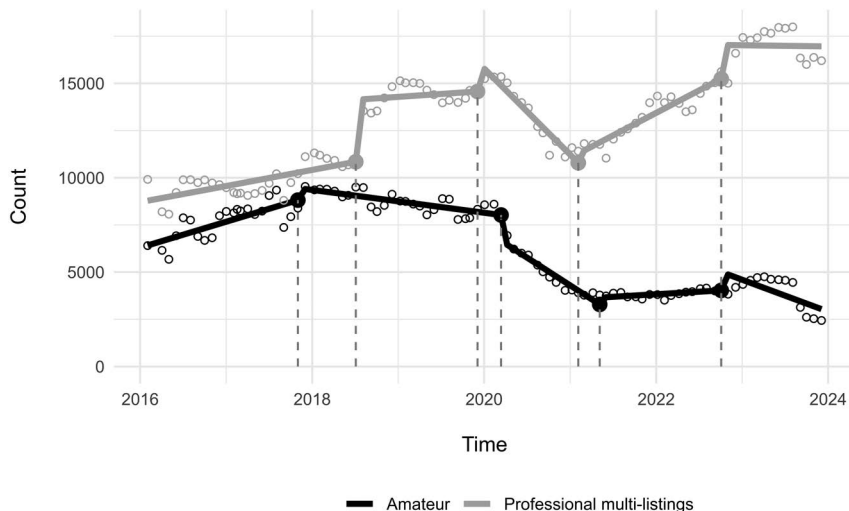


Figure 7.4 Types of listings in New York City across time. Gray points indicate the measured values. Colored lines indicate fitted values computed with the *strucchange* package, with colored points and vertical dashed lines denoting computed breakpoints in linear regressions. The figure is based on our own depictions and calculations, sourced from web-scraped Airbnb data.

Source: Own representation.

York marketplace was hit hard by COVID-19, with all listing categories declining throughout the crisis. While amateurs remained at a reduced but stable level following the end of the lockdowns, professionals soon recovered to pre-pandemic levels. Rather counterintuitively, we observed a spike in both professional and amateur listings prior to the registration requirements taking effect, with considerable exits at the start of enforcement in September 2023. Still, in the months following, both kinds of listings remained stable. Further inquiries are needed to determine the effectiveness of Local Law 18 for the containment of short-term rentals in New York City.

San Francisco

Regulatory regime

Airbnb started in San Francisco in 2007, with the city following a strict ban-and-restore approach with command-and-control enforcement. Since 1981, all rental activity for less than 30 days have been prohibited. Since 2012, official bodies and public interest groups have been able to carry out enforcement. In 2014, official bodies took a trim-and-adjust approach, drifting toward accommodate-and-hope with additional *algorithmic* enforcement features. Provisions for personally hosted and unhosted listings after registration with official bodies were introduced, with unhosted listings limited to 90 nights per year. Furthermore, Airbnb was obligated to inform hosts about applicable rules and allowed to collect and remit applicable taxes. In 2015, the existing enforcement mode was strengthened by founding a special agency with the Office of Short-Term Residential Rental Administration and Enforcement. However, the perceived inefficiencies of the command-and-control solution prompted a shift toward an *algorithmic* enforcement mode in the years 2016 and 2017. First, official bodies passed an ordinance requiring hosting platforms to share data. In reaction to a lawsuit, this ordinance was reworked shortly thereafter. As part of a settlement, both parties began cooperating on *algorithmic* enforcement from May 2017 onwards, while Airbnb agreed to delete all existing listings violating the registration requirement between November 2017 and February 2018. In June 2020, official bodies in San Francisco shifted their regulatory stance further toward ban-and-restore by amending the regulatory regime and introducing a new accommodation category for rentals of at least 30 days but no more than one year. Like traditional short-term rentals, these intermediate-length occupancies (ILOs) were subject to a permit system, with permits being limited to 1,000. Most ILO permits were limited to the downtown area in order to protect residential neighborhoods.

Supply patterns and regulatory regime

During 2016 and 2017, amateur listings and professionals followed steady trajectories, with amateurs remaining at a stable level and professional listings declining (Figure 7.5). While the deleting of illegal listings by Airbnb resulted in lasting change for a number of amateurs, professionals recuperated almost immediately, rendering the intervention mostly symbolic in terms of further reigning in professional actors. As we also observed in New York, professional multi-listings suddenly leaped in mid-2018. However, this did not correspond with any salient regulatory event. In the aftermath of this leap-event, professional listings in San Francisco continuously rose in a pattern akin to developments in London. Overall, in the observation period, San Francisco shifted from a ban-and-restore stance with command-and-control enforcement to a trim-and-adjust stance drifting to accommodate-and-hope with *algorithmic* enforcement, facilitated by cooperation with Airbnb. This shift discontinued previous patterns in the marketplace and eventually allowed professional multi-listings to grow following an intervention coordinated by official bodies and platform

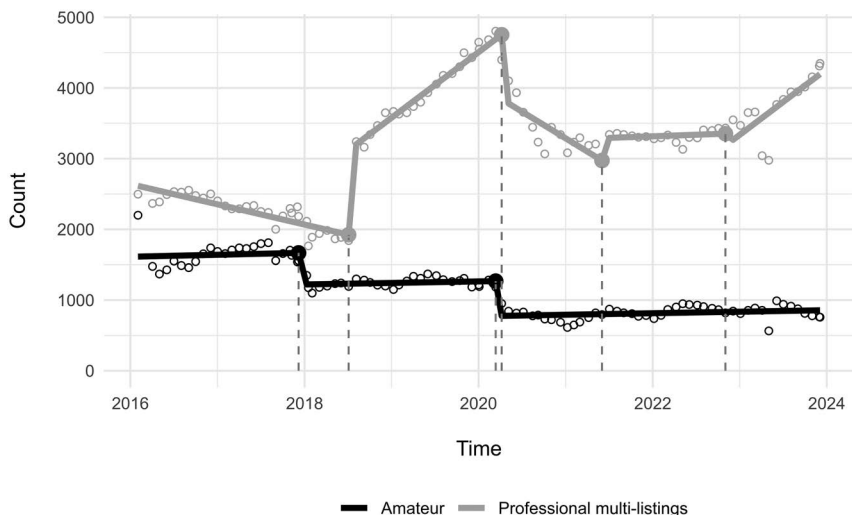


Figure 7.5 Types of listings in San Francisco across time. Gray points indicate the measured values. Colored lines indicate fitted values computed with the *strucchange* package, with colored points and vertical dashed lines denoting computed breakpoints in linear regressions. The figure is based on our own depiction and calculation, sourced from web-scraped Airbnb data.

Source: Own representation.

operators that lastingly decreased the levels of amateur listings. These tendencies were corroborated by the lasting impacts of COVID-19. While both professionals and amateurs left the market at the beginning of the pandemic, only professionals returned to the platform in significant numbers, while amateurs generally remained at the decreased pandemic levels.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper investigated how different regulatory regimes affect professional Airbnb listings in five cities by analyzing their regulatory stances and enforcement over time. We found a range of approaches, from London's relaxed rules to stricter regimes in Berlin, San Francisco, Amsterdam, and New York City. Our analysis revealed significant variations in regulatory stances and adjustments among these cities. London adopted the most pronounced *accommodate-and-hope* approach through deregulation and tax incentives. San Francisco, Berlin, and Amsterdam used a *trim-and-adjust* strategy, sometimes leaning toward *accommodate-and-hope*, but also banning activities they considered harmful. San Francisco's stance remained stable, while Amsterdam became more critical, ending cooperation and shifting toward *ban-and-restore*. Berlin initially imposed strict restrictions on private home hosting but left commercial properties unregulated; later, it allowed more sharing-economy practices while maintaining bans on professional hosting in private homes. New York explicitly limited nearly all legal short-term rental activity at the end of the observation, also following a *trim-and-adjust* approach.

We observed distinct patterns in listing types. London showed steady growth in professional multi-listings with low numbers of amateur listings, aligning with its relaxed regulatory stance. Amsterdam and Berlin initially had a dominance of amateur listings, but in Berlin, COVID-19 led to professionals gaining dominance. In New York City and San Francisco, professional multi-listings consistently dominated their markets. Initially, both cities saw contained growth in professional listings, but San Francisco diverged in mid-2018 after cooperating with Airbnb. This cooperation coincided with a surge in professional listings and a pattern resembling London's domination of professional listings.

These trends highlight the importance of enforcement in local regulatory regimes describing the ways in which rules are monitored and sanctioned. Initially relying on traditional *command-and-control* methods, cities (except London) later adopted variations of the *algorithmic enforcement* approach. Over nearly 10 years, we observed a convergence trend in monitoring data, implementing registration or licensing systems, and incentivizing platforms to remove bad actors. However, the effectiveness of algorithmic enforcement depended on the relationship between authorities

and platforms. We identified two approaches: (1) *cooperative algorithmic enforcement* and (2) *confrontational algorithmic enforcement*. New York illustrates these approaches. Traditional enforcement had limited success and faced media criticism. The city then adopted cooperative algorithmic enforcement via data sharing but saw increased listings without a containment of professionals. Only after the city switched to confrontational enforcement, forcing Airbnb's compliance, did the desired results emerge.

Conversely, the case of San Francisco shows the pitfalls of cooperative algorithmic enforcement. After a 2016 agreement, regulators lost control over professional listings. Privatization of the registration system and compromises during its creation led to loopholes, allowing listings to operate before approval and enabling co-hosting, thus fostering professionalization. This led to dynamics such as London's self-regulation with minimal government oversight.

Airbnb regulation highlights the importance of data access for governing a platform's network space. This applies to both Airbnb and other actors. Connecting to general points on how platform data practices transform societal relations and alter opportunities for critique and negotiation over legitimate practices (Diaz-Bone, Horvath, and Cappel 2020), we argue that this also applies to Airbnb and is exemplified by the regulation attempts we showcased.

Additionally, our results show that regulatory regimes must consider interactions with other regulations, such as zoning. Late-stage Berlin illustrates that targeting private dwellings can unintentionally professionalize the market, similar to deregulated London. Strict barriers for private individuals, combined with unregulated professional hosting of commercial properties, lead to a highly commercialized marketplace.

We also observed a trend toward integrating multiple government layers. While regulation is municipal, state, and (trans)national actors are increasingly involved. Examples include New York's 2010 MDL reform, London's 2015 De-Regulation Act, and the Netherlands' 2020 national short-term rental law. Shortly after our observation period, the European Union passed a short-term rental regulation to facilitate algorithmic enforcement. These suggest a regulatory division of labor—higher legislatures provide liberal frameworks, while municipalities handle restrictive fine-tuning and enforcement.

Our findings offer insights into regulating digital platforms amid competing territorial and network space logics. We observed a rise in *algorithmic regulation*, centered on algorithmic enforcement. According to Yeung (2018), algorithmic regulation involves setting standards, gathering information, and enforcement or behavior modification. This outline matches more general frameworks that describe rule deciding, monitoring, and sanctioning as core components of decided social order (Ahrne and

Brunsson 2011). In regulatory regimes, rule deciding sets the tone (regulatory stance), while enforcement through monitoring and sanctioning ensures practical relevance and real-world effects.

In Airbnb's case, both official bodies and private platforms regulate by setting rules, monitoring, and sanctioning users (Kirchner and Schüßler 2019). This creates a layered system of public and private governance—often with divergent goals. Here, actors adhere to different spatial logics: Official bodies base their regulation on territorial control, while platforms regulate the digital marketplace, operating a network space across boundaries. Conflicts quickly arise from these conflicting territorial and network space logics.

These spatial logics also underlie the regulatory stances and enforcement variants discussed. A permissive self-regulation mode lets the digital marketplace shape societal relationships to Airbnb's benefit. Command-and-control uses traditional methods to defend the territorial domain against Airbnb's deterritorializing influence. However, as coordination shifts to the network space, traditional enforcement fails to identify violators effectively, rendering it ineffective against operations beyond territorial reach.

An algorithmic mode demands platform data, which requires access to the network space to enforce territorial rules. Using data from Airbnb's marketplace allows officials to govern societal relationships according to territorial interests. Our results suggest that success in algorithmic enforcement is more likely with a confrontational approach; cooperative approaches give platforms more influence, strengthening their grasp on places. In the confrontational variant, algorithmic enforcement uses network space data to uphold territorial control, thus shifting regulation's practical and legitimizing logics. Territorial power is based on a monopoly of force and public good, while platforms base their claims on controlling access and maximizing welfare through network effects. Platform operators enforce rules by moderating access, such as through tiered compliance systems. Criticism over harsh punishments and Airbnb's reluctance to comply led many cases to adopt registration systems, focusing punishment on platform operators who have structural power beyond the state's reach to prevent illegal activity from the outset. Thus, algorithmic enforcement refigures territory by integrating network space logics to uphold its domain. The question becomes not who governs the territory or the network space but who maintains the upper hand across both physical and digital spaces.

Our study has some limitations. While professional multi-hosts tend to commercialize Airbnb, regulations often target specific practices and properties. Future research should use finer-grained approaches to investigate the effects on rental periods, guest numbers, and listing types. Qualitative research can show the various ways that hosts professionalize,

which quantitative studies cannot fully reflect. Future studies could integrate qualitative and quantitative findings to understand regulations' effects on different user types. Additionally, focusing on prominent cases limits generalization; Airbnb discourse emphasizes urban settings in the Global North. Future research should include varied contexts, especially in the Global South, and address urban biases by investigating rural areas to broaden the understanding of the platform's spatial constitution.

Digital platforms like Airbnb transform societal relationships. Our results show that territorially bound regulations conflict with Airbnb's global network space in a *variety of refigurations*, leading to *multiple spatialities*. Using extensive quantitative data from five cities, we identified three typical approaches to these conflicts, resulting in corresponding market compositions. Administrations either fostered the platform by not effectively regulating it, cooperated with platform operators, or confronted them to force compliance in the administration's interest. The first approach yields sovereignty to promote economic activity, while cooperation can unintentionally have similar effects and shift power dynamics. However, three city cases showed a reassertion of territorial control, through which state actors improved their approaches to the point that platforms had to comply. This reflects similar developments with other platforms like Uber, the "Big Five," or base internet infrastructures that increasingly become territorially contained and integrated into geopolitical strategies (Thelen 2018; Lambach 2020; Pohle and Voelsen 2022; Garcia Calvo, Kenney, and Zysman 2024). With access to data on regulation and platform responses, Airbnb serves as a key case to understand how the territorial power of administrators and the trans-territorial power of network spaces are negotiated and exercised.

Notes

- 1 The two remaining categories that we did not analyze in this paper were professional single (only one listing per host and availability of 120 days or more in the next 365 days) and unavailable (no availability in the next 365 days).
- 2 The R-package "strucchange" computes several solutions with an ascending number of break points and the corresponding dates of the breaks. The package discerns the optimal number of breaks for the given observations by comparing the BIC values of the solutions and selecting the solution with the lowest BIC value. We used a default h-value of 0.15 (the h-value denotes the minimal segment size as a fraction relative to the sample size).

References

- Adamiak, Czesław. 2022. "Current State and Development of Airbnb Accommodation Offer in 167 Countries." *Current Issues in Tourism* 25 (19): 3131–3149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2019.1696758>

- Ahrne, Göran, and Nils Brunsson. 2011. "Organization Outside Organizations: The Significance of Partial Organization." *Organization* 18 (1): 83–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508410376256>
- Airbnb. 2024. "Responsible Hosting." *Airbnb*. Accessed November 21, 2024. https://www.airbnb.com/help/topic/272/responsible-hosting?locale=en&_set_bev_on_new_domain=1617630103_ZWUwNzUwYmRjN2Ey
- Ametowobla, Dzifa, and Stefan Kirchner. 2023. "The Organization of Digital Platforms: The Role of Digital Technology and Architecture for Social Order." *Zeitschrift Für Soziologie* 52 (2): 143–56. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zfsoz-2023-2012>
- Benítez-Auriolés, Beatriz, and Iis Tussyadiah. 2020. "What Airbnb Does to the Housing Market." *Annals of Tourism Research* 103108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.103108>
- Bosma, Jelke R., and Niels van Doorn. 2022. "The Gentrification of Airbnb: Closing Rent Gaps Through the Professionalization of Hosting." *Space and Culture* 120633122210906. <https://doi.org/10.1177/12063312221090606>
- Briel, Dorine, and Sara Dolnicar. 2020. "The Evolution of Airbnb Regulation - An International Longitudinal Investigation 2008–2020." *Annals of Tourism Research* 102983. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.102983>
- Castells, Manuel. 2000. "Toward a Sociology of the Network Society." *Contemporary Sociology* 29 (5): 693. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2655234>
- City and County of San Francisco. 2015. "Analysis of the Impact of Short-Term Rentals on Housing." [Report].
- Cutolo, Donato, and Martin Kenney. 2019. *Dependent Entrepreneurs in a Platform Economy: Playing in the Gardens of the Gods*. Working Paper no. 3. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Roundtable on the International Economy.
- Diaz-Bone, Rainer, Kenneth Horvath, and Valeska Cappel. 2020. "Social Research in Times of Big Data. The Challenges of New Data Worlds and the Need for a Sociology of Social Research." *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 45 (3): 314–341.
- Duso, Tomaso, Claus Michelsen, Maximilian Schaefer, and Kevin Ducbao Tran. 2020. *Airbnb and Rents: Evidence from Berlin*. DIW Discussion Paper no. 1890. Berlin: Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW). <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/222939>
- Elden, Stuart. 2005. "Missing the Point: Globalization, Deterritorialization and the Space of the World." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30 (1): 8–19.
- Elden, Stuart. 2010. "Land, Terrain, Territory." *Progress in Human Geography* 34 (6): 799–817. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132510362603>
- Engels, Barbara, Vera Demary, Christian Rusche, Christoph Busch, Justus Haucap, Christiane Kehder, and Ina Loebert. 2018. *Sharing Economy Im Wirtschaftsraum Deutschland. Tourismuspolitik*. Berlin: Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie (BMWi). <https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Publikationen/Studien/sharing-economy-im-wirtschaftsraum-deutschland.html>
- Evans, David S. 2008. "Competition and Regulatory Policy for Multi-Sided Platforms With Applications to the Web Economy." *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1090368>
- Ferreri, Mara, and Romola Sanyal. 2018. "Platform Economies and Urban Planning: Airbnb and Regulated Deregulation in London." *Urban Studies* 55 (15): 3353–3368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098017751982>
- Finck, Michèle, and Sofia Ranchordás. 2016. "Sharing and the City." *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 49: 1299.

- Frenken, Koen, Arnoud Waes, Peter Pelzer, Magda Smink, and Rinie Est. 2020. "Safeguarding Public Interests in the Platform Economy." *Policy & Internet* 12 (3): 400–425. <https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.217>
- Furukawa, Norikazu, and Motoharu Onuki. 2019. "The Design and Effects of Short-Term Rental Regulation." *Current Issues in Tourism* 25 (20): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2019.1638892>
- Garcia Calvo, Angela, Martin Kenney, and John Zysman. 2024. "Will Nation States Reassert Their Sovereignty over the Platform Economy?." *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4790191>
- Gil, Javier, Pablo Martínez, and Jorge Sequera. 2023. "The Neoliberal Tenant Dystopia: Digital Polyplatform Rentierism, the Hybridization of Platform-Based Rental Markets and Financialization of Housing." *Cities* 137: 104245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2023.104245>
- Gottmann, Jean. 1973. *The Significance of Territory*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Guttentag, Daniel. 2017. "Regulating Innovation in the Collaborative Economy: An Examination of Airbnb's Early Legal Issues." In *Collaborative Economy and Tourism: Perspectives, Policies and Prospects*, edited by Dianne Dredge, and Szilvia Gyimóthy, 97–128. Cham: Springer.
- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. 2003. *Empire*. 1. Harvard University Press paperback ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Henama, Unathi Sonwabile, and Lwazi Apleni. 2020. "Airbnb as a Tourism Supply Chain Champion for Small Businesses: The Case of South Africa." In *Strategies for Promoting Sustainable Hospitality and Tourism Services*, 22–38. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Hübscher, Marcus, and Till Kallert. 2023. "Taming Airbnb Locally: Analysing Regulations in Amsterdam, Berlin and London." *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 114 (1): 6–27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tesg.12537>
- Ioannides, Dimitri, Michael Röslmaier, and Egbert van der Zee. 2019. "Airbnb as an Instigator of 'Tourism Bubble' Expansion in Utrecht's Lombok Neighbourhood." *Tourism Geographies* 21 (5): 822–840. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2018.1454505>
- Kadi, Justin, Leonhard Plank, and Roman Seidl. 2019. "Airbnb as a Tool for Inclusive Tourism?." *Tourism Geographies* 24 (4–5): 669–691. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2019.1654541>
- Kenney, Martin, and John Zysman. 2019. "Work and Value Creation in the Platform Economy." In *Work and Labor in the Digital Age*, edited by Steve P. Valas, and Anne Kovalainen, 13–41. Leeds: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Kirchner, Stefan. 2022. "Kommt Jetzt Die Plattformgesellschaft? Organisation in Der Digitalen Transformation Und Impulse Für Eine Soziologie Der Digitalisierung [Is the Platform Society Coming Now? Organization in the Digital Transformation and Impulses for a Sociology of Digitalization]." *Soziale Welt* 73 (3): 514–545. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0038-6073-2022-3-514>
- Kirchner, Stefan, and Simon C. Pohl. 2025. "Selling Out the City? Airbnbs' Amateur and Professional Listings Across Cities, Time, and Hotspots." *Berliner Journal Für Soziologie* 34(4). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11609-024-00542-3>
- Kirchner, Stefan, and Elke Schüßler. 2019. "The Organization of Digital Market-places: Unmasking the Role of Internet Platforms in the Sharing Economy." In *Organization Outside Organizations*, edited by Göran Ahrne and Nils Brunsson, 131–154. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Kirchner, Stefan, and Elke Schüßler. 2020. "Regulating the Sharing Economy: A Field Perspective." In *Theorizing the Sharing Economy: Variety and Trajectories of New Forms of Organizing*, edited by Indre Maurer, Johanna Mair, and Achim Oberg, 215–36. Research in the Sociology of Organizations. Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X2020000066010>
- Knoblauch, Hubert. 2020. *The Communicative Construction of Reality*. Knowledge, Communication and Society. London: Routledge.
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2017. "On the Spatial Re-Figuration of the Social World." *Sociologica* 2: 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.2383/88197>
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2020. "The Re-Figuration of Spaces and Refigured Modernity—Concept and Diagnosis." *Historical Social Research* 45 (2): 263–292. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.2.263-292>
- Lambach, Daniel. 2020. "The Territorialization of Cyberspace*." *International Studies Review* 22 (3): 482–506. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viz022>
- Lehdonvirta, Vili. 2022. *Cloud Empires: How Digital Platforms Are Overtaking the State and How We Can Regain Control*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Lerena Rongvaux, Natalia, and Luciana Rodriguez. 2023. "Airbnb in Latin America: A Literature Review from an Urban Studies Perspective." *Journal of Urban Affairs*, (February): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2023.2168552>
- Li, Jun, Antonio Moreno, and Dennis J. Zhang. 2019. "Agent Pricing in the Sharing Economy: Evidence from Airbnb." In *Sharing Economy*, edited by Ming Hu, 6: 485–503. Springer Series in Supply Chain Management. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-01863-4_20
- Lorde, Troy, and Tennyson S. D. Joseph. 2019. "Airbnb, Technological Change and Disruption in Barbadian Tourism: A Theoretical Framework." *Third World Quarterly* 40 (12): 2190–2209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1633913>
- Löw, Martina. 2016. *The Sociology of Space: Materiality, Social Structures, and Action*. Cultural Sociology. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-69568-3>
- Löw, Martina, and Gunter Weidenhaus. 2018. "Relationale Räume Mit Grenzen [Relational Spaces With Boundaries]." In *Technik—Macht—Raum*, edited by Andreas Brenneis, Oliver Honer, Sina Keesser, Annette Ripper, and Silke Vetter-Schultheiß, 207–227. Technikzukunft, Wissenschaft Und Gesellschaft. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-15154-6_11.
- Massey, Doreen B. 2012. *For Space*. 1. publ., Repr. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Mayring, Philipp. 2014. *Qualitative Content Analysis: Theoretical Foundation, Basic Procedures and Software Solution*. Klagenfurt: Beltz.
- Miller, Stephen R. 2016. "First Principles for Regulating the Sharing Economy." *Harvard Journal on Legislation* 53: 147.
- Nieuwland, Shirley, and Rianne van Melik. 2020. "Regulating Airbnb: How Cities Deal With Perceived Negative Externalities of Short-Term Rentals." *Current Issues in Tourism* 23 (7): 811–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2018.1504899>
- Oskam, Jeroen, and Albert Boswijk. 2016. "Airbnb: The Future of Networked Hospitality Businesses." *Journal of Tourism Futures* 2 (1): 22–42. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-11-2015-0048>
- Pinkster, Fenne M., and Willem R. Boterman. 2017. "When the Spell Is Broken: Gentrification, Urban Tourism and Privileged Discontent in the Amsterdam Canal District." *Cultural Geographies* 24 (3): 457–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474017706176>

- Pohle, Julia, and Daniel Voelsen. 2022. "Centrality and Power. The Struggle Over the Techno-political Configuration of the Internet and the Global Digital Order." *Policy & Internet* 14 (1): 13–27. <https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.296>
- Proserpio, Davide, Wendy Xu, and Georgios Zervas. 2018. "You Get What You Give: Theory and Evidence of Reciprocity in the Sharing Economy." *Quantitative Marketing and Economics* 16 (4): 371–407.
- Richards, Steven, Lorraine Brown, and Alessandra Dilettuso. 2019. "The Airbnb Phenomenon: The Resident's Perspective." *International Journal of Tourism Cities* 6 (1): 8–26. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-06-2019-0084>
- Storey, David. 2012. *Territories*. 2nd ed. Milton Park: Routledge.
- Thelen, Kathleen. 2018. "Regulating Uber: The Politics of the Platform Economy in Europe and the United States." *Perspectives on Politics* 16 (4): 938–953. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592718001081>
- Törnberg, Petter. 2023. "How Platforms Govern: Social Regulation in Digital Capitalism." *Big Data & Society* 10 (1): 205395172311538. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517231153808>
- Törnberg, Petter, and Letizia Chiappini. 2020. "Selling Black Places on Airbnb: Colonial Discourse and the Marketing of Black Communities in New York City." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 52 (3): 553–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X19886321>
- Uzunca, Bilgehan, and Andrea Borlenghi. 2019. "Regulation Strictness and Supply in the Platform Economy: The Case of Airbnb and Couchsurfing." *Industry and Innovation* 26 (8): 920–942. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13662716.2019.1633278>
- Uzunca, Bilgehan, J. P. Coen Rigtering, and Pinar Ozcan. 2018. "Sharing and Shaping: A Cross-Country Comparison of How Sharing Economy Firms Shape Their Institutional Environment to Gain Legitimacy." *Academy of Management Discoveries* 4 (3): 248–272. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2016.0153>
- Wachsmuth, David, and Alexander Weisler. 2018. "Airbnb and the Rent Gap: Gentrification through the Sharing Economy." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 50 (6): 1147–1170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X18778038>
- Weber, Max. 2004. *The Vocation Lectures*, edited by David Owen and Tracy B. Strong. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. Indianapolis Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Yeung, Karen. 2018. "Algorithmic Regulation: A Critical Interrogation." *Regulation & Governance* 12 (4): 505–23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12158>
- Yin, Robert K. 2007. *Case Study Research*. 3rd ed., 9th print. Vol. 5. Applied Social Research Methods Series. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Zeileis, Achim, Friedrich Leisch, Kurt Hornik, and Christian Kleiber. 2002. "Strucchange: An R Package for Testing for Structural Change in Linear Regression Models." *Journal of Statistical Software* 7 (2). <https://doi.org/10.18637/jss.v007.i02>

Part III

**Land rights and conflictual
spaces**



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

8 Notions of land—Figurations of conflict

Spatial forms of conflicts and the making of Kaloleni and Makongeni

Makau Kitata and Jochen Kibel

Introduction: A constant state of insecurity

Nairobi city dwellers appropriate popular culture to attribute meaning to their urban spaces. Through music, they express city experiences that are a window through which we may glimpse and evaluate the dynamics involved in belonging to the Nairobi urban framework. Shauri Moyo, by Daudi Kabaka (1968), considered one of the most popular and iconic songs from Nairobi, encapsulates the colonial and postcolonial fabric of the city's southeastern neighborhoods that were set up to segregate Kenya's black working force during colonial times (Otiso 2005). The song presents the overarching theme of uncertainty and insecurity within Nairobi housing conditions. Homes that do not fully provide shelter from the arbitrariness of owners strongly resonate with it. The conflicts of space and the social implications of insufficient home ownership and legislation are processed here in popular culture. The song's success may also be attributed to its depiction of a constant state of insecurity—a deeply rooted and widely shared experience of almost all Nairobi city dwellers.

Nilikuta bibi wakwanza Nairobi, aka nipenda na Mimi nikampenda nikamuuliza kama ana bwana akanijibu Sina hata mpenzi 2x	I met my first love in Nairobi She loved me and I loved her I asked her if she was married She answered she didn't even have a lover 2x
Nikaenda nayee mpaka kwake shauri moyo kwa nyumba za tumbako, nilipolala nikasikia hodi hodi 'fungueni ni Mimi mwenye nyumba' 2x	I went with her to her place In Shauri Moyo at the tobacco quarters About to sleep I heard a door-knock 'Open the door, it is the house owner' 2x

DOI: [10.4324/9781003542810-11](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003542810-11)

This chapter has been made available under a CC-BY 4.0 license.

Hivi akileta aibu sana sana kuapa Mimi na yule bwana tungepigana Mimi na yule bwana tuumizane wewe ungefanyaje? 2x	See, she brought a lot of shame To love me with that other fella Had we clashed with that man And hurt each other, what would you do? 2x
--	--

The song, regarded as a timeless classic of Nairobi folk music and popularly known as *zilizopendwa* (the beloved hits), captures both the literal and metaphorical tenuousness of house/home ownership in Nairobi through a popular folk-art form. Released in 1968, five years after Kenya's independence, it chronicles the experiences of a man in search of love and a secure sense of belonging in urban Nairobi. It figuratively references the open-endedness of spatial claims for ordinary folk in Nairobi during the 1960s by drawing on a love story between the narrator and a woman in the context of a disputed house/home. The couple's relationship serves as a metaphor for the uncertain search for security and shelter in the context of precarious housing conditions, which became prevalent in post-independent Nairobi (Mwau, Sverdlik, and Makau 2020, 16). In the second stanza, the man escorts his lover to Shauri Moyo. Originally, the British colonial government allocated this estate to Akamba veterans who served the British in the so-called Kings African Rifles as a reward for their participation in the Second World War. Alongside these settlements were the working quarters of British American Tobacco (BAT) employees, where the man's lover supposedly owned a home. However, when he was about to fall asleep, the unacknowledged real owner, a man, urged him to be let in. This stanza underlines the precariousness of spatial claims in Nairobi.

Occupiers of houses in Nairobi were allottees who only carried allocation cards and not title deeds. This unequal allocation of land and property ensured that they could not claim ownership of the property or use it as security for their development. Under the constant threat of being evicted, the inhabitants of these homes were merely caretakers at the mercy of the government. The government, like the said owner in the song, could come in at any time and dispossess the occupant of the housing unit without regard to the inconvenience and destabilization it would cause the occupier. The shame the man feels because the woman lied to him and the house owner resonates strongly in the third stanza. It indexes the possibility of violence in the dispute of the love triangle—in this case, house ownership. As in the final stanza, the singer recapitulates the first stanza. The cyclic rejoinder telescopes a recurrence of the weak spatial security that continues to characterize living in Nairobi into the 21st century.

From the song, we may discern how the history of housing in Nairobi contributes to the physical and cultural production of urban spaces, helping to explain why the urban fabric unfolded quite differently in the

neighboring estates of Kaloleni, one of the first planned garden cities in Nairobi from the 1940s (Smith 2019), and Makongeni, a barrack-like quarter established in the 1920s (Martin and Bezemer 2019) for railway workers who were subjected to the *kipande* system, which restricted their presence in the city both temporally and spatially (Karari 2018). The divergent morphologies and the tension between the “conceived” space of urbanist planners or colonial social engineering and the “lived” space (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, 38–39) that is eventually refigured by the creative interactions of the dwellers of Kaloleni and Makongeni estates tell a narrative of a continuing negotiation of the meaning of the Nairobi urban space in the context of conflict. These developments result from historical, legal, architectural, and social insecurities and conflicts that unfold spatially between governing authorities and the assigned home occupiers.

In these figurations of conflict, inhabitants utilize a range of spatial and social resources. In the context of persistent threats of eviction, the dynamic interactions between the denizens and their spatial environments, as well as the strategies they employ to navigate these challenges, give rise to novel spatial and social orders. In contrast to the assumption that sociospatial changes are either “transformations” or “decay,” which implies a shift from one phase to another, we argue with Löw and Knoblauch that the essence of the matter here is a “refiguration of spaces” that arises from a complex interplay between diverse variables that are spatially and socially productive (Knoblauch and Löw 2020). The spatial figurations can be traced to common underlying conflictual constellations. However, the unequal distribution of cultural and architectural resources among the residents of Kaloleni and Makongeni has resulted in distinctive urban spaces shaped by specific manifestations of conflict.

Notwithstanding the equally insecure legal status of ownership and scarcity of economic resources, the garden city of Kaloleni exhibits an entirely different architectural layout compared to the former bachelor quarters of Makongeni. Furthermore, the cultural aspects of belonging are appropriated as a resource to form a strong sense of community among the Kaloleni residents, which ultimately enables them to maintain their houses, whereas recurrent demolition takes place in Makongeni. This illustrates how the spatial “making of Nairobi” (Smith 2019) is intertwined with the formation of communities and vice versa. The success or failure of these processes is contingent due to the interplay of competing forces that ultimately give rise to a refiguration of both spaces and communities.

As we will show in the first section of this chapter, at the center of conflicts of space are multiple notions of nonbinding home allocations and unclear legal status that deny residents any form of certainty, security, and legitimacy. The use of allocation cards, as opposed to title deeds, or occupancy leases, has occasioned conflicts of space that have shaped the

Nairobi urban fabric from colonial times to the present. In the second section of the chapter, we lay out our theoretical understanding of space and conflict. In doing so, we agree with the theme of this volume that “social conflict is a phenomenon that fundamentally emerges from the spatiality of the social” (Knoblauch, Sommer, and Pfetsch in this volume). Therefore, conflicts between actors, as well as their social interactions that are informed by cultural patterns and prefigured by historical structures, unfold spatially. Additionally, with Georg Simmel, we understand conflicts as productive forms of sociality, as they relate to conflicting parties and at times help integrate communities. Combining these two strands, we argue that spatialization and socialization go hand in hand. Starting from the legal framework that creates *conflicts over space* (*Raumkonflikte*), we further look at conflicts as spatial figurations of conflating legal, economic, material, and cultural aspects from whose interplay *spaces emerge as a product of conflict* (*Konfliktträume*). At the core of these spatial conflicts are different sociospatial logics that structure the interactions between the dwellers and their spaces and eventually refigure the urban morphology of Nairobi, as the examples of iron sheet extensions (*mabati*) demonstrate.

Notions of land: Legal bottlenecks and historical conflicts of space

The problem of delayed and unresolved legislation and uncertain and overlapping land rights is crucial to understanding conflicts of space in Nairobi, Kenya. Land conflicts in Kenya need to be traced to large-scale land dispossession by the British colonial power. For instance, the steal of fertile land in Kenya, which then became the “white” highlands in central Kenya, for instance, needs to be considered as a crucial “Modus Operandi of Oppressing” whose results have long-lasting effects, as “colonial land injustices nurtured a postcolonial land crisis and violence” (Karari 2018, 2). The eviction of millions from their land was used as a means of detention and control by the colonizers during their fight against the anticolonial Mau Mau liberation movement. Additionally, the multitude of colonial land policies, which were inherently incompatible with traditional forms of livelihood, has resulted in an inherited lack of legal and constitutional clarity within the postcolonial era.

In the colonial era, land rights acts like the Indian Transfer of Property Act (ITPA) from 1882 were transposed from other parts of the British Empire, regardless of whether these legal frames would fit cultural customs or satisfy the requirements of the local population. ITPA was used as a guideline for land administration in rural and urban areas of Kenya and later became the Transfer of Property Act (Republic of Kenya 1962). This brought conflicts of interpretation and resulted in conflicts due to the challenges of specification where land would have overlapping delineation

and uses. For example, agricultural land could also be classified as coastal land. Acts of government faced the challenge of obtaining control and consensus, resulting in some lands having their specific legislation. This inaugurated a historical vagueness about land administration. Upon independence, settler land was registered and recognized under the ITPA, and the postcolonial regime did not scrap that controversial guide and was unwilling or unable to do so in the transition. Such historical land injustices were addressed by the Ministry of Land in 2009.

Historical land injustices are grievances which stretch back to colonial land administration practices and laws that resulted in mass disinheritance of communities of their land, and which grievances have not been sufficiently resolved to date. Sources of these grievances include land adjudication and registration laws and processes, and treaties and agreements between local communities and the British. The grievances remain unresolved because successive post independence Governments have failed to address them in a holistic manner.

(Republic of Kenya 2009, 42)

A lack of historical clarity about land ownership, insufficient constitutional interventions, and different notions of land are core to conflicts about space in Kenya. In its attempt to resolve this, the Kenyan Ministry of Lands created a new Land Policy that describes the problem and the resulting need for legal adjustment as follows:

Kenya has not had a single and clearly defined National Land Policy since independence. This, together with the existence of many land laws, some of which are incompatible, has resulted in a complex land management and administration system. The land question has manifested itself in many ways such as fragmentation, breakdown in land administration, disparities in land ownership and poverty. This has resulted in environmental, social, economic and political problems including deterioration in land quality, squatting and landlessness, disinheritance of some groups and individuals, urban squalor, underutilization and abandonment of agricultural land, tenure *insecurity and conflict*.

(Republic of Kenya 2009, ix, own emphasis)

According to former Minister for Lands James Orengo, the above-quoted paper was considered to “form the foundation upon which the administrative and legislative framework will be built.” It was equally seen as an important step “in tackling [landownership that is], arguably, the most emotive and culturally sensitive issue in Kenya” (Republic of

Kenya 2009, vii). Due to its outstanding economic and cultural significance (Owuor 2006), fundamental issues in the policy should be anchored in the Constitution. For these reasons, land has been treated as a constitutional issue according to the Constitution of Kenya 2010, which sought to address these conflicts as a way of staving off historical disputes on land rights. However, protracted and unclear legal impediments still control the relationship between the need for a secure home and an enabling legislative environment. Also, the current Constitution does not recognize the uniqueness of the land and lumps it with other categories of property, making it difficult to resolve historical injustices.

The Land Act of 2012 (Republic of Kenya 2012), the Community Land Act of 2016 (Republic of Kenya 2016), and the implementation of the National Land Commission (NLC) were established to resolve land disputes and tenure insecurity. It was a plea to make it a constitutional matter due to its outstanding cultural, economic, and livelihood significance. The NLC was explicitly established to overcome the aforementioned historical land injustices stemming from colonial and postcolonial times. The issue now became having a common registry. However, this effort was also disputed since some individuals would claim to have settled somewhere earlier than others. Others would claim to own the land through a Government Land Act title (GLA) (Republic of Kenya 1984), while others would produce a Registered Land Act (Republic of Kenya 1989) title. The 2010 Constitution and the 2012 Land Acts were enacted to resolve these conflicts of multiple registries of land. Although the new land laws of 2012 repealed, for instance, the ITPA and the GLA, a single registration system and land registry are still not implemented (Doshi 2012). Regimes and statutes controlling land remain conflicting and overlapping. For example, there is a statute that governs agricultural land and another that governs coastal land. However, there is agricultural land on the coast. The question then arises: With which statute do you legislate the land? This illustrates a haphazard land legislative system and the multiple and often overlapping legal notions of land.

From the foregoing, it turns out that land conflicts have been exacerbated by the absence of a singular registry and cohesive policy for land management. This situation has resulted in government acts, allocations, and systems for demarcating and adjudicating land access that are ineffective. Consequently, multiple individuals from different registries hold ownership claims to the same land, intensifying the ownership problem while attempting to resolve it. The 2010 Constitution of Kenya introduced three different notions of land: private land, national land, and community land. The fact that customary laws and land claimed by communities were formalized and elevated to the status of a legal category was a novelty. For the first time in Kenyan history, the Community Land Act was enacted

and defined communities as individuals with a genuine common interest. This definition is a source of vagueness. Communities may now include individuals with a shared socioeconomic situation, like slum dwellers, people with shared cultural affiliations, for example, ethnic communities, and denizens that are bound by a common history of dwelling together. As long as they claim to be a community, they can claim land ownership. But there's still very limited litigation to define these terms. Land disputes remain unresolved since there is no Supreme Court judgment defining exactly what a community is. In the absence of a clear meaning for the three variables, the Constitution has institutionalized different notions of land that are contested and therefore open to conflict. This is illustrated by the words of Antony Wasuna, a Nairobi lawyer:

Now the Community Land Act that was enacted created such a broad definition. Maybe in a good way, because it wants to include more people. But it now says that it is people, for example, who are bound by culture. For example, if there's an ethnic cultural presumption that we are a clan, or we are Luos living in an area kind or such kind of thing. But it also says that that culture need not be ethnic.

This illustrates the vagueness and open-endedness of the term “community,” as found in the Constitution. As a taxonomic category, it accommodates people bound by culture, shared interests, or socioeconomic circumstances. But it also states that a community needs not be ethnic. The elevation of community land as a legally codified entity creates new friction and conflicts, as multiple individual and collective actors advocate for their land claims. In a 2022 revised version of the Community Land Act from 2016, it says that customary and community land rights now are “conferred by orders derived from African customary law, customs or practices provide that such rights are not inconsistent with the Constitution or any written law” (Republic of Kenya 2016, 6). Consequently, the formalization of different and plural understandings of property sometimes overlaps with different legal interpretations. The subject of land rights, therefore, remains protracted. The introduction of legal entities and legislation to resolve conflicts of space paradoxically leads to new conflicts. It seems credible to assume that failure of the constitutional provisions, the integrity of litigation, and enforcing claims of community land remains out of reach for the vast majority of city dwellers around Shauri Moyo and the other estates in Nairobi's (Kohrs, Hering, and Shadrack in this volume). What remains is the resultant and well-known uncertainty and insecurity in home spaces in Nairobi depicted in Kabaka's song.

Spatial figurations of conflict: The production of space and community

Although the category of “community land” has been institutionalized to claim ownership for communities, land remains out of reach for the majority of communities in Nairobi. For instance, only 8% of Nairobi’s total households own their houses, making the city predominantly rely on rental units with an immense shortfall in affordable housing (Mwau, Sverdlik, and Makau 2020, 38). The cases discussed in this paper show that the way communities organize and claim space in their neighborhoods can lead to appropriation and redesigning of urban spaces despite full ownership. How these spaces are claimed and produced stems from what we call *spatial figurations of conflict*.

In addition to the legal and structural elements that give rise to conflicts rooted in historical injustices, it is essential to consider the influence of other factors on the nature of these conflicts. It is beyond a doubt that economic power imbalances and conflicts over land ownership play a pivotal role in the production of urban spaces. Adopting Norbert Elias’ concept of figuration, we recognize the multifaceted nature of conflicts, which are shaped by interdependent variables such as architectural design, cultural expectations, and even subjective self-understanding of the denizens (Elias [1969] 1983, 41–65). In this way, the social figurations correspond and interdepend with the material aspects of space and architecture. The term *spatial figurations of conflict* allows for this consideration of a multitude of factors, including tangible, economic, cultural, and symbolic elements.

Elias’ concept of figuration also seems applicable to analyzing the interactions and interdependencies between the communities and their spaces, as it is strongly rooted in a historical perspective. Elias was particularly interested in tracing the historical trajectories of the social phenomena he scrutinized. The urban form of the city is still significantly influenced by the segregationist policies initiated by the British colonial authorities (Mwau, Sverdlik, and Makau 2020, 38). As racial segregation was partially replaced by socioeconomic segregation, those areas that were “initially intended for European residents were subsequently transformed into estates for modern Nairobi’s elite” (Mwau, Sverdlik, and Makau 2020, 38).

The concept of figurations highlights the historical dimension of the sociospatial arrangement; however, it must be said that historical aspects do structure the social but never determine it, as Elias’ concept is inherently a processual one. Central to the figuration is an *ever-changing interplay* between all of the aforementioned aspects that constantly (re)figure the social in an endless chain of interdependencies. It can thus be defined as a force

field created by the conflicting interdependencies between a multitude of socially relevant aspects, thereby establishing a link to the dimension of conflict. As Georg Simmel observed, conflicts are forms of socialization and thus can have both constructive and destructive effects. When viewed as a form of social interaction, this allows us to consider how communities emerge from conflicts. Simmel's analysis of the Indian caste system demonstrates that the constitution of these categories depends on their conflictual "reciprocal repulsion" (Simmel 1904, 492).

Enmities not merely prevent gradual disappearance of the boundaries within the society – and for this reason these enmities may be consciously promoted, as guarantee of the existing social constitution – but more than this, the enmities are directly productive sociologically.

(Simmel 1904, 492)

To consider conflict "without reference to its consequences [as] a form of sociality" (Simmel 1904, 490) is a helpful tool here because the conflictual figurations scrutinized in this study lead to partial integration of the communities in the two Nairobi estates. To varying degrees, this adheres to the notion of figuration because the cultural resources of a common history and ethnic background are mobilized to prevail in the conflict but also to produce differences between established and outsiders in the estates (cf. Elias and Scotson 1994). The concept of Simmel is particularly pertinent in this context, as it suggests that conflict gives rise to new social orders and communities, characterized by "reciprocally repulsing" identities.

The theoretical concept of the refiguration of spaces, as introduced by Martina Löw and Hubert Knoblauch, is of particular importance in this context. This concept posits that conflicts assume a spatial form and, in turn, shape societies in a spatial manner. It is crucial to emphasize that conflict is not only a conduit for socialization, but it is also a phenomenon that is inherently spatial. The term refiguration signifies not only a novel major societal figuration but also draws attention to the conflicts and tensions that exist *between* different figurations. It is only at this juncture that refiguration emerges (Knoblauch and Löw 2020, 276). Figuration emphasizes the historical and processual dimension of conflict, whereas Simmel's understanding of conflict allows us to consider conflicts as socially productive. Ultimately, the refiguration of spaces unites both concepts under the umbrella of a spatial perspective. Consequently, we regard the conflictual *spatial* figurations in Makongeni and Kaloleni as both spatially and socially productive forces that follow historical trajectories but reciprocally produce urban spaces and communities, particularly by mobilizing architectural and cultural resources.

Indeed, these conflict constellations, with their architectural forms as well as distinct senses of belonging, have produced varying urban spaces in Kaloleni and Makongeni. The battles and struggles for urban spaces have produced two spatial figurations of conflict, leading to an urban landscape that then again shapes the continuing conflict. As we can see from aerial photography, the spatial structure of the two estates has been developing in rather different ways.

Over the course of nearly two decades (2006–2023), residents of Kaloleni have employed the construction of provisional metal extensions, colloquially termed “mabati,” as a means of consolidating their neighborhood. In contrast, attempts in Makongeni have been unsuccessful, with the mabati structures repeatedly demolished due to the prevalence of violence and the exposure of extensions between the barrack-like architecture. The densification of the backyards in Kaloleni, however, demonstrates that the two figurations of conflict result in markedly different spatial productions. These developments serve as indicators of historical, legal, architectural, and social conflicts that manifest spatially between governing authorities and designated home occupiers. Eventually, these struggles give rise to the iterative refiguration of spaces.

The contrasting architectural styles and the tension between planned spaces conceived by urbanist and colonial authorities and the lived space (Lefebvre [1974] 1991) appropriated and refigured through the everyday interactions of the Kaloleni and Makongeni dwellers demonstrate the ongoing negotiation of the meaning of Nairobi urban space in the context of conflict. Departing from the aerial photos and the view from afar, in the following sections, we will zoom in to scrutinize how the spatial figurations of conflict unfold on the ground. We do so by departing from our ethnographic field notes at the beginning of each section.

Makongeni: Landscapes of demolitions

As we drive into Makongeni, there is an office to the right of the gate. This is the Makongeni pensioners’ office, which runs the estate. We drive in to meet rows of conjoined bungalows separated by spaces that have ruins of house floors (demolished mabatis). Further down the road, we meet three women who run different kiosks selling the same things (potatoes, cabbages, sukumawiki, and different fruits). We buy avocados from them and start a conversation. Kwendo, our local guide, asks them about the whereabouts of the elders who represent the residents. We are told they are not around, but we can talk to the young men at the “Senate.” When we arrive at the so-called Senate, we find young men seated in a structure with the sign “Senate” written on the wall. The Senate is a “base” where male elders and youths meet and talk. We sit down and ask for sodas and water. The youth are freely

chewing at muguka, a version of the stimulant khat enjoyed by youths in Nairobi. In this case, as in others in Nairobi, members are bonded by the consumption of khat and alcohol. This bond, they say, was strengthened during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Makongeni, it led to the formation of the Senate, which facilitated the sharing of business and employment opportunities and created a sense of belonging among the inhabitants of the estate.

Architecture of control

According to George Owino, who was born and raised in Makongeni, the name of the estate comes from “makonge,” the Swahili word for sisal—the estate was originally a sisal farm that stretched to Ruai roughly 20 km further to the east. The estate was built by the East African Railways starting in the 1920s to house the many strong people needed as manual laborers. The one-room dwellings were designed as hostels for the working African man, who was only allowed to stay temporarily without his family in the city (Harris and Hay 2007). The construction of basic accommodation in the eastern part of the city for black workers of the Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) was also an attempt to shape the subjectivity of wage laborers through the housing typology of the so-called “landhies.” This was initially done by limiting their tenure to a temporary period and by excluding their wives and families (Martin and Bezemer 2019). In neighborhoods such as Kariakor, Landie Mawe, Muthurwa, and Makongeni in the east of the city, these former barracks for railway workers are a testament to the colonial endeavor to shape subjectivity through the imposition of a rigid spatial figuration. The architectural design of Makongeni was intentionally structured to exert control over the inhabitants and to shape their identity as colonial subjects through the spaces in which they had to live. This building typology was gradually superseded by the concept of Garden City from the late 1920s onward (Martin and Bezemer 2019, 10), as in the Kaloleni estate bordering Makongeni to the west (see Figure 8.1). The change in housing typologies followed the shift in colonial policies that eventually would allow the permanent presence of Africans in the city from 1939 onward (Figure 8.2) (Harris and Hay 2007, 195).

Fraudulent deals: Ownership and conflict

Makongeni Estate currently belongs to the Kenya Railways Staff Retirement Benefits Scheme. Before this, the railway workers’ pensions were managed by the British government, while Kenya Railways managed the salaries. Later, it was run by the Railways Pensions Fund scheme. As the pension scheme’s funds decreased, Kenya Railways was privatized. As a consequence, retirement and accommodation issues are now handled by



Figure 8.1 Kaloleni and Makogeni in 2006 and 2023. Densified backyards in Kaloleni, whereas in Makogeni brighter spots between the houses witness the demolition of iron sheet extensions.

Source: Christopher Heidecke based on Google Earth [2006, Maxar Technologies]/[2023, Airbus].

the Kenya Railway Staff Retirement Benefits Scheme. The Managing Director of Kenya Railways, alongside the Chief Executive Officer of the retirement scheme, decided to give pensioners houses instead of pensions. They were free to rent out the houses as an additional source of income. Railway workers who still lived in those houses had the rents initially deducted from their salaries. Now their deductions have been increased to fund the pension scheme.

The allocation of houses at Makogeni Estate is done at the Retirement Benefits Scheme’s Estate Assistants office, situated at the entrance to the estate. Because of high demand, it’s challenging to be allocated a house. Fraudulent deals occur to the unsuspecting people who are interested in living in Makogeni as tenants. For example, these people would be deceived into getting houses, only to be rented out in communal washrooms. The current housing situation prevails due to rumors and splinter groups



Figure 8.2 Street in Makongeni. Architecture of control to initially host bachelor workers in barrack-like compounds.

Source: Jochen Kibel.

formed among Makongeni residents amid the government's alleged relocation of residents to build business premises and high-rise houses. Residents were cautious because of a similar event that occurred in Ngara, which put those residents at a disadvantage.

Even with all those efforts, retired Railways workers are still adversely affected, as many are yet to receive their pensions—some are in arrears of 6–9 months. There is an ongoing court case with little to no progress. In Makongeni, retirees live in houses that generate rent to fund their pensions. Additionally, the lack of timely payment of rent by the tenants who stopped paying rent after the court case began makes the situation more protracted. The limited options for those seeking to become owners of houses in the area, coupled with the acute shortage of affordable housing, particularly in the southeast of Nairobi, have resulted in the (temporary) occupation of space in Makongeni. By constructing extensions between houses in the vast open spaces between them, residents effectively claimed and transformed the colonial architectural structures of discipline and control.

Intensified hostility: Demolition of house extensions

In Makongeni, these extensions were present from 2007 to 2016. They were built by the children of the staff living in the railway houses. Extensions emerged in Makongeni as a growing trend within neighborhoods in

the larger Eastlands area to accommodate the young men as they transitioned into adulthood, in line with the local communities' customs. After initiation rites, young men are not supposed to sleep in the same house as their parents.

Kenya Railways, however, felt that their tenants should not be landlords by constructing these extensions. It can be argued that the transitional character of the mabati (iron sheet) structure is a consequence of a combination of factors, including cultural and economic constraints, as well as a form of protest and a precautionary measure taken by residents occupying land that lacks legal security. These factors can be seen as symptoms of varying degrees of spatial uncertainty and insecurity. The first instance of the demolition of extensions in Makongeni was in 2016. As the extensions were in open spaces, the government could easily demolish them. This was to pave the way for the construction of high-rise residences that would serve as a protective buffer along the railway line. Financing for the construction of these houses was provided by the World Bank. Kenya Railways made the plans without consulting the staff, who should be the direct beneficiaries.

Nevertheless, extensions continued to come up, facilitated by the underhand dealings of the changing management. These extensions also put pressure on existing amenities, e.g., illegal tapping of electricity. Eventually, these new extensions were demolished due to insecurity—increased incidences of robbery because though the main houses were occupied by Railways staff and their families, the extensions were leased out to outsiders, some of them of questionable character. The demolition of the Mabati extensions in Makongeni represents a turning point in the increasingly violent conflict that has characterized the area. The conflict resulted in an intensification of hostilities. As the gravel of the demolished Mabati structures in the image demonstrates, only some concrete floors survived the demolition. The conflicting interests of the various powerful actors involved could not maintain the spatial materialization that had been formed through social interaction and cultural conventions. Spatial claims that had not been taken into consideration in the initial architectural design could not be sustained here (Figure 8.3).

Production of urban landscapes as a destructive figuration

As our introductory ethnographic note underlines, there is a sense of community in Makongeni. However, the socialization and the constitution of the community mirror the overall hostile and at times violent figuration of conflict that produces the urban fabric. Within the Makongeni estate, “Senate,” a community self-help group, was formed in



Figure 8.3 Ruins of demolished extensions in Makongeni. Concrete floor indicates former inhabitants' claims for space.

Source: Jochen Kibel.

2011. This group, composed mainly of the sons of the complaining retirees, claims to provide education and mentorship, community policing, and meeting spaces for free to the residents of Makongeni. In January 2023, the Senate formed Deemanga (meaning “stone” in Sheng, which is a slang spoken in Nairobi combining mainly Swahili (Sh) and English (eng)), a limited company that is involved in income-generating activities whose proceeds go toward corporate social responsibility activities.

The name Deemanga indexes the potential for violence, as it is also the name Nairobi youth use to refer to the stones thrown at police during demonstrations. Deemanga is the name of the missiles used to stone thieves by the public exercising mob justice. In the past, residents used to meet at the Makongeni Social Hall—initially used for welfare-related activities. The hall called “Dallas” was previously used for boxing, but it has been destroyed. It is a monument of violence for space in Makongeni. As one member of the Senate, Angaya Kagali, reported, “An individual wanted to take over the hall for private use. Residents protested and chaos ensued. This led to the destruction of the hall. Its roof is burned and only a shell remains. Residents have improvised their senate as a substitute for the Social hall.”

The spatial figuration of conflict in Makongeni is shaped by factors similar to those in the rest of Nairobi’s southeast, including ambiguous

property rights and ownership, inadequate governance, and physical insecurity. Furthermore, the open architectural design of former railway workers' barracks in Makongeni does not protect them from arbitrary decision-making by local authorities. Exposed to the discretion of those in a position to remove them, the community in Makongeni constitutes itself in "reciprocal repulsion" (Simmel 1904, 492), whereas the vicious circle of destruction and violence is maintained.

Kaloleni: Hidden ownership

On our way to Kaloleni, we pass the market stalls along Jogoo Road in Nairobi's southeast. Across the road are Shauri Moyo and the so-called Burma Market. Butchers selling freshly slaughtered meat; craftsmen producing and selling ironware (bowls, pots, and wheelbarrows) here, and tailors and shoemakers offering their services. Exposed to the "hot sun," this kind of work is described as "jua kali" signifying more broadly the tough conditions of making a living here. On the streets are matatus, Bodaboda motorbike taxis, and numerous handcarts on which water canisters (mitungi) are stacked on top of each other. The densely packed stalls and treeless streets make it difficult to move forward. Everyone here seems to be doing their part in the hustle and bustle, and at the same time is kept moving by the flow of people, goods, and traffic. When we arrive in Kaloleni, the picture changes. Along the tree-lined street on which we enter the neighborhood, children play. In front of the houses, residents sit under the shade of the trees, chatting and calmly observing the leisurely goings-on in the neighborhood. When we see a group of men sitting in a semicircle in the shade of the trees at an intersection in front of a restaurant, we are asked who we are looking for and are kindly offered help. After mentioning that we are interested in the old houses in Nairobi's southwest, it turns out that all men live and grew up here. Full of pride and enthusiasm, the men tell the history of this place.

Divide and rule: Architecture of attempted pacification

The Kaloleni estate, which is situated in direct proximity to Makongeni, was planned as the first garden city and given to fighters of the Kings African Rifle Corps (KAR), who fought in WWII (Smith 2019). Before getting housed in Kaloleni, the decommissioned African soldiers were quartered in the present-day Burma market for a year as construction work progressed. Yet, the former fighters have never received proper title deeds. Ownership is administered by a successor institution of British colonial power, the British Council on War Memorial. Civilian initiatives seem to be forming to change this. This is a manifest conflict about rights

and spaces, better understood as the colonial continuities of urban home-making in Nairobi.

Kaloleni is predominantly occupied by members of the Luo and Luhya communities. These communities started occupying this place that was built by Italian prisoners of war between 1945 and 1948. The houses were then allocated to veterans of the so-called Kings African Rifles (Keeton 2023) who had assisted the British colonial government in securing India from the Japanese onslaught in Burma. The Burma market derives its name from this history, as the veterans were first placed there after returning from Asia. This episode shows how deeply the urban spaces of Nairobi are inflicted with the global entanglements of colonial history. The Luos and Luhya were allocated Kaloleni; the Akamba veterans, Shauri Moyo; the Kalenjin, Pumwani; and the Nubians, Kibera. This was a clear case of divide and rule, based on ethnic profiling.

Racial inequality in house allocation: Ownership and hidden architecture

Ownership of the houses became a subject of conflict. First, regarding what compensation for participating in the war meant. According to Kwendo, our local guide, “The King’s African Rifles didn’t know their white WWII veteran colleagues were given farms in Laikipia and the white highlands. The houses allocated to African WWII veterans were not enough for the retired soldiers. It meant they were never compensated,” said Kwendo, a son of one of the African veterans. It is of greater significance to note that the allocation of the houses in question did not encompass any form of legally secured ownership status. Cards first issued by the colonial government were just cards with numbers indicating the position of the house and not ownership documents. Since 1947, the veterans were still paying debts, initially to the colonial government and later to the County Government of Nairobi, for what was meant to eventually become their property due to a rent-to-own promise. Eventually, after 1963, the government of Kenya took over and assumed ownership.

The colonial allocation arrangement was not altered, but the allotted members became mere caretakers. However, unofficially, the residents of Kaloleni perceived these houses as their property. They later started building extensions in the backyards to accommodate young men who were outgrowing the space in the small houses. Later, when the veterans got families, a conflict based on insufficient space to house a growing family set in. Kaloleni residents were allowed only to have two extensions to their allocated houses to cater to their families and an African culture that demands that young adult boys should not spend their nights in their parent’s houses. However, they went beyond the stipulated two semi-permanent extensions and densified their backyards with as

many as six extra structures for rental income (Makachia 2011, 96) and as a protest.

Unlike in Makongeni, mabatis have increased in number in Kaloleni in recent years. What started from the initial two extensions and increased through successful claims of space remains permanent in Kaloleni, this time hidden behind the compounds of the legally recognized structures (see Figure 8.1). The relevance of these housing typologies has been demonstrated in multiple estates in Nairobi (Makachia 2011). The house design in Kaloleni was quite different from the previous Kenya Railway Ladhie architecture, which designed houses as bachelor quarters for workers. In Shauri Moyo and Kaloleni, new Garden City typologies emerged (Martin and Bezemer 2019). These houses would group around backyards that were much easier to claim property within the hidden structures. The strong sense of belonging and ownership among Kaloleni dwellers resulted in the successful formalization of the cultural aspects of housing that were not considered by the colonial architecture (Figure 8.4).



Figure 8.4 Densified backyard and formerly open shared space (behind the arc) in Kaloleni. The makeshift units are rented out by the quasi-owners.

Source: Makau Kitata.

Resistance: Collective action and appropriating space

Different forms of resistance have emerged from this precarious home ownership scenario. These range from withdrawal of rent payment, unlicensed home extensions, and activities of collective actors. The resulting spatial conflicts have initiated a refiguration of space in which subjects empower themselves in both Kaloleni and Makongeni and continue to shape the way residents interact with space and define themselves. It is an example of resistance and self-esteem against the authorities. Kenya's Ministry of Planning, in partnership with the World Bank, set out to erect high-rise buildings in Kaloleni in 2018. Residents were invited to sign and give consent for the destruction of their homes. The government enticed residents with lunch tokens to lure them into surrendering their homes. The residents took the tokens. However, they refused to sign release documents. As Kwendo proudly states, "They gave us 1000 shillings per person to lure the residents but they refused. The government did this for 5 days. The residents took the lunch money but refused to sign the consent with the Kenya Ministry of Planning, and the World Bank."

Kaloleni residents were afraid of being duped into losing their homes to private developers and well-connected politicians. As Kwendo put it, "In Ngara estate, resident homeowners were given 6000 shillings to vacate their homes with a promise that they would be the first to be allocated the new houses. After going away for two years, they were never recalled to occupy the newly constructed houses." It is important to state that the constant threat of being evicted by urban planning fantasies and the country's new development blueprint Kenya Vision 2030 ([Republic of Kenya 2007](#)), which would mean a "radical redevelopment of the whole neighborhood," is also what integrates the community of Kaloleni. A strong sense of belonging and reluctance eventually leads to the creation of this part of the city ([Smith 2019](#), 55).

Another example of how resistance as a form of conflict can be spatially productive is evidenced by the refusal of the inhabitants to pay rent. The owners of the shops in Kaloleni don't pay rent to the government. Instead, they pay yearly land rates. Other residents of Kaloleni stopped paying rent 10 years ago. Rather, they would be charged service charges for road maintenance, garbage collection, and water. The government ceased supplying water in 1978, leaving Kaloleni dependent on water vendors. As a result, water containers (*mitungi*) have become a common sight in public spaces, reflecting the incomplete water infrastructure, particularly in Nairobi's historically underserved eastern neighborhoods ([Kasper and Schramm 2023](#)). This kind of boycott and a choice to source services privately make the residents of Kaloleni feel like the true owners of the estate. However, having taken this rebellious stance, they did not publicize their



Figure 8.5 Water containers (mitungi) on a handcart in Kaloleni. A crucial part of the water infrastructure, especially in the historically deprived neighborhoods in Nairobi's east.

Source: Jochen Kibel.

agenda. They would like the government to go to court so that they can prove their case (Figure 8.5).

Collective actors: Organizing self-help

Collective actors have emerged to claim land rights in Nairobi. However, these actors have only limited means of enforcing the law in their favor. They are driven by the constitutional recognition of community land in their activism. Nairobi residents are involved in efforts to claim the right to the city. The sons of the original owners of Kaloleni formed a collective called the Junta. Their vision as Kaloleni residents is to act as protection outfits. Its objective is to protect the welfare and well-being of Kaloleni residents. They are a council of elders who believe they are “tough.” As Kwendo describes, “We get inspiration from people the West considers dictators. We are inspired by Patrice Lumumba, Che Guevara, Nyerere, Mandela, Castro, and Barack Obama—but not Jomo Kenyatta. We consider such a leader as a sellout. To us, the last revolutionary was John Pombe Magufuli. We believe he was poisoned by someone in his inner circle (for defying the West) and his fate sealed in Nairobi.”

By mobilizing architectural resources as well as a strong sense of belonging grounded in the heroic commemoration of their shared history,

Kaloleni dwellers maintained their houses. Strengthening their community makes them a strong opponent against the threat of legal insecurity and unclear notions of ownership. By succeeding in acting as quasi-owners, they become a factor of resistance within the spatial figuration of conflict.

Conclusion: Uncertain futures

Different notions of land, home ownership, and legal insecurities refigure conflicts of space in Nairobi. Since colonial times, unclear property rights and overlapping land claims have been contested within Nairobi. These different notions of land ownership and the uncertainty that comes with it shape the urban fabric of the city, as well as the overall sentiment of insecurity that Daudi Kabaka sang about. This contestation has persisted to shape and influence the way citizens interact with the spaces they occupy in the city. Furthermore, in this paper, we saw figurations of conflict as forms of socialization that are not only structured by spaces but also spatially productive. Through spatial figurations of conflict, we understand conflictual constellations in which spatial, legal, economic, architectural, social, and cultural resources are entangled and mutually refigure each other. In Nairobi, they unfold spatially between governing authorities and assigned home occupiers.

Nevertheless, as has been demonstrated, the inhabitants of Kaloleni and Makongeni have adapted these structures to suit their own needs. Despite persistent insecurity, which is shaped by legal uncertainties and historical injustices, residents of these estates strive to assert their presence in the city. Their interactions with the built environment are characterized by a conflictual and resistant stance. Although the legal and economic circumstances in Kaloleni and Makongeni are equally scarce and opaque, the figurations of conflict in these two Nairobi estates are producing urban spaces in different ways. Whereas in Makongeni, the spatial figuration of conflict turns violent and leads to the repeated demolition of self-created extensions, in Kaloleni, dwellers have succeeded in maintaining their extensions, leading to the densification of the place. Kaloleni dwellers manage to mobilize their heritage and the commemoration of a heroic past to create a strong sense of community. Whereas the conflict in Makongeni leads to a constant struggle between different groups and the constant threat of demolition, Kaloleni dwellers have managed to integrate a strong sense of community under the equally looming threat of being evicted. The spatial layout of the architecture, with small bungalows and a compound hidden behind the house, gives the conflict about land in Kaloleni another spatial dynamic.

On the horizon loom new large-scale urban planning projects that are completely detached from the economic realities and social relations that

make urban Nairobi. According to Kwendo, Kaloleni residents envision a modern high-rise estate with a bridge over Jogoo Road, leading to a super mall in Burma. This is an aspiration of the residents who seek to inhabit a modern-day Kaloleni, with its reliance on the economies afforded by the road and market infrastructure. All estates in Nairobi's Southeast are equally threatened by a new masterplan launched by the Nairobi City County Government in 2019 that would erase any forms of customary construction efforts in favor of capital-intensive market-driven neighborhoods. Like colonial architecture, urban planning on a large scale does not pay any attention to the complex web of interdependencies and social interactions between the inhabitants and their spaces that have evolved into the spatially productive conflict figurations that form urban Nairobi. In addition, these notions of belonging in a contested city space have produced selfhood and urban spaces that were never conceived through conventional urban planning. It therefore remains questionable whether the 21st-century vision of the city will keep its promises to improve the living conditions of those who have lived here and produced the city in its unique spatiality.

The unending conflicts retrace the sentiments of the persona in the song *Shauri Moyo* (Kabaka 1968). Though the ambitious city dweller aspires to find a space to actualize his urban and human identity, the governing structure of home ownership and resultant circumstances continually frustrate this desire, with potential conflicts with people's existence in the Nairobi urban space (Figure 8.6).

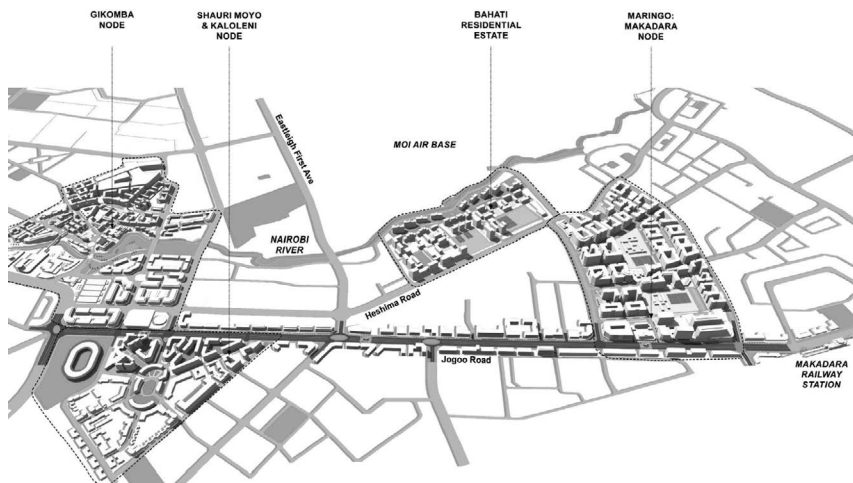


Figure 8.6 Eastlands Urban Renewal Project by the Nairobi City County Government. Source: Nairobi City County Government 2019, 287.

Acknowledgments

This publication was jointly supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG) project number 290045248—SFB 1265 “Re-Figuration of Spaces” and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) via the “Global Center of Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability” (GCSMUS). We are grateful to Kate Owino, the project’s research assistant; Zacchaeus Kwendo, Chairman of the Kaloleni Residents Welfare Association; Antony Wasuna, an advocate of the High Court of Kenya; and Angaya Kagali and George Owino, members of Makongeni “Senate,” who generously shared their time and insights.

References

- Doshi, Mona. 2012. *The Land Laws of Kenya: A Summary of the Changes*. Nairobi: Anjarwalla and Khanna. Accessed September 03, 2024. <https://estates.uonbi.ac.ke/sites/default/files/centraladmin/estates/Summary-of-the-Land-Laws-Anjarwalla-Khanna-October-2012.pdf.pdf>
- Elias, Norbert. (1969) 1983. *The Court Society*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Elias, Norbert, and John L. Scotson. 1994. *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Inquiry into Community Problems*. Theory, Culture and Society. London: Sage.
- Harris, Richard, and Alison Hay. 2007. “New Plans for Housing in Urban Kenya, 1939–63.” *Planning Perspectives* 22 (2): 195–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02665430701213580>.
- Kabaka, Daudi. 1968. “Shauri Moyo: African Twist.” Helule Album.
- Karari, Peter. 2018. “Modus Operandi of Oppressing the ‘Savages’: The Kenyan British Colonial Experience.” *Peace and Conflict Studies* 25 (1): 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.46743/1082-7307/2018.1436>
- Kasper, Moritz, and Sophie Schramm. 2023. “Storage City: Water Tanks, Jerry Cans, and Batteries as Infrastructure in Nairobi.” *Urban Studies* 60 (12): 2400–2417.
- Keeton, Rachel. 2023. *Kaloleni: A Kenyan Garden City*. Rotterdam: International New Town Institute. Accessed September 03, 2024. <http://web.archive.org/web/20230924032259/https://www.newtowninstitute.org/spip.php?article1005>
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2020. “The Re-Figuration of Spaces and Refigured Modernity – Concept and Diagnosis.” *Historical Social Research* 45 (2): 263–292. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.2.263-292>
- Lefebvre, Henri. (1974) 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Makachia, Peter. 2011. “The Influence of the Tenure System to the Physical Environments in Nairobi’s Human Settlements.” *Les Cahiers d’Afrique De l’Est*, 44, 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.4000/estafrica.530>
- Martin, Aurora Marijke, and Pauline M. Bezemer. 2019. “The Concept and Planning of Public Native Housing Estates in Nairobi/Kenya, 1918–1948.” *Planning Perspectives* 35 (4): 609–634. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2019.1602785>
- Mwau, Baraka, Alice Sverdlik, and Jack Makau. 2020. *Urban Transformation and the Politics of Shelter: Understanding Nairobi’s Housing Markets*. London: International Institute for Environment and Development.

- Nairobi City County Government. 2019. *Nairobi Metropolitan Services Improvement Project EASTLANDS URBAN RENEWAL PLAN: Eastlands Urban Renewal Project*. Accessed September 6, 2024. <https://www.housingandurban.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/NaMSIP-EASTLANDS-URBAN-RENEWAL-PLAN-1.pdf>
- Otiso, Kefa M. 2005. "Colonial Urbanization and Urban Management in Kenya." In *African Urban Spaces in Historical Perspective*, edited by Steven J. Salm, and Toyin Falola, 73–97. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
- Owuor, Samuel O. 2006. *Bridging the Urban-Rural Divide: Multi-Spatial Livelihoods in Nakuru Town, Kenya*. Universiteit van Amsterdam. Accessed September 02, 2024. https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/4116205/143649_Owuor.pdf
- Republic of Kenya. 1962, revised 2010. *Transfer of Property Act: Group 8*. Accessed September 02, 2024. <https://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/TransferofPropertyGroup8.pdf>
- Republic of Kenya. 1984, revised 2010. *The Government Lands Act: Chapter 280*. Accessed September 02, 2024. <https://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/GovernmentLandsActCap280.pdf>
- Republic of Kenya. 1989, revised 2010. *The Registered Land Act: Chapter 300*. Accessed September 02, 2024. <https://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/RegisteredLandActCap300.pdf>
- Republic of Kenya. 2007. *Kenya Vision 2030: The Popular Version*. Accessed September 02, 2024. <https://nairobi.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Kenya-Vision-2030.pdf>
- Republic of Kenya. Ministry of Land. 2009. *Sessional Paper No. 3 of 2009: On National Land Policy*. Accessed September 02, 2024. <https://repository.kippra.or.ke/bitstream/handle/123456789/1283/Sessional-paper-on-Kenya-National-Land-Policy.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>
- Republic of Kenya. 2012. *The Land Act: No. 6 of 2012*. Accessed September 02, 2024. <http://www.parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2017-05/LandAct2012.pdf>
- Republic of Kenya. 2016, revised 2022. *The Community Land Act: Chapter 287*. Accessed September 02, 2024. <http://kenyalaw.org/8181/exist/rest/db/kenyalex/Kenya/Legislation/English/Acts%20and%20Regulations/C/Community%20Land%20Act%20-%20No.%2027%20of%202016/docs/CommunityLandAct27of2016.pdf>
- Simmel, Georg. 1904. "The Sociology of Conflict." *American Journal of Sociology* 9 (4): 490–525. <https://doi.org/10.1086/211234>
- Smith, Constance. 2019. *Nairobi in the Making: Landscapes of Time and Urban Belonging*. Suffolk: James Currey.

9 The (re)making of conflictual spaces

New urban frontiers and infrastructure-led development in Nairobi

Alexander Kohrs, Linda Hering, and John K. Shadrack

Introduction

Urban growth often provokes conflicts over land ownership (Gillespie and Schindler 2022), disputes about tenements and infrastructure connections (Maina and Mwau 2019), and challenges tied to political patronage and rent-seeking behaviors (Obala and Mattingly 2014; Ajulu 2021). These dynamics frequently result in dispossession and displacement, especially during the implementation of urban (re)structuring and infrastructure projects (Manji 2015). Thus, the conflicts are caused by varied everyday experiences shaped by systemic power imbalances.

In Nairobi, rapid urbanization is taking place, with projections indicating continued growth (Mwau, Sverdlik, and Makau 2020). This is driven by ongoing rural-to-urban migration, which leads to the emergence of densely populated areas, further intensifying urban inequalities (Shifa and Leibbrandt 2017). Consequently, urban expansion in conjunction with current sociospatial restructuring is creating new urban frontiers, incorporating more areas into the capitalist growth machine (Brenner 2019). In this process, Nairobi's historical context is crucial, as the city remains deeply influenced by its colonial legacy (Owuor and Mbatia 2012). This legacy established an urban system of segregation and unequal access to state resources, which has perpetuated selective opportunities for social mobility, reproducing an enormous urban poor population (Mwau, Sverdlik, and Makau 2020). Foreign direct investments in large-scale land acquisition (Lawrence, Sippel, and Burch 2015) and infrastructure projects are driving these inequalities even further.

In response, informal arrangements—spanning trade, housing, and labor—dominate the city, offering essential services and livelihoods, though often under precarious conditions. Estimates indicate that between 36% and 60% of the population resides in informal settlements (Mwau,

Sverdlik, and Makau 2020), and around 2 million residents allocate more than 50% of their incomes to food expenses (Owuor 2019). Studies in Nairobi's informal settlements show that most residents lack formal employment, relying instead on casual work or petty trading, which limits their financial resources and undermines a decent standard of living (e.g., Soma et al. 2022).

Social inequality in Nairobi is evident spatially, with 50–60% of the poorer population occupying just 5–6% of the urban land, resulting in densities of up to 2,300 people per hectare in informal settlements (Owuor et al. 2017). These areas suffer from overcrowding, perilous housing, and inadequate infrastructure, in contrast to high-income neighborhoods with clear land ownership. The state's withdrawal from social housing and lack of incentives for affordable housing exacerbate these inequalities (Mwau, Sverdlik, and Makau 2020).

The sub-county of Kasarani in northeastern Nairobi illustrates urban inequality. Despite significant investments in master-planned developments, supermarkets, and infrastructure, informal settlements like Gituamba continue to expand. This article focuses on Gituamba, an informal settlement that has evolved from a remote periphery to an integral part of Nairobi's urban fabric. We explore this peripheral space through a critical lens (Meth et al. 2021), investigating how “transversal logics” shape its development. Drawing on Caldeira's (2022) concept of transversal logics, we examine how the urban poor engage in territorialization through localized practices and shared spatial knowledge, creating spaces where hegemonic norms and institutions are reinterpreted and hybridized. We aim to scrutinize these transversal logics within the context of infrastructure-led urban development in northeastern Nairobi, ultimately revealing the refiguration of urban spaces (Knoblauch and Löw 2024) through the actions and practices of the marginalized urban populace.

By using Gituamba as a case study, we first outline the theoretical framework, integrating discussions on planetary urbanism, peripheral urbanization, and the refiguration of space. We then trace the settlement's historical development, emphasizing the role of the Thika Road Highway, a key urban development project. Thus, this analysis encapsulates the transversal logics driving everyday life in this peripheral area, highlighting how these logics, as responses to external processes, co-constitute Gituamba as a contested conflictual territorial space within its surroundings.

Urban peripheries in peripheral states

If urbanization is perceived as a dynamic process (Harvey 1996), this postulate considers the structural transformations within core urban areas, urban edges, and nonurban regions (Lukas and Reis 2022). These are

linked and driven by large-scale land acquisition and colossal infrastructure projects that shape further developments and (re)produce socially created inequalities (Gillespie and Schindler 2022). This also holds true for Kenya and its capital Nairobi, often characterized as a central node for the country's economic activity.

Viewing urbanization from the perspective of “planetary urbanization,” we contend that urbanization is neither a phenomenon confined to specific locations nor a feature inherent to urban models that can be distinctly separated from nonurban spaces (Lukas and Reis 2022). Instead, we conceive urbanization as a multifaceted materialization of a circular metabolism driven by various human actions, which are spatiotemporal and political in nature while following multiple capitalist logics (Brenner and Schmid 2018; Brenner 2019). Over time, these circular processes develop among actors, institutions, infrastructures, and ecologies in ways that are often “discontinuous, contested, and unforeseen, through diverse spatial practices, conflicts, and struggles” (Brenner 2019, 69). Urbanization must be understood as a process that creates both centers and peripheries (Brenner 2019). Centers and nodes¹ are characterized by dense populations, infrastructure, economic activity, and multilayered—complex communication networks. In contrast, peripheries are spaces with lower economic activity and sparse connections to these networks. These peripheries can manifest either as low-density areas focused on resource extraction (far hinterland) or as densely populated but socially marginalized spaces. Even when geographically close to urban centers, these marginalized areas often lack essential features of urban implosions, such as access to socioeconomic infrastructure and opportunities for urban consumption and lifestyle (near hinterland) (Neel 2018).

The production of peripheral spaces varies widely, encompassing different functions in the urbanization process. This includes informal settlements housing the workforce or the industrial exploitation of remote hinterlands such as mining sites, both of which are closely linked to the spatial production processes of urban centers (Brenner 2019; Meth et al. 2021).

Our contextual understanding of the urbanization process contrasts with classical concepts in urban geography, such as peri-urbanization (Follmann 2022) and suburbanization, which define urban growth mainly through densification and clear geographic boundaries, often reinforcing a rigid urban–rural dichotomy and underemphasizing the social production and complexity of spatiourban forms. This is evident at urban edges, where conventionally opposing rural and urban elements intersect. For example, in the urban fringes of many Global South cities, small-scale agriculture and high-density apartment buildings coexist, creating hybrid forms that reflect a rapidly changing periphery aimed at fostering new urban nodes and addressing the needs of central urban areas (Brenner 2019).

Consequently, some peripheral urbanizations in sub-Saharan cities involve the development of planned satellite towns designed to meet the needs of the upper class. Others are largely composed of informal settlements arising from the need for housing for the poorest segments and serve mainly as cheap labor reserves. Meanwhile, still, others emerge as “greenfield land subdivision schemes” for the urban middle class, seeking to escape the disadvantages of agglomeration such as crime and high rents (van Noorloos and Kloosterboer 2018; Meth et al. 2021). In most cases, all these phenomena intersect and generate diverse spatial arrangements, in which interactions and conflicts develop in the realm of the disparate logics of spatial figures (Knoblauch and Löw 2024).

Conflict and informal settlements

In exploring the emergence of new elements within human settlement agglomerations, the concept of conflict assumes a central role as a fundamental category, as it does in explaining spatial and related social transformations in general (Knoblauch and Löw 2024). Conflicts occur when goals are incompatible (Lombard and Rakodi 2016) or when tensions between interests, viewpoints, or wills lead to opposition, disagreement, and struggles (Obala and Mattingly 2014). From the latter perspective, conflicts often arise due to unequal access to resources such as land, money, and knowledge, and they can be both material and immaterial. According to Elias, figurational sociology actors’ conflicts are historical processes in which individuals and social groups compete for positions of power and instruments of domination (Elias and Scotson 1994). As a result of this conflict-driven process, the web of relationships is subject to constant change. Through this constantly evolving figuration, some actors are in the position to exploit those with less power, leading to tensions between different groups and individuals.

In urban spaces, conflicts are inherent and not always destructive, but when they become violent, they often disproportionately harm low-income residents by disrupting social relationships and reinforcing insecure housing and living conditions (Omenya and Grace 2012; Lombard and Rakodi 2016). As Baur and Kulke (in this volume) argue, the extent and impact of conflicts on marginalized groups depend on institutionalization, such as relevant legislation. In many core cities of the capitalist world system, coalitions of powerful actors, such as state officials in Singapore, have enforced these pacifications, resulting in relatively stable conflict management alongside economic growth. However, a different dynamic is observed in many cities in the Global South. Here, transversal logics often give rise to coalitions of the urban poor, local politicians, and other actors, creating new forms of institutionalization that sometimes clash

with official state logics (Caldeira 2022). Due to pronounced resource scarcity and inequality in these cities, conflict-ridden institutionalizations and spaces emerge, which materialize, for instance, in precarious informal settlements. As outlined by Knoblauch, Sommer, and Pfetsch in the Introduction to this volume, we thus distinguish between conflictual spaces and spatial conflicts.

Infrastructure-led development as a new development model

Nairobi's rapid urbanization, as in many Global South cities, has occurred without matching industrial growth, leading to informal labor, production, trade, and housing (Mwau, Sverdlik, and Makau 2020). Postcolonial urbanization has been marked by unequal infrastructure, weak social services, slum growth, and rising crime, especially among youth in informal settlements. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the 1980s and 1990s worsened these issues by reducing state housing support and prioritizing private interests. As a result, many residents now spend much of their income on insecure, substandard housing without rental contracts (Omenya and Grace 2012).

In the 2000s, the Kenyan government addressed economic and urbanization challenges through an infrastructure-led development model (Gillespie and Schindler 2022). Supported by national governments, international actors like China, and institutions such as the African Development Bank, this model promoted transnational infrastructure investments for modernization. It aims to boost economic growth by improving connectivity and integrating remote regions into global networks (Schindler and Kanai 2021). These projects reshape urban spaces and drive both inner-city restructuring and peripheral expansion, with the expectation of stimulating development in sectors such as industry, trade, housing, and infrastructure.

However, studies show that urban growth corridors distribute benefits unequally, often leading to urban enclaves, gentrification, and speculation (K'Akumu and Gateri 2023). From the perspective of the refiguration of spaces, infrastructure-led development aims to reposition regions within the global capitalist economy by creating new transnational spaces (Knoblauch and Löw 2024). However, this process, driven by globalization, denationalization, and trade liberalization, reproduces global inequalities, creating a political paradox (Piketty 2020). National-level strategies to address these issues have, in turn, generated new urban growth frontiers.

This paper presents two key points. First, large infrastructure projects like the Thika Superhighway create new connections between key areas, benefiting some while disadvantaging others. Second, by focusing on Gitumba, an informal settlement, we explore the concept of auto-construction (Caldeira 2022), showing how marginalized communities develop locally

specific coping strategies in response to global processes. Auto-construction, common in peripheral urbanization, describes self-built neighborhoods that bypass the formal real estate and finance systems, contrasting with state-led, formal urbanization guided by official planning. Instead, these communities follow “transversal” frameworks of incremental development. This process involves establishing institutions to enable collective action and negotiations with state, public, and private actors over legal status, infrastructure, and essential resources for community development. Networks, including family, neighbors, and local political connections, are key to claiming urban space. This act of city claiming is a process with its own agency and spatiotemporality (Caldeira 2022). We aim to show that auto-construction is locally specific, driven by the pursuit of life opportunities, and operates within a spectrum of legal ambiguity and unclear regulatory frameworks.

Methods and research design

The findings are based on an extended literature review as well as three phases of fieldwork totaling 12 weeks between November 2022 and March 2024. During this period, we conducted a series of mapping exercises (Füllung, Hering, and Kulke 2024) with a specific focus on the distribution of food retail outlets across four distinct study areas in Kasarani: Clay City, City Chicken Estate, Sunton, and Gituamba. Each of these exhibited a unique morphology in relation to the built environment, social composition of the inhabitants, access to (non)public infrastructure, and the food retail landscape. We also conducted 38 qualitative interviews with residents and retailers, lasting 30 minutes to two hours, some of which required translation. The interviewees were residents and retailers based in the aforementioned areas, thus able to share their local knowledge and (hi)stories. Additionally, key informants from civil societies, comprising both state and nonstate actors, were consulted to gain a more expert impression of the general development and challenges in living and working in the area, with a specific focus on food retail and consumption. MAX-QDA was utilized for the analysis of the qualitative interview data. To enhance our comprehension of the processes and the potential conflictual aspects, we engaged in discourse with local researchers from urban planning, geography, or engineering and carried out a content analysis of the pertinent research literature on the history and development of the areas and the relevant infrastructure.

Nairobi’s urban growth frontiers

This section examines the logic behind the construction of the Thika Road Superhighway and the subsequent impacts and conflicts observed

with(in) the study area. Subsequently, an examination of the formation and development of Gituamba and the transversal logics that are jointly conceived and shared by the residents serve to define the character of the place.

Thika Road Superhighway: Nairobi's northeastern urban growth corridor

Nairobi's infrastructure-led development, part of the "Kenya Vision 2030" program, is exemplified by highway and bypass projects like the Thika Road Superhighway (Republik of Kenya 2007). Upgraded between 2009 and 2012, the 50-km road now connects Nairobi to the Mount Kenya region and the hinterland. As part of the A2 route and the trans-African north-south network, it plays a key role in reshaping the movement of goods, people, and economic activities for the coming decades (Figure 9.1) (Mbataru 2018; Gillespie and Schindler 2022).

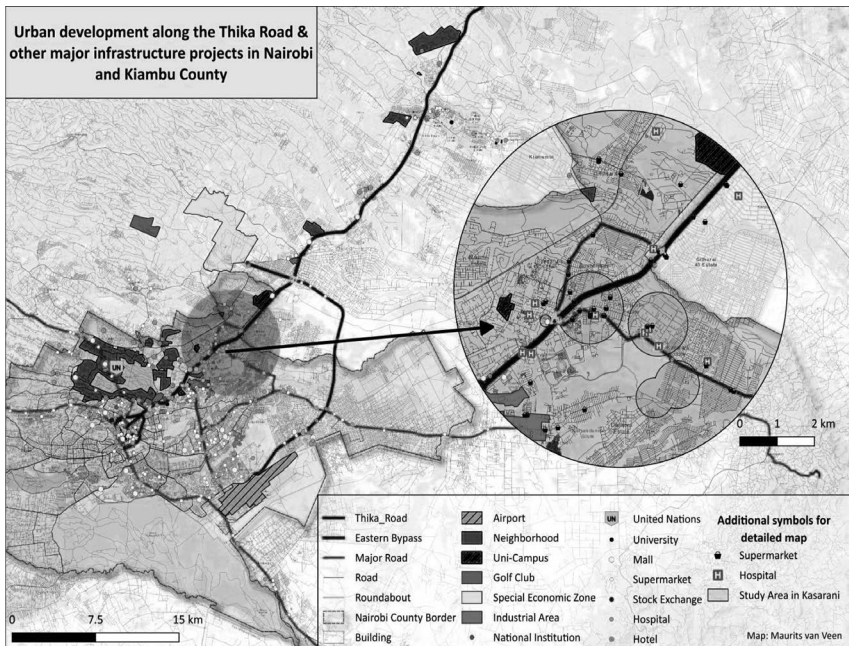


Figure 9.1 Infrastructure-led development illustrated by the Thika Road Superhighway and the emergence of an urban growth corridor in the north-east of Nairobi.

Source: Own representation.

The project was closely linked to urban restructuring, as highlighted by satellite image analyses (Siro and Sichangi 2017) and qualitative studies (Mbataru 2018; K'Akumu and Gateri 2023), which documented various phenomena ranging from increased trading activity to gentrification. The initial phase involved demolishing informal houses and businesses, displacing residents to clear space for the Superhighway. Between 2007 and 2015, land prices around the highway surged tenfold (Manji 2015), and farmlands were rapidly converted into residential zones amid waves of speculative buying and selling (Kinuthia, Majale, and Letema 2021). This transformation also spurred significant expansion, including master-planned developments, new housing estates, shopping malls, and public institutions, such as university campuses along the highway. Additionally, the area saw a growing presence of international service companies like Subway and Woolworths, as well as financial institutions like KCB Bank. Particularly, this transformative shift has produced contrasting outcomes: While (upper) middle-class residential areas have emerged, precarious informal settlements have also seen significant growth. Proximity to the highway is crucial in determining whether individuals benefit from amenities like upscale shopping and faster links to the CBD. In contrast, more distant locales face sociospatial disadvantages—such as poor connections to the highway or being situated in remote farmland areas without water access—resulting in a “poverty of connection” (Graham and Marvin 2001, 288). These conditions significantly impact daily activities, including household tasks, access to employment, education, and other essential services. Specifically, in contexts where consumption serves as a marker of social positioning (Baur and Kulke in this volume) and community membership, economically marginalized spaces and their residents increasingly fade from the purview of society (Graham and Marvin 2001).

Informal settlements in Nairobi as conflictual spaces of inequality

Informal settlements are conflictual spaces marked by tensions between social groups and conflicting spatial dynamics. In Nairobi, 92% of residents rent from slumlords, often spending most of their income on housing due to a lack of regulation, leaving little for essentials. This leads to conflict when rents rise, and gentrification displaces low-income households, worsening social inequality and straining infrastructure. Rapid economic growth and urban migration have driven peripheral urbanization, with half of the settlement land publicly owned but largely inaccessible to the poor, who rent from structure owners. This reinforces global power asymmetries as urban areas polarize, benefiting the wealthy while excluding the poor (Graham and Marvin 2001; Omenya and Grace 2012; Rigon 2016). Furthermore, from the perspective of refiguration of space (Knoblauch and

Löw 2024), infrastructures can be interpreted as trajectorial spaces, connecting places while informal settlements can be seen as territorial spaces, with the most likely scenario that for the residents these settlements are characterized as specific places of home. As spatial figures are based on their own inherent logics, conflicts may arise when these spatial logics of social actions conflict with one another, as we will outline.

Below, we present the case of one such informal settlement on the outskirts of Nairobi, Gituamba. We will describe the genesis and how Gituamba became an integral part of Nairobi's urban areas. In this way, we identify the internal transversal logic at work, which reflects the logic of the territory or place. We also consider how external forces continue to exert a latent influence on ongoing processes. This implies that even when an infrastructure project is in a distant location, it still affects the daily life interactions and challenges faced by people in spaces near and far away.

The historical genesis of Gituamba

Gituamba is an informal settlement located in the northeast of the Kenyan capital in Kasarani location. According to the interviewees, the population has grown enormously over the last three decades, with around 10,000 inhabitants currently residing there. Looking at the spatial extension, this is a small area of around 12 hectares and is located on the southern border between the Nairobi subcounties of Kasarani and Dandora, directly next to the riverbanks of the Nairobi and Ruaka Rivers. The distance to the Thika Road Superhighway is approximately 5–6 km (Figure 9.2).

Gituamba dates to the early 90s and exhibits three discernible phases of neighborhood development. The initial formative phase, spanning until the mid-2000s, denotes its foundational period. The subsequent phase follows from the mid-2000s to the mid-2010s and signifies an early stage of urbanization. During this period, the construction of primary urban infrastructure occurred alongside a notable shift in the local populace from agrarian subsistence to urban labor. Presently, Gituamba is experiencing a phase marked by pronounced population growth, infrastructure consolidation, and proliferating diversity in the social structure of the settlement.

The genesis and evolution of Gituamba exemplify the interplay of context-specific practices, resources, and regulations (Simone 2020), contributing to the (re)production of its distinct sociospatial fabric. The logic of the place has engendered a locally grounded socio-spatial figuration, including, on the one hand, specific transversal logic based on assumptions and convictions, such as who is the legitimate owner, developer, and rule-maker of the place. On the other hand, material resources, including access to public or private infrastructure, are formed in specific ways over time, which has also resulted in the emergence of new conflicts.

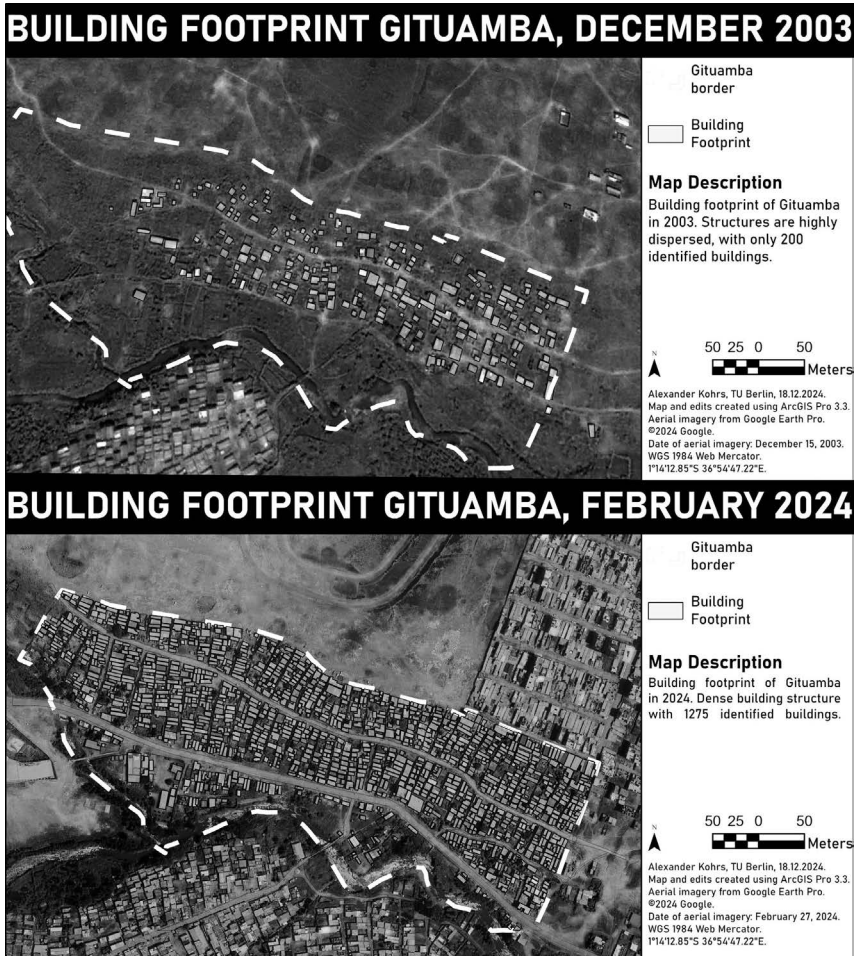


Figure 9.2 Spatiotemporal evolution of built structures in Gituamba.

Source: Own representation.

Insights from recurrent interviews underscore that despite having faced remarkable growth and consolidation, Gituamba largely remains peripheralized and invisible but has established its own demarcated space with internal rules, norms, and a place-specific built environment.

The founding of Gituamba: Demarking the territory

In tracing the origins of Gituamba, a precise starting point emerges: January 1991. Residents recall two key events: a fire that devastated the

nearby informal settlement of Korogocho and the construction of Ngununyu Primary School, which forced the relocation of squatters (Interview, Local Pastor, 08.09.2023). As a result, the land that would become Gituamba was designated as a new settlement area for some Korogocho residents, guided by local KANU officials.² This inception narrative underscores the role of local political actors and administrators in the establishment of Gituamba, reflecting broader historical trends. The early 1990s, a period of transition from single-party rule to a multiparty system, saw significant political co-optation and patronage as ruling politicians sought to influence election outcomes (Ajulu 2021). Although reliable legal procedures were bypassed during the initial occupation of the area, residents still assert, “[In] Gituamba, they are not land grabbers. [...] Because government is the one who took them from Korogocho to here, still on state land” (Interview, Member Nyumba Kumi, 28.08.2023, Trader in Group discussion, 21.08.2023).

Interviewees noted that KANU agents recruited settlers from Korogocho and Dandora in the early years, offering them plots as “grants” (Interview, Member Nyumba Kumi, 28.08.2023). Before settling, future residents and local authorities held meetings to coordinate efforts and demarcate plots (Interview, Local Pastor, 08.09.2023). During these gatherings, certificates and documents were issued to record land distribution, although they lacked official state recognition. These early documents, periodically updated, represent a formal institution rooted in resilient, informal practices. While KANU offices are frequently cited as key players in the settlement’s foundation, the precise leadership and process remain unclear (Interview, Member Nyumba Kumi, 28.08.2023).

This situation highlights two key aspects of Gituamba’s foundation. First, the involvement of local politicians increased the settlement’s perceived legitimacy, even as they exceeded their authority, leading residents to view themselves as settlers, despite being legally considered squatters. From its inception, Gituamba has existed as a semi-legal space on Nairobi’s periphery. Second, the blurred lines between legality and illegality were evident, as the plots were not legally acquired, yet state institutions often accepted or even supported the settlement.

Gituamba’s early settlement phase, lasting about 10–15 years, saw an initial population of 30–80 individuals (Interview, Local Pastor, 08.09.2023). The area was then seen as a rural enclave, described as “bushy” with “large trees” along the riverbanks and rugged, rocky terrain inhabited by wild animals like snakes and termites (Interview, Mother_c Gituamba, 23.08.2023). Others describe the area as rugged with rocks and inhabited by wild animals, such as snakes, and termites (Interview, Mother_c Gituamba, 23.08.2023).

The early history of Gituamba, largely based on oral accounts due to scant documentation, reveals harsh conditions that forced the initial

settlers, mainly the urban poor, to adapt and gradually transform the environment. This narrative portrays these settlers as pioneers who made the land habitable through their efforts (Interview, Member Nyumba Kumi, 28.08.2023). Consequently, one interviewee noted that establishing Gituamba was challenging, causing many early residents to leave (Group Interview, Elders, 02.09.2023, Pos. 113).

In the 1990s, Gituamba had very few settlers, and people primarily knew only their immediate neighbors (Interview, Mother_h Gituamba, 26.08.2023). Social relationships with residents of more distant houses were often minimal or weak. In the past (...), when you see one person here, you wouldn't know where the person is located (Interview, Mother_c Gituamba, 23.08.2023).

Over time, social connections in Gituamba strengthened, fostering a shared community identity. Despite this, the housing situation remained precarious, with shacks built from found stones, iron sheets, wood, and recycled plastic sheeting (Interview, Mother_h Gituamba, 26.08.2024; Trader in Group Discussion, 21.08.2023). This approach was driven by financial constraints and a desire to avoid the appearance of permanent structures to reduce the risk of eviction (Group Interview, Elders, 02.09.2023). Thus, living in a conflictual space encouraged invisibility (Knoblauch, Sommer, and Pfetsch in the Introduction to this volume); consequently, early Gituamba residents used invisibility and a certain form of appearance as a strategy to install in the place.

It was noted that Gituamba faced a significant lack of public infrastructure, including water, sewage, electricity, and roads, which complicated daily life (Interview, Mother_c Gituamba, 23.08.2023). The absence of roads meant that Gituamba could only be accessed on foot (Interview, Mother_h Gituamba, 26.08.2023). Additionally, the lack of a bridge left Gituamba separated from the neighboring Dandora estate by the river. Consequently, Gituamba was disconnected not only from basic infrastructure but also from opportunities and services available in more economically flourishing parts of Nairobi. In short, it was disconnected from Nairobi's broader urban network. Despite its challenges, Gituamba offered advantages that contributed to its consolidation. In the 1990s, early residents benefited from large plots of land that allowed for subsistence farming near rivers (Group Interview, Elders, 02.09.2023). This farming activity occasionally increased household income and supported the settlement's development.

However, the residents of Gituamba did not rely solely on subsistence farming. They consistently sought opportunities for monetary income through small-scale trading and day labor (Interview, Mother_h Gituamba, 26.08.2023; Group Interview, Elders, 02.09.2023). Its proximity to Nairobi, particularly to the neighborhoods developing along the Thika–Nairobi

Road, became increasingly advantageous by providing job opportunities, such as construction work, and a customer base for informal trade.

Phase of consolidation: “Auto-construction” and new conflicts

In the 2000s, Gituamba transitioned from a small village to a peripheral urban neighborhood, with about 4,000 residents by 2009 (Ministry of Lands, Housing, and Urban Development 2014, 14). This period also saw northeast Nairobi, marked by the Thika Road Superhighway, emerge as a new urban frontier. The highway enhanced connectivity and attracted private investments in gated communities, malls, and resorts within a 5-km radius of Gituamba (Gillespie and Schindler 2022). However, this rapid urbanization has led to unplanned growth in marginalized neighborhoods, significantly altering daily life in these informal settings (Mwau, Sverdlik, and Makau 2020). Referring to Gituamba, it can be stated that affordability became a key reason for its rapid growth, attracting residents who found surrounding neighborhoods too expensive. Consequently, one resident tells us, “Now talking in the broad view of the Gituambarians [...], they have to fend for their rents. And that is the lowest kind of housing in Nairobi one can find [...] because people pay even 30,000 KSH rent, right?” (Interview, Men Gituamba, 29.09.2024)

This affordability stems from the informal commodification of land rights, which allowed small investments in housing and drove Gituamba’s material and infrastructural development. Coupled with Nairobi’s overall population growth (Mwau, Sverdlik, and Makau 2020) and infrastructure projects like the Thika Road Superhighway, Gituamba became increasingly attractive to new residents. While the Thika Road Superhighway improved connectivity, it also made the surrounding areas more expensive (K’Akumu and Gateri 2023, 13). In contrast, Gituamba, being “illegal” and “informal” remained affordable for “*everyday hustlers*” with many new employment opportunities in the nearby middle-class areas. In Gituamba, follow-up investments were primarily driven by existing residents and newcomers, often marginalized individuals, rather than institutional or wealthy private investors. The absence of formal legal investments meant that Gituamba continued to serve as a housing area for the urban poor. The neighborhood’s consolidation was closely tied to the installation of basic infrastructure like water and electricity, as well as the construction of new stone houses. One resident told us, “Let’s just say that after people saw that the homes were connected to piped water, that’s when they came and bought land. That’s also when many of the early residents sold their homes and left, and in selling to those who were more financially capable” (Interview, Mother_h Gituamba, 26.08.2023).

It is important to emphasize that these first installations were created through collective action by the inhabitants of Gituamba, helping them to settle more profoundly by remaking their place of home (Kibel, Kitata, and Baur 2024). These early infrastructure projects, such as the water connection established in the early 2000s with World Vision's help, and the first electricity connections in the mid-2000s, can be seen as urban commons that benefited all residents. The water pipeline, extending from Dandora to Gituamba and crossing the Nairobi River, was shared by the community at a central plot. Similarly, the first electricity connections were installed, most likely in the mid-2000s.

So, what we didn't have by that time is power (...) Dandora side, there was power. We managed to come together, those who are in this side. We buy this wire. Only one line. You dig a channel to that side, they connect for us there, but in business.

(Interview, Member Nyumba Kumi, 28.08.2023)

This example highlights several key aspects of infrastructuring practices in Gituamba. First, electricity connections were established through collective action coordinated by the community council. Second, the neighborhood's resources were mobilized in a process of "auto-construction," which contrasts with conventional, professional urban planning by focusing on incremental development rather than fully integrated neighborhoods. Third, the blending of informal and legal practices is evident, especially with the imposition of monthly fees for unauthorized power connections within a capitalist framework. Notably, these transversal logics, which tackle local challenges and conflicts while operating outside the state's dominant framework, combined with the material and infrastructural transformations, contributed to the refiguration of Gituamba. This refiguration was highly influenced by the broader commodification processes initiated by Thika Road Superhighway.

Transversal logics in practice: New Institutions and commodification

The findings of the research into the initial formation and consolidation phases indicate that the primary objective of the early residents of Gituamba was to establish a new material and infrastructural figuration. This entailed the evolution of a shared social identity, mediated through the implementation of transversal logics. In contrast, our analysis of the latest phase demonstrates that the development in the present day is directed toward enhancing internal social networks and structuring daily life within the informal settlement, which are now either stabilized or refigured. The involvement of social institutions is crucial in shaping local dynamics,

particularly as Gituamba becomes increasingly diverse, leading to new tensions and conflict situations.

One key institution is the Nyumba Kumi Council, composed of neighborhood members, which has played a crucial role in shaping internal transversal logics. Originally a government initiative to address crime and youth violence, the Nyumba Kumi concept formalized and legitimized existing councils in Gituamba. Though councils were in place before the Nyumba Kumi legislation, the 2013 law, created after the Westgate Mall attack (Wamaita, Nzioka, and Muigua 2019), formalized this community policing initiative. Residents, guided by elected representatives, collaborate with police and other stakeholders to prevent violent crime.

In Gituamba, the Nyumba Kumi is made up of elected members from three area clusters electing one representative for men, women, and young people's issues and demands. This means there are "12 elders"—elected members—who form the Nyumba Kumi council. These members act under the leadership of an elected chairman. As intended by the law, the members of the Nyumba Kumi report to the chief on issues such as domestic violence and crimes connected to drug abuse, stealing, and many more. The chairman's main duties are to provide the chief of Kasarani and other public entities with weekly reports on newcomers, births, illegal activities, and crimes. Therefore, he claims to deal with the following:

Secrets, a lot of secrets surrounding bedrooms. As a [member of the Nyumba Kumi], I get involved with those cases, and I know. I have to know what the problem is, why you are beaten, but he has to tell me. That domestic violence, if I have a woman leader at that particular cluster, I know. But those are ones we cannot transfer or transfer to higher offices. We just deal with them, that particular time, and we just settle them, and life continues.

(Interview, Member Nyumba Kumi, 28.08.2024)

Interestingly, the Nyumba Kumi not only reports issues but also manages community life according to its own rules, including handling and punishing domestic violence or crimes locally. While this approach can be effective, studies on violence and conflict in Nairobi's informal settlements show that such issues persist continuously (Omenya and Grace 2012).

Furthermore, it is evident that the authority of the Nyumba Kumi extends far beyond security-related aspects. Despite lacking formal legal authority to intervene in areas typically handled by public administration, the Nyumba Kumi exerts influence through its own mechanisms, such as regularly hosting communal meetings known as Barazas. For example, Barazas provide a platform for engaging with officials, like representatives from the Kenyan power company or county assembly members, to discuss

local needs and plan actions. This role legitimizes the Nyumba Kumi as a coordination hub for public and semi-public actors interacting with the settlement. Although the Nyumba Kumi is seen as an authority in Gituamba, its actions are subject to community debate, with various interest groups expecting their concerns to be addressed.

The Nyumba Kumi Council plays a crucial role in legitimizing and consolidating Gituamba as a recognized neighborhood, advancing its process of territorialization. Although not intended by the law, the council's efforts to address issues like legalizing land titles reflect its growing authority. The Nyumba Kumi aims to expand its own competencies and help structure owners obtain official titles. If successful, this could trigger new social and spatial changes (a new wave of refiguration), including improved infrastructure and housing. However, legal ownership may also create new power asymmetries and gentrify current beneficiaries of semi-legal status.

Another example of how transversal logics repeatedly manifest in Gituamba is the sale of parcels of land. Here, the elected members of the Nyumba Kumi are usually present and witness when these land titles are being sold, even though the titles proof *de jure* no claim for the land. This practice of informal title deeds is common in Nairobi (Maina and Mwau 2019) and passes as a legitimate form of property in the normative system that governs informal housing markets. Even if these documents and procedures are not recognized by the legal system, they embody their own logic and local rights and effectively replace the official framework of the housing market, which excludes many urban poor. All these semi-legal practices contribute to the functioning of the community's everyday life and, with this, a shared sense for the place of home within a demarcated territory.

External factors, such as the Thika Road Superhighway, and private institutional investments near Gituamba are crucial in driving transformation within the informal settlement. For example, a privately funded slaughterhouse has recently provided some residents with employment. However, these jobs are often insecure, with short-term contracts and wages rarely exceeding 20,000 KSH per month. Despite these challenges, the presence of a relatively large employer led one interviewee to remark:

The majority are not engineers or technicians. They are those unskilled labourers. [...] Kasarani area is a very big area. Construction also are many, so they just fit, but our prayer is if we can get companies. Like here, you see this one, our slaughterhouse, a bigger number of workers there come from this village. [...] If we can have another industry like that within, it can help a lot because that's the only way this entire community can manage to have their daily life.

(Interview, Member Nyumba Kumi, 28.08.2024)

New employment opportunities, such as those from the slaughterhouse, have provided some income stability. However, many residents still face precarious conditions, struggling to secure enough income for basic needs like housing and food.

Despite Gituamba's efforts to establish itself as a neighborhood in Kasarani through various self-initiated improvements, it remains a manifestation of ongoing conflicts. These conflicts stem from social differentiation within the neighborhood and tensions with surrounding state regulations. The construction of Tamarac Road illustrates this dynamic. Intended to limit Gituamba's expansion and improve the slaughterhouse's connectivity to the city's highway network, the road also led to the removal of properties without compensation, despite support from many residents. This underscores the complex trade-offs involved in such development projects (Expert Interview, Urban Planner, 05.10.2023). Gituamba emerges as a conflictual urban space not only when external urban restructuring measures affect the development of the neighborhood but also through internal conflictual situations. Significant social differentiation has emerged from the population influx and the expansion of houses by structure owners. Although many landlords were once impoverished, they gained upward mobility by acquiring plots for free or at low cost during the initial settlement. In contrast, many new tenants, who often depend on casual incomes, now face stark social and economic disparities compared to landlords. Consequently, tenants report that there are hardly any secure, contractual agreements between tenants and landlords, leaving them often at the mercy of the landlords' goodwill, as one interviewee describes: "(...) if you pay 3000 KSH in Nairobi, you are in poverty. You don't have a regular salary. So, getting this 3000 also is effective for you. And sometimes it's not there. I found the landlord I come and confront somebody over 3000. (...) So being in the pit of poverty." (Interview, Men Gituamba, 29.02.2024)

Although there are institutions like the Nyumba Kumi and agreements between tenants and landlords that can include solutions such as rent deferrals, it is evident that the final resolution often involves violence, ultimately threatening tenants with homelessness.

Interviewer: What does [the landlord] do [in the case of rent arrears]?

Respondent: He has to evict him through force. (...). You have to become ugly (...). Remove all the things outside. So that when he comes the house is locked. Some people even remove the roof. You come in the evening and find you have no roof. Or you have no door. (Interview, Men Gituamba, 29.02.2024)

Our analysis shows that Gituamba is gradually developing and transforming in response to a complex mix of internal and external factors.

This process highlights how global economic forces are negotiated and adapted at the local level. This results in the refiguration of this peri-urban space that exhibits its own local logic, while still being influenced by the logic of trajectory space. In this example, the Thika Road Highway illustrates a postcolonial approach to planning and leadership that reinforces global inequalities within the capitalist system, affecting daily life in the informal settlement and highlighting the residents' counter-narratives.

Conclusion: Everyday life in Nairobi's marginalized urban frontier

Although Gituamba was established by the state to relocate informal settlers to state-owned land, it remains illegal to date. Over time, unique semi-legal practices have developed (transversal logics), creating a cohesive community in this peripheral area. Located between rural and urban environments, Gituamba acts as a relational hinterland supporting urban spaces inhabited by middle- and high-income groups. It provides low-wage laborers for nearby areas but remains marginalized, lacking adequate public infrastructure, like other informal settlements.

Administratively, Gituamba is mostly tolerated or overlooked. A distinct community with its internal institutions, such as community policing, Nyumba Kumi, and Barazas, has emerged. These community regulations govern land allocation and documentation. Gituamba exemplifies a dynamic peripheralized urban space where community resilience and self-governance intersect with sporadic state interventions. Conflicts arise from power differentials exacerbated by large-scale infrastructure projects that connect some to the global system while marginalizing others. These projects perpetuate socioeconomic disparities, impacting broader urban and especially urban fringe landscapes. In the beginning, the conflict was about who owned the land and who was brought there. However, later, this changed, and the manifest conflict became latent as people appropriated the space, making it a shared home, but are still living at risk of being sent away from "their" place.

Our paper illustrates how the capitalist mode of production influences urbanization in Nairobi. We demonstrated how an informal settlement in the peripheral urban is (re)produced by both internal community processes—characterizing the logic of the place—and external forces, such as infrastructure projects like the Thika Road Superhighway—that represent the logic of trajectorial space. Gituamba serves as a hinterland for central Nairobi, providing informal labor and services and will continue to do so in the future. The ongoing urbanization and new urban frontiers reinforce inequalities, leading to conflicts over land access and infrastructure development, but they also engender novel social conflicts

between the established and the incoming inhabitants. Speculation in Nairobi and Gituamba highlights the initial stages of global infrastructure deployment, showcasing competing visions to shape urban spaces toward global capitalism amid geopolitical turbulence and new trade geographies. Our analysis of the conflictual space of Gituamba has revealed that social and spatial changes at different places and scales are interrelated and structure the development of a peripheral area, such as Gituamba. This refiguring is not only a consequence of the changes themselves but also a result of the interdependence of social and spatial dynamics and conflicts that will shape future development and potential alternatives.

Notes

- 1 An urban node is a central area where multiple infrastructures intersect, serving as a focal point of connectivity. Examples include neighborhoods with major train stations connected to highways, public transportation networks, universities, and major employers (Cheng et al. 2013).
- 2 KANU, or Kenyan African National Union, was the ruling party in Kenya from independence in 1963 until 2002. Initially formed from a coalition of independence movements, KANU under Presidents Kenyatta and Moi became a tool for consolidating autocratic rule. Over time, it evolved into a mechanism for economic and political rent-seeking, characterized by corruption, patronage, and clientelism (Ajulu 2021).

Bibliography

- Ajulu, Rok. 2021. *Post-Colonial Kenya: The Rise of an Authoritarian and Predatory State. Contemporary African Politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Brenner, Neil. 2019. *New Urban Spaces: Urban Theory and the Scale Question*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brenner, Neil, and Christian Schmid. 2018. "Elements for a New Epistemology of the Urban." In *The Sage Handbook of the 21st Century City*, edited by Suzanne Hall, and Ricky Burdett, 47–67. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Caldeira, Teresa. 2022. "Peripheral Urbanization: Autoconstruction, Transversal Logics, and Politics in Cities of the Global South." In *Beyond the Megacity*, edited by Nadine Reis, and Michael Lukas, 55–82. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Cheng, Jianquan, Luca Bertolini, Frank Le Clercq, and Loek Kapoen. 2013. "Understanding Urban Networks: Comparing a Node-, a Density- and an Accessibility-Based View." *Cities* 31: 165–176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2012.04.005>
- Elias, Norbert, and John L. Scotson. 1994. *The Established and the Outsiders*. London: Sage.
- Follmann, Alexander. 2022. "Geographies of Peri-urbanization in the Global South." *Geography Compass* 16 (7): e12650. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12650>
- Füllung, Julia, Linda Hering, and Elmar Kulke. 2024. "Mapping and Photo Documentation. Proposal for a Space-Sensitive Mixed Methods Design Using the Example of Retail Mapping." In *Handbook of Qualitative and Visual Methods*

- in *Spatial Research*, edited by Anna Juliane Heinrich, Séverine Marguin, Angela Million, and Jörg Stollmann, 265–281. Stuttgart: utb.
- Gillespie, Tom, and Seth Schindler. 2022. “Africa’s New Urban Spaces: Deindustrialisation, Infrastructure-Led Development and Real Estate Frontiers.” *Review of African Political Economy* 49 (174): 531–549. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2023.2171284>
- Graham, Stephen, and Simon Marvin. 2001. *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*. London: Routledge.
- Harvey, David. 1996. “Cities or Urbanization?.” *City* 1 (1–2): 38–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604819608900022>
- K’Akumu, Owiti A., and Catherine W. Gateri. 2023. “Evaluation of the Nairobi-Thika Road Improvement Project in the Context of Inclusive Development.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 58 (7): 1325–1348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096221084254>
- Kibel, Jochen, Makau Kitata, and Nina Baur. 2024. “Refigured Homes: Gender Balances and the Refiguration of Spaces in Germany and Kenya.” In *Dynamics of Gender Relations: Process-Sociological Perspectives*, edited by Stefanie Ernst, and Valerie Dahl. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kinuthia, Hannah W., Christine Majale, and Sammy C. Letema. 2021. “Influence of Public Policy Planning on Peri-Urban Land Speculation in (Greater) Eastern Bypass in Nairobi Metropolitan.” *Land Use Policy* 107: 105515. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2021.105515>
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2024. “The Refiguration of the Global: Globalization and the Spatial Logics of Digitalization.” *Critical Sociology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205241262304>
- Lawrence, Geoffrey, Sarah R. Sippel, and David Burch. 2015. “The Financialisation of Food and Farming.” In *Handbook on the Globalisation of Agriculture*, edited by Guy Robinson, and Doris A. Carson. Cheltenham: Elgar.
- Lombard, Melanie, and Carole Rakodi. 2016. “Urban Land Conflict in the Global South: Towards an Analytical Framework.” *Urban Studies* 53 (13): 2683–2699. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098016659616>
- Lukas, Michael, and Nadine Reis. 2022. “Introduction: Old and New Dimensions of Peripheral Urbanization in Latin America.” In *Beyond the Megacity*, edited by Nadine Reis, and Michael Lukas, 1–54. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Maina, Miriam, and Baraka Mwau. 2019. “Nairobi: The Socio-Political Implications of Informal Tenement Housing in Nairobi, Kenya.” In *The Routledge Handbook on Informal Urbanization*, edited by Robert Rocco, and Jan van Ballegooijen, 215–225. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Manji, Ambreena. 2015. “Bulldozers, Homes and Highways: Nairobi and the Right to the City.” *Review of African Political Economy* 42 (144): 206–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2014.988698>
- Mbataru, Patrick. 2018. “An Analysis of the Influence of Road Infrastructure Implementation on Local Development: The Case of Thika Superhighway in Kenya.” *Africa Journal of Public Sector Development and Governance* 1 (1): 82–89. <https://doi.org/10.55390/ajpsdg.2018.1.1.7>
- Meth, Paula, Tom Goodfellow, Alison Todes, and Sarah Charlton. 2021. “Conceptualizing African Urban Peripheries.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 45 (6): 985–1007. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.13044>

- Ministry of Lands, Housing, and Urban Development. 2014. *Resettlement Action Plan Report for KCC (Embakasi) Informal Settlement in Nairobi County*. Nairobi: Kenya Informal Settlements Improvement Project.
- Mwau, Baraka, Alice Sverdlik, and Jack Makau. 2020. *Urban Transformation and the Politics of Shelter: Understanding Nairobi's Housing Markets*. London: International Institute for Environment and Development.
- Neel, Phil A. 2018. *Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Obala, Luke M., and Michael Mattingly. 2014. "Ethnicity, Corruption and Violence in Urban Land Conflict in Kenya." *Urban Studies* 51 (13): 2735–2751. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098013513650>
- Omenya, Alfred, and Lubaale Grace. 2012. *Understanding the Tipping Point of Urban Conflict: The Case of Nairobi, Kenya*. Working Paper no. 6. Manchester: Urban Tipping Point (UTP), The University of Manchester. Accessed June 20, 2024. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08aa6ed915d3cfd00088a/60712_Omenya_understanding.pdf
- Owuor, Samuel. 2019. "Urbanisation and Household Food Security in Nairobi, Kenya." In *Sustainable Development in Africa: Case Studies*, edited by Masafumi Nagao, Jewette Masinja, and Amin Alhassan, 161–174. Denver: Spears Media Press.
- Owuor, Samuel, Andrea Brown, Jonathan Crush, Bruce Frayne, and Jeremy Wagner. 2017. *The Urban Food System of Nairobi, Kenya*. Waterloo, ON: Hungry Cities Partnership.
- Owuor, Samuel, and Teresa Mbatia. 2012. "Nairobi." In *Capital Cities in Africa: Power and Powerlessness*, edited by Simon Bekker and Göran Therborn, 120–140. Dakar: CODESRIA Books Publication System.
- Piketty, Thomas. 2020. *Capital and Ideology*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Republic of Kenya. 2007. *Kenya Vision 2030: A Globally Competitive and Prosperous Kenya*. Accessed August 10, 2024. https://www.researchictafrica.net/countries/kenya/Kenya_Vision_2030_-_2007.pdf
- Rigon, Andrea. 2016. "Collective or Individual Titles? Conflict over Tenure Regularisation in a Kenyan Informal Settlement." *Urban Studies* 53 (13): 2758–2778. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098015602658>
- Schindler, Seth, and Juan Miguel Kanai. 2021. "Getting the Territory Right: Infrastructure-Led Development and the Re-Emergence of Spatial Planning Strategies." *Regional Studies* 55 (1): 40–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1661984>
- Shifa, Muna, and Murray Leibbrandt. 2017. "Urban Poverty and Inequality in Kenya." *Urban Forum* 28 (4): 363–385.
- Simone, AbdouMaliq. 2020. "Cities of the Global South." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46 (1): 603–622.
- Siro, Benjamin, and Arthur Sichangi. 2017. "Analysis of the Impact of New Road Infrastructure Development on Urban Sprawl and Modelling Using Remote Sensing: A Case Study of Thika Road Superhighway and Eastern Bypass of the Nairobi Metropolitan, Kenya." *IOSR Journal of Environmental Science, Toxicology and Food Technology* 11 (03): 41–49.
- Soma, Katrine, Valerie Cornelia Johanna Janssen, Oscar I. Ayuya, and Benson Obwanga. 2022. "Food Systems in Informal Urban Settlements: Exploring Differences in Livelihood Welfare Factors Across Kibera, Nairobi." *Sustainability* 14 (17): 11099. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141711099>

- van Noorloos, Femke, and Marjan Kloosterboer. 2018. "Africa's New Cities: The Contested Future of Urbanisation." *Urban Studies* 55 (6): 1223–1241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098017700574>
- Wamaitha, Ndono, John M. Nzioka, and Kariuki Muigua. 2019. "Effectiveness of the Nyumba Kumi Community Policing Initiative in Kenya." *Journal of Sustainability, Environment and Peace* 1 (2): 63–67.

10 Spatial tensions and conflict

Forcibly displaced people in Lagos and Amman

*Qusay Amer, Rebecca Enobong Roberts,
and Francesca Ceola*

Introduction

This article aims to enhance the comprehension of various spatial tensions. It explores the complex connection between physical locations, emplacement, and the city as a whole. It analyzes the spatial practices and conceptualizations of space creation among two distinct populations of forcibly displaced urban migrants—namely, refugees and internally displaced individuals in Lagos, Nigeria, and Amman, Jordan—as well as the emerging forms of spatial conflicts resulting from such. It is based on the Architectures of Asylum project, in which we understand conflict as the expression of multifaceted social tensions. The project examines the emerging themes of spatial practices arising from the conflicting negotiations between forcibly displaced populations and the technomanagerial norms and rules that govern their daily routines (Steigemann and Misselwitz 2020).

Using the heuristics of the spatial figures of territory, place, and network as descriptives of spatial logics—that is, structures of the social (Knoblauch and Löw 2020)—allows us to discuss the spaces of conflicts and the conflictual spaces related to migration governance by capturing both the processuality and spatiality of the conflicts. For the two cities, we analyze the networks that drive policies related to forced migration and the diverse forms of translocal and transnational migrations. Our primary emphasis is on the strategic development and implementation of physical interventions in various urban areas connected to the impacts of forced displacement.

In Lagos, attention is directed on the examination of the city of refuge situated within neoliberal urbanism, with a particular focus on how conflicts over space and resources affect spatial organization and dynamics through territorial and place-asserting logics. This involves analyzing how areas of the city are used and contested by different urban groups and how these disputes lead to changes in the urban landscape. We examine the trajectories of internally displaced people (IDPs) from the northern part

of the country who temporarily settle in the city, often resulting in protracted displacement characterized by “waiting” and “the permanence of temporariness” (Brun and Fábos 2015). We look at their spatial practices within the urban context, such as home-making and economic activities, which we examine through the lens of spatial figures to gain insight into the conflictual spaces that emerge between forcibly displaced people and host communities. This study shows how conflicts materialize as physical confrontation, displacement, and the abuse and oppression of displaced groups. In Amman, we focus on spatial tensions, institutionalized conflict containment techniques, and negotiation processes that affect urban refugee care sites. We study the networks driving migration policies and the design and production of physical interventions in urban settings to better comprehend them. Spatial figures and multiple spatialities (Löw and Knoblauch 2020) help us grasp the players’ positionality and perspectivism in these places as differently situated social references that generate geographical variances, variations, and divergences (Löw and Knoblauch 2020).

Through the use of spatial ethnography methodologies, the research explores daily activities involved in urban landscaping. We rely on Dalal’s (2020, 218) analysis of “refugee-more-than-human” encounters, specifically in the context of camps, to examine the metropolis and highlight the acquisition of a fresh spatial understanding through interactions with novel urban and constructed surroundings. The examination of these encounters points to the social divisions and conflicts that influence the development of the urban environment, particularly for forcibly displaced individuals who must navigate, create, and compete for resources within these settings.

In both cities, commonplace interactions prompt a reevaluation of the sociopolitical layout of everyday life, leading to the emergence of new stories about living together and tactics for overcoming feelings of being confined in space that arise from displacement and exacerbated by a lack of rights in the urban environment (Amit and Knowles 2017). This text highlights the contrasting experiences of forced migrants in relation to the prevailing perception of rigid differences between different forcibly displaced groups. We contend that both IDPs and refugees adeptly navigate, negotiate, and reestablish social interactions relationally within a multifaceted and dynamic metropolitan setting, highlighting the significant impact of micro-analysis on these two populations.

The next two parts of this chapter characterize the research locations of Lagos and Amman through ethnographic memos (written *italics*) presenting the sites, the materialities, and claims that are causing conflict. Lagos and Amman are used to demonstrate that the city not only depicts and perpetuates conflicts but also reshapes sociospatial logics of exclusion and selective

inclusion via everyday actions and imaginations. The following spatial “measurements” are analyzed to achieve this: (1) the spatial emergence of conflict from social and economic identity differences; (2) the use of space as a pretext and material support for social and economic conflicts; and (3) humanitarian interventions disrupting local socioethnic, economic, and political equilibrium and affecting state sovereignty and displaced populations.

Lagos

The Lagos case study focuses on IDPs from 13 northern Nigerian states, but primarily Borno and Adamawa. In 2003, most of our study population was displaced primarily due to Boko Haram,¹ with a minor part due to climate change and other ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria’s North and Middle Belts. Nigeria has established official humanitarian facilities in the north where displacements are occurring. The country’s humanitarian strategy remains concentrated in the north and on encampments, highly terrorized forced returns, and resettlements in the same region. This strategy ignores a bulk of IDPs, referred to by [Olanrewaju et al. \(2019\)](#) as the “invisible majority,” who seek self-solutions due to failures in this response by migrating to cities ([Roberts and Lawanson 2023](#)). Similarly, all foreign humanitarian efforts in Nigeria target the same area and use the same stringent approaches, effectively regionalizing humanitarian response to the north of the country. As such, when IDPs move from the areas of the humanitarian interventions of the north to cities, they are left without any form of support ([Roberts and Lawanson 2023](#)). The state government told us that, while its humanitarian intervention caters to its own internal population who have become displaced, as well as to refugee arrivals in Lagos, IDP migrants from outside Lagos are excluded (LASEMA interview, October 2022).

The mismatch between institutional systems is a crucial causative element that makes IDP migrants in Lagos an especially vulnerable group, for which vulnerability is influenced by identity politics, rights, and urban belonging ([Roberts and Lawanson 2023](#)). Building on the testimonies of IDPs and local residents in Lagos in the following ethnographic memo, the subsequent paragraphs examine the conditions and genealogies of spatial conflict.

After traveling longly in the yellow minibus with an open door, we were dropped off at the bus stop closest to the IDP settlement, where the second part of the journey into the settlement begins.

We then negotiated with the motorcycle guys on the side of the road to get a cheap price for a ten- to fifteen-minute ride to the settlement.

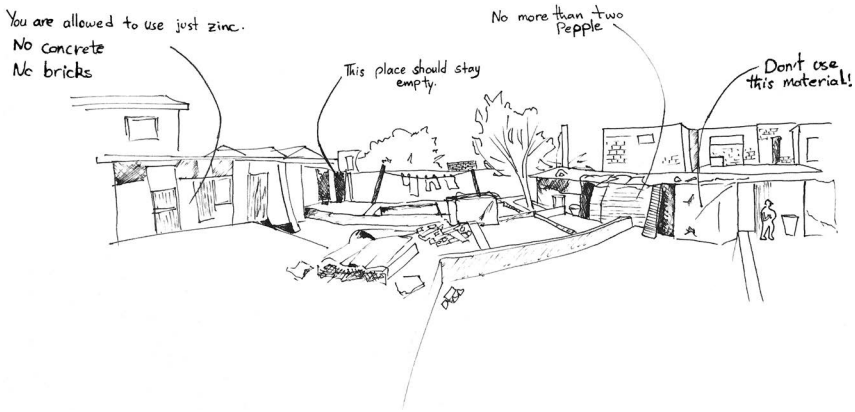


Figure 10.1 This sketch shows one of the investigated compounds within an informal camp in Lagos.

Source: Own representation.

It had just stopped raining, and the air felt fresh. Before it rained, it was heavy and sticky. The road ride was very bumpy, and we had to stop several times and push the very well-maintained motorcycle because it got stuck in puddles and holes. We finally arrived at the compound within the settlement where we were holding the interviews we came for. Our team member, who speaks Hausa, greeted the people sitting in the yard of the compound [Figure 10.1]. We were introduced to each other.

Foremost, building north–south alliances with other researchers was needed to help overcome the challenges presented in researching these vulnerable groups, as these groups are typically located in inaccessible areas that present challenges and affect what type of research is being done and by whom.

Our first interview was with Serki, the leader of the IDP community. He told us his story:

The first time I came to Lagos was in 2003, before I had to leave Chibok Local Government Area in Borno State in 2011. Most Nigerian farmers moved to Lagos during the offseason to conduct petty trading, so I would bring goods from the north and bring them to Lagos to sell. I lived in both Lagos and Chibok part time—in Lagos during planting and harvest time and in Chibok during the offseason. When Boko Haram stormed my town in 2011, abducted

my daughter, and killed several of my family members, unlike some others who have no touch in major cities such as Lagos, I quickly relocated with my family to Lagos in the same year [...] By 2013, Lagos State had seen a huge number of IDPs from the north relocate here, and as someone with “connections” to Lagos who had begun to penetrate certain major cultural and political circles in the city, I became a natural host to many of our people. Hence, I was elected as a community leader known as the Seriki of the IDPs here in Lekki. At this point, my assigned space was overcrowded, and the locals desired a clear separation from IDPs, so I went to the Baale (local community leader) of Igbo Efon and requested that we be granted our own settlement place, which is how Owode Mango came to be.

The above shows the established social relationships that were in existence prior to the displacement and that facilitated the resettlement of IDP migrants in Lagos. Spatialized processes are presented within the epistemologies and methodologies of spatial practices, in which the local population must designate spaces to IDPs, despite the fact that they too are citizens.

The second person we interviewed had a completely different experience with multiple displacement. She was displaced in 2011; at that time, she was 11 years old. Her family ultimately relocated to Lagos in 2013, with the assistance of other IDPs who were already in the city. She told us how they had previously resided in numerous locations, including a camp in Yola, Adamawa State, and just a tiny amount of Abuja. Her story is as follows:

I was unaware that the family providing assistance to my family was residing under a bridge in the heart of the city, and I was unaware that we were unable to remain in a real home upon our arrival. We relocated to the area beneath the bridge after residing in a boundary location near the Lagos–Ogun state border, where the majority of IDPs initially reside until they can secure employment in the city. We were granted a designated area and constructed our residences in accordance with the Seriki’s agreement in that location. We resided in this location from 2014 to 2017, but we were ultimately compelled to vacate due to the increasing population, which caused others to observe our presence. Even though we were already paying land renters, the police and local community gatekeepers, known as “area boys,” were continually collecting money from us to allow us to remain in the area. Ultimately, in 2017, the environment management agency issued a notice of demolition because our residence there was deemed to be an unauthorized use of public space.

[...] Ultimately, we relocated to a separate location. We utilized the same unfolded building materials from the old site and followed the same building guidelines established by our land renter to only build temporary residences. We resided here from 2017 until 2019, when, as our population grew, the same government agency discovered and issued another demolition order, and over time, our leader had established contact with the IDP Seriki in Lekki, Owode Mango. In all the places we've lived, we've always been aware that we're strangers and outsiders who must follow the rules set by the locals who allow us to live there, usually telling us that our homes are only temporary, although we started living there in 2014 and many of us even before that. [...] They want us to keep these camp buildings up so that they can distinguish us from the residents. Even though we live among locals and other migrants who are not IDPs, we are the only ones subjected to such isolation and limits on temporary housing, and many times, our houses are burned down by the locals at their mercy. [...] This type of limitation, which has additional repercussions, prevents us from having an address, and without an address, many of us are unable to obtain the utility bills necessary to open bank accounts or register in public school. Even though I've been here for 11 years, I still feel like I'm living in a camp since everything is the same, the only difference being that, here, unlike camp, we earn money and pay taxes to the local government and state without the benefits, but our money cannot buy us dignity and rights as IDPs in Lagos.

The uncertainties of protracted displacement within social figurations and dynamic social constellations are highlighted here. This aligns with [Tuathail and Luke's \(1994\)](#) framing of the loss of place and gaining a new place as “deterritorialization” and “reterritorialization.” The narration above presents physical spaces that are extended through structural stress rather than existing as static locations. The interviewee details the geography of prolonged displacement and translocal forced migration, with the daily experiences of displaced people sometimes transcending national borders, geographical locations, viewpoints, abilities, and cultures, thus making them important to recognize. According to [Etzold et al. \(2019\)](#), the interlinking of translocality and human movement is cultivated by IDPs to address and escape chronic displacement and the clashes with defensive and oppressive territorially reasoned backlashes from local populations.

We then heard a very different perspective that of the leader of a local community “hosting” IDP in the area. His words are as follows:

I am the local community leader of Igbo Efon. We first came into contact with the [IDP] group when some of them were traders

shuttling between Lagos and the north. At the time, our relationship was mutually beneficial and equal because they were economic migrants contributing to our local economy here in Lekki. Since moving here as displaced peoples, that relationship has changed because we didn't expect them to still be here. In 2013, when we officially allocated them a settlement plot, it was meant to be temporary, but many years later, they are still here, so we have to not make them too comfortable, as their presence is equally a threat, not just because of Boko Haram insecurity that comes with hosting them, but also because of the ethnic domination of our indigenous land. IDPs are now too much in Lagos, and that cannot be a good thing for us local people.

The above deconstructs the “hosting” relationship in light of the fact that formal humanitarian coverage is not extended to IDP migrants upon their arrival in Lagos (Roberts and Lawanson 2023). The interpretive analysis above presents IDPs as cultivating their urban resilience in partnership with locals. The negotiating reality does not implicitly interpret relations between parties or power relations and institutional structures that marginalize and oppress IDPs, nor does it explain how national insecurity and IDP spatial practices interact.

To sum up

The interview segments above show the opinions of an IDP leader, an IDP inhabitant from Owode Mango, and a local community leader from Igbo Efon, Lekki, and Lagos. They show that shelter is the most pressing necessity for IDPs in Lagos. They also emphasize that securing conventional sheltering is complex due to the need to consider a variety of factors: accessibility of land and materials, the involvement of affected communities, and coordination. Lagos resettling groups confront added complexity due to ethno-religious, cultural, and the political determinants that caused their exodus.

IDP settlement differs from local settling. The latter may be relocated via government-led forceful evictions. To clarify, Lagos's urbanity comprises development initiatives for the middle class, the affluent, and the megarich (Olajide and Lawanson 2021) by expropriation and displacement of vast urban poor and informal and formal populations. State-sponsored “urban renewal” programs typically do this. IDP and local community displacement need resettlement, which is relevant to our scenario.

Forcibly displaced urban migrants negotiate with landowners and traditional authorities to remain as IDPs or locals. Resettlement in other metropolitan neighborhoods densifies the built environment and population

spatial concentration, impacting the demand on local infrastructure. Spatial cultivation and adaptation into self-built communities and homes, as the principal urban resilience strategy of our case study population, is cultivated through an informal land brokerage system. The state government's humanitarian policy protects and covers its own urban displaced population and refugees from nearby African states but excludes translocal forced migrants in Lagos, in somewhat of a mix of territorial claiming and place-identity reinforcement that effectively pushes some out while keeping others in.

We found that IDPs and informal communities co-produce relocation and integration. According to an Igbo Efon leader "Local sponsors (locals), landlords, and land brokers regulate IDPs' spatial practices officially allocating them [IDPs] a settlement plot." This highlights the decision-making authority over land allocation for IDPs. Due to the policy exclusion of IDP arrivals in Lagos, their process of resettlement is inducted into a pattern of constant unfolding and rebuilding across space and time, as conceptualized by [Misselwitz and Roberts \(2024\)](#). Our discussion began with a male IDP community leader who had direct access to the city before displacement and who used a unique, seamless resettlement technique. In contrast, the second interviewee is indicative of the majority of the IDP demographic in Lagos, where the process of locating and securing a place for IDPs is conducted in a variety of locations, with a multiplicity of phases, and in precarious settings that are entrenched in multiple cycles of displacement that generate translocal urban geographies (cf. [Misselwitz and Roberts 2024](#)).

Across stages and spaces, IDPs negotiate informal temporary occupation of land with adjacent local communities, who assume the role of host. According to the third interviewee, IDP settlement is a source of cash for individuals who lease the property and for the area boys² and local administration who get additional "taxation" from them for not persecuting the IDP population. IDPs must agree to and follow all host community terms under these agreements. The resulting agreements are geographically segregating, restricting, marginalizing, and oppressive.

This geographical separation between IDPs and the host community has existed since Owode Mango was founded. In 2019, when the IDP community grew rapidly, it splits. There are two methods by which IDPs have acquired additional land: communal rental or private ownership by individuals. The former entails philanthropic proprietors who temporarily lease their land to IDPs until they are prepared to utilize it. This structure prevents opportunistic land thieves from encroaching. In these circumstances, IDPs may rent only group land and temporary homes. However, other groups, unlike IDPs, may rent prebuilt homes or plots of land for building ([Misselwitz and Roberts 2024](#)).

Without the municipal authorities' framework, intracommunity land access agreements would not happen. Gray space—a metaphorical and physical environment associated with urban “informality”—helps explain these urbanization activities that go unchecked by urban governments. According to [Yiftachel \(2015\)](#), marginalized groups use state-led spatial governance withdrawal due to structural defunding or lack of involvement with low-income city dwellers to create gray spaces that defy planning and migration regimes. Yiftachel also develops the notion of defensive urban citizenship to capture how urban dwellers of gray spaces resist new marginalized groups because their arrival increases competition for space and resources ([Yiftachel 2015](#); [Yiftachel and Cohen 2021](#)).

In the third testimony, Igbo Efon's local community leader noted that IDPs were first seen as unproblematic because the relationship was balanced and helpful to the local community. The host did not anticipate that northern Nigeria's conflict would last 14 years, and because of the prolonged displacement and translocal forced mobility to Lagos, they were not invited to remain longer, since they posed a security and territorial control risk. From the local population's perspective, the rapid arrival of IDPs from the north carries a significant risk of Boko Haram invasion into Lagos and poses socioethnic, cultural, religious, territorial control, and land dispute threats.

The community leader echoed the defensive urban citizenship interpretation by saying that IDPs should not undermine local ethnic dominance over indigenous territory. Thus, the juxtaposition of “newcomers” (i.e., IDPs) with long-term local inhabitants sets up conflict latency about spatial presence and entitlement. Latency typically leads to active conflict and subsequent relocation for the IDP group by the local host. Internal IDP divisions are largely faith based, and the IDP community's religious identity from before their displacement and relocation causes problems. Thus, Christian and Muslim IDPs live apart because Muslim IDPs are seen as a security risk due to the northern Nigerian conflict ([Roberts and Lawanson 2023](#)).

The Lagos research revealed an ambivalently warm yet antagonistic relationship managed by exclusion and selective inclusion, as translocal forced migrants from northern Nigeria to Lagos are more likely to lack housing or access to slums. Social connections assist community members in connecting with local communities and informal land channels who serve as landlords to the IDPs' arrivals. Negotiations commence, and the landlord unilaterally sets IDP land leases and development limitations. IDPs may be uprooted again if social tensions with their hosting neighbors force the hosts to lift the arrangement, generating continual instability.

Amman

Amman has been described by many scholars as a living example of a city that emerged from migration. For decades, the city has changed its identity—referred to as the “city of many hats” (Daher 2011)—and has expanded in all directions, swallowing one group of refugees after the other. Various refugee movements were assimilated in Amman, leaving visible imprints on the urban fabric. Due to the strong hierarchical structure employed in governing the city and the top-down approach, various conflicts resulted from these movements, albeit often without resolving them.

During our fieldwork in Amman, Jordan, we had the opportunity to attend several workshops aimed at the refugee communities, which offered us a window into the city refugees’ lives. The following excerpts from an ethnographic memo present one of many workshops we attended—“Data Justice for Refugees.” The workshop captured the underlying tensions among different refugee groups and between the refugees and the host community.

Memo from workshop

It was a cold and rainy day in November 2023. I decided to take the new bus line in the city—known as Amman Bus Rapid Transit, which started operating two years ago. The bus was crowded. I hardly squeezed myself in between the other passengers. Just when I had lowered my backpack onto my feet and gotten hold of a pole, I heard someone calling my name. It was Ali, the person I met a week before. We were on our way to the second session of a workshop called “Data Justice for Refugees.” He joked about the name of the bus being “rapid.” Almost everyone makes this joke about the new bus and states that the money could have been invested better. Ali is a Syrian guy in his thirties who arrived in Amman in 2011. He came with his family and stayed first at the house of his brother, who has been living in Amman since the 2000s. Between November and December. Together with four colleagues who share Syrian, Palestinian, and Jordanian backgrounds, the team organized several workshops to make the voices of the refugees heard, as Ali would say.

The program was a pilot project developed by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) based in London and in collaboration with the King Hussein Foundation’s Information and Research Centre. It aimed to support the collective action of refugees in

Jordan by developing an information economy by and for refugees that directly responds to their advocacy goals (IIED 2024).

Half an hour of squeezed bus times later, Ali and I got off in the western part of Amman, walked three minutes, and arrived at a new glazed building. We met the other workshop participants on the third floor in a room with a view of a very busy street and gray buildings. The city of Amman has this strong division between rich and poor. Most of the participants arrived from the eastern part of the city, the poorer part.

After several decades of urban renewal, Amman's rapid growth has been marked by a social divide and a strong contrast between low-income, poorly served, highly populated neighborhoods and neighborhoods primarily located in the west of the city, where the level of education is higher and the buildings and infrastructure are more developed (Potter et al. 2009; Ababsa 2014).

The participants represent different refugee communities, such as the Syrian, Iraqi, Yemeni, Eritrean, Somali, Palestinian communities. For this session, the team had also invited people from the host community. The first part of the workshop consisted of each of the participants writing down the priorities of their respective community and presenting them in front of the group. In the second part of the workshop, the participants had to work together in groups and identify common difficulties and solutions. On our way to the workshop, Ali had shared his worries about the participants blaming each other for the miserable situation they lived in. A Yemeni woman started talking about the difficulties and the high cost of renewing the residency permit for her and her family, since authorities stopped issuing Yemeni refugee asylum papers—in favor of another group. An Eritrean man complained that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the local authorities refused to recognize Eritrean refugees, addressing the problem of racial hierarchization within refugee politics. “That’s why we do not get any kind of support, while other nationalities get everything, but not the Eritrean.” A Somali guy complained how all support is oriented towards Syrian refugees. A Syrian woman blamed the authorities and international actors for not guaranteeing stable health care support, which could have saved her from getting a physical impairment. A young Jordanian man blamed Syrian refugees for the high rents in the city. Despite all these strong statements, the participants knew that the individuals in the room were not the reason behind all these conflicts. They would still make jokes together and feel for each other.

On the way home, Ali shared his relief: another session was done, and luckily, there were no fights. So that went well.

The complaints and blame that refugees directed at authorities and international actors reflect the frustration and competition for limited resources, which exacerbate spatial conflicts within the refugee communities (Figure 10.2). In fact, Jordan is a small country that lacks natural resources and has little useful land area (Ababsa 2014). Additionally, the refugees struggle because of the racial and tribal hierarchization and health care access. To make sense of these sociospatial relations, the conceptual framework of conflicts can be used as a backdrop for interpreting Amman's transformations and the role of migration in their making. Our research in Amman indicated that the emergence and development of migration policy within the country are entangled in the urban planning and architecture of the city. We argue that it is very connected to the geopolitical understanding of the region, as it addresses different political approaches, such as rent seeking (El-Abed 2014; Tsourapas 2019) and extra-territorialization (beyond the legal borders of the European Union (EU); Geiger and Pécoud 2010; cf. Inder 2010; Kasperek 2010; Walters 2010).

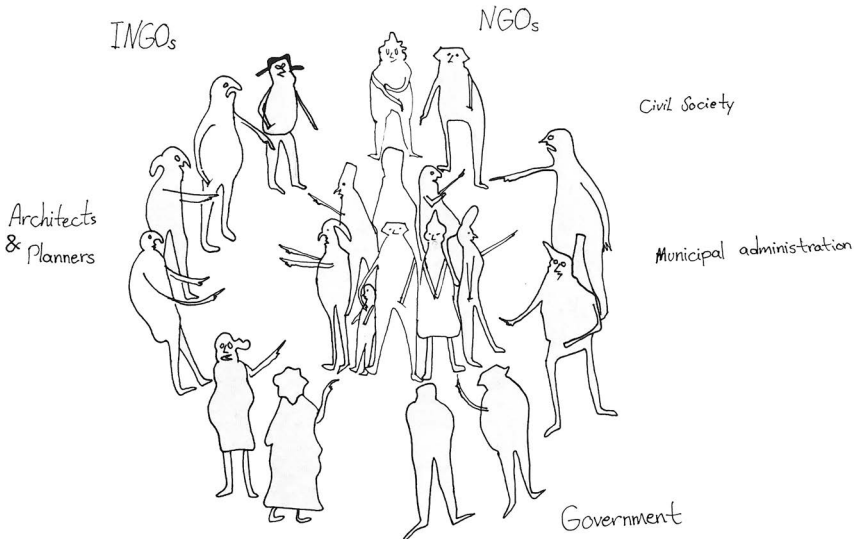


Figure 10.2 The illustration exemplifies the relational constellation of stakeholders discussing money, as well as practices, affordances, what is allowed, what is not, etc.

Source: Own representation.

Due to its geostrategic location, Jordan has taken part in various international conferences addressing refugees and migration issues and has signed the resulting agreements. Jordan has also been invited when not geographically connected to the places that are the main focus of the conference, such as the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference (November 1995) and the Barcelona declaration, which has addressed cooperation between the EU and Mediterranean countries across political, economic, and social spheres. In addition, demographic problems, namely, migration from the Global South to the Global North and the rise of terrorism, have placed the issue of security on the agenda of the Mediterranean region (Kasmi 2020). At the time, Jordan was invited as a transit country where refugees start their journey toward Europe. As one interviewed expert put it, this could be viewed as “a policy of containment and its use to shape the buffer zone areas.”

The research in Amman asserts that these relationships have evolved and taken various forms over the years. The funds are channeled in various ways, beginning with a direct connection to the World Bank or International Monetary Fund (IMF) or through investments made by “donor countries.” This process extends beyond city networks and involves more complex relationships, which we look at through the lens of the network spatial figure (cf. Löw and Knoblauch 2020). We find that a historically constructed regime, made of a set of rules, norms, institutions, and practices that structure political power and authority within a territory, is being challenged by the policies brought by various networks. In other words, the city networks provide the possibility to avoid a “democracy deficit” between local, national, and multilateral layers of governance, and a scale jump through the city administration to avoid national limitations (Davidson et al. 2019). According to Löw and Knoblauch (2020, 40, own translation), “network and territorial spaces are already simultaneously effective spatial logics that are in tension with each other.” Accordingly, we observe the manifold conflicts and tensions that arise in encounters with, between, and within these spatial figures.

Our investigation in Amman helps us define the conflicts on two levels. The first is the relationship between international and national interest and how governing migration is dependent on international politics. The second is between refugees and host communities and how conflict is being contained institutionally. The following section addresses the two levels of conflict containment strategies, based on our literature review and empirical data.

The relationship of international and national interest

Various strategies have been used by a large number of international actors and organizations to address the refugee issues in Jordan, especially after the Syrian refugee influx in 2012. Such assistance cultivates and harnesses access

to socioeconomic resources, including cash-for-rent and cash-for-work programs and vocational training, to boost recovery and transcend self-reliance. The donors' annual conference for the countries who received Syrian refugees was initiated in London in 2016 and has been held in Brussels ever since (2017–2023). It is known as the International Compact for Jordan (ICJ), co-chaired by Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar, and the United Kingdom and the IMF/World Bank and Multilateral Development Banks (Jordan et al. 2023). It has resulted in Jordan adjusting its own National Resilience Plan from 2013, its Regional Response Plan from 2014, and the Jordan Response Plan from 2015, which is planned to be updated every two years. The ICJ combined the humanitarian aid, development assistance, and trade benefits negotiated as part of the Compact exceed the assistance provided to any other state in the region (Kelberer 2017; Jordan et al. 2023).

This was not the first attempt to contain refugees within the country's borders through political arrangements. It had happened before in 1948 and 1967 with displaced people from Palestine, in 1991 and 2003 with displaced people from Iraq, and for many other refugee groups who first sought safety in Jordan, such as those from Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, and Eritrea. As part of a very conflictual region, the international migration policy relations for the area must be understood at the interface between the Middle East geopolitical relations and global geopolitics, including the relationship with European migration policy and the role of international aid in influencing some of those wider relations (Jordan et al. 2023). Over the last few decades, many scholars have addressed how Jordan has all the characteristics of an indirect “rentier state” (Abu-Lughod 1983; Biegel 1996; Ababsa 2014; El-Abed 2014). It not only depends on the remittances coming from abroad but also uses its geopolitical strategic location, in addition to the aid from the international community, to gain support in facing various crises, especially refugee crises and now, more urgently, climate change. As Tsourapas (2019) posits, a rentier state is one “seeking to leverage their position as host states of displaced communities for material gain.”

For example, the agreement after the ICJ (in 2016) was financed by the World Bank and EU aid disbursement (US \$300 million), and 200,000 work permits were issued for Syrian refugees (Tobin et al. 2021). In fact, many studies have indicated that it is particularly challenging to obtain formal employment with legitimate work permits, especially in urban settings. The overall scarcity of job opportunities, coupled with limited access and cultural constraints, forces many individuals, particularly women, out of the workforce or into informal jobs in restricted sectors, which come with additional risks (Tobin et al. 2021). Many reports have indicated that a large number of refugees do not aim to get a work permit, and those who are documented are able to renew the permit, thus accounting for the 200,000 work permits.

All of this illuminates how both techno-managerial regimes on the international and national levels gain from this. These agreements, aimed at opening new possibilities for refugees, have prevented refugees from ensuring long-term stability and basic rights, such as access to the labor market, by preventing them from becoming an active part of the community and pushing them into a limbo where they struggle for years. They get trapped in protracted displacement characterized by “waiting” and “the permanence of temporariness” (Brun and Fábos 2015). Eventually, these agreements successfully contain refugees and asylum seekers.

Refugees and the host community

In an interview with the head of the Sustainable Development and Amman Resilience at Greater Amman Municipality, she illustrated how conflicts between refugees and locals have been contained institutionally:

At the beginning of the refugee crisis, we noticed that there were prejudices and issues due to the [funding] targeting only refugees, meaning refugees who live in urban areas and who originally arrived in poor areas. The international community provided assistance. You give it to a Syrian refugee, and his neighbor doesn't have anything to eat. There were a few problems at the beginning. However, under royal directives, organizations were forced to provide services to the host community and refugees.

One Syrian woman who was working on one of the focus projects in Amman said, “*In this room,³ there are Syrian and Jordanian women; they are like our sisters and daughters.*” Another Syrian woman added:

At the beginning of the crisis, in 2012–2013, they were very welcoming and very sympathetic to Syrians [...] I'm talking about Jordanians and Palestinian Jordanians, both sides were very cooperative and sympathetic, but then things started to change that made them feel that Syrians are taking over their rights, and that the Syrians took their place at work, or that they receive aid and that they [the Syrian refugees] live better than us [locals], and this became the case after a year and a half, like 2014–2015.

A Jordanian woman commented:

I need financial support [...] I work a lot with them [Syrian refugees]. We are very good friends with them [...] the opposite, all of these organizations and aid arrived, since the Syrians came to Jordan; there

were no such things in the first place. They opened [for us] the door to employment and opened the door to get aid, and that did not exist before.”

During our field trip in Amman, we identified various projects targeting public spaces and infrastructures, which had been funded through international actors and aimed to address refugees and host communities. All of these projects took/are taking place in the eastern (poor) part of the city. The study of various projects served to understand the emergence of planning negotiation processes in which different actors interact with each other and mobilize different bodies of knowledge in the process. Considered actors include civil society, city authorities, and national governance levels, or globally active actors, such as humanitarian organizations, international development cooperation organizations, or global city networks. The intention was to address the spatial conflicts that characterize the planning and physical-material production of places for refugee care in urban contexts.

Ghanem (2022) said that the production of public spaces in Amman:

...has witnessed a shift due to the influx of refugees it has received in recent years and the role of refugee-oriented NGOs [nongovernment organizations]. With developed countries paying more and more attention to Project for Public Spaces (POS) as tools for sociocultural integration, a shift in priorities is sure to take place. More POS projects in the eastern side of the city focusing on everyday spaces are being initiated by NGOs or activists who have secured international funds in line with De Landa (2006) [citation from original source], who highlights the unintended consequences of intended actions (meaning here that integrative POS projects with specific intentions to integrate refugees generate unintended outcomes that enhanced the POS sector in general).

As this highlights, the exacerbated spatial conflicts manifest in various ways. The majority of the interviewees explicitly asserted that the sole cause of intercommunity animosity is the economic tension and not any form of racism. Numerous reports from organizations operating in the country indicate that this principle is equally applicable to both youth and other age groups. Across our collected data, physical confrontations were also mentioned several times, but while we do not wish to undermine this aspect, it was the least mentioned manifestation of conflict.

The main issues that interviewees agreed on were that refugees are being denied their rights—(a) the right to find a proper job, since refugees are allowed to work in specific sectors, which leads to working illegally and

to confrontation with the authorities; (b) the right to have full access to health care systems, where refugees still face challenges, such as high costs and overcrowded facilities; (c) the right to citizenship, which affects their long-term security and ability to be part of the society; and (d) the right to education, where overcrowded classrooms and lack of resources are some of the obstacles that refugee children face in Jordanian schools. Secondary and higher education opportunities are even more limited.

To conclude, we considered all attempts to improve the livelihood of the refugees, the implementation of policies to contain refugees within the region, and the institutionalized containment strategy to reduce conflict between refugees and hosts by providing access to new sources of income. However, we argue that these have only led to the denial of refugees' basic rights, such as the freedom of movement, access to proper education and health care, and the right to work in the fields of their specialization, ultimately pushing them into protracted displacement.

Discussion

In the context of addressing the varied forcibly displaced populations that impact the urban fabric, Lagos and Amman demonstrate more similarities than differences. The two are situated in fragile southern regions that, despite their vulnerable status, perform critical humanitarian roles in the Middle Eastern and North African region and sub-Saharan Africa. Cities have become essential mediators in the global economy, global politics, and the social and cultural tensions that arise from cohabitation with diversity (Wilson 2015). Only recently have social scientists interested in asylum seekers and refugees' politics and geography begun to investigate the urban dimension.

This chapter contributes to the framing of the developing arguments. It explores the implications of addressing the forcibly displaced separately, where their political, social, and ethnic identities matter in the specific spaces they share, or attempt to share, with a variety of urban dwellers. In so doing, we conceptualize refugees in Amman and IDPs in Lagos as critical and active urban actors, contradicting the common notion of this group as passive liabilities for cities. This frames their spatial interactions to show how their resilience strategies are embedded in competition for scarce urban resources as a struggle for urban rights and citizenship.

These issues are crucial because they frequently dictate who is eligible to reside in specific regions, access services, and engage in civic activities. The urban landscape is characterized by ongoing negotiations and occasional conflicts as various groups contend for their respective position due to the competition for space and resources. Our analysis of authorities, legalizations, claims, and forced migration studies challenges

the nation-state-centric view of refugee and asylum geographies. Spatial tensions and citizenship criteria—membership in the larger social apparatus and its rights—are highlighted. We contend that citizenship offers a competitive advantage in spatial conflicts; however, it does not predict the results (winners and losers) systematically.

The Lagos case shows how an IDP community leader acquired land for their people based on social connectivity before the forced migration, despite ethnic and religious barriers. While the IDP leader and his people lack social and political legitimacy, they have created a space for themselves by mobilizing social capital and sacrificing geographical agency and housing quality. In Amman, the exclusion of refugees from forms of citizenship undermines their economic autonomy, satisfactory healthcare, and quality of education. However, we are reminded that membership of the urban poor in the national society has also not translated into access to economic security for them. Through aid-funded projects of physical interventions in the city—literally, space-making—identity politics are made to matter less, as both citizens and “nonzens” are called into harnessing livelihoods and spatial agency. This is not to romanticize urban refugees’ agency and impact on urban space as empowered. Rather, it serves to point out how a politics of presence (Darling 2016) might better unpack the spatial agency and activity of urban refugees beyond categories of identity and linear narratives of “informality,” “poverty,” and “victimhood.”

We have demonstrated how Lagos’s humanitarian stance protects sub-Saharan African refugees but not IDP forced migrants. However, humanitarian assistance for refugees is formally established in Amman, thus leading our critique of the international humanitarian strategy of containment as an externalization maneuver to prevent onwards migration, in Amman, that translates into incentives of a national response framework that are focused on financial aid absorption. In Lagos, the response strategy leans toward regional encampment and exclusion of translocal forced migrants, thus hindering sustainable and inclusive urbanization. In both Lagos and Amman, we found conflictive encounters of policies and socio-spatial processes shaped by the figures of territorial identity, place assertions, and networked policy and aid circulation.

Circling back to the figurative metaphors of territory, place, and network figures, the intersectionality of legal status, displacement history, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, and gender reveals many additional layers. We attempted to cast light on three significant issues in Lagos and Amman. The first issue involves the clashes between the state’s legal conceptions of order and control over space/people and forcibly displaced people’s lives. Second, humanitarianism challenges state sovereignty by affecting social and geographical development. This is accomplished by setting agendas that disrupt local socioethnic, economic, and political

equilibrium. The Amman humanitarian agency and its national/local policymaking networks seem to be less important in Lagos in their own problematic ways. Importantly, it strips displaced communities of agency and dignity. Third, city space is both a pretext and theater for identities and practices to meet, and whether such encounters are conflictual or controlled molds them. Urban areas become dialectical spaces where migration and refugee movements synthesize locations, bodies, and cultures into complex epistemological spaces.

In conclusion, the findings from Lagos and Amman stress the “fragility” of organizational life patterns in culturally varied groups, especially in persistent conflict. Practitioners must appreciate the fragility of naturally encountered places but not be paralyzed by it. The emerging themes suggest a powerful interpretive framing of post-displacement geographies within new forms of urbanization that reflect the asylum architectures (Misselwitz and Steigemann 2022) of cities in the Global South based on their point of view in national contexts of rapid and protracted displacement and erratic urbanization induced by the displaced. Our chapter presents a framework for continued testing; through research on practice in various situations, these propositions may be further expanded and enhanced, thereby enhancing understandings of conflicts and their embeddedness in the everyday lives of displaced urban dwellers.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank all of the anonymous IDP key informants and the Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation, the LOTS Charity Foundation, and the Shantytown Empowerment Foundation for their relentless efforts in coordinating citywide local community access. In Amman, we extend gratitude to the organizational team of the “Data Justice for Refugees” workshop and everyone who participated in the interviews.

We also express heartfelt gratitude to the Centre for Housing at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, for hosting us in Lagos, particularly our Lagos colleague and geospatial data expert, Joseph Kayode Aro.

We thank our scholarship fellowship, the CRC 1265, and Elsa Neumann Stiftung for funding our individual projects. Lastly, we extend a special thank you to our project supervisors and collaborators, Professor Philipp Misselwitz, Technical University of Berlin, and Professor Taibat Lawanson, University of Lagos.

Funding statement

The researchers were funded by Elsa Neumann Stiftung and the German Research Foundation DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft).

Notes

- 1 According to Amnesty international: Boko Haram (which roughly translates as “Western education is forbidden”) is an armed group that opposes secular authority. They have been fighting the Nigerian state since 2009 through an escalating campaign of bomb attacks, hit-and-run raids of towns and villages and the capture and occupation of larger towns in the northeast of the country. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/01/boko-haram-glance/>
- 2 The term “area boy” was originally used to refer to anyone who identified with the street, locality or the area where he resides. These young men (and sometimes women) grouped themselves into a form of sociocultural organization who carried out duties to their communities that included acting as de facto security personnels and organizers of local parties and festivals. <https://africasacountry.com/2021/09/lagos-street-boys>
- 3 The interview was conducted at the construction site, where the women were working inside a workshop to produce the mosaic for the tables that are going to be used in the park.

References

- Ababsa, Myriam. 2014. “Jordan’s Rentier Economy.” In *Atlas of Jordan History, Territories and Society*, edited by Myriam Ababsa, 287–292. Beirut: Ifpo Press.
- Abu-Lughod, Janet. 1983. “Urbanization and Social Change in the Arab World.” *Ekistics* 50 (300): 223–231. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43620378>
- Amit, Vered, and Caroline Knowles. 2017. “Improvising and Navigating Mobilities: Tacking in Everyday Life.” *Theory, Culture and Society* 34 (7–8): 165–179.
- Biegel, Reiner. 1996. “Urban Development and the Role of the Service and Banking Sector.” In *Amman: The City and Its Society*, edited by Jean Hannoyer, and Seteny Shami, 379–403. Beirut: Ifpo Press. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.ifpo.8249>
- Brun, Cathrine, and Anita Fábos. 2015. “Making Homes in Limbo? A Conceptual Framework.” *Refuge* 31 (1): 5–17.
- Daher, Rami. 2011. “Understanding Cultural Change and Urban Transformation Qualifying Amman: The City of Many Hats.” In *Cities, Urban Practices and Nation Building in Jordan*, edited by Myriam Ababsa, and Rami Daher, 65–89. Beirut: Presses de l’Ifpo.
- Dalal, Ayham. 2020. “The Refugee Camp as Site of Multiple Encounters and Realizations.” *Review of Middle East Studies* 54 (2): 215–233. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2021.10>
- Darling, Jonathan. 2016. “Forced Migration and the City: Irregularity, Informality, and the Politics of Presence.” *Progress in Human Geography* 41 (2): 178–198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516629004>
- Davidson, Kathryn, Lars Coenen, Michele Acuto, and Brendan Gleeson. 2019. “Reconfiguring Urban Governance in an Age of Rising City Networks: A Research Agenda.” *Urban Studies* 56 (16): 3540–3555. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098018816010>
- De Landa, Manuel. 2006. *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*. London: Continuum. Quoted in H. Ghanem. “Public Outdoor Space and Refugees’ Socio-Cultural Integration: Understanding Refugees’ Agency within a Network of Actors in Amman, Jordan.” PhD diss., School of Landscape Architecture, the University of Sheffield, 2022.

- El-Abed, Oroub. 2014. "The Discourse of Guesthood: Forced Migrants in Jordan." In *Managing Muslim Mobilities: Religion and Global Migrations*, edited by Anita H. Fábos, and Riina Isotalo, 81–100. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/97811373886410_5
- Etzold, B. Benjamin, Milena Belloni, Russel King, Albert Kraler, and Ferruccio Pastore. 2019. *Transnational Figurations of Displacement: Conceptualising Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connectivity Through a Process-Oriented Perspective*. TRAFIG Working Paper No. 1. Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC).
- Geiger, Martin, and Antoine Pécoud. 2010. "The Politics of International Migration Management." In *The Politics of International Migration Management*, edited by Martin Geiger, and Antoine Pécoud, 1–20. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ghanem, Hala. 2022. *Public Outdoor Space and Refugees' Socio-Cultural Integration: Understanding Refugees' Agency within a Network of Actors in Amman, Jordan*. PhD diss., School of Landscape Architecture, the University of Sheffield.
- IIED (International Institute for Environmental Development). 2024. *Data Justice for Refugees: Refugees in Jordan Set Out Priorities for a Better Future*. IIED. Accessed August 31, 2024. <https://www.iied.org/data-justice-for-refugees-refugees-jordan-set-out-priorities-for-better-future>
- Inder, Claire. 2010. "International Refugee Law, 'Hyper-Legalism' and Migration Management: The Pacific Solution." In *The Politics of International Migration Management*, edited by Martin Geiger, and Antoine Pécoud, 220–251. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jordan, Zoë, Cathrine Brun, Israa Sadler, and Dana Obeidat. 2023. "EFFEXT Background Papers – National and International Migration Policy in Jordan." Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI). Accessed August 31, 2024. <https://www.cmi.no/publications/8872-effext-background-paper-jordan>
- Kasmi, Sanae. 2020. *Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean: 25 Years of the Barcelona Process*. Berlin: Konrad Adenauer Foundation.
- Kasperek, Bernd. 2010. "Borders and Populations in Flux: Frontex's Place in the European Union's Migration Management." In *The Politics of International Migration Management*, edited by Martin Geiger, and Antoine Pécoud, 119–140. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kelberer, Victoria. 2017. "Negotiating Crisis: International Aid and Refugee Policy in Jordan." *Middle East Policy* 24: 148–165.
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2020. "The Re-Figuration of Spaces and Refigured Modernity: Concept and Diagnosis." *Historical Social Research* 45 (2): 263–292.
- Löw, Martina, and Hubert Knoblauch. 2020. "Raumfiguren, Raumkulturen Und Die Refiguration Von Räumen." In *Am Ende Der Globalisierung: Über Die Refiguration Von Räumen*, edited by Martina Löw, Volkan Sayman, Jona Schwörer, and Hannah Wolf, 25–58. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Misselwitz, Philipp, and Rebecca E. Roberts. 2024. "Exploring the Potential of the Spatial Agency of Refugees and IDPs to Inform Alternative Approaches of 'Protection': Case Studies from Lagos and Berlin." In *Everyday Urban Practices in Africa: Disrupting Global Norms*, edited by Nadine Appelhans, Carmel Rawhani, Marie Huchzermeyer, Basirat Oyalowo, and Mfaniseni F. Sihlongonyane, 111–131. London: Routledge.
- Misselwitz, Philipp, and Anna Steigemann. 2022. "Architecture of Asylum: Negotiating Home-Making Through Concrete Spatial Strategies." In *Communicative*

- Constructions and the Refiguration of Spaces*, edited by Gabriela B. Christmann, Hubert Knoblauch, and Martina Löw, 174–194. London: Routledge.
- Olajide, Olajide, and Taibat Lawanson. 2021. “Urban Paradox and the Rise of the Neoliberal City: Case Study of Lagos, Nigeria.” *Urban Studies* 59 (9): 1763–1781. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211014461>
- Olanrewaju, Faith O., Adekunle Olanrewaju, Femi Omotoso, Joshua O. Alabi, Emmanuel Amoo, Ejiroghene Loromeke, and Lady A. Ajayi. 2019. “Insurgency and the Invisible Displaced Population in Nigeria: A Situational Analysis.” *SAGE Open* 9: 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019846207>
- Potter, Robert B., Khadija Darmame, Nasim Barham, and Stephen Nortcliff. 2009. “Ever-Growing Amman’, Jordan: Urban Expansion, Social Polarisation and Contemporary Urban Planning Issues.” *Habitat Interdoational* 33 (1): 81–92. DOI:10.1016/j.habitatint.2008.05.005
- Roberts, Rebecca E., and Taibat Lawanson. 2023. *Understanding IDPs in Nigerian Cities*. Working Paper No. 36. Researching Internal Displacement.
- Steigemann, Anna, and Philipp Misselwitz. 2020. “Architectures of Asylum: Making Home in a State of Permanent Temporariness.” *Current Sociology* 68 (5): 628–650.
- Tobin, Sarah A., Are J. Knudsen, Fawwaz A. Momani, Tamara Al Yakoub, and Rasheed Al-Jarrah. 2021. *Figurations of Displacement in Jordan and Beyond: Empirical Findings and Reflections on Protracted Displacement and Translocal Connections of Syrian Refugees*. TRAFIG Working Paper No. 6. Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC).
- Tsourapas, Gerasimos. 2019. “The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Foreign Policy Decision-Making in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey.” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4 (4): 464–481.
- Tuathail, Gearóid Ó, and Timothy W. Luke. 1994. “Present at the (Dis)Integration: Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization in the New World Order.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 84 (3): 381–398.
- Walters, William. 2010. “Imagined Migration World: The European Union’s Anti-Illegal Immigration Discourse.” In *The Politics of International Migration Management*, edited by Martin Geiger, and Antoine Pécoud, 73–95. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wilson, Helen F. 2015. “An Urban Laboratory for the Multicultural Nation?” *Ethnicities* 15 (4): 586–604. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796815577703>
- Yiftachel, Oren. 2015. “Epilogue: From ‘Gray Space’ to Equal ‘Metrozenship’? Reflections on Urban Citizenship.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39 (4): 726–737.
- Yiftachel, Oren, and Nir Cohen. 2021. “Defensive Urban Citizenship: A View from Southeastern Tel Aviv.” In *Theorising Urban Development from the Global South*, edited by Anjali K. Mohan, Sony Pellissery, and Juliana G. Aristizábal, 149–174. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Part IV

**Social exclusion and spatial
knowledge**



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

11 Spatial conflict containment in Singapore

Pacifying conflictual spaces by (in)visibilizing them in urban infrastructure

Nina Baur and Elmar Kulke

Pacifying conflictual spaces by containing conflicts in infrastructure

When reflecting on social conflicts in space, it is important to remember that—as resources are scarce—there are always conflicts in all spatialities. However, these conflicts play out differently in different spatialities because they do not take place in a vacuum—rather, they take place against a spatiality’s past in two ways.

First, in the *longue durée*, spatialities create and maintain their own distinct constellations of knowledge and modes of expression that are not only deeply ingrained in collective memory but also reflected in current everyday practices and—in times of crises or social conflicts—result in typical ways of both framing and resolving conflicts (Baur and Hering 2017), thus pre-structuring future conflicts along path-dependent lines.

Second, solutions to past conflicts are often deeply engrained and objectified in a spatiality’s material structure, such as a city’s layout, transport routes and buildings—physical space becomes a tool that makes some ways of conflict resolution easier but others more difficult (Simmel [1901] 1996: 261–267). As a result, spatialities differ in at least three ways in how social conflicts play out: (a) the resources that are considered scarce and are, therefore, the source of conflict, (b) which social groups are typically in conflict over these resources and (c) legitimate means of conflict resolution.

These context-specific entanglements become clearer if one stops limiting common social-science research practice to empirically only ground theory in European or Anglo-Saxon case studies (Baur 2025) but contrasts past findings on social conflicts with new insights from non-Western societies. Therefore and as we assume that most readers are well aware of the spatial arrangements of European cities, in this paper, we will focus on social conflicts in Singapore. However, the empirical data we draw on were gained comparing spatial arrangements of Singapore and Berlin (Germany) (Baur and Kulke 2023)—so if in this paper, we refer to

differences between Singapore and European cities, we are actually comparing Berlin and Singapore: Both cities are comparable in size, have an elevated level of socioeconomic development and, therefore, belong to the Global North. The major lines of conflict in both countries run along class and ethnic groups. However, in many ways, Singapore maximizes contrasts to European cities and thus is a good starting point for empirically grounded theory building. For example, on a structural level, Singapore's legal and institutional framework differs significantly from Germany's. Historically, Singapore has always been an international trade and transport hub. As a city state, Singapore has to import a large part of its produce from abroad. Culturally, Singapore is a blend of Asian cultures, namely, Chinese, Malay and Indian, with only hints of European influence (Ting 2024, 285–292). Due to these differences, social conflicts in space are expected to play out very differently in Singapore than in Europe.

Social groups in conflict

Social conflicts are typically about scarce resources that must somehow be distributed between people. The result is often social inequality, meaning that life chances and access to scarce resources are not determined by chance or individual achievement but by belonging to a specific social group.

As in many European countries, in Singapore, *social class* is one of the most important dimensions of social inequality. Typically, all family members belong to the same social class. As in Germany, class in Singapore is not only defined by ownership but also by paid work—access to specific job categories can only be achieved by specific educational qualifications which result in distinct occupational prestige and income. While it is difficult to measure class inequality cross-culturally, and while deprived people can be found in all countries in both countries, the percentage of extremely poor persons seems to be similar. However, while wealthy people can be found everywhere, and their overall number is usually very small, their proportion is much higher in Singapore than in Berlin. For example, Singapore has the eighth-highest number of billionaires globally (Koop and Ma 2022), making the superrich a defining feature in social space.

Social class typically intersects with other dimensions of social inequality. As in many other countries, in Singapore, *ethnicity* plays a crucial role in defining urban space. More specifically, Singapore originated from a trading post along the maritime Silk Road and has always been a meeting place for diverse cultures (Ting 2024, 290–293). This was reinforced during British colonialism when the current historic town center was designed, and different immigrant groups were originally assigned to separate quarters. The historical immigrant patterns are reflected in today's population structure, in which 76% of Singapore's citizens are

(mostly Buddhist or Taoist) ethnic Chinese, 15% (Muslim) ethnic Malay and 8% (Hindu or Muslim) ethnic Indian (Singstat 2021, 7). Only a very small minority are of British or other origins. In contrast to Germany, one cannot extrapolate from a Singaporean citizen's ethnicity on their social class, with one exception: While the dominant ethnic groups might come from all social classes—including wealthy business elites—ethnic Europeans were typically *only* upper-middle and upper-class.

However, this only holds for Singaporean citizens, who are only part of the resident population. Like Germany, Singapore has a high rate of immigration. When it comes to migrant workers, government-based politics use non-spatial strategies of conflict containment, as observed by Knoblauch, Pfetsch and Sommer (in this volume), to hide part of Singapore's ethnic diversity and resulting class differences. The majority of labor migrants are unskilled labor migrants immigrating from poorer neighboring countries, such as domestic servants from the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. These migrant workers usually have only temporary residency permits and do not appear in official statistics or measures of inequality. They are typically integrated into Singaporean underclasses, and their number is a substantial part of the total population (Paul 2017, 102; Dobrusskin and Helbrecht 2021).

Modes of conflict resolution

When social groups have conflicting interests, there are various modes of resolving these conflicts, ranging from applying individual or collective *physical violence* against people and things—examples being wars, gang violence or police violence on streets, or domestic violence, ranging from beating to mutilating. For example, as Kohrs, Hering and Shadrack (in this volume) show, in Nairobi (Kenya), physical violence is a quite common means of resolving conflicts.

However, as Simmel ([1903] 1995, 222–227) has argued, in complex societies with long chains of interdependence, physical violence as a means of conflict resolution is very rare, because typically, *exchange and trade* (“Tausch”) turn physical fights and battles (“Kampf”) into nonphysical competition (“Wettbewerb”)—and in this sense, the *economy* has a pacifying effect (“pazifizierende Wirkung”). Accordingly, intermediaries or traders (“Händler”) symbolize the function of exchange (“Funktion des Austauschens”) (Simmel [1901] 1996, 210–211), which is also why, historically, one of the first specialized professions to develop when a division of labor was implemented were intermediaries or traders (Simmel [1901] 1996, 210–211). As a result, social conflicts are often institutionalized—for example, in Europe, they occur via elections or formal labor conflicts (such as strikes).

Concerning this transfer from physical violence to a more peaceful means of resolving social conflicts, Singapore is an interesting case because it was characterized by violent conflictual spaces in the 1960s, which took the form of both class and race riots during which many people died. For example, during a riot on 21.07.1964, 23 people died, and hundreds more were injured. Within a decade, Singapore managed to pacify these conflictual spaces by spatially containing them. *Spatial containment was achieved in the following three ways:*

- *Legislation and institutional control* have been important means for spatial containment. The “Internal Security Act” grants Singapore’s executive powers against actions that may threaten Singapore’s internal security, including those that “promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or other classes of the population likely to cause violence.”
- Singapore has been applying the logic of spatial avoidance of conflicts by encouraging *economic development* (Ting 2024, 285–290), so all citizens have benefited economically to some extent from nonviolent conflict resolution, which aligns with Simmel’s argument.
- In the course of its politics of social mixing, Singapore has been using *urban design* to spatially contain conflicts in spatial arrangements, thus visibilizing class and ethnic conflicts between citizens while invisibilizing conflicts between citizens and non-citizens. How these conflicts are spatially contained is the focus of this paper.

Housing and food as scarce resources and sources of conflict

When it comes to the issue of which resources different social groups go into conflict about, from an economic, sociological and geographical point of view, there are two angles: production and consumption. Most research—especially social inequality research—has focused on production and has shown that the key resources for reproducing class inequality are ownership and income from paid work. The key indicators for social class are income, occupational status and education, which until today are empirically strongly linked (Müller-Schneider 2003; Groh-Samberg, Büchler and Gerlitz 2020), and Knoblauch, Pfetsch and Sommer explore how production and spatial conflicts are related in the introduction to this volume.

However, the key argument of sociological lifestyle researchers such as Thorstein Veblen (1899), Pierre Bourdieu ([1979] 1984), Norbert Elias ([1939] 2000) or Gerhard Schulze (1992) is that concerning social conflicts in space, consumption is more important because in everyday life, you do not see how much people own or earn. To express their class, people have to display their socioeconomic status through their lifestyle—that is, by their everyday practices and consumption patterns. Through their lifestyles,

people express who they are (identity), who they want to be (aspirations), and who they do *not* want to be (distinction). In doing so, people relate not only to their own classes but also to other social classes. In their aspirations, they relate to the upper classes. In distinction, they mostly relate to the lower classes. Because aspirations often result in imitating upper-class lifestyles, upper-class lifestyles are normalized over time, and the upper classes are forced to continuously change their lifestyles to distinguish themselves from the lower classes, thus driving the refiguration process (Elias [1939] 2000).

Therefore, lifestyles and associated social and consumption practices have been continuously changing over time. They are deeply engrained into specific socio-cultural contexts—what is done and consumed by whom, why in which ways can only be understood when understanding social contexts' history and past. Schulze (1992) has shown that—while specific consumption patterns and everyday practices are changing over time—every social group has a typical philosophy of a good life (“Lebensphilosophie”), their specific mode of distinction (“Distinktion”) and their own idea of what is pleasurable (“Genuss”); together, they comprise the aesthetics of everyday life (“Alltagsästhetische Schemata”) which are relatively stable over the course of life.

Based on this reasoning, the remainder of this paper focuses on consumption, specifically *food* and *housing*, in urban spaces. Lifestyle research has shown that in most social contexts, these are the key markers of displaying social class in everyday life. We use food and housing as examples to elaborate on how urban design and everyday social practices complement each other in Singapore to spatially contain conflicts in spatial arrangements. The second section describes our data and methods. The third section discusses how, in the 1960s, Singapore was characterized by violent conflictual spaces along class and ethnic lines and how these conflicts were highly visible in urban spaces. Section four will show how Singaporean governments tried to alleviate these conflicts between 1965 and 1990. We demonstrate how these policies spatially contained class and ethnic conflicts between Singaporean citizens of different classes and ethnic groups. In contrast, ongoing conflicts between Singaporean citizens and lower-class immigrant laborers still linger, but are veiled. As we illustrate in the fifth section, the overall result is that the higher classes need fewer markers for displaying their social status in public spaces than they would need in Europe. We conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of spatial conflicts.

Data and methods

The data used for the following analysis consist of a mix between literature, cartographic data, social inequality indices and historical information. The data were used to select about 20 neighborhoods within

Singaporean urban space. We aimed to maximize the variation between neighborhoods concerning building structure, embeddedness in the city and social and ethnic diversity. Note that the distinction between neighborhoods is not as clear-cut as it appears at first sight, so this number must remain an estimate. We then conducted focused ethnography (Knoblauch 2001) in Singapore (September–October 2023) by walking the selected neighborhoods in a four-person research team. Data were documented in field notes, photography and sketches and triangulated both with observations and with various other data (Fülling, Hering, and Kulke 2021), as well as with findings from our own research projects and from other researchers.

Visibilizing social conflict in Singapore’s urban space (before 1965)

Housing practices are one of the most important ways of expressing social class in everyday life. Three aspects of housing practices show *how social class is expressed in urban space*:

- In its intersection with other dimensions of social inequality, social class gives rise to specific housing patterns. In Germany, the home functions as a territorial space. In a middle-class nuclear family, only middle-class people live in the *home*, and no other class has access to it. Due to the widespread practice of live-in domestic servants in Singapore, the classes mingle in the home (Baur and Kulke 2023).
- Social classes are typically distributed unevenly in different neighborhoods across urban space. In doing so, they relate to each other and are coupled in their everyday practices. Which social class is located where can only be understood if one untangles a city’s history starting from its formative phase. This forms an *overall spatial arrangement* (“*Raumanordnung*”) of the city (Löw and Knoblauch 2021).
- As we will show in the next session, this spatial arrangement of social classes affects how the *neighborhood* is structured.

In *European cities*, such as Berlin, the *social classes* tend to segregate in different neighborhoods (*horizontal territorialization*). Typically, each neighborhood is dominated by a social class. With industrialization, the home (“*Wohnort*”) and the workplace (“*Arbeitsort*”) have been separated, and the working population commutes between these neighborhoods, thus coupling them (Kulke and Baur 2021). As a result, middle-class Germans do not typically meet upper-class residents in everyday life. They meet working-class residents outside the home, either in their neighborhood at shops (“*Einkaufsort*”), e.g. when buying food or other services typically provided by lower-skilled labor, or at the workplace outside their neighborhood. Consequently,

the neighborhood where a person lives and what the home looks like from the outside become key markers for assessing another person's social class. Which neighborhoods are regarded as "better" or "worse" is strongly defined by a city's urban history (Baur and Kulke 2023).

While *Singapore's* urban space is similar in size to that of Berlin, its spatial arrangement follows completely different rationales. To untangle them, one must examine Singapore's history. During the colonial period under British rule, a specific urban landscape developed in Singapore (Vorlaufer 2009, 110f). The spatial distribution and the internal structure of housing areas were not so much defined by social class, but by ethnicity and the immigration regimes of these ethnic groups. Network migration of people from the same family, region or business was the most important factor in forming different neighborhoods. In other words, the spatial arrangement of the neighborhoods and their specific architecture cemented *class and ethnic differences* by assigning different immigrant groups to separate quarters.

The British typically worked in administration, as officers in the military or in the management of trading/transportation companies. Their neighborhoods were dominated by the "black-and-white colonial houses," connected to their economic activities and today represent Singapore's upper-class areas (Figure 11.1a).

Chinese immigrants worked mainly in trade, retailing and handicrafts. While the earlier settlers were predominantly male and intermarried with local Malay women, forming Peranakan culture, later immigration waves typically remained culturally Chinese. Most historic Chinese houses were constructed next to the Singapore River in "Chinatown," the most important port area at that time and opened the possibility which allowed them to practice their economic activities. Typically, Chinese settlers constructed "shop houses" (Figure 11.1b), which had two floors: the ground floor for



Figure 11.1a Upper-class colonial housing in Singapore.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.1b Shophouses in Singapore.

Source: Nina Baur.

commercial activities and the upper floor for living. All houses were attached, with only a small façade facing the street and either a very long hallway or a series of rooms attached to each other like pearls on a thread which extended to the back of the house and typically included one or two backyards.

The areas of the Hindu Indian, Muslim Malay, and Arab groups have more or less the same building characteristics and are also dominated by shophouses. Indians typically immigrated to Singapore in connection with British colonial activities—such as working in administration and the military—or running their own retail and services business. Their housing was northeast of the colonial center in “Little India.” The Malay settled further to the east in Kampong Glem.

As a result of these historic settlement patterns, at the time of Singapore’s independence from the British Empire in 1963, the urban housing landscape was characterized by a distinct separation of the ethnic–religious groups (Figure 11.2), and in the first years after decolonization, ethnic and class conflicts escalated.

Since 1957, Singapore’s population has grown rapidly from 1.5 Mio. to 5.7 Mio. in 2020 (SHDB 2022), resulting in a dire need for new housing. As indicated above, when Singapore left Malaysia in 1965, it faced not only

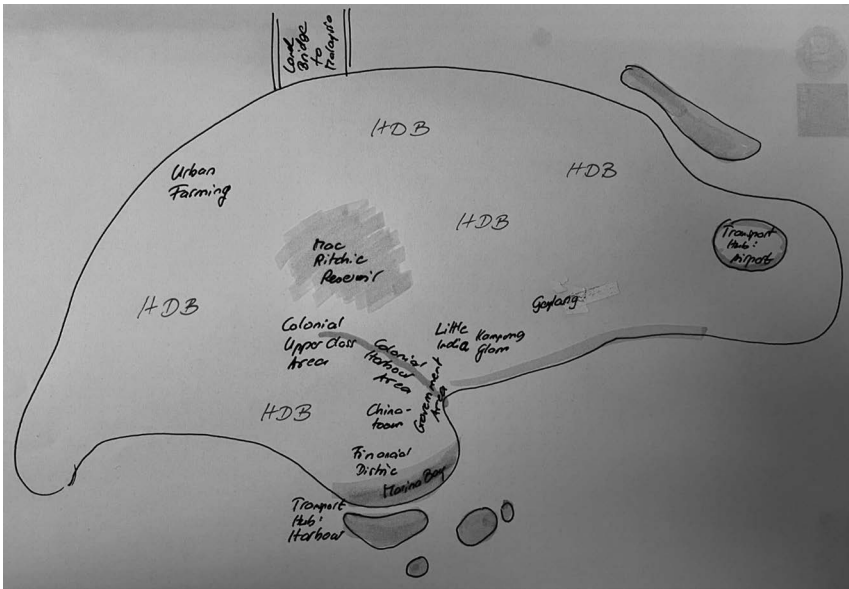


Figure 11.2 Social inequality and urban space in Singapore (modern structure).

Source: Nina Baur.

huge class and ethnic conflicts but also huge economic issues, including mass unemployment, housing shortages, crime and lack of land and natural resources such as food and petroleum. The housing situation was severe. In the shophouse areas, hygienic conditions were horrid. These neighborhoods were heavily overpopulated and had no piped water, no wastewater channels and almost no electrical service. Many Singaporeans lived in poorly constructed squatter settlements built of highly flammable materials, posing a high risk of fire. Therefore, additional housing was urgently needed to accommodate the growing population and resettle people from shophouse areas.

Invisibilizing social conflicts in Singapore's urban space (1965–1990)

Between 1959 and 1990, Lee Kuan Yew's government addressed these issues by implementing a large-scale public housing program and a policy of racial and social mixing and developing the country's economic infrastructure, resulting in Singapore evolving from a poor nation to one of the richest countries in the world. One of the most important measures was the establishment of the Singapore Housing Development Board (SHDB) in the 1960s to construct new neighborhoods and towns for Singaporeans. Following independence, Singapore's government established the legal conditions for SHDB work. Based on the Land Acquisition Act, the SHDB could define and take possession of areas for constructing new housing complexes. For Singaporeans, the Home Ownership Scheme and the Central Provident Fund opened the possibility of buying newly constructed apartments. Since then, the newly constructed neighborhoods have been highly uniform. Both Singapore's urban development policy and fast economic growth induced a total change in the urban housing landscape and its relation to class (Kiese 2017; Kinder 2017).

SHDB policies were important for improving housing conditions and getting rid of poverty and were a key instrument to overcome ethnic and class segregation and reduce the resulting spatial conflicts. A key element of SHDB policies has been the policy of "social mixing" (Beng Huat [1991] 1997). This policy has been extraordinarily successful. While in 1957, 8% of Singaporeans lived in SHDB housing, in 2020, about 80% of the population of Singapore lived in these public housing estates (SHDB 2022). With this share, Singapore probably has the world's strongest socioeconomic and religious–ethnic mixture in housing areas.

Refiguration of urban space to invisibilize social conflicts—Distributing SHDB housing across urban space

While Singapore's historical town center continues to be dominated by colonial structures, the SHDB has designated the rest of urban space

for their program to distribute social housing equally across the city (Figure 11.2). One of the key measures was that, from the beginning, Singaporean urban planners have integrated transport planning and urban planning, as well as designed not only single housing blocks but entire neighborhoods, including their links to public transport. The first key feature of Singapore's urban structure is *connectivity*. While in European cities, central areas and neighborhoods at the fringes can be distinguished, SHDB neighborhoods are always linked to the town by a central transport hub (bus or metro station), resulting in travel distances to the center being more or less equal, regardless of where one lives (Figure 11.2).

Refiguration of neighborhoods to invisibilize social conflicts—The layout of SHDB housing

To achieve Singapore's aim to alleviate social conflict, the most essential element of SHDB housing policy is to ensure a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-class mixture representing the whole range of Singaporean society within each housing block. "Building helps to promote social cohesion and racial harmony, strengthen family ties, care for the needs of the elderly, singles and low-income families." In the same house and even on the same floor, small apartments for low-income households and large apartments for higher-income households have been constructed and purposefully sold to people of different social groups.

Early SHDB neighborhoods had several multi-story buildings surrounding a central service area with retail stores, hawker centers, medical services, a school and a library. Several neighborhoods then formed a *New Town*—that is a neighborhood constructed after independence—with a central area containing more advanced services in retailing, gastronomy, healthcare or education.

In the newest SHDB neighborhoods (Figure 11.3), all these functions are integrated into one high-rise building (*vertical territorialization*). This means that urban space cannot be understood without thinking in three-dimensional terms. Residents arrive at ground level or underground via buses or subways. When entering, they can shop for groceries and other goods and grab food at a hawker center or food court located underground or on the ground floor. Also, there are parks and community centers for leisure activities on the ground level. Offices are typically located at the lower levels, followed by mid-range restaurants (typically on the fourth or fifth floors), apartments on the upper floors and then up-scale restaurants and bars on the rooftop and upper floors, typically nested in a lush urban garden with grand harbor or city views. Everything is accessible to everyone—many walkways link diverse places.

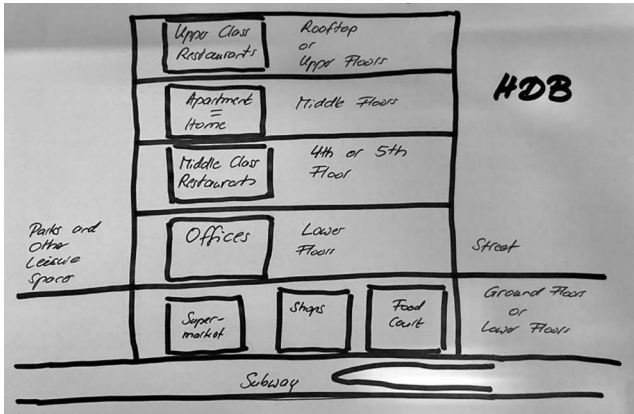


Figure 11.3 Arranging neighborhoods according to the principle of vertical territorialization in Singapore.

Source: Nina Baur.

Refiguration of the entanglement of food and space to pacify social conflicts—Hawker centers and food courts as the heart of the community

An integral part of social mixing was forming a distinct Singaporean food culture and integrating it into SHDB housing as a key element of any neighborhood. To understand this, one must remember that lifestyle research has shown that eating practices are one of the key ways of making social class (and ethnic identity) visible. While in Europe, the point of reference for “good eating” is typically French high-brow cuisine in which other cuisines are integrated, Singaporean cuisine refers to Chinese cooking and eating culture. Therefore, the internal logic of Singapore’s food culture can only be untangled if Chinese food culture is understood.

Socially, food is of enormous importance in everyday life—while in Europe, people might go out for a drink to socialize, in Chinese culture, they go out to eat. While in European cuisine, every customer typically gets their own plate with their own share, in Chinese cuisine, people like eating together and sharing food from the same plates. Moreover, many smaller meals are consumed in the course of the day. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the Singaporean state has encouraged food and eating to be a means of building a cosmopolitan national identity, community and memory (Low 2016; Kong 2016, 220), resulting in a “foodie culture” (Kong 2016, 223–224) where hunting for the best version of a favorite dish all over town and comparing these dishes in the (social) media is a passion (Xiang Ru 2016). Combining public policies of social mixing with economic development policies, Singapore transformed its tradition



Figure 11.4 Shared infrastructure at hawker centers.

Source: Nina Baur.

of street food (harkening back to the nineteenth century) into hawker centers in the early twentieth century and into food courts in the 1970s (Beng Huat 2016; Kong 2016, 212).

Economically, hawker centers provide cheap food, so the (female) working population does not have to cook (Sinha 2016). Hawkers, who produce fresh meals on demand, are a time-saving and cost-effective alternative to cooking for oneself. In particular, families in which both partners work do not have the time to prepare meals. When comparing prices, hawker meals are no more expensive than buying the components for a meal and preparing them at home. Hawker centers improve hygiene and provide the hawkers with infrastructure such as electricity, fresh water and joint facilities such as toilets or dishwashing (Figure 11.4). The result is that especially younger Singaporeans eat most meals outside the home (Sinha 2016, 171–173).

At hawker centers, customers assemble meals by buying at different shops. They can either share all dishes (in the typical Southeast and East Asian way) or enjoy an individual dish (in the European way) but still share a meal (Figure 11.5). This allows for community building, thus imitating Chinese banquet-style dining. If there are people who share tastes and



Figure 11.5 Integrating multi-ethnic cuisines in Chinese eating culture.

Source: Nina Baur.

cultural and religious eating practices, they can share meals following the Chinese eating culture. However, they can now snack on meals from different cuisines, ranging from Chinese to Indian to European. However, if they have different dietary rules—for example, Muslims not being allowed to eat pork, Chinese preferring pork and many Indians being vegetarian—each person can enjoy their own food. Nevertheless, they can still enjoy a shared meal.

The hawker centers represent a neighborhood's social and spatial heart and function as a kind of community center or meeting place, thus physically representing policies of social mixing of different ethnic groups and all classes. Even the upper classes can enjoy a meal without losing their status. The acceptability for the upper classes eating street food reflects in Singapore being the only country in the world with Michelin-star hawkers (Figure 11.13a). Spatially, this importance of hawker markets as places of social mingling reflects in them typically being located next to a transport hub such as a bus or subway station and being either situated in special buildings—the hawker markets—or on the lowest floor of an SHDB building (basement or ground floor).

Visibilizing the refiguration of neighborhoods—The SHDB showrooms

SHDB housing not only encourages social mixing of different classes and ethnic groups but also makes these differences highly visible—by both living on the same floors of the same house and by regularly meeting, e.g. in hawker markets, there is much closer everyday contact between the social classes and ethnic groups than in the more segregated Berlin neighborhoods. Therefore, in Singapore, everyone knows which social class they belong to, ironically reducing potential social conflicts and the drive for distinction. Social differences are emphasized and visibilized by neighborhood infrastructure.

In particular, class differences become more self-evident, as social class defines which flat size a family may buy. Singaporeans typically buy SHDB housing at the beginning of their careers when their incomes are still low. Housing is funded by obtaining a loan on their estimated future pension. Depending on the type of jobs family members have in their early twenties, a projection of future earnings is made—depending on these earnings, the size of the flat they can afford is defined.

The result is that you know someone's status by the size of their flat. Class differences are even more visible because SHDB has showroom flats, where prospective buyers can inspect flats of different sizes before deciding. Figure 11.6 shows the showroom for a two-bedroom flat with the typical layout of each flat for buyers to examine. These flats standardize class tastes by showing suggested furniture for a flat and providing a



Figure 11.6 Re-visibility of social conflicts in space via showroom flats.

Source: Nina Baur.

tablet with further suggestions for decorating rooms, including where to buy furniture.

Invisibilizing other social conflicts—Immigrant lower-class labor at the intersection of class, gender and ethnicity

The SHDB showroom flats further highlight policies for the social mixing of class, age and ethnic group by advertising “typical” inhabitants of social housing (Figure 11.7). However, this advertisement also emphasizes another type of social conflict that is completely invisibilized—that between full citizens (of the historically grown ethnic groups, namely Chinese, Malay, Indian and Peranakan Singaporeans) and lower-class labor, especially female migrants from the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia.

To understand how invisibilization works, it is helpful to consider the example of Germany first. In most continental European societies during modernization, domestic labor was increasingly considered exploitative and demeaning to servants. Therefore, eliminating domestic labor was seen as an achievement. At the same time, due to increasing wages and decreasing wage differences, domestic labor became too expensive. Today, middle-class Germans typically do not have, but also do not want and cannot afford, domestic servants. If people use services, they are usually



Figure 11.7 Advertisement showing social mingling between traditional ethnic groups and family types in SHDB showroom flats.

Source: Nina Baur.

acquired outside the home, meaning that lower-class persons rarely experience a middle-class household from the inside (Kibel, Kitata, and Baur 2024). As Figure 11.8a illustrates, spatially, this results in German homes being embedded into the neighborhood, the city and the nation. Each of these nested entities is a territorial space (“Territorialraum”) characterized by a logic of demarcation (“Logik der Grenzziehung”) (Knoblauch and Löw 2021). Families from different social classes are segregated in residential neighborhoods, move largely within their own neighborhood for everyday activities and typically only have access to homes of their own social class (Baur et al. 2021).

In contrast, in Singapore—as in most other non-European countries—middle-class households typically engage *domestic servants*. Since the early twentieth century, well-off families paid “amahs,” female domestic servants from China who swore to celibacy, lived and worked for the family for the rest of their lives. In the course of increasing wealth as a result of Singapore’s economic development and increasing female labor market participation, employing female domestic servants has been a common practice in the middle class since the 1980s (Sinha 2016, 165–166). By 2016, one in five Singaporean households had a (female) domestic servant

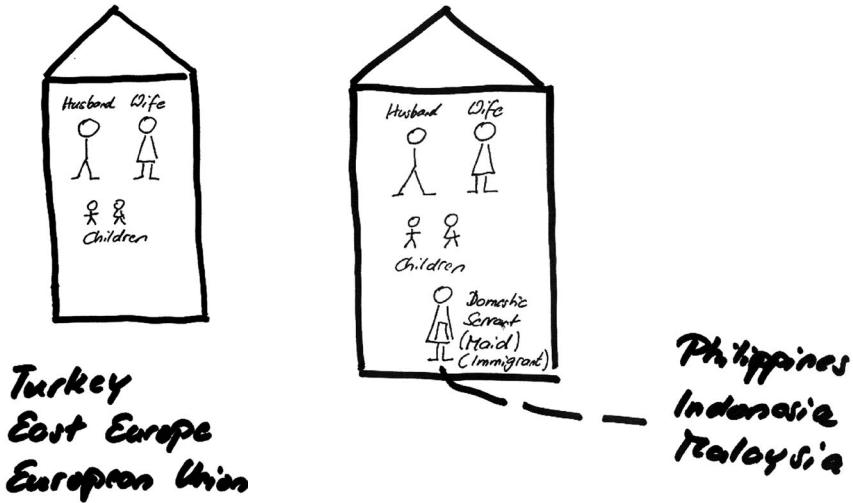


Figure 11.8a Family structures, lower-class labor migration and housing in Berlin (Germany).

Source: Nina Baur.

Figure 11.8b Family structures, lower-class labor migration and housing in Singapore.

Source: Nina Baur.

(Paul 2017, 102). These maids typically live in their employer’s apartment and are labor migrants with limited working and residence permits from neighboring poorer countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia or the Philippines. As Figure 11.8b illustrates, this results in the lower classes breaking up the territorial space of a middle-class home by linking it to other spaces in a space of pathways (“Bahnenraum”), following a logic of transit (“Logik der Durchquerung”) by commuting these spaces, thus creating a potential spatial conflict (“Raumkonflikt”) between territorial space and space of pathways (Löw and Knoblauch 2021). Concerning class differences and possible social conflicts in space, this has two effects:

- Middle-class lifestyles become intimately visible for the working classes (but not necessarily vice versa).
- The differences between (higher-class) citizens and (extremely low-class) migrant (domestic) labor are almost completely invisibilized in everyday interactions. Although they are always “there,” domestic laborers are typically absent in media discourse or visual representations of Singaporean societies, as illustrated in Figure 11.7.

Domestic laborers are also invisibilized in storytelling and narratives, including qualitative interviews. If a Singaporean invites you to dinner and they say, “I will invite you and cook for you,” it is much more likely the housekeeper will cook than they will cook. If you ask them who lives in their home, a typical answer might be “My husband, my children and my parents,” excluding the maid who is only mentioned if asked directly because her presence is self-evident.

However, the invisibilization of domestic servants goes even further: If you ask specifically in interviews about domestic servants, interview partners might say, “Yes, you know, of course, we have a domestic servant, and there’s a room specially designed for domestic servants in all SHDB flats.” However, in our ethnographic work, when we went to the showroom flats to inspect these rooms, we first did not find them at all. [Figure 11.9](#) shows how a European might miss these rooms because their *intended use is veiled even in the showroom flats*—likely because domestic migrants do *not* fit the Singaporean self-image of social mingling. [Figure 11.9](#) shows the kitchen of the five-room flat, which is the largest flat size available and only intended for larger upper-middle-class families (however, similar architectural designs can even be found in the smallest flat size intended for the working classes). If you look at the five-room flat in general or the kitchen in particular, on first impression, there is no room for domestic servants.

When you inspect closely, all SHDB flats have a (usually hidden) door for a storage room. If you open the door, this room is also decorated as a storage room ([Figure 11.10](#)).



Figure 11.9 Invisibilizing migrant domestic servants: Frontstage housing.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.10 Invisibilizing migrant domestic servants: Backstage storage rooms.
Source: Nina Baur.

Upon closer inspection, its true purpose becomes obvious ([Figure 11.11](#)): SHDB storage rooms have a notice board claiming that there is a secondary function as an air shelter in case of war and explaining how the air shelter should be used without suffocating. Accordingly, air ducts ensure ventilation (which a storage room would not need). An even closer inspection will reveal a third intended use of this room. SHDB storage rooms have air conditioning, electric outlets and a plug for the TV—which you only need if someone is supposed to spend extensive time here. In summary, these “storage rooms” are likely the rooms intended for the housekeepers. This reflects [Dobrusskin and Helbrecht’s \(2021\)](#) finding that maids don’t have any proper space inside the home, which drives them to spend their leisure time in outdoor public spaces.

Re-visibilizing social conflicts in space

In the course of building Singapore’s nation, urban and transport planning were used to mix racial and class differences by forcing them to cohabitate



Figure 11.11 Invisibilizing migrant domestic servants: backstage—intended use of storage rooms.

Source: Nina Baur.

in the same neighborhood. However, the policy of social mixing does not diminish social class and ethnic differences, but instead makes them more visible. As a result, the upper classes need fewer markers of lifestyle and consumption practices to express their higher status and distinguish themselves from the lower classes. These few markers can only be found in three fields of consumption—namely car ownership, housing and food practices—and are complemented by a specific intermingling of the social classes in public space. These obvious markers of wealth make it possible for elites to downplay social status in other consumption domains and adapt to lower-class lifestyles if they feel like it.

Housing and car ownership

The first indicator of wealth is owning a car. Import taxes, maintenance taxes and the cost of renting a parking space (in a city where space is scarce) add to the purchase price, and cars may only be used for a few years. To be allowed to buy a car, you must show that you have parking space.

Concerning housing, the higher classes can distinguish themselves from the lower classes with two markers of inequality. First, in SHDB flats, the number of rooms is assigned based on income. Second, because of globalization, a very high-income class has evolved. While public housing peaked in the 1990s—when 86% of Singaporeans lived in public housing—since then, neighborhoods have been re-separated and re-segregated. Since then, this share has dropped slightly. Today, residents with very high incomes have to (because they may not buy SHDB flats) but also prefer to live in private condominiums. Private-sector housing is located in urban space in a very distinct way, thus marking social inequality. As shown in [Figure 11.2](#), entire neighborhoods consist mostly of



Figure 11.12 Modern high-income housing in Singapore.

Source: Nina Baur.

high-income residences. These are either located in (a) the colonial upper-class areas, (b) renovated old shophouse areas—making the historical town center a highly gentrified area—or (c) highly-esteemed locations close to urban green spaces.

Local legislation requires public footpaths across private housing to ensure mobility across urban areas. However, at the same time, private-sector housing is subtly gated and guarded by security personnel, excluding people who do not belong to this social class. This gating offers open views inside (Figure 11.12). This in turn makes upper-class lifestyle extremely visible, especially as upper-class private housing itself can be distinguished by specific architectural styles—this might be either colonial housing (Figure 11.1) or newer facilities which are typically designed by well-known architects and offer private facilities like tropical gardens, swimming pools, tennis-court or sports-centers (Figure 11.12).

Food

Lifestyle research has shown that eating practices are one of the key ways of making social class visible—not only because the lower classes have

restricted budgets but also because typical tastes and ways of eating express and enforce identity within a social group and make social class visible to outsiders (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Elias [1939] 2000). Most Singaporeans eat most of their meals outside the home. However, the *hawker markets reveal that social mixing has not been as successful as public policies might claim:*

- When observing everyday interaction—namely, who shares a meal with whom—the *different ethnic groups still tend not to intermingle.*
- In a nation of foodies, with 93% of Singaporeans describing themselves as passionate about food (Sinha 2016, 172), everyone values good food. While it is possible to eat very cheaply in Singapore, *some food remains expensive*, and not everyone can access it. Due to the high value given to food, Singapore is the second most expensive country in the world for fine dining (Stewart 2021). The city has about 50 Michelin-starred restaurants, twice the number of Berlin restaurants (Figure 11.13a and 11.13b).
- If Singaporeans shop for groceries to cook at home, they can choose from a variety of retailing formats ranging from wet and fresh markets (Figure 11.14d), state-run supermarkets such as FairPrice (Figure 11.14b) or privately owned mid-range supermarkets (Figure 11.14c). Corresponding with the SDHB politics of social mixing, all these retailing formats can be found in almost all housing estates. However, a small and increasing segment of higher-class Singaporeans prefer to shop for special foods. A specific market segment—*luxury organic grocery shops*, such as Little Farms (Figure 11.14a)—is aimed at these higher-class Singaporeans. So, if there is a Little Farms in a neighborhood, it is a sign that it has a high proportion of high-income inhabitants.



Figure 11.13a Fine dining in Singapore: Hawker with Michelin star.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.13b Fine dining in Singapore: The colonial town center.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.14a Fresh produce in Singapore at a luxury organic market.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.14b Fresh produce in Singapore at a fair price supermarket.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.14c Fresh produce in Singapore at a privately owned supermarket.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.14d Fresh produce in Singapore at a fresh market.

Source: Nina Baur.

Public space

The spatial framework of public space also makes social conflicts visible in two ways. First, relatively early, *upper-class Singaporeans seem to have emancipated themselves from traditional European and Chinese high-brow culture*, trying to define their own lifestyles. As depicted in early-twentieth-century postcards, Singapore re-defined everything that the British upper classes of the times typically hated and considered as demeaning—*transport hubs such as freight harbors, tropical greens and hawker food*—as a feature and a specific Singaporean tourist attraction. Urban planning has embraced this approach since then. For example, Marina Bay (Figure 11.15b) in the south is a landfill purposefully redeveloped at the harbor. Today, the harbor is



Figure 11.15a Transport hubs and tropical gardens as markers of luxury locations in Singapore: Changi International Airport.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.15b Transport hubs and tropical gardens as markers of luxury locations in Singapore: Marina Bay Sands.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.15c Transport hubs and tropical gardens as markers of luxury locations in Singapore: Kent Ridge & Telok Blangah Hill Park.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.15d Transport hubs and tropical gardens as markers of luxury locations in Singapore: Sentosa Island.

Source: Nina Baur.

supported by a second transport hub—the airport. This means that the most expensive Singaporean locations in urban areas are the historic upper-class residential areas or those close to parks, the sea or transport hubs such as the harbor or the airport (e.g. [Figures 11.15a–11.15d](#)). For example, at Changi International Airport ([Figure 11.15a](#)), visitors can fine-dine in Michelin-rated restaurants, enjoying an indoor tropical forest garden.

Second, *public spaces are organized in staged layers, thus visibilizing social class*, while most green spaces, such as the Marina Bay Botanical Gardens, have free public areas open to everyone. As [Dobrusskin and Helbrecht \(2021\)](#) have shown, this space is used by the lower classes such as domestic maids for recreational activities ([Figure 11.16a](#)). Within the Gardens, there are also semi-exclusive spaces, such as indoor glass houses, which are theoretically open to everyone but have high entry fees. As a result, they are mainly used by tourists and the middle class ([Figure 11.16b](#)) and offer fine views of spaces representing Singapore's wealth, such as the harbor, financial district and expensive neighborhoods ([Figure 11.16c](#)).



Figure 11.16a Staging of inequality: Gardens of the Bay. General setting—Free public space.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.16b Staging of inequality: Gardens of the Bay. Semi-exclusive spaces—entry fees.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.16c Staging of inequality: Gardens of the Bay. Visibility of semi-exclusive spaces.

Source: Nina Baur.



Figure 11.16d Staging of inequality: Gardens of the Bay. Exclusive spaces—fine dining locations.

Source: Nina Baur.

Within these semi-exclusive spaces, there are exclusive spaces for fine dining. These high-end restaurants are subtly gated, in this case by flowers or glass walls (Figure 11.16d), so everybody can see the rich having parties.

Conclusions

When it comes to social conflicts, one of the most challenging questions to be answered is: When and why are they resolved violently—and when are they not? Singapore offers a fine example of a spatiality in which violent modes of conflict resolution were transformed into nonviolent forms of conflict resolution using spatial containment. One of the reasons is that the Singaporean state is one of the most authoritarian democracies in the world—setting and enforcing a firm set of rules. The question is: Why do people abide by this? We have shown in this paper that, in part, the policies of economic development and social mixing have resulted in most Singaporeans benefitting from how social conflicts are resolved. Singapore is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and due to housing and food policies, almost all Singaporeans have access to basic resources, which are typical sites of conflict elsewhere.

Social mixing is strongly enforced by infrastructure, especially how urban spaces are designed. These urban spaces minimize the markers of social inequality that the higher classes need to express themselves and downplay class and ethnic differences. As shown, class differences are ironically more visible in public spaces. At the same time, this high visibility invisibilizes other differences—namely, those between citizens and non-citizens, which comprise a large part of the resident population and represent both the lowest classes and specific migrant groups.

References

- Baur, Nina. 2025. “Mapping Out Europe’s Spatiality.” In *Figuring Out Spaces*, edited by Jochen Kibel, Nina Meier, Silke Steets, and Gunter Weidenhaus, 259–280. Bielefeld: transcript. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839475041>
- Baur, Nina, and Linda Hering. 2017. “Learning from the Past. How Local Economic Conventions Influence Responses to Global Crises.” *Human Figurations* 6 (2). Accessed 6 August 2024. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0006.208>
- Baur, Nina, and Elmar Kulke. 2023. “Social Milieus in Urban Space.” In *Multivariate Scaling Methods and the Reconstruction of Social Spaces*, edited by Alice Felix Leßke, Rebekka Atakan, Manuela Schmidt, and Yvonne Scheit, 164–193. Opladen: Budrich. <https://doi.org/10.3224/84742764>
- Baur, Nina, Elmar Kulke, Linda Hering, and Julia Fülling. 2021. “Dynamics of Polycontexturalization in Commodity Chains.” *Sozialraum.de* 13 (1). Accessed 6 August 2024. <https://www.sozialraum.de/dynamics-of-polycontexturalization-in-commodity-chains.php>

- Beng Huat, Chua. (1991) 1997. "Modernism and the Vernacular." In *Understanding Singaporean Society*, edited by Ong Jin Hui, Tong Chee Kiong, and Ser Tan Ern, 423–442. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Beng Huat, Chua. 2016. "Taking the Street Out of Street Food." In *Foodways and Foodscapes*, edited by Lily Kong, and Vineeta Sinha, 23–40. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (1979) 1984. *Distinction*. New York: Routledge.
- Dobrussskin, Janina, and Ilse Helbrecht. 2021. "Anerkennung und ontologische (Un-)Sicherheit von migrantischen Care-Arbeiterinnen in Singapur [Recognition and Ontological (In)Security of Migrant Care Workers in Singapore]." *Geographica Helvetica* 76: 425–436. <https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-76-425-2021>
- Elias, Norbert. (1939) 2000. *The Civilizing Process*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fülling, Julia, Linda Hering, and Elmar Kulke. 2021. "Kartierung Und Foto-Dokumentation [Mapping and Photo Documentation]." In *Handbuch Qualitative Und Visuelle Methoden Der Raumforschung*, edited by Anna Juliane Heinrich, Séverine Marguin, Angela Million, and Jörg Stollmann, 345–364. Bielefeld: UTB.
- Groh-Samberg, Olaf, Theresa Büchler, and Jean-Yves Gerlitz. 2020. *Soziale Lagen in Multidimensionaler Längsschnittbetrachtung* [Social Situations in Multidimensional Longitudinal Analysis]. Berlin: BMAS. Accessed August 6, 2024. https://www.armuts-und-reichtumsbericht.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/Service/Studien/2-studie-socium.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&cv=2
- Kibel, Jochen, Makau Kitata, and Nina Baur. 2024. "Refigured Homes: Gender Balances and the Refiguration of Spaces in Germany and Kenya." In *Dynamics of Gender Relations: Process-Sociological Perspectives*, edited by Stefanie Ernst, and Valerie Dahl. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kiese, Matthias. 2017. "Singapur." *Geographische Rundschau* 69 (1): 47–53.
- Kinder, Sebastian. 2017. "Global City Singapur." *Geographie Heute*, no. 336: 34–37.
- Knoblauch, Hubert. 2001. "Fokussierte Ethnographie." *Sozialer Sinn* 2 (1): 123–141.
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2021. "Comparison, Refiguration, and Multiple Spatialities." *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 22 (3), Art. 19, 30 paragraphs. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-22.3.3791>
- Kong, Lily. 2016. "From Sushi in Singapore to Laksa in London." In *Foodways and Foodscapes*, edited by Lily Kong, and Vineeta Sinha, 207–242. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing.
- Koop, Avery, and Joyce Ma. 2022. "Mapped: The World's Billionaire Population, by Country." *Visual Capitalis*. Accessed August 6, 2024. <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/mapped-the-worlds-billionaire-population-by-country/>
- Kulke, Elmar, and Nina Baur. 2021. "Spatial Transformations and Spatio-Temporal Coupling." In *Spatial Transformations*, edited by Angela Million, Christian Haid, Ignacio Castillo Ulloa, and Nina Baur, 151–166. London and New York: Routledge.
- Low, Kelvin E.Y. 2016. "Tasting Memories, Cooking Heritage." In *Foodways and Foodscapes*, edited by Lily Kong, and Vineeta Sinha, 61–80. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing.
- Löw, Martina, and Hubert Knoblauch. 2021. "Raumfiguren, Raumkulturen Und Die Refiguration Von Räumen [Spatial Figures, Spatial Cultures and the Refiguration of Spaces]." In *Am Ende Der Globalisierung*, edited by Martina Löw, Volkan Sayman, Jona Schwerer, and Hannah Wolf, 25–28. Bielefeld: transcript.

- Müller-Schneider, Thomas. 2003. "Differenzierung des Milieugefüges [Differentiation of the Milieu Structure]." *Kölner Zeitschrift Für Soziologie Und Sozialpsychologie* 55 (4): 782–794. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11577-003-0121-6>
- Paul, Anju Mary. 2017. *Multinational Maids*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schulze, Gerhard. 1992. *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft* [The Experience Society]. Frankfurt am Main: Campus.
- SHDB. Singapore Housing Development Board. 2022. *Infoweb*. Accessed 6 August 2024. <https://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/homepage>
- Simmel, Georg. (1901) 1996. *Philosophie Des Geldes* [Philosophy of Money]. Frankfurt a. M: Suhrkamp.
- Simmel, Georg. (1903) 1995. "Soziologie Der Konkurrenz [Sociology of Competition]." In *Gesamtausgabe. Band 7: Aufsätze Und Abhandlungen 1901–1908. Band 1*, edited by Georg Simmel, 221–246. Frankfurt a. M: Suhrkamp.
- Singstat. Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore. 2021. *Census of Population 2020 Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion*. Singapore: Singstat. Accessed August 6, 2024. <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/cop2020/sr1/cop2020sr1.ashx>
- Sinha, Vineeta. 2016. "Mapping Singapore's Culinary Landscape." In *Foodways and Foodscapes*, edited by Lily Kong, and Vineeta Sinha, 159–184. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing.
- Stewart, Melissa. 2021. *Singapore is Second Most Expensive Country for Fine Dining*. Accessed August 6, 2024. <https://cنالuxury.channelnewsasia.com/experiences/singapore-second-most-expensive-country-michelin-dining-190366>
- Ting, Kennie. 2024. *The Great Port Cities of Asia*. Singapore: Talisman.
- Veblen, Thorstein. 1899. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Vorlauffer, Karl. 2009. *Südostasien* [Southeast Asia]. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Xiang Ru, Amy Tan. 2016. "Bloggers, Critics and Photographers in the Mediation of Food Consumption." In *Foodways and Foodscapes*, edited by Lily Kong, and Vineeta Sinha, 185–296. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing.

12 Growing up (un)knowingly in a cage

Youths' conflictive spatial knowledge

*Ignacio Castillo Ulloa, Anna Juliane Heinrich,
Angela Million, and Ludovica Tomarchio*

Introduction: Caught up in a risky-and-at-risk loop

This chapter deals with the following question: How do young people accommodate conflicts experienced in their everyday lives into their spatial knowledge? We focus on how latent-objective and/or manifest-subjective conflicts influence the spatial knowledge of young people by discussing how they are internalized. We claim that, through this internalization, young people manage to spatialize conflicts by way of their spatial perceptions and practices. Likewise, the characteristics of the spaces that young people frequent have a marked effect thereupon. For example, conflicts emerge from the discrepancy between the intended and actual perceptions and uses of spaces. Furthermore, we build on the notions of “place” and “territory,” understood as “spatial figures” (CRC 1265 2023), to shed light on spatial conflicts. The existing literature on the interplay between youth, conflict, and space (Karsten 2005; Monahan 2006; Skelton 2009; Rudner 2012; Gray and Manning 2014) argues that young people’s presence and practices are remarkably subject to control and regulation. Particularly in the public spaces to which they are attracted, young people are positioned as being both “risky” and “at risk”—and thus in need of taming and safeguarding. Against this backdrop, we draw on case studies from Berlin and Lima to identify how the binomial control + regulation is made operative (by adults) and endured (by young people), not only in public spaces but also in other ones within their daily lives. All in all, the young people we researched are, *figuratively speaking*, being brought up inside an “imperceptible cage” that visibly territorializes their everyday lives and thereby reproduces the being-risky-and-at-risk loop in which they are enmeshed.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, we explain the methodology of our study, followed by the concepts (e.g., *spatial conflict*, *place identity*, *territoriality*, and *non-territoriality*) we draw on to look into the interaction between conflicts and spatial knowledge. After presenting the

main findings of the case studies, we return to the research question and point out how conflicts are *spatialized* inasmuch as young people manage to internalize and integrate them into their spatial knowledge. The chapter closes with a succinct critical reflection on how the imaginative power of young people's spatial knowledge, when deemed *conflict-prone*, may inform the theory and practice of design and planning. Thus, cities may become open-ended, rather than encased territories, for young people to explore and experience more freely and autonomously.

Methodological approach: Drawing and talking about their “cages”

To investigate the everyday lives of young people in both Berlin and Lima, we used a qualitative approach that combined narrative mapping, go-alongs, and participant observation. “Narrative mapping” (Behnken and Zinnecker 1991, 2010; Million 2021, 293–308) involves participants creating illustrative maps to depict their daily routines. These maps, which are not cartographic but rather representational, are then expanded by posing questions about them. The participants in our study produced their maps using a progressive web application (PWA) developed specifically by the research team in collaboration with Visual Intelligence, a Berlin-based company (see Figure 12.1 for examples of hand-drawn and digital maps). Aspects of the PWA were codesigned during participatory workshops with the researched youths to make the drawing exercise more attuned to their preferences and needs (see Tomarchio et al. 2023). To supplement this method, the research design included a series of go-alongs. Additionally, participant observation, documented through field notes, was employed throughout the data collection to reflect on the research design and its implementation. Table 12.1 summarizes the data compiled per case study.

The data—basically, transcripts and maps—were analyzed with a coding scheme using MAXQDA 2018 (VERBI software). Each research participant case was complemented by information from field notes, team discussions, and photographs. Also, a matrix was created to synthesize research participant cases according to the coded themes. The findings presented in this chapter are drawn from the empirical material relating to conflicts—for example, conflicts over and/or usages of spaces, emotions related to and meaningfulness of spaces, gender, family, and parenting style, among others. The empirical data were summarized and compared across the two case studies and partly relative to the qualitative meta-study on the historical evolution of young people's spatial knowledge (see Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024).

The case studies were selected to allow for comparing young people's spatialities in contrasting socioeconomic and urban contexts. In Berlin,

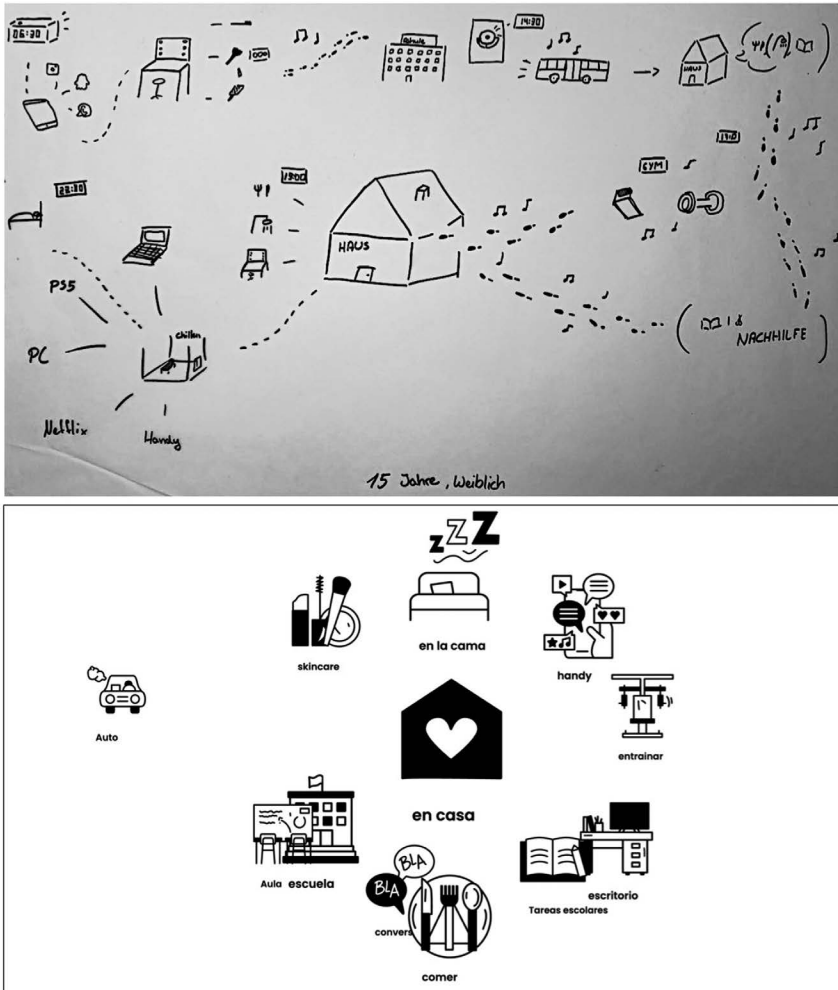


Figure 12.1 Examples of narrative maps depicting “cages” produced by research participants during the participatory workshops organized in Berlin (above, hand drawn) and Lima (below, generated with the PWA).

Source: Own representation.

the research focused on a group of teenagers attending a public school in Neukölln, a district known for its diverse population and urban landscape, which features a mix of residential (from 19th-century buildings to 1970s high-rise apartments), commercial, and green areas. In contrast, the Lima case study was conducted in a private school where most students

Table 12.1 The complete collected dataset, including interviews and go-alongs, alongside the gender distribution of the research participants.

	Berlin	Lima
Workshops	N = 24 Male: 11 Female: 13 Date: November 2022	N = 21 Male: 6 Female: 15 Date: September 2023
Mapping and interviews	n = 12 Male: 7 Female: 5 Date: May 2023	n = 18 Male: 6 Female: 12 Date: September 2023
Go-alongs	n = 1 Female: 1 Date: May 2023	n = 12 Male: 3 Female: 9 Date: September 2023

come from a higher socioeconomic background. Characterized by limited walkability, high traffic, significant visual and sound pollution, and a predominantly low-rise housing, the urban environment in Lima is markedly different from that in Berlin. In addition, the choice of both cases was bound to logistic and practical aspects, as we had previously conducted research in both cities and were thus familiar with the procedure to obtain clearance from the schools (and, in the case of Berlin, the Senate of Berlin). Before presenting the reflections derived from the empirical data, we next delineate our conceptual framework.

The spatialization of conflicts: How does young people’s spatial knowledge accommodate them?

Spatial knowledge “includes 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” (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024, 12). It thus substantially shapes how we act with, upon, and in relation to spaces. For young people, this presupposes that they have become sufficiently spatially cognizant and have developed “an objective view of the world” because they possess a “stable perception and conception of objects, spaces and their interactions” (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024, 14). Over time, young people then create spatial systems that are grounded in and derived from spatial properties and their relations, which in turn give way to a more comprehensive conception of space (Piaget and Inhelder 1967, 375; Sack 1980, 127). In our view, young people produce and acquire *embodied-experienced* and *mediated* stocks of spatial knowledge therefrom. The former emerge out of corporal, physical, and sensorial engagements with and explorations of nearby (and even remote¹)

surroundings through their own agency, while the latter are imparted to young people by an intermediating agency (e.g., when they are told stories about certain spaces). Against this background, we see young people integrating conflicts into their spatial knowledge, thereby *spatializing* them.

To shed light on this spatializing process, the notions of *place* and *territory*—which are part of the “spatial figures”² formulated by the CRC 1265 (2023) as “analytical concepts”—come in handy. Place, seen as a spatial figure, “follows a logic of overlapping, multiple forms of reference” and “interrelate[s] heterogenous elements in a mode of densification, which in turn makes them distinct and distinguishable” (CRC 1265 2023, 15). Apropos the distinctiveness and distinguishability of places, Tim Creswell (2004, 7), building on John Agnew (1987), explains that the most straightforward understanding of place is “a meaningful location.” The primary features of a place, continues the author, are location, locale and *sense of place*. Sense of place is the way people subjectively relate to a place, for instance, by naming it. It alludes to the symbolic quality that comprises the manifold ways in which people get to know, picture, experience, and articulate a place. Furthermore, this singularity of places is also commonly referred to as “place identity”: “*those dimensions of self that define the individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment*” (Proshansky 1978, 155; italics in the original). Consequently, the distinctive character of place emanates from its sense of place and finds expression in place identity. Both of these features are two sides of the same coin and thus hint at the connection between place and young people’s spatial knowledge:

The place-identity of the individual is neither a simple nor a static structure. Socialization during the earlier years involves the child in a variety of physical settings both on a transient as well as on a more permanent basis. This person-physical setting interaction process continues, of course, throughout the life cycle. Furthermore, since both the person and his or her physical environments are likely to change over time, like other subidentities of the individual, the organization of ideas, feelings, preferences, values, memories, and attitudes about these environments represents a psychological structure which is both enduring and changing.

(Proshansky 1978, 156)

We therefore consider place identity and sense of place to be not only embedded in the attainment of a comprehensive conception of space but also undergirding the production and acquisition of spatial knowledge.

Also, conflicts are internalized and thus spatialized alongside place identity formation, because conflicts are precisely part of the repertoire of ideas, beliefs, and feelings that, over time, enduringly and variably shape the individual self-identities of young people.

To clarify what we mean by “conflicts” in relation to the spatial knowledge of young people, we follow the notion used in CRC 1265 (2023, 24). Rather than static scales or specific spatial arrangements, we recognize conflicts as an integral part of young people’s socialization, particularly in the ambivalent domain of public spaces, to which they feel as much drawn as excluded. As one study on youths growing up in 1990s’ Australia contends, young people in public spaces “find themselves located in an ambiguous zone—too old for playgrounds, too young to be valued consumers” (Malone and Hasluck 1998, 25). Because of this being-in-between ambiguity, young people are frequently confronted with conflicts in public spaces that revolve around the divergence between envisioned (by adults) and performed (by youths) uses. Some authors have maintained that the lack of fixed and clear boundaries in public spaces, rather than stabilize, constitutes a source of conflict and tension (Sebba and Churchman 1983, 191). Other authors have observed that “many conflicts associated with adolescents that currently occur in [...] public settings are a result of places not being used as they were intended. Perhaps if the intended use of a place included the social and recreational activities of teens, they would be accepted instead of banned” (Owens 2002, 162; see also Castillo Ulloa, Million, and Schwerer 2022). Moreover, we argue that conflicts, akin to the case of violence, have a subjective and objective facet which ought to be factored in to understand how they not only play out in space but also develop their own spatiality. Regarding the twofold character of violence, Slavoj Žižek (2009, 2) explains:

The catch is that subjective and objective violence cannot be perceived from the same standpoint: subjective violence is experienced as such against the background of a non-violent zero level. It is seen as perturbation of the “normal”, peaceful state of things. However, objective violence is the violence inherent to this “normal” state of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent. Systemic violence is thus something like the notorious “dark matter” of physics, the counterpart to an all-too-visible subjective violence. It may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seem [stet] to be “irrational” explosions of subjective violence.

As subjectively violent registered episodes, conflicts may indeed cause an imprint on young people’s spatial knowledge by, for instance, conferring

a place with a negative set of feelings and emotions (and, by extension, a repelling sense and identity). Objectively violent conflicts, on the other hand, seem to permeate young people's daily routines in an inconspicuous manner and are thus constantly fed into their spatial knowledge as well. Either of a subjective or an objective nature, what young people fundamentally integrate into their spatial knowledge are *spatial conflicts*. According to the editors of this volume, spatial conflicts emerge out of the clash between groups of social actors and take place in different manners. Spatial conflicts can also have a symbolic character, when either the relevance of a space or the determination of "who should have power over space" is contested (see Knoblauch, Sommer, and Pfetsch in the Introduction to this volume, p. 4). Furthermore, spatial conflicts can eventuate either quiescently or discernibly. To put it another way, spatial conflicts reveal to have a subjective or objective violent character depending on the shape they take and the degree of confrontation occurring between social actors involved. Our analysis focuses on the impact of latent-objective or manifest-subjective spatial conflicts on young people's spatial knowledge and how they are internalized. Since we depart from the premise that spatial conflicts are inherent in the way young people are persistently subject to control and regulation by adults, we hold the functions of *territoriality* and *non-territoriality* to be instrumental to this end.

A *territory* (or "territorial space") is discernible for its bordering logic whereby two or more homogenized spaces are placed in relation to one another, thereby establishing outside/inside, known/strange, and safe/dangerous dualities (CRC 1265 2023, 14). When a territory is created, what is primarily at play is the function of "territoriality," which is:

[T]he attempt to affect, influence, or control actions and interactions (of people, things, and relationships) by asserting and attempting to enforce control over a geographic area (Sack 1981). This definition applies whether such attempts are made by individuals or by groups, and it applies at any scale from the room to the international arena [...] and is intended to include many facets of behavior often referred to by other concepts such as property in land (real estate), sovereignty, dominion, "turf", and "fixed personal space."

(Sack 1983, 55; drawing on Sack 1981)

There are also "degrees of territorializing and span of control" (Sack 1983, 69), which are contingent on the ways territoriality is asserted—from legal rights to social and cultural norms to prohibitions/permissions regarding the appropriate use of spaces. Additionally, it must be underscored that territoriality "is not an object but a relationship. A room may be a territory at one time and not at another" (Sack 1983, 56). Moreover,

for territoriality to come about, non-territoriality has to occur as well. In this regard, Robert Sack (1983, 56; italics in the original) provides an example to illustrate the somewhat nuanced difference between territoriality and non-territoriality, which happens to be quite apposite to the control and regulation young people undergo:

[L]et us suppose a parent is home minding the children. They are found in the study scribbling on note cards, upsetting piles of books, and ripping up manuscripts. The parent could have a face-to-face, heart-to-heart talk with the children, telling them not to touch these books, note cards, and manuscripts. The parent might even spank them. In either case, the parent is attempting to control the actions of the children directly by contact, and in a way that focuses on specific categories of things such as books, note cards, and manuscripts. The parent, x , is attempting non-territorially to limit the children's (y) access to these resources.

But there is another alternative to the same goal. The parent could hope to control the actions of the children regarding books, manuscripts, and note cards without telling them not to touch just these kinds of things. This could be done by telling the children that they may not go into the study without permission, that the study is off limits. This is an example of territoriality because it is an attempt by x to limit the children's (y) access to things by asserting control over an area. Of course, asserting that the study is off limits, as well as enforcing the assertion, requires that the information be transmitted to the children and that their behavior be monitored. This, of course, requires contact and is nonterritorial, but territoriality, if it works, can avoid other nonterritorial contacts, in this case further admonitions by the parent of the children.

In relation to the production/acquisition of spatial knowledge, we see adults (notably, parents) seeking to assert control over young people through both territoriality (stating which places are off- and within limits) and non-territoriality (infusing varying degrees of territorialization with explicit rules and persuasive implicit fears). As a result, young people may end up subdued to the point of being unable to territorialize themselves. They also struggle at times to establish feelings of attachment and belonging to places they like. Furthermore, the territoriality and non-territoriality that adults perform are meant fundamentally to keep young people safe and at a distance from experiencing firsthand spatial conflicts. Hence the alleged need to surreptitiously "encage" young people's everyday lives to tame and safeguard them.

Growing up (un)knowingly in a “cage”

Research in fields like human geography, environmental and social psychology, and planning has demonstrated that public spaces are important for young people’s psychosocial development and socialization (Gray and Manning 2022), construction of individual self-identity (Proshansky 1978; Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff 1983; van Lieshout and Aarts 2008), and feelings of rootedness and belonging (Banerjee and Lynch 1977). At the same time, there is a body of literature that examines the various ways young people have become increasingly hindered to access, use and even simply be in public spaces that are remarkably adult-centric (Karsten 2005; Monahan 2006; Skelton 2009; Rudner 2012). More specifically, “[m]any researchers have highlighted the precarious position of young people in public spaces, and the ways in which their use of, and presence in, public spaces is increasingly regulated and controlled” (Gray and Manning 2022, 1401). Despite the predicament young people are presented with in public space, other studies have also shown that, far from surrendering to surveillance and monitoring mechanisms, they create “secret spaces” (Moore [1986] 2017) or “safe spaces” (Djohari, Pyndiah, and Arnone 2018). The transient character of secret/safe spaces notwithstanding, they are an integral part of subverting and counteracting strategies that we characterize as “coping mechanisms.” The benefits of *coping mechanisms* are almost irrefutable, as they allow young people to express themselves and resist and reconfigure social pressures—including subjective and objective spatial conflicts—acting upon their lives. Nevertheless, the social pressures that young people confront “can lay the foundation for intergroup conflict that can be disadvantaging [...] [by] imposing limitations on their mobility and access to leisure, education, employment and social opportunities” (Gray and Manning 2022, 1402). Against this backdrop and in view of our findings, the following question arises: What happens when territoriality and non-territoriality exerted by adults upon young people cut across not only public spaces but also their almost entire domain of action? Our claim is that the young people in our study are unknowingly growing up within a “cage” produced and driven through an adult-centric territoriality and non-territoriality.

Daily life within a checkered territory of controlled places: The cases of Berlin and Lima

Young people use dexterously their spatial knowledge to decode and deal with the elements underlying the conflicts they (may) chance upon, for example, by adapting their antics to—and even transgressing—the normativity of shopping malls and sneaking into a sibling’s room to play video games (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024). We take this kind of spatial knowledge

implementation to be part of the *coping mechanisms* that young people deploy to deal with spatial conflicts. Furthermore, we see conflict-ridden situations traversing young people’s public and private spaces and their impact being contingent on the degree of territoriality and non-territoriality expressed in terms of socio-spatial *structural* and *personal* control (see Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024, 184ff).

As Figure 12.2 depicts, our findings suggest that the inside/outside duality establishes an “inside-circumscription” as safe and an “outside-unrestraint” as dangerous, by way of an “inward” logic of territoriality and non-territoriality aimed at enclosing young people. Here, the function of territoriality becomes primarily operative by determining which places are within limits. Non-territoriality is predominantly set into motion through direct control over young people’s movements (e.g., by parents driving their children almost everywhere they need to go or even grounding them).

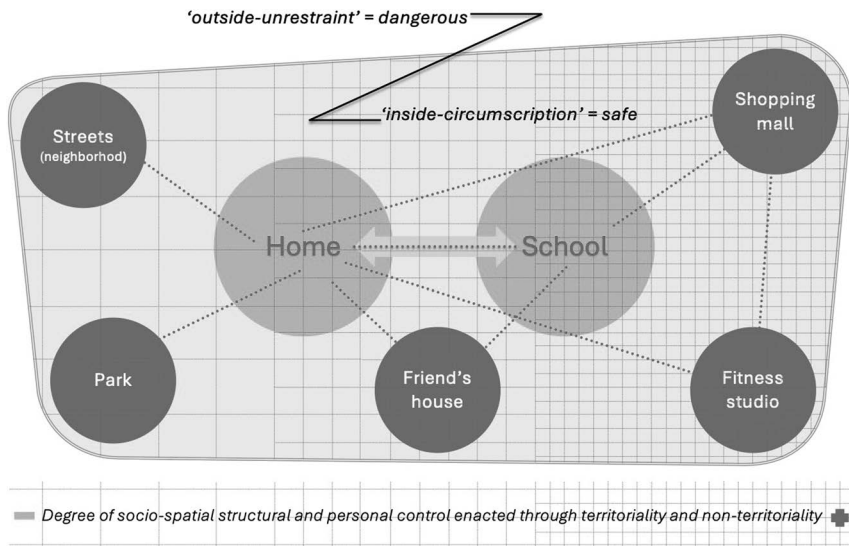


Figure 12.2 The checked territory within the daily lives of young people unfolds. Gravitating around the home and the school, a handful of other places (park, streets, fitness studio, etc.) are incorporated through an “inward” logic of territoriality (the clear definition of within-limits places) and non-territoriality (directly holding the sway over young people’s mobility). Seeking to contain, instead of keeping off limits, the resulting territorialized everyday lives of young people offer variegated levels of autonomy, depending on the extent to which socio-spatial structural and personal control have been established.

Source: Own representation.

As a way to disguise itself, this distinctive confinement of young people's everyday lives provides them with varying degrees of latitude within its limits. Hence the checkering of the resulting territories whose lattice can be tightened and loosened according to the degree of socio-spatial structural and personal control exerted. In the next section, we explore this and other dimensions of the adult-centric (if not parental) territoriality and non-territoriality with respect to the internalization of spatial conflicts in each of the case studies.

Berlin: Somewhat grappling with spatial conflicts

With a small number of exceptions (concerning mostly young girls and due to either parental style or cultural background), the research participants in Berlin have the opportunity to move around rather autonomously. Using public transportation (e.g., to commute to school) is “common practice” for these young Berliners. Interestingly enough, the space–time of the subway (from getting to the station to waiting for and riding the train) imparts a feeling of unease on boys and girls alike—which we see as potential-objective spatial conflicts. For example, one female research participant stated, in the interview, that she only rides the subway to go to school and that she has “no bad experience with it now.”³ During the go-along, however, she clearly did not feel comfortable either at the platform or in the railcar. When asked about this evinced nuisance, she said that there are many “weird people” and it is usually loud and crowded. She also explained that she has a persistent feeling that “something may happen anytime.”

The dormant-objective spatial conflicts this sentiment alludes to was echoed by other interviewees as well. Some of the *coping mechanisms* to counteract the negative spatial perception ascribed to the subway settings (i.e., stations' whereabouts, platforms, and railcars) include avoiding head-on contact with seemingly “weird people,” finding a fairly isolated spot on the platform, and making sure to be able to step out of the railcar as soon as possible. Another strategy entails turning to the cell phone to detach oneself from the unpleasantness permeating the subway or other frequented places.

While it is hard to pin down where exactly the potential conflictive character of the subway comes from, it is clear what these young Berliners attached it to: the strangeness of the other travelers, the tedium of just having to sit there and wait to reach their destination, and the latent possibility that “something may happen.” Dormant-objective spatial conflicts, as things that may unexpectedly come off, do indeed transpire. As one male interviewee recounted, “Once I was minding my own business and, all of a sudden, a crazy guy starts yelling at me.” Instead of remaining at

a loss out of fear, he mentioned that he actually yelled back but realized in the end that it did not make any difference and decided to get off at the next station. Similarly, another male research participant encountered a conflict-laden situation while strolling the subway platform with friends and attempting to pick up some cash that they spotted on the rail tracks:

We rode the subway to the Zwickauer Damm [station] and saw the money on the railway track, and then the police came. And then he [a security guard] called me out and said, “Either you come here right now or I’ll call the police.” I said, “You don’t need to... [and the next thing I knew] we’re in the police car. And then we all went to the police station [...]. My mate went there too and my parents picked me up straight away and then [...] I only got grounded for a week.

Such incidents may well constitute “watershed moments” disrupting the everyday trajectories and practices of these young people. After all, these situations can be deemed as subjective spatial conflicts. However, none of the interviewees said that they avoid the places where the manifest-subjective conflicts occurred. Nor have they developed a negative spatial perception of those places. The only lamentable aspect, pertaining the second case, was the aftermath—having to endure house arrest. This attests to a rather extreme form of parental territoriality (only places within limits are the home and school) and non-territoriality (expressed in the command to return home immediately after school) seeking to keep the young boy away from potentially conflictive circumstances.

Regarding spatial conflicts marking inflection points on young people’s everyday lives, there seems to be a much powerful variant in place—when conflicts are imagined *vis-à-vis* actually undergone. A case in point is a female interviewee of Turkish descent who spoke about both manifest-subjective (endured in Berlin within her daily routine) and latent-objective (visiting relatives in Turkey during her holidays) spatial conflicts:

Sometimes outside [while hanging out with friends], I’ve been approached quite oddly by strangers. There was once a man who had a glass bottle, and he kind of wanted to hit me with it. And then the police came by because they were right next to us and they were like, “What’s going on here?”

When asked whether she had established a negative association with the place in Berlin where the incident took place, she candidly replied “no” and added that she was convinced that “something really bad should never

happen to me.” Later in the interview, she talked about the places she either knowingly avoids or is not allowed to go on her own and why:

In the village [where my relatives in Turkey live] or in other towns, I’m not allowed to [go by myself], because in our village, it’s often the case that you get kidnapped and then you [are forced to] get married, and that’s why I’m not allowed to walk alone.

As counterfactual as the assertion may sound, it is noteworthy—if not, mesmerizing—how “imagined” spatial conflicts (the potential of kidnapping and enforced marriage) override spatial conflicts actually experienced (in the form of tangible harassment). While the interviewee seemed to be convinced that nothing “really bad” would occur to her in Berlin, she would never set foot in those villages and towns abroad that she is told to stay away from.

Overall, the majority of the young Berliners in our study move within checkered territories, whose internal lattice is rather loose and thus allows them to roam freely. A few interviewees said that they undertake rather long jaunts throughout the city during weekends and summer breaks. At the same time, the non-territoriality of their parents can tighten the grid of the checkered territory, for example, by grounding their children with house arrest. Likewise, the personal and structural control exerted through both territoriality and non-territoriality is felt by female participants more prominently (see [Figure 12.3](#)). Consequently, they undergo forms of non-territoriality that range from rather *tacit* (e.g., keeping in touch via text messages) to outright *explicit* (e.g., being escorted at almost all times). As to the integration of conflicts into their spatial knowledge, it is worth noting how differently the researched youths internalize latent-objective and manifest-subjective spatial conflicts. The coping mechanisms for dealing with already encountered manifest-subjective spatial conflicts appear to follow a “normalizing” logic (e.g., continuing to frequent places where conflicts have occurred or not pursuing disputes further). In contrast, the coping mechanisms for handling not-yet-experienced latent-objective spatial conflicts are ostensibly granted by their parents (e.g., through a non-territoriality based on fear-laden narratives).

Between these two situations, the coping mechanism of resorting to the cell phone to manage the latent-objective spatial conflicts perceived to be looming large in the subway settings stands out due to its somewhat contradictory character. Attempting to detach themselves from potentially conflict-prone circumstances, some of the young people in our study are dwindling their reaction capacity should a latent spatial conflict become tangible. Thus, the recourse of using their cell phone arguably hinders the ability to effectively deal with and spatialize conflicts, inasmuch as

this coping mechanism, by enabling to disengage from both what is going on and what may happen, has a plausible countereffect. Furthermore, the coping mechanisms associated with manifest-subjective spatial conflicts are bound to *embodied-experienced* stocks of spatial knowledge, while those related to latent-objective spatial conflicts are largely connected with *mediated* stocks of spatial knowledge.

Lima: A spectator-like experience of spatial conflicts

Contrasted with their counterparts in Berlin, the daily lives of research participants in Lima endure a more salient level of individual and structural control (with boys in Lima having almost the same autonomy to move around as some of the girls in Berlin; see [Figure 12.3](#)). The main reason is the sweeping agency of parents to enact territoriality and non-territoriality. Parents not only decide which places are within limits but also directly dominate the movement of their children by driving them practically everywhere. With the exception of a handful of reported incidents, such as being followed by a stranger or robbed in a shopping mall, these young people have little to no direct contact with manifest-subjective spatial conflicts. They also perceive the quiescence of latent-objective spatial conflicts from a distance. Such “spectator-like” perception of spatial conflicts is discernible in the following account by a female interviewee:

[Once] I was watching a couple of boys running around in the mall and [...] the security guard at a store rebuked them. Or sometimes things like that happen when you're playing at trying on clothes, there, trying them on like that [...] you get noticed. I mean, you can't be doing these things because you're not a child anymore [...]. Moreover, the fact that everywhere, I mean, everybody uses applications, so it's not very difficult to record what you do and then post it on social networks and say, “Oh, this person is fooling around.”

It is notable that, for this young girl, the manifest-subject spatial conflict linked to “inappropriate” social behavior (i.e., running around and trying on clothes without the intention to buy them) accentuates the possibility that the reprimand might find its way into the virtual world of social networks. Although there is no direct apparent connection, such risk may deter these young people. Therefore, grappling with the non-territoriality that regulates (their) behavior in shopping centers is yet more difficult for them. Moreover, developing coping mechanisms to handle and accommodate conflicts into their spatial knowledge turns out to be hard for some of the young people in our Lima case study. They are suspended between

“no- longer-being-a-child” and “not-yet-being-an-adult.” As one female interviewee explained:

There are also places that have a maximum age limit, and it is unpleasant because [...] you would like to do that activity, but you can't enter because you are a grown-up [...]. The truth is that [...] I [...] am now a teenager, but it doesn't mean that because of that you can't do the same activities that a child does.

The pronounced parental territoriality and non-territoriality these youths endure have given way to a coping mechanism that renders spatial conflicts, both manifest-subjective and latent-objective, “invisible.” By somewhat willingly obviating conflicts, two research participants evinced to have this coping mechanism already in place, when prompted to recall any kind of conflictive situation undergone:

I think mostly in areas where I feel uncomfortable or don't go because I don't like it much. But, for example, in my whole district where I live, I have never seen anything [that might even resemble a conflict].
(male interviewee)

I only move around some districts of the city, the ones I know better and are safer.
(female interviewee)

Based on a perception that precludes spatial conflicts, this coping mechanism is undoubtedly the outcome of parental territoriality (excluding all places held to be dangerous) and non-territoriality (secluding their children in a safe territory by governing their movements). While the gender gap is not that conspicuous regarding the coupling of certain places with “being safe,” which reflects how place identity is used to ground coping mechanisms, it becomes discernible in terms of the actual autonomy to move around (see [Figure 12.3](#)). As two female interviewees stated, wandering around by themselves is simply not an option:

I have a limit where I'm allowed to go alone, and if it's farther away, I have to go accompanied by someone, or else my mom won't let me.
It's just that my mother picks me up or not. They [the parents] take me anywhere [...] But more for safety.

The gender divide becomes yet more striking when both the non-perception of insecurity and the freedom to roam are coupled together.

The following passage from a field note, taken during a go-along carried out in tandem with a female and male participant, attests this:

During the conversation, it is noticeable that K (male) and A (female) joke about A not being able to move around freely in her district. K shows her the routes he walks while listening to music. He mentions that he consistently listens to music when walking and has never experienced any insecurity or conflict.

By and large, the everyday lives of the research participants in Lima take place in checkered territories whose lattices, particularly for young girls, are quite taut due to the pervasive influence of parental control. Given the limited exposure of the young people to spatial conflicts, their repertoire of coping mechanisms is scarce and follows adult-centric (if not, outright parental) mandates, especially concerning behavior in public spaces and precluding dangerous situations. Consequently, conflicts are ostensibly accommodated via mediated stocks of spatial knowledge. The basis for devising coping mechanisms is mostly imparted to these youths, rather than generated by themselves after having experienced firsthand manifest-subjective spatial conflicts. Therefore, it becomes challenging for them to attach significance to public spaces—and eventually develop a place identity and sense of place. These young people are not only left with the sensation of being constantly out of place but also lack the competence to come to terms with spatial conflicts by themselves. Interestingly, while some of these youths are fairly aware of the circumstances that they have to endure daily and wish their reality were otherwise, a few others said to be content with their current lifestyles.

Youths' conflictful/less spatial knowledge: Territory, place identity, and spatial conflicts

When the two samples are contrasted regarding personal and structural control, induced through adult-centric territoriality and non-territoriality, the disparity according to gender is arresting (see [Figure 12.3](#)). It is also remarkable that, across samples, the researched boys in Lima exhibited a comparable level of autonomy to wander around as some of the researched girls in Berlin (which translates into similar levels of personal and structural control). In light of exposure to spatial conflicts, the gender gap becomes blurry (see [Figure 12.4](#)). However, there is a visible divide between the groups in Berlin and Lima regarding exposure to spatial conflicts, and despite the indistinctness of a gender wedge, some boys in each sample exhibited a higher degree of exposure to and spatialization of conflicts.

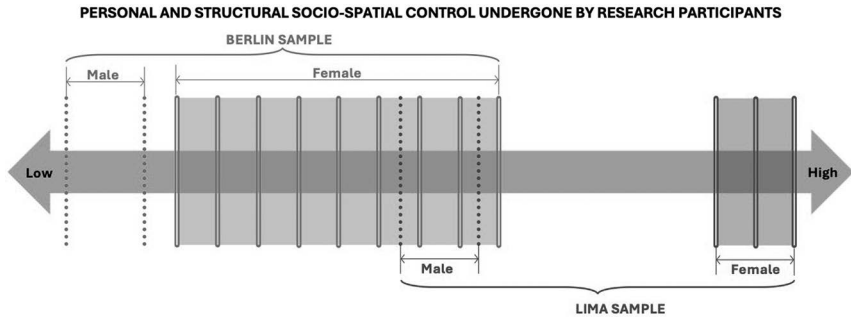


Figure 12.3 The level of personal and structural control to which the researched youths are subject. To clarify, rather than expressing results quantitatively, the graphic is meant to reflect, by visually stressing along the low–high continuum, the discrepancies identified in the qualitative analysis of the empirical material.

Source: Own representation.

The incorporation of conflicts into young people’s spatial knowledge becomes evident in the spatial practices that they develop as part of their coping mechanisms. Our findings show that research participants in Berlin have, on average, confronted rather directly manifest-subjective spatial conflicts (e.g., harassment, rambling scolding, muggings, and even cursory arrests). Only a few of the researched youths in Lima reported somewhat akin experiences (e.g., being followed by a stranger and being mugged). Both analyzed groups share their perceptions of quiescent spatial conflicts, for they are buttressed by fears and stigmas that are discursively attached to particular places or parts of the city. Moreover, it is the parents who, for the most part, seeking to keep their children safe and away from conflict-ridden situations, articulate such narratives as an integral part of their non-territoriality. Consequently, the researched youths are placed at a passive receiving end and lack discursive competences to articulate their own fears and demarcate their territories accordingly. One important distinction in this regard is the lengths to which parents actually territorialize their children’s everyday lives. Parents in Berlin resort to more subtle and indirect tactics of non-territoriality, such as staying in touch through text messages, having the youths escorted, or imposing curfews. In Lima, the non-territoriality of parents is explicit and direct, ranging from accompanying their children almost everywhere to keeping the number of places within limits—other than the home and school—to the bare minimum. In either case, territories resulting from parentally produced territoriality and non-territoriality seek not only to contain but also to exert control, affect and influence their children’s everyday lives.

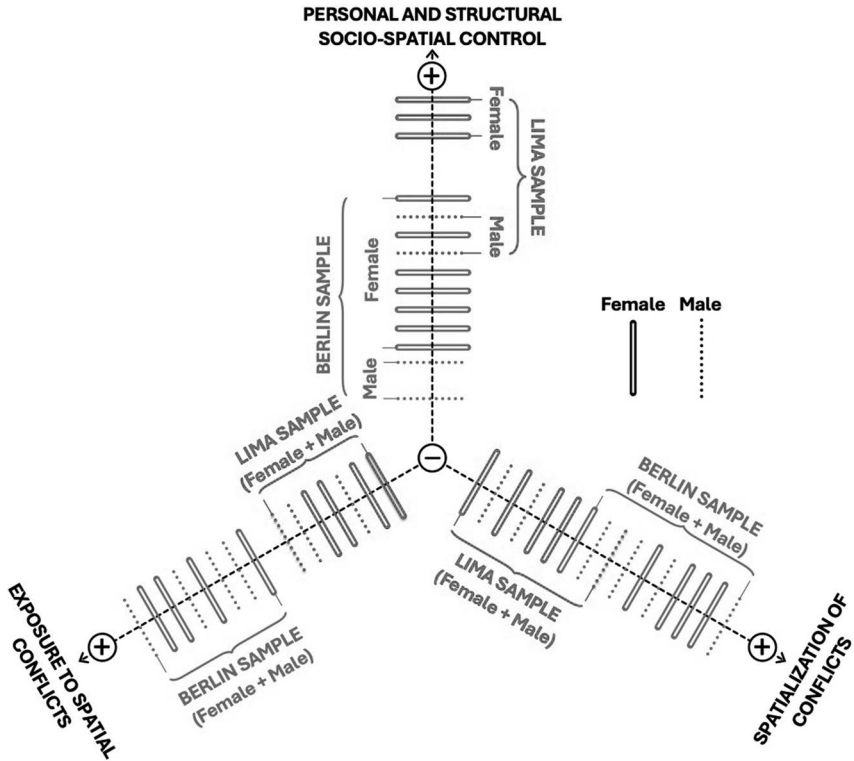


Figure 12.4 Correlations among personal and structural control, exposure to spatial conflicts, and spatialization of conflicts. To clarify, rather than expressing results quantitatively, the graphic is meant to reflect, by visually stressing along the \ominus — \oplus continuums, the discrepancies identified in the qualitative analysis of the empirical material.

Source: Own representation.

Another crippling effect these young people undergo is the incapacity to confer *themselves* specific meanings and emotions to places where they have undergone conflicts as a way to deal with and accommodate them into their spatial knowledge. What instead appears to be happening is that potential negative associations with places, where manifest-subjective spatial conflicts have occurred or latent-objective ones are believed to transpire, are respectively downplayed through a superimposing positive spatial perception and eclipsed. An example of the former is to continue haunting the shopping mall of choice despite having been scolded or robbed. As to the latter, immersing oneself into the virtual world of the internet via the cell phone while waiting and riding the subway is a recurrent exemplar.

Since place identity and sense of place are integral to the production and acquisition of spatial knowledge of young people, the ways in which spatial conflicts are coped with and thereby internalized have long-lasting and manifold ramifications, not only on their individual self-identities in specific but also on their spatial cognition in general.

All things considered, the “checked” assemblage of places that compose these young people’s daily lives is stabilized through an adult-centric “safety-preserving” territoriality and non-territoriality. The resulting territorial spaces are sweeping—they virtually mirror and equate themselves with these youths’ everyday lives.⁴ Hence the little to no opportunity for the researched young people to trigger their own logic of territoriality and even non-territoriality—akin to when a neighborhood corner or their room at home are claimed as their turf. To sum up, the more *conflictless* the spatial knowledge of young people actually is, the less autonomy and self-assertion they have vis-à-vis an environment that places them in a risky-and-at-risk loop. Strangely enough, inverting the formula so that young people’s spatial knowledge becomes more *conflictful*, may actually offer them a way out of this predicament. We conclude this chapter with some thoughts on how the practice of planning and design has something to contribute to this end.

Reading between the lines: Young people’s conflictive spatial knowledge as an asset for planning and design practice

Spaces in cities and neighborhoods are infused with distinctive forms of territoriality and non-territoriality, which can be seen as “spatial pedagogization” (Castillo Ulloa et al. 2024). Moreover, the practice of planning and design is arguably instrumental to the diverse ways in which territories are actually “pedagogized.” These territorial spaces are mostly the expression of socio-spatial control at both the personal and structural levels under the premise that young people are “at risk” and “risky” everywhere. And this premise becomes tangible in the adult-centric built environment in which the everyday lives of young people unfold. Thus, the following question arises: How is the built environment ultimately effectuated?

The built environment is most definitively the object of design and planning practice, in that it largely determines physical spatial arrangements (e.g., through design schemes and zoning plans) and the interactions people would eventually develop with them (given its *prescriptive* normative-regulative character). When seen through the lens of territoriality and non-territoriality and in connection with young people’s everyday lives, the influence of planning and design practice becomes yet more apparent. To shed light on the relationship between planning and design practice (in both their physical-concrete and regulatory dimension) and

territorialization, the dynamics of how places contained within territories are laden with power, ought to be considered:

Territorial rules about what is in or out of place pervade and structure lives and provide specific examples of how place has power. It may appear [...] that the power of place is secondary to social power, in that the latter seems to impart the power to place. This is not the case, as the theory of territoriality reveals, precisely because the various forms of social power cannot exist without [...] territorial rules. Territorial and social rules are mutually constitutive.

(Sack 1993, 326–327)

In our view, planning and design practice become operative at precisely the intersection between territorial (finding expression in maps, master plans, and urban design proposals) and social (mandates, conventions, etc.) rules. Therefore, planning and design practice not only render envisaged orders of the built environment concrete but also harmonize the territorial and social rules that are to underpin them. Against this backdrop, it is easily inferable that planning and design are rarely, if ever, exercised considering the wants and needs of young people, but rather, as our analysis on spatial conflicts reveals, by seeking to prescribe them.

We see the exploration of conflicts relative to the spatial cognition of young people as offering valuable potential for change. To begin with, it critically exposes the (allegedly) unintended consequences of planning and design decisions. For example, cities, instead of becoming more walkable, have systematically favored the primacy of a mobility centered on private automobiles. As a result, the roaming latitude of young people—and consequently, their exposure to spatial conflicts—has been significantly reduced. In the long run, understanding how young people accommodate conflicts into their spatial knowledge may indeed go from being a “throughway research anecdote” to an integral part of the epistemic base of planning and design practice. For this purpose, it must be recognized that young people’s spatial knowledge is inextricably conflictive. The crux of the matter is then viewing it as conflictful rather than futilely attempting to make it conflictless.

Notes

- 1 Consider, as an example, the widespread ability that (young) people currently have to obtain detailed information about spaces located geographically distant by way of digital devices and information and communication technologies.
- 2 There are four spatial figures: territorial space, network space, trajectorial space, and place. Rather than describing empirical findings, spatial figures are meant to “function as analytical concepts (in Weberian terms: as ideal types)” (CRC 1265 2023, 14).

- 3 All interview excerpts cited have been translated from German (the Berlin case) and Spanish (the Lima case) by the authors.
- 4 To be sure, each place that a young person daily frequents (the school, shopping center, a friend's home, a park, and even the streets) may be seen as constituting not only places of their everyday lives but also a territorial space (with its own territoriality and non-territoriality; e.g., both home and school). In turn, each of these places—now territories—would compose a network space of territorial spaces. While such a take offers an enticing research outlook, pursuing this reasoning further may also rapidly lead to a rabbit hole.

References

- Agnew, John A. 1987. *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society*. Boston: Allen and Unwin.
- Banerjee, Tridib, and Kevin Lynch. 1977. "On People and Places: A Comparative Study of the Spatial Environment of Adolescence." *The Town and Planning Review* 48 (2): 105–115.
- Behnken, Imbke, and J Jürgen Zinnecker. 2010. "Narrative Landkarten: Ein Verfahren Zur Rekonstruktion Aktueller Und Biografisch Erinnerter Lebensräume [Narrative Maps: A Method for Reconstructing Current and Biographically Remembered Living Spaces]." In *Enzyklopädie Erziehungswissenschaft Online: Methoden Der Empirischen Erziehungswissenschaftlichen Forschung*, edited by Sabine Maschke, and Ludwig Stecher, 1–25. Qualitative Forschungsmethoden. Weinheim: Juventa.
- Behnken, Imbke, and Jürgen Zinnecker. 1991. *Modernisierung Von Kindheit Im Inter- Und Intragenerativen Vergleich: Familien- Und Regionbezogene Fallstudien Von Kindern, Eltern Und Großeltern* [Modernization of Childhood in Inter- and Intra-Generational Comparison: Family- and Region-Based Case Studies of Children, Parents, and Grandparents]. Projekt 'Kindheit im Siegerland' no. 1. Siegen: Universität-Gesamthochschule.
- Castillo Ulloa, Ignacio, Anna Juliane Heinrich, Angela Million, and Jona Schwerer. 2024. *The Evolution of Young People's Spatial Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Castillo Ulloa, Ignacio, Angela Million, and Jona Schwerer. 2022. "I Spy With My Little Eye': Children's Actual Use and Experts' Intended Design of Public Space." In *Spatial Transformations: Kaleidoscopic Perspectives on the Refiguration of Spaces*, edited by Angela Million, Christian Haid, Ignacio Castillo Ulloa, and Nina Baur, 294–309. London: Routledge.
- CRC 1265 (Collaborative Research Center 1265). 2023. *Profile and Goals of the Collaborative Research Center 1265 'Re-Figuration of Spaces' in Its Second Phase*. Working Paper No. 12. Berlin: SFB 1265 Re-Figuration von Räumen.
- Creswell, Tim. 2004. *Place: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Djohari, Natalie, Gitanjali Pyndiah, and Anna Arnone. 2018. "Rethinking 'Safe Spaces' in Children's Geographies." *Children's Geographies* 16 (4): 351–355.
- Gray, Debra, and Rachel Manning. 2014. "Oh My God, We're Not Doing Nothing': Young People's Experiences of Spatial Regulation." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 53 (4): 640–655.
- Gray, Debra, and Rachel Manning. 2022. "Constructing the Places of Young People in Public Space: Conflict, Belonging and Identity." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 61 (4): 1400–1417.

- Karsten, Lia. 2005. "It All Used To Be Better? Different Generations on Continuity and Change in Urban Children's Daily Use of Space." *Children's Geographies* 3 (3): 275–290.
- Malone, Karen, and Lindsay Hasluck. 1998. "Geographies of Exclusion: Young People's Perceptions and Use of Public Space." *Family Matters* 49: 20–26.
- Million, Angela. 2021. "Mental Maps Und Narrative Landkarten [Mental Maps and Narrative Maps]." In *Handbuch Qualitative Und Visuelle Methoden Der Raumforschung*, edited by Anna Juliane Heinrich, Séverine Marguin, Angela Million, and Jörg Stollmann, 293–308. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Monahan, Torin, ed. 2006. *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge.
- Moore, Robin C. (1986) 2017. *Childhood's Domain: Play and Place in Child Development*. London: Routledge.
- Owens, Patsy E. 2002. "No Teens Allowed: The Exclusion of Adolescents from Public Spaces." *Landscape Journal* 21 (1–2): 156–163.
- Piaget, Jan, and Baerbel Inhelder. 1967. *The Child's Conception of Space*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Proshansky, Harold M. 1978. "The City and Self-Identity." *Environment and Behavior* 10 (2): 139–291.
- Proshansky, H.M., Abbe K. Fabian, and Robert Kaminoff. 1983. "Place Identity: Physical World Socialization of the Self." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 3 (1): 57–83.
- Rudner, Julie. 2012. "Public Knowing of Risk and Children's Independent Mobility." *Progress in Planning* 78 (1): 1–53.
- Sack, Robert. 1980. *Conceptions of Space in Social Thought: A Geographic Perspective*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sack, Robert. 1981. "Territorial Bases of Power." In *Political Studies from Spatial Perspectives*, edited by Alan D. Burnett, and Peter J. Taylor, 53–71. New York: John Wiley.
- Sack, Robert. 1983. "Human Territoriality: A Theory." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 73 (1): 55–74.
- Sack, Robert. 1993. "The Power of Place and Space." *Geographical Review* 83 (3): 326–329.
- Sebba, Rachel, and Arza Churchman. 1983. "Territories and Territoriality in the Home." *Environment and Behaviour* 15 (2): 191–210.
- Skelton, Tracey. 2009. "Children's Geographies/Geographies of Children: Play, Work, Mobilities and Migration." *Geography Compass* 3 (4): 430–1448.
- Tomarchio, Ludovica, Anna Juliane Heinrich, Ignacio Castillo Ulloa, and Angela Million. 2023. "Five Days in a Berlin School: Participatory Workshop for the Development of a Progressive Web Application." *The Blog of the Collaborative Research Center 1265 "Re-Figuration of Spaces"*, 21 April 2023, <https://www.sfb1265.de/blog/five-days-in-a-berlin-school/>.
- van Lieshout, Maartje, and Noelle Aarts. 2008. "Youth and Immigrants' Perspectives on Public Spaces." *Space and Culture* 11 (4): 497–513.
- VERBI Software. 2018. *MAXQDA 2018*. Berlin: VERBI Software.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2009. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. London: Profile Books.

13 Beyond remembrance

Spatial dynamics in commemorating racist violence in Solingen and Rostock

*Kübra Gencal, Emma Luna Brahm,
and Daniel Kubiak*

Introduction

Far-right and racially motivated violence has a long continuity in Germany's post-war and post-reunification history, with a notable surge after the reunification of East and West Germany in the 1990s (Virchow 2022; Kössler and Steuwer 2023). In the aftermath, the ways of commemorating this violence became controversial, especially among the affected cities, and new spatial (Massey 2009) and social constitutions in the form of commemorative practices (Assmann 2018) have emerged as spatial conflicts. Our case cities, Solingen and Rostock, are important examples through which we can observe the negotiations among civil society actors, politicians, and academics regarding the question of how to remember the racist violence of the 1990s (Müller et al. 2023). Considering the ongoing negotiations and discussions commemorating this racist violence, the longstanding history of contention concerning the appropriate manner of remembrance becomes evident regarding the racist pogrom in Rostock (Heinrich 2021; Warda 2022) and the arson attack in Solingen (SOS Rassismus 2001; Demirtaş et al. 2023).

In this chapter, we provide insights into the conflicting commemoration practices of racist violence in both cities by analyzing the empirical data collected through expert interviews and participant observations during commemorative events. Commemorative practices, whether driven by civil society or state institutions, often shape public memory and reinforce collective identities by using practices such as organizing collective gatherings, erecting memorials and monuments, naming streets, and producing artworks (Gutman 2017b; Rose-Redwood et al. 2022). In this chapter, we focus on commemorative practices by examining the processes of constructing material memorials in urban spaces and the dynamics of annual urban events organized at these sites or within the broader public spaces of the cities. Our analysis centers on these spatial dynamics, considering space as produced and defined through interactions between people and their

surroundings and affected by the narratives constructed around it (Massey 2009, 16). By focusing on these practices, we investigate how commemorative sites become symbolic battlegrounds embodying the unresolved tensions within German society. Based on our data, we argue that the specific practices and sites of remembrance hold distinct symbolic significance, leading to multiple commemorative practices simultaneously, depending on the individual background and the institutional, social, cultural, or religious affiliation of the actors involved. Furthermore, we examine the extent to which these contested ideas surrounding memory practices are connected to spatial conflicts within urban areas. By exploring these disputed ideas and their implementations, we contribute to a deeper understanding of spatial conflicts and their dynamics, including not only physical environments but also symbolic battles over memory, identity, and power.

Presenting the case studies of Rostock and Solingen

In the early 1990s, Rostock and Solingen witnessed severe attacks motivated by far-right ideologies and leading to tragic outcomes and societal consequences. These cases can provide significant insights into the impact of far-right violence, fueled by ethnic and nationalist convictions (European Commission 2021), on local communities and space configurations. Additionally, the violent outbreak in Rostock played a critical role in bringing about significant restrictions on asylum rights, leading to a change in the German constitution (Thomas and Virchow 2024, 103). In both cases, racist convictions were the primary motivation for the violence, and some of the perpetrators were organized in far-right structures (SOS Rassismus 2001).

Two apartment blocks of the *Sonnenblumenhaus* (Sunflower House) in Mecklenburger Allee 17 and 18 in the northernmost district of Lichtenhagen, Rostock, were attacked and set on fire by a large crowd that had gathered there between August 22 and 26, 1992. The attacks initially targeted an overcrowded asylum reception center, housing primarily Roma from Romania, before shifting to a neighboring building where former Vietnamese guest workers lived. The assault escalated when rioters threw stones and Molotov cocktails, setting the building on fire and forcing approximately 100 individuals to narrowly escape through the roof. As the situation intensified, the crowd expanded to about 3,000 people chanting racial slurs and applauding the violators. The police and fire brigade were overwhelmed by the situation and failed to push back the aggressive crowd; hence, it took days until the state officials suppressed the riots. This attack in Rostock-Lichtenhagen is considered one of the most severe racist pogroms since 1945. In the aftermath, the political and public debate around asylum intensified, resulting in the passing of a new, stricter asylum

law—the “asylum compromise” (Engler and Schneider 2015, 5)—which was enacted on May 26, 1993, in the German Parliament.

Only three days later, on May 29, 1993, four young men with right-wing extremist ties perpetrated an arson attack on the house belonging to the Genç family in Untere Wernerstraße 81 in Solingen. The Genç family had moved from Turkey to Germany in the 1970s as part of a recruitment agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and Turkey, and in 1980, the family bought the house at Untere Wernerstraße 81. On the night of May 28–29, 1993, the house was set on fire while the family was asleep. Upon realizing the danger, the 19 people inside the home attempted to escape. However, the fire had spread so far that an escape was not possible for everyone. Five members of the Genç family (Gürsün İnce, Hatice Genç, Hülya Genç, Saim Genç, and Gülüstan Öztürk) lost their lives, and severe suffering was inflicted on the family and their relatives. The arson attack particularly shook the Turkish community in Solingen, especially in the period directly after the attack, and it is considered one of the deadliest racially motivated attacks in Germany.

Above all, Rostock-Lichtenhagen and Solingen are significant cases linked by the tightening of the asylum compromise. Both cases, together with the racist riots in Hoyerswerda in 1991 and the arson attack on the house of the Arslan family in Mölln in 1992, are regarded as symbols of far-right and racist violence in the early 1990s in Germany, often referred to as one word, “#HoyerswerdaLichtenhagenMöllnSolingen” (Oster and Henningsen 2022), but they are by no means the only cases. Since 1990, at least 219 people have been murdered in Germany because of racism, alongside numerous attacks targeting diverse groups, including migrants and BIPOCs (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) (Amadeu Antonio Stiftung n.d.). The documentation of these incidents varies significantly, with some being comprehensively recorded while others remain undocumented. Throughout Germany, civil society initiatives document incidents of racist and far-right violence, encompassing verbal abuses, graffiti, threats, demonstrations, and similar events, resulting in comprehensive databases and lists. Germany, particularly its eastern regions, is considered to be the area with the most documented far-right and racist attacks in Europe (Jupskās and Koehler 2020).

The events in Rostock and Solingen have always been used for not only journalistic but also cinematic, musical, and theatrical engagement.¹ In the early 1990s, these events prompted numerous counterprotests, including demonstrations and candlelit vigils against far-right extremism. These engagements show that both events hold their significance in the collective memory, especially during the yearly events. While the narrative of remembrance has mainly focused on identifying the perpetrators, more recent publications have shifted to giving greater attention to the impact on the victims.

This change in the culture of remembrance for far-right and racist violence has been particularly noticeable since the racist murders in Hanau in 2020, as identified by [Stjepandić \(2022\)](#). The recently published autobiography by Said Etris [Hashemi \(2024\)](#) provides detailed insights from his perspective as a survivor of the racist attack in Hanau, contributing to this change in perceptions. Kien Nghi [Ha \(2012\)](#) also raises concerns about the inadequacies of conventional memorial practices, sparking broader discussions on the topic. Scholarly works have increasingly voiced the criticism that the victims and affected communities are often left out of the memory-making process and that the commemoration activities might become politicized ([Oster and Henningsen 2022](#); [Virchow 2022](#); [Warda 2022](#); [Demirtaş et al. 2023](#)).

Methodology

To answer the questions raised—how commemorative practices shape urban spaces, how these are influenced by different actors, and the extent to which the contested ideas surrounding memory practices are connected to special conflicts within urban areas—we collected empirical data by conducting 27 interviews in Rostock (10) and Solingen (17) with experts from the city administration, civil society organizations, and migrant-led organizations. In addition to the expert interviews, we used participant observations, as they enabled us to reveal the commemoration processes and the social interactions of the different groups in detail. For this, we participated in the 30th-year commemoration events in Rostock and Solingen, respectively, in 2022 and 2023. We used this method to reveal the details of the commemoration practices on site by observing behavior and performances rather than relying on what was said ([Bryman 2016](#), 494). Except for two interviews which were conducted in Turkish, all interviews were conducted in German. The interviews conducted in Turkish were later transcribed and then translated into German to provide comprehensive data. After data collection, we coded the empirical data, which allowed us to organize the data into categories related to the research questions and understand the complex processes ([LeCompte and Schensul 2010](#), 81). For the analysis, we created and developed conceptual (sub)categories based on the codes that help explain spatial conflicts in commemoration practices. Selected excerpts from the interviews were translated into English for this chapter.

Analysis

As discussed, the racist violence that occurred in Rostock and Solingen provides prominent examples of different narratives regarding the appropriate manners of remembrance. Here, noteworthy questions arise about what conflicts emerge if—or rather, when—divergent claims regarding

remembrance clash. Thus, in this chapter, we aim to reveal the conflicting dynamics within our case studies to understand how commemorative sites become symbolic battlegrounds and the extent to which the contested ideas surrounding memory practices lead to spatial conflicts within urban areas.

This section starts by analyzing the purpose that different actors ascribe to commemorative practices. Following this, we take a closer look at the positionality of the various actors, their impact on the dynamics of commemoration, and the two main lines of conflict—the political representation and spatial claims and the visibility and invisibility of both actors and memorial sites.

Shaping the future through remembering the past

Practices and places of commemoration are often examined in the context of collective memory. Collective memories can be defined as socially produced reconstructions of a collective past ascribed to a particular group (Halbwachs [1925] 1992; Assmann 1995; Assmann 2020). In this context, past, present, and future are directly linked to each other in that reference is made to past events to create a certain narrative about the present and set goals for the future (Assmann 2020, 25–27). The reference to past events is always selective, as incorporating some events in many cases means disregarding others. Collective memory is often used to construct a collective identity in which the narrative of a shared past and a common imagining of a future is embedded (Assmann 2020, 28–29). The imbalance between remembering one event and neglecting another can lead to conflict when a collective memory is anchored in and through institutions. According to Jan Assmann (2017), a distinction should be drawn between communicative and cultural memory. While communicative memory is expressed in the predominantly everyday exchange and communication of past events, the latter is based on cultural objectification and is anchored in political and ceremonial practices (Assmann 2017, 50–56). The association between cultural memory and national identity can reinforce the assumption that solely institutionalized commemorative practices are legitimate, thereby negating alternative forms of commemoration. The institutionalization of certain memories is often accompanied by a material anchorage in public spaces, creating a visible linkage between memory discourse and public space. This spatialization of remembrance reinforces the struggles over collective memories and respective narratives, as we will discuss in further detail in the following chapters.

Furthermore, annual commemorative events have been criticized as simply being symbolic but lacking actual political aspirations and consequences (Czollek 2023). Considering the recently strengthened far-right political forces and the current racial and far-right violent attacks in Germany and elsewhere, scholars and actors from civil society have highlighted the need

to extend the culture of remembrance to include the commemoration of past and present acts of racist and far-right violence (Alexopoulou 2021; Georgi et al. 2022). Pointing to the similarities between the violence in the 1990s and more recent incidents reveals the continuities of racial discrimination and the necessity of addressing these in discourses on commemoration. As previously mentioned, the remembrance of racist violence has been negotiated for roughly 30 years in Solingen and Rostock. In our research, various interviewees emphasized the importance of highlighting the historical overlaps and continuities in the scope of remembrance. Undermining the assumption that racist attacks are not isolated incidents but instead manifestations of a larger social and systematic issue, they affirmed the conjunction of remembrance with an in-depth discussion of racist social structures that reference past and present events (Kahveci and Sarp 2017; Alexopoulou 2021).

Following the goal of preventing future acts of far-right or racist violence, our interviewees underlined the importance of keeping the memory of the arson attack and the pogrom incorporated in collective memory, be it local or national, especially for younger generations, who themselves were not yet born in the early 1990s and thus might not know about the incidents and their implications (SG_02, 90²). During the annual commemoration ceremony in May 2023, Özlem Genç, the grandchild of Mevlüde Genç, addressed precisely this challenge and denounced that the arson attack had not been negotiated enough publicly. Furthermore, she underlined the necessity of constructing remembrance as a form of prevention, provided that future transformation is to be achieved. One interviewee from Rostock explained that the correlation between the Rostock-Lichtenhagen pogrom and the restrictive asylum policy that followed might not be evident to many young people and people who migrated to Germany over the last 30 years. Hence, they attested to the great potential that remembrance practices could have regarding the understanding of current dynamics:

So, why are things the way they are today? Using the example of the past, including Rostock-Lichtenhagen, you can wonderfully outline what scope for action there actually is for actors, how you can actually act in it, what actually has to happen so that something like this doesn't happen.

(HRO_03, 127)

The commemorative practices thus visualize the correlations between past and present, justifying political and activist efforts to counteract racism and far-right movements. As another interviewee explained, "In order for things to not repeat themselves, one has to understand what went wrong back then, where it could have been prevented, so to speak" (HRO_05, 195). In this sense, remembrance goes beyond the sole purpose

of mourning and functions as an active antidiscrimination practice. This practice can be seen as an activist approach that focuses on “the commemoration of a contested past to influence public debate” and aims to frame a perspective of a collective future based on reflections of the past as “memory activism” (Gutman 2017a, 55). This type of activism reveals the complex interrelation between shaping the future and remembering the past. On the one hand, the way in which the past is remembered and interpreted is shaped by current visions of the future; on the other hand, the current understanding of the past also heavily influences future imaginations (Gutman 2017b, 26). The goal of memory activism is thus to raise awareness of this interconnectedness and even challenge current interpretations and practices of remembrance (Gutman 2017b, 26). In this way, memory activists can “use memory as the crucial way of transforming society from below” (Gutman and Wüstenberg 2022, 1071).

Accordingly, commemoration is considered an ongoing process that changes over time and continuously grows with new emerging knowledge (HRO_02, 43). In this dynamic process lies a particular potential for change, likewise emphasized by Aleida Assmann (2020, 75), who objects to the classification of remembrance as a static fixation on the past. Overall, our interviewees seemed to share this understanding of remembrance as future-oriented prevention that requires a discussion of past events and the circumstances leading to them. However, there are disagreements and conflicts regarding the appropriate approach to remembering the arson attack in Solingen and the pogrom in Rostock-Lichtenhagen.

In both cities, individual and collective actors play pivotal roles in the different stages of the remembrance process. Some of these actors directly or indirectly influence the way in which local, national, or transnational remembrance practices are organized and how the racial attacks are remembered. Although these actors do not directly control the content of (collective) memory, they are in the position to decide where and how that memory is formed or maintained and who gets to actively participate in this process. While the various nonstate actors are similar in viewing commemoration as a platform to achieve social change, the question of what constitutes the “correct” way to remember remains contentious. The following two sections further examine these negotiations and spatial conflicts, particularly focusing on the politics of memory and questions of visibility and participation.

Politics of memory: Spatial claims, representation, and symbolic action

The concept of “politics of memory” here refers to the ways in which memory and remembrance are shaped, contested, and used by various actors and institutions within the public sphere (Huysen 2003; Verovšek 2016). It encompasses the processes and mechanisms that affect how past violent

events are exchanged, challenged, silenced, or negotiated in spaces beyond official or institutional contexts (Verovšek 2016, 3). In this sense, it is directly related to the dynamics of interactions between different groups and actors, their conflicts in public spaces, and various social and political demands and activism that lead to the formation of a collective memory. Commemoration practices serve as spheres of contact in which multiple actors interact and negotiate differences and spatial conflicts regarding these practices, especially concerning a seemingly adequate way to remember racially motivated violence (Rose-Redwood et al. 2022, 449).

Our research showed that the representation of diverging narratives and the usage of memorial spaces are potential reasons for conflict. Conflicts in this dimension often revolve around how political authorities control commemorative practices and narratives, potentially contradicting alternative or marginalized perspectives. These practices are not mere reflections of the past but are actively shaped by those in positions of authority who have the power to influence what is commemorated and, consequently, collectively remembered or forgotten (McDowell and Braniff 2014, 22). Our empirical data show that local, national, and transnational political actors participate in commemorative events and that their decisions significantly affect remembrance practices. We also observed that the negotiation process carried out between political and civil society actors and affected communities influences the ways of commemorating and (re)producing various sites of remembrance.

Conflicts may arise over whose narratives are part of the national collective memory and whose are marginalized or even excluded. This can lead to debates over which groups' experiences are acknowledged in commemorations and who is recognized as belonging to the community affected by past violence. Thus, the memory of the past can often become plural, contested, and contentious due to various group affiliations and multiple belongings in society (Daphi and Zamponi 2019, 402). Disputes in this dimension might also focus on recognizing different degrees of affectedness by racist violence and how this recognition is reflected in (spatial) commemoration practices (Assmann 1995; Massey 2009).

In both cities, the public administration plays an important role in organizing the yearly events in negotiation with actors from the affected communities, migrant-led organizations, and other civil society and political actors. Local governments cooperate with other actors to organize annual events and create networks for antidiscrimination work and education. Remembrance practices are also carried out by actors from civil society and, in the case of Solingen, by religious organizations. In both cities, migrant organizations have become heavily involved with the aim of constructing their commemoration practices to empower their community. The active presence of the (religious) migrant organization in Solingen is

related to the positionality and membership of the Genç family itself. Every year, they organize a commemorative event with speakers from different religious communities, political representatives from Solingen, and state officials from Turkey. The sense of belonging to a specific Turkish religious community plays an essential role in how the question of who “owns” the memory of historical events and who has the right to define their meaning is negotiated. In this context, local conflicts arise in relation to specific remembrance places, such as Untere Wernerstraße 81, where the arson attack took place. This place holds different meanings for various actors and organizations and has become a focal point of conflict regarding its use as a place of remembrance. In this context, we observed a spatial conflict manifesting as a struggle over the ownership and symbolic representation of the spaces in which commemoration takes place. The main organizer of the event mentioned above described the situation as follows:

It belongs to us; we manage the program and the ceremony in front of the house. As Turks, it belongs to us. Next year, we will not let anyone organize any other program or demonstrate there; we will register the police for the whole day.

(SG_17, 24-25)

The involvement of Turkish and religious communities in organizing events and demonstrations at this site indicates a claim over the space that transcends mere physical ownership and is instead closely connected to cultural and historical identity. Thus, this excerpt illustrates that space is a social product shaped by the interactions and claims of different groups (Massey 2009). If these claims differ, conflicts can arise over attempts by certain groups to monopolize the narrative or exclude others from participating in the memory-making process.

As Massey (2009, 16) argues, space here is defined by the interaction of people in these spaces and the narratives about them. Rather than being inherent, the social significance or identity attributed to a space is a product of social interactions. Thus, they cannot be considered to have a set meaning; instead, they are the culmination of diverse social relationships (Massey 1994, 119). In Solingen, these spatial conflicts are mainly between the Turkish religious community and left-wing activist groups who organize their own events and between the Turkish religious community and actors from the city administration who plan the official events on the commemoration day. While the religious community asserts control over the organization of events, the public status of space maintained by the city and other commemorative practices related to the space complicates this claim. Therefore, the process of identifying space is dynamic and contested, with different power relations playing a critical role.

Here, Massey's (2009) concept of power geometry allows for an understanding of space as a product of the social relations of power and movement, where the identification of spaces is not just about geographical locations but also about how these spaces are experienced, imagined, and contested by various actors within the matrix of power relations. In this context, the places of commemoration become "the products of negotiations, conflict, competition, agreement, and so forth between different interests and positions" (Massey 2009, 24). This highlights the ongoing negotiation and deliberation in public domains about the appropriate use and ownership of commemorative spaces.

Additionally, the attendance of high-ranking representatives of the Republic of Turkey at the annual commemoration events adds more political complexity and potential for conflicts. Their participation in the commemoration practices can be seen as a form of politicization, where, through public memory, they assert the presence and significance of the Turkish community within the German sociopolitical context. The involvement of high-ranking Turkish officials in Solingen's commemorations adds a layer of international political complexity, illustrating how spatial conflicts can transcend local boundaries and involve national and transnational actors. Moreover, conflict arises regarding the perceived reasons why local political actors organize and participate in these events. The criticism is that the commemorative events are being politicized and instrumentalized for political interest but not as a gateway to more extensive public discussions about the root of the problem that leads to such attacks in the first place. The interviewees expressed criticism mainly about the inadequate examination of the anchoring of structural racism in society and the continuities of racism in connection with the respective acts of violence. Additionally, despite the significant involvement of the local government in the annual commemoration efforts in Solingen, our data indicate a pronounced tendency toward "ritualization" or "monotony" within the remembrance ceremonies: "It is always the same people that attend. So, the event is always the same; the speeches are always similar [...] It is like a mandatory event" (SG_02, 35). In this sense, the commemorative practices supported and organized by local politicians seem to stagnate on a symbolic level and function as a platform for symbolic gestures, although lacking political actions, as one of our interviewees pointed out:

Well, of course, it's always politicians who speak for it. The consul general comes here every year and conveys it. But here is my criticism again. Well, it's more of a symbol. They come here, take pictures, camera here, camera there, so that they can say: "Yes, we have ticked that off now. We can go again now."

(SG_05, 52)

Thus, local governments are being criticized for not only withholding political discussions about racism and far-right violence but for also utilizing the annual remembrance to positively influence the city's image for external observers and actors (SG_27, 69). In an interview conducted by [Brehmer \(2022\)](#), Kien Nghi Ha voices similar criticism and explains that it is not the annual commemorations that should be criticized but the imbalance between this one-off event and the avoidance of racism during the rest of the year. In this way, the invisibility of and lack of discussions about racism can be legitimized or appeased by referencing the annual events.

(In)visibility: Negotiating memory in contested spaces

Conflicts also unfold along the question of whether and the extent to which remembrance in public spaces should be ostentatious or even disruptive. Spatial forms of commemoration serve the purpose of visibility, anchoring the past in everyday life through the material presence of a monument, memorial plaque, or similar forms. [Alderman \(2003, 165\)](#) emphasizes the “geographic scale” of memorials; their visibility significantly determines who will be engaged with and is influenced by their intended messages. Thus, the visibility of memorial sites, especially regarding their size and location, heavily influences the impact that a memorial can have. The memorial sites in Rostock and Solingen are viewed critically by some actors in both respects.

In Solingen, there are three places where commemoration takes place: the location of the arson attack (Untere Wernerstraße 81), the Solinger monument erected close to the Mildred-Scheel Berufskolleg, and lastly, the newly renamed Mevlüde-Genç-Platz in Solingen Mitte. One central point of criticism concerns the handling of the attack site in the direct aftermath of the arson attack—more precisely, the fact that the house was demolished shortly after the arson attack, leaving a blank space in its place and erasing the undeniable consequences of the urban landscape. Following these critics' argumentation, the demolition counteracts efforts to keep the incidents alive in urban consciousness:

So, if you were to walk past there now, [...] would you immediately notice [...] that it used to be the Genç family's house? No, well, totally inconspicuous, so to speak. Otherwise, no. There are just five chestnut trees that look like five normal trees. And then there's a stone, exactly, with this written on it. But you won't immediately recognize that something terrible has happened there.

(SG_05, 53-55).

Keeping in mind the challenge that many people are no longer aware of the incident, the fact that there is no prominent materialist reminder embedded in the urban landscape increases the invisibility of the attack and does not counteract the growing tendency to forget. According to the account of our interviewee, when walking down Untere Wernerstraße, the probability seems to be quite high that someone not familiar with the past would only notice the chestnut trees, planted as a tribute to the victims, and perceive them as “normal” trees but disregard the memorial plaque attached. Thus, the urban landscape does not mirror or store the testimony of past events. According to Çaylı (2021, 76–77), the city’s decision to demolish the house only two weeks after the attack itself contradicts the approach of the general public, who gathered at the site of the arson attack and hung banners on the wreckage, thus, in a way, transforming the site into a memorial itself. This collective act was hindered from going any further due to the political decision to demolish the house, which demonstrates who had power over the spatial and memorial narratives at that time.

Not only was the family home demolished, but the Solinger monument was realized solely through civic engagement and cooperation with the local youth welfare initiative and workshop in Solingen and then erected at a decentral place. This illustrates the political attitude toward long-term forms of remembrance in the 1990s. Keeping the urban image in a positive light seemed to have been more important to local politicians than addressing local and structural racism by, for example, following the civic impulse to anchor the events in material form in the urban environment. This again shows how the subject of collective identity is negotiated through remembrance, along with the question of what narrative is supposed to be told about a city’s past, present, and future.

By erecting the memorial in a decentralized location, residents and city visitors are unlikely to come into contact with it. This means that the very people who should be reached by a central place of remembrance and who could learn through contact with it are, in fact, not reached:

But such an important memorial, such a memorial, such a vigil, has to go somewhere where it is seen more. And it won’t be seen there. So, there, maybe vocational students will see it. Yes, it is also important that young people are reached, but it would be much, much better if they had placed this memorial or this vigil, if chosen, if you had done this memorial or this vigil in the downtown, so that it always comes to mind.

(SG_05, 19-21)

In a way, the decision to demolish the building and erect a memorial on the outskirts of the city erases the arson attack from the city’s collective

memory, or at least diminishes its significance. The naming of a (previously nameless) square in the city center—first, after the birthplace of the Genç family in Turkey, and last year, in the name of Mevlüde Genç following her death—can be seen as an essential means of making the tragic history more visible in the city center. In this case, the act of naming serves as a crucial means of integrating history into the urban public space, allowing historical events or persons to become part of everyday life (Alderman 2003, 163–165). It also becomes a political decision that defines what is historically significant or worthy to commemorate publicly (Azaryahu 1996; Alderman 2003). Our data show that this link between political actions, commemorative practices and collective memory is highly contentious. Spatial conflicts can be observed in both cities regarding the appropriate way to remember. This includes the ongoing debates over the naming of streets and squares, especially in Solingen (SG_04, 56; SG_12, 50). Although the case of Solingen shows a progression toward more public visibility regarding the spatial distribution of names, it is clear that negotiations over the appropriateness of the Mevlüde-Genç-Platz as a memorial site will continue. This is also due to discussions on the act of naming as symbolic expressions of broader conflicts over power among different groups with competing interests. The role of street names in conveying meanings is an integral part of continuously evolving remembrance practices, adapted as social configurations and political priorities change (Azaryahu 1996; Whelan 2011).

We observed similar criticism, public discussions, and negotiations in Rostock. In the immediate aftermath of the pogrom, actions of commemoration—in accordance with the inactivity of political actors during the pogrom—remained similarly limited. After a long period during which local political actors made no efforts to realize a place of commemoration, several memorial steles were erected in 2017 at various locations in Rostock to commemorate the pogrom of 1992 and to address and criticize various social and political grievances. The steles, designed by a group of artists, were selected as the winning designs in an art competition announced by the municipality in 2016 to commemorate the Rostock-Lichtenhagen pogrom, as they developed a concept with the commemoration working group to give an artistic perspective to this commemoration (HRO_10, 27). The steles aimed to illustrate the role of various social groups in the context of the pogrom: politics, state authority, the media, society, and vigilante justice.

Here, we can see how the discourse on collective memory had explicit material effects on the decision regarding which steles were to be erected and where. Up to this point, the discourse on remembrance in Rostock had hardly included the perspectives of the various victim groups. While the “Vietnamese perspective” was still given marginal attention by

institutional representations, the Roma group had no agency in the collective memory. Therefore, it was not entirely surprising that no stele was included to commemorate civil society as an important actor in resistance and remembrance work. In 2018, a nonprofit association initiated another memorial designed by the artists. While various interviewees assessed the idea behind these efforts positively (HRO_02, 33), the implementation was again sharply criticized. The memorial steles are relatively inconspicuous in terms of their size, positioning, and design, so they blend into the cityscape. One interviewee reported, for example, that the steles are often searched for diffusely and that some people are ultimately unable to find them (HRO_03, 113). Other interviewees also criticized the implementation of spatial remembrance. The memorial stele placed at the Sunflower House itself was particularly criticized for its size. Compared to the large building, almost monumental itself, this stele, which is just under 120 cm high, virtually disappears. One interviewee explained the situation as follows:

There is, we have here a memorial stele, and it doesn't have any information board on it. When you go there with people, if I say, let's go there, they park their bicycles against this white column and ask, "Well, where is it?" And I say, "You've just leaned your bicycle against it." So, it is hardly recognized as such. There is no information available. There is a website very faintly inscribed into the stone where one can get information, but hardly anyone sees it. There is no stumbling stone there, no QR code, no information plaque.

(HRO_08, 147)

While the placement of the steles in the city center and at the place of the pogrom itself theoretically ensures that people are confronted with the events in different areas, this does not happen in reality because of their inconspicuousness. Accordingly, the pogrom is similarly invisible in the cityscape. Due to this invisibility and the inactivity of the local government in the past, civil actions and protests have taken place to give more visibility and public attention to the remembrance of the pogrom. In October 1992, a memorial plaque was attached outside the town hall by a French Jewish activist group and representatives of the Roma National. One interviewee explained:

The activists essentially established continuities between the persecution of Roma and Jews during National Socialism, and what then happened during the pogrom. [...] The plaque was removed shortly after the action, many of the protesters were arrested, and in 2012, it was reattached [...] during this 20-year commemoration, exactly.

(HRO_03, 62)

On the one hand, this example shows the commonality of activist commemoration practices in Rostock and Solingen. In both cities, memory activists strove to point to historical continuities regarding the respective attacks to emphasize the necessity of a structural and systemic examination and confrontation of racism and racial violence. On the other hand, the interest of local politicians, especially in the years after the racist attacks, seemed to align, as they wanted to maintain a positive image of the city and therefore opposed integrating the pogrom and arson attack into the narrative by commemorating the events in a material, permanent, and public way.

The concept of (in)visibility transcends mere physical representation to encompass broader dimensions of social engagement and the intricacies of commemorative dynamics, addressing issues of representation along with the questions of who gets to speak and who gets to mourn (Confino 1997; Butler 2004). Consequently, conflicts surrounding the matter of (in)visibility are not confined solely to the material sites of memory but also extend into the issues of representation and agency. In particular, the (non)participation of individuals who were directly affected by the violence and their families can have an impact on the commemoration practices. For many families and community members, commemorative events provide a space for mourning (SG_08, 19-21), and the public commemoration of racist violence additionally allows for the processing of collective grief (Moore 2009; Woodley 2023). Affected groups often engage in commemorative practices to advocate for justice or to inform the broader public and future generations about the violence that occurred and their loss, with the overarching goal of fostering comprehension and averting the recurrence of such attacks (SG_09, 68).

The surviving members of the Genç family have been publicly outspoken about the need to remember the victims of this racially motivated attack. During the commemoration events in Solingen, the family plays a prominent role during both the planning phase and the event. They are in contact with many other actors from the city administration and civil society and are thus able to directly influence practices. Their actions contribute to the construction of collective memory, a process vital for the affected families in asserting their narrative and identity in the aftermath of violence. This active remembrance serves as a personal catharsis and a form of social advocacy that seeks acknowledgment and justice for the victims. This strongly contrasts with Rostock, where the directly affected families and groups do not play a central role in the local yearly commemoration events. In Rostock, this leads to the emergence of power imbalances, as we observed that the invisibility of specific groups, such as Roma and Sinti, leads to the vocalization of criticism and conflict in the planning and during the commemoration events. One of the interviewees emphasized the importance of the visibility of the affected communities,

which could bring different aspects to the memory practices and change the dynamics of events in Rostock:

Because these people are also not present. I believe if people were living here, drawing attention to themselves, and making themselves available as witnesses, then that would actually be a different dimension.

(HRO_09, 12)

The actors involved in planning commemoration events struggle with this missing agency for the victims. There are efforts to incorporate the narratives and voices of some victims through art exhibitions and interview excerpts; nonetheless, this is still seen as insufficient by some of the actors involved. When comparing the roles of the victims and victims' families in Rostock and Solingen, it becomes clear that the commemoration practices differ as a result of varying degrees of agency from this group of actors. While in Solingen, the victims' family is very much at the center of these efforts and highly involved, in Rostock, the victims and their families have next to no agency because they are "just not there anymore" (HRO_04, 84).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we showed that commemoration processes are shaped by competing claims of different actors over the adequate way of remembrance. Commemoration practices make past events visible in the present and shape collective memory; however, the ways of remembrance and the dynamics behind their constitutions have a contested structure. Regarding Rostock and Solingen, we portrayed that the material sites and (re)production of new memorials have become significant parts of remembrance and have changed the urban landscape over the course of the last 30 years. However, different groups and individuals attach different meanings to new memorial sites. Accordingly, the spaces in our case cities changed not only in terms of their physical characteristics but also regarding the narratives about them and the significance ascribed to them. In both Solingen and Rostock, we observed that different groups have distinct relationships with space, leading to conflicts that arise due to competing claims over particular spaces that result in "a palimpsest of overlapping multi-vocal landscapes" (Saunders 2001, 37). Thus, both cities can be seen as urban palimpsests in which different past and present narratives of memorial sites coexist and constantly influence each other (Huysen 2003). This can also be seen as resulting from commemorative practices and sites being shaped by power dynamics among political, civil society actors, and affected communities, with decisions by local, national, and transnational

actors playing a significant role in what is remembered and how it is remembered. The constitution of commemorative spaces is a dynamic, contested process influenced by social relations of power, where these spaces are not only about geographical location but also about how they are experienced and contested by various stakeholders. This struggle is not isolated to the local context of the case cities but reflects a broader national and even global challenge of how societies struggle with remembering past violence.

Notes

- 1 Examples include the film *We Are Young. We Are Strong.* (2014) directed by Burhan Qurbani, the song *Fremd im eigenen Land* [Foreign in your own country] (1992) by Advanced Chemistry, and theatrical works such as *Sonnenblumenhaus* [Sunflower House] (2016) by Dan Thy Nguyen and *türken, feuer* [Turks, fire] (2020) by Özlem Özgül Dündar.
- 2 All empirical data have been anonymized to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the interviewees. Quotations extracted from these interviews have been numbered for reference within the text. The abbreviations “SG” and “HRO,” respectively, refer to Solingen and Rostock. The first number following these abbreviations corresponds to the quoted interviewee, while the second number indicates the specific line in the transcript where the excerpt is located.

References

- Alderman, Derek H. 2003. “Street Names and the Scaling of Memory: The Politics of Commemorating Martin Luther King, Jr. Within the African American Community.” *Area* 35 (2): 163–173.
- Alexopoulou, Maria. 2021. “Die Schwierigkeit, Rassismus Zu Erinnern: Zwickau, Chemnitz, Jena Und Der NSU-Komplex [The Difficulty of Remembering Racism: Zwickau, Chemnitz, Jena and the NSU Complex.]” In *Rassismus. Macht. Vergessen. Von München über Den NSU Bis Hanau: Symbolische Und Materielle Kämpfe Entlang Rechten Terrors*, edited by Onur Suzan Nobrega, Matthias Quent, and Jonas Zipf, 363–380. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Amadeu Antonio Stiftung. n.d. “Todesopfer rechter Gewalt [Victims of Right-wing Violence].” Accessed March 5, 2024. <https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/rassismus/todesopfer-rechter-gewalt/>
- Assmann, Aleida. 2018. *Erinnerungsräume. Formen Und Wandlungen Des Kulturellen Gedächtnisses* [Spaces of Remembrance: Forms and Transformations of Cultural Memory]. München: C.H. Beck.
- Assmann, Aleida. 2020. *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention* [The New Unease with the Memory Culture: An Intervention]. München: C.H. Beck.
- Assmann, Jan. 1995. “Erinnern, Um Dazuzugehören. Kulturelles Gedächtnis, Zugehörigkeitsstruktur Und Normative Vergangenheit [Remember to Belong: Cultural Memory, Structures of Belonging, and Normative Past.]” In *Generation Und Gedächtnis. Erinnerungen Und Kollektive Identitäten*, edited by Kristin Platt, and Mihran Dabag, 51–75. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

- Assmann, Jan. 2017. *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung Und Politische Identität in Frühen Hochkulturen* [The Cultural Memory: Writing, Memory, and Political Identity in Advanced Civilization]. München: C.H. Beck.
- Azaryahu, Maoz. 1996. "The Power of Commemorative Street Names." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14 (3): 311–330.
- Brehmer, Marten. 2022. "Interview mit Kien Nghi Ha: Bis zum Pogrom Lebte ich in Einer Realitätsfernen Blase [Interview with Kien Nghi Ha: Until the Pogrom, I Lived in a Bubble Detached from Reality]." *MiGAZIN*, August 22. Accessed January 9, 2024. <https://www.migazin.de/2022/08/22/interview-kien-nghi-ha-bis-zum-pogrom-lebte-ich-in-einer-realitaetsfernen-blase/>
- Bryman, Alan. 2016. *Social Research Methods*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 2004. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.
- Çaylı, Eray. 2021. "The Aesthetics and Publics of Testimony: Participation and Agency in Architectural Memorializations of the 1993 Solingen Arson Attack." *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 39 (1): 72–92.
- Confino, Alon. 1997. "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method." *The American Historical Review* 102 (5): 1386–1403.
- Czollek, Max. 2023. *Versöhnungstheater* [Theater of Reconciliation]. München: Carl Hanser.
- Daphi, Priska, and Lorenzo Zamponi. 2019. "Exploring the Movement-Memory Nexus: Insights and Ways Forward." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 24 (4): 399–417.
- Demirtaş, Birgül, Adelheid Schmitz, Derya Gür-Şeker, and Çağrı Kahveci. 2023. *Solingen, 30 Jahre Nach Dem Brandanschlag: Rassismus, Extrem Rechte Gewalt Und Die Narben Einer Vernachlässigten Aufarbeitung* [Solingen, 30 Years After the Arson Attack: Racism, Far-Right Violence, and the Scars of Neglected Reappraisal]. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Engler, Marcus, and Jan Schneider. 2015. "German Asylum Policy and EU Refugee Protection: The Prospects of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS)." *Focus Migration* No 29: 1–17. Accessed March 11, 2024. https://www.bpb.de/system/files/dokument_pdf/Policy%20Brief_German%20Asylum%20Policy%20and%20EU%20Refugee%20Protection_2015.pdf
- European Commission. 2021. "Working Definition for Violent Right-Wing Extremism." Accessed March 19, 2024. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-02/VRWE%20working%20definition_en.pdf
- Georgi, Viola B., Martin Lücke, Johannes Meyer-Hamme, and Riem Spielhaus. 2022. "Neue Perspektiven Für Die Erinnerungskultur in Der Migrationsgesellschaft – Problemaufriss Und Konzeption Des Bandes [New Perspectives for Memory Culture in the Migration Society – Problem Outline and Concept of the Volume]." In *Geschichten Im Wandel: Neue Perspektiven Für Die Erinnerungskultur in Der Migrationsgesellschaft*, edited by Viola B. Georgi, Martin Lücke, Johannes Meyer-Hamme, and Riem Spielhaus, 11–46. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Gutman, Yifat. 2017a. "Looking Backward to The Future: Counter-Memory as Oppositional Knowledge-Production in The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict." *Current Sociology* 65 (1): 54–72.
- Gutman, Yifat. 2017b. *Memory Activism: Reimagining the Past for the Future in Israel-Palestine*. Vanderbilt University Press.
- Gutman, Yifat, and Jenny Wüstenberg. 2022. "Challenging the Meaning of the Past From Below: A Typology for Comparative Research on Memory Activists." *Memory Studies* 15 (5): 1070–1086.

- Ha, Kien Nghi. 2012. "Rostock-Lichtenhagen—Die Rückkehr des Verdrängten [Rostock-Lichtenhagen—The Return of the Repressed]." *Heimatkunde*, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, September 1. Accessed March 5, 2024. heimatkunde.boell.de/de/2012/09/01/rostock-lichtenhagen-die-rueckkehr-des-verdraengten
- Halbwachs, Maurice. (1925) 1992. *On Collective Memory*, translated by Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hashemi, Said Etris. 2024. *Der Tag, an Dem Ich Sterben Sollte: Wie Der Terror in Hanau Mein Leben Für Immer Verändert Hat* [The Day I Was Supposed to Die: How the Terror in Hanau Changed My Life Forever]. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe.
- Heinrich, Gudrun. 2021. "Rostock-Lichtenhagen 1992 Als Lerngegenstand Der Politischen Bildung [Rostock-Lichtenhagen 1992 as a Subject of Political Education]." In *Rechtsextremismus—Musik Und Medien*, edited by Sabine Mecking, Manuela Schwartz, and Yvonne Wasserloos, 241–257. Göttingen: V&R Unipress.
- Huyssen, Andreas. 2003. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Jupskås, Anders R., and Daniel Koehler. 2020. "Germany: The European Hotspot of Far Right Violence." C-REX—Center for Research on Extremism, July 27. Accessed March 5, 2024. <http://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2020/germany-the-european-hotspot-of-far-right-violence.html>
- Kahveci, Çağrı, and Özge P. Sarp. 2017. "Von Solingen Zum NSU. Rassistische Gewalt Im Kollektiven Gedächtnis Von Migrant*innen Türkischer Herkunft [From Solingen to the NSU. Racist Violence in the Collective Memory of Migrants of Turkish Origin]." In *Den NSU-Komplex Analysieren: Aktuelle Perspektiven Aus Der Wissenschaft*, edited by Juliane Karakayalı, Çağrı Kahveci, Doris Liebscher, and Carl Melchers, 37–56. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Kössler, Till, and Janosch Steuer. 2023. *Brandspuren: Das Vereinte Deutschland Und Die Rechte Gewalt Der Frühen 1990er-Jahre. Sonderausgabe Für Die Bundeszentrale Für Politische Bildung* [Burn Marks: Unified Germany and Far-Right Violence in the Early 1990s. Special Edition for the Federal Agency for Civic Education]. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung.
- LeCompte, Margaret D., and Jean J. Schensul. 2010. *Analysis and Interpretation of Ethnographic Data: A Mixed Methods Approach Second Edition*. Maryland: Altamira Press.
- Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Massey, Doreen. 2009. "Concepts of Space and Power in Theory in Political Practice." *Documents d'Analisi Geografica* 55: 15–26.
- McDowell, Sara, and Máire Braniff. 2014. *Commemoration as Conflict: Space, Memory and Identity in Peace Processes*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moore, Lisa M. 2009. "(Re)Covering the Past, Remembering Trauma: The Politics of Commemoration at Sites of Atrocity." *Journal of Public and International Affairs* 20: 47–64.
- Müller, Anna-Lisa, Mert Pekşen, Daniel Kubiak, Emma Brahm, Kübra Gencal, and Rani Pabst. 2023. "Rassistisch Motivierte Anschläge Vor Ort Und Ihre Sozialräumliche Wirkmächtigkeit: Zur Konstitution Von Räumen Der Migrationsgesellschaft [Racially Motivated Attacks on Site and Their Socio-Spatial Impact: On the Constitution of Spaces in the Migration Society]" In *Polarisierte Welten: Verhandlungsband Zum 41. Kongress Der Deutschen Gesellschaft Für Soziologie 2022*, edited by Paula Irene Villa Braslavsky, 1–11. Deutschen

- Gesellschaft für Soziologie. https://publikationen.soziologie.de/index.php/kongressband_2022/article/view/1658
- Oster, Stefanie, and Johann Henningsen. 2022. "The Truth Lies in Rostock: Eine Dokumentation zum Pogrom in Lichtenhagen 1992." *Zeitgeschichte online*, August 17. Accessed December 8, 2022. <https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/film/truth-lies-rostock>
- Rose-Redwood, Reuben, Ian G. Baird, Emilia Palonen, and CindyAnn Rose-Redwood. 2022. "Monumentality, Memoryscapes, and the Politics of Place." *An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 21 (5): 448–467. ACME. <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/2266>
- Saunders, Nicholas. 2001. "Matter and Memory in the Landscapes of Conflict: The Western Front 1914–1999." In *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*, edited by Barbara Bender, and Margot Winer, 37–53. London: Routledge.
- SOS Rassismus. 2001. *Der Brandanschlag Von Solingen. Auswirkungen Und Konsequenzen: Eine Dokumentation* [The Arson Attack in Solingen. Impact and Consequences: A Documentation]. Solingen: SOS Rassismus.
- Stjepandić, Katarina. 2022. "Hanau Ist überall: Der Aufbau Von Solidaritätsnetzwerken Nach Den Rassistischen Anschlägen In Hanau Als Postmigrantische Mobilisierung [Hanau Is Everywhere: The Formation of Solidarity Networks After the Racist Attacks in Hanau as a Post-Migrant Mobilization]." In *Demokratie Und Migration. Konflikte Um Migration Und Grenzbeziehungen in Der Demokratie*, edited by Julia Glathe, and Laura Gorriahn, 326–351. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Thomas, Tanja, and Fabian Virchow. 2024. "Hegemonic Listening and Doing Memory on Right-Wing Violence: Negotiating German Political Culture in Public Spheres." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 50 (1): 102–124.
- Verovšek, Peter. 2016. "Collective Memory, Politics, and the Influence of the Past: The Politics of Memory as a Research Paradigm." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4 (3): 1–15.
- Virchow, Fabian. 2022. "Researching Transnational Right-Wing Terrorism: Challenges and Trajectories." In *A Transnational History of Right-Wing Terrorism: Political Violence and the Far Right in Eastern and Western Europe Since 1900*, edited by Johannes Dalfinger, and Moritz Florin, 258–266. London: Routledge.
- Warda, Katharina. 2022. "Das Pogrom in Rostock-Lichtenhagen—Zäsur, Symbol, Folgen [The Pogrom in Rostock-Lichtenhagen—Turning Point, Symbol, Consequences]." *Der Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Ostdeutschland*. Accessed March 5, 2024. <http://www.ostbeauftragter.de/ostb-de/themen/bericht-des-ostbeauftragten/blicke-auf-ostdeutschland/das-pogrom-in-rostock-lichtenhagen-zaesur-symbol-folgen-2080824>
- Whelan, Yvonne. 2011. "(Inter)National Naming: Heritage, Conflict and Diaspora." *ACME. An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 10 (1): 7–12. <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v10i1.880>
- Woodley, Jenny. 2023. "Nothing Is Lost: Mourning and Memory at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice." *Memory Studies* 16 (5): 1054–1070.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Part V

**Struggles over ecology
and space**



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

14 Socioecological transformation and conflict

Arenas, topics, and dimensions¹

Miriam Schad and Bernd Sommer

Introduction

With the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, 197 countries committed to limiting global warming to well below 2°C compared to preindustrial levels. In the European Union (EU), the Commission has outlined its guidelines under the title *Fit for 55* to achieve the goals of the *European Green Deal* to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 and to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. Federal states, cities, and municipalities across various European countries have also set legally binding climate targets. Measures to mitigate anthropogenic climate change serve as prominent examples of the many efforts being made globally to establish more sustainable relationships with the natural environment.

At first glance, many societies appear to share a broad consensus on issues such as climate change, environmental protection, and ecological sustainability. This perception is reinforced by the fact that, in most industrialized OECD countries, political parties focused on *green issues* have experienced significant growth in recent years. Such parties have even become part of governing coalitions in countries such as Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Austria (as of 2024). Traditional political parties have also incorporated environmental and climate protection into their platforms. Climate justice movements, such as Fridays for Future ([Wahlström et al. 2019](#)), have emerged as some of the most mobilized social movements of today. Moreover, particularly in Europe and North America, companies are developing sustainable product lines, and consumers are increasingly encouraged to consider sustainability criteria in their purchasing decisions ([Shove 2010](#); [Fischer and Sommer 2011](#)). Finally, representative population surveys indicate that concern for the natural environment is a relatively constant high priority for people in affluent societies ([Diekmann and Franzen 2019](#); [Mau, Lux, and Westheuser 2023](#)), and climate change denial continues to play a subordinate role in democratic European societies ([Lewis, Palm, and Feng 2019](#); [Sommer et al. 2022](#)).

DOI: [10.4324/9781003542810-19](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003542810-19)

This chapter has been made available under a CC-BY 4.0 license.

Upon closer inspection, however, this apparent social consensus is fragile, and the concrete implementation and political negotiation of these goals often lead to conflict. In Germany, the phaseout of open-cast lignite coal mining in Lusatia (Haas 2020) and the protests against ongoing open-cast mining in Lützerath (see Stoltenberg et al. in this volume) are notable examples of conflicts between environmental objectives and economic or social concerns, drawing significant public attention. The societal consequences of such conflicts vary. For example, in response to contentious farmer protests in several European countries during early 2024, the European Commission delayed or weakened certain environmental protection regulations. Climate justice movements such as *Fridays for Future*, *Extinction Rebellion*, and *The Last Generation* regularly highlight the huge gap between the measures being implemented and the scientific consensus on what is necessary to meet climate targets. In addition, repeated court rulings have demanded stronger efforts to achieve legally mandated climate goals, and climate litigation is seen as a potential driver of decarbonization (Aykut et al. 2023).

The phaseout of fossil fuels and the establishment of more sustainable relations with nature require profound changes across nearly all areas of society. In politics, civil society, and science, this process is referred to as socioecological transformation (Brand 2021; Hoffmann et al. 2023). In contrast to “refiguration” (Knoblauch, Sommer, and Pfetsch in this volume), the concept of transformation refers to intentional efforts to induce societal change in line with normative goals, particularly sustainability (Brand 2018). From this perspective, this article examines the transformation conflicts that arise from society’s relationship with nature. The scope of the article includes both completed and neglected transformation efforts, their repercussions on the conditions of implementation, and their unintended consequences. Thus, despite their intentional origins, socioecological transformation strategies often lead to refiguration processes. Moreover, in different temporal and spatial contexts, the goals that guide societal transformation efforts are interpreted differently. For instance, the normative goal of sustainability entails various imaginaries and narratives, ranging from market-based ecological modernization to post-capitalist concepts such as degrowth (Adloff and Neckel 2019; Saito 2024). In other words, highly contradictory policies and reform proposals are sometimes subsumed under apparently unambiguous terms such as “transformation” and “sustainability,” thereby fueling potential transformation conflicts.

In our analysis, we focus mainly on the dynamics within societies in countries of the Global North (especially Europe) to provide a specific perspective on socioecological transformation. Through socioecological transformation, especially ecological modernization, different potential

conflicts emerge across the Global South and the peripheries of the Global North, each with its own logic (see section “Topics and lines of conflict”).

Social conflicts have long been a central topic in the social sciences, particularly in sociology. Conflicts are regarded as inherent to modern societies, with various functions and meanings attributed to them in the literature. The second section of this article provides a brief reconstruction of known perspectives on conflicts in sociological theories and offers a tentative definition of socioecological transformation conflicts. In the third section, five arenas where socioecological transformation conflicts are currently most acute are examined. The first four arenas result from the politically induced reorganization of entire infrastructures or from conflicts driven by the demand to align everyday lifestyles with environmental protection criteria. These arenas include energy, mobility, housing, and food transitions. The fifth arena, outlined in this paper, addresses conflicts related to adaptations and the restoration of ecological damage and environmental change. Building on this, section four identifies current lines of social tension and contentious issues embedded in socioecological transformation processes. These conflicts can be categorized into three groups: distribution issues, lifestyle issues, and externalization effects. These topics overlap with the respective fields and arenas of conflict.

Several of these conflicts are spatial in nature, and socioecological transformation processes often generate conflictual spaces (see Knoblauch, Sommer, and Pfetsch in this volume). As societal transformation efforts progress, existing spatial logics, infrastructures, and institutional frameworks are challenged by new arrangements shaped by normative transformation goals. This, in turn, creates conflicts on various levels. For example, efforts to implement climate-friendly mobility systems often lead to disputes regarding which traffic participants should be prioritized in their use of space. Furthermore, many of these conflicts involve spatial dimensions where the benefits of one transformation strategy, driven by a specific spatial logic, have negative consequences in another—often geographically detached—space (see the subsection “Externalization as a transnational conflict” below). In its final section, the article discusses these spatial dimensions and the societal relevance of dissent as a key area for further research on socioecological transformation conflicts.

Theories of conflict and the characteristics of transformation conflicts

Social conflicts arise from societal structures and are an expression of specific power relations. These conflicts, in turn, can influence these structures, either facilitating or hindering politically desired changes. Conflict research generally defines conflict as a social phenomenon in which two or more

parties interact while pursuing differing interests and goals. Such conflicts become sociologically significant when they involve cross-situational disputes over issues, norms and values, resources, rules, or even justifications and interpretations (Bonacker 2005). In the case of socioecological transformation conflicts, the central question concerns their specific characteristics and how they relate to existing concepts of environmental and risk conflicts. Environmental conflicts generally refer to the relationship between humans and their natural environment. In the context of different strands of research, this includes questions about the social distribution of environmental burdens and resources. It also involves different normative ideas about nature and the environment, as well as the role of armed conflicts in environmental degradation (Swain and Öjendal 2020). Depending on the constellation, this may involve conflicts of interest, values, and knowledge (Kropp and Sonnberger 2021, 134). A distinction must be made between environmental and risk conflicts, which are primarily associated with Beck's (2009) work. Beck describes the distribution of risks as unintended side effects of second modernity. These risks equally affect privileged social groups due to a "boomerang effect." This effect not only includes risks from environmental pollution (such as particulate matter) but also risk conflicts arising from new technologies (such as artificial intelligence). Nonetheless, in his later writings, Beck acknowledges that risk classes persist and that inequality effects are determined by risk type (Beck 2016). Transformation conflicts, however, differ from environmental and risk conflicts. They arise from specific imaginaries (Adloff and Neckel 2019) and from the implementation of policies aiming at achieving greater ecological sustainability. These conflicts are further exacerbated by the effects of ecological destruction, especially the impacts of anthropogenic climate change. The transformations identified as areas of conflict—energy, mobility, housing, and food—are influenced by civil society involvement, private sector activities in new *green markets*, changing consumer habits, adapted legislation, and political decisions. A key characteristic of transformation conflicts is the significant role played by the state in shaping and implementing transitions, such as the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. The state may act as a conflict party itself while also being tasked with resolving conflicts.

In most sociological theories, conflicts are described as the "engine" of social change and are assigned a central societal function, such as in Marx's account of class conflict (Marx and Engels 1848) or Elias's more general notion of conflicts between established and outsider groups within society (Elias 2012). According to Simmel (1992), social interaction can generally take the form of cooperation or conflict. From a sociological perspective, emerging transformation conflicts are not surprising and may be necessary prerequisites for social change. However, Dahrendorf (1972) points to the need for conflict regulation—not suppression or resolution—in which

conflicts (and not the causes) are regulated. In doing so, he emphasizes the central role of the state, which creates the legal and political framework for conflict regulation (Dahrendorf 1961). The question remains whether the parties involved in transformation conflicts can be clearly identified and whether they are genuinely interested in resolving these conflicts. Coser (1964), for example, emphasizes the integrative function of existing conflicts that hold social groups together. However, conflict does not always play a productive role in social processes. For example, economic research informed by social psychology describes how conflicts can escalate in various stages, starting with a hardening of positions and advancing to such an extent that all parties involved in the conflict are harmed (Glasl 2020). Following Dahrendorf and Hirschman, Neckel also distinguishes between tensions and divisions in sustainability conflicts:

Tensions are an expression of latent conflicts awaiting their socio-political mobilization. [...] Divisions, on the other hand, are intensified forms of an open social conflict that can lead to social escalation through the overlapping of material conflicts of interest and a difference in values. Sustainability conflicts are prototypical cases of such an overlapping of divisible and indivisible conflicts, as they affect both the material reproduction and the cultural ethos of social class. (Neckel 2020, 96, own translation)

The complexity of transformation conflicts and the number of actors involved can be demonstrated by examining different areas of conflict.

Conflict arenas of a socioecological transformation

Energy transition

A widely observed socioecological conflict is the dispute over the narrower field of energy transition. The term “energy transition” refers to the transformation of the energy regime from mainly fossil to renewable sources. In this context, we use the term “narrower field of energy transition,” since the focus is initially on energy generation and the development of infrastructure, rather than on the context of usage, such as the electrification of private motor vehicles or heating. The expansion of renewable energies is a key prerequisite to achieving climate targets and will be accelerated in the coming years. Despite the general support for the energy transition even before the war in Ukraine, particular projects and aspects of its implementation were controversial (Sommer et al. 2022).

Conflicts can be identified in various areas related to infrastructure expansion or individual behavior expectations. One particularly contentious

area is the expansion of infrastructure for renewable energy, such as wind energy, as well as the transformation and reconfiguration of mining regions, exemplified by the phaseout of lignite mining and its use in electricity generation. This susceptibility to conflict can be attributed to the “obduracy” (Hommels 2005) of such infrastructure, given their slow changes. Furthermore, much infrastructure appears apolitical, but it is controlled and governed by conscious political decisions (Kropp and Sonnenberger 2021, 193–206). Therefore, it is becoming increasingly important to consider the social impacts of infrastructure, particularly within energy systems (Star 1999). Besides the debate over which energy supply model should be pursued in the future, there are fundamental protests against the expansion of renewable energy generation, especially wind turbines, in different European countries.

However, there are significant differences between protests related to energy transition. NIMBY (*not in my backyard*) protests are directed against the negative effects of construction measures on local residents (Reusswig, Lass, and Bock 2020). Typically, protests take place when large construction and infrastructure projects affect people’s surroundings. A green–green conflict between climate protection and nature conservation has also been a major issue in protests against the energy transition. In the case of Germany, Reusswig, Lass, and Bock (2020) observed that (right-wing) populist forces have become increasingly involved in citizen protests against wind energy and grid expansion. As a result, protests are increasingly addressing more fundamental issues, and spatial references change. Thus, NIMBYs could become NIABYs (*not in anyone’s backyard*), since wind turbines and other infrastructure for the energy transition should not be built anywhere.

Mobility transition

The transformation toward climate neutrality is proving especially difficult in the mobility sector. Generally, a distinction can be made between a transition of the power unit (electrification of automobility) and a transition of the mobility system. The introduction of e-cars fits into and reproduces the dominant automobility dispositive (Manderscheid 2020) but is accompanied by conflicts, especially at the level of production and employment (Dörre et al. 2024). However, the growing use of motorized private transport concerns beyond climate protection. Vehicles, particularly those with combustion engines, contribute significantly to local environmental issues, often exceeding permissible emission limits on high-traffic roads. As a result of the enormous amount of space that cars occupy, new questions of “spatial justice” (Ruhrort, Zehl, and Knie 2021, 2) arise. The redistribution of public space and the restriction of private motorized transportation

often become points of contention (e.g., discussions about pop-up cycle lanes in Berlin).

Unlike the energy transition, mobility transition disputes go beyond infrastructure planning and involve individual responsibilities on a daily basis. The realities of everyday life face very different challenges when it comes to aligning individual mobility behavior with environmental protection criteria. When considering the particular challenges faced by rural areas, for example, it is clear just how different the specific conditions for individual action and spatial context are. In principle, a sustainable mobility system can be implemented in urban areas due to higher population density. However, establishing car-sharing services and switching to walking, cycling, and public transportation in rural areas is far more challenging. Providing public transportation in rural areas that is easily accessible and operates on an attractive schedule is particularly expensive. Car-dependent commuters are also especially burdened by environmental pricing instruments, as rural commutes are typically longer than urban ones. Further tensions and conflicts in the transport sector are also repeatedly sparked by debates about the (non-)introduction of a speed limit on all highways. Due to its high climate impact, air traffic, especially for short distances, has also attracted attention, with climate activists recently targeting airports. Additionally, it becomes apparent that environmental attitudes do not automatically translate into action in everyday life. Long-distance flights are particularly popular in green and cosmopolitan milieus despite potentially being accompanied by shame (Degele 2022).

Housing transition

The housing and building sector is responsible for a large proportion of CO₂ emissions and causes land-use problems. This gives rise to a wide range of transformation efforts, involving questions about the condition of buildings, for instance, their heat supply, or the question of how much living space a person needs. Conflicts arise in areas such as energy-efficient building refurbishment, especially in relation to the distribution of costs and financial consequences. Landlords and tenants may have conflicting interests as a result of government climate protection requirements. In recent years, the phaseout of fossil-fuel-based heating systems and their replacement with alternative systems (such as heat pumps) has become a highly controversial topic in political debates in European countries such as Germany or Great Britain, as well as on the EU level. There are also a number of target conflicts at a political level (such as the target to halve land use and plans to build new residential homes). Some local authorities opt for space-saving refurbishments of existing buildings instead of new buildings. Residential land use is also driven by the increase in average

living space per capita. This is due to the increase in one-person households and the continuing trend toward single-family homes in many European countries. Political statements questioning the allocation of plots and subsidy programs are regularly the subject of social controversy because cultural models are affected. A detached house is still considered to be a status symbol and the epitome of good living for many people (Böcker et al. 2020).

In the context of a sustainability transformation, housing conflicts also revolve around residential environmental conditions and context effects. The topic of green gentrification has particular relevance in this context. This refers to the fact that gentrification processes in cities like Copenhagen occur or are intensified in the course of redesigning a neighborhood for reasons of climate protection and sustainability—for example, by reducing the use of private transport—resulting in local displacement of low-income populations and trans-local impacts (Blok 2020).

Food transition

As the dominant method of food production, industrial agriculture is associated with numerous socioecological crises. Established fertilization practices endanger water quality in many places and alter the nitrogen cycle. Pesticides and monoculture cultivation are considered key drivers of biodiversity loss. This is due not only to the associated externalities (such as greenhouse gas emissions or nitrate input) but also to their quantitative spatial significance. According to the *Farm Structure Survey*, in 2020, a little less than one-half of the total land area of the EU is farm managed. A major ecological concern is industrial livestock farming, which makes up one-fifth of all farms in the EU. Between 2005 and 2020, agricultural land usage remained largely unchanged despite the sharp decline in farm numbers, the result of the difficulties many small-scale and family farms face (Eurostat 2023). Cost pressures have had a particularly strong impact, leading to an increasing number of families no longer seeing a future for their farms (Zukunftskommission Landwirtschaft 2021). As a result, farmers are unlikely to be able to farm sustainably. Government regulations on environmental and animal protection—such as limiting fertilizers, banning pesticides, and raising animal husbandry standards—are seen as additional burdens in a highly competitive, sometimes ruinous, transnational market environment. Conventional farmers regularly protest against regulations implemented by national governments or the EU. As a result of farmers' protests in various European countries in 2024, the EU Commission has decided to loosen its environmental regulations, for instance, concerning land set aside to prevent further biodiversity loss.

There is competition for land use between various interests and objectives, including grain cultivation, energy crops, and nature conservation. Housing and mobility also face conflicts on the production side, which manifest themselves on the consumer side as disputes over lifestyles (Neckel 2020). Often, questions about the type and quantity of meat and animal products to be consumed, as well as the consumption of organic foods, are part of cultural classifications that act as markers of distinction for the higher classes.

Adaptation and restoration

Conflicts are not only resulting from the politically induced transformation of the economy and society but are also taking place due to the ecological destruction and climate impacts that are already occurring. Climate change already impacts all regions of the world (IPCC 2022) and is just one of several ecological crises on a planetary scale (Richardson et al. 2023). Adaptation measures and the restoration of damaged areas go hand in hand with questions of cost distribution and the attribution of responsibility. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that European societies have encountered additional severe crises in recent years, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the impact of Russia's attack on Ukraine. Due to these multiple and ongoing crises, according to Staab (2022), adaptation has become the dominant *leitmotif* of contemporary societies. Institutions in modern societies are increasingly dealing with stressors resulting from these crises instead of promoting societal change according to normative goals (such as sustainability). These societal adaptation processes are often highly conflictual as well. Material foundations and nature's stubbornness (*Eigensinn*) are therefore increasingly important aspects of current transformation conflicts (Schaupp 2024). This affects the aforementioned arenas themselves. For instance, Schaupp (2024) highlights that the construction industry, particularly its building sites, is directly affected by extreme weather events. As a result, working conditions must be adapted to new conditions caused by climate change-induced heat waves. Schaupp demonstrates that construction companies, responding to these extreme weather events, have lobbied for more flexible working time regimes, which in turn led to strikes by construction workers. However, other arenas are also affected: Climate change, for instance, alters the opportunities and risks in agricultural production and therefore the price, quantity, and quality of many agricultural products (Jacobs et al. 2019). For many farmers, this further exacerbates the already difficult situation outlined above.

In addition, the consequences of climate change are already unfolding in all parts of the world. To prepare for more extreme weather events, such as floods and rising sea levels, many European societies intend to give water

“more space.” However, this regularly provokes resistance from residents of coastal areas, who prefer to use buffer zones for private or commercial purposes (Schmitt 2018). There is a growing demand for compensation in the Global South, where the consequences are often even more dramatic. Each year, flooding, wildfires, droughts, and extreme heat events are reported. Rising sea levels are having a catastrophic impact on small islands (IPCC 2022). Over the past few decades, international climate negotiations under the umbrella of the United Nations have primarily focused on mitigation and adaptation. The growing incidence of climate change impacts has increased the focus on compensation for loss and damage caused by climate change, which has become a topic of conflict between states in recent years. For example, the *Loss and Damage Fund* was established at UNFCCC’s COP 27 in Egypt in 2022 as a financial assistance program for countries vulnerable to climate change. These efforts, however, cover only a fraction of the many types of damage, and financial payments alone will not be able to restore destroyed habitats and livelihoods. However, damage is not only caused by the increasing impacts of a changing climate but also by a process of externalization that takes place in the context of ecological modernization in order to prevent climate change.

Topics and lines of conflict

Socioecological transformation as a distribution conflict within society

The economic costs of many climate and other environmental policies, as well as their social consequences, are at odds with the conflict areas outlined above. Different distribution conflicts are evident in almost all areas of socioecological transformation. In France, the so-called yellow vest movement demonstrates the vehemence that conflicts can take on when they are caused by social policies that transform society. In autumn 2018, there were massive protests against the increase in energy taxes for environmental reasons, which particularly affected precarious workers and repeatedly led to riots and clashes with the police. This anecdotal episode is backed by empirical research. According to Mau, Lux, and Westheuser (2023), certain social groups are more afraid of the financial aspects of climate change mitigation and transformation policies than of the impacts of climate change. This argument is not unfounded, as the literature describes various distributional effects, such as those caused by the energy transition.

Cases in which energy transition worsens existing fuel poverty problems, for example, are particularly crucial. According to a common definition, this affects households that spend more than 10% of their income on energy services (Boardman 1991). In Europe, and especially in Eastern

and Southern Europe, there is a high level of fuel poverty (Thomson and Snell 2013). Frondel et al. (2017) identify a fairness gap in the distribution of energy transition costs among private households. Various taxes and levies are largely responsible for electricity prices doubling between 2000 and 2017 in Germany. Due to their regressive nature, these taxes, levies, and surcharges disproportionately burden low-income households. In addition, large industrial companies were exempted from taxes, levies, and surcharges for reasons of international competition, which further exacerbated the unequal distribution of costs. However, studies show that fuel poverty is not exclusively linked to energy transition (Heindl 2014). Energy price increases in connection with energy and climate policy decisions reproduce and possibly exacerbate the problem, but they are not the cause. Rather, it is the precarious income situation of households. This effect has become particularly visible and publicly discussed with the sharp rise in energy prices due to the Russian attack on Ukraine. Furthermore, wealthier households are also more likely to benefit from investing in alternative technologies, such as photovoltaic systems, as lower-income households generally do not have the financial resources to realize this investment opportunity (Bardt and Niehues 2013). Regardless of whether it was intended or not, this policy of subsidizing private households to switch to renewables was accompanied by redistribution effects from the bottom to the top.

Socioecological transformation as a cultural conflict

Neckel (2020) explains the conflictual nature of sustainability as a dispute over lifestyles triggered by disagreements over ecological values. Therefore, values and cultural identity appear to be another contentious topic across the aforementioned areas of conflict. As an example, it is not just about whether certain social groups can afford green energy or organic food but also about whether new ways of living or political engagement required as a result of socioecological transformation are viewed as legitimate or interpreted as a new hegemonic discourse that challenges existing lifestyles and practices. As a result of multiple socioecological crises and political efforts to address them, environmentally harmful practices like carnivorous diets, air travel, motorized private transport, or living in a single-family home are becoming increasingly contentious topics. Distribution disputes over divisible goods can generally be solved with appropriate political regulation and are generally considered solvable. An overlap of sustainability questions and value questions can exacerbate conflicts, making conflict resolution nearly impossible.

Findings that interpret transformation processes as value conflicts correspond to contemporary social diagnoses that assume a social divide

between the old and new middle classes (Reckwitz 2020), communitarians and cosmopolitans (Merkel and Zürn 2019), or between Anywheres and Somewheres (Goodhart 2017). Corresponding cultural differences are expressed in the fact that green and sustainable products and consumption patterns have become part of certain milieus' lifestyles. For example, the purchase of organic food, green electricity, or the use of cargo bikes are interpreted as a form of ecological distinction (Neckel 2018), which representatives of the middle classes use to demarcate boundaries in relation to lower and higher social classes. Based on survey data on environmental awareness in Germany, Eversberg and Fritz (2022) observe a latently conflictual tripartite division of the population in Germany. This division consists of an eco-socialist, a liberal-environmentalist, and an authoritarian–fossilist milieu. Other authors describe resource-intensive lifestyles as imperial and habitually internalized defense mechanisms for a large part of the population (Brand and Wissen 2021). Ideals of self-realization prevent the most diverse milieus from turning away from consumption-oriented and environmentally intensive patterns of living and are also expressed in different political demands and strategies; according to this interpretation, right-wing populist narratives against a socioecological transformation are only one variant of such a “second-order emancipation” (Blühdorn 2022) and “libertarian authoritarianism” (Amlinger and Nachtwey 2022) that brashly rejects any restriction of individual freedom. This is often accompanied by “counter-epistemologies” (Amlinger and Nachtwey 2022) that replace a scientific consensus, for instance, on climate change. From this perspective, the shift in protests toward fundamental issues resulting from populist discourses described in the field of energy transition (Reusswig, Lass, and Bock 2020) can also be read as a defensive strategy in which cultural issues are negotiated. Recently, right-wing populism has increasingly been mobilized against green issues. While right-wing populists often discuss the distribution conflict, they tend to discredit climate change mitigation efforts and sustainability as elite projects that target the common people (Sommer et al. 2022). In this context, media representatives and scientists are also seen as opponents in the field of political debate, for example, when it comes to denying anthropogenic climate change and the necessity for climate protection measures.

Different perspectives on climate protection and ecological sustainability, however, are not only socially stratified but are also age- and gender-based. Among the most mobilized climate justice movements of our time, Fridays for Future is supported by school students and young adults and is regarded as part of a generational conflict (Von Redecker 2020). At the same time, its protagonists—such as Greta Thunberg or Luisa Neubauer—are often female. It is also known from survey data that women are more likely to follow a vegetarian or vegan diet and attach more importance to

protecting the climate and the natural environment, while conservative white men are statistically more likely to deny climate change and reject climate protection (McCright and Dunlap 2011; Krange, Bjørn Kaltenborn, and Hultman 2019). This indicates that transformation conflicts are always conflicts of interpretation in which position in the social field, general political preferences, age, and gender influence individual positioning in the sustainability discourse.

Externalization as a transnational conflict

Strategies and programs aimed at promoting socioecological transformation in the Global North cannot be adequately described without considering the interdependence between the Global North and the Global South. To achieve ecological modernization, societies in the Global North systematically draw resources from the Global South and externalize the associated costs (Lessenich 2019; Lang, Manahan, and Bringel 2024). Examples include the production of electric cars, the cultivation of palm oil (which replaces animal fats), and the production of organic avocados. Asymmetrical power relations and inequalities can result in conflict when resistance to extraction and externalization processes exists in the affected regions. Many conflicts begin and are sparked by environmental destruction caused by global economic actors. These conflicts vary in intensity and form, are usually subject to less state regulation—unlike most intra-societal conflicts in the Global North—and can become violent. As in the Global North, protests against the expansion of renewable energies also occur equally in the Global South or emerging countries (as with wind farms in Mexico, Backhouse and Lehmann 2019; Dunlap 2019). Land grabbing, i.e., land seizure by investors and state organizations associated with large-scale projects, can also be observed in the form of green grabbing, for example, when the basis for smallholder agriculture and subsistence farming are destroyed for reforestation projects to compensate for CO₂ emissions (Backhouse 2019).

The Green Deal currently being pursued by the EU also includes many strategies that require international cooperation with societies in the Global South. One example is the focus on green hydrogen, which is set to become a core element of the European energy industry. For example, large production facilities are to be built in Chile to supply the European energy market, with its energy-intensive industries, with sufficient hydrogen (Norambuena et al. 2022). Further collaborations for the production of “green hydrogen” are being planned with Namibia, Morocco, Qatar, or Brazil, for example. The production of “green hydrogen” also requires (besides water) huge amounts of *clean energy* and, therefore, a lot of space. The social implications of these new energy infrastructures have barely

been studied (Hanusch and Schad 2021). The intensification of the expansion of renewable energies, the consumption of water in regions with already reduced water availability, and local problems with nature conservation increase the potential for conflict. Similar forms of externalization can be witnessed in the field of agriculture. A principal reason for global deforestation is the transformation of primeval forests into agricultural land. This newly gained cropland is primarily used for the production of fodder that is, for instance, exported to the EU to feed pigs, chicken, and cattle. In the Global North, these conflict constellations are not visible to or suppressed by the populations, and the parties to the conflict may not always be easily identified, as there are certainly winners (through new jobs) and losers (local farmers).

Outlook: Spatial dimensions, societal effects, and desiderata

The current systematization of conflicts within socioecological transformation efforts analytically distinguishes between arenas and topics of conflict. As already shown in some cases, it is striking that these conflicts have a wide range of spatial references and degrees of spatial realization. When socioecological transformation necessitates the conversion of built infrastructures—whether in energy, mobility, housing, or food transition—the spatial impact becomes particularly visible. The transition from an energy system based on fossil fuels to a system based on renewables means that energy can no longer be exploited from the “subterranean forest” (Sieferele 2001). Instead, facilities for energy production have to be installed above ground. In order to satisfy the huge energy demands of modern societies, this requires an immense amount of space. This triggers conflicts over space that are already claimed by various actors for divergent usages and creates manifest spatial conflicts. Political and economic decision-makers respond to this, for example, by offshoring wind parks, where they affect marine diversity. Infrastructural expansions have clear spatial references to trajectories, territories, or locally constituted places, but the negotiation can also be generalized through networks. This becomes particularly clear when, for example, the NIMBY claim (*not in my backyard*) becomes an NIABY claim (*not in anyone’s backyard*). Besides the built infrastructure, there are also requirements at the level of individual behavior and consumer habits. For example, the question of how much living space should be occupied by each individual is becoming more important on a discursive level.

When looking at the topics of conflict, there are also differences in the intensity with which they are exhibited spatially. When we examine distribution conflicts, we find that they often relate to using space and distributing spatially bound resources. However, it is not possible to derive

a monocausal logic from which it can be concluded that reducing spatial requirements will always cause conflict. According to a study in Zurich, a reduction in living space can also be seen as legitimate or even as a gain, and corresponding conflicts can be moderated by transparent and democratic rules (Lange 2025). In addition to manifest spatial conflicts, there are also a large number of latent conflictual spaces. In cultural conflicts, belonging to a certain social group is essential and refers to spaces in their self-images in different degrees. These spatial ties can be illustrated by the presented concepts of social divide—like communitarians and cosmopolitans or “new” and “old middle classes” (Reckwitz 2020). It is common to these types of concepts that there are social groups or milieus where local ties are less pronounced and an urban lifestyle is practiced. Although members of these groups tend to live in green milieus, their lifestyles are resource intensive with a high degree of mobility. In contrast, other social groups or milieus tend to be more localized and focus more on local problems than global environmental issues like climate change. The last topic presented, externalization, also involves a spatial dimension and can be understood as another variation of conflictual space. Throughout the societies of the Global North, conflicts are avoided at the local level, resulting in spatial dispersion and externalization. Conflicts in one space are avoided by shifting them to another space, using the external space as if it were an “empty space” (Lang, Manahan, and Bringel 2024, 6) without any prior use or meaning.

This analysis opens up several questions for future research, with one of the core issues being whether transformation conflicts must necessarily be considered problematic, potentially dangerous, or dysfunctional. Nevertheless, the research literature on the politics of transformation conflicts is ambiguous. A study by Četković and Hagemann (2020) suggests that polarization in the political arena can positively impact climate and environmental protection policies. Similarly, Mouffe (2022) argues that societal antagonisms (or more precisely agonisms) are central to politics, with their affective dimension driving social change. Swyngedouw (2010) also sees the politicization and social intensification of climate and sustainability discourses as drivers of transformation. Neckel (2020, 96) emphasizes that “disputes over sustainability create tensions and divisions, but also conceivable coalitions” (own translation).

At the same time, some of these conflicts even result in the revocation of environmental protection efforts. Several authors, such as Giddens (2009), stress the importance of preventing partisan disputes over climate protection. Based on empirical evidence, Reusswig, Lass, and Bock (2020) demonstrate for Germany how right-wing populism’s involvement in anti-wind power protests shifts local conflicts toward fundamental issues, making them difficult to resolve. More recently, it seems such a process of shifting

socioecological transformation conflicts can be witnessed not only on the local level but also increasingly on the national level of various societies.

Climate science research shows that we are headed into a crucial decade if we are to achieve internationally agreed climate targets. This suggests that political and social efforts to achieve a climate transition will be intensified, which is likely to increase the virulence of the corresponding transformation conflicts. The question of the (dys)functionality of conflicts within a socioecological transformation is gaining relevance.

Note

- 1 This chapter is a revised and extended version of a paper published in German in 2022 by the same authors (Sommer and Schad 2022).

References

- Adloff, Frank, and Sighard Neckel. 2019. "Futures of Sustainability as Modernization, Transformation, and Control: A Conceptual Framework." *Sustainability Science* 14 (4): 1015–1025. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-019-00671-2>
- Amlinger, Carolin, and Oliver Nachtwey. 2022. *Gekränkte Freiheit: Aspekte des libertären Autoritarismus* [Offended Freedom: Aspects of Libertarian Authoritarianism]. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Aykut, Stefan, Antje Wiener, Cathrin Zengerling, and Jill Bähring. 2023. "Climate Litigation as a Social Driver Towards Deep Decarbonisation I: A Framework and a General Assessment." *Carbon & Climate Law Review* 17 (3): 181–192. <https://doi.org/10.21552/cclr/2023/3/10>
- Backhouse, Maria. 2019. "Green Grabbing." In *Wörterbuch Land- Und Rohstoffkonflikte* [Dictionary of Land and Resource Conflicts], edited by Jan Brunner, Anna Dobelmann, Sarah Kirst, and Louisa Praise, 122–126. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Backhouse, Maria, and Rosa Lehmann. 2019. "New 'Renewable' Frontiers: Contested Palm Oil Plantations and Wind Energy Projects in Brazil and Mexico." *Journal of Land Use Science* 18 (3): 1–16. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1747423X.2019.1648577>
- Bardt, Hubertus, and Judith Niehues. 2013. "Verteilungswirkungen des EEG [Distribution Effects of the Renewable Energy Act]." *Zeitschrift Für Energiewirtschaft* 37 (3): 211–218. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12398-013-0109-5>
- Beck, Ulrich. 2009. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Beck, Ulrich. 2016. *The Metamorphosis of the World*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Blok, Anders. 2020. "Urban Green Gentrification in an Unequal World of Climate Change." *Urban Studies* 57 (14): 2803–2816. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098019891050>
- Blühdorn, Ingolfur. 2022. "Liberation and Limitation: Emancipatory Politics, Socio-Ecological Transformation and the Grammar of the Autocratic-Authoritarian Turn." *European Journal of Social Theory* 25 (1): 26–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310211027088>
- Boardman, Brenda. 1991. *Fuel Poverty: From Cold Homes to Affordable Warmth*. London: Belhaven Press.

- Böcker, Maike, Henning Brüggemann, Michaela Christ, Alexandra Knak, Jonas Lage, and Bernd Sommer. 2020. *Wie Wird Weniger Genug? Suffizienz Als Strategie Einer Nachhaltigen Stadtentwicklung* [How Can Less Be Enough? Sufficiency as a Strategy for Sustainable Urban Development]. München: Oekom.
- Bonacker, Thorsten. 2005. "Sozialwissenschaftliche Konflikttheorien. Einleitung Und Überblick [Social Science Conflict Theories. Introduction and Overview]." In *Sozialwissenschaftliche Konflikttheorien. Eine Einführung*, edited by Thorsten Bonacker, 9–29. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Brand, Karl-Werner. 2018. "Disruptive Transformationen. Gesellschaftliche Umbrüche und sozial-ökologische Transformationsdynamiken kapitalistischer Industriegesellschaften – ein zyklisch-struktureller Erklärungsansatz [Disruptive Transformations. Social Upheavals and Socioecological Transformation Dynamics of Capitalist Industrial Societies – a Cyclical-Structural Explanatory Approach]." *Berliner Journal Für Soziologie* 28 (1): 479–509. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11609-019-00383-5>
- Brand, Karl-Werner. 2021. "Große Transformation' oder 'Nachhaltige Nicht-Nachhaltigkeit'? Wider die Beliebigkeit sozialwissenschaftlicher Nachhaltigkeits- und Transformationstheorien ['Great Transformation' or 'Sustainable Non-Sustainability'? How to Avert the Arbitrariness of Sustainability and Transformation Theories in the Social Sciences]." *Leviathan* 49 (2): 189–214. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0340-0425-2021-2-189>
- Brand, Ulrich, and Markus Wissen. 2021. *The Imperial Mode of Living. Everyday Life and the Ecological Crisis of Capitalism*. La Vergne: Verso.
- Četković, Stefan, and Christian Hagemann. 2020. "Changing Climate for Populists? Examining the Influence of Radical-Right Political Parties on Low-Carbon Energy Transitions in Western Europe." *Energy Research & Social Science* 66: 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101571>
- Coser, Lewis A. 1964. *The Functions of Social Conflict. An Examination of the Concept of Social Conflict and Its Use in Empirical Sociological Research*. New York: The Free Press.
- Dahrendorf, Ralf. 1961. *Gesellschaft und Freiheit* [Society and Freedom]. München: R. Piper & Co.
- Dahrendorf, Ralf. 1972. *Konflikt und Freiheit. Auf dem Weg zur Dienstklassengesellschaft* [Conflict and Freedom. On The Way To a Service Society]. München: R. Piper & Co.
- Degele, Nina. 2022. "Privilegienblindes Reisen in Zeiten des Klimawandels [Privilege-Blind Traveling in Times of Climate Change]." *Zeitschrift Diskurs* 7: 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.17185/diskurs/75907>
- Diekmann, Andreas, and Axel Franzen. 2019. "Environmental Concern: A Global Perspective." In *Einstellungen und Verhalten in der empirischen Sozialforschung*, edited by Jochen Mayerl, Thomas Krause, Andreas Wahl, and Marius Wuketich, 253–272. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Dörre, Klaus, Steffen Liebig, Kim Lucht, and Johanna Sittel. 2024. "Class Versus Climate? Transformation Conflicts in the Automotive Industry." *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 32 (2): 371–404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25739638.2024.2367900>
- Dunlap, Alexander. 2019. *Renewing Destruction. Wind Energy Development, Conflict and Resistance in a Latin American Context*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Elias, Norbert. 2012. *The Court Society. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, edited by Richard Kilminster. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

- Eurostat. 2023. "Farms and Farmland in the European Union – Statistics." *Eurostat Statistics Explained*. Accessed November 1 2024. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Farms_and_farmland_in_the_European_Union_-_statistics#Farms_in_2020
- Eversberg, Dennis, and Martin Fritz. 2022. "Bioeconomy as a Societal Transformation: Mentalities, Conflicts and Social Practices." *Sustainable Production and Consumption* 30: 973–987. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2022.01.021>
- Fischer, Michael, and Bernd Sommer. 2011. "Mentale und soziale Infrastrukturen – Voraussetzungen verantwortungsvollen Konsums im Kontext der Nachhaltigkeit [Mental and Social Infrastructures – Prerequisites for Responsible Consumption in the Context of Sustainability]." In *Die Verantwortung des Konsumenten. Über das Verhältnis von Markt, Moral und Konsum* [The Responsibility of the Consumer. On the Relationship Between the Market, Morality and Consumption], edited by Ludger Heidbrink, Imke Schmidt, and Björn Ahaus, 183–202. Frankfurt am Main: Campus.
- Frondel, Manuel, Ole Kutzschbauch, Stephan Sommer, and Stefan Traub. 2017. "Die Gerechtigkeitslücke in der Verteilung der Kosten der Energiewende auf die privaten Haushalte [The Equity Gap in the Distribution of the Costs of the Energy Transition among Private Households]." *Perspektiven Der Wirtschaftspolitik* 18 (4): 335–347. <https://doi.org/10.1515/pwp-2017-0034>
- Giddens, Anthony. 2009. *The Politics of Climate Change*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Glasl, Friedrich. 2020. *Konfliktmanagement. Ein Handbuch für Führung, Beratung und Mediation* [Conflict Management. A Handbook for Leadership, Counseling and Mediation]. Bern: Freies Geistesleben.
- Goodhart, David. 2017. *The Road to Somewhere. The New Tribes Shaping British Politics*. London: Penguin Books.
- Haas, Tobias. 2020. "Die Lausitz im Strukturwandel: Der Kohleausstieg im Spannungsfeld zwischen autoritärem Populismus und progressiver Erneuerung [Lusatia in Structural Transformation. Coal Phase-Out in the Area of Conflict between Authoritarian Populism and Progressive Renewal]." *PROKLA. Zeitschrift Für Kritische Sozialwissenschaft* 50 (198): 151–169. <https://doi.org/10.32387/prokla.v50i198.1853>
- Hanusch, Frederic, and Miriam Schad. 2021. "Hydrogen Research: Technology First, Society Second?." *GAIA – Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society* 30 (2): 82–86. <https://doi.org/10.14512/gaia.30.2.5>
- Heindl, Peter. 2014. "Ökonomische Aspekte der Lastenverteilung in der Umweltpolitik am Beispiel der Energiewende. Ein Beitrag zum interdisziplinären Dialog [Economic Aspects of Burden Sharing in Environmental Policy using the Example of the Energy Transition. A Contribution to the Interdisciplinary Dialog]." *ZEW Discussion Paper* 14 (06/2014): 1–23.
- Hoffmann, Jessica, Marlon Philipp, Marco Sonnberger, and Bernd Sommer. 2023. "Transformation. SuN-Blog." *Soziologie und Nachhaltigkeit - Beiträge zur sozial-ökologischen Transformationsforschung*. Accessed November 1 2024. <https://sun-blog.org/transformation-glossar-soziologie-der-nachhaltigkeit/>
- Hommels, Anique. 2005. "Studying Obduracy in the City: Toward a Productive Fusion between Technology Studies and Urban Studies." *Science Technology and Human Values*, 30 (3): 323–351. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243904271759>
- IPCC. 2022. *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the*

- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Jacobs, Claire, Maria Bergglund, Blaž Kurnik, Serena Marras, Valentina Mereu, and Melania Michetti. 2019. *Climate Change Adaptation in the Agriculture Sector in Europe*. EEA Report, 04/2019. Luxembourg, Denmark: European Environment Agency.
- Krange, Olve, Petter Bjørn Kaltenborn, and Martin Hultman. 2019. "Cool Dudes in Norway: Climate Change Denial among Conservative Norwegian Men." *Environmental Sociology* 5 (1): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2018.1488516>
- Kropp, Cordula, and Marco Sonnberger. 2021. *Umweltsoziologie* [Environmental Sociology]. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Lang, Miriam, Mary Ann Manahan, and Breno Bringel, eds. 2024. *The Geopolitics of Green Colonialism. Global Justice and Ecosocial Transitions*. London: Pluto Press (Environment).
- Lange, Jonas. 2025. "How to Reduce? Legitimacy of housing sufficiency policies in the case of occupancy requirements in Switzerland." *Sustainability: Science Practice and Policy* 21 (1): 2463190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2025.2463190>
- Lessenich, Stephan. 2019. *Living Well at Others' Expense: The Hidden Costs of Western Prosperity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Lewis, Gregory B., Risa Palm, and Bo Feng. 2019. "Cross-National Variation in Determinants of Climate Change Concern." *Environmental Politics* 28 (5): 793–821. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2018.1512261>
- Manderscheid, Katharina. 2020. "Antriebs-, Verkehrs- Oder Mobilitätswende?: Zur Elektrifizierung Des Automobilitätsdispositivs [Drive System, Traffic or Mobility Turnaround? On the Electrification of the Automotive Dispositif]." In *Baustelle Elektromobilität: Sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf die Transformation der (Auto-)Mobilität* [Electromobility Construction Site: Social Science Perspectives on the Transformation of (Car) Mobility], edited by Achim Brunnengraber, and Tobias Haas, 37–68. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 1848. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Marxists Internet Archive.
- Mau, Steffen, Thomas Lux, and Linus Westheuser. 2023. *Triggerpunkte. Konsens und Konflikt in der Gegenwartsgesellschaft* [Trigger Points. Consensus and Conflict in Contemporary Society]. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- McCright, Aaron M., and Riley E. Dunlap. 2011. "Cool Dudes: The Denial of Climate Change among Conservative White Males in the United States." *Global Environmental Change* 21 (4): 1163–1172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.06.003>
- Merkel, Wolfgang, and Michael Zürn. 2019. "Kosmopolitismus, Kommunitarismus und die Demokratie [Cosmopolitanism, Communitarianism and Democracy]." In *Internationale Gerechtigkeit und institutionelle Verantwortung* [International Justice and Institutional Responsibility], edited by Julian Nida-Rümelin, Detlef von Daniels, and Nicole Wloka, 67–102. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Mouffe, Chantal. 2022. *Towards a Green Democratic Revolution: Left Populism and the Power of Affects*. London: verso.
- Neckel, Sighard. 2018. "Ökologische Distinktion [Ecological Distinction]." In *Die Gesellschaft der Nachhaltigkeit. Umriss eines Forschungsprogramms* [The Society of Sustainability. Outlines of a Research Program], edited by Sighard Neckel, Martina Hasenfratz, Natalia Besedovsky, Timo Wiegand, Moritz Bodenberg, and Sarah Miriam Pritz, 59–76. Bielefeld: transcript.

- Neckel, Sighard. 2020. "Der Streit um die Lebensführung. Nachhaltigkeit als sozialer Konflikt [The Dispute over Lifestyle. Sustainability as a Social Conflict]." *Mittelweg* 36 (6): 82–100.
- Norambuena, Heraldo V., Fabio A. Labra, Ricardo Matus, Humberto Gómez, Diego Luna-Quevedo, and Carmen Espoz. 2022. "Green Energy Threatens Chile's Magallanes Region." *Science* 376 (6591): 361–362. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abo4129>
- Reckwitz, Andreas. 2020. *The Society of Singularities*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Reusswig, Fritz, Wiebke Lass, and Seraja Bock. 2020. "Abschied vom NIMBY. Transformationen des Energiewende-Protests und populistischer Diskurs [Farewell to NIMBY. Transformations of the Energy Transition Protest and Populist Discourse]." *Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen* 33 (1): 140–160. <https://doi.org/10.1515/fjsb-2020-0012>
- Richardson, Katherine, Will Steffen, Wolfgang Lucht, Jørgen Bendtsen, Sarah E. Cornell, Jonathan F. Donges, Markus Drüke, et al. 2023. "Earth Beyond Six of Nine Planetary Boundaries." *Science Advances* 9 (37): eadh2458. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adh2458>
- Ruhrort, Lisa, Franziska Zehl, and Andreas Knie. 2021. *Untersuchung von Einstellungen gegenüber einer Neuaufteilung öffentlicher Räume zulasten des Autoverkehrs* [Investigation of Attitudes towards a Reallocation of Public Spaces to the Detriment of Car Traffic]. Discussion Paper SP III 2021–602. Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung.
- Saito, Kohai. 2024. *Slow Down. How Degrowth Communism Can Save the Earth*. London: W&N.
- Schaupp, Simon. 2024. *Stoffwechselfolitik. Arbeit, Natur und die Zukunft des Planeten* [Metabolic Policy. Work, Nature and the Future of the Planet]. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Schmitt, Lea. 2018. "Changing Climates, Changing Spaces, Changing Times: Adaptation and Conflict on the West Frisian Island of Ameland." In *Climate Change and Cultural Transition in Europe*, edited by Claus Leggewie, and Franz Mauelshagen, 266–299. Boston: Brill.
- Shove, Elisabeth. 2010. "Beyond the ABC: Climate Change Policy and Theories of Social Change." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 2010 (42): 1273–1285. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a42282>
- Sieferle, Rolf Peter. 2001. *The Subterranean Forest. Energy Systems and the Industrial Revolution*. Cambridge, UK: The White Horse Press.
- Simmel, Georg. 1992. *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* [Sociology. Studies on the Forms of Socialization]. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Sommer, Bernd, and Miriam Schad. 2022. Sozial-ökologische Transformationskonflikte. Konturen eines Forschungsfeldes [Socio-ecological transformation conflicts. Contours of a field of research]. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 69(4): 451–468.
- Sommer, Bernd, Miriam Schad, Philipp Kadelke, Franziska Humpert, and Christian Möstl. 2022. *Rechtspopulismus vs. Klimaschutz? Positionen, Einstellungen, Erklärungsansätze* [Right-Wing Populism vs. Climate Protection? Positions, Attitudes, Explanations]. München: Oekom.
- Staab, Philipp. 2022. *Anpassung. Leitmotiv der nächsten Gesellschaft* [Adaptation. The Leitmotiv of the Next Society]. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Star, Susan L. 1999. "The Ethnography of Infrastructure." *American Behavioral Scientist* 43: 377–391. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027649921955326>

- Swain, Ashok, and Joakim Öjendal, eds. 2020. *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Conflict and Peacebuilding*. London: Routledge.
- Swyngedouw, Erik. 2010. "Apocalypse Forever? Post-Political Populism and the Spectre of Climate." *Theory, Culture & Society* 27 (2–3): 213–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409358728>
- Thomson, Harriet, and Carolyn Snell. 2013. "Quantifying the Prevalence of Fuel Poverty across the European Union." *Energy Policy* 52: 563–572. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2012.10.009>
- Von Redecker, Eva. 2020. *Revolution für das Leben. Philosophie der neuen Protestformen* [Revolution for Life. Philosophy of the New Forms of Protest]. Frankfurt a.M: Fisher Taschenbuch.
- Wahlström, Mattias, Piotr Kocyba, Michiel De Vydt, and Joost de Moor, eds. 2019. "Protest for a Future: Composition, Mobilization and Motives of the Participants in Fridays for Future Climate Protests on 15 March, 2019 in 13 European Cities." Institute for Protest and Social Movement Studies. Accessed November 1 2024. https://protestinstitut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/20190709_Protest-for-a-future_GCS-Descriptive-Report.pdf
- Zukunftskommission Landwirtschaft. 2021. *Zukunft Landwirtschaft. Eine gesamtgesellschaftliche Aufgabe. Empfehlungen der Zukunftskommission Landwirtschaft* [Future Agriculture. A task for society as a whole. Recommendations of the Commission for the Future of Agriculture]. Berlin: Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft. Accessed November 1 2024. https://www.bmel.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/_Landwirtschaft/abschlussbericht-zukunftskommission-landwirtschaft.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=17

15 The spatial dimension of climate justice conflicts and solidarities

A conceptual model

*Daniela Stoltenberg, Barbara Pfetsch,
Zozan Baran, and Annie Waldherr*

Introduction

The first thing you saw when approaching Lützerath was the banner. In bold, black letters on a yellow background, spanning across the front of an old farmhouse, it read: “1.5 degrees means: Lützerath stays!” (German: “1,5°C heißt: Lützerath bleibt!”). However, the village was the last place intended for demolition for the extension of Garzweiler open-cast mine before Germany would phase out lignite extraction to mitigate climate change. Located northwest of Cologne in Germany’s largest coal-mining region, Lützerath was immediately marked as a site of contention. When we visited the site in September 2022, the roughly 75 villagers had mostly been resettled, while a large group of climate activists had squatted the remaining buildings and erected tents and tree houses. Only a few hundred meters from the banners and squats, the mine loomed, guarded by fences and the patrol cars of private security hired by energy company RWE. A few months later, in January 2023, the village was cleared during a large-scale police operation and torn down.

Within this vignette from the site, we find spatial patterns that typify climate justice conflicts and movement solidarities in Germany and beyond. On the one hand, there is the manifest and material conflict between the open-cast mine and the village, both laying claim on the same piece of land. On the other hand, the “Lützerath stays” banner encapsulates multiple spatial strategies of climate activists. By referencing the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees, it connects the local to the global. By calling out the village by name, it emphasizes local specificity and identity. And through the slogan of “[placename] stays,” it draws connections to other environmental struggles across Germany, which use the same semantic pattern in their rallying cries.

Climate change and the resulting environmental degradation exemplify the complex spatial structure of contemporary social issues. In an increasingly interdependent and globalized world, issues often cannot be tied to

political territories. The actors who mobilize around them connect across scales and locations in a way that facilitates strength and solidarities for movements, while also containing tensions and possible contradictions, which can turn conflictual. In this contribution, we seek to elucidate the spatiality of such solidarities and conflicts.

Climate change is frequently conceptualized as a “planetary issue,” which requires the response of a global public sphere (Castells 2008, 82). Yet, its consequences, ranging from sea-level rise to desertification or food insecurity, are unevenly distributed globally and regionally (e.g., Gosling et al. 2011). Places and populations, which contribute relatively little to greenhouse gas emissions, are disproportionately affected by climate change (Ngcamu 2023). Moreover, energy extraction or deforestation often lead to the displacement of vulnerable local populations.

The notion of climate justice highlights these uneven responsibilities and impacts, the intersectional dimensions of inequitable vulnerabilities to climate change, and the importance of the voices of local communities (e.g., Schlosberg and Collins 2014). It emphasizes that the impact of climate change intersects with other social cleavages and axes of inequality. Climate justice—as both an academic concept and a grassroots movement principle—emerged from the older movement for environmental justice. It initially brought together civil rights activists and environmentalists protesting the disposal of hazardous waste in poor and racialized communities in the United States. Later, it expanded topically and geographically to investigate and challenge a range of inequitable environmental practices (Schlosberg and Collins 2014).

By focusing on community-level impacts of and responsibilities for climate change, both a spatial and a conflict-centric perspective are inscribed in the notion of climate justice. The location of a community along with its socio-economic composition, resources, and positionality influences its vulnerability to climate impacts. It may also shape the extent to which actors have access to the resources and infrastructures which facilitate mobilization and enable them to effectively advocate for themselves (cf. Stoltenberg 2024). These inequities are not incidental, but related to societal power structures, cleavages, and conflicts.

Still, the notions of space and conflict often remain implicit in the social scientific literature on climate justice (for an exception, see Routledge 2011). Research on climate activism tends to focus on the national scale and places in the Global North (Baran and Stoltenberg 2023). This is becoming increasingly insufficient, especially as digital media connects activists translocally and facilitates connections, which “criss-cross scales and localities” (Stephansen 2019, 346). In this chapter, we develop a deeper understanding of the socio-spatial arrangements of climate justice conflicts and solidarities in the digital age. We discuss the relational spaces

(Löw 2008), which emerge from ‘place-based struggles’ (Routledge 2003) around climate justice because of the engagement of actors from different places and scales, who tie these place-based struggles to issues across places and scales. We ask: *What is the spatial dimension of conflicts and solidarities around climate justice? How can it be empirically grasped and studied?*

We combine the perspectives of communication research and sociology with a substantive interest in digital public spheres and contentious politics. From these vantage points, we identify two approaches to space, conflict, and (climate justice) social movements and review the related literature in the next two sections. First, *spatial conflicts* emerge because conflictual demands and logics are placed upon the same location. In the introductory example: The land under Lützerath cannot be both a village and an open-cast mine. Second, *conflictual spaces*, as well as solidary spaces, emerge within a movement, for instance when local, regional, national, and global actors become involved in the struggle over Lützerath. On the one hand, this can grant visibility to the place-based struggle and create a powerful symbol for the wider movement. On the other hand, tensions may arise, for instance, if local activists wish to focus on Lützerath’s specificity, while national or global actors use it to emphasize the global issue of greenhouse gas emissions.

Merging these perspectives, in the third section, we develop a conceptual model of the spatial dimensions of climate justice conflicts and solidarities. We use observations from two field trips, to the coal-mining region in Germany and to the oil- and gas-drilling region of North Dakota, USA, to illustrate key points of the model. In a concluding section, we point towards an emerging research agenda around socio-spatiality in climate justice movements, which should bring together environmental scholars, social movement researchers, and communication scientists.

Spatial conflicts and climate policy: One location, multiple claims

The struggle over Lützerath, slated for removal for a coal-mining pit, exemplifies typical features of spatial conflicts in climate policy. It epitomizes the conflicting demands on resources related to physical space, leading to disputes over the allocation, use, or control of spaces, territories, and resources. *Spatial conflicts* can emerge in various forms and levels of social and political entities, including territorial disputes between countries, competition for land use in specific locations, and struggles over access to natural resources such as water or minerals. These conflicts involve socio-economic dimensions reflecting disputes over ownership and resource distribution as manifestations of political and social power.

The most direct form of this spatial conflict revolves around irreconcilable claims to land. In Lützerath, for instance, this plays out between its use for coal mining versus as the living environment of the village inhabitants. However, the significance of the conflict transcends mere claims to physical land, encompassing a broader dispute over the value of space itself and its symbolic meaning. From this perspective, spatial conflicts involve competing interests, values, and identities associated with specific geographic locations and relate to disputes about who holds the power to define the meaning and purpose of land. Spatial conflicts around climate justice therefore align with broad social cleavages. The struggle over the use of pieces of land comes to signify both a traditional economic cleavage and a postmaterialist, environmental cleavage (cf. Dalton 2009). A multitude of actors participate in these symbolic struggles over the definition of land, ranging from landowners, governing administrations, businesses, and corporations to local communities, experts, scientists, social and political movements, individual activists, farmers, and inhabitants (see also Kaiser 2020).

While spatial conflicts carry direct meaning as contention about the definition and use of land, in the context of our research, spatial conflicts are linked to social constructions where physical and symbolic spaces are marked as conflictual. Following Löw (2008), we see space not as an a priori entity on which conflictual claims are laid; rather, in physically arranging, acting within and communicating about places, actors construct space. The conflictual nature of spatial constructions can be identified in two distinct forms. First, conflicts can revolve around the concept of space as expressed in a particular spatial figure, such as place, territory, trajectory, or network (Löw 2020). We argue that the spatial figure also adds an additional layer to explaining the relationship between space and conflicts. For instance, different actors may construct a location as a place, which is characterized by identity and uniqueness (Löw 2020). However, if one actor group constructs a place as home, while another constructs it as an activist encampment, tensions may arise within the same spatial figure. Second, spatial conflicts can also arise from the clashes of the logic of spatial figures. When actors imagine the same or an intersecting space as territory, trajectory, network, or place, and when at the same time this requires opposing actions on space, we are most likely to see this second form of spatial conflict. For example, in ecological projects, the inherent logic of pipeline projects (to cross land between two points efficiently) may clash with the territorial logic of land ownership, leading to spatial conflicts. In the Lützerath project, the conflict unfolds when the local community wants to assert the logic of the place as a historically and emotionally defined home (*Heimat*) against the energy company's legal claim to define and exploit the territory for its purposes.

The mobilization of climate activism exacerbates the spatial conflict and eventually turns it into a conflictual space, as argued in the next section. In direct confrontation, the relationship between space and conflict is most visible. However, contention in movement activity is not a static or fixed relationship, but dynamic and fluid. The conflict provokes direct and sometimes violent clashes between activists and the police, thereby also provoking reactions in protest activity or even a redefinition of the movement's immediate goals and actions.

In climate change policy, spatial conflicts are usually entangled with other societal conflicts, such as economic, social, or political inequalities within a country and oftentimes also between regions and interests of the Global North versus the Global South. This interconnection binds conflicts over land and natural resources in one particular place or territory to larger questions of globalization and economic development and their consequences. This means that spatial conflicts can never be dissociated from the pervasive social cleavages within a society (e.g., [Dalton 2009](#)). For analysis, this also means that spatial conflicts must always be placed into context and mirrored in the larger framework of questions of social, economic, or cultural power distribution, as well as to the struggle within this field in social movement activity.

The nature of spatial conflicts in climate policy means that the contention exceeds its local boundedness and therefore enhances the role of communication in movement activity. Moreover, the broader the claims involved in spatial conflicts, the more social and cultural dimensions are relevant in communication. Ethnicity, religion, language, and identity are involved and influence the framing of the issue and the organization of solidarity ([Hunt and Benford 2004](#); [Eidson et al. 2017](#)). Also, communication infrastructures, particularly the architectures of digital platforms and social media ([Milan 2013](#)), impact the contention of spatial conflicts in climate justice.

Conflictual space and climate activism: Intra-movement solidarities and tensions

While spatial conflicts around climate justice often mark activists' demand for the preservation of a space against political or economic actors' impetus to develop or exploit the same land, there are also spatial tensions as well as spatial solidarities *within* climate justice movements. [Routledge \(2011, 385\)](#) argues that there is not one coherent climate justice movement, but "a range of overlapping, interacting, competing, and differentially placed and resourced networks concerned with issues of climate change and justice." Within these activist networks, actors rely on each other to attain visibility beyond their own places. At the same time, it is a setting rife with tensions which often emerge spatially.

We highlight three spatial patterns within climate justice activism. These can be a source of power and solidarity for actors who pursue the goals of climate protection and mitigation. Yet, there are tensions embedded in them, which can become conflictual. We argue that connections between *center and periphery*, between the *local and translocal*, and between *scales of activism* can produce solidary spaces as well as conflictual spaces—and can move back and forth between the two over time—depending on how movement actors navigate the logics, demands, or priorities of different contexts. Conflictual spaces emerge when certain spaces become an arena of encounters between antagonistic actors—actors with demands that are perceived as potentially contradictory or damaging to the counterpart of the conflictual relationship (cf. [Wieviorka 2013](#)). In this sense, conflictual spaces spatially mark and demarcate different types of conflicts—including ecological and organizational.

Before discussing the three patterns in more depth, we want to highlight the role of mediated communication—especially of digital and social media—in forging translocal solidarities, but also in bringing socio-spatial intra-movement tensions to the fore. In line with the loosely networked character of climate justice movements, social movements in general have changed character with the rising influence of digital media technologies. [Bennett and Segerberg \(2012\)](#) highlight the emergence of a logic of *connective action*, in which movements increasingly rely on loose, large-scale networks, through which activists share and adapt personalized messages and oscillate between online engagement and offline protest events. These digitally enabled movements are described as “relatively unbounded” ([Bennett and Segerberg 2012](#), 759) and able to easily cross issues and geographical boundaries. Essentially, digital media enable a spatial “context collapse,” wherein geographically distant and close actors come into the same sphere and interweave previously distinct local and scalar context ([Stephansen 2019](#), 347; see also [Routledge 2003](#)).

In this setting, rather than one global movement, activist publics are better imagined as decentered, distributed, overlapping and criss-crossing scales ([Stephansen 2019](#), 346). These networks, which [Routledge \(2003](#), 345) conceives of as ‘convergence spaces,’ can facilitate “communication, information sharing, solidarity, coordination and resource mobilization” beyond what any single place-based movement can hope to achieve. At the same time, their increasing heterogeneity raises the likelihood of contradictions within global movements, e.g., regarding potentially conflicting goals, ideologies, or strategies ([Routledge 2003](#)). In movements spanning wide geographical areas, tensions arise from “unequal discursive and material power relations” ([Routledge 2003](#), 346).

Research consistently highlights the role of places in facilitating and maintaining solidarity in this setting. Places, on the one hand, provide a

physical space for heterogeneous movement actors to encounter one another. On the other hand, through “place frames” (Martin 2016) they offer a way to express grievances in concrete, geographical terms. That is, places are discursively constructed as a “socio-spatial-temporal but also [...] *scalar* configuration of grievances, activists, claimants, and political resistances” (Martin 2016, 89–90, highlight in original). Often, relevant places are conferences and events, such as the World Social Forum (Stephansen 2019) or the UN Climate Summits (Roosvall and Tegelberg 2018). However, “contentious places” (Baran and Stoltenberg 2024)—places, such as Lützerath, which are marked as contested through discursive and political efforts and which come to signify an issue—may be equally important for facilitating solidarity and generating meaning within movements.

Hence, places and networked “convergent spaces” (Routledge 2003) bring together heterogeneous movement actors translocally. The coming together around places and connecting them translocally and across scales to larger issues is a necessary condition to maintain movement cohesion, mobilize resources, and build power beyond each individual place (Bosco 2002). At the same time, conflictual spaces can emerge within the movement, insofar as spatially structured differences in goals, ideologies, and strategies must be negotiated along at least three axes: center–periphery, local–translocal, and scalar.

Solidarities and tensions between center and periphery

Tensions between center and periphery form one of the most consistently described cleavages in political science (e.g., Ford and Jennings 2020). They highlight that geographical location overlaps and coincides with the locus of power as well as ideologies and political priorities. In terms of center–periphery cleavages, the notion of climate justice emerges from the Global South to highlight the social injustice, environmental destruction, and economic inequalities resulting from a global system in which industrialized countries benefit from fossil fuel industries, while Global South countries disproportionately suffer the consequences (Routledge 2011, 385). Climate justice movements seek to challenge that system, yet an imbalance of resources and discursive power between Global North and Global South also exists within social movements themselves (Routledge 2003, 346). Broadly speaking, digital divides continue to shape who participates in digital activism along lines such as class, age, and location (e.g., Schradie 2018; Fernández-Prados et al. 2021).

On the one hand, both central and peripheral, Global North and Global South actors within the movement benefit from mutual knowledge and resource sharing. On the other hand, divides between Global North and Global South persist and there is evidence that rather than

local issue importance, global position and resources drive visibility and power within movements. For instance, in a hyperlink network analysis of the HIV/AIDS movement, [Shumate and Dewitt \(2008\)](#) find a north/south divide and a more central position of organizations from the Global North. Beyond inequalities within the movement, activists also have to grapple with the unequal attention allocated by media and other actors. The case of Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate who alongside Greta Thunberg and other European Fridays for Future activists had traveled to the 2020 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, but was cropped out of photographs and press coverage, serves as a stark example. Nakate used the incident to draw attention to the exclusion of Black and African voices in the climate movement ([Hasan 2023](#)).

A second, more regional permutation of the center-periphery divide lies in the outsized role of urban, middle-class, politically engaged, and progressive activists in the movement (cf. [Wahlström et al. 2019](#)). This may create tensions with activists with other socio-spatial backgrounds. For instance, [Grosse and Mark \(2020\)](#) focus on Indigenous activism in the context of COP25 and highlight exclusionary dynamics within the climate justice movement. In a rather different example, [Love-Nichols \(2020\)](#) highlights climate protection efforts by politically conservative, rural hunters and fishers, who share a narrow issue-specific interest with the broader movement but find themselves ideologically polarized from it in every other way.

Solidarities and tensions between the local and the translocal

Place-based struggles rely on translocal solidarities, that is “ongoing connections, social and material relations, articulations and negotiations” ([Routledge 2011](#), 386) beyond the particularity of the individual location. Such horizontal connections from place to place can increase visibility and mobilize support for place-based struggles and can highlight shared grievances to allow movements to build broader issue agendas.

Digital media have eased opportunities for connecting local struggles on both an actor and a discursive level. For instance, [Bastos and Mercea \(2016\)](#) highlight the emergence of so-called “serial activists” on Twitter, a class of highly political users who post about many geographically distant activist hashtags and thereby facilitate connections between causes and language communities. These committed digital activists drew attention to struggles as diverse as the aftermath of the 2009 Iranian election, Occupy Wall Street, and the Spanish Indignados movement. In our own research, we focus on co-hashtagging to show that Twitter activists involved in the contention over the preservation of Hambach Forest form translocal discursive connections especially based on shared territory (to contentious places within the same country and region) or shared issue ([Baran and Stoltenberg 2024](#)).

As much as translocal solidarities and the involvement of people from elsewhere in place-based struggles are necessary for movements, there are tensions inherent in these patterns. Local activists in place-based struggles will often be intensely engaged in place-making. This involves highlighting aspects that make a place “exceptional,” such as local religious and spiritual sites or unique aspects of the flora and fauna, and building identity around them (e.g., [Schaeffer and Smits 2015](#)). In the German coal-mining region of the Rhineland, a traditionally catholic area, activism against the destruction of churches for the extensions of mines (cf. [Kern 2022](#)) sticks out as an example. Local activists therefore highlight the uniqueness and identity of *place* ([Löw 2020](#)) in their contentious action.

Translocal activists may engage in struggles using their spatial knowledge, but not necessarily ever setting foot in the places in question. [Stoltenberg \(2024\)](#) highlights that contentious places with a high degree of visibility come to be used as ciphers for issues in public discourses. The place is invoked almost in passing, its name being used to index larger conversations, but without recurring to its identity or meaning for the people who inhabit it. The practice of remotely “checking in” via Facebook at Standing Rock reservation during the contention over the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016 is a clear example of engaging with a place-based struggle without being in place ([Baik 2020](#)). In a nutshell, tensions between local and translocal engagement may arise due to differences in place-based knowledge, and in the interest in the unique place vs. the place as a symbol for larger struggles.

Solidarities and tensions across scales

Climate justice movements have to navigate multiple scalar contexts ([Fisher 2015](#)), ranging from the global nature of the issue to its uneven regional permutations and responsibilities and to the place-based struggles over pipelines, mines, or deforestation projects. Where translocal connections highlight horizontal connections between place-based struggles, we use “scales” to refer to these vertical layers of movements. Processes of scaling are key for social movements “as a strategic device to promote their causes at the most important level” ([Fisher 2015](#), 75). The multi-scalar nature of climate justice movements may become a strength, e.g., if global claims lend credibility, while local struggles make movements concrete and definable. However, scale is not an inherent ontological feature of struggles, actors, or policies; rather, it is continuously negotiated and constructed ([Brown and Purcell 2005](#)).

Tensions may arise on the discursive level if national or local branches need to adapt the frames and narratives of global social movements to ensure that they resonate within their own context (e.g., [Shahin, Nakahara,](#)

and Sánchez 2024; Suk et al. 2024). Shahin, Nakahara, and Sánchez (2024), for instance, describe how the transnational Black Lives Matter movement became hybridized and adapted to local issues in Brazil, India, and Japan. This process spawned resonant frames, which aligned with the overall movement's values, but also reactionary frames and hostility. Similar processes may occur during scaling-up, when local movements attach to regional, national, or global activism and discourses.

In a multiscale movement, climate activists also need to negotiate what political scales and stakeholders are the most pertinent targets (Fisher 2015; Baykan 2019). Baykan (2019), studying the Turkish climate movement's strategies around the Copenhagen Climate Summit, demonstrates how activists shift scales. Following the summit's failure to deliver a binding agreement, activists increasingly laid blame and responsibility on the national government, rather than blaming the United States or pushing for an international policy solution. Tensions may arise during such shifts in activist strategies, particularly if different parts of a movement disagree on the allocation of responsibility or the most effective scale to target.

Negotiating climate justice: A conceptual model

Climate change and climate justice pose a field with complex conflictual as well as solidary patterns, large parts of which are spatially organized. At the level of spatial conflicts, contentions around climate justice emerge within place-based struggles over land use and rights, for instance in cases of mining or pipeline construction. At the level of solidary and conflictual spaces, climate justice movements are involved in clashes and negotiate tensions between center and periphery, between local and translocal, and between different scalar contexts. Regarding public communication and movement politics around climate justice, we propose a conceptual model for thinking through the socio-spatial patterns of conflict and solidarity. The model systematizes the spatial patterns of climate justice and other social movements and can be utilized to specify and order empirical research going forward.

In a previous study, building on Adams and Jansson (2012), we have argued that a spatial analysis of public communication can take four perspectives, by focusing on (1) the places of issues (representations), (2) the discursive linking of places (connections), (3) on the locations of actors (textures), and (4) and their networks (structures) (Waldherr et al. 2024). We build on this scheme and specify it for the spatial dimension of climate justice struggles (Figure 15.1). We discuss key dimensions of the model and illustrate them with our monitoring of social media communication and two field trips to the sites of place-based climate justice struggles, the coal-mining region around Garzweiler and Lützerath in Germany (2022)

and the oil- and gas-drilling region in North Dakota, USA (2023). We draw on extensive fieldnotes and digital photography from these trips and interrogate them regarding the question of spatial conflict and conflictual spaces.

Three core dimensions of climate justice conflicts and the communication and mobilization around them are identified in the model: (1) manifestations of the phenomenon of climate change, (2) issue spaces, and (3) actors/interaction networks.

Dimension 1: The phenomenon of climate change

The *phenomenon* of climate change is multiscalar, as it extends globally, but with differential impacts and responsibilities at the regional scale, and considerable legislative power at the national level. Furthermore, climate justice is often invoked locally, in the context of local climate-related projects, such as mines or pipelines, which can become contentious struggles.

Spatial conflicts play out most obviously on the local level as we have exemplified in the Lützerath case which marks a conflict between place and territory (cf. Löw 2020). These spatial conflicts tend to be rooted, not within the movement, but between movements and their local, regional, or international co-actors. They arise from irreconcilable tensions of spatial logics, a dynamic which has been identified as the driving force behind the refiguration of space (e.g., Knoblauch and Löw 2024). In the Lützerath case, on the one hand, the energy company RWE, in some instances together with state actors, enforces a logic of territory, defending the coal mine and its extension area as a delineated space to be exploited for energy production. When we were in the field in 2022, the logic of territory

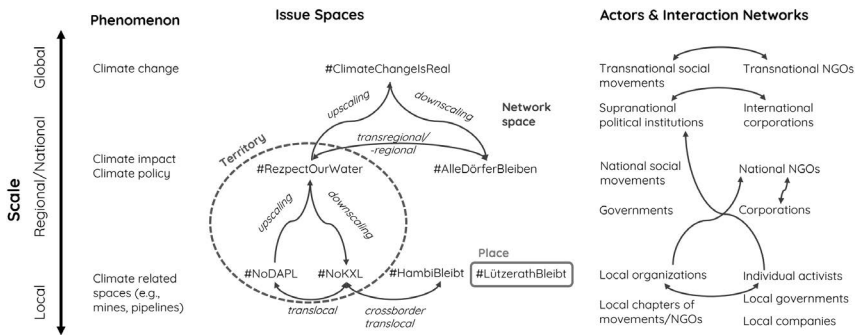


Figure 15.1 Conceptual model of the spatial dimension of climate justice conflicts. Source: Daniela Stoltenberg.

clearly presented itself in the fencing off of the mine, making it hard to get close. This boundary was also enforced by an omnipresent private security company, whose white vans were almost always around in our field of vision. They observed the actors' behaviors in the vicinity of the mine, but were rarely interfering. The enforcement of territory culminated in the massive police operation through which the village was cleared in January 2023.

Locals and movement actors, on the other hand, were heavily engaged in place-making. This was visible, for instance, in frequent references to unique aspects of the natural environment, such as the quality of agricultural land (so-called Lössboden) threatened by the mine. Moreover, in the catholic Rhineland region, the destruction of churches and graveyards were often invoked. In Lützerath itself, religiously motivated climate activists had set up the "Eibenkapelle," a small outdoor site for vigil and prayer (Figure 15.2). In the spatial conflict, antagonistic actors therefore constructed and used the same physical space in fundamentally incompatible ways.



Figure 15.2 Place-making in the spatial conflict of Lützerath, Germany: The "Eibenkapelle."

Source: Zozan Baran.

Dimension 2: Issue spaces

The second dimension of our model refers to *issue spaces* and describe the discursive construction of the spatial dimension of climate change, through the association of places with the issue (Stoltenberg 2024). The concept therefore aims at capturing the *representations* and *connections* (Waldherr et al. 2024) in public communication. While we use popular movement hashtags in Figure 15.1 to illustrate the construction of issue spaces, they equally emerge from place frames (Martin 2016), place-based narratives, or imagery. Issue spaces are constructed materially (e.g., through protest signs) and in digital discourses. At the local level, place-based climate struggles are clashes between economic and civil society interests. Movement actors narrate what these places mean, why they should be preserved, or why changes—such as the construction of a pipeline—should be opposed.

Place-based struggles become *translocally connected* in the issue space, for instance, by being discussed within the same message. Such translocal connections often stay within the same regional or national context, but may also cross borders to connect geographically distant struggles (Baran and Stoltenberg 2024). Activism against oil and gas pipelines in the United States—and sometimes extending to Canada—exemplifies such translocal connections. Across North America, we identified 26 place-based struggles specifically opposing the construction of pipelines, all of them highlighting their interconnectedness through recurring semantic patterns in digital activism. Specifically, they organized around movement hashtags following the scheme of #No[PipelineName] or #Stop[PipelineName]. All of these cases, as well as some additional environmental struggles, were connected through co-hashtagging. Moreover, these discursive horizontal connections between places often followed the underlying trajectory space at the level of infrastructures: along the same network of pipelines, local contention occurred in multiple places, often when pipelines were routed through Indigenous territories. It is likely that local actors followed in the footsteps of highly visible contentions, such as around the Dakota Access Pipeline (#NoDAPL), demonstrating the sharing of practices and experiences in solidary spaces. That is despite the fact that when we visited Standing Rock reservation in 2023, only few traces of the 2016 #NoDAPL contention could still be found materially (see Figure 15.3). In the digital space, it continued to serve as a translocal organizing marker, tying together related place-based struggles.

Actors may also draw connections across scales to highlight the universality of an issue or generate specificity. Such processes of upscaling and downscaling can be found, for instance, in the #RespectOurWater movement in the United States, which ties together struggles over water rights in indigenous communities, or in the #AlleDörferBleiben (#AllVillagesStay)



Figure 15.3 Traces of #NoDAPL in a parking lot in Fort Yates, Standing Rock reservation.

Source: Daniela Stoltenberg.

movement in Germany, which connects villages in danger of displacement for coal mining. Scalar connections may reach up to the global level, when movements appeal to the global nature of climate change and the need for global solidarity. We encountered such a scalar connection by the *Alle Dörfer Bleiben* movement in Keyenberg, the neighboring village of Lützerath ([Figure 15.4](#)). On an informational board, painted in the movement's signature yellow, “*Alle Dörfer bleiben weltweit*” (“All villages stay worldwide”) was written.

At the same time, the invocation of Lützerath as a place-based struggle in the climate justice movement also highlights how scalar conflicts may emerge. After the village's destruction, while locals may have still been mourning the loss of place, some actors in the national movement were quick to move on from Lützerath as primarily a symbol. Even though the village was gone, the fight was not lost so long as the coal under it had not



Figure 15.4 “All villages stay worldwide”: Solidarity across scales in Keyenberg, Germany.

Source: Zozan Baran.

been excavated, some argued online. Evidently, Lützerath meant something different for national than for local actors.

Dimension 3: Actors and interaction networks

The construction of space in relation to a social struggle such as climate justice can also be mapped for *actors and their interaction networks*. Not all actors have a fixed scalar or spatial context, but may shift spatial strategies based on specific causes and mobilizations. These *textures*, i.e., the locations of actors (Waldherr et al. 2024), drive the perception and priorities of actors and their access to resources. NGO and movement actors, ranging from Greenpeace to Fridays for Future, often exhibit a multiscalar organizational structure with a global parent organization and nested national and local chapters. Up- and downscaling as well as translocal connections emerge when these actors form ties, within and across movements. Individual activists, too, are rooted in places and may form ties to activists in other places or to larger-scale organizations. Here, too, a

network space emerges, driven by the *structures* (Waldherr et al. 2024) of interactions and relations between actors. Importantly, these interaction networks are not limited to movements, but include economic and political actors across all scalar and local contexts, whose position in climate justice is addressed, supported, or opposed in communication.

Within the context of actors and their networks, we witnessed an example of a conflictual pattern between center and periphery during our field trip to Bismarck, North Dakota. The area had garnered international attention in 2016 when the routing of the Dakota Access Pipeline through poor and Indigenous communities to the south of the city had yielded large-scale Indigenous mobilization and protest (see, e.g., Baik 2020). At the time of our visit in 2023, the legacy of these protests reverberated in mobilization against another project. In order to avoid resistance or protest, a company planning to build a carbon capture and storage pipeline proposed routing it to the north of Bismarck (see Figure 15.5). This would put the project, framed as a climate mitigation project to limit carbon emission, through



Figure 15.5 Opposition to a carbon capture project, Bismarck, North Dakota.

Source: Daniela Stoltenberg.

wealthy, conservative-leaning suburbs. We had the opportunity to attend a large public hearing about the project, in which residents invariably discussed carbon storage as a dangerous experimental technology, threatening their environment. They argued that, while they were not generally opposed to pipelines, this technology should not be built on their land and—if implemented at all—routing it south of the city and close to Standing Rock reservation was the more sensible option. Under the banner of environmental protection, the contention pitted more urban and more rural communities, those with more and less socio-economic power, and predominantly white people vs. Indigenous communities against each other.

This example highlights, once more, that connections within the actor and issue space around climate justice can have different valence. Discursive connections as well the relations between actors can signify different modes of interaction, including conflict and cooperation (Neuberger 2014). This means that connections should not always be interpreted as signs of solidarity. Rather, between center and periphery, between local and translocal, and across scalar contexts, they may signal solidarity or conflict; and this can shift over time.

Spatial figures and interconnections between the dimensions

In the previous sections, we have introduced an actor- and issue-centered communication space that highlights the role of different spatial figures (Löw 2020) in the organization of climate justice and other social movements. Taking all the mutual references across scales and locations together, a discursive *network space* (Löw 2020) emerges. It facilitates public imagination of issue spaces (Stoltenberg 2024) as a multiscale and translocal phenomenon.

Within this relational space (Löw 2008), we can observe densifications in discursive connections within the same *territory* (Löw 2020). We demonstrate this in our study by showing how contentious places connected to Hambach Forest, form dense discursive clusters on the basis of shared country and even shared federal state (Baran and Stoltenberg 2024). This shows how, even within technically boundless digital activism, scale and territory still structure the emergence of translocal solidarities.

The role of *place* (Löw 2020) and its representation in local struggles remains considerable. Actors struggle over ideas about what a place like Lützerath or Standing Rock means, to whom it belongs, and what it should become in the future. These ideas will differ and potentially become conflictual depending on the socio-spatial positions and scalar contexts of different movement actors.

Finally, although we have thus far treated actor spaces and issue spaces as analytically separate, many of the examples indicate that they

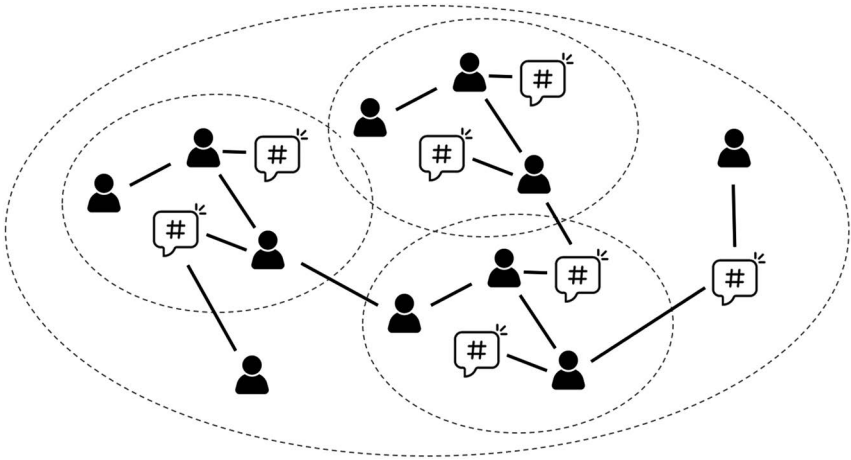


Figure 15.6 A multiscalar movement communication space.

Source: Daniela Stoltenberg.

empirically intersect. Actors from specific places and scalar contexts may engage with issues from different places and scales, creating complex issue-actor networks. Both actors and issues are associated with specific places and territories, shown in [Figure 15.6](#) as permeable oval shapes. They communicatively relate to these spaces and to each other. The relevant spatial units may overlap and connections between actors and issues may also form across them, albeit less densely ([Waldherr et al. 2024](#); [Baran and Stoltenberg 2024](#)). Moreover, spatial units are nested across scales and at these higher scales, too, actors and issues form—multilevel and multiplex—networks. Connections also form across these scales. We thus conceptualize movement communication spaces as multiscalar, nested, and overlapping.

Outlook

In this chapter, we argue that the field of climate justice is characterized by both spatial conflicts and conflictual spaces. Taking a communication and social movement approach, we put forward a spatial perspective on social struggles over climate justice. Building on literature and our own empirical material, we highlight that spatial conflicts emerge due to place-based struggles in areas like energy production or deforestation. Opposing claims to the land and its ownership clash, coinciding with struggles between different spatial figures ([Löw 2020](#)) and between economy and

ecology. Within climate justice movements, solidary as well as conflictual spaces emerge due to the co-occurrence of multiscalar, local and translocal, center and periphery actors and narratives. The different logics and priorities can be a strength to the movement because they facilitate reach and the sharing of resources and knowledge. If priorities and claims become too different, they can become conflictual.

We have proposed a model which incorporates the dimensions of climate change as a phenomenon, discursive issue spaces, as well as actors and their networks. In each dimension, translocal (horizontal) and scalar (vertical) connections emerge and form a network space, which densifies around national and regional territories and highlights particular places as meaningful.

Going forward, empirical studies should focus on further substantiating the model and explore further variations and nuances as regards the three main dimensions. Due to the hybrid character of contemporary movements, which oscillate between digital and material spaces (Dahlberg-Grundberg 2019; Baran and Stoltenberg 2024), this research agenda will need to include both large-scale analyses of digital data and field research. While the model points out key dimensions of study, it requires considerable methodological work to develop mixed-methods approaches which facilitate the connection of these diverse data sources. Future work should also dive deeper into the temporal dimension of the model by studying how movements oscillate between different spatial contexts and between solidarity and conflict over time. Finally, the question of multiple spatialities requires asking how these patterns play out in struggles across different parts of the world.

The interdisciplinary field of climate justice movements brings together environmental scholars, as well as movement and communication researchers. Making explicit a spatial perspective on climate justice struggles can elucidate how intersectional axes of inequality and marginalization are spatially organized to produce unequal outcomes. In turn, climate justice presents a pertinent case for spatial research, since it exemplifies the complex socio-spatial patterns of contemporary social issues.

References

- Adams, Paul C., and André Jansson. 2012. "Communication Geography: A Bridge Between Disciplines." *Communication Theory* 22 (3): 299–318. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2012.01406.x>
- Baik, Jeeyun. 2020. "The Geotagging Counterpublic: The Case of Facebook Remote Check-Ins to Standing Rock." *International Journal of Communication* 14: 2057–2077. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/12663>
- Baran, Zozan, and Daniela Stoltenberg. 2023. "Tracing the Emergent Field of Digital Environmental and Climate Activism Research: A Mixed-Methods

- Systematic Literature Review.” *Environmental Communication* 17 (5): 453–468. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2023.2212137>
- Baran, Zozan, and Daniela Stoltenberg. 2024. “Dynamics of Scale Shift: Contentious Places and Hybrid Activism on Social Media.” *New Media & Society*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448241247314>
- Bastos, Marco T., and Dan Mercea. 2016. “Serial Activists: Political Twitter Beyond Influentials and the Twittertariat.” *New Media & Society* 18 (10): 2359–2378. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815584764>
- Baykan, Barış Gençer. 2019. “What Did the Turkish Climate Movement Learn from a Global Policy Failure? Frame Shift after the Copenhagen Climate Summit.” *Turkish Studies* 20 (4): 637–655. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2019.1601563>
- Bennett, W. Lance, and Alexandra Segerberg. 2012. “The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics.” *Information, Communication & Society* 15 (5): 739–768. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661>
- Bosco, Fernando J. 2002. “Place, Space, Networks, and the Sustainability of Collective Action: The Madres de Plaza de Mayo.” *Global Networks* 1 (4): 307–329. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00018>
- Brown, J. Christopher, and Mark Purcell. 2005. “There’s Nothing Inherent about Scale: Political Ecology, the Local Trap, and the Politics of Development in the Brazilian Amazon.” *Geoforum* 36 (5): 607–624. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2004.09.001>
- Castells, Manuel. 2008. “The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (1): 78–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311877>
- Dahlberg-Grundberg, Michael. 2019. “Hybrid Political Activism and the Online/Offline Divide.” In *Hybrid Media Culture: Sensing Place in a World of Flows*, edited by Simon Lindgren, 67–89. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Dalton, Russell J. 2009. “Economics, Environmentalism and Party Alignments: A Note on Partisan Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies.” *European Journal of Political Research* 48 (2): 161–175. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2008.00831.x>
- Eidson, John R., Dereje Feyissa, Veronika Fuest, Markus V. Hoehne, Boris Nieswand, Günther Schlee, and Olaf Zenker. 2017. “From Identification to Framing and Alignment: A New Approach to the Comparative Analysis of Collective Identities.” *Current Anthropology* 58 (3): 340–359. <https://doi.org/10.1086/691970>
- Fernández-Prados, Juan S., Antonio Lozano-Díaz, Alexandra Ainz-Galende, and Rubén Rodríguez-Puertas. 2021. “Intergenerational Digital and Democratic Divide: Comparative Analysis of Unconventional and Digital Activism around the World.” In *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Information and Education Technology (ICIET)*, 466–470. IEEE.
- Fisher, Susannah. 2015. “The Emerging Geographies of Climate Justice.” *The Geographical Journal* 181 (1): 73–82. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12078>
- Ford, Robert, and Will Jennings. 2020. “The Changing Cleavage Politics of Western Europe.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 23: 295–314. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-052217-104957>
- Gosling, Simon N., Rachel Warren, Nigel W. Arnell, Peter Good, John Caesar, Dan Bernie, Jason A. Lowe, Paul van der Linden, Jesse R. O’Hanley, and Stephen M.

- Smith. 2011. "A Review of Recent Developments in Climate Change Science. Part II: The Global-Scale Impacts of Climate Change." *Progress in Physical Geography* 35 (4): 443–464. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309133311407650>
- Grosse, Corrie, and Brigid Mark. 2020. "A Colonized COP: Indigenous Exclusion and Youth Climate Justice Activism at the United Nations Climate Change Negotiations." In *From Student Strikes to the Extinction Rebellion: New Protest Movements Shaping Our Future*, edited by Benjamin J. Richardson, 146–170. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Hasan, Mahedi. 2023. "Symbolic Annihilation: Analyzing Associated Press's Erasure of Vanessa Nakate and Marginalization of Black Women Activists." *Journal of Black Studies* 55 (3): 253–267. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219347231220679>
- Hunt, Scott A., and Robert A. Benford. 2004. "Collective Identity, Solidarity, and Commitment." In *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, 433–457. Malden, MA: Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470999103.ch19>
- Kaiser, Ruben. 2020. "Bäume, die die Welt bedeuten. Der Hambacher Forst als Symbol der deutschen Klimabewegung [Trees That Mean the World. Hambach Forest As a Symbol of the German Climate Movement.]" *Soziologiemagazin* 13 (2): 51–67. <https://elibrary.utb.de/doi/abs/10.3224/soz.v13i2.05>
- Kern, Benedikt. 2022. "Spirituality at the Abyss: The Coal-Mining Area in Rhineland, Germany as a Liberation-Theological Field of Intervention." In *Doing Climate Justice: Theological Explorations*, edited by Jan Niklas Collet, Judith Gruber, Wietske de Jong-Kumru, Christian Kern, Sebastian Pittl, Stefan Silber, and Christian Tauchner, 13–20. Paderborn: Brill Schöningh.
- Knoblauch, Hubert, and Martina Löw. 2024. "The Refiguration of the Global: Globalization and the Spatial Logics of Digitalization." *Critical Sociology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205241262304>
- Love-Nichols, Jessica. 2020. "Tied to the Land': Climate Change Activism Among U.S. Hunters and Fishers." *Frontiers in Communication* 5: 1. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2020.00001>
- Löw, Martina. 2008. "The Constitution of Space: The Structuration of Spaces Through the Simultaneity of Effect and Perception." *European Journal of Social Theory* 11 (1): 25–49. <https://www.doi.org/10.1177/1368431007085286>
- Löw, Martina. 2020. "In Welchen Räumen leben wir? Eine raumsoziologisch und kommunikativ konstruktivistische Bestimmung der Raumfiguren Territorialraum, Bahnenraum, Netzwerkraum und Ort [In What Spaces Do We Live? A Space-Sociological and Communicative Constructivist Definition of the Spatial Figures: Territorial Space, Trajectory Space, Network Space, and Place.]" In *Grenzen der Kommunikation – Kommunikation an Den Grenzen*, edited by Jo Reichertz, 149–164. Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft.
- Martin, Deborah G. 2016. "Place Frames: Analysing Practice and Production of Place in Contentious Politics." In *Spaces of Contention: Spatialities and Social Movements*, edited by Walter Nicholls, Byron Miller, and Justin Beaumont, 85–99. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Milan, Stefania. 2013. *Social Movements and Their Technologies: Wiring Social Change*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Neuberger, Christoph. 2014. "Konflikt, Konkurrenz und Kooperation: Interaktionsmodi in einer Theorie der dynamischen Netzwerköffentlichkeit [Conflict, Competition, and Cooperation: Modes of Interaction in a Theory of Dynamic Network Publics.]" *Medien & Kommunikationswissenschaft* 62 (4): 567–587. <https://www.doi.org/10.5771/1615-634x-2014-4-567>

- Ngcamu, Bethuel Sibongiseni. 2023. "Climate Change Effects on Vulnerable Populations in the Global South: A Systematic Review." *Natural Hazards* 118 (2): 977–991. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/s11069-023-06070-2>
- Roosvall, Anna, and Matthew Tegelberg. 2018. *Media and Transnational Climate Justice: Indigenous Activism and Climate Politics*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Routledge, Paul. 2003. "Convergence Space: Process Geographies of Grassroots Globalization Networks." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28: 333–349. <https://www.doi.org/10.1111/1475-5661.00096>
- Routledge, Paul. 2011. "Translocal Climate Justice Solidarities." In *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, edited by John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Nordgaard, and David Schlosberg, 384–398. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schaeffer, Colombina, and Mattijs Smits. 2015. "From Matters of Fact to Places of Concern? Energy, Environmental Movements and Place-Making in Chile and Thailand." *Geoforum* 65: 146–157. <https://www.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.07.021>
- Schlosberg, David, and Lisette B. Collins. 2014. "From Environmental to Climate Justice: Climate Change and the Discourse of Environmental Justice." *WIREs Climate Change* 5 (3): 359–374. <https://www.doi.org/10.1002/wcc.275>
- Schradie, Jen. 2018. "The Digital Activism Gap: How Class and Costs Shape Online Collective Action." *Social Problems* 65 (1): 51–74. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spx042>
- Shahin, Saif, Junki Nakahara, and Mariana Sánchez. 2024. "Black Lives Matter Goes Global: Connective Action Meets Cultural Hybridity in Brazil, India, and Japan." *New Media & Society* 26 (1): 216–235. <https://www.doi.org/10.1177/14614448211057106>
- Shumate, Michelle, and Lori Dewitt. 2008. "The North/South Divide in NGO Hyperlink Networks." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2): 405–428. <https://www.doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2008.00402.x>
- Stephansen, Hilde C. 2019. "Conceptualizing a Distributed, Multi-Scalar Global Public Sphere Through Activist Communication Practices in the World Social Forum." *Global Media and Communication* 15 (3): 345–360. <https://www.doi.org/10.1177/1742766519872777>
- Stoltenberg, Daniela. 2024. *The Spaces of Public Issues: How Social Media Discourses Shape Public Imaginations of Issue Spatiality*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Suk, Jiyouon, Yibing Sun, Luhang Sun, Mengyu Li, Catalina Fariás, Hyerin Kwon, Shreenita Ghosh et al. 2024. "'Think Global, Act Local': How #MeToo Hybridized across Borders and Platforms for Contextual Relevance." *Information, Communication & Society* 27 (3): 498–519. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2023.2219716>
- Wahlström, Mattias, Piotr Kocyba, Michiel de Vydt, and Joost de Moor, eds. 2019. *Protest for a Future: Composition, Mobilization and Motives of the Participants in Fridays For Future Climate Protests on 15 March, 2019 in 13 European Cities*.
- Waldherr, Annie, Daniela Stoltenberg, Daniel Maier, Alexa Keinert, and Barbara Pfetsch. 2024. "Translocal Networked Public Spheres: Spatial Arrangements of Metropolitan Twitter." *New Media & Society* 26 (11): 6636–6657. <https://www.doi.org/10.1177/14614448231156579>
- Wieviorka, Michel. 2013. "Social Conflict." *Current Sociology* 61 (5–6): 696–713. <https://www.doi.org/10.1177/0011392113499487>

16 Conflicts along the “fresh air corridors” of Stuttgart

The figurational politics of climate adaptation

Indrawan Prabaharyaka and Ignacio Farías

Introduction

Stuttgart has a reputation in Germany for being a city of air pollution and extreme summer heat. However, it is also the place where Germans pioneered the concept of urban ventilation. In fact, Stuttgart’s post-war urban history is marked not only by the terribly modern ideal of the car-centric city but also by the climatological discovery, protection, and popularization of the so-called “fresh air corridors” or *Frischluftschneisen*. If you ask around and listen, you will often hear people using this term in Stuttgart. On New Year’s Eve 2023, Indrawan had dinner with a former colleague and her family in Stuttgart. She told him, “This city is crisscrossed by fresh air corridors that bring fresh air from green spaces on higher ground to what is literally the center of Stuttgart, the lower and hotter parts of the city.” Her father, Hans-Christoph, was ambivalent about the city’s protection of the air corridors: “For landowners like me, it means a series of restrictions. It could be quite unfortunate. Actually, I cannot extend my house, although there is a free space, a garden behind it.” Hannes Schwertfeger, an architect with whom Indrawan would collaborate during his fieldwork in Stuttgart, warned him from the outset: “Space conflicts over fresh air corridors are very common in the city.” In Stuttgart, fresh air corridors are more than just a matter of airflow or climate; they can significantly shape the built environment. Conflicts along these corridors are inevitable.

In 2004, the association “Schutzgemeinschaft Rohrer Weg” began to mobilize against a plan to build single-family houses on an orchard meadow (*Streuobstwiese*) composed of several plots belonging to several private landowners in Möhringen, Stuttgart. The members of the association argued that the meadow was both a producer of cool air and part of the air route through which fresh air enters and cools the city center. As the city considers prohibiting a housing development in the orchard meadow, three landowners sued the city council in 2006, taking the case to the

Administrative Court. Their lawyers contended that because Möhringen only became part of Stuttgart in 1956 and the post-war building plans were never publicly deliberated—councilors had decided among themselves where and what could be built—the plans should be deemed retrospectively invalid. One by one, the plans of the previous decades became invalid until the last valid reference was a decree issued by the Nazi Regime on the eve of the Second World War. On the basis of this decree, the court decided that individual houses could be built. Apart from the singular process of judicial archeology that led to the retroactive annulment of all development plans, the case is interesting because it involves one of the first citizens’ initiatives to place a specific type of climatological object at the center of its mobilization: the fresh air corridor as an environmental infrastructure to be protected, with a higher value than other urban needs, such as the provision and densification of housing, or even the exercise of private property rights. A few years later, other citizens’ initiatives were even named after this climatological object: Frischluft für Cannstatt (Fresh Air for Cannstatt) and Bürgerinitiative Frischluftschneise Nord (Citizen Initiative Fresh Air Corridor North).

These are not isolated cases. Since the 2000s, a number of urban conflicts in Stuttgart have revolved around fresh air corridors, leading their protagonists to different battlefields: streets, courts, and scientific studies. In this paper, we analyze how fresh air corridors are historically constructed as an object of climatological knowledge and urban planning and differently mobilized by different urban actors in land-use conflicts. Conflicts over space are usually analyzed with an urban political economy lens, focusing, e.g., on the neoliberalization of urban politics. Accordingly, conflicts around urban space are seen as deeply rooted in processes of privatization and gentrification, leading to spatial inequality and environmental injustice, and triggering the resistance and struggles of communities. More importantly, the notion of conflict is still strongly influenced today by Marxist analysis of class conflicts (Turner 2015), which are structurally grounded, as they depend on the relational position of social classes in the social structure. Accordingly, conflicts are seen as being inscribed in the social structure. They can be triggered by different issues, but at their core, they are structurally determined. This analytical view implies that actors know or should know to which party they belong, as well as which interests they have. Particularly in the case of conflicts about urban space, these are even understood as involving opposing actors seeking mutually exclusionary goods. We certainly could interpret the conflicts about fresh air in Stuttgart along these lines, but by doing so, we might be missing their emergent quality and the role played by the fresh air corridors performatively structuring citizen protests, legal disputes, and epistemic controversies.

This analytical perspective requires addressing a number of empirical and theoretical issues. The first concerns the specific technoscientific genealogy of this climatological object, that is, reconstructing the very specific climatological developments that led to the identification, mapping, and modeling of fresh air corridors as a core figure in urban climate systems (Section “The invention of the fresh air route”). The second is to understand the differences between protest, litigation, and controversy as distinct types of conflict in which the objects of conflict, such as air corridors, are constructed and mobilized differently. We aim to develop this theoretical distinction between demonstration, litigation, and controversy on the basis of our case study, but in a way that could apply to other spatial conflicts and conflicts over space (Section “Mobilizing aeroroutes in conflicts over space”). The third issue is concerned with the specificity of fresh air routes as topographical figures in conflict with other topographical figures, such as the figure of settlement pressure and the related densification policies or, to a lesser extent, the figure of the car-centric city. Attention to such conflicting relationships between specific topographical figures sheds light on underlying conflicts between topological figures, such as the territory and the route (Section “Spatial figures and frictions”).

Our work was based on a research plan formulated by Ignacio following the Collaborative Research Center’s framework. Interviews were conducted from 2023 to 2024 online and offline (in Stuttgart and Ruhr Metropolitan Area) with urban climatologists (Rainer Kapp, Jürgen Baumüller, Ulrich Reuter, Ulrich Hoffmann, Silke Drautz, Wilhelm Kuttler, Wolfgang Beckröge, Dieter Scherer, and Torsten Nagel) and citizens involved in the spatial conflicts in the city (Reinhard König from Vaihingen Ökologisch Sozial; Ursula Minges, Rüdiger Reinboth, and Norbert Michel from Schutzgemeinschaft Rohrer Weg; Günther Seyfferth from Aktionbündnis Birkacher Feld; Jürgen Lessat and Gretel Quiring from Frischluft für Cannstatt). All interviews were based on a semi-structured questionnaire that allowed for improvisation during the interview events. All interviews were audiovisually documented. To trace the historical genealogy of the knowledge at stake, we collected textual, visual, and audiovisual documents from public archives (Stadtarchiv Stuttgart and Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg) and private libraries (of the interviewees mentioned before, notably Norbert Michel, Günther Seyfferth, and Wilhelm Kuttler). Finally, Indrawan attended a series of thematically relevant policy events in order to expand the scope and to thicken the qualitative data.

The invention of the fresh air route

In July 1949, at the height of summer, the comedy duo Häberle and Pfeilerer recorded a sketch called The Heat of Dog Day (*Hundstagshitze*).

After the comedians had guessed the temperature difference between the inside and outside of each room in their house, Pfeleiderer came up with the ridiculous idea of inventing an ice iron (*Bügeleisen*) to combat the extreme heat. Otherwise, he claimed, one was helpless in the summer because “the only thing I can do is do nothing”¹ (Reichert and Heiler 2016).

In the same year, the first meteorologist (Karl Schwalb²) who worked for the city of Stuttgart published a microclimate planning program to combat the urban heat. “The disadvantage of the metropolitan climate,” he wrote, “is that it weakens the human immune system against environmental influences and thus makes the citizens susceptible to diseases that have to be treated in hospitals every year” (Schwalb 1949). He framed the problem in terms of the health costs of treating these diseases. But, as he explained, not only were the city’s climate and economy intertwined, but the risk of extreme heat was also distributed volumetrically: During summer nights, those living in the city center on lower ground have to wait longer for the temperature to cool down, while houses on higher ground further from the city center are already cooler and the inhabitants can sleep earlier and longer.

Starting from the premise that the risk of extreme heat depended not only on solar radiation but also on the materiality of urban surfaces and air circulation, Schwalb understood that the climate of the metropolis (*das Großstadtklima*) depended on an artificial landscape that could be modified. Taking into account the city’s kettle-shaped topography, which not only reduces wind speed but also traps air pollution, the meteorologist identified the problem of fresh air supply (*Frischluftzufuhr*). The various sources of heat emission—from heated urban surfaces and buildings, industrial combustion, and other anthropogenic activities—were in conflict with the supply of fresh air, the only remedy for heat. Urban planners, he suggested, should consider where fresh air is generated and direct it toward the hottest parts of the city center. He wrote, “If the fresh air can flow unhindered into the Heselachtal and if it is strong enough, the urban area in the south and part of the city centre will soon be flooded (with fresh air) and the polluted air will be removed or lifted upwards. The construction work should therefore be coordinated in such a way that as few obstacles as possible stand in the way of this night-time supply of fresh air” (Schwalb 1949).

The impact of meteorological identification and protection of green spaces as fresh air corridors cannot be overestimated. In the post-war reconstruction plan for Stuttgart drawn up by the city’s building director, Walther Hoss (1949), he emphasized the importance of “green ribbons” (*grüne Bänder*), free of buildings, which would act as a climate-control device for the hotter areas at the foot of the city’s cauldron. On the occasion of the Federal Garden Exhibition (*Bundesgartenschau*) in Stuttgart in 1961, Klaus Eberhard (1961), a horticulturist from Constance, organized a public lecture about a 5-km pedestrian path from the district of Bad

Cannstatt to the city center, crossed only five times by car traffic, to show how the city promoted the preservation of “green areas” and the planning of “green zones.” In 1969, Jörg Martin Hamm, a geographer from Tübingen, was the first to map the airflows in the city center. His work would be crucial and would set a precedent for future policy measures. His map and Stuttgart’s first employed meteorologist, Karl Schwalb, played a prominent role in the documentary film “Urban Development and Urban Climate” that brought the city of Stuttgart to prominence, as it was presented in the very first meeting of UN Habitat in 1976 (Figures 16.1 and 16.2).

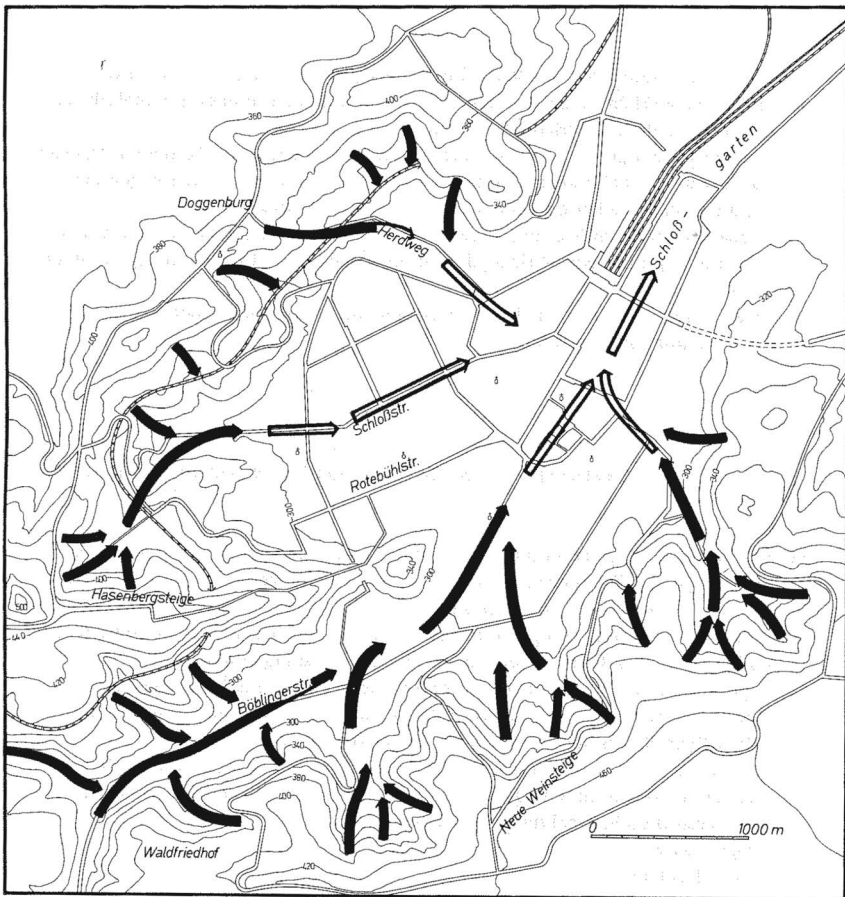


Figure 16.1 The first illustration of multiple arrows depicting airflows around and through the city center of Stuttgart.

Source: Hamm (1969, 92).



Figure 16.2 Stuttgart's first meteorologist explaining the map of airflows in the city center developed from Hamm's mapping.

Source: Scheef (1975, timestamp: 4'10").

How green these green spaces should be, how open these open spaces should be, and where they should be located and distributed began to be systematically cataloged for urban planning in the 1970s, when the State Ministry for Spatial Order, Construction and Urban Planning funded research projects on improving urban air and climate. The report *Regional Air Exchanges and Their Importance for the Spatial Planning* (Institut für Umweltschutz der Universität Dortmund 1979) is a culmination of these research projects. It defines key spatial terms, one of which is “climatic-ecological balancing performance,” which refers to the ability of unbuilt spaces to circulate air and reduce negative climatic effects and air pollution. Climatologists identified “climatically active” areas that produce fresh air and cool settlements, and then assessed the productivity of different landscape types of producing cool air, of which barren land and wasteland were considered the best producers, while dense forest was the worst.

In 1973, the Stuttgart Climatology Section set another milestone, when it produced the first microclimatic expert report (*Gutachten*) for three major building projects in the Killesberg area, following a local citizen

initiative's protest at the potential "climatic swap" (*Klimawechsel*) resulting from the planned high-rise buildings (Fach 1972). Based on the results of infrared thermography of the area, the Climatology Section detailed in its report the urban design parameters for optimizing local climates (*Lokalklimata*), such as the permissible degree of surface sealing (*Geschossflächenzahl*), the distance between buildings, the use of building materials, and the location of parking spaces (Landeshauptadt Stuttgart 1973). A few years later, in 1978, the Climatology Section published the results of the subsequent infrared thermography flight (Robel, Hoffmann, and Riekert 1979), which was an important input for the publication of the Climate Handbook for City-Making (*Städtebauliche Klimafibel*), a primer on climate-friendly urban design, in which the "heat island" was discussed, including how to combat it effectively by ensuring that "the distance from the fresh air reservoirs to the city centre should not be too great" and, most importantly, by determining exactly where the fresh and cool air should flow (Forschungsgemeinschaft Bauen und Wohnen 1978).

Since the 1990s, the term fresh air corridor (*Frischluftschneise*) has gradually replaced the older term fresh air supply (*Frischluftzufuhr*). In our interviews, both experts and laypeople use the latter term and consider the former to be old-fashioned. There is an interesting distinction between these two spatial figurations: Air supply requires policies aimed at preserving specific areas (e.g., fields, parks, and forests) that produce fresh and cool air, whereas air corridor means securing the volumetric routes through which air flows. Both spatial figures also imply different strategies of urban intervention, ranging from the protection of important green areas from the encroachment of human settlements (i.e., the preservation of a forest) to the preservation of the routes through which air flows in a fluctuating manner, passing through, rubbing against, and cooling the buildings.

Although the importance of fresh air corridors in Stuttgart is undeniable, the existing literature on the social history of urban climatology still mostly emphasizes the concept of climatope, which enables communication with experts outside climatology and knowledge exchange outside of Germany, e.g., with Japan (Hebbert and Jankovic 2013; Hebbert 2014). This social history misses at least two important points. First, in terms of origin, climatope was not born in Stuttgart. In the 1980s, urban climatologists in the Ruhr region began to analyze urban climate in terms of climatopes understood as smaller spatial units with a homogeneous microclimate (Brahe and Horbert 1983; Stock and Beckröge 1985; Stock et al. 1986). It was only later that the concept was incorporated into the 1992 Climate Atlas published by the Stuttgart District Association, thus combining the analysis of air currents with that of urban climatopes (Baumüller et al. 1992). Second, by focusing on the circulation of knowledge *outside*

of Germany, the existing social history ignores the interaction of the climate and the key concept of the fresh air corridor, and how the latter articulates conflicts *within* the city of Stuttgart. As we will show in the following section, it is the fresh air corridors that capture the imagination, set in motion, and frame conflicts over space in the city of Stuttgart.

Mobilizing aeroroutes in conflicts over space

In the 2000s, in the run-up to the local elections in 2009, Stuttgart was full of spatial conflicts. The conflicts involve various social actors, including state institutions (City Council, District Councils, Administrative Court), citizen groups, urban climatologists, architects, and land owners. They would have different motivations but share a key similarity: They are either for or against “aeroroutes” (Prabaharyaka 2024). Citizens’ groups often form coalitions with urban climatologists, who are often in an antagonistic relationship with their counterparts in other governmental agencies concerned with the construction or expansion of human settlements. Below, we present and reflect on three forms of spatial conflict—demonstration, litigation, and scientific controversy—over the use of space for either the protection and maintenance of aeroroutes or the densification of urban settlements.

Demonstration: The public evidence of air routes

Speaking on radio in 1990, Hansjörg Rist, a former urban planning advisor to the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of the Interior, predicted that the air corridor would remain an issue in the future: “I believe that under the pressure of events one should not be sad that it (the wind corridor) will be forgotten in the future, but rather that there will be more and more pressure from the public on the legislators, especially if the conditions get worse” (Rist 1990). And he was right. Especially in the 2000s, many citizens’ initiatives have formed or changed their demands in order to defend open spaces against the building plans of the city administration and private actors in the name of the climatic function of the fresh air corridors. One example is the “Schutzgemeinschaft Rohrer Weg” in the district of Möhringen, whose protest banner (see Figure 16.3) is paradigmatic for the zeitgeist of the period of increased politicization of urban air and climate. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, their demonstration eventually failed to stop the construction project on an orchard meadow in their neighborhood. In other cases, citizens have successfully defended these air corridors. The cases of Bad Cannstatt, Birkach, and the Killesberg district are good examples of this history of successful mobilization.

Interestingly, in many of these mobilizations, citizens protested against the city’s plans to build on open and green spaces, using maps produced



Figure 16.3 Rüdiger Reinboth and another member of the Conservation Society of Rohrer Weg showed a protest banner, “Fresh Air from Rohrer Weg, Fresher Wind in the City Council”

Source: Kai Müller.

by the city’s climatology department that made the air corridors visible. There is an interesting epistemic alliance, as these initiatives mobilize and demonstrate the knowledge produced by this department. Their demonstrations thus aim not only to publicly articulate their interests and values as citizens of Stuttgart but also to make scientific knowledge public and to create public evidence for the climatic value of the fresh air corridors. The creation of such an epistemic alliance does not simply result from the appropriation of climatological knowledge by the initiatives, but there is an explicit effort on the part of the department to make its knowledge public and to communicate and socialize climatological knowledge with the public.

Indeed, since at least the 1970s, the Climatology Department has sought to influence urban development projects by producing expert reports and models. Climate analyses, especially in the form of cartographies, began to be produced in a way that could be read by planners, policymakers, and politicians. Wolfgang Beckröge, an urban climatologist and member of the Greens in the Ruhr region, also noted that climate analyses used to be produced for three main audiences: Public and private companies involved in construction projects, politicians in the City Council, and urban planners in the city administration. In the case of Stuttgart, it was probably the publication of the CD STADTKLIMA-21 in 1997 that created an information

infrastructure aimed at the general public, making the department’s climatological knowledge available to everyone. Beckröge mentioned a fourth target group: “We no longer print the climate analysis reports in five hard copies. Now we can put them on the Internet, and citizens and their initiatives can use them for their own purposes.”

Indeed, as the climatological models began to reach not only an expert audience but also the citizens of Stuttgart, they began to change the language and framing of many protests against building projects along the fresh and cool air corridors. The cartography of urban climate developed for the 1992 Climate Atlas was then used by concerned citizens who learned about the mapping of fresh and cool air and climatopes and recruited fresh air corridors as allies in their cause. In contrast to citizens’ initiatives protesting to save a natural biotope or against noise and air pollution, many initiatives began to defend this particular climatic object, which the locals call by various names in addition to fresh air corridors (*Frischluftschneise*): cold air corridors (*Kaltluftschneise*), air drainage (*Luftabfluss*), airway (*Luftbahn*), and airflow (*Luftströmung*). Interestingly, the maps are used not only to demonstrate the existence of these corridors but also to show how new buildings and developments “devour” not only open spaces but also cold and fresh air.

Understanding this wave of protests as a demonstration of climatological knowledge allows us to highlight the epistemic practice of a “popular climatology” in which citizens engage. As with other issue-based publics or concerned groups, their aim is to demonstrate the existence of a problem so that authorities pay attention to it. As such, many of these groups also campaigned for political change in the city government. As the banner carried by Rohrer Weg activists in 2007 suggested, the demand for fresh air would require a wind of change in the city government. When Green Party politician Boris Palmer ran for Mayor in 2004, he was one of the few candidates to ally himself closely with the Schutzgemeinschaft Rohrer Weg, arguing that he would not allow any development in the area. He was not elected, but in 2009, the Greens won the local elections for the first time after decades of dominance by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its conservative coalition. With the Greens in power, many such mobilizations came to an end.

Although some of the citizens’ initiatives that protested against building projects in the 2000s are now dormant, the demands to protect the air corridors and the language and attention given to them have remained part of the citizens’ repertoire. The fresh air corridor is not only a concept that citizens use in everyday conversations about the city, but it is also part of their physical and sensory experiences. *Fresh air corridors* give concerned citizens a word that becomes a thing: an atmospheric and terrestrial pathway through which cool air sweeps hot air upwards, tempering local

climates close to the ground. It gives a name to an experience or an intensity. It is not just a spatial figure that can be drawn on a map and pointed at with a finger but an environment that can also be felt through our skin.

Litigations: The legal weight of fresh air routes

Citizens do not always form epistemic alliances with the urban climatology department. Occasionally, landowners have taken legal action to challenge planning decisions derived from the climatological analysis of fresh air corridors in the city of Stuttgart. Interestingly, in these cases, expert knowledge about fresh air corridors does not have to be proven, but rather weighed against other rights, instruments, and values.

The first legal challenges to the recommendations of the climatology department came in 2007, when the Hillside Development Plan was published (Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart 2008; Verwaltungsgerichtshof Baden-Württemberg 2014). This plan, based on a diploma thesis supported and supervised by the Urban Climatology Section, aims to protect the city's climate by recommending further restrictions on new development on the slopes of Stuttgart, through which fresh and cool air flows from the green areas at higher altitudes into the city center. At the same time, as the plan was published, and in one case shortly before its publication, two landowners applied for building permits. On the basis of the Framework Plan, however, the District Council of Stuttgart West decided first to impose a development freeze and later to reject the building permits applied for, even though the planned construction projects were permitted by the legally binding development plan (*Bebauungsplan*). In 2010, the landowners appealed, arguing that the Framework Plan was not legally binding and could not be equated with an integral urban development instrument, such as the existing development plan. In dismissing the appeal, the Administrative Court argued that, although the Framework Plan was not legally binding, it was perfectly legal for the District Council to use it as a guide, as it had to balance private and public interests when making its decision. The court also emphasized that, although the framework plan was a form of "negative" planning, in the sense that it restricted development, it had a "positive" aim of ensuring the existence of the fresh air corridors.

A new development plan for the Oberer Hasenberg/Nordhang area of Stuttgart was published in July 2011. This area covers the higher elevations of one of the northern slopes of the Stuttgart Valley, an area that was mainly built up with detached and semi-detached houses according to a 1902 development plan and 1935 local building regulations. With the new development plan, the city significantly restricted new construction in the area. This change was in line with the objectives of the 2007 Hillside Development Plan. Among other things, the new development plan creates

private green spaces in previously developed areas in order to protect existing fresh air corridors. Interestingly, the planners explain that the climatic assessment of individual building modifications faces a “problem of scale” when it comes to quantifying their effects, as they cannot be proven for each individual house or building. The new plan therefore relies on a qualitative assessment based on the accumulated scientific experience of the Urban Climatology Section, a municipal department that they note has been working in the city for more than 70 years.

Shortly before the plan was officially published, the City Council made the final draft available to the public for one month. On the last day of the review period, a non-profit organization running a state-accredited school and two private landowners submitted a series of objections to the new development plan. The educational institution argued that the plan would perpetuate an arbitrary building structure without any underlying urban design concept and that new constructions in the unbuilt areas would have no impact on the urban climate. They also requested that the buildable area for their plot be amended to allow for future development, especially given that other plots had seen their buildable area increase. The City Council (*Gemeinderat*) did not consider the objections and approved the plan. It argued that the school site contained high-quality biotopes and supported “the thermally induced air exchange close to the ground, which contributes to the improvement of air hygiene conditions in the western basin in the form of nocturnal downslope winds. Building extensions in the area of the northern slope of the Hasenberg would have a negative impact on the night-time flow of cold air for both wind dynamic and thermal reasons” ([Verwaltungsgerichtshof Baden-Württemberg 2014](#), §22, own translation).

Not satisfied with the negative response, the landowners filed for Judicial Review (*Normenkontrollverfahren*). They argued both against the withdrawal of the existing building rights, which in practice would amount to a form of expropriation, and, more specifically, against the lack of climatological evidence to justify the changes so that the entire development plan should be declared invalid. They then formulated three key arguments concerning the projected impact of construction on the climatic function of the area. The first argument was that their property was located on the border between a densely populated area and a large open and wooded area. Taking into account the large open area, they argued that the proposed development within the plot would not alter the overall climatic effect of the area. The second argument was that the development plan covered a relatively small area (5 ha out of more than 800 ha covered by the Hillside Development Plan), so the impact on the urban climate would also be minimal. They argued that if the area had more extensive climatic significance, a climate study would have been required.

Third, they argued that the city's Green Space Plan already distinguishes between areas that are climatically highly sensitive and those that are only sensitive to the change of use. The plots in question, they underlined, were in sensitive areas and not in highly sensitive areas.

Almost three years later, on December 18, 2014, the Administrative Court of Baden-Württemberg issued its decision, rejecting the landowner's appeal. The core of the court's reasoning is an assessment of the relative legal weight of the fresh air corridors. This relative weighing first begins with the argument against the revocation of building rights. As the court explains, there is no planning principle that precludes the revocation of existing planning permission, but such overregulation can only be justified on grounds of public interest, such as the preservation of the urban climate by means of fresh air corridors. Since the city of Stuttgart has a climate characterized by a lack of wind and ventilation and other climatic impairments, previously granted building rights could be revoked (§§82, 83, 85). Second, the court discusses the problem of scale in the climatological assessment of building projects. On the one hand, it is argued that climatological knowledge does not operate at the level of individual buildings but at the level of larger areas. On the other hand, there is evidence that an individual building can have a measurable impact on the fresh air corridors. Interestingly, the court invited an urban climatologist, Silke Drautz, as an expert witness. She gave oral evidence of the relative lack of cold air corridors in the western part of Stuttgart and their vulnerability and sensitivity to any building intervention. On the basis of this evidence, the Court rejected the landowner's request for a second expert opinion, arguing that the scientific evidence was univocal.

The judicialization of conflicts over air corridors is thus a crucial moment in which it is not the physical existence or beneficial effects of air corridors that are at stake, but their legal weight. This involves both contesting and assessing the status of the policy instruments that protect them, especially as they may conflict with other urban policy instruments, and the extent to which their climatic function legitimately restricts the property rights of individual landowners. In both cases, the ability of planning to strike a balance between mutually exclusive values or rights is called into question. Interestingly, it is the Court that will have to rule on the existence of an integral and balanced approach to planning.

Controversies: The scientific uncertainty of fresh air routes

While the Court considers the climatological findings unambiguous and does not question the expertise of the experts, there are other conflicts that take the form of controversies over the scientific basis of climatological claims and recommendations. Such technoscientific controversies have

accompanied the climatology of fresh air routes from an early stage. In an interview with Wilhelm Kuttler, an urban climatologist from Essen, Germany, he recalled that, in the 1970s, he had argued with his fellow climatologists about whether such air corridors existed at all. At that time, it was not yet common climatological knowledge that such strong airflows could occur in the volume space up to 5 m above the ground. Instead, climatological models assumed that the air was moving as a huge mass in the lower atmosphere. But while this was a purely scientific controversy between climate scientists, since the 2000s, we have seen expert controversies over planning decisions, fueled by citizens themselves.

A case in point is the District of Bad Cannstatt. In December 2006, Jürgen Lessat, a journalist and one of the founders of the Fresh Air for Cannstatt (*Frischlucht für Cannstatt*) citizens' initiative, reported that Stuttgart's Finance Mayor, a CDU politician, had designated some green spaces, including the meadows along Rommelshäuser Strasse, as building land. The Urban Climatology Section prepared an expert report based on three computer models to estimate the climatological effects of converting green spaces into buildings and found that “together with the Cannstatter *Wäsen* landscape, the slopes mentioned here (near to Rommelshäuser Straße) have a positive effect on air exchange, especially for the south of Bad Cannstatt, and create a separation between the residential and industrial areas of Untertürkheim and Bad Cannstatt” (*Abteilung Stadtklimatologie* 2008). In 2008, senior urban climatologist Ulrich Hoffmann presented the results of the study several times at the District Council's meetings and press releases. He advised against the development because the houses would block one of the last fresh air corridors with a direct and intact connection to the Neckar basin.

In February 2008, the District Council of Bad Cannstatt summoned Hoffmann to a meeting with the Environment and Technology Committee to explain how and to what extent individual houses could change the air temperature, a question Hoffmann could not fully answer because one of the models did not show the exact percentage of reduction in estimated cool air volume, although it clearly showed the visual simulation of how and to what extent the airflow and wind speed would be blocked by the planned buildings. After the meeting, Roland Schmid, a CDU politician, declared that “a neutral expert is better,” and the CDU coalition government, through the Urban Planning and Renewal Agency, commissioned an external expert assessment on the issue. Wilhelm Kuttler and his team of urban climatologists from the University of Duisburg-Essen produced a new report based on a 24-hour field measurement from May 8 to 9, 2008 (*Kuttler, Dütemeyer, and Barlag* 2008). The report described the observation that night-time cool airflow was weak and transient and estimated that the first building scenario (10–15 houses on 1.3 ha, plus 0.2 ha for

parks and parking lots) would reduce cool airflow by 1.9%, while the second scenario (20–25 houses on 2.3 ha) would reduce it by 3.2%. According to Ulrich Reuter, then head of the Urban Climatology Section, these data were interpreted by the politicians who supported the building projects as a confirmation that the climatic effect of building these 10–25 houses would be marginal, even though the report explicitly stated in bold letters that “in the case of a potential, successive expansion of the planning area on the remaining cold air production areas within the Rommelshäuser Straße valley, a negative impact on the climatic functions of the Rommelshäuser Straße valley cannot be ruled out” (Kuttler, Dütemeyer, and Barlag 2008).

In an interview with us, Ulrich Hoffman recalled a similar case in another part of the city in the 1980s, where the consultant stated in his report that a building of one-fifth the size of the area studied would not have a major impact. The statement was then manipulated: “The expert recommends building on a fifth of the area! Thanks to a careful town planner involved in the case, the area has not been built on to this day. But it was a lesson learned that urban climatological recommendations are hardly ever feasible if you allow the conversion of space ‘little by little’. This brings us to the question of the scalability of urban climatology, because the scientific knowledge and the scale of its implementation must go together, and only then will it lead in the right conceptual direction” (April 25, 2024, offline). By the time a decision had to be made on the planned construction project around Rommelshäuser Straße, the governing coalition in Stuttgart had changed and the Greens had a majority, so the plan was rejected and shelved.

A different kind of controversy took place in 2018 in the city of Esslingen, which is part of the Stuttgart Metropolitan Area. Since 2016, the citizens’ initiative, Rettet das Greut e.V., has been protesting against the city’s plans to build housing in the cool air corridors of Geißelbachtal (Holoch 2016). The protest intensified in 2018, when the plan was changed and more buildings were allowed to be built: 90 instead of the originally planned 70 apartments on an area of 14,500 m², one of Esslingen’s fresh air corridors (Holoch 2018). The city commissioned an expert report from the climatology consultancy Ökoplana, which confirmed that the area has an important climatic function for the flow of cold air into the city. However, it was concluded that the proposed development would only reduce the airflow by 1%. The citizens’ initiative hired another consultancy, Modus Consult, to critically unpack Ökoplana’s report. They questioned the KLAM 21 climate model used by Ökoplana on the grounds that it did not work with real data, assumed ideal conditions, and was overly simplistic. They pointed out that the actual impact may be very different from what is assumed in the model. For the citizens’ initiative, the report submitted

by Ökoplana is considered nothing more than a “favours report” (*Gefälligkeitsgutachten*). In the end, the city decided to go ahead with the construction of the housing units, arguing that the effect was small and that the supply of fresh air to the corridor was not that relevant for the city as a whole.

These two controversies are good examples of the epistemic uncertainties surrounding the climatological knowledge of fresh air corridors, particularly concerning the scale and methods of expert assessment. In both cases, city governments closed the controversy by making decisions without addressing the underlying epistemic uncertainties. However, in the field of urban climatology, these uncertainties remain an open area of controversy.

Dieter Scherer, Professor of Climatology at the Technical University of Berlin, argues that most climatologists are extremely dogmatic about building restrictions to protect fresh air corridors and thus wrongly assume that the best solution is to avoid building at all costs. The problem, he argues, is that most climatologists are still thinking in terms of airflow models from the past, where cool air is imagined to be like cool water flowing through a city. “This is completely wrong,” says Scherer in an interview with us. As part of a research project, Scherer has developed sophisticated software to model not only the wind but also the swirls, or turbulence, that play the most important role in the circulation of air. “Cool air can circulate through the roof, through the courtyard, and can also develop on a green façade and roof.” In a newspaper article, Scherer noted, “Sometimes it is enough to change the shape or layout of a building to maintain the cooling effect (of wind corridors)” (April 24, 2023, online). His argument is that, with the sophistication of computer modeling, climatologists and planners can visualize urban atmospheric turbulence better than before and thus optimize a building block plan so that, if the buildings follow certain planning and design rules, the air can still circulate.

Many urban climatologists who continue to argue against any kind of development in climatically valuable open and green spaces point to the uncertainties of the computer models used to calculate airflows. For Rainer Kapp, the current Head of the Stuttgart Urban Climatology Section, a model is nothing more than a model, one reference among many available for making planning recommendations. The Section, he said, is privileged to have access to several models that allow urban climatologists to formulate recommendations on how to better preserve the fresh air corridors, taking into account several aspects. In addition to the models, they also take into account the logic of urban planning, which is mostly driven by the imperative of economic growth, allowing for new buildings that disrupt airflows and can end up as aesthetic eyesores. Expert controversies over the climatic effects of air corridors are thus never a purely technical

issue, but they do highlight the epistemic uncertainties surrounding the assessment of fresh air corridors.

Spatial figures and frictions

As we have demonstrated in this study, the climatological knowledge of fresh air corridors fuels spatial conflicts in Stuttgart in different ways: It strengthens the demonstrations of citizens' initiatives on the climatic importance of fresh air corridors, it overrides existing planning regulations and individual building rights, leading to their judicialization, and it remains fraught with epistemic uncertainties, thus opening up space for planning controversies. Despite the different valuations of fresh air corridors in such conflicts, they form a recognizable spatial figuration for all actors involved: citizens, lawyers, climatologists, and planners, allowing for connections and translations between these different battlegrounds. As a spatial figuration, the fresh air corridor entails a specific topographical imagination of the city as a space traversed by flows, which is radically opposed to the most common spatial figurations of the city as a more or less compact urban territory. Indeed, in most of the conflicts surrounding the fresh air corridors, the latter are seen as contradicting the ideal of urban densification that is ubiquitous in current debates on housing shortages and is relevant to climate change mitigation.

One concept that captures this more traditional spatial figuration is that of "settlement pressure," a concept that came up in a panel discussion at the Day of the Regions in Cottbus (June 14, 2023). Tina Fuchs, manager of a real estate lobby organization, the Zentraler Immobilien Ausschuss, described the current situation in many German cities as one of increased settlement pressure, a situation that would require cities to become more active in filling the gaps within urban areas and beyond their boundaries. Her presentation sparked a debate on the causes of this "settlement pressure." Migration, intergenerational effects, and empty housing stock were much discussed as interconnected causes, but the very existence and the increase in such settlement pressure seemed obvious to all. Interestingly, the term first appeared historically in the records of the West German Parliament in the 1960s to describe the tendency of urban settlements to expand and agglomerate beyond the administrative boundaries of the city, converting forests and farmlands into buildings ([Deutscher Bundestag 1966](#)). The pressure began later to be calculated with regard to increases in the population aged 20–45 and the creation of new households per square kilometer ([Gatzweiler 1993](#)). Interestingly, planners conceptualized settlement pressure as an urban phenomenon leading to "a more rational use of land" ([Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz 1992](#)). Around the same time, the concept began to be discussed by urban climatologists. Wolfgang

Beckröge, an urban climatologist working in the Ruhr area, argued in a paper co-authored with an urban planner that the encroachment of settlement pressure on the green belt of many German cities was an important factor to be considered in the spatial analysis of urban climate, as it had a negative impact on urban air hygiene (Reiß-Schmidt and Beckröge 1993).

The conflict between “settlement pressure” and “fresh air corridors” that we can trace in Stuttgart speaks thus of a more general friction between different figurations of the city: one that figures the city as a compact territory with clear boundaries and increasing homogeneity toward the inside, and another that figures the city as zone crisscrossed by different trajectories and flows connecting the city core with different spaces beyond the city boundaries. Interestingly, the friction between these two ways of figuring urban space is at play in many conflicts of the present, such as the existing incompatibility between the goals of climate mitigation and climate adaptation. The need to adapt cities to future environmental disasters, especially those associated with the risk of heavy rainfall and flooding, requires cities to leave large open green spaces for the management of these water flows. These measures are clearly at odds with the figuration of a carbon-neutral city, which relies on dense renewable energy and housing infrastructures. Thus, whereas climate mitigation requires higher housing densities, climate adaptation requires low and noncompact building arrangements to allow space for airflow.

Frictions between figurations of the city are indeed a constant source of conflicts between urban climatologists and ecologists on the one hand, and urban planners on the other. “My message would be,” said Nicole Baumüller, a Stuttgart planner we interviewed (February 9, 2024, online), “that urban climatologists need to have an understanding of the language of urban planning.” Urban climatologists addressed their agendas sometimes like lobbyists, which is understandable in her view, as they have the role to submit their professional knowledge within the planning process. But, from the point of view of planning, it must be clear that urban climate is just one issue that planners deal with. Planners, she argued, are a bit like mediators which have to bring different actors and issues together by weighting them (*Abwägung*) and finding compromises. Sometimes urban climate issues are higher ranked, in other cases less so. For Rainer Kapp, head of the climatology department, their job is indeed to impose restrictions: “We rarely give praise,” he says (May 5, 2023, offline). “We give criticism. Sometimes the planners take it personally. That’s understandable, because we often have killer arguments for proposals that are normally possible in other places. Our working relationship [between urban climatologists and planners] is not always free of conflict.” The conflict, however, arises not only from professional roles but also from differing conceptualizations of urban spaces and, consequently, different spatial logics and topologies.

Notes

- 1 “S’Einzige, was mr tun kann, ist nix tun.”
- 2 Karl Schwalb is not an unproblematic character. Being conscripted to the Wehrmacht, he was close to the Nazi regime. He was also suspected of corruptions and mismanagement. This disclaimer is intended to decenter him as a single meteorologist and reposition him as part of the wider intellectual networks that constituted the production of climatological knowledge and urban spaces. It was not uncommon in this period for meteorologists to be employed in the public administration of German-speaking governments.

References

- Abteilung Stadtklimatologie. 2008. *Das Stadtklima als Planungsfaktor in Bad Cannstatt* [Urban Climate as Planning Factor in Bad Cannstatt]. Stuttgart: Abteilung Stadtklimatologie.
- Baumüller, Jürgen, Ulrich Hoffmann, Torsten Nagel, and Ulrich Reuter. 1992. *Klimaatlas Stuttgart* [Climate Atlas of Stuttgart]. Stuttgart: Nachbarschaftsverband Stuttgart.
- Brahe, Peter, and Manfred Horbert. 1983. *Klimaökologisches Gutachten Mühleheim* [Climate-Ecological Assessment of Mühleheim]. Essen - Berlin: Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet.
- Deutscher Bundestag. 1966. *Raumordnungsbericht 1966 der Bundesregierung* [1966 Spatial Order Report of the Federal Government]. V/1155. Bonn: Bonner Universitäts-Buchdruckerei.
- Eberhard, Klaus. 1961. “Hilfe Durch Grün [How Green Spaces Help].” *Bundesgartenschau Stuttgart 1961*. Bonn: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Garten- und Landschaftskultur im Zentralverband des deutschen Gartenbaues.
- Fach, Gert. 1972. “Killesbergler befürchten Klimawechsel [Killesberg Residents Fear of Climate Shift].” *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, April 26, 1972.
- Forschungsgemeinschaft Bauen und Wohnen. 1978. *Städtebauliche Klimafibel* [Climate Handbook for City Making]. Stuttgart: Druckerei Georg Günthner.
- Gatzweiler, Hans-Peter. 1993. “Metropolen oder Mittelstädte?: Siedlungspolitik Für Agglomerationsräume in den 90er Jahren [Metropolis or Medium Cities?: Settlement Policy for Agglomeration Spaces in the 1990s].” *Raumforschung und Raumordnung | Spatial Research and Planning* 51 (4): 175–184. <https://doi.org/10.14512/rur.2107>
- Hamm, Jörg Martin. 1969. “Untersuchungen zum Stadtklima von Stuttgart [Investigations of Urban Climate of Stuttgart].” Tübinger Geographische Studien. PhD diss., University of Tübingen.
- Hebbert, Michael. 2014. “Climatology for City Planning in Historical Perspective.” *Urban Climate* 10 (December): 204–215. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.uclim.2014.07.001>
- Hebbert, Michael, and Vladimir Jankovic. 2013. “Cities and Climate Change: The Precedents and Why They Matter.” *Urban Studies* 50 (7): 1332–1347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098013480970>
- Holoch, Kai. 2016. “Gleiche Erkenntnis – Ganz anderes Ergebnis [Same Knowledge – Totally Different Conclusion].” *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, July 2, 2016.
- Holoch, Kai. 2018. “Maßlose Pläne für das Baugebiet Greut [Excessive Planning for the Building Area of Greut].” *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, July 6, 2018.

- Hoss, Walther. 1949. “Aufbauplan der Stadt Stuttgart [Reconstruction Plan of the City of Stuttgart].” *Die Neue Stadt. Zeitschrift für die Gestaltung Von Stadt Und Land* 3 (2): 50–58.
- Institut für Umweltschutz der Universität Dortmund. 1979. *Regionale Luftaustauschprozesse und ihre Bedeutung für die räumliche Planung* [Regional Air Exchanges and Their Importance for Spatial Planning]. 32. Raumordnung. Bonn: Bundesminister für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau.
- Kuttler, Wilhelm, Dirk Dütemeyer, and Andreas-Bent Barlag. 2008. *Klimatologisches Gutachten zur Beurteilung der Stadtklimatischen Auswirkungen einer zusätzlichen Baugebietsdarstellung im Bereich Rommelshäuser Straße in Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt*. [Climatological Examination for the Assessment of Urban Climatic Effects of an additional Building Area at Rommelshäuser Street in Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt]. Essen: Abteilung Angewandte Klimatologie und Landschaftsökologie, Universität Duisburg-Essen.
- Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart. 1973. *Hauptakte: Klimagutachten für den Stuttgarter Norden I* [Main File: Climate Examination I of Stuttgart-Nord]. Stuttgart: Stadtarchiv.
- Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart. 2008. *Rahmenplan Halbhöhenlagen* [Hillside Development Plan]. Stuttgart: Abteilung Siedtebauliche Planung Mitte.
- Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz. 1992. *Siedlungsdruck und Bodenverfügbarkeit: Studien zur künftigen Siedlungsentwicklung in den Großstadt-Ballungsräumen* [Settlement Pressure and Land Availability: Studies of Future Settlement Development in the Metropolis-Conurbation]. Wien: Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz.
- Prabaharyaka, Indrawan. 2024. “The Aeroroutes of Stuttgart.” *Anthropology News*, February 2024. Accessed December 5, 2024. <https://www.anthropology-news.org/articles/the-aeroroutes-of-stuttgart/>
- Reichert, Willy, and Oscar Heiler. 2016. *Häberle und Pfeiderer – Hundstagshitze und andere Sketche* [Dog Day Heat and Other Sketches] Tübingen: Silberburg-Verlag.
- Reiß-Schmidt, Stephan, and Wolfgang Beckröge. 1993. “Einbeziehung Klimatische und lufthygienischer Fragen in die Landes- und Regionalplanung [Incorporating Climatic and Air Hygiene Issues into State and Regional Planning].” In *Luft-hygiene Und Klima*, edited by Kommission Reinhaltung der Luft, Hans Schirmer, Wilhelm Kuttler, Jürgen Löbel, and Konradin Weber, 58–86. Berlin: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-51160-8_2
- Rist, Hansjörg. 1990. *Vorstellung einer städtebaulichen Klimafibel* [Presenting Climate Handbook for Urban Design]. Stuttgart: Südfunk 1.
- Robel, Franz, Ulrich Hoffmann, and Anselm Riekert. 1979. *Daten und Aussagen zum Stadtklima von Stuttgart auf der Grundlage der Infrarot-Thermographie* [Data and Statements of Urban Climate of Stuttgart based on Infrared Thermography]. Stuttgart: Chemisches Untersuchungsamt der Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart, Klimatologische Abteilung.
- Scheef, Roland. 1975. *Stadtklimatologie am Beispiel Stuttgart* [Urban Climatology Using the Example of Stuttgart]. Stuttgart: Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart.
- Schutzgemeinschaft Rohrer Weg. 2008. *Flächen-und Kaltluftfraß ca. 1988* [The Devoured Land and Cool Air Around 1988]. Stuttgart: Schutzgemeinschaft Rohrer Weg.
- Schwalb, Karl. 1949. “Klimaplanung der Stadt Stuttgart [Climate Planning of the City of Stuttgart].” *Die neue Stadt. Zeitschrift für die Gestaltung von Stadt und Land* 3 (2): 68–72.

- Stock, Peter, and Wolfgang Beckröge. 1985. *Klimaanalyse Stadt Essen* [Climate Analysis of the City of Essen]. Essen: Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet.
- Stock, Peter, Wolfgang Beckröge, Olaf Kiese, Wilhelm Kuttler, and Herbert Lüftner. 1986. *Klimaanalyse Stadt Dortmund* [Climate Analysis of the City of Dortmund]. P018. Planungshefte Ruhrgebiet. Essen: Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet.
- Turner, Jonathan H. 2015. "Sociological Theory." In *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, edited by James D. Wright, 954–964. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Verwaltungsgerichtshof Baden-Württemberg. 2014. *Normenkontrollantrag im Zusammenhang mit dem Rahmenplan "Halbhöhenlagen" der Landeshauptstadt* [Request of Norm Inspection in Relation to the Hillside Development Plan of the Capital City of Stuttgart]. Mannheim: Verwaltungsgerichtshof Baden-Württemberg.

Index

Note: Page references in *italics* denote figures, in **bold** tables and with “n” endnotes.

- accommodate-and-hope approach 144–145, 151–152, 157
- action: collective 185–186, 196, 204, 222; communicative 4, 15, 31, 101, 116–117, 136; social 6, 32, 76, 136; spatial 4, 14, 131, 137
- actors 186–187; climate justice 344–346, 345; individual 10; and interaction networks 344–346, 345; social 10, 34, 36, 38, 40, 100, 270, 359; state 102, 142, 147, 160, 340
- Adams, Paul C. 339
- adaptation 311, 318; climate 20, 352–369; micro-climatic heat 41; and restoration 317–318; socioecological transformation 317–318
- aeroroutes: mobilizing in conflicts over space 359–368; protection/maintenance of 359
- African Development Bank 195
- Africanity 73
- Afrocontemporary aesthetic 75
- Afrovellas 71, 74; multiple spatialities of health care in 86–88, 87
- Afropolitanism 73
- Agnew, John 268
- agonism 8, 323
- Airbnb: Amsterdam 147–149; Berlin 149–150, 151; dataset and variables 145–146; enforcement modes 144–145, 146; London 151–153, 152; marketplace in European cities 140–160; marketplace in US 140–160; New York City 153–155, 154; overview 140–141; refiguration of spaces 141–142; regulatory responses 143–144; regulatory stance 144, 146; San Francisco 155–157, 156; spatial conflicts 142–143
- Alderman, Derek H. 296
- algorithmic regulation: across digital spaces 140–160; across physical spaces 140–160
- Amman, Jordan 19, 222–229; forcibly displaced people in 213–231; humanitarian agency 231; humanitarian assistance for refugees in 230; international/national interest 225–227; refugees and host community 227–229
- Amnesty international 232n1
- “area boy” 217, 220, 232n2
- Argentina 59–60
- Assmann, Aleida 292
- Assmann, Jan 290
- asymmetries 55–60, 66, 198, 206
- auto-construction 195–196, 203–204
- Badiei, Farzaneh 111–112, 114
- ban-and-restore approach 144, 157
- Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference 225
- Bastos, Marco T. 337
- Bauder, Harald 54
- Baumüller, Jürgen 354
- Baumüller, Nicole 369
- Baykan, Barış Gençer 339

- Beck, Koloma 7
- Beckröge, Wolfgang 360–361, 368–369
- Bell Yembel, Jacques Merlin 78
- Bennett, W. Lance 335
- Berlin: Airbnb 149–150, 151; daily life within territory of controlled places 272–279; eventization of queer space 125–131; grappling with spatial conflicts 274–277; queer spatial conflict 121–137
- Biden, Joe 108
- Black Lives Matter movement 339
- Bock, Seraja 314, 323
- Boko Haram 61, 215, 232n1
- borders: closures 56–57, 60; as conflictual spaces 55; demarcations 65; integration measures 52; on the internet 97–117; intraregional 65; regional integration projects 55
- Bourdieu, Pierre 240
- Brehmer, Marten 296
- Brenner, Neil 3
- British Empire 244
- Buckridge, Chris 114
- Bürgerinitiative Frischluftschneise Nord (Citizen Initiative Fresh Air Corridor North) 353
- Butollo, Florian 8
- cage: Berlin and Lima 272–279; daily life within territory of controlled places 272–279; drawing and talking about 265–267; growing up (un)knowingly in 264–283; place identity 279–282; spatial conflicts 279–282; spatialization of conflicts 267–271; spatial knowledge 267–271; territory 279–282; young people’s conflictive spatial knowledge 282–283; youths conflictful/less spatial knowledge 279–282
- Caldeira, Teresa 192
- Cape Town: eventization of queer space 125–131; location sharing 131–134; queer spatial conflict 121–137; territorialization 134–136
- car-dependent commuters 315
- case studies: of Rostock 287–289; of Solingen 287–289
- C’est la Vie!* 80–82, 81
- Ćetković, Stefan 323
- Chojnacki, Sven 6, 34
- Christian Democratic Union (CDU) 361
- circulation 12, 14–15, 230, 355, 358, 367; free 52, 58; international 14; multiple 73
- class: conflicts 312, 353; immigrant lower-class labor 250–254, 251–254
- cleavages 33
- climate activism: conflictual space and 334–339; intra-movement solidarities and tensions 334–339
- climate adaptation: and climate mitigation 369; figurational politics of 352–369
- climate change 340–341, 341
- Climate Handbook for City-Making (*Städtebauliche Klimafibel*) 358
- climate justice: actors and interaction networks 344–346, 345; and climate change 340–341, 341; interconnections between dimensions 346–347, 347; issue spaces 342–344, 343, 344; negotiating 339–347; spatial figures 346–347, 347
- climate justice conflicts: conflictual space and climate activism 334–339; intra-movement solidarities/tensions 334–339; negotiating climate justice 339–347; spatial conflicts and climate policy 332–334; spatial dimension of 330–348
- climate justice movements 309, 310, 338
- climate policy: one location, multiple claims 332–334; and spatial conflicts 332–334
- “climatic swap” (*Klimawechsel*) 358
- Coal and Steel Treaty 50
- collaborative research centers (CRCs) 27–29, 35–36
- collective action 185–186
- collective actors 186–187
- collective memories 237, 288, 290–293, 298–301
- collective physical violence 239

- Collins, Randall 29
 Comaroff, Jean 76
 Comaroff, John L. 76
 commodification 204–208
 communication 15, 31, 332, 334, 358; civilian 109; deliberative forms of 104; digital 6; global 6, 99; Internet-based 5, 109–110; mediated 335; network 5–6; political 112; public 5, 339, 342; researchers 348; social media 339; styles 44; telegraph 102
 communicative actions 4, 15, 31, 101, 116–117, 136
 community: food courts as heart of 247–248, 247–249; hawkers centers as heart of 247–248, 247–249
 community land 174–176
 Community Land Act of 2016 (Kenya) 172–173
 conflict(s): containment 13–15, 40–42; externalization as transnational 321–322; fields of 15–16; housing/food as scarce resources 240–241; and informal settlements 194–195; institutionalization of 33; intensity and forms of 31–32; of modernities 71–88; and refiguration 1–3; regulation 312–313; social groups in 238–239; in social science 29–35; socioecological transformation 313–318; sources of 240–241; spatial forms of 167–188; spatialization of 267–271; topics and lines of 318–322; trajectories to 29–31
 conflict in space: in Nairobi, Kenya 170–173; and refiguration 3–5; studies of 5–7
 conflictive spatial knowledge 264–283
 conflict–space relations 37–42; conflict containment 40–42; conflictual spaces 39–40; constellations of 43; spatial conflicts 37–39
 conflictual spaces 3, 18–19, 39–40, 332; borders as 55; and climate activism 334–339; of inequality 198–199; informal settlements in Nairobi as 198–199; (re)making of 191–209; overview 27–29, 28; pacifying by containing conflicts in infrastructure 237–238; and spatial conflicts 10–11; (in)visibilizing in urban infrastructure 237–261
 consolidation: auto-construction and new conflicts 203–204; phase of 203–204
 container space 185
 content delivery networks (CDNs) 111–112
 contested spaces 296–301
 context dependency of conflict 44
 contextures/contexts 8, 13; cultural 27, 41, 79; historical 79; local and global 73; official or institutional 293; political 28; scalar 338, 345–347; social 27, 241; socio-cultural 241; sociospatial 41; temporal and spatial 310; urban 228, 265
 Copenhagen Climate Summit 339
 coping mechanisms 20, 30, 272–274, 276–280
 Coser, Lewis A. 7, 313
 “counter-epistemologies” 320
 COVID-19 pandemic 317
 Cox, Murray 145
 Crawford, Alice 123
 Creswell, Tim 268
 cultural conflict: conflictual spaces 28; socioecological transformation as 319–321
 Dahrendorf, Ralf 7, 13, 30, 41–42, 312, 313
 Dakota Access Pipeline (#NoDAPL) 342, 343
 Dalal, Ayham 214
 de Certeau, Michel 77
 de-globalization 7–10
 desiderata 322–324
 De Souza e Silva, Adriana 122
 Dewitt, Lori 337
 Diagne, Souleymane Bachir 73
 digital infrastructure 37, 44, 100, 137
 digital media 331, 335, 337
 digital mediatization 10, 16, 18, 99–100, 121, 125, 132, 136–137
Digital Medusa initiative 111
 digital railroad spaces 117
 digital spaces 17–18, 140–160

- distribution conflict: within society 318–319; socioecological transformation as 318–319
- Dobrusskin, Janina 254, 260
- “donor countries” 225
- dormant-objective spatial conflicts 274
- Dowler, Lorraine 6
- Dünne, Jörg 77
- Eberhard, Klaus 355
- ecology 20–21
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) 50, 50–51, 52; economic conflicts 55–57; security conflicts 61–62
- economic conflicts 55–60; comparison of regions 60; ECOWAS 55–57; EU 57–58; Mercosur 58–60
- economic development 54, 240, 251, 261, 334
- economic integration 52–53
- Elias, Norbert 3–4, 240, 312
- emotions/affects 3, 74, 82, 265, 270, 281
- energy transition 313–314
- Engels, Bettina 6, 34
- entanglement 10, 72, 76, 80, 183, 237
- epistemic cultures 15
- ethnicity 238, 250–254, 251–254
- ethnographic investigation 78–80
- Etzold, B. Benjamin 218
- European Commission 310, 316
- European Court of Justice 62
- European Fridays for Future 337
- European Green Deal 309
- European Network Against Racism (ENAR) 63
- European Union (EU) 50, 51, 309, 316, 321; economic conflicts 57–58; security conflicts 62–63
- eventization of queer space 125–131
- Eversberg, Dennis 320
- externalization as transnational conflict 321–322
- Extinction Rebellion 310
- Farm Structure Survey 316
- Federal Garden Exhibition (*Bundesgartenschau*), Stuttgart 355
- Fedorov, Mykhailo 103
- Ferguson, Niall 4, 11
- figurational politics of climate adaptation 352–369
- figurations of conflict 167–188
- figure: emblematic 85; spatial 3–5, 11–19, 31, 34, 38, 40, 42, 97, 116, 124–125, 130, 134, 136–137, 194, 199, 213–214, 225, 264, 268, 283n2, 333, 346–347, 368–369; territorial 14; topographical 354; topological 14
- food: as scarce resources 240–241; as sources of conflict 240–241; transition 316–317
- food courts: as heart of community 247–248, 247–249; social conflicts 247–249
- forcibly displaced people: in Amman 213–231; in Lagos 213–231
- foreign direct investments 191
- Fraser, Nancy 30
- Free Movement Protocol 61
- Fremd im eigenen Land* 302n1
- fresh air corridors 361; and settlement pressure 369; of Stuttgart 352–369
- Fresh Air for Cannstatt (*Frischluft für Cannstatt*) citizens’ initiative 365
- fresh air routes: invention of 354–359, 356, 357; legal weight of 362–364; public evidence of 359–362; scientific uncertainty of 364–368
- Freuler, Ortiz 102
- Fridays for Future 309, 310, 320, 344
- Frischluft für Cannstatt (Fresh Air for Cannstatt) 353
- Fritz, Martin 320
- Frondel, Manuel 319
- Fuchs, Tina 368
- “The Future of Tradition” (Diagne) 73
- Garnier, Xavier 74
- gender 20, 33, 42, 230; expression 128, 132; gap 278, 279; identities 124, 132, 135; immigrant lower-class labor 250–254, 251–254; and spatial conflicts 20
- geopolitical conflicts 6
- geopoliticization 9
- Germany 62–63
- Ghana 56
- “Ghana Must Go” program 56
- Ghanem, Hala 228

- Giddens, Anthony 323
- Gituamba, Kenya 19, 192,
195–197; auto-construction
and new conflicts 203–204;
commodification 204–208;
demarking the territory 200–203;
founding of 200–203; historical
genesis of 199–208, 200; new
institutions 204–208; phase
of consolidation 203–204;
spatiotemporal evolution of built
structures in 200; transversal
logics in practice 204–208
- Gleditsch, Kristian Skrede 6
- globalization 7–10
- Global North 5, 20, 160, 225, 238,
310–311, 321–323, 331, 334,
336–337
- Global South 5, 16, 20, 142, 160,
193–195, 225, 231, 311, 318, 321,
334, 336
- glocalization 8
- Government Land Act title (GLA)
(Kenya) 172
- Grande, Edgar 8
- green areas 266, 356, 358, 362
- Green Deal 321
- green markets 312
- Greenpeace 344
- green ribbons (*grüne Bänder*) 355
- green zones 356
- Gregory, Derek 6
- Grindr 123
- Grosse, Corrie 337
- Guild, Elspeth 55
- Hagemann, Christian 323
- Hamm, Jörg Martin 356
- Hartal, Gilly 123–124, 134
- Harvey, David 3, 4, 7
- Hashemi, Said Etris 289
- Hassan, Neil Ryan 123
- hawker centers: customers at 248;
as heart of community 247–248,
247–249; shared infrastructure at
248
- health care: multiple spatialities of
86–88, 87; secularization of 80–82;
syncretic understanding of 82–84,
83; urbanized 84–86; *see also*
spaces of health care
- The Heat of Dog Day (*Hundstagshitze*)
354
- Helbrecht, Ilse 254, 260
- Henry, Christine 76
- Hilger, Janna Mareike 124–125
- historical genesis of Gituamba 199–
208, 200
- HIV/AIDS movement 337
- Hoffmann, Ulrich 365, 366
- Holen, Hans Petter 106
- Honneth, Axel 30
- Hoss, Walther 355
- host community 227–229
- housing: as scarce resource 240–241;
and source of conflict 240–241;
transition 315–316
- hybridization 121
- hybridization of space 122
- hybrid social networks 122
- hybrid space 121, 122
- imaginative spaces 86
- immigrant lower-class labor: at
intersection of class 250–254,
251–254; at intersection of ethnicity
250–254, 251–254; at intersection
of gender 250–254, 251–254
- Indian Transfer of Property Act (ITPA)
170–171
- individual physical violence 239
- inequality: conflictual spaces of
198–199; informal settlements in
Nairobi as conflictual spaces of
198–199; social 16, 19, 192, 198,
238, 240–242, 244, 255, 261
- informal settlements: conflict and 194–
195; in Nairobi as conflictual spaces
of inequality 198–199
- infrastructure: digital 37, 44, 100,
137; -led development as new
development model 195–196;
material 10, 16, 37, 101; pacifying
conflictual spaces by containing
conflicts in 237–238
- institutionalization: of conflict
33; conflict-ridden 195; and
marginalized groups 194; of
memories 290
- institutionalized spaces 143
- institutions 1, 4, 192–193, 195–196,
207–208, 225; financial 198;

- Mercosur 64; new 204–208; political 8, 33; public 198; regional 37; social 100, 204; state 201, 286; welfare 58
- integration projects 53–54, 55
- integrative sorcery 84
- interaction networks 344–346, 345
- interdisciplinary research 35
- internally displaced persons (IDPs) 19, 41, 213–215; across stages and spaces 220–221; and informal communities 220; testimonies of 215, 221
- International Compact for Jordan (ICJ) 226
- International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London 222
- International Monetary Fund (IMF) 225, 226
- international/national interest 225–227
- internet: fragmentation 99–103; reconfiguration of 99–103; refiguration of 114–117; Russian 103–113; weaponization 99–103
- Internet Architecture Board (IAB) 117n3
- Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) 101–102
- Internet-based communication 5
- Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) 101–113; and Russian internet 103–113; self-positioning 108
- Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) 117n3
- internet governance 101
- intra-movement solidarities/tensions 334–339
- IP addresses 101
- Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP) 61
- Jansson, André 339
- Jordan: geostrategic location of 225; National Resilience Plan 226; natural resources in 224
- juxtaposition, spatial 80–82, 81
- Kabaka, Daudi 167
- Kaloleni estate 169, 175–177, 178, 182–188; appropriating space 185–186; architecture of attempted pacification 182–183; collective action 185–186; collective actors 186–187; racial inequality 183–184
- Kapp, Rainer 367, 369
- Karma* series 82–84, 83, 86
- KCB Bank 198
- Kenya 38, 170–173, 183, 209n2
- Kenyan African National Union (KANU) 201, 209n2
- Kenya Railways 177–180
- Kenya Railways Staff Retirement Benefits Scheme 177
- Kenya Uganda Railway (KUR) 177
- “Kenya Vision 2030” program 185, 197
- Kien Nghi Ha 289, 296
- King Hussein Foundation 222
- kipande* system 169
- Knoblauch, Hubert 31, 169, 175, 225
- knowledge: spatial 4, 13, 16, 19–20, 39, 77, 121, 192; superficial 130; youths’ conflictive spatial 264–283
- Kriesi, Hanspeter 8
- Krishnan, Madhu 77
- Kuttler, Wilhelm 365
- Lagos, Nigeria 215–221; forcibly displaced people in 213–231
- Land Act of 2012 (Kenya) 172
- land rights 18–19
- Lass, Wiebke 314, 323
- The Last Generation 310
- Lee, Rebekah 75
- Lee Kuan Yew 245
- Lefebvre, Henry 7, 34
- Lettkemann, Eric 122
- libertarian authoritarianism 320
- Lima: daily life within controlled places 272–279; spectator-like experience of spatial conflicts 277–279
- lines of conflict 10, 28, 238, 290, 318–322
- load shedding 132
- localization 100, 192, 323
- locative media 121
- Loss and Damage Fund* 318

- Love-Nichols, Jessica 337
 Löw, Martina 2, 40, 169, 175, 225, 333
 Luke, Timothy W. 218
 Lux, Thomas 318
- mabati 176
 macroeconomic regimes 20
 macroterritorialization 49, 52–54
 Makongeni estate 169, 175–177, 178, 182–188; architecture of control 177; demolition of house extensions 179–180; destructive figuration 180–182; ownership and conflict 177–179
 Malowany, Maureen 75
 marabout 76
 Marby, Göran 105–106
 marginalized urban frontier: everyday life in 208–209; Nairobi's 208–209
 Mark, Brigid 337
 Marx, Karl 312
 Massey, Doreen 294
 material infrastructure 10, 16, 37, 101
 materiality 9, 76–77, 97, 99, 116, 355
 Mau, Steffen 4, 318
 MAXQDA 2018 (VERBI software) 265
 Mbembé, Achille 73–74
 McAdam, Doug 32
 medical pluralism 75, 81
 medical syncretism 76, 83
 megastructures 5
 memories: collective 237, 288, 290–293, 298–301; negotiating in contested spaces 296–301
 Mercea, Dan 337
 Merton, Robert King 31–32, 36
 meta-analysis 35–36
 Mignolo, Walter 9
 Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) 62
 Misselwitz, Philipp 220
 mobility transition 314–315
 modernities: in African humanities 72–74; moral issues 75–76; stories and series 74–75; in West Africa 72–76
 modes of conflict resolution 239–240
 moral conflicts 80–86
 Mouffe, Chantal 8, 323
 Multilateral Development Banks 226
 multiple spatialities of health care 86–88, 87
 “multistakeholder” model 101
- Nairobi, Kenya 167–188; Community Land Act of 2016 172; conflict and informal settlements 194–195; conflicts of space in 170–173; everyday life in marginalized urban frontier 208–209; folk music 168; historical genesis of Gituamba 199–208, 200; history of housing 168–169; Indian Transfer of Property Act (ITPA) 170–171; informal settlements in 198–199; infrastructure-led development in 191–209; Land Act of 2012 172; methods and research design 196; new urban frontiers 191–209; northeastern urban growth corridor 197, 197–198; Thika Road Superhighway 197, 197–198; urban growth frontiers 196–199; urban peripheries in peripheral states 192–196; *zilizopendwa* 168
 Nakahara, Junki 339
 Nakate, Vanessa 337
 narrative mapping 265
 National Science Foundation (NSF) 117n2
 Nazi regime 370n2
 Nazism 9
 Neckel, Sighard 313, 319, 323
 neighborhoods: SDHB showrooms 249–250, 250; visibilizing refiguration of 249–250, 250
 networked governance 101
 network spaces 12–14, 17–18, 114, 130, 133, 140–143, 158–160, 283n2, 284n4, 345–346, 348
 Neubauer, Luisa 320
 Neuberger, Christoph 5
 new institutions 204–208
 Newman, David 55
 new urban frontiers in Nairobi 191–209
 Nguéa, Annette Angoua 78
 NIABYs (not in anyone's backyard) 314, 322
 Nigeria 56–57

- NIMBY (not in my backyard) protests 314, 322
 non-territoriality 264, 270–280, 282
 NSFNET 101
 Nyumba Kumi, Gituamba 207–208;
 authority of 205–206; elected
 members of 206; legislation 205
 Nyumba Kumi Council 205, 206
- objectivation/objectification 4, 99, 290
 Occupy Wall Street 337
 OECD countries 309
 Ökoplana 366–367
 OpenNet initiative 102–103
 Orengo, James 171
 Owino, George 177
- Palmer, Boris 361
 Paris Climate Agreement 309
 peripheral states: urban peripheries in
 192–196
 physical spaces 140–160
 physical violence: collective 239;
 individual 239
 Piketty, Thomas 8
 place 283n2; identity 279–282; queer-
 inclusive 128–129; as spatial figures
 12
 planetary urbanization 193
 platform capitalism 140
 Pohle, Julia 103
 political conflict 5–6
 politics of memory 292–296
 polycontexturalization 49, 60, 65–66,
 81, 136
 Postel, Jon 101
 power: dynamics 44; geometry 295
 practices: commemoration 20,
 286–287, 289–295, 298, 300–301;
 cultural and religious eating 249;
 governance 53; healing 75–76,
 81–82, 84, 86; home-making 38;
 sharing-economy 157; spatial 1, 19,
 39, 123, 131–133, 193, 213–214,
 217, 219–220, 280; tourism
 accommodation 153
 progressive web application (PWA)
 265
 protectionism 55–60
 Prybytko, Stas 98
 public evidence of air routes 359–362
 queer-inclusive places 128–129
 queer spaces 124–125; eventization of
 125–131
 queer spatial conflict: in Berlin 121–
 137; in Cape Town 121–137
 Qurbani, Burhan 302n1
- racial inequality 183–184
 racist violence: in Rostock 286–302;
 in Solingen 286–302; spatial
 dynamics in commemorating
 286–302
 Randeria, Shalini 10
 Rau, Susanne 12
 refiguration: of conflict 11–13; and
 conflict in space 3–5; and conflicts
 1–3; of entanglement of food/space
 to pacify social conflicts 247–248,
 247–249; fields of 15–16; of the
 internet 114–117; of neighborhoods
 to invisibilize social conflicts
 246; SHDB housing 245–246;
 sociospatial approach to 76–80; of
 urban space to invisibilize social
 conflicts 245–246
 refugees 227–229
 regime: authoritarian 12;
 macroeconomic 17, 20; migration
 11; Nazi 370n2; regulatory 5
*Regional Air Exchanges and Their
 Importance for the Spatial Planning*
 (Institut für Umweltschutz der
 Universität Dortmund 1979) 357
 regional free movement 52–54
 regional integration projects 55
 Regional Internet Registries (RIRs)
 102–103
 Reinboth, Rüdiger 360
 relational space 331, 346
 remaking of conflictual spaces
 191–209
 representation 292–296
 Request for Comments (RFC) 117n3
 Residence Agreement (2002) 58
 restoration: and adaptation 317–318;
 socioecological transformation
 317–318
 reterritorialization of the internet 102
 Rettet das Greut e.V. 366
 Reusswig, Fritz 314, 323
 Reuter, Ulrich 366

- re-visibility social conflicts in space 254–261, 255, 256–260
- Reynolds, Joyce 101
- RIPE Labs 111
- RIPE Network Coordination Centre (NCC): information authority 107; and Russian internet 103–113; self-positioning 108
- Rist, Hansjörg 359
- Roberts, Rebecca E. 220
- Rohrer Weg activists 361
- Rokkan, Stein 8
- Rostock 287–289; commemorating racist violence in 286–302; invisibility 296–301; negotiating memory in contested spaces 296–301; politics of memory 292–296; representation 292–296; shaping future through remembering past 290–292; spatial claims 292–296; spatial dynamics in 286–302; symbolic action 292–296
- Rostock-Lichtenhagen pogrom 287–288, 291–292, 298
- rough consensus 104
- R-package “strucchange” 146, 160n2
- rural-to-urban migration 191
- Russia: internet 103–113; invasion of Ukraine 97–99; Sovereign Internet Bill 102
- safe(r) spacing 121–137; eventization of queer space 125–131; location sharing 131–134; territorialization 134–136
- Said, Edward 86
- Sánchez, Mariana 339
- Sarr, Felwine 73
- scenario of spaces 77
- Schaupp, Simon 317
- Schengen Borders Code (SBC) 66n5
- Scherer, Dieter 367
- Schmid, Roland 365
- Schulze, Gerhard 240, 241
- Schulz-Schaeffer, Ingo 122
- Schutzgemeinschaft Rohrer Weg 352, 361
- Schwalb, Karl 355, 356, 370n2
- second-order emancipation 320
- Second World War 353
- secularization of health care 80–82
- security conflicts 60–65; comparison of regions 64–65; ECOWAS 61–62; EU 62–63; Mercosur 63–64
- Seegerberg, Alexandra 335
- settlements: conflict and 194–195; informal 194–195, 198–199
- Shahin, Saif 339
- Shumate, Michelle 337
- Silk Road 238
- Simmel, Georg 7, 30, 175, 239, 240, 312
- Singapore: Central Provident Fund 245; conflict resolution 239–240; food 256–258, 257–258; Home Ownership Scheme 245; housing and car ownership 255–256; housing/food as scarce resources 240–241; immigrant lower-class labor 250–254, 251–254; invisibilizing social conflicts 250–254, 251–254; Land Acquisition Act 245; pacifying conflictual spaces 237–238; public space 258–261, 259–260; refiguration of entanglement of food/space 247–248, 247–249; refiguration of neighborhoods 246; refiguration of urban space 245–246; re-visibility social conflicts in space 254–261, 255, 256–260; social groups in conflict 238–239; sources of conflict 240–241; spatial conflict containment in 237–261; visibility refiguration of neighborhoods 249–250, 250; visibility social conflict in urban space 242–245
- Singapore Housing Development Board (SHDB) 245; housing 245–246; showrooms 249–250, 250
- Skocpol, Theda 29
- social class 7, 39, 238–243, 247, 249, 251, 255
- social conflicts: class, gender and ethnicity 250–254, 251–254; food courts 247–248, 247–249; hawker centers 247–248, 247–249; immigrant lower-class labor 250–254, 251–254; invisibilizing 250–254, 251–254; invisibilizing in Singapore’s urban space 245–254;

- refiguration of entanglement of food/space 247–248, 247–249; refiguration of neighborhoods 246; refiguration of urban space 245–246; re-visualizing in space 254–261, 255, 256–260; visualizing in Singapore's urban space 242–245
- social exclusion 19–20
- social groups 238–239
- social inequality 16, 19, 192, 198, 238, 240–242, 244, 255, 261
- social mixing 245
- societal effects 322–324
- socioecological transformation:
 - adaptation and restoration 317–318; and conflict 309–324; conflict arenas of 313–318; as cultural conflict 319–321; as distribution conflict within society 318–319; energy transition 313–314; food transition 316–317; housing transition 315–316; mobility transition 314–315
- sociospatial approach to refiguration 76–80; ethnographic investigation 78–80; film analysis 78–80; spatial stories 77
- solidarities: across scales 338–339; between center and periphery 336–337; conflictual space and climate activism 334–339; intramovement 334–339; between local and translocal 337–338; negotiating climate justice 339–347; spatial conflicts and climate policy 332–334; spatial dimension of 330–348
- Solingen 287–289; commemorating racist violence in 286–302; negotiating memory in contested spaces 296–301; politics of memory 292–296; representation 292–296; shaping future through remembering past 290–292; spatial claims 292–296; symbolic action 292–296
- Southern Common Market (Mercosur) 50, 50, 52; economic conflicts 58–60; security conflicts 63–64
- sovereignty bargains 52
- spaces 17–18; in conflict studies 33–34; conflictual 191–209; mobilizing aeroroutes in conflicts over 359–368; negotiating memory in contested 296–301; network 12–14, 17, 114, 130, 133, 140–143, 158–160, 345–346, 348; production of 174–176; relational 331, 346; re-visualizing social conflicts in 254–261, 255, 256–260; territorial 11–13, 14; trajectorial 12–13, 15, 133–134, 199, 208, 283n2; urban 245–246
- spaces of health care: sorcery in West Africa 75–76; stories and series 74–75; in West African popular culture 71–88
- spacing 2, 18, 35, 40; safe(r) 121–137
- spatial arrangements 4, 28, 38–39, 41, 86, 131, 194, 237, 240–243, 269, 282, 331
- spatial claims 292–296
- spatial-communicative figuration 115–117
- spatial conflicts 3, 20, 27, 37–39, 279–282, 332; Airbnb 142–143; and climate policy 332–334; and conflictual spaces 10–11; containment in Singapore 237–261; defined 28; between macroterritorial and national levels 52–54
- spatial constitution 13, 80, 160
- spatial dimensions 322–324; of climate justice conflicts 330–348
- spatial experience 20, 41, 121, 123, 167–168
- spatial figurations of conflict 174–176
- spatial figures 11–13; and frictions 368–369; and interconnections between dimensions 346–347, 347
- spatial imagination 2, 73, 215, 292, 368
- spatialization of conflicts 267–271
- spatial justice 314
- spatial juxtaposition 80–82, 81
- spatial knowledge 19–20, 267–271
- spatial pedagogization 282
- spatial practices 1, 19, 39, 123, 131–133, 193, 213–214, 217, 219–220, 280
- spatial segmentation 82–84, 83
- spatial stories 77

- spatial structures 2, 16–17, 97, 123, 176, 330
 spatial tensions and conflict 213–231
 spatial uprooting 84–86
 staged moral conflicts 80–86
 Staritz, Cornelia 8
 Starosielski, Nicole 100
 Stjepandić, Katarina 289
 structural adjustment programs (SAPs) 195
 structural conflicts 30
 structural globalization 9
 Stuttgart: aeroroutes in conflicts
 over space 359–368; airflows
 through city center of 356; Climate
 Handbook for City-Making 358;
 first meteorologist explaining map
 of airflows 357; fresh air corridors
 of 352–369; invention of fresh air
 route 354–359, 356, 357; legal
 weight of fresh air routes 362–364;
 public evidence of air routes 359–
 362; scientific uncertainty of fresh
 air routes 364–368; spatial figures
 and frictions 368–369
 Stuttgart District Association 358
 subject 2–4, 6, 12–13, 15, 18, 31,
 42–43, 72, 74, 104, 115, 137,
 155, 173–174, 183, 206, 264,
 297, 316
 Subway 198
 supranationality 105
 supranational regions 49
 Swyngedouw, Erik 3, 323
 Sy, Kalista 85
 symbolic action 292–296
 symbolic interactionism 31
 syncretic understanding of health care
 82–84, 83
 synthesizing/operation of synthesis 2,
 35, 40, 42–44

 Tall, Emmanuelle Kadya 76
 Tarrow, Sidney 32
 temporary queering 129
 tensions: across scales 338–339;
 between center and periphery
 336–337; between local and
 translocal 337–338
 territorial-geopolitical logic 3
 territoriality 270–271

 territorialization 134–136
 territorial space 6, 11–13, 14–15, 33,
 49, 53, 114, 134, 136, 140, 192,
 199, 225, 242, 251–252, 270, 282,
 283n2, 284n4
 theories of conflict 311–313
 Thika Road Superhighway 197,
 197–198
 Thunberg, Greta 320, 337
 Tilly, Charles 32
 Tomiche, Anne 74
 topics/lines of conflict 318–322
 trajectorial space 12–13, 15, 133–134,
 199, 208, 283n2
 transformation conflicts: characteristics
 of 311–313; theories of conflict
 311–313
 translocal activists 338
 translocality/translocalization 218
 transnational conflicts 321–322
 transversal logics 19, 204–208
 Treaty of Maastricht 58
 Treaty of Rome 57
 trim-and-adjust approach 144, 157
 Tsourapas, Gerasimos 226
 Tuathail, Gearóid Ó 218
 Turkish religious community 294

 Ukraine: digital censorship 98; internet
 infrastructure damage 98; internet
 outages 98; and Russian internet
 103–113; Russia's invasion of 97–99
 UN Climate Summits 336
 UNFCCC 318
 UN Habitat 356
 urban design 240–241, 358, 363
 “Urban Development and Urban
 Climate” 356
 urban growth frontiers 196–199
 urban infrastructure 237–261
 urbanized health care 84–86
 urban peripheries in peripheral states
 192–196
 urban spaces 245–246
 Uruguay 59–60
 US Department of Defense 101

 van den Akker, Robin 122
 Veblen, Thorstein 240
 Visual Intelligence 265
 Voelsen, Daniel 100, 103

- walled gardens 103
 Wasuna, Antony 173
We Are Young. We Are Strong 302n1
 Weberian theories 29–30
 West African popular culture:
 modernities in West Africa
 72–76; sociospatial approach
 to refiguration 76–80; spaces of
 health care in 71–88; staged moral
 conflicts 80–86
 Westgate Mall attack 205
 Westheuser, Linus 318
 Wieviorka, Michel 32
 Woolworths 198
 World Bank 225, 226
 World Economic Forum in Davos,
 Switzerland 337
 World Health Organization (WHO)
 76
- World Social Forum 336
 World Summit on the Information
 Society (WSIS) 104
- Yaay 2.0* 84–86, 85
 Yiftachel, Oren 221
 youths: conflictful/less spatial
 knowledge 279–282; conflictive
 spatial knowledge 264–283;
 conflictive spatial knowledge
 for planning/design practice
 282–283; place identity 279–282;
 spatial conflicts 279–282; spatial
 knowledge 267–271; territory
 279–282
- Zentraler Immobilien Ausschuss 368
zilizopendwa 168
 Žižek, Slavoj 269