The Gambiarra City: International Migrants' Subjectivity and the Making of a Multi-Dimensional Urban Space in São Paulo[1]

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São Paulo has been studied extensively as a divided city in which inequality has torn apart the urban space between centre and periphery. Following the specific connections between the local and the global in the lives of international migrants, I suggest that São Paulo can be a 'gambiarra' city. A 'gambiarra' city accommodates all kinds of life journeys, becoming a multi-dimensional space inhabited, activated and explored as a resource in the transformations of subjectivity. An approach that takes into account migrants' trajectories of mobility in the city and their understandings of belonging brings out the ways in which people's selfhood develops in the urban environment. The analysis shows that Latin American urban centres such as São Paulo are complex and heterogeneous spaces, in which migrants' presence can stand beyond the confines of ethnic territories.
Keywords: Migrants, mobility, São Paulo, subjectivity, urban space.

> When I arrived in São Paulo, I was surprised because I saw such a big city. The first times I went out to the streets I felt like an ant. Around me there were high-rises and it was like I was wiped out. Now I can walk across the city and appreciate it a lot, because I can remember many good things about this city and [the neighbourhood of] Bom Retiro. I like the squares, stores, sports courts and everything in Bom Retiro. I feel that Brazil-São Paulo-Bom Retiro is part of my life history. (Corina, 2014)[2]

Born in Cochabamba, Bolivia, Corina was in her twenties when I met her in the Portuguese classes that I was teaching in Bom Retiro. Like most Spanish-speaking migrants living in this area, Corina worked as a seamstress in one of the many outsourced sewing units attached to the garment industry. Corina's words, quoted from a class assignment, draw attention to the way people can activate or de-activate personal and urban resources to make a city something of their own.

For Corina, São Paulo first evoked disorientation and impressions of being irrelevant within a huge urban conurbation: she 'felt like an ant' and 'was wiped out' in the presence of numerous high-rises when she first arrived. Corina's feelings were not atypical as São Paulo has often been described as not being 'a humane city' (Amaral 2001). Convergent with this picture of a disheartening metropolis, urban studies on São Paulo have constructed a portrait of a 'divided city', split between the poles of 'centre' and 'periphery'. These studies, as I argue in the next section, are based largely on macro-structural analyses, which take São Paulo as a case for discussing, among other issues, inequality, segregation, violence and precarious ways of

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[2] Excerpt from a Portuguese class assignment of October 2014. My translation from Portuguese and Spanish. The name Corina is a pseudonym, to protect anonymity.

living. This notion of a divided city, however, suggest that understandings of belonging and living in the city are defined by the spatial area in which the individual is placed. Therefore, discussions generally revolve around the dichotomy between the 'privileged', placed in the social and symbolic space of the 'centre', and the 'marginals', consigned to the social and symbolic space of the 'periphery.' Such formulation tends to reinforce a framework of 'static' positions in the urban scenario of São Paulo, whereby each subject becomes the expression of the divide, or area, within which their life is circumscribed.

Accounts such as Corina's problematise this vision of fixed identities in a 'divided city.' Her understanding of living in São Paulo highlights that she is both a mobile being (she is a migrant and walks 'all over the city') and a subject in transformation effected in and through the city. In this article, I focus on the life trajectories of international migrants in São Paulo to suggest that, in taking into account their understandings of belonging and mobility in the urban space, cities can be deemed multi-dimensional places that embrace the life-in-the-making of their inhabitants. By taking seriously the perceptions of leading different lives in an urban setting, I propose to describe São Paulo as a 'gambiarra city'. 'Gambiarra' is a colloquial word in Portuguese**,** usually referring to a solution improvised with existing scarce resources. By calling São Paulo a 'gambiarra city,' I want to approach it as a city experienced with different points of arrival and departure that allows different sorts of lives exist in their own processes of subjective transformation.

São Paulo and its Complexities: Beyond the 'Divided City' and its Migrants' Neighbourhoods

In 2010, a United Nations Human Settlements report (UN-HABITAT) launched a series called 'Cities and Citizens — Bridging the Urban Divide,' which presented São Paulo as 'a tale of two cities.'[3] The divide that led to this characterisation referred to the appalling inequalities of income, health, water, sanitation, education and other categories that were produced by urban processes of social exclusion. São Paulo's specific inequalities became an oft-explored dynamic that disclosed, for instance: the misadjusted modernity of a country that produced a problematic city caught between the poles of 'the archaic' and 'the postmodern' (Maricato 1999); or the social and territorial segregation in which different urban classes existed spatially and socially separate from one another, with the upper-middle classes living in enclaves of gated condominiums while the lower classes subsisted in precarious settlements near these enclosed complexes or in the suburbs (Caldeira 2000). Within this dichotomist framework, some studies focused on one side of the divide, specifically on the peripheral and precarious areas, such as the 'auto-constructed' lots (Holston 2008) or 'slums' (Davies 2006).

Accordingly, an extensive tradition of urban studies attempted to understand São Paulo as a 'divided city' within the universe of the disenfranchised. Scholars' attention to urban populations was directed both to the peripheries and the city centre. Apropos the peripheries, some studies highlighted working-class groups organised around issues of urban infrastructure and housing (Bonduki and Rolnik 1979) and influence networks drawn along the lines of party

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[3] For an example of a critical analysis of 'dual cities' in Albania, see Prato (2017).

politics (Caldeira 1984). Also, they portrayed other forms of socialisation such as leisure activities (Magnani 1984) and claims of a periphery identity via hip-hop music and culture (Pardue 2010). Conversely, some accounts focused on the city centre and recounted how this part of São Paulo lost its prominence as a vital reference for the city's dynamics, being re-appropriated by lower-class workers in precarious housing situations (Kowarick 2011) or by 'unwanted' individuals, such as crack users (Frúgoli and Spaggiari 2010; Rui 2012). Therefore, the representation of São Paulo as a 'divided city' was closely accompanied by the portrayal of numerous 'marginal' subjectivities.

At the same time, specific areas and neighbourhoods in São Paulo have been associated with specific groups of international migrants throughout the twentieth century. For instance, Japanese nationals were likely to be concentrated in the neighbourhood of Liberdade (Cardoso 1972), while Italians were spread across Brás, Bexiga and Barra Funda (Machado 1983 [1927]). Migrants of Syrian and Lebanese origin could be found in the area around 25 de Março Street (Truzzi 1996) and the district of Bom Retiro was said to be one of the few that hosted successive migrant groups, where Jewish migrants replaced the Italians, and subsequently the Koreans succeeded the Jews (Truzzi 2001). All these accounts shape international migrants' presence in São Paulo as ethnic groups, in which a national or ethnic qualifier comes to be commensurable with a specific culture and attached to a particular territory in the urban space.

Both formulations of 'migrant's neighbourhoods' and the 'divided city' tie certain spaces to certain groups of people. They inscribe marks of difference onto particular places and simultaneously circumscribe certain subjectivities within specific urban boundaries. Eventually, they promote the characterisation of places and subjects by attributing a certain degree of alterity (peripheral, marginal, or foreigner) and, consequently, essentialise them in some way. In this framework, actors in the city become closely identified with the spaces to which they are assumed to belong, thus generating a sense of 'static' positionalities.

Based on the evidence provided by the physical mobility of international migrants within and beyond the city, this paper enquires into Latin American cities such as São Paulo by taking into account migrants' own understandings of self and belonging and observing how these impact the way they circulate in the city. As mobile actors, migrants can develop various life trajectories that disclose different aspects of the urban space, thereby revealing how cities are complex and multi-layered environments. I intend to show this without recourse to exoticizing urban areas via the alterity of specific subjects or socio-economic conditions — the very features which the narratives of 'migrants' neighbourhoods' and a 'divided city' usually emphasise. Instead, I want to advance an understanding of São Paulo's urban complexity which resonates with previous analyses that not only have revealed the ambiguous forms of urban processes in São Paulo, (Telles 2006, Feltran 2011) but have considered the city as a heterogeneous place (Marques 2016). I will highlight this complexity by showing the presence of international migrants in ways which Veronica Gago (2017) identifies as 'mottled'. I also mobilise Abdoumalik Simone's (2016) conceptualisations of the 'mutant' and the 'opaque' (2016) nature of urban cities in the Global South. The 'mottled', 'mutant' and 'opaque' will be galvanised in this article by the notion of 'gambiarra.'

I adopt an approach developed by Pardo (1996) on the relationships between the individual and 'the system' in order to bring out individual international migrants' understandings of life in the city and indicate how complex and multifaceted an immense city like São Paulo can be by accommodating disparate personal trajectories within its urban space. I follow my interlocutors throughout the city and beyond so as to identify the intricate entanglements in they are involved while making a living in São Paulo. In this way, I optimise the possibilities for applying participant observation as a resourceful method that helps to expand the reaches of urban research in a global context (Prato and Pardo 2013). I also want to show 'that individual lives are uniquely shaped in the city' (Pardo and Prato 2018: 7) because a city is not just a scenario: a city becomes constitutive of these lives, at the same time that these lives constitute the city.

International Migrants as Urban Subjectivities in São Paulo: Singular Mobilities and Life Journeys

Following on from studies that treat the mobility of certain migrant groups by defining migrants' ways of being as 'patterns' in the city (Rolnik 2012, Souchaud 2012), I opt instead for developing an approach that privileges the apprehension of singular mobilities within the city, that is, I concentrate on following the personal courses of particular migrants in order to reach a comprehension of the urban environment via certain individuals' own understandings of their trajectories within the city.

In this endeavour, I do not limit the analytical gaze by considering just one nationality and/or ethnicity, an approach which is frequently adopted in migration studies. Here, I present the personal trajectories of migrants from countries such as Bolivia, South Korea and Paraguay, for fieldwork in São Paulo offered rich opportunities for meeting such a diverse set of people.[4] Corina, introduced earlier, is from Bolivia. Helen, Mr Kwon and Kitty [5] are the other interlocutors whose senses of belonging and courses in the city are depicted in the following sections. Whereas Helen and Mr Kwon were born in South Korea, Kitty was born in Paraguay. While Helen can be considered a 'foreign resident' because of her status as a middle-class housewife, all the others can be said to be 'economic migrants' (Prato 2016), as their main motivation was to work in Brazil.

Each of them adopted different strategies for living in São Paulo, as each nationality can acquire a different status according to Brazil's legal framework and international treaties (Silva 2018). For instance, both Helen and Mr Kwon held permanent residency permits while Kitty lived and worked without legal documents. Helen and Mr Kwon developed different attitudes in relation to their ethnic community. Whereas the former distanced herself from the

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[4] I spent 16 months of fieldwork in São Paulo and a couple of cities in Bolivia and South Korea between 2013 and 2015. During fieldwork, I had the opportunity to be in contact with men and women, working and middle-class people, some were born in Paraguay or South Korea, others in China or Bolivia. The only reference that united them all was the fact that I met each of them directly or indirectly in the district of Bom Retiro.

[5] These are pseudonyms.

community, the latter strongly based his existence on it. Ciubrinskas (2018) observed a similar phenomenon in Chicago and referred to it as 'transnational fragmentation'.

The ethnographic cases for this article chosen for specific reasons. Corina's perception of São Paulo was the one which raised my awareness of the importance of the urban environment to people's subjectivity, so I use her case in the introduction as inspiring example**.** However, as I could not gather sufficient material concerning her experiences, the other three life journeys were selected in order to develop my argument. Helen's and Mr Kwon's trajectories are significant because they show how individuals from the same country of origin can develop very different senses of belonging and, consequently, dissimilar life courses in the city. At the same time, Kitty's trajectory in São Paulo typifies the unsuspected relations that flourish in the informal environment of the city, as her course crossed Mr Kwon's, even though they came from different countries. In this sense, Kitty's and Mr Kwon's connections can be seen as exemplary of São Paulo's 'superdiverse' configurations of the kind analysed by Rosbrook-Thompson and Armstrong (2018).

Therefore, I use the expression 'life journey' to refer to the courses that mark the singularity of a person's existence. In what follows, these individuals are taken as the central focus of an analysis in which their idiosyncrasies about ways of living and thinking gain pre-eminence (Rapport 2012b). The concept of life journey also recognises life as a 'struggle for being' and an experiment in which people live the world in their own terms (Jackson 2005). By giving pre-eminence to the ways in which a migrant's life proceeds in space and time, acknowledging it as a manifestation of a valid experimentation in the world, the concept of life journey substantiates a migrant's sense of existence in unique configurations. These configurations are capable of expressing the intersections among multiple categories, such as nationality, class, ethnicity, gender and citizenship. The present analysis thus recognises the dynamic capacity of an individual's agency to move within the configuration in which they belong and influence it (Pardo 1996).

At the beginning of this article, Corina's own impressions of São Paulo offered a glimpse into her trajectory as a migrant. In her progress through the city, she found the resources to create a personal and intimate journey that both transformed her and made São Paulo become part of her life history. From now on, I will refer to migrants' trajectories in São Paulo as 'life journeys.' By adopting such an approach, migrants' mobilities in São Paulo will be recognised as existential processes in which the city permeates people's subjectivity. In people's efforts to make life keep going, these subjectivities enliven the city in such a way that their individual trajectories contribute to the process of 'making' São Paulo too. In order to demonstrate that a trajectory within a city is singular and that a person constitutes and is simultaneously constituted by the urban environment, I now turn to the ethnographic cases of Helen, Mr Kwon and Kitty within São Paulo.

Helen and the Open City

Helen and I met in the public school in Bom Retiro where I volunteered to teach Basic Portuguese for Non-Brazilians. She had recently arrived in São Paulo with her husband, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of São Paulo. Living in the west part of the city, she used

to commute by subway to attend the classes every Sunday. She was born in South Korea and the reasons and conditions for her move to Brazil were not related to joining Korean kin or exploring business opportunities, as is frequently the case (Choi 2009, Kim and Lee 2016). Before moving to Brazil, Helen already had an extensive record of domestic and transnational mobility as she had moved between cities in South Korea and Japan. She was born in the 1970s in a small town in the southwest region of South Korea. After finishing secondary school, she moved to Busan to study Japanese. When she earned her degree, she looked for work and moved to Seoul. Later she moved to a small town in Japan, where she taught Korean to Japanese city council officials. In this town, she met her husband, who was born in Brazil but had been in Japan since his undergraduate studies. Going against her parents' expectations, Helen married this non-Korean and, while the couple was living in Japan, she gave birth to a baby girl in Seoul. São Paulo became part of her trajectory because her husband held a fixed-term academic post at the University of São Paulo. Arriving in the city with such a history of international mobility, Helen had a particular way of conceiving belonging. She had never felt that being 'Korean' was the only defining aspect of her person. After living for eleven years in Japan, she observed that she was Japanese too. 'My sister and friends in Korea say that I've changed and now I'm Japanese, but I didn't expect to feel Japanese', she once jokingly remarked. Although Helen acknowledged characteristics she identified as being Japanese, she was aware that she was not Japanese. By Japanese, she meant, for example, a disposition to appreciate quieter behaviour, in contrast to Koreans, who she thought were not very courteous, 'Oh, Koreans are very noisy!' Because she did not identify herself as entirely Korean, she was not very enthusiastic about attending most of the events organised by Korean families in São Paulo. 'There is a wall between me and them. Koreans here frequently cast a look of disapproval when I speak in Japanese to my husband.' Brazilian-ness was not yet an attribute Helen recognised in herself, but she was keen to achieve a command of Portuguese and to take the Brazilian proficiency test for foreigners.[6] Once a week she visited Bom Retiro to attend the Portuguese classes in the above-mentioned public school.

The transnational space she created by way of her life journey did not follow the usual circuit of countries through which Koreans in Latin America traditionally circulate (Park 2014). She deliberately opted for not attaching herself completely to a Korean community in Brazil. Similarly, Prato (2009) found that contemporary Albanian migrants avoided interaction with co-nationals in Italy because they did not identify with the pre-established Albanian communities. Helen's international trajectory did not conform to the usual accounts of ethnic groups in Latin America which assume that international migrants identify themselves with the nationality of their country of origin. Helen's case challenges this presupposition since she did not believe she was only Korean: she declined invitations to attend events organised by other Koreans in São Paulo and preferred, for instance, to travel to other spaces in the city, such as public parks and open markets where she could have quality time with her family, 'I like to go to the open market. There's *pastel*[7] and sugarcane juice. There is a kind stall-owner who always

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[6] Celpe-Bras is the official test for assessing a foreigner's proficiency of Portuguese in Brazil.
[7] Common snack in Brazil, consisting of rectangle-shaped thin-crust pies with assorted fillings.

gives us more juice.' Likewise, Helen travelled across São Paulo to the public school in the city centre to learn Portuguese, considering this a positive experience, 'In the Portuguese class, all students speak Spanish, except me. I didn't speak Portuguese well, but this class is good for me.'[8]

In order to cope with the events of her life journey beyond a sense of national-cum-ethnic categorisation, Helen developed a reflexive approach about herself. She called it a 'way of thinking' and told me: 'When someone leaves one's own country of origin, one acquires another way of thinking. One can think about everything in different ways.' Helen's way of thinking incorporated the unexpected events of her life journey, and also expressed an ability to go beyond categorical features of national classification (Rapport 2010). Thinking beyond this convention engendered a life journey that required a reflexivity which questioned usual values and allowed her to develop novel understandings of being in the world, such as in her notion of a way of thinking. Helen's refusal to be fully identified by ethnic-cum-national fixities was combined with an extremely mobile life journey worldwide. As such, she explored São Paulo based on her way of thinking, acknowledging that the city contributed to changing her: 'I am learning a new language and getting to know São Paulo.' She then praised the city as an 'open place', where she was able to come and go according to her family needs, recognizing that she incorporated something of it in herself.

Mr Kwon and the Precarious City

I now turn to Mr Kwon, who, like Helen, was born in South Korea. I do this to demonstrate that even when people have the same nationality, they can follow very different paths in São Paulo because each migrant develops a unique sense of self in the city which may or may not be based on matters of national belonging. Mr Kwon had arrived in São Paulo in the 1990s spurred on by his brother-in-law's enthusiasm for new opportunities, as South Korean migrants were often attracted by the circumstances available in some Latin American cities (Choi 2009). At that time, Brazil seemed to be a 'new Eldorado' (Silva 2013) but things did not go as expected. Mr Kwon ended up no longer married and his two daughters had grown up away from him in Seoul. I met him when I applied for a part-time position in his flower shop in Bom Retiro. He also owned a restaurant on the same block, where he employed other staff.

Unlike Helen's life journey, Mr Kwon's trajectory in São Paulo was definitely led by a powerful sense of being Korean. In his late fifties, he frequently affirmed, 'I will soon go back to my homeland', namely South Korea. However, he had been postponing his return for more than twenty years. Besides his desire to return to the place he considered as home, his businesses in São Paulo also capitalised on his Korean identity: his restaurant and flower shop catered for Korean customers, and non-Koreans always came accompanied by Koreans. However, Mr Kwon's way of being Korean in São Paulo was rather peculiar when compared to descriptions of other Koreans living in the city (Sampaio 2011). He dedicated himself to two activities usually ascribed to women — cooking and arranging flowers. By dedicating his time exclusively to running his businesses, he did not have the opportunity to enjoy leisure time on

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[8] My translation from an excerpt of Helen's Portuguese class assignment of August 2014.

golf courses, as other local Korean men did, and could not develop religious bonds in any of the Korean Christian churches of Bom Retiro. Again, one sees how the details of individual life courses in São Paulo do not match standard descriptions of collective ethnic performance. Nevertheless, Mr Kwon's sense of being Korean provided him with a certain level of personal certainty and integrity. It asserted Korean-ness during a provisional period in a country he did not feel was his whilst simultaneously providing for a future life as a Korean in his own homeland. His way of being Korean surely demonstrates that ethnic-cum-national affiliation is 'an emic category of ascription' (Eriksen 2010:16), but Mr Kwon enlivened it in very unusual ways, as pointed out above.

This strong sense of belonging, which was firmly attached to a national identity, strongly directed Mr Kwon's activities in São Paulo — something which did not happen to Helen. Once, having learned that I had a Brazilian boyfriend, he very disparagingly said, 'Brazilians are all reprobates: they get married, make babies and leave you.' Regarding Paraguayans, who were frequently employed in his businesses, he confided, showing a certain trust in me, that 'here [in the restaurant], there are Paraguayans working, it's no good, but don't say anything to them.' Whereas non-Koreans would be generally deemed untrustworthy, São Paulo was said to be 'dangerous' and 'unsafe', as it was 'full of crooks.' For this reason, Mr Kwon undertook a very limited amount of circulation in the city. Generally, he would confine himself to the weekly trips to purchase wholesale goods in distribution centres located in the west zone. In seeing his stay in São Paulo as temporary, he also preferred not to have a secure and comfortable house of his own. His routine in Bom Retiro largely consisted of work in the restaurant and the flower shop. He lived very modestly, using a bed, cooker, sink and bathroom at the back of his flower shop. He worked long hours, usually going to bed around 2 am, saying that he worked so hard in order 'to have the money to retire in South Korea.' He did not invest either in formal or long-term employment relations in Brazil, but organised his businesses around precarious practices. The jobs in the flower shop and the restaurant did not follow formal procedures: there were no written contracts and everything was agreed orally and in general terms. While the first month was considered a trial period, no job duration was defined and there was no mention of social security benefits. Under these conditions, innumerable instabilities affected both employer and staff. Due to the combination of a lack of formal commitments tying them to work and the low wage offered, many employees worked for only a few weeks, quitting as soon as they could find better-paid jobs. As mentioned above, Mr Kwon's employees were usually from Paraguay, confirming a history of involvement between generations of Koreans and nationals of Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America (Buechler 2004), however, mentions of past Brazilian staff were sporadically made. While Mr Kwon contributed to the making of a precarious environment within São Paulo, at the same time he was also deeply affected by precariousness. The sense of being Korean expressed by Mr Kwon asserted an ethnic specificity that insulated him within a 'Korean world' in São Paulo and restricted his mobility within a 'dangerous' city. His experiences as an international migrant in São Paulo initiated practices that reinforced the precarious environment in the city while this same environment impacted his way of conceiving an unstable life in the city.

Kitty and the Rough City

Moving now to Kitty's life journey, I aim to show how certain urban spaces in São Paulo are not exclusive to specific ethnic groups as the academic approach on 'migrants' neighbourhoods' tends to stress, since Mr Kwon's life journey intersected with Kitty's at a specific moment in the district of Bom Retiro. Kitty's mobility was largely driven by a widespread network of Paraguayan nationals who directed her towards the informal labour setting where Mr Kwon's businesses existed. I met Kitty when I was rushing around Mr Kwon's restaurant on a Friday night as other employees had gone to Paraguay for the Christmas holiday. Kitty and her partner Jimmy had come to replace them. Before working for Mr Kwon, they had been employees of an outsourced business in the local garment industry, as Kitty explained, 'I used to iron clothes and he folded them.' Kitty was 26 and Jimmy was 21. Both were born in Paraguay and their presence in Brazil reflected a recent trend of young Paraguayans going to São Paulo after 2000 (Profit 2014). Kitty also had a ten-year-old son living with her mother in Paraguay.

In participating in an informal network of Paraguayans living in São Paulo, Kitty could find casual work at outsourced businesses and places such as Mr Kwon's restaurant, as well as boyfriends or partners of Paraguayan origin. The informality of such a universe, which some characterise as a sort of 'invisibility' (Maldonado 2016), imparted a highly unstable and uncertain trajectory for Kitty in São Paulo. For instance, some time after I met her in Mr Kwon's restaurant kitchen, she became pregnant. Jimmy decided not to take responsibility and left her to make the difficult decision of having a child without a father in Brazil or risking her life in an illegal abortion. She decided to have the baby, but the pregnancy disrupted Kitty's ability to work and send remittances to her mother and ten-year-old son in Paraguay. As Kitty did not have official documents, her pregnancy reinforced the precariousness of her life in São Paulo. She continued working informally at Mr Kwon's restaurant and flower shop for some months but, when her pregnancy became apparent, she was dismissed. She tried to stay with Jimmy, now in a painful relationship with him, as he preferred to find another girlfriend. Later, Kitty found a new Paraguayan partner, Juan, who she said 'had more brains' than Jimmy. Kitty and Juan worked for two months in a Paraguayan-owned business ironing and folding clothes. However, the owner fled to Paraguay without paying any of the employees and Juan had to work in another clothing business. Because of her pregnancy, Kitty could not find work easily so she was embroidering women's tops for a low piece rate. Kitty's 'varoncito'[9] came into the world in October 2014 in a public hospital in the eastern zone of São Paulo. By the end of that month, both Juan and Kitty left São Paulo for Paraguay, as they could not find work anymore. She lamented, 'now I have a Brazilian child, but no means to stay in Brazil.'

After resorting to an informal network of Paraguayans in São Paulo, Kitty experienced a very unstable trajectory in the city. The Paraguayan network she encountered there disappointed her, as her former partner did not take responsibility for the child and the Paraguayan business owner did not pay her for two months' work. But equally, this same network provided her with solutions when, for example, her new Paraguayan partner, Juan, was willing to embrace her

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[9] Spanish for baby boy.

and her child and to become a family. Kitty relied on the resourcefulness of a network of Paraguayans in São Paulo which directed her circulation in the city by providing informal work and love relationships. However, there was a point at which this network could not offer solutions for her life journey anymore and she had to leave the city. Nevertheless, the city gave her work, partners and a new baby, changing her life profoundly.

The life journeys of Helen, Mr Kwon, and Kitty demonstrate that, in following some migrants' singular life journeys in a city such as São Paulo, a personal course does not adhere completely to the depictions given in accounts which claim that international migrants follow regular patterns or become part of consistent ethnic collectives. Helen's, Mr Kwon's, and Kitty's lives contained contradictory senses of belonging that could give them something to rely on but they also led to situations that did not contribute to or reinforce ethnic or collective attachments, as many approaches in migration studies generally assume. The ethnographic cases make evident that, in the life journeys of Mr Kwon, Helen and Kitty, ethnicity or national affiliation acquired ambiguous features during the making of their trajectories in São Paulo. Other aspects such as class, employment status, gender and citizenship were also intricately intertwined with the way each of them led a life in the city. This life journey approach meets the debate on intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991, Davis 2008) for it takes into account that different aspects that constitute a human life and tries to move beyond certain essentialisms. However, the life journey approach also emphasises the *combination* of characteristics inherent in each case, taking into account that every individual develops a position in the world involving unique sets of categories. Accordingly, the individuals whom I portray hold unique positions, even though they are gathered under the same classification as 'international migrants.' In contrast to certain assumptions in migration studies that privilege depictions of migrants under generic ascriptions of nationality, the life journey approach shows that other categories of differentiation also affect the way people can live in São Paulo. As I have argued, class and gender defined very different trajectories in the city for Helen and Mr Kwon, even though both were born in the same country. As a middle-class housewife, accompanying her husband, Helen had time to go to parks and open markets with her daughter, and commute to other neighbourhoods to learn Portuguese. Conversely, Mr Kwon, as a small businesses owner in Bom Retiro, worked extremely long hours in the informal employment environment he fostered and had no time to enjoy other spaces in the city. Concurrently, class and citizenship status also defined different positionalities for Helen and Kitty, though they shared the same gender category. Helen had official status as a permanent resident and could access formal public services in the city. Kitty did not have the papers to stay in the country and moved in informal and precarious settings. Therefore, the different position of each person affected her or his chances to venture within and beyond the city precisely because the city offered opportunities according to the specificity of each individual's situation.

Towards the 'Gambiarra City'
As demonstrated, approaching people's lives through the notion of life journeys — their circulation within and beyond São Paulo with a corresponding singular sense of self — affords a different understanding of the city. The district of Bom Retiro was the starting point where I

met all the participants in my research, but the neighbourhood was only one point among many others involved in each life journey. Corina's, Helen's, Mr Kwon's and Kitty's presences in Bom Retiro could be misconstrued if taken as expressions of general ethnic occurrences based on relations circumscribed by the territorial limits of a neighbourhood, as the 'migrants' neighbourhoods' approach usually suggests. The focus on life journeys reveals that senses of belonging can be individually authored and can hold contradictory and open outlooks (Cohen 1996, Rapport 2012a), aspects that are usually overlooked by approaches concerned with general categorisations of ethnicity and nationality that privilege generalisation and collective representations.

Besides, Bom Retiro had varying levels of significance in the overall dynamics of each life journey. Bom Retiro only makes sense when it enables these same life journeys to be connected to other parts of the city of São Paulo and beyond. Bringing to mind Varshaver and Rocheva's (2018) questioning of the presence of ethnic neighbourhood for some migrants communities in Moscow, the life journeys methodologically prevented me from taking the neighbourhood as the unit of study and led me to a dense city that embraced all these different life journeys at once. In following each life journey, different aspects of the city were inhabited, activated and explored, thus making the place manifold, and a resource available for the development of each trajectory. Consider São Paulo.

If São Paulo has been portrayed as a city divided between centre and periphery, and a city of migrants' neighbourhoods, the focus on the singular mobility of migrants' lives reveals a multi-dimensional city. The approaches that stress São Paulo as a divided city rely heavily on political and economic frameworks that analyse the city through structural accounts of inequalities and historical imbalance. My approach, which underlines São Paulo as a multi-dimensional city and considers people's mobilities in São Paulo and beyond, does not view peoples' movements as patterns determined by certain structural conditions. Instead, it emphasises people's mobilities as existential processes that imbue the city with singular and open subjectivities. In following people's movement to fulfil senses of belonging, dreams, hopes or projects, one can see how they face daily struggles and predicaments and how these individual trajectories contribute to different

Hence, the life journeys delineated in this paper disclose São Paulo as a plastic place where people circulate within very different scenarios. Despite the unequal distribution of urban resources and rights, São Paulo enables connections of different sorts according to the particular life goals and experiences that propel people's mobilities. In this multi-dimensional city, norms of ethnicity and kinship, laws of nationality and conditions of social and economic inequality inform the singular positionality each individual. In response to existing expedients and conditions, individuals are compelled to devise solutions for continuing a life trajectory in the city and beyond. In this sense, social, economic or political restrictions can be regarded as cues for setting people's resourcefulness and potentialities in motion. This leads to the evolution of very different urban journeys, since each person holds a very particular position in the world. Here agency is intimately coupled with questions of positionality and becomes manifested through people's efforts to combine the multiple aspects each of them is entangled with. In this way, very singular and dynamic forms of existence are engendered. Therefore, in line with

Pardo's argument (1996) on the dynamic relationship between individual agency and the entanglements each situated life confronts in its daily existence, even people with restricted access to formal resources are not rigidly 'structurally' determined, but are instead able to move within — and to effect changes — in the wider urban fabric.

In the lives depicted here, the trajectories of Mr Kwon and Kitty were tied into the precarity and informality of work relations in Bom Retiro, while Helen followed routes that did not intersect with the others during my fieldwork. The city that was lived through these life journeys is one that is materialised when prompted and challenged by people's agency and resourcefulness. In this way, São Paulo can be seen as a boundless city that is discovered and re-discovered at every enactment experienced in it. It is a city that can be abandoned when solutions are exhausted, as exemplified by Kitty's return to Paraguay. And it is a city that can inspire very different hopes and attitudes, such as Mr Kwon's desire to return to South Korea or Helen's openness about living in São Paulo or any other place in the world.

Referring to recent transformations in Latin American cities like São Paulo and Lima, Peixoto (2009) and Gandolfo (2013) propose the idea of Latin American megacities as urban 'formlessnesses' associated with processes of globalisation. According to Peixoto, the volume of heterogeneous processes of megacities require new ways for capturing their realities. Megacities in Latin America can no longer be comprehended by their physical form, or by their objects (streets, monuments, sanitation structures, etc.). Here is 'foremost a field of moving forces and continuous organisation' (Peixoto 2009:244). The city is, therefore, to be considered formless because its nature and character rely on events that continually induce new configurations rather than on the collection of fixed urban objects. For Gandolfo (2013), these new configurations also involve an attention to the resourcefulness of informal arrangements largely existent in popular economies, which Gago (2017) also highlights as fundamental but paradoxical elements for understanding the making of contemporary Latin American cities. In recognising Peixoto's and Gandolfo's propositions of urban formlessness as an invitation to appreciate the Latin American city with its contradictory aspects of instability and openness — which Gago identifies as being 'mottled' — I suggest that from the urban experiences revealed through the life journeys briefly portrayed here, some Latin American metropolises can be understood as 'gambiarra' cities.

The term 'gambiarra' emerged during my fieldwork when an employee from the corporation responsible for the communication infrastructures in São Paulo visited my flat to activate my internet connection. In order to link my flat's internet point, he had to climb the closest street post which supported a messy bundle of wires and carefully find, in the mesh of electricity, landlines, cable TV cords, the right cable to make me be part of the world wide web. While he was testing if he had been successful, he observed, 'Madam, this net is an entire gambiarra,' as he was foreseeing that he would have to come back to reinforce my internet point with other cables to make it 'stable.' I asked if that situation was exclusive of older neighbourhoods like Bom Retiro, which required infrastructure renovation, and he remarked, 'No, madam, the whole city is like this in varying degrees.'

Figure 1. A street post in the neighbourhood of Bom Retiro, São Paulo — Simone Toji, 2014.

Encouraged by this statement, I found the expression 'gambiarra' extremely inspiring for considering the urban phenomena I was experiencing in São Paulo not as a localised matter but rather as a widespread kind of question. This idea of 'gambiarra' that I provide here closely coincides with Lévi-Strauss's notion of 'bricolage'. For Lévi-Strauss (1966), 'bricolage' is a mode of knowledge that, like science, possesses a speculative frame to explore reality, providing forms of classification and understandings of the world. However, bricolage, unlike science, finds answers for the tasks it is confronted with by working with the limited repertoire of 'remains and debris of events' which are at hand (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 22). The idea of 'gambiarra' benefits from this notion of 'bricolage' for its 'make it up as one goes along' aspect. It is a proposition for understanding cities through the awareness that a life might be composed of multiple attempts to exist within the available resources of the world, an awareness that also understands the world not through a well-defined concept, but through the process of life making in itself — which according to the life journeys portrayed here is highly impermanent and unsteady.

Hence, I place the emphasis of the expression 'gambiarra'[10] on its active and malleable sense in my discussion of São Paulo. This plasticity of the city, as Peixoto's and Gandolfo's 'formlessness' suggests, is not given by the availability of urban objects, but by the occurrence of multiple events, such as those that each life journey was compelled to enact. The life journeys of Corina, Helen, Mr Kwon and Kitty become human (and humane) documents since they express the way each of them found it possible to live in São Paulo in their own terms so as to face their struggles. Through their life journeys, Corina, Kitty, Mr Kwon and Helen revealed a highly challenging city that affected the accomplishment of very different life journeys. In this way, São Paulo can be seen as a city of potentialities (Simone 2016). As a never resolved city and, in its incompleteness and failure to be completely coherent and intelligible, a 'gambiarra' city offers itself as potentiality. Potentiality to allow people from all walks of life and all parts

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[10] The illegal aspect of the expression 'gambiarra' is more often stressed.

of the globe to find their ways in the city. Potentiality to intermittently exceed lawfulness and become highly unstable. In a 'gambiarra' city, there will be always a dimension that may be unreachable and inconceivable until one risks trying it. In the porousness and ambiguity of the 'gambiarra' city, one can glimpse the unstable space shaped by the life journeys of Mr Kwon and Kitty, or the hint of an open city brought to life by Helen's and Corina's life journeys.

Although malleability is a key aspect of the 'gambiarra' city, it is not always 'soft' as Raban (1998) describes it. For Raban, a city has a softness manifested by the heterogeneous lives that its inhabitants inscribe on the textures and soundings of an urban setting. The nature and character of the city come to be expressed through the creative engagement its numerous inhabitants have with it. In contrast, the malleability of the 'gambiarra' city can at times be 'rough', as expectations and imagined solutions can be upset by unexpected interferences, such as when Corina first arrived in São Paulo and felt diminished by so many gigantic buildings; or when Kitty went back to Paraguay because neither she nor her new partner could find jobs after the birth of her child. Sometimes the malleability of the 'gambiarra' city is not exactly as it was once conceived. So, this city is not 'soft' in the sense that the situatedness of each life journey does not allow ideal propositions to be easily accomplished. As previously discussed, there are specificities and positionalities grounding each specific existence. Still, the 'gambiarra' city is plastic in a 'rough' way, because individuals are challenged to be creative in their life journeys and to activate agency so as to find ways to live in the city. This is the reason why the 'gambiarra' city is animated through a continuous process of engagement and, in this sense, is not a finished object. No one lives a city in general, because it is not possible to be a general presence in attendance at all points at once. A city is made alive through the multiple and specific engagements its inhabitants are able to establish with it, sometimes in unanticipated ways. The unpredictability of the 'gambiarra' city further emphasises the significance of the minute and singular elements involved in the making of the city. As Agier (2009) proposes, 'faire ville', the making-of-the-city is not an object: it is a situated and minute process. An analysis of the city does justice to this making by embracing its fluidity (as against 'softness'), de-centring analysis from a focus on essences to one on lived situations. The making-of-the-city, then, necessarily comprises a myriad of ways of making-the-city.

In this sense, a 'gambiarra' city requires persistent agency and creativity from its inhabitants, because its inconstancy and precarity make the urban environment 'rough'. However, the solutions created by each life journey in the city are testimonies that there will be startling ways to make life keep going in or beyond it. São Paulo as a 'gambiarra' ci**t**y, revealed by the life journeys portrayed here, is not the expression of an urban mode**l**: it is a city-in-action.

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