Chapter 11
Noopolitical Resistances Networks as Counterlaboratories of Migration and Identity in Europe

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Abstract Geopolitics of knowledge (or noopolitics) have played a significant role in the generation of urban and regional networks. However, contrary to what it is usually assumed, noopolitics is not just limited to the "soft," mediated realm, but also alters tangible reality, producing and transforming space. In order to better understand these spatial configurations, the focus of this research is placed on virtual community-based networks which acquire a spatial dimension to counter-hegemonic policies. These alternative networks acquire a particular intensity in the Mediterranean region and Central Europe. In this regard, the term "counterlaboratory," used by Agamben, will be explored and extended to qualify the status of these strategies in the region, especially during the European migrant crisis in 2015. Through schemes and images, Faist's pentatonic model of transnational political space (re-interpreted by Banki, Refug Rev 1:1–24, 2013) is used to make visible the relations among agents in each specific example. Since the study has been mainly conducted in an urban scale, most of the counterlaboratories are located in cities, although some of them belong to peripheral areas or to the virtual realm. From a spatial perspective, this paper aims at addressing the question of identities in a hyper-mediated and urbanised world. Besides, the arrival and settlement of "the Other(s)"—without which Europe is not able to define itself—leads to new practices and habits which blur and redraw the limits of the European identity, which has never been fixed or stable, but subject to permanent crises and transformation.

11.1 Introduction. Europe, Habitat and the Refugee Crisis

> Europe is a process, always *in fieri*, something that is indefinitely becoming truth, while facing a double risk: either to consolidate, still, as a centre of radiation or, conversely, to alienate itself, being attracted to a more powerful orbit. It is itself only when it is expelled out of itself. Hence the constant need for reflection. Logically, its fate may be expressed by

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> an infinite judgment ("Europe is not-Asia"), so it suits the ambiguity of the term *Occidens* ("that which dies" – "that which gives death.") (Duque 2003, 439)

With these words, the Spanish philosopher Félix Duque states the first of his seven theses on the fate of Europe. As an evolving reality, its nature corresponds to a contraposition of extremes. This permanent movement between consolidation as an influential global actor and estrangement may serve as a starting point for our text that departs from the inadequacy between the *concept-Europe* and the *thing-Europe*, that is, its geographical space. This duality is particularly relevant when the Old Continent is facing a historical challenge: the redefinition of the European identity through the permeability of its borders (who has the right to Europe?) and its relation to the alien "others." The situation seems to reinforce the assertion of the German sociologist, Beck (2003), who claimed that Europe itself would be rejected by the EU if it applied for membership; such are the deficiencies that this institution maintains and further demands.

Migration tendencies and causes are permanently changing and presenting new challenges to societies. It is difficult—if not impossible—to grasp a more or less stable snapshot of the situation, as new decisions and conflicts appear almost every day, especially after the European migrant crisis in 2015. This situation is particularly delicate in the Mediterranean region, since hundreds of thousands of people that come from the Middle East, escaping from war and violence in their countries (mostly from Syria and Iraq) are added to the regular flows between Western and Sub-Saharan Africa and the South of Europe, dramatically increasing the flow intensity in transnational routes.[1] Therefore, the Mediterranean area witnesses the appearance of new critical regions in terms of migration, especially the one comprised of Turkey and Greece, including the Aegean islands like Lesvos or Kos. Besides, displacements and movements within the Israeli–Palestinian territories should not be forgotten, representing part of a local-scale conflict that has global repercussions.

It is difficult to provide accurate figures, since data about arrivals and status are often mixed or incomplete, and terms such as "migrant," "refugee" or "asylum seeker" are usually confused by the media, the states[2] and the general public (Access Info and The Global Detention Project 2015; Couldrey and Herson 2016, 30–31).

[1] "For decades there have been boats and smugglers bringing people in search of jobs over the Mediterranean via Spain and Italy. They came and continue to come mostly from the Maghreb region and from Western Sub-Saharan Africa. They were mostly regular migrants (…). These older, smaller, flows continue today, coming mostly via Morocco and the Canary Islands. They tend to fit the standard definition of migrations.

A major difference in this current flow, compared to decades old flows is that the centre of gravity has shifted to the Eastern Mediterranean. Greece has become the strategic link for these migrations: (…) already in early 2015 it surpassed Italy as the main recipient, receiving 68,000 refugees, mostly Syrians but also, among others, Afghanis and Iraqis. Until 2015, the rise in Mediterranean Sea arrivals was felt primarily in Italy. In 2014, Italy received over three quarters of all maritime refugees and migrants (170,000). In contrast, Greece received 43,500. In this new turn of events, the central and eastern Mediterranean routes have become comparable in size. But the people in each come from different countries. (…)" (Sassen 2016).

[2] Neither the Member States of the EU nor EU bodies such as Eurostat are required to gather data on the number of migrant people detained (Access Info and The Global Detention Project 2015, 6).

Moreover, the number of people arriving European territories fluctuates every day, but statistics are usually not weekly or even daily updated. Most of the time, these data do not reflect reality because of the dispersion of the phenomenon and the lack of means to carry out a reliable count. For this reason, the problem of migration becomes extremely complex and the task of thinking of possible—even provisory—solutions is unavoidably tied to indeterminacy.

Regional responses are no less variable and contingent. At the moment, European countries—facing their own problems of economic crisis, fear of terrorism, etc.—are still debating about the number of people that each state should receive, though the real number of hosted refugees differs significantly from the agreed quotas. At the same time, national and international interventions to rescue migrant people (like Operation *Mare Nostrum*, led by Italy) have been reduced and new fences, similar to the ones in the Spanish exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, have been built in some Eastern countries (Hungary, Greece or Bulgaria) and between France and the United Kingdom, which are also closing their borders to avoid the entrance of migrant people. Meanwhile, countries neighbouring conflict zones—such as Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon—have adopted a common strategy coordinated by UNHCR, called the 2018 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), although the number of refugee people in these countries is overwhelming considering the resources on which they count to integrate them. In July 2015, Turkey had "already been host to nearly 2 million Syrians since civil war broke in early 2011" (Demirtas 2015) and Jordan and Lebanon experienced a population increase of 10 and 25%, respectively, at the same time. "With no political solution in sight, host countries are implementing new measures to alleviate the burden on their economies" and the increasing strain on their infrastructures (Balsari et al. 2015, 942).

This chapter argues that the issue of migration goes far beyond its mere physical and organisational dimensions—although they still remain absolutely relevant. In fact, it is not only a "placing" problem but also an identity and communicational one. The rise of nonpolitical practices in governmental strategies is one of the triggers of parallel movements of nonpolitical resistances led by different collectives of citizens, activists or displaced people. In order to better understand these conflicts and tensions from the perspective of bottom-up strategies, the focus is placed on specific virtual, community-based networks which acquire a spatial dimension to counter-hegemonic policies in the European continent. These strategies seem to be the most effective ones in order to hear the voices of migrant people and give them space inside the community, instead of being externalised.[3]

Although almost 80% of displaced people of the world remain in the Global South (Sassen 2014, 61), these alternative networks acquire a particular intensity in the Mediterranean region and Central Europe. In this regard, the term "counterlaboratory," coined by Latour (1987, 79)[4] but redefined by Giorgio Agamben in terms of

[3]I have discussed the topic of externalisation of the Other in: "Inside/Outside: On the Hybridization of Real and Virtual Spaces for Resistant Bodies." In *Nomadic Interiors: Living and Inhabiting in an Age of Migrations*, edited by Luca Basso Peressut et al. Milan: SMOwn Publishing, 2015.

[4]Latour uses the term in a techno-scientific context: the counterlaboratory would be a laboratory built to refute or reshape the conclusions drawn in another laboratory. In this sense, scientific

habitat conditions (Bauman and Agamben 2008), is explored and extended in order to qualify the status of these strategies in the region.

11.2 (Counter)Laboratories and Noopolitical Strategies

> Similar to refugee camps in the regions of origin, the detention camps in Europe are located in isolated places, remote from other built environments and from urban centres, keeping people out of sight, separated from the rest of the population. Thus, the refugees' call "No camp!" –and their resistance to being transferred to such a closed facility – is an active refusal to be separated from the rest of the world, suspended for an unknown period in an arbitrary location. (Katz 2016, 17)

In a territorial scale, when reflecting on emerging models for future cities, Giorgio Agamben (2008, 107–34) remarks that the localising factor plays a key role in the processes of globalisation, radically changing the way that conflicts are resolved by relocating people (problems) outside their societies. Through this reflection, the Italian philosopher suggests that the future of our cities could be being tested in this "outside" places. These processes are intimately linked to what he calls "bare life" (1998): "a biological existence that can be sacrificed at any time by a colonial power that maintains the right to kill with impunity but has withdrawn all moral, political or human responsibilities from the population" (Graham 2011, xxv). But while all these situations entail an experimental condition regarding future power and life conditions (control, poverty, mobility, anonymity, property…), these experiments might be reverted by their subjects or inhabitants. Agamben (2008, 109) used the term "counterlaboratories" to designate spaces that revert the conditions of those enclaves created by states or institutions which perform as contemporary laboratories of habitability and modes of life, like the *favelas* and other informal settlements, but also sieges like Gaza or the West Bank, refugee camps proliferating along the borders of several states, African-American ghettos or French *banlieues* (Graham 2011, 113). Sometimes, these marginal, limited enclaves are ruled by their own codes, different from the rest of the city or region in which they are inserted. This chapter focuses on the typology of the refugee camp and alternatives to it, as well as in tools that reflect on this reality and highlight particular situations of conflict which involve several agents from a transnational perspective.

For many years, the camp has been the chosen settlement model to host displaced people for a certain period of time, sometimes indeterminate. As a matter of fact, thousands of people remain in these places, far from any urban or rural reality and living in a permanent nomadic state, under artificial and precarious conditions. As pointed before, some experts detect urban-like features in refugee camps, as their inhabitants are constantly transforming their environment into a more "human" one,

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production is described through a warlike antagonism. Other authors use the term "laboratory" to refer to spaces that share similar conditions with those that Agamben mentions, such as Li (2006) or Graham (2011).

thus operating through a similar logic to that of the counterlaboratory: spaces to test possible futures and likely conditions of habitability. Kilian Kleinschmidt—former senior field coordinator for the UNHCR—states that "[i]n the Middle East, we were building camps: storage facilities for people. But the refugees were building a city. These are the cities of tomorrow. The average stay today in a camp is 17 years. That's a generation. Let's look at these places as cities" (Kleinschmidt and Radford 2015).

However, despite the tendency to recreate pseudo-urban conditions in these sites, the camp is undoubtedly an anti-urban solution, lacking of the facilities and deserving conditions of everyday life that inhabitants need to feel safe and comfortable. In fact, some researchers have demonstrated that "those refugees who have opted out of the camp system—even when that means forgoing any humanitarian assistance—have established an effective alternative approach to exile" (Hovil 2014). This will to live *in* the city, to be part of an urban community—with all the advantages it offers—brings once again the topic of the city as a motor, as a node; and in this particular case of migration, a proper spatial organisation at all levels—especially in local and regional levels—is essential. In this regard, the UNHCR launched 2 years ago a new policy of alternatives to camps, recognising that it is more sustainable and positive to integrate refugee people within urban or rural communities (UNHCR 2014).

Together with physical tactics, such as border checkpoints, fences or camps, other methods appear related to much more intangible elements. In 1999, the American defense experts John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt elaborated a report for RAND Corporation (a global policy think-tank related to the US army) in which they found an advance of the diffuse and the informational in terms of power. Admitting that, despite their differences, both hard and soft power strategies appear often intertwined or combined, Arquilla and Ronfeldt sketch a "geopolitics of knowledge" (Aberkane 2015) articulated around the space of a *Noosphere*, the "globe-girdling realm of the mind" (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1999, 4).

Coming from the Greek *νόος* ("knowledge"), the scientists and intellectuals Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Vladimir Vernadsky spatialised the whole of the products of human thought (knowledge, ideas, concepts, speculations, affects…) through the idea of an imaginary additional terrestrial layer, superimposed on the geosphere and the biosphere. However, this vision of a noosphere elaborated in the first decades of the twentieth century, being arguably too exclusive and anthropocentric, acquires a more complex dimension today, once we acknowledge the multiplicity of relations and intellectual exchanges between humans and non-humans. Indeed, Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1999, 4) include the realms of cyberspace and the infosphere (cyberspace plus the media), thus opening the field—though not implicitly—to different agents, with special emphasis on the instrumental devices which enable communications and the rapid exchange of information: cable systems, satellites, the Internet, mobile phones, broadcast and interactive media configure a material base for the airy realm of the noosphere, whose relevance and potential are multiplied because of interconnectivity. The reasons for this development can be placed at three levels, according to the authors: technological innovation, the emergence of a new organisational ecology and the rise of informational soft power strategies and their importance in international politics.

Contrary to what it is usually assumed, noopolitics is not just limited to the "soft" realm but also alters tangible reality. In a world in which global connectivity increases every day, relations and modes of making tend to complexity. Aberkane (2015) notices how classical geopolitics has been based on the "interaction of kinespheres over what are usually zero-sum exchanges (territories, natural resources, stable markets, trade routes, etc.)" Consequently, the wider the extension of a particular state's kinesphere or controlled space, the greatest its power over others, at least according to the classical doctrine. However, the increasing development and awareness of the importance of the noosphere leads to a deep transformation of geopolitics in terms of power organisation and distribution. Following the ideas of the geographer Serge Soudoplatoff, Aberkane formulates a law which claims that "knowledge exchanges are positive sum: when one gives away, say an ounce of gold, one does not have it anymore; when one gives away knowledge, or an idea, one still has it." This fact, according to the author, makes the accumulation, generation and control of knowledge one of the most powerful tools for states and corporations, since they usually lead to apparently "win-win" situations that leave little space for discontent and critique.[5]

In spatial terms, this shift from territorial to knowledge economy as a more profitable way of power administration and the transition from a hierarchical to a network organisation is reflected in the emergence of new tools and strategies for space production at all levels—territorial, urban, architectural, domestic, artistic, etc. For instance, we are witnessing how in some contexts conventional urban policymaking is giving more importance to the inclusion of participatory processes and best practice exchange, or how international architectural firms open branch offices in other parts of the world; not to mention the radical transformation that spaces of sociability have experienced, going from meeting and encounter in the city streets and squares to social exchange through forums, chats and diverse social networks. In fact, noopolitical approaches have played a significant role in the generation of urban and regional networks: formation of cultural nodes, rapid exchange of information, creation of common markets, or development of place branding campaigns are just some of the strategies undertaken by global actors in order to organise and control economic and political domains. Certainly, this does not entail that traditional spatial practices have disappeared or that they will in the future. Rather, it is already evident that the global ecosystem consists of multiple, hybrid networks that allow different types of relations and spatial configurations.

Thus, together with *Realpolitik* elements such as fences, camps or deterrence devices in street furniture, states also intervene and reinforce their dominance by means of noopolitical strategies, like biometric databases, propaganda through media and ideological debates. Therefore, the possibility of a noosphere reinforces the spiky,

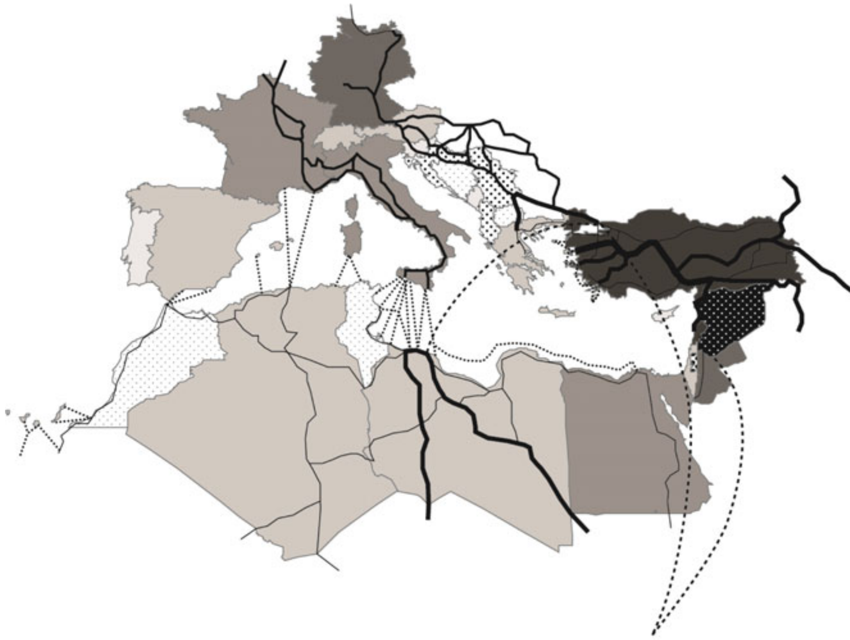
[5]The clearest example of this may be found in the "new forms of labour-force extraction" that Google or Amazon have established, profiting from the unremunerated work of the users who spend their time and attention as basic currencies in exchange for their free services (Andreotti and Lahiji 2016, 129) and the accumulation of stock in what Horning (2012) calls "our digitised identity containers" or self-representation profiles which project a specific subject to the rest of the connected community.

sharp character of the world. However, sometimes these tactics can be visibly—even efficiently—countered. Indeed, several scholars and researchers have already explored these tools used by global hegemonic powers at different scales, but also how they are appropriated and reversed by opposing actors,[6] creating reverses or counterspaces using similar tools to those of soft power. Thus, in order to better understand the quality and possibilities of these interstitial spaces in the light of the question of identity, the term counterlaboratory could be reread and reconceptualised. In fact, it shares some similarities with Lefebvre's (1991) *counterspace*, that is, the reverse of hegemonic space, throughout which differences and conflicts emerge. We could talk of other kind of spaces, in which the same tools used by governments and institutions are subverted in order to generate resistant and resilient communities. For instance, the use of mainstream social networks and apps which are mostly used to collect private information is also used to efficiently communicate and start the migration journeys (Kleinschmidt and Radford 2015; Malla et al. 2015). The spatiality of these counterlaboratories is complex, and transcends the physical realm in many ways, although always tied to it. Agents and positions are diverse: cities of arrival, transit countries, different routes, distribution of services in regional nodes… and the ways of representing them are never objective, but always intentional.

To get an idea of the magnitude and direction of migrant flows in Europe and the Mediterranean region, and in order to contextualise what Susan Banki calls "transnational political space" (2013), a map has been drawn with migration data collected during the European refugee crisis between 2015 and 2016 (UNHCR 2015a, b; International Organization for Migration 2015) (Fig. 11.1). It is clear that the main routes of migration flow from the South and the East to the North, towards Germany and Scandinavian countries. There are also intermediate states, such as Spain and Italy. If we look at the net migration rate index of each country, we will notice that countries such as Libya and Spain have very high values; however, they are due to other type of migration (workers mainly coming from Latin America and Central Africa). Of course, Syria is the country that most people leave because of conflicts. The map shows the main countries of origin of displaced people, people in refugee-like situation and asylum seekers in the region, as well as the main countries of asylum. Pressure lies upon countries around Syria: Lebanon, Jordan and above all Turkey. In Europe, it is easy to distinguish which are the preferred countries and which are transit countries.

However, most of the specific counterlaboratories studied are located within the urban fabric, although some of them belong either to peripheral areas (borders, transnational routes…) or to the virtual realm. This diversity of spaces, inserted within a wider geopolitical context, enhances the debate of European identity and its relation to the political space, as well as the question of how to make visible—even with precarious tools—the diversity and conflict inherent to the identity construction and its spatialisation. As a result of the interaction between different agents under

[6] Arquilla and Ronfeldt point mostly to the strength of new NGOs, but later they would also recognise that the most effective example may be the global network of jihadis as a new form of spatialising conflict (2007, 7).



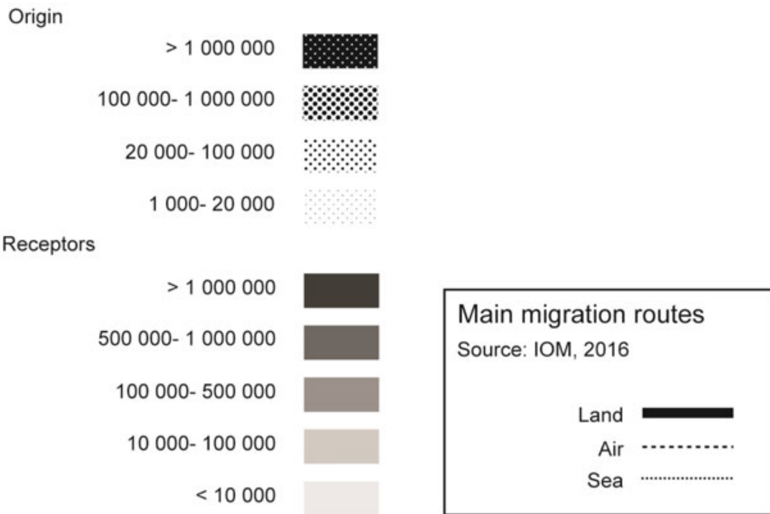


Fig. 11.1 Migration flows in the mediterranean area between 2015 and 2016. Map by the author (based on UNHCR 2015a, b and IOM)

diverse political, social and cultural contexts, clashes, negotiations and encounters in terms of space and identity emerge among groups and institutions, as it will be explored in the following section.

11.3 Initiatives and Tools

> Naturally, too, it happens that a counter-space and a counter-project simulate existing space, parodying it and demonstrating its limitations, without for all that escaping its clutches. (Lefebvre 1991, 382)

Having framed the space of the research, and before exploring the examples of possible counterlaboratories, a basic tool is needed to make them comparable, or at least, to recognise the agents participating in their development. In an article about activism and precariousness, Susan Banki used a pentatonic model developed by Faist (2000) (Fig. 11.2) in order to qualify transnational social space, which includes more agents than just migrant or refugee people and the governments concerned (origin and host countries), but also civil society in origin and asylum countries. It could be assumed that international institutions such as UNHCR, UN-Habitat and alike act as mediators in this transnational space, though supported by rulers and governments. It is also

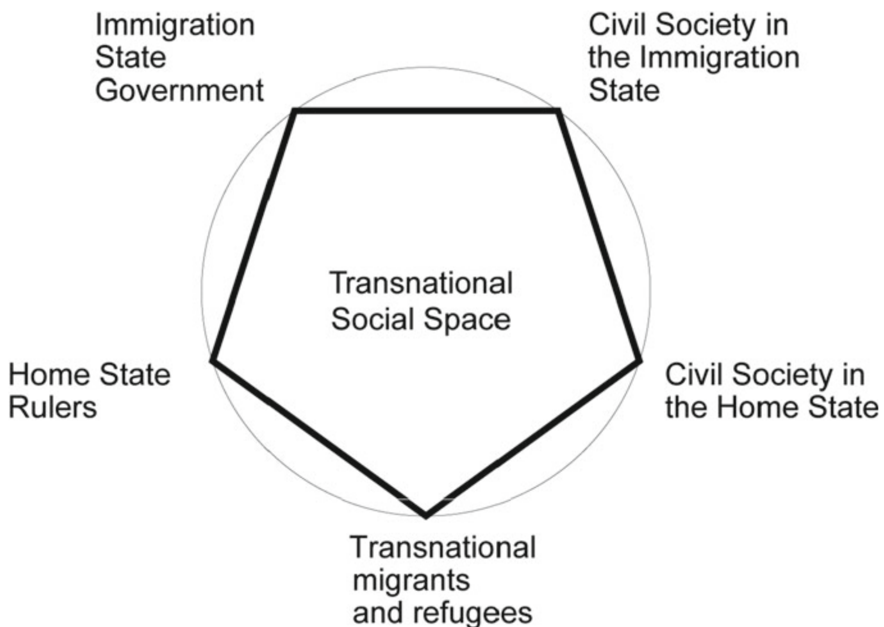


Fig. 11.2 Transnational Social Space (pentatonic model by Faist 2000). Drawing by the author (based on Banki 2013)

important to acknowledge the conjoint labour with other agents, either institutional or not, as sometimes—especially in emergency situations—local individuals are more eager to participate. For instance, the engagement of German locals with asylum seekers in their neighbourhoods increased during the refugee crisis. "Established organisations working with refugees in Germany estimated an average increase of 70% of interest in volunteering for (…) more than a third of volunteers were active in self-organised groups and initiatives rather than in established NGOs" (Couldrey and Herson 2016, 66).

However, given the situation in which migrant people and asylum seekers find themselves during their journeys and their arrival into host countries, it is worth recalling the main limitation of Faist's model that Banki (2013) finds in her article, that is, the obliteration of "informal, clandestine, and unregulated activities through which political transnational actors, and refugees in particular, may attempt to achieve their political aims." Therefore, she articulates a connection between precarity[7] as a factor directly affecting political action and what she calls "mobilisation elements" which characterise different modes of action. Focusing on homeland activism, Banki (2013) detects some of these mobilisation elements, such as personal motivation, information politics and exchange, access to resources (cash, credit, technology, etc.) and media, and the capacity to count on international institutions. Interestingly, all these elements may be inserted within the realm of noopolitics, since they are mostly related to affects and knowledge and channelled through physical and virtual networks. Moreover, considering the nature of the counterlaboratories analysed in this chapter, precarity is a cross-cutting element that is present in all of them to a greater or lesser extent; however, following Banski's levels, case studies may be considered to be situations ranging between medium and extreme precarity.

For the purposes of the research, Faist's pentatonic model is re-traced—following the contribution of Banki (2013)—to analyse interactions between these agents in different situations that can be read as counterlaboratories. Specific initiatives developed in these areas, combining activism, art and social networking, will be explored in order to discover useful strategies from these European counterlaboratories of migration, that could help better understand identity construction and assertion processes regarding migrant flows in this context. These interstitial spaces, situations and networks reflect larger-scale movements and relations in transnational space, since they are products of the interaction between agents and institutions, beyond geographical or country-specific factors. The classification of the so-called counterlaboratories in five different categories has been organised according to diverse tools in order to make it easier to understand how these are used to create and spatialize networks

[7]Banki (2013) uses the term "precarity" applied to "[f]orms of vulnerability and impediments to security and stability that stem from both formal (legal, political) and informal (social, cultural) processes." Butler (2009, 96:25–32) made a nuanced distinction between "precarity" and the most common term "precariousness": while the former refers to a particular, politically-induced vulnerability (by capitalism, war, catastrophes, etc.), the latter is shared by all mortals: it is a corporeal vulnerability that affects all beings, related to the notion of "bare life." Despite Banki's use of the term "precarity," both concepts are intersecting and offer a wider perspective on the issue of migration, in which natural precariousness of nomad bodies are affected by conditions of precarity.

and communities. However, they are not exclusive and they may appear combined in many cases, but all of them work as networks in varying degrees. Besides, different types of relations between agents have been detected and classified as strong or weak, collaborative or conflicting in order to offer a more comprehensive perspective.

11.3.1 Monitoring Information Tools

During the long journeys from one country to another, traversing the European continent, monitoring information tools are very useful to plan the next movements avoiding obstacles, controlling spatial data and the situation of checkpoints, open roads or fences, as well as additional news about health assistance or weather conditions. These tools, mainly managed and updated by local associations, offer first-hand spatial information that can be accessed through a connected portable device (usually a smartphone) or in ambulant information points situated in different parts of the busiest routes. The most problematic aspect is usually the frequency of updating, which can be quite irregular depending on network coverage and the reception of last-minute information. Usually, these networks are run by civilians for displaced people, and mediated through local or regional NGOs, although migrant people may also participate and collaborate by sharing information. In most of these cases, information is also used to denounce abusive practices and policies of immigration state governments.

Initiatives such as *Bordermonitoring* (Fig. 11.3(1))[8] or *Welcome to Europe* (Fig. 11.3(3))[9] have been launched and designed for migrant people who have access to the Internet, either planning their journeys or already on route. While the second offers general and simple information for migrant people by country and topic (policies, gender, minors, detention, regularisation, contact, safety at the sea, etc.), the first is bidirectional, in the sense that it also offers information from the sites to the rest of the Internet community through reports and Twitter messages. In a similar way, *Watch the Med* (Fig. 11.3(2))[10] maps information about deaths, arrivals, violations of displaced people's rights and other incidents at the Mediterranean maritime borders of the EU. The platform has also launched an emergency number that can be used by people coming in distress while crossing the Mediterranean Sea, so volunteers can pressure coast guards and national authorities to start a rescue operation. In a more physical dimension, parallel groups offer information directly on-site, such as the *Moving Europe*[11] bus (Fig. 11.3(4)), which provided not only information but also other services, such as power supply, or USB chargers along the Balkan route.

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[8]http://bordermonitoring.eu/ Numbers in parentheses indicate the diagram corresponding to each counterlaboratory in image 2.

[9]http://w2eu.info/.

[10]http://watchthemed.net/index.php/main.

[11]http://moving-europe.org is a joint initiative of bordermonitoring.eu, welcome2europe and Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht&Migration.

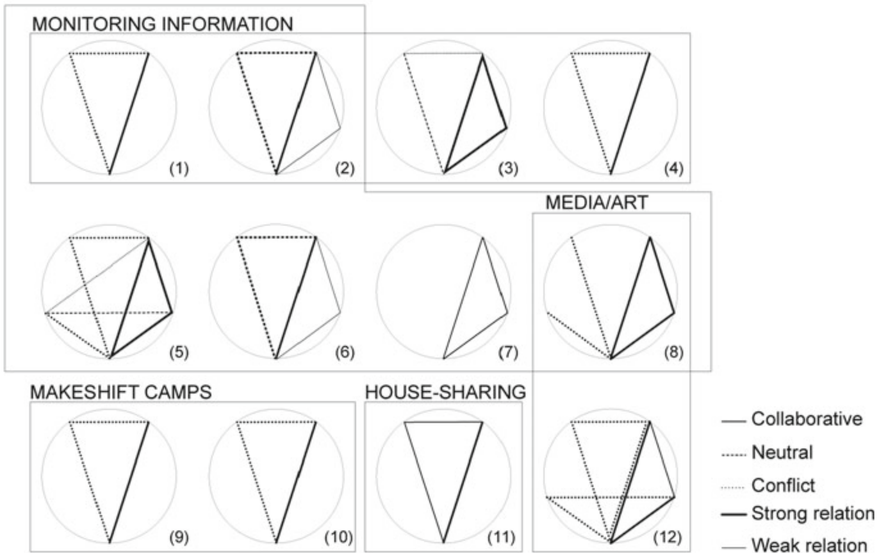

Fig. 11.3 Interactions and relations between agents in different counterlaboratories (based on the pentatonic model by Faist 2000). Drawing by the author

11.3.2 Maps and Cartographies

Mapping is one of the most prolific and useful tools. As it has been previously shown, cartographic representation is very linked to monitoring information tools, but also makes visible certain relations between elements that may not be evident in principle. Besides, maps are never finished, but in permanent elaboration and construction; this fact—especially in the case of open maps—makes them flexible and dynamic tools which reflect the character of a changing reality and the subjective perspective of their creators, as well as offering the possibility of being openly read and interpreted by different individuals and groups.

One of the first and most successful cartographies of a possible counterspace was the map elaborated in *Indymedia Estrecho* (Fig. 11.3(5)),[12] conducted mainly by scholars and activists together with civilians from home and immigration states. The objective of the initiative was to elaborate diverse cartographies of the interstitial space between Spain and Morocco, depicting main migration flows and relevant spots such as camps, smugglers sites, self-organised movements, protests (either supporting or rejecting migrant people), surveillance, militarised areas, detention centres and control devices, among many other elements in order to present a diverse,

[12]*Indymedia Estrecho* was inserted in the global publishing network Independent Media Center (also known as *Indymedia* or IMC), which groups different journalist collectives—although anyone can participate and contribute—that report on political and social issues. It was created during the Seattle anti-WTO protests in 1999.

collective imaginary of the region. Finally, their purpose for a transborder migration observatory failed, but the output material is extremely accurate and detailed, offering a perspective from a very local, specific region with strong identity connotations between North Africa and the south of Spain. Interestingly, the orientation of the maps was inverted (south-north, instead of north-south) in order to reinforce the opposition towards hegemonic space.

Although this particular project was very complex and cartographies were drawn mostly by professionals, there are many other ways to use mapping which rely on much simpler tools, usually participative and collective. Such is the case of *Arriving in Berlin—A map made by refugees* (Fig. 11.3(6)),[13] a project in which migrant and refugee people already settled in the German capital share their own experience and knowledge with newcomers by means of an open map which is being permanently updated with different relevant aspects for their arrival, such as free Wi-Fi spots, information desks, language classes, doctors speaking different languages (Arabic, Farsi…) or public institutions. Other collaborative maps can be created and consulted in *OpenStreetMap* (OSM) (Fig. 11.3(7)),[14] a wiki tool through which any user can draw specific areas with geographic information obtained with GPS, ortophotography or vector data. In recent years, some users have started to mark and draw refugee camps in OSM and other platforms like Google Maps, in order to contribute to the visibility of these areas, in which people are doomed to remain externalised, outside the acceptable world and left to survive—and then die—away from the glare of the media.

11.3.3 Media and Artistic Research

It is worth emphasising the role that art acquires as a privileged field for interpreting and constructing reality. In this regard, it is interesting to take artistic practice into account when exploring ways of representing socio-spatial conflicts.[15] Therefore, activist projects and actions based on media and artistic research are a very powerful tool to catch the attention of civil society and institutions in host countries. Moreover, they open a broad field to explore and contest the notions of identity and belonging. In this regard, there is plenty of media and artistic projects which work in this direction. Two paradigmatic examples have been chosen—an artistic and a media project—in order to illustrate the spatialisation of identity questions through these particular tools.

Between 2008 and 2011, the Moroccan artist Bouchra Khalili developed two consecutive projects based on map-making from the perspective of individuals who had

[13] https://arriving-in-berlin.de/.

[14] https://www.openstreetmap.org/.

[15] Bourriaud (2002, 13) asserts that art's purpose is not "to prepare and announce a future world" anymore, but rather to model "possible universes." The artistic action thus becomes a "vector of knowledge" (Genard 2008, 104) for social practice.

abandoned their homes in order to undertake an illegal cross-border journey from their countries of origin to a safer land, usually in a European country. In *The Mapping Journey Project* (Fig. 11.3(8)), each one of the participants was recorded remembering his/her itinerary, which was traced over the map with a permanent marker. These elementary exercises, in which the border is transgressed with a single ink stroke, are just the depiction of an arduous path that traverses diverse spaces and borders going against them, at different speeds and by various means of transport: from Jalalabad to Rome, from Beni-Mellal to Torino or Utrecht, from Ramallah to Jerusalem or from Al Fashir to Istanbul, passing through Tripoli, Athens or Barcelona. Countless stories and anecdotes—escapes, detentions, illness, deportation…—are hidden behind the two-dimensional surface of the map, in which any obstacle or achievement within the complex transnational space between Europe, Africa and the Middle East takes the form of a simple line. In the following project, *The Constellation Series*, Khalili depicts the same routes without a political map in the background, reinforcing the imprecise, trans-territorial space between Europe and countries of origin.[16]

From the field of media-making, the project *Remapping Europe* (Fig. 11.3(12))—conducted within the transnational media hub Doc Next Network and supported by the European Cultural Foundation and the European Commission—[17] put together several media labs from different countries (Spain, Poland, Turkey and the UK) in order to produce critical audiovisual material reflecting on the idea of European identity and its inherent conflicts, touching migration, racism, gender, etc. It is a way of visualising conflict through more institutional ways, as the network is supported by European institutions. A collection of media and audiovisual materials by young European media-makers reflects different positions and exchanges between diverse groups of migrant people and locals from different backgrounds. Besides, the parallel compilation book *Remixing Europe* (2014) reflects on the position of European society towards otherness analysed from the perspective of young media-makers, in order to extract conclusions about the way displaced people are depicted and imagined in European mainstream media. As the historian and professor Fatima El-Tayeb concludes in the publication derived from the project, the multiculturalist discourse—which has been much questioned in recent years—still preserves a racialised, exclusionary understanding of Europeanness that considers the other as a being-in-transit, without roots in a host country: "a linear narrative of Europeanness has been constructed and is used as foundation for an identity that transcends national divisions but remains firmly within internal limits" (V.V.A.A. 2014, 78). Conversely, she proposes a narrative based on remixing—recalling the experimental artistic technique—to think an European society that is not necessarily white and Christian, but much more plural and diverse, beyond binaries such as Orient/Occident, fundamentalism/enlightenment, Islam/Europe, past/future… and negating the spatial logic of the Union through trans-local and trans-ethnic counter-discourses.

[16]The project is further explained in a publication by the artist in *Artforum*. A fragment can be read in Khalili's website: http://www.bouchrakhalili.com/the-constellations/.

[17]http://www.docnextnetwork.org/.

11.3.4 Makeshift Camps

Makeshift protest camps are one of the most common ways to build a counterlaboratory within an urban or semi-urban context: people who confine themselves to protest about something they consider unfair, either building a new camp or occupying an existing building. One of the first examples is that of the *sans-papiers* in Paris in 1966, in which a group of migrant workers claimed their right to "papers for all" occupying diverse churches in the French capital. Since then, makeshift camps have become one of the most effective and visible spaces for contestation in many cities. During the recent European refugee crisis, several of them have appeared in different cities, situating precarity in the core of host countries and societies. Some of the best known are those organised in Vienna (*Refugee Protest Camp*, 2012–2013) or Berlin (*Oplatz*, 2013–2014) (Fig. 11.3(9)). In other countries in which migratory pressure during the crisis was higher, such as Turkey, Greece or Jordan, other solutions were adopted: they were also vindictive, but obviously more oriented towards immediate assistance, like the alternative camp Pikpa in Lesvos (Fig. 11.3(10)),[18] coordinated with other Greek islands. Organised following an assembly, horizontal model, the camp is run by workers and volunteers from all over the world, offering a welcoming space for migrant people (with playgrounds, vegetable gardens…) in which they can participate in a more human atmosphere and in which social, cultural and artistic projects and activities play an important role—even collaborations with Tate Modern or the European cultural project Metabody have been carried out. Therefore, these camps are valuable not only to generate encounters between local population and migrant people but also to help them recover their agency, since they participate in their construction and management (Katz 2016, 18).

11.3.5 House-Sharing

The alternative of shared housing (which consists on sharing rooms and/or domestic spaces and responsibilities with other people) is seen as a long term solution, since refugee people have to obtain their permit before being legally hosted. However, many people in host countries have already offered their homes before assigned refugees have arrived. Sharing and creating a common space between guests and hosts appears as a much more integrative solution than asylum houses and centres, although it is not easy to put it into practice due to administrative and political obstacles.

Since 2014, the international platform *Refugees Welcome* (Fig. 11.3(11))[19] has matched more than a thousand refugee people to hosts offering some space for them at their homes. The guest pays a certain amount for sharing the house, while the host undertakes to accompany the refugee person during his/her stay. The number may be insignificant, but the living conditions of newcomers are very different to those who

[18] http://lesvossolidarity.org/index.php/en/.

[19] http://www.refugees-welcome.net/.

remain in camps. Following the UNHCR policies, in which they recommend that displaced people join urban or rural communities rather than staying in provisional camps, it is shown how people in this situation can access easily to health and education systems and be more independent as well (UNHCR 2014, 2015a).

11.4 Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, it has been argued how counterlaboratories emerge in different contexts adopting diverse forms and strategies. Some of them imply multiple agents, others are mostly bidirectional, and some others count on the support (even slight) of institutions and governments. Europe, as a territory in permanent crises, provides space for these reverses that, despite their fragility, render contradictions and agents visible, while articulating their insertion in a transnational social space.

Some interesting conclusions can be drawn from the comparison of the different graphics based on Faist's pentatonic model. First, it seems that mapping and cartographic tools are among the most powerful ones, since they are easy to combine with other strategies. Their spatial connotations become even stronger when related to other aspects, opening ways for interpretation. Besides, they can be used as collaborative, dynamic tools to exchange perspectives and reinforce bonds between agents.

At the same time, research and artistic/media practice provides both a complex framework to interpret the issue of migration—in terms of identity, place-making, personal experience, etc.—and dense relational networks in which most of transnational agents are present in varying degrees. Projects such as *Indymedia Estrecho* or *Remapping Europe* involve a wide range actors and reflect both positive and conflict relations—for instance, *Remapping Europe* collects and works with the impressions and relations between migrant people and welcoming Europeans of different origins, but also brings awareness about racism and opposition against displaced people in host countries.

It seems obvious that, since counterlaboratories are by definition reversals of hegemonic conditions, relations with states and governments are usually problematic. However, in less precarious situations—such in the cases of *Arriving in Berlin* or house-sharing platforms—these relations have been considered to be neutral, since European states usually tolerate these activities, even when civil and activist organisers are against current migration policies. Also in *Watch the Med*, collaboration with maritime authorities is essential, although state practices are openly criticised and denounced by the managers of the platform. Meanwhile, home state agents (both civilians and rulers) seem to play a secondary role, although sometimes there are certain relations of collaboration, especially with families, friends and people who is planning or preparing a journey, either because they provide information or they are interested in receiving it.

Regarding the noopolitical dimension of counterlaboratories, most of the cases involve affective, informational, artistic or knowledge components that can be considered as noopolitical, as they favour cross-cutting, horizontal relations in terms of power and counter-power which take place in the *soft* realm of the immaterial or the virtual. Nevertheless, any (counter) laboratory requires a physical support, even a precarious or ephemeral one. All the examples show that the spatial dimension, understood as materiality, is important in order to acquire its full potential when combined with the possibilities that virtual networks offer. As Harvey (2012, 161–62) states, "it is bodies on the street and in the squares, not the babble of sentiments on Twitter or Facebook, that really matter," although it is impossible to deny the effectiveness of virtual tools in contexts such as the one studied here.

It is true that since many years ago, cities have acquired an unprecedented leading role as regional economic motors, becoming even more relevant than nation-states in many ways: we see here that national, governmental strategies are not satisfactory at all, sometimes only increasing the problem. Regional and local levels seem to be more effective and "human," since communication and information tools have boosted the connections between local and regional nodes. Of course, this does not mean that NGOs or activists should replace states in assisting refugee people, but their strategies and networks should be taken into account as their work is faster and more connected to real needs. Thus, counterlaboratories emerge as powerful, interdisciplinary spaces that help for better organisation and reception in the Mediterranean region and central European states. It is clear that the leading role of peripheral regions in the EU is essential, not only empowering communities but also when they are forced or want to return to their home countries. The most important effect is the sensation of humanity, belonging and participation which stems from the activity of locals and displaced people—no matter their profession or status—ameliorating the integration of refugee and migrant people and asylum seekers by getting them involved in social urban practices and contexts.

While European territory is being permanently rethought, opened and closed through borders and fences that separate the geographical Union from its outside, the European society shows a very different reality today. Facing the question "who has the right to Europe?" we find a wide diversity of subjects, from different origins, races and religions that in other time—and even today, in some cases—would have been considered as Non-European (black, Roma, Muslim…) It happens that European society oscillates between the desire for integration and assimilation and the suspicion of anything that has its immediate origins beyond its current borders—forgetting, precisely, that Europe is always defined negatively, by opposition.

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