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Nelson Mandela Square: Spatialities in a Frontier

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Abstract

This article presents the partial result of a broader research, carried out in the Lavapiés neighborhood, central Madrid, aimed at apprehending the constitution of its distinct spatialities and the meanings they generate in culture. The object of discussion hereby proposed is Nelson Mandela square, one of the main meeting points of immigrants in the region, in order to verify how the emergence of spatialities based on exchanges and tensions among the different groups spending time at the venue occurs. To this end, the analysis will be based on the ambivalence that characterizes the functioning of the semiotic frontier, as defined by the culture cultural semiotician Iuri Lotman (1996). The research method includes situationist drift and the participant observation. In the square, the presence of two distinct spatialities is noticed: one marked by a distancing resulting in relationships guided by what Richard Sennett (2018/2019) indicates as the "close-stranger" and another one characterized by translational exchanges by which a city is built differently from the one planned by urbanism. Through the discussion, it is also aimed to point out how, through the frontier, it becomes possible to apprehend forms of constitution of the pidgin city (Careri, 2016/2017), which emerges in the midst of relationships marked by unpredictability and error, resulting from the interactions established between different alterities.

Keywords

city, frontier, spatialities, translation

A Praça Nelson Mandela: Espacialidades em Fronteira

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta o resultado parcial de uma pesquisa mais ampla, realizada no bairro Lavapiés, região central de Madrid, voltada a apreender a constituição de suas distintas espacialidades e os sentidos que elas geram na cultura. A discussão aqui proposta terá como objeto a praça Nelson Mandela, um dos principais pontos de encontro de imigrantes na região, com o intuito de verificar de que maneira ocorre a emersão de espacialidades pautadas pelos intercâmbios e tensionamentos entre os diferentes grupos que frequentam o espaço. Para tanto, a análise terá por base a ambivalência que caracteriza o funcionamento da fronteira semiótica, tal como ela foi definida pelo semioticista da cultura Iuri Lotman (1996). A deriva situacionista e a observação participante foram utilizadas como método de pesquisa. Na praça, nota-se a presença de duas espacialidades distintas: uma marcada por um distanciamento que resulta em relações pautadas por aquilo que Richard Sennett (2018/2019) indica ser o "próximo-estranho" e outra caracterizada por intercâmbios tradutórios pelos quais se constrói uma cidade diferente daquela planejada pelo urbanismo. Por meio da discussão, objetiva-se ainda pontuar de que maneira, por meio da fronteira, se torna possível apreender formas de constituição da cidade *pidgin* (Careri, 2016/2017), que emergem em meio a relações marcadas pela imprevisibilidade e pelo erro, decorrentes das interações estabelecidas entre distintas alteridades.

Palavras-chave
cidade, espacialidades, fronteira, tradução

Introduction

Lavapiés, along with El Rastro, is known as one of the "low districts" in the city of Madrid, so defined due to their geographical position, located on a slope that flows into the river Manzanares. According to Osorio (2017), these neighborhoods are so referred due to the low purchasing power of the vast majority of those who once lived there. From the 15th century onwards, Lavapiés became an industrial area and later concentrated the main slaughterhouses of the city, attracting a large contingent of migrants from agrarian regions of Spain. Nowadays, the neighborhood has a very peculiar occupation. According to Osorio (2017), about 32% of its residents are immigrants, while in other neighborhoods in the Spanish capital, this percentage reaches 16%. As for the others, 1/3 of them is composed of long-term residents and the rest by the so-called "temporary" residents, formed basically by students and tourists who live in medium and short-term rental apartments.

One cannot let unnoticed the way in which this diversity ends up producing very peculiar spatialities (Ferrara, 2002, 2008) which, in turn, are the result of conflicts, exchanges and tensions that subsist synchronously in the region. In an attempt to discriminate how each of these three groups of residents constitutes as a dominant or a vector related to the formation manner of very unique spatialities, we present in this work the result of an analysis experiment related to an emerging configuration, primarily, by the presence of immigrants: Nelson Mandela square, an important meeting point of the Senegalese and other migrant groups in Lavapiés.

It is noteworthy that the choice of this object was not random, but, rather, a result of the presently adopted methodological strategy. During 10 months, from October 2018 to August 2019, we made numerous wanderings (Debord, 2003) in the neighborhood, on different days and at times of the week. As Careri (2016/2017) points out, the walk that characterizes situational wandering also implies "knowing where to stop" (p. 33), given the recognition of information that stands out among others present in the city.

Thus, we were drawn to the fact that Nelson Mandela seemed to present a synthesis of the relationships articulated in other squares in the neighborhood, also used as a meeting point for immigrants, not only the Senegalese, but also from other African countries. The reason is that in this particular place you can observe different uses, in addition to an ostentatious occupation every day of the week and at different times where a singular visuality is buitlt and there, conflicts and exchanges, resulting from the presence of the other and otherness, are more compeling. Thus, we are interested in exploring how, in this public space, there is a constitution of singular spatialities, often ambivalent, stemming from the diversity of interactions and bonds articulated there.

According to Careri (2016/2017), as "much of it [the walk] takes place where we do not have the right to go" (p. 105), therefore, creating strategies that allow us to build

forms of "relationship with the studied territory" (p. 33) becomes part of the research itself, since they are not given a priori, but are articulated according to the peculiarities of the space intended to be known.

In the study of Nelson Mandela square, this task was characterized by errors, hits and revisions of the route that took place in the course of time. Each of the strategies used in order to establish a bond with the local regulars allowed us to know the actual investigated space better. In other words: the process that led to the delimitation of different forms of interaction with different groups was, in itself, a means of getting to know them, as we seek to explain in the course of this analysis.

The fieldwork was then carried out in line with the precepts of participant observation, as defined by Ingold (2016, 2017). One of the central features of this procedure concerns the "way of *corresponding* with people" (Ingold, 2017, p. 225), which implies coming in line with the other's temporality and presupposes an eminently dialogical relationship in which the researcher himself or herself undergoes a transformation throughout the interaction process. Also according to Ingold (2016, 2017), there is no way to work according to this perspective without considering the "wait" to the movement of the one you try to interact with. This, therefore, requires time to be spent in the investigative process, whose results are not immediately shown, neither can be measured quantitatively, since, according to Careri (2016/2017): "exploration does not need goals, but time to be spent" (p. 107).

Thus, over the course of seven months, from January to July 2019, we were almost daily present in Nelson Mandela square at different times of the day, a fundamental factor for us to get an idea of the diversity of relationships articulated there, as well as "testing" different forms of interaction with their regulars and, at the same time, learning from them. Another aspect that should not go unnoticed in this process concerns our own condition as female, cisgender, white and foreign researcher — coming from Brazil — once this condition directly interfered with the type of interaction we developed with some of the square goers and with the "correspondence" we established with them, as we discuss below.

In turn, the analysis of the relationships articulated in Nelson Mandela square was carried out based on the epistemological perspective of study of culture proposed by the semioticist Iuri Lotman (1996), from the School of Tatar-Moscow. According to this approach, no cultural phenomenon can be studied in isolation, without considering the frontiers (Lotman, 1996) it establishes with others, which, according to the semiotic point of view, implies considering relations of delimitation, tension, resistance, translation and intranslatability among different singularities.

The study was also based on the different visualities constructed by tensioning between the physical-built space and the unforeseeable uses made of it. Although they use different terminologies, such as urban and city (Ferrara, 2000; Santos, 1994) or *ville* and *cité* (Sennett, 2018/2019), the authors denote the existence of two distinct phenomena: the space designed by urban planning and the city that is built based on the various bonds established among its inhabitants resulting in the redefinition of areas built by

urbanism, attributing new meanings to them. It is precisely the way in which this city is built in Nelson Mandela square that we try to discuss in this article.

The Frontier, the "I" and the "Other's" and the Non-Hereditary Memory

Before exploring in details the characterization of a spatiality built essentially by the relationship between the I and the other's, as occurring in Nelson Mandela square, it is worth explaining how this bond is articulated through the semiotic frontier.

According to Lotman (1996), while constituting different forms of culture, one of the central activities developed by individuals involves creating "classification models of space", elaborated based on the delimitation between what a collectivity defines as its own and other's. Such models are accompanied by the translation of the most varied types of linkage — being social, political, family, religious, among others — to the "language of spatial relations" (p. 83), as the occurred to the sacred space, which would correspond to the world of the gods. It is a founding mechanism of the semiotic individuation process, since, through that, a given culture outlines its distinctive features providing a singular identity.

This definition, in turn, is an indispensable condition for the functioning of the semiotic frontier. Only through recognizing the singularity of a certain form of ordering the translation exchange it establishes with others can be apprehended, so semiotic individuality is essential for the occurrence of exchanges and tensions. This is why the frontier presupposes a two-way movement: it both separates, once it allows us to perceive the specificity of what has been placed in dialogue and its redefinition through exchanges with the surroundings, as it unites, by enabling dialogue between different individualities.

For Lotman (1996), no culture is self-sufficient. Underpinning their functioning there is an intelligent device characterized essentially by the capacity of its various constitutive systems to establish translational exchanges with one another and, at the same time, to carry out its internal self-organization, an absolutely necessary process after exchanges with the environment, ensuring the continuity of a particular semiotic individuality.

Hence, it is noted that the frontier should be understood as an important "functional position" (Lotman, 1996, p. 26) which is not constituted a priori, since it is continuously redefined as the relationships of a system are established with the surroundings and the consequent internal rearrangement that arises as a result of such exchanges. Consequently, what a culture considers to being of its own and what is extraneous can vary significantly: through the frontier, any form of cultural organization subsists in a continuous process of individuation built in the relationship of alterity with the different one.

Through this line of thought, it is noticed that the frontier is an important analysis instrument to apprehend the geopolitical relationships that increasingly, continuously redefine the city spaces. That is true especially in megalopoles, intensified by migratory processes, as observed in the Lavapiés neighborhood, once it is based on, as a priority,

the informational dimension of sociocultural exchanges, from which different spatialities are built, which, in turn, are also in a continuous becoming.

As Mezzadra and Neilson (2013/2017) claim, it is no longer possible to think of immigrants as "marginal subjects" who subsist at the mercy of the society or who must adapt to the new a place of living, given that they act as "central protagonists in the drama of the 'fabrication' of space, time and materiality of the same social" (p. 188), as it occurs in Nelson Mandela square.

Even not mentioning Lotman, these authors also present an important discussion to think about migratory processes through the frontier — understood not in their geographical aspect, but rather by the labor relations it articulates — allied to the informational, political, economic and temporal aspects.

For Mezzadra and Neilson (2013/2017), the translation taking place at the frontier should be understood as a "social practice" (p. 309) that is not limited to merely linguistic issues, since any kind of social interaction happens in the midst of a multitude of cultural codes. As such, the frontier that enables the translation process is characterized "as both a device of union and separation between languages, cultures and, certainly, subjectivities" (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013/2017, p. 309). Such processes would elucidate the constitution of subjectivation forms built by translational relationships with the different part, in a way that each sphere placed in dialogue maintains a singular yet moving individuality.

It is worth noting that the becomings that characterize the movement of different spheres still involve the non-hereditary cultural memory. For Lotman (1996), the constitutive diversity of culture requires, primarily, the configuration of different memories, which also remain in constant conflict and tension. And, just as the action exerted by the intelligent device of culture, memory presupposes a double functioning divided into informative and creative. The first one is responsible for the "conservation of texts" (Lotman, 1996, p. 158) and is directly related to the mechanisms of self-regulation of a given cultural sphere, ensuring its continuity. On the other hand, the creative one relates to the ability to generate new texts through memory when in contact with other spheres.

Thus, in the becoming of systems, it is perceptible the movement of both trends, by which one can apprehend what remains and what changes in the context of a certain semiotic individuality. It is by the correlation of all these mechanisms that two very unique spatialities are formed in Nelson Mandela square, as we discuss below.

Nelson Mandela Square: Two Sides, Different Logics of Use

Known as an important meeting point for immigrants, especially the Senegalese, Nelson Mandela square presents itself as a very exemplary case of spatialities emerged in the neighborhood, mainly from the late 1990s onwards, due to more recent migratory flows[1]. Because it has configured itself as an industrial region, with small and cheap

[1] According to Osorio (2017), currently, the most representative groups are, respectively, from Bangladesh (20.56%), Morocco (6.97%), Ecuador (6.22%) and Senegal (4.06%).

housing, Lavapiés has become an attractive neighborhood for those arriving in the Spanish capital city[2].

Nelson Mandela square is not the only spot that concentrates much of the marks referring to the Senegalese presence in the neighborhood. It is manifest in all its surroundings, given the presence of restaurants, hairdressing salons and small African clothing stores, many of which make clothes in the shop itself.

As soon as we started to go to the square regularly, we noticed the almost daily presence of a police car parked there, especially in the late afternoon, when the police, inside or outside the vehicle, spent a few hours watching the place. Another aspect that also caught our attention concerns the resistance of its regulars to any form of visual recording. Every time we tried to make images with our camera, there was the dispersion of the regulars or some of them inquired us about the reason for the recording. This led us to believe that most of the users of that space were undocumented immigrants[3].

Subsequently, this mistrust was confirmed throughout the bibliography consulted about the neighborhood (Fernández, 2013; Osorio, 2017; Rodríguez, 2015; Sanz, 2010), as well as Norma, representative of the collective La quimera de Lavapiés, whose head office is located at Nelson Mandela square. She also warned us about drug trafficking in the region. Our first contact with the collective was through the social network Facebook, through which Norma invited us to attend the weekly hearings, when, along with other members of the collective and whoever was present, we could talk about the square[4]. We also started to attend other activities of the collective, especially some anti-racist workshops, in which the situation of immigrants, mainly coming from the African continent, was constantly discussed.

Alongside the intensification of the immigrants' presence in the region, Lavapiés has undergone significant interventions by the government aiming to requalifying the region, which, among other actions, encompassed the subsidy for housing renovation, the incentive to create cultural equipment, the installation of 48 security cameras and the renovation of public areas (Fernández, 2013; Rodríguez, 2015). These last two aspects are directly related because, as in other squares in the neighborhood — Tirso de Molina, Lavapiés, Arturo Barea and La Corrala —, in Nelson Mandela a constant in its designs configuration is noticed: open cemented areas with many voids, few trees and hardly any garden areas, despite the recurrence of children's equipment.

[2] As Sanz (2010) points out, it is noticed that the increase in immigration in Lavapiés was accompanied by the real state prices raise, so that, nowadays, the cost of housing in the neighborhood does not differ significantly from that of other regions of the Spanish capital. Although this is not the theme of the present study, we believe it is necessary to emphasize it, since this brings about the hypothesis that the arrival of new immigrants in the region is mainly due to the networks formed among them, so that those who have lived longer receive the newcomers. This could also be observed in certain conversations we had with Nelson Mandela square goers who had recently arrived in the Spanish capital.

[3] This is the reason for the low quality of some of the images illustrating this study, since they were performed in disguise.

[4] It should be noted that, since our first contact, the representative of the collective La quimera de Lavapiés said that she would only talk to us in the hearings, and not in isolation. Such behavior says a lot about the neighborhood that, in the Spanish capital, is also known for the presence of numerous occupations and collectives. According to Fernández (2013), such is the neighborhood's tendency towards activism that there is a term to designate it: *el rollito*.

For being diaphanous areas, they become easily controllable, whose visuality is directly linked to biopower strategies used by urban planning that, as Sennett (2018/2019) points out, aim to "simplify" the physical-constructed space so that only one type of person can use it, in a single way, thus any use that does not fit its pre-established form is easily detected, which, in this case, it appears to be primarily targeting undocumented immigrants.

Although it is not the object of the present study, one cannot let unnoticed that such actions are in line with the process of gentrification that the region has been going through since the late 1990s (Fernández, 2013). After all, it is a central neighborhood, marked by the working-class activity, whose houses have been revitalized and which brings together the largest number of public and private cultural institutions from all over Spain. These are precisely the central features, according to Smith (1996/2012), synthesize the profile of spatialities that historically, constituted the focus of gentrification occurring in large urban centers, so that: "the poor and proletarian neighborhoods, located at the city center are renovated based on private capital, housing purchasers and middle-class tenants – neighborhoods that had previously undergone a lack of investment and the exodus of the middle class itself" (p. 74).

Resuming Nelson Mandela square, with regard to its design and visuality, one particular aspect draws our attention: its vast number of benches, allotted especially at its ends, which does not occur in any other area of the neighborhood. Thus, on one of its ends, next to Mesón de Paredes street, there is a row of 12 benches (Figure 1), while at the other end, near Amparo street, there are two other rows, composed of 10 benches (Figure 2). Such seats most resemble bins, devoid of backrest, uncomfortable and only part of them, the ones next to Amparo street, has shade.

Figure 1 *Nelson Mandela Square Next to Mesón de Paredes Street*
Credits. Regiane Miranda de Oliveira Nakagawa

Figure 3 *Nelson Mandela Square Next to Amparo Street*
Credits. Regiane Miranda de Oliveira Nakagawa

It is impossible to ignore that the allotment of this equipment at the square ends, next to the streets, also makes control by the police force easier. Despite that, such benches are not only widely used but also build a very unique dynamic for the square.

Sennett (2018/2019) establishes an important analogy between different types of urban equipment and the punctuation used in the language, as provided for in normative grammar, so that certain interventions would perform, in the urban space, the same function as graphic signs perform in the verbal text, often resulting in meanings that are not limited to language. As indicated by the author, these are forms of "spatial punctuation" (Sennett, 2018/2019, p. 276) that intervene in the construction of the physical-constructed space, but whose meanings can go beyond it. More specifically, in the context of this work, we will report to one of them: the quotation marks[5].

In the same way the quotation marks highlight a word or fragment present in a text, the "urban quotation marks" (Sennett, 2018/2019, p. 276), materialized by certain equipment, such as benches and drinking fountains, draw attention to the space where they are located. Allied to this initial function, another one overlaps, once, just as the quotation marks also highlight the use of a word outside its usual context or meaning by which, often, an irony is constructed, the urban quotation marks are also not limited to merely highlighting the presence of a certain space, but rather entail its resignification, giving rise to a new spatiality and the generation of meanings, often not predictable and contradictory ones. Therefore,

> the grammarians would say that the quotation marks put into question the value of the word or the phrase they indicate, meaning, they do not consider them correct. But quotation marks also value the word within it; as Leon Festinger would say; the quotation marks stimulate focal attention to the arbitrary, the problematic, but also the importante element. The same occurs in the constructed medium. (Sennett, 2018/2019, p. 277)

[5] The other two refer to the exclamation mark and the semicolon.

Sennett (2018/2019) also indicates that many of these markers can be arbitrarily allocated, but this is not what seems to happen to the benches in Nelson Mandela square, given the proximity to the street and the rowed position that, as we highlight, tends to facilitate control.

However, at the same time, this provision also favors face-to-face meetings, an interaction that is intrinsically related to the idea of community characterizing a public square. In our view, this form of encounters, which has distinct logics at the two ends of Nelson Mandela, also intensifies and elucidates conflicts, frontiers, the delimitations between the I and the other's, and the memory of different groups that coexist there. These are urban quotation marks that not only draw attention to the paradoxes that persist there, but also enhance the emertion of different interaction and subjectivation modalities, from which the formation of two spatialities in the same physical-constructed space occurs.

A central feature in the uses of the benches located next to Mesón de Paredes street is that they are occupied, essentially, throughout the day and a predominantly male presence can be observed[6]. Not infrequently, we also observe the presence of men dressed in Islamic tunics and, through the contact we had with many of them, part of the regulars of this part of the square are, in fact, Muslims. Over time, we discovered that there is a mosque on Cabestreros Street, whose corner with Mesón de Paredes street is precisely across from the aforementioned row of benches. The door to the building remains closed most of the time and only by watching the movement in a few days and times it is possible to realize it is a mosque.

In this extension of the square, there is the delimitation of a meeting spatiality and coexistence that circumscribes a very specific "I", based essentially on the correlation of religious, ethnic-racial and gender aspects. The status of a white, solo and foreign woman, such place could hardly feel comfortable, once the slightest closeness was seen with suspicion. However, occasionally, there is the presence of small groups of young Spanish citizens who, at sparse times, sit there to talk to each other and seldom interact with other regulars.

Over the months we daily went to the square, the users of this stretch were undoubtedly the most resistant to our presence. Over time, we realized that the best way to interact with them was to respond assertively to the "flirtation" they addressed to us, especially the younger ones. From then on, long conversations were established and often culminated in an invitation to a party or a private meeting, especially when we reported to be Brazilians. It was through these dialogues, restricted to the space of the square, that we effectively confirmed our hypothesis that the Muslim religion was a factor of agglutination of users of that space, allied to the ethnic issue.

In particular, a dialogue with a young man from Guinea-Bissau caught our attention. Not long ago he was in Madrid and struggled with the Spanish language. In a certain excerpt of the conversation, when we reported the importance of African religions in Brazil, the young man showed total ignorance about the subject. More specifically, when

[6] During the fieldwork, in addition to the presence of Senegalese, a predominant group in the square, we also had contact with men from Guinea Bissau and Congo.

we talked about the orixás and alluded to "Oxalá", he immediately interrupted us and said "Ah, yes, Allah", and began to talk excitedly about the Muslim religion, of which he was a follower. Far from being a rustle, his mistaken translation from "Oxalá" to "Allah" has placed itself as an important source of information for our investigation.

More specifically, the question concerning the I–other relationship seems to be intensified in this spot by the type of bond established among its regulars and the attendants/owners of the three grocery stores located on Mesón de Paredes street, across from the square (Figure 3). Users of that space regularly enter these shops to buy products of immediate consumption, such as water and soda. They are small trades that have a common trait: all of them are owned by people from Bangladesh. During the day, the wives are in charge of serving the customers once such shops do not have hired employees. Another common trait is that they all wear the hijab, clothing used by women followers of the Muslim religion.

Figure 3 *Grocery Stores on Mesón de Paredes Street, From Left to Right: Auto Servicio Frutas y Verduras, Mashallah and Shamima*

Credits. Regiane Miranda de Oliveira Nakagawa

These are family businesses, as we were told by one of these women, stating rather proudly that her husband had been the first shopkeeper on that stretch of the street a few years ago. As we found out by attending these minimarkets weekly as any ordinary customer, these women establish merely "commercial" contact with the regulars of that stretch of the square. In this case, a particular situation caught our attention. In another conversation with the same lady, we asked if she liked to live in Madrid and what the relationship with the people around her was like. As she responded that "life was difficult there", a square goer came in to buy a product, and when he approached the cashier to pay for it, she immediately stopped talking and lowered her head, as if she couldn't look at him directly or as if he should not hear what we were talking about. More subtly, in other circumstances, such discomfort was also observed in the other grocery stores.

At the same time, we realized that, as we attended these places, a relationship of a certain complicity was established between us and these women, since we shared, in

addition to being female, the situation as a foreigner coming from a peripheral country. One of the ways to get closer to them was through trivial comments on some product found there —such as coconut water — by which Brazil and the longing for the country was mentioned, which resulted as a pretext for shopkeepers to also talk about their stories and how they missed their countries of origin, a recurring topic for the women to whom we talked.

It is noticeable that the I–other relationship is articulated not only between the regulars of that end of the square, but also among those shopkeepers, who also mark a space of their own. It can be said that the interaction between one group and another also intervenes in the delimitation that each one establishes for themselves.

This semiotic mechanism, which, as Lotman (1996) indicates, implies building one's own individuality in the relationship with the other can, in our view, also lead to the emergence of another sociocultural phenomenon in the sphere of the city. This is what Sennett (2018/2019), in allusion to Emmanuel Levinas, defines as "the other as a stranger" (p. 164). As the author points out, this relationship is woven in the daily life of cities and presupposes the recognition of the other, a stranger, often impossible to be understood, with whom a minimal relationship of coexistence is established, even as a guarantee of survival of both groups, as it happens, for example, in the most varied commercial exchanges. Thereby, it would be possible to apprehend a "civilizing ethics" (Sennett, 2018/2019, p. 164) that guides most of the bonds that build the city.

In our view, this is a remarkable aspect of the connections established between the regulars of the benches located next to Mesón de Paredes street and the shopkeepers in its surroundings. Each group builds its own spatiality, with its cultural and conduct codes that, somehow, take back particular traits of each one's homeland; at the same time, the recognition of such diversity is accompanied by the need to establish relationships of coexistence, since somehow, they need one another. No manifest tension among these groups can be noticed, though neither do they show interest in strengthening bonds nor performing any exchange with each other.

If we consider that, according to the semiotic perspective of culture study proposed by Lotman (1996), the delimitation of the pertaining space of a culture is a founding element of its own. It can soon be assumed that this mechanism, as observed in the reported excerpt, constitutes an inherent process to every collectivity faced with the challenge of building its own a spatiality in a new living place in which the action of informational memory intervenes irreparably.

As Makarychev and Yatsyk (2017) state, according to the Lotmanian perspective, any closing is momentary, as it is configured as a mere stage of self-awareness and internal reorganization of a given cultural sphere. In this respect, the authors even indicate an appropriate distinction between distancing and isolation, since, in the first case, there is no denial of the other's existence, except for their temporary distance. Seen through a semiotic bias, this is, in our view, one of the necessary conditions for the creation of the close–stranger bond.

The informational memory intervenes in the configuration of an "own space" resulting from the interaction with the other. It also causes a given social organization to acquire unique characteristics and its own codes, in view of the specificity of the I–other relationships that occurs in a certain location. According to Makarychev and Yatsyk (2017), the one that temporarily excludes remains somehow linked to the one that was excluded. This is always a contextual situation that does not make it impossible for other relationships to arise at the border. From this perspective, in that context, one cannot ignore that the distance between Senegalese and Bangladeshis also results in defining them in their semiotic individuality.

Moreover, the frontiers a particular semiotic individuality builds with different spheres are never the same, which equally interferes with their uniqueness. Depending on the context, what is own can change its position, as well as the other's, therefore it is the culture resulting by building that, in certain circumstances, is the foreigner (Lotman, 2013), which can acquire different gradations and levels.

This discussion seems to be central to us in order to situate the relationships articulated in the referred part of the square, since, for the shopkeepers located on Mesón de Paredes street, people who attend Nelson Mandela would be a specific type of foreigner, meaning, the close–stranger, different from what occurs with Latin Americans and Spanish, with whom there seems to be another type of relationship and exchange. The same is true for those who are daily in the square, who also maintain a certain distance from the shopkeepers, but not from other groups, also composed of Spanish and Latin Americans. As Sennett (2018/2019) also points out, "the differences are not all the same. Social class differences are not experienced today in the same way as cultural differences in race, religion or ethnicity" (p. 176).

In the presente context, due to the conviviality we had with the two groups, along with the field observation, aspects concerning race and ethnicity seem, in fact, to acquire a greater relevance in the tessitura of the idea of the close–stranger, which does not mean that both circumscribe the same delimitation in relation to other groupings. Another aspect that should also be taken into account, in view of our status as researchers, is the relationship of proximity and complicity built among foreign women from peripheral regions. Gender seems to be an indispensable factor in the degree their closeness.

This perception is reinforced when we make a counterpoint with the uses of the benches located at the other end of the square, near Amparo street, which are practically unoccupied throughout the day, except for Sundays, when the neighborhood acquires its very own dynamic due to the great influx of people attending the Rastro[7] market. On the other days of the week, the occupation of this space begins in the afternoon, being intensified at the end of the day.

As on the other end of the square, the presence of Senegalese immigrants is also dominant, but its regulars are younger. There are also women of different age groups,

[7] The Rastro market has been going on since the 16th century in the region, where you can find clothes, antiques, jewelry, leather products and decoration (Trapiello, 2018). Currently, it takes palce on Sundays and public holidays.

including older women and interracial couples with young children. In other words, when compared to the type of attenders on the opposite side of the square, the heterogeneity of the group is noticeable and the people who stop there daily are almost always the same.

The presence of Spanish people in the end near Amparo street is significantly higher than on the other side, since it is common for young people and adolescents to gather in small groups and spend hours there, chatting and sharing small snacks, especially on weekends (Figure 4).

Figure 4 *Nelson Mandela Square — Overview of the Half Near Amparo Street*
Credits. Regiane Miranda de Oliveira Nakagawa

Probably, due to the diversity of groups that attend this part of the square, and where, in fact, we spent most of the time, we realized that our presence was barely noticed. Moreover, at no time were there flirtatious approaches. In this area, we always used some subterfuge that appeared to establish some form of interaction at the time, such as the day we saw a youngster wearing a tshirt of the Bahian group Olodum. This was a pretext to "bring up the subject" and the young man responded by saying that he had been given it by a Brazilian friend and that he really liked Brazilian music.

There is still another grouping that occupies those benches every day: six to seven women, also from Bangladesh and dressed in hijab, who, always in the late afternoon, gather around the last bench in front of the small playground located at the end of the square. All have small children and take them to the park to play, after school. It is also a form of meeting and socializing for whom daily spend hours there (Figure 5).

Figure 5 *Women Gathered in Front of the Playground in Nelson Mandela Square*
Credits. Regiane Miranda de Oliveira Nakagawa

It is noticed that this gathering constitutes a completely apart configuration in that part of the square, since the women who meet there do not establish any form of interaction with the other regulars of the place. This behavior is similar to the close–stranger relationship that, as we pointed out, seems to be dominant in the stretch next to Mesón de Paredes street.

However, with regard to the spot in this study, there are some indications of relationships no longer guided by I–other distancing or close–distant, but rather by situations that emerge through translation exchanges that mean bonds, however sparse.

One case in particular caught our attention. Often, on Sundays, Spanish residents sit on the benches located in this stretch to play the guitar and sing. On one of these occasions, one of the Senegalese young men who attends that spot of the square almost daily arrived from Amparo street and approached two other Spanish youngsters who, on the guitar, played and humming a Spanish pop song. By joining the group almost immediately, he began to sing a kind of hip hop in a completely unknown language to us, in addition to which, for much of his intervention, there was only the percussion produced by his own voice.

In the correlation between pop and hip hop, a very unique sound was produced that is not limited to a simple overlaping. The modal character of the sound emitted by the young man — which, as Wisnik (1989) points out, aims to convert the noise of the world into orderly sound forms, and "it is also the world of timbres: instruments that are voices and voices that are instruments" (p. 40) — it is configured as a rhythmic structure that, even correlated with the syntagma of the song, does not have a specific or manifest semantic meaning, thus generating the emertion of an unusual textual configuration, "resulting from the deformation of the usual text according to the influence of the laws of this communication" (Lotman, 1998, p. 51) which, in this case, emerged from the gathering of these young men.

Such extremely prosaic interaction only likely to be perceived when attending that area on a daily basis, offers the indication of an autopoietic, often individual and localized movement, which, as Ferrara (2018) indicates, builds the daily life of the city.

Morever, it unveils the possibility of configuring a process of intranslatability between different cultural spheres.

Lotman (1996) defines it by the correlation established between absolutely differing languages, in which there is no previous algorithm that determines a parameter for translation. Thereby, casual and uncertain translational equivalences are established, resulting in the arising of expressive forms and cultural texts characterized by a very specific synthesis, capable of generating the eruption of unpredictable meanings or the very indefinition of a text, as occurred in this case, resulting in a sound that was no longer pop or hip hop.

It could be said that this situation elucidates how the processes operationalized by the frontier can be configured as social practices bearing a much broader sociocultural function. Together with translation, Mezzadra and Neilson (2013/2017) also report to intranslatability to explain the specificity of certain processes of subjectivation that occur at the frontier, by which it would be possible to build the "common". More particularly, in the context of intranslatability, this implies the eruption of a certain configuration that does not belong to any of the spheres placed in dialogue, but which, without them, would not exist either. In this sense, the "common" does not exist as an a priori, but it is the result of exchanges, at first unthinkable and unpredictable, that continually take place at the frontier. Therefore:

> the translation relationship that we consider crucial for the composition of the common involves a constant feedback of the energies of the struggles involved in th construction of *commons*. The material constitution of the common cannot be assimilated under the logic of the universal and the private [aspects]. This is the reason why we can talk about translating the common, which is not only pointing out how *commons* are produced, but also marking how they connect and divide their constituting singularities simultaneously. (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013/2017, p. 330)

The construction of the "common" by intranslatability is also a condition for the possibility of buiding unique spatialities in the city, however ephemeral they may be, as reported above. They result from absolutely banal social practices, which are fundamental preconditions for emerging a city built together with an idea of the "common" that takes place in the midst of encounters, resistances and exchanges. This generates the very indefinition of the city, as well as the individualities placed in relationships, redefined due to the translation exchanges, since "every new step of cultural development increases, and does not exhaust the informational value of culture, thus increasing and not diminishing its internal indefinition" (Lotman, 1996, p. 75).

In this regard, Careri (2016/2017) establishes an important correlation between pidgin, a contact or common language that arises from the encounter between cultures that have completely different languages, and the pidgin spaces that come to light in the city. Pidgin tends to be created spontaneously and as na emergency in order to enable communication between different collectivities and arises, above all, from error and lack

of understanding of what is said, characterized by an extremely simplified and rudimentary grammatical and normative structure.

Similarly, the pidgin spaces of the city, also called by the author "intercultural public spaces" (Careri, 2016/2017, p. 59), erupt amid relationships of intranslatability built between absolutely differing codes and directly linked to an "unpredictable dimension of reality" (Careri, 2016/2017, p. 57), whose result, as it erupts, proves uncertain. It is a movement of the city endowed with a logic that is completely averse to the normative codes characterizing urban planning and that it often seeks to control.

Also in this regard, it should be emphasized that, in the fieldwork period, more specifically, in March 2019, the renovation project of the square began[8]. Such renewal began in the area near Mesón de Paredes street and, during the works carried out there, there was no interdiction of the space where the benches are placed, but, rather, the large open area located between them and the grid that demarcated the half of the square. This stage of the renovation has already been completed and focused on the requalification of part of the floor, which did not generate significant changes in the design and visuality in that part.

Very different is the renovation initiated in May 2019 in the area near Amparo street and that, while writing this article, had not been completed yet. The renovation began with the removal of children's equipment from the end of the square, followed by interventions on the floor, which first interdicted fractions of the square and, later, its complete closing by fences placed in the access to this part.

As Norma from the collective La quimera de Lavapiés told us, there was no previous contact from public authorities with the users of the square to discuss, collectively, the interventions undertaken there, so the only data she obtained was reached through informal conversations with the builders, who informed her of the expansion of the leisure area intended for children. In parallel, the only information we obtained about the project was available on the website linked to the city hall, curiously entitled Decide Madrid (Madrid decides), as follows:

> project of reactivation of the square, with placement of vegetable gardens and recreational activities, eliminating points of conflict to attract a sector of the population such as families and elderly people, allowing them to enjoy without fear of this venue that also belongs to them. (Alemrac, 2012)

It is hard not to be surprised about a project that foresees a requalification aiming to eliminate "conflict spots" and is targeted at families and old people who can enjoy it without fear. As we report, the square regulars are families and older people, as well as young people. However, it seems that these are not the groups the government believes should or could occupy that area, which, in our view, contributes to ratify the process of gentrification that has guided the urban planning in the region. In a way, this discourse also seems to indicate the recognition of a possibile irruption in that locality of

[8] It is noteworthy that other squares in the neighborhood have also undergone urban interventions.

an increasingly difficult to be controlled and/or managed city, requiring the continuous redefinition of its physical space as an attempt to "erase" the uses and memories that qualify it and build it as such.

On the other hand, as we monitored, even in the midst of works, the usual regulars did not stop using this part of Nelson Mandela square. As soon as the children's equipment was removed, numerous graffiti appeared on the wall next to them (Figure 6). The contrast generated by the color of that intervention reinforced the austere character and the grayish color that distinguishes the design of the square.

Figure 6 *Graffiti at Nelson Mandela Square After the Playground Removal*

Credits. Regiane Miranda de Oliveira Nakagawa

As Sennett (2018/2019) points out, "color is destined to challenge the different footprints that time usually leaves in physical materials" (p. 99), an aspect that is especially salient in the benches located in this part of the square, since many were painted in different colors by their own users (Figure 7). The worn, dirty or graffited shades build a visuality demonstrating that "the physical medium was used; life marks the shape" (Sennett, 2018/2019, p. 99). Although, as the author points out, color is indicative of the course of time and the graffiti performed there is a trait of the present, the as it precisely seems to dialogue with the marks built with time and that signal different forms of use of the square, constituting, in our view, the action of the city's creative memory that erupts when in tension with urban planning.

Figure 7 *Benches in Nelson Mandela Square, Next to Amparo Street*
Credits. Regiane Miranda de Oliveira Nakagawa

Moreover, as the works tend to occur mainly in the morning, bringing down the protective fence is recurrent in the late afternoon by those who already attended the square and continue to do so (Figure 8).

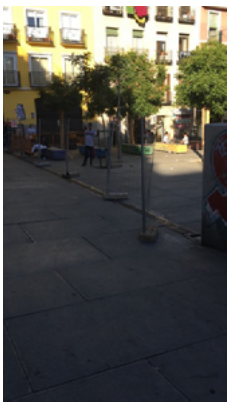

Figure 8 *Opening of Protective Fence — Nelson Mandela Square*
Credits. Regiane Miranda de Oliveira Nakagawa

However, this did not happen with the women whose children used the playground there: as soon as it was removed, they began to meet in Tirso de Molina square, located a few blocks away, which also has children's playground. We also observed the fences being broght down on Sundays by key members of the collective La quimera de Lavapiés, who, on that day, sell meals made in a "collaborative" way, when each one pays as much as they want or can afford (Figure 9).

Figure 9 *Nelson Mandela Square Bringing Down of Protective Fence by Members of Collective La Quimera de Lavapiés*

Credits. Regiane Miranda de Oliveira Nakagawa

In our view, such practices — aroused by an authoritarian intervention placed on the venue, disregarding the memory of the uses built there — offer an indication of the potential for the eruption of a "common" and a pidgin city (Careri, 2016/ 2017) that, according to the logic of city planning, should be avoided. In addition, it is still symptomatic that the ongoing renovation made in the part near Amparo street is much more extreme than the one carried out in the other half. Thus, the uses that will be enhanced in Nelson Mandela square are doubtful once its requalification is completed, as well as how the memory inscribed there will be resignified.

Final Considerations

The recognition of two distinct modalities in the use of Nelson Mandela square makes clear the ambivalence that characterizes the processes operationalized at the frontier, encompassing both semiotic individualization, as well as translation and intranslatability relationships. Consequently, different spatialities are built that, first of all, elucidate the formal transformations that every immigration process generates in the city pointing to different becomings, which include the resignification of what was already there. As Careri (2016/2017) points out, "those who arrive change us" (p. 58), so that there is no disregard for the way in which such constitutive spatialities of the Lavapiés neighborhood redefine it in its most banal daily life.

Thereby, there are forms of occupation in which, however much it is expected to predict or direct them, there is always a datum of unpredictability. The foreigner does not report to an established and predefined situation, since it involves a specific context whose positions are continuously redefined by different encounters and tensions. Taking this aspect into account implies considering how the processes of subjectivation, by which the subjects continually redefine themselves, also generate constructions and reconstructions of spatialities by the delimitation of the I with regard to others, so that,

as Sennett (2018/2019) points out, "the knowledge of migrants is the knowledge that all city planners need, since they have abandoned the safety of what is homelike and local" perceptions (p. 262).

Due to the subjectivation that happens at the frontier, considering the specificity of a subject in continuous transit, a nomadic city is built that, absent from "stable reference points" (Careri, 2002/2013, p. 46), is also in motion. It is not only the physical displacement in space, but the displacement of space itself that operates by redefining spatialities, a fact that inevitably poses a huge challenge to think about the big cities today. In this perspective, the analysis presented here can be seen as an important metatext that, in turn, allows us to bring out the condition of countless other megalopolises, where new "common" erupt daily due to migratory processes.

Translation: Ana Trivellato

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