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SIT: Migration and Transnational Identity

Individual Study Project Final Paper

Transnational Sharing Economies & Neoliberal Urbanism: Airbnb in the City-Region of Tangier

Abstract: Since the early 1980s, Morocco's strategies of urban governance have been decidedly neoliberal, focusing on entrepreneurialism, market liberalization, and privatization in order to make Moroccan cities more competitive in a global capitalist market (Bogaert 2010; Kanai & Kutz 2011). Within this context of neoliberal urban restructuring, I examine the case of Airbnb in the rapidly globalising city-region of Tangier. Airbnb is an online "sharing economy" platform which allows property owners to rent out living spaces to short-term travellers, usually tourists. In the Moroccan urban context, Airbnb is part of a broader trend of entrepreneurial development, influx of international capital into the real estate market, and touristification. However, while most urban entrepreneurialism in Morocco has been tightly state-lead and planned by a confederation of government agencies and private interests, Airbnb hosts participate in transnational entrepreneurialism outside of the scope of the state or other financial institutions (Zemni & Bogaert 2011). Interviews conducted with Airbnb hosts in Tangier help to provide a picture of the individuals participating in global urban processes and the concrete social networks in which these processes unfold, complicating simplistic narratives of neoliberal globalisation in which depersonified "capital" and monolithic institutions are the only relevant actors.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1980s, Morocco's strategies of urban governance have been decidedly neoliberal, focusing on entrepreneurialism, market liberalization, and privatization in order to make Moroccan cities more competitive in a global capitalist market (Bogaert 2010; Kanai & Kutz 2011). By design, this market liberalization created a favorable investment climate for foreign capital, much of which was funneled into Morocco's cities with 20.1% of FDI going to real estate and 8.7% to the tourist industry as of 2018 ("Santander Trade Portal" 2019). This has been especially true of the city-region of Tangier, which over the past two decades has been transformed by rapid touristification and a series of state-led entrepreneurial mega-projects such as the Tanger City Center and the Tanger-Med Port. Within this macrostructural context of state-led neoliberal urban restructuring and the influx of foreign entrepreneurial capital, the case of Airbnb in Tangier offers a window into micro-entreprenerualisms on concrete socio-economic and interpersonal scales. While Airbnb hosts in Tangier engage in a form of transnational entrepreneurialism which is not under the direct control of regularizing state or financial institutions, the entrepreneurial endeavors of Airbnb hosts are nonetheless influenced and shaped by these broader processes occurring on the urban and global scale. The disparate and isolated entrepreneurialisms of Airbnb hosts help to counter and ground narratives of globalisation which cast either depersonified "capital" or some mysterious "transnational elite" as the only relevant actors in global processes.

The question this study is asking is what can the business practices and experiences of Airbnb hosts in a rapidly globalising city reveal about how global urban processes unfold on the concrete social scale. Interviews with Airbnb hosts in Tangier provide valuable qualitative data which, while not generalizable, helps to illustrate transnational micro-entrepreneurialisms in the context of macrostructural state-led entrepreneurialism and neoliberal urban restructuring. To contextualize this research and situate it within a broader academic discourse, three reviews of literature with different focuses are provided. The first section provides a theoretical framework for the study, summarizing different perspectives on global, urban, and local scales within globalisation and transnational studies. The second section reviews the literature about Airbnb in the context of globalisation, highlighting debates about transnational gentrification and neoliberal discourse. The third and final section of the literature review provides background on Morocco's unique strategies of urban governance and neoliberal restructuring.

CONTEXT & LITERATURE REVIEW

Urbanism & Scalar Theory

In this section, I offer a theoretical backdrop for the study of Airbnb and global urbanism through a cursory overview of the ways social scientists have understood urbanism within global and transnational frameworks, with particular focus on the relationship between local, urban, and global scales. Drawing mostly on broad theoretical and methodological sources, this review of literature aims to synthesize and comment upon the intersections and differences between

the fields of transnational, urban, and migration studies. First, I will discuss how the analytical unit of the city is understood and transformed within global and transnational theoretical perspectives. Next, I will shift focus to localities, examining how the local is implicated in global processes and addressing methodological questions of urban versus local scale.

      Global Cities. When studying urbanism, it would seem to make the most sense to begin with studying the city as an analytical unit. This is easy if the city in question is an ancient Greek walled metropolis: the economy is mostly contained in the city's walls, there is a single governing body, and the speed of trade and communication is limited to horsepower. However, trying to study a city such as New York or Hong Kong gets a lot messier. With hundreds of different nested governing bodies, diverse economies with local and multinational endeavors stretching all over the globe, and populations migrating back and forth nonstop, it becomes difficult to know how to define the city on a spatial and functional level. Indeed, neoliberal globalisation means that scalar units which used to be bounded and nested (global, national, urban, local) are now thrown into complex restructuring processes which make "the city" methodologically difficult to study in isolation. Clearly, at the center of discussions of global and transnational urbanism is the question of scale, so this section will mostly consist of an overview of perspectives on urban scale.

      In his now canonical book *The Urban Question* (1977), urban scholar Manuel Castells attempted to define urban scale by conceptualizing the city as a functional unit within the capitalist mode of production (Brenner, 2011). Castells theorized scales as differentiated spatial units which come together to form the capitalist system-- the urban system is just one of these units in which social processes and capital accumulation are arranged on the urban scale as opposed to the regional or global scale (Ibid). In this view, the city as a bounded spatial unit can only be demarcated in terms of its function as a site of the reproduction of labor power (Ibid). In other words, the geographic scale of the city is understood in reference to the city's social functions for capitalism. This general way of framing scale in terms of function became influential in urban studies, despite major theoretical flaws. As Neil Brenner (2011) points out, this view takes "urban" scale at face value, reifying the urban scalar unit rather than theorizing local scales or questioning how the idea of an "urban system" itself could be socially constructed. Additionally, Castell's theory conceives of scales as mutually exclusive, suggesting that supra-urban scales like regions or nations are simply the inert backdrop of urban studies.

      Later urban scholars such as David Harvey viewed urban scale as much less monolithic (Ibid). Rather than defining a unitary urban scale strictly in terms of teleological function, these scholars conceptualized cities as sets of multifaceted shifting localities where capitalist social relations materialized in different socio-geographic processes and territorializations (Ibid). While both inspired by Marxian political economy, Castells analyzed urban scale in terms of the functionally specific role it played in capitalist processes while Harvey and others analyzed these capitalist processes in terms of how they shaped the geographical patterns of the city (Ibid). The amended urban Marxist view offered by Harvey focused on how different spatial arrangements both within and beyond the urban unit were continually being restructured to allow for capital accumulation and spatial fixes to crises (Ibid). This conceptualization allowed

for scales to be more fluid, processual, and interrelated but still nonetheless imagined capital jumping between scales rather than actively restructuring the scales themselves (Ibid).

Since the 1990s, scholarship about urbanism and globalisation has focused more explicitly on the results of global neoliberal restructuring and how cities act on a global scale. In this view, the flow of capital is freed from local and national economies and turns certain "global" cities into crossroads for transnational capital accumulation (Ibid). This not only constructs the global scale in terms of the relations between these cities deemed "global", but also changes the relations between these cities, organizing different cities into a global hierarchy in which they compete (Ibid). The urban and global scales are not nested or mutually exclusive but rather co-constitutive and in constant processes of restructuring. Indeed, "global" cities often have more in common with other global cities thousands of miles away than they do with smaller cities within their own country (Schiller & Caglar, 2011). Similar to Harvey's conceptualization, global city theory examines the uneven spatialization of capital flows, focusing on the ways global neoliberal capitalism makes some cities incredibly connected and developed while other cities which are lower in the global urban hierarchy become increasingly disconnected (Ibid). In this way, the national scale is bypassed by global cities as the urban and global are directly connected without direct mediation of the nation-state (Sigler & Wachsmuth, 2016). However, this perspective tends to focus on the way globalisation affects just a few key cities deemed "global" while ignoring the scalar restructuring and uneven development of other less "global" cities and localities (Ibid).

Indeed, even if a city is not a clearing house for global capital or favored by a transnational elite, global rescaling processes and transnational migration still affect its development. For example, Rijk Van Dijk's research (2011) on Ghanaian migrant communities in the Netherlands highlights how global movement of information, people, and culture is not always parallel to capital penetration and mass accumulation processes. While Amsterdam is usually understood to be the more "global" city, Ghanaian migrants flocked to The Hague because it was a religious hotspot for international Ghanaian Pentecostalism (Ibid). Van Dijk traces how demographically small cities such as The Hague and Kumasi are connected to each other through religious global pathways and networks that bypass "global" cities like Amsterdam.

Transnational Localities. The example of Ghanaian migrants constructing hotspots in disparate localities which cannot be easily grouped into a single "global city" troubles the simple scalar model of urban and global. While we began with attempting to define the urban unit, conceptualizing cities as unitary wholes can lead us to overlook the transnational processes and scalar restructuring which occur on the local level. When people live in a city, and especially when transnational actors like migrants and tourists come to a city, they do not experience it as an entire city but rather as a select set of hot spots (Ibid). On both an experiential and functional level, it may make more sense to examine globalisation on the local scale rather than using entire cities as the units of analysis. Another example of this can be seen in Sigler & Wachsmuth's study (2016) on transnational gentrification in Panama. They theorize the process of transnational gentrification, in which global redevelopment capital is connected with localities across the world, as opposed to gentrification processes on the city level. In the gentrification of

the Casa Antiguo neighborhood, the broader urban context of Panama was all but irrelevant, as developers marketed the locality exclusively to foreign tourists making it a gentrified transnational hot spot which could have been installed in almost any city (Sigler & Wachsmuth, 2016). Beyond and comprising what makes a city "global" is a collection of localities and hot spots which are connected transnationally to different degrees and along different pathways.

While globalisation studies found itself well suited to analyzing urbanism on the city scale, studying the local scale in a global context calls for a transnational perspective. Indeed, transnational perspectives are often framed as the more agent-focused cousin of globalisation studies, which usually has more macrostructural tendencies (Smith, 2005). While globalisation's macrostructural perspective privileges the urban scale as a depersonified unit, transnational lenses make localities below the urban scale more legible by focusing on transnational actors and social processes on meso and microstructural scales. Studies discussed above such as Van Dijk's research on Ghanaian migrants and Sigler & Wachsmuth's research on gentrification in Panama highlight this aspect of transnational approaches by focusing on the localities which make up supposedly "global" cities. Van Dijk (2011) shows how migrants intersubjectively construct their own global pathways and hot spots which bypass overarching city scales. Sigler & Wachsmuth (2016) also examine the specific actors engaged in transnational processes, observing how the investments of local Panamanians and the movements of a transnational elite link the local scale directly with the global, making the city scale irrelevant. However, it is important to note that the differences between transnationalism and globalisation can be overstated, as neither of these discourses is unitary or coherent (Smith, 2005). Beyond this, a major critique of transnational descriptions is that by focusing on locality and agency, they often lose all historical and geographical specificity (Ibid). Scholars will laud the "transnationalism" of certain migrant communities while ignoring the urban and national contexts of these populations, as well as depicting communities and processes understood as "transnational" as always positive and potentially radical alternatives to global capitalism (Ibid). As Michael Smith (2005) points out, all social actors are still ensconced in systems of power and privilege, and a "transnational" status does necessarily subvert global power structures.

This nebulous discussion of different scales, whether local, urban, or global, may seem somewhat theoretical and removed from reality, and that is because scalar theory is purposefully abstract. As Neil Brenner (2011) puts it, scale is a "real abstraction of historically and geographically specific social relations" (p. 31). Scales exist empirically in some sense because social interactions are scaled, but the academic discussion of scales often has more to do with how methodologically and theoretically social scientists can define the object of study (Ibid). Indeed, scales are difficult to discuss because in some ways they are very empirically real both on an objective and experiential level, but in other ways they are fabrications of academic and global discourses with questionable usefulness. While viewing the city as a bounded coherent unit may be a social construction, the city scale is also very real when it comes to how cities are represented and governed (Schiller & Caglar, 2011). As cities are represented and marketed in global political and economic discourses, their representations as global cities does much to reify the image of a unified overarching city scale. Additionally, the city scale offers a useful arena for national, regional, and urban governments to scale their interventions and policies, especially when it comes to neoliberal restructuring (Ibid). State intervention on the

urban scale reifies the city as a cohesive territorial unit on a concrete and symbolic level. So while the urban scale is really just an agglomeration of myriad shifting local scales and territories, it also takes on a reality of its own when it comes to subjective experience and discourse, especially when discursive constructions of the city are translated to policy.

This debate between urban and local scales and how they fit into global scale begins to seem futile as all the terms under discussion fall apart under scrutiny. As a way out of this conundrum, Neil Brenner (2011) suggests that perhaps it is imprecise to discuss scales as if they were stable objects in and of themselves. Rather, he writes that scales are, "temporarily stabilized *effects* of diverse sociospatial processes, which must be theorized and investigated on their own terms. It is, in short, *processes* of scaling and rescaling, rather than scales themselves, that must be the main analytical focus," (Brenner, 2011, p. 31). Taking this into account, it is not a flaw that definitions of local, urban, and global scales always seem to fall short, because these categories are arbitrarily isolated components of much larger and continually evolving processes. The question of scale is always one of fluidity, interconnection, ephemeral territorializations, and the discussion of scales is only useful to the extent that it recognizes the false objectivity of scales themselves.

Airbnb & Global Capitalism

Launched in San Francisco in 2008, Airbnb is an online marketplace which allows users to rent out accommodations to other users for short periods of time. Airbnb hosts can rent out a single room in their homes or entire apartments or dwellings, listing them on the Airbnb website for potential customers to see. Users can then sort through available listings, choose one which suits their needs, and leave reviews of the hosts and the accommodations. Airbnb takes a commission of 8%-18% per booking (Wachsmuth & Weisler 2018). Along with Uber, Airbnb is one of the key figures in what is known as the "sharing economy", a model where underutilized goods and services (such as a spare room in a home) are exchanged on a peer-to-peer basis through the facilitation of an online marketplace. While many Airbnb hosts are part-time casual users renting out spare rooms for a little extra income, Airbnb also has a growing number of commercial users who invest in multiple properties specifically to rent them out full-time over Airbnb and turn profits. In 2015, while only 9% of users were professional leasing companies, this portion of Airbnb hosts generated up to 37% of all Airbnb revenue, while small-time hosts just renting out one room made up only 16% of income (Ibid). Currently, Airbnb operates in more than 81,000 cities across more than 191 countries (Airbnb Press Room).

The implications of Airbnb for scalar theory are abundant. It represents yet another way that the urban and local scales are connected with the global, as internationally desirable localities can be opened up to touristification faster and with less development than ever before. With an online platform facilitating it, Airbnb allows for much lower barriers to entry for those interested in investing in foreign real estate, and provides a steady stream of foreign travellers to rent Airbnbs. By being less bounded by regulations and organizational bureaucracy like the hotel industry, Airbnb creates a pathway through which transnationally induced urban restructuring such as gentrification can happen incredibly quickly. Beyond this, Airbnb aligns itself with the "sharing economy", a discourse with a strong neoliberal streak, and in doing so

rhetorically rescales the identities of individual consumer and supplier to a global capitalist imaginary.

Airbnb & Transnational Gentrification. Gentrification, with or without Airbnb, is the general process by which localities gradually shift from lower income housing and services to middle and upper income housing and services. Usually, this process happens when localities are renovated or restructured to fit to middle or upper class tastes, thus bringing in higher income groups who begin to live and shop in these areas, raising property values and beginning a cycle in which the original inhabitants of an area are displaced through being priced out of where they once lived. The most influential way that gentrification has been theorized is through the concept of the rent gap (Wachsmuth & Weisler 2018). Put simply, the wider the gap between the potential rent a property could be generating and the actual rent it is yielding, the greater the incentive for property owners to invest capital to achieve these higher rent potentials (Ibid). A rent gap can be opened up either through neighborhood degradation and devaluation, thus lowering the actual rents properties are yielding, or through a sudden state or culturally induced increase in the potential revenues properties could be making (Ibid). As property owners and real estate investors respond to the structural incentive to close a rent gap by channeling redevelopment capital into certain localities, wealthier populations who are able to pay higher rents flock to neighborhoods, thus increasing potential property values even more as an area gains cultural desirability. Previous lower income tenants are evicted or priced out of their neighborhoods as the affluent snap up property and are followed by even more affluent people, thus creating the positive feedback loop of gentrification.

The common narrative of gentrification occurs on a closed city scale, with capital and populations circulating within the urban unit but not from outside. However, the contemporary mobility of global capital and the transnational elite combined with concerted efforts by neoliberal states such as Morocco to open up their economies to foreign investment has caused gentrification to be rescaled to the global level. While in the mid 1970s gentrification was highly localised and characterized by laissez-faire capitalism, gentrification has taken on a significantly global and state-led character since the 1990s (Aalbers 2019). In what is known as 3rd wave gentrification, the state is significantly involved in partnerships with the private sector to aid the process of gentrification, taking on policies to encourage foreign real estate investment and working to "clean up" certain localities to make them more appealing for gentrifiers (Ibid). These efforts by urban and national governments to encourage gentrification can be seen as an attempt to cause cities to become and remain competitive on a global scale. Using gentrification as a global strategy to bolster positions in urban hierarchies, the state intervenes in scalar processes by attempting to attract foreign capital and transnational elite to a city (Sigler & Wachsmuth 2016). In what has been termed 5th wave gentrification taking place globally since the mid 2000s, state-led gentrification is supplemented by the power and organisational control of international finance (Aalbers 2019). Through corporate landlords backed by international capital, the practice of investing in foreign property as an asset, and increasing touristification through platform capitalisms such as Airbnb, the contemporary mode of gentrification has been rescaled fully to be global and eased along by both the state and international finance (Ibid).

Rather than previous forms of gentrification in which the process was lead mostly by groups of people migrating from one area to another, 5th wave gentrification capitalizes on the global mobility of capital and people, gentrifying not through changing residencies but through investing in and touristifying different localities internationally (Ibid).

Airbnb significantly changes the processes and scale of gentrification. By making it more profitable for property owners to offer their properties as short-term rentals over Airbnb than to rent to stable tenants, Airbnb clearly has the potential to reduce housing supplies and displace low income groups from certain localities. In this way, the presence of Airbnb opens up rent gaps out of nowhere, suddenly making potential revenue from properties skyrocket and increasing the incentive for property owners to phase out long-term tenants in favor of short-term leases (Wachsmuth & Weisler 2018). Essentially, Airbnb opens up a rent gap which it itself is the primary means of closing. Even more insidious is the fact that unlike the usual narrative of the rent gap in which the potential rents must be high enough to offset the costs of redevelopment, with Airbnb almost no redevelopment capital must be spent to collect the high potential rents (Ibid). Indeed, if a property owner wants to switch from long-term tenants to Airbnb, all it would cost is some furniture and a fresh coat of paint. Add to this equation the presence of international real estate capital with interest in investing in property in order to rent it out over Airbnb, as well as the presence of a transnationally mobile tourist and business population in need of accomodations in cities all over the world. Indeed, whereas in standard gentrification the rent gap is scaled on the urban level, Airbnb allows for the rent gap to be scaled globally, meaning housing prices are set more and more by global rather than local demand, triggering transnational gentrification (Ibid). This is especially true of neighborhoods and localities which have become transnational hotspots due to their cultural cache but still lack the tourist infrastructure of more central urban areas (Ibid). In these places, Airbnb allows tourists to penetrate neighborhoods more deeply than before, responding very quickly to what areas become internationally trendy and contributing to their subsequent gentrification. Indeed, 74% of Airbnb listings in major cities are outside of major hotel districts and Airbnb guests spend 42% of their time in the neighborhood where they are staying (Airbnb Press Room). However, Airbnb is unlikely to begin gentrifying processes in poor or racialized areas, but rather is likely to contribute to areas which are already being gentrified or even begin to "super-gentrify" some neighborhoods (Ibid).

The "Sharing Economy" & Entrepreneurial Citizenship. Airbnb conceives of and rhetorically situates itself as part of the "sharing economy". Also referred to as the peer-to-peer economy, the collaborative economy, or the on-demand economy, services within this sector connect customers with either goods or services through a two-sided online marketplace where theoretically consumers and suppliers are on equal footing. The sharing economy is understood as both part of a capitalist economy but also potentially a radical alternative to it, purportedly offering a way for good and services to be exchanged through "sharing" (Cockayne 2016). However, examining the discourse of "sharing" in Airbnb reveals that this rhetoric serves to naturalize and reinforce conditions of neoliberal capitalist labor relations, in ways which I argue rescale imaginings of global economic citizenship. Clearly, the entire idea of a "sharing" economy is a contradiction in terms: sharing implies a non-transactional selfless act while

renting out property is obviously entirely transactional and based on capitalist notions of private ownership (Ibid). While sharing conjures up this positive image of collaboration and equity, in practice the sharing economy extends neoliberal trends of treating labor as entrepreneurial, isolated, and without security or value (Ibid). The labor-power of Airbnb hosts or Uber drivers is expected to be supplied immediately whenever consumers demand it, and their livelihoods depend on neoliberal values of "self-responsibility", framing their labor as a near valueless prerequisite for inclusion in a free market which owes them nothing (Ibid). While this free market capitalist framing of labor is not new, international platform capitalism like Airbnb allows for this rhetoric around labor and self-responsibility to be rescaled to the global level.

See, for example, this description of Airbnb's business pulled from their website: "Airbnb exists to create a world where anyone can belong anywhere, providing healthy travel that is local, authentic, diverse, inclusive and sustainable. Airbnb uniquely leverages technology to economically empower millions of people around the world to unlock and monetize their spaces, passions and talents to become hospitality entrepreneurs" (Airbnb Press Room). The image that this description evokes is one of transnational neoliberal economic citizenship, where people move as freely as capital and anyone in the world can and should respond to an entrepreneurial impulse to monetize their property. In his interviews with employees of sharing economy companies, Daniel Cockayne (2016) notes how services like Airbnb conjure the image of a post-capitalist fantasy through a return to more a more "authentic" set of social relations. His respondents frequently described sharing economy services in terms of a metaphorical "village" in which peers share resources in authentic and altruistic ways (Ibid). This framing is fascinating because of its implications for scale, imagining the global real estate market as purely an authentic village, thus normalizing the injustices and uneven development caused by the dynamics of global capital.

Moroccan Neoliberalism & Urban Restructuring

As David Harvey discusses at length in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005)*,* the neoliberal state in practice is frequently characterized by a fundamental paradox: while deregulation, free trade, and privatization are the watch words of neoliberal theory, the neoliberal state must continually intervene in the market to ensure its financial solvency and maintain its competitiveness in a global marketplace. According to Harvey, neoliberalism has two contradictory objectives of "sustaining capitalism, on the one hand, and the restoration/reconstitution of ruling class power on the other" (2005, p. 152). If these are the animating contradictions of contemporary neoliberalism, then Morocco might provide an example *par excellence* of a neoliberal state which has managed to achieve both objectives in part, deregulating its economy and opening itself up to an influx of global capital all while maintaining tight authoritarian control over state-led development projects, tourism, and foreign investment. After independence and throughout the 1960s and 1970s Morocco's state model can be described as developmentalist, with strong state control over the economy and investment in public social services (Bogaert 2011). However, following major state budget deficits, the Moroccan government adopted the IMF and World Bank supported Structural Adjustment Program in 1983 and reoriented its governance around neoliberal logics and

objectives (Zemni & Bogaert 2011). Koenraad Bogaert (2011) describes what followed as a phase of "roll back neoliberalism" followed by a phase of "roll out neoliberalism". During "roll back neoliberalism" the state withdrew from its developmentalist functions, reducing public social services, allowing increased privatization of key industries, and liberalizing and deregulating the market (Ibid). However, this aggressive neoliberalisation and new lack of social services created massive social inequities, marginalization, and consequently social unrest and violence epitomized by a spate of urban riots and terrorist attacks throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s (Ibid). Responding to the marginalization and unrest caused by early neoliberal reforms, the Moroccan state began a phase of "roll out neoliberalism" in which state institutions were rearranged to better collaborate with private interests and state power was redeployed to engage in social welfare interventions according to neoliberal logics of market inclusion and self-responsibility (Ibid). The results of these consecutive phases of neoliberal restructuring can be seen most clearly in Morocco's cities, as geographically uneven development has socially and spatially fractured cities along class lines, turning the urban landscape into one of extremes. State intervention at either end of these extremes helps to illustrate Morocco's mode of neoliberal yet authoritarian urban governance, as state-led entrepreneurial mega-projects gentrify the urban core while slum clearance projects attempt to bring the urban periphery into the fold of the capitalist market.

State-led Entrepreneurialism & Touristification. Within the neoliberal logic of urban development which Morocco has adopted, the city is treated by the state not according to its *use value* (i.e. quality of life and equity for city-dwellers) but according to its *exchange value* in a competitive global marketplace (Zemni & Bogaert 2011). The city essentially becomes a product which the state wishes to sell foreign investors, tourists, and financial institutions. To this end, the Moroccan government has deregulated and created tax incentives for foreign investment as well as encouraged the growth of a robust tourist industry which can supply the cultural and physical amenities desired by a transnational elite (Lee 2008). While it relies on and actively courts foreign investment, Morocco's brand of urban neoliberal governance remains deeply authoritarian and state-led (Kanai & Kutz 2011; Zemni & Bogaert 2011). Indeed, during Morocco's period of "roll out neoliberalism" discussed above, state power was rearranged both to better cooperate with international private interests as well as to better control the restructuring of urban space. Through the creation of spatially differentiated urban governing bodies and state corporations which nonetheless remain completely under the authority of the monarchy, the Moroccan state has harnessed international entrepreneurial capital to propel its cities into the global market all while maintaining control over and reaping the rewards of urban development (Ibid).

The most visible examples of this mode of state-led entrepreneurialism are the series of massive state-directed but privately funded mega-projects which have dominated urban development in Morocco over the past several decades. These projects include the Tanger City Center and Tangier-Med Port in Tangier, the Bouregreg Valley in Rabat-Sale, the marina in Casablanca, and many other highways, tramways, mega malls, and marinas (Zemni & Bogaert 2011). What these projects share is the combination of state technocracy and foreign investment capital which brought them about. Major cities in Morocco often have several

technocratic institutions which are under the jurisdiction of the monarchy (through either the Ministry of the Interior or the Ministry of Tourism) and serve to control and direct urban development and attract foreign investment in their cities (Kanai & Kutz 2011). Tangier for example has the super-prefectural government of the *wilaya,* the *agence urbaine,* and the *conseil communal*, the directors of all of which are appointed by the monarchy, usually plucked directly from the international private sector (Ibid). This elite cadre of city managers and the foreign private firms they work with on entrepreneurial projects form a loose confederation of public and private actors which effectually govern cities in Morocco (Ibid). Working together, this governing assemblage creates entrepreneurial mega-projects like the ones listed above, visually and economically dominating urban life and ultimately repackaging Moroccan cities to be more desirable to a transnationally mobile elite of tourists and investors.

METHODS & ETHICS

Overview

As may be clear from the literature reviewed above, academic scholarship about global capitalism and neoliberal urbanism often falls into the habit of speaking in frustratingly vague abstractions. To call this mode of describing global political economy abstract is not necessarily a critique, for as Neil Brenner (2011) says of scales, concepts like "neoliberalism" and "global capitalism" represent "real abstraction[s]" which are nonetheless necessary analytical tools for describing phenomenon which are too vast and diverse to be adequately described in terms of the particular and concrete (p. 31). However, while abstractions serve an important function by giving us language to synthesize and critique the broad trends made up of myriad specificities, they lose their usefulness when they become too severed from the concrete social worlds they purport to describe, subsiding into a string of self-referential jargon with little connection to the objective (and subjective) realities of political economy. Just as macrostructural abstractions are necessary to critique totality, attention to historically and culturally specific social actors, institutions, and dynamics is necessary to keep concepts like "neoliberalism" and "global capitalism" grounded.

Broadly, the goal of this research was to produce concrete social data to ground and illustrate the elusive processes of global capital and neoliberal urbanism in terms of the actual social actors and networks through which these processes unfold. Indeed, if the common wisdom is that Airbnb in Morocco is part of a trend of foreign capital influx through entrepreneurial investment and tourism, aided by Morocco's mode of neoliberal urban governance, then this research aims to determine the actual motivations, strategies, and identities of the actors involved in this process. While Airbnb hosts have little directly to do with Tangier's urban governance or neoliberal state policy, I chose to interview Airbnb hosts because they offered a glimpse into some of the transnational interactions and socio-economic networks which exist within this broader context of Moroccan urbanism and tourism. With this interest in mind, guiding research questions were fairly simple ones about the business practices and

experiences of Airbnb hosts in a globalizing city: What are the educational and demographic backgrounds of Airbnb hosts and why did they decide to begin hosting over Airbnb? What kind of labor does Airbnb hosting require and what are the financial and non-financial incentives for hosting? How do Airbnb hosts relate to their guests and what are some of their biggest challenges?

Research Design

Over the course of one month, 5 in-depth interviews were conducted with Airbnb hosts in Tangier. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, based on whoever was responsive to recruitment messages sent over the Airbnb website and willing to meet for an interview. Interviews were conducted mostly in English by necessity, although one interview was conducted in French with the assistance of a translator. Interview questions focused on determining the educational and demographic backgrounds of hosts, how and why the hosts got into the business/acquired their property, their general business model, and their experiences being hosts. Interviews were recorded and detailed notes were taken after the interview's conclusion, but interviews were not formally transcribed or coded.

Recruitment. The Airbnb website allows users to search for listings according to geographic region. Using this feature, I looked through listings in the Tangier-Tetouan metropolitan area, sending recruitment messages to all hosts who listed themselves as English-speaking. Hosts were messaged using the messaging feature on the Airbnb website, which forces the person messaging to select a date range which they would like to request the listing for. To be able to message hosts, I had to select an arbitrary date range as if I were going to book their listing, but I explained in my recruitment message that I was only interested in conducting interviews and not booking an Airbnb (see Appendix A for recruitment message). Hosts were messaged fairly indiscriminately as I simply scrolled through listings and messaged each host who seemed to speak English. Not all hosts in the area were messaged and my sample was likely skewed by Airbnb's search algorithms which place superhosts and popular listings closer to the top of search results. Participants were selected based on convenience and willingness, usually assessed by their responsiveness to messages and availability to meet for an interview. Because most interviews had to be conducted in English, participants were also selected based on their apparent fluency in english as determined by their communications with me over messages.

Sample. Five Airbnb hosts were interviewed; four men and one woman. Most participants were in their 30s, with one in his 60s. Three participants were Moroccan while two were from other European countries. Four out of five live in Morocco full-time while only three live in Tangier year-round. One host lived in a different city in Morocco while another host lived in a European country. Almost all participants only rented out just one property over Airbnb, with only one participant listing two properties.Three of the participants were Airbnb superhosts, and all property listings were for entire dwellings except for one host who rented out several spare rooms in his home. Three of the hosts listed properties inside the Medina, while two hosts listed

properties in the beach quarter just east of the Medina. This sample is not intended to be representative of all Airbnb hosts in the Tangier area. The sample was significantly skewed towards hosts who speak English and hosts who live in Tangier. There were many hosts who were not recruited either because they lived outside of Morocco or because they did not speak English.

Interview Procedure. Hosts who were interested and available to participate in the research were asked to specify a time and place best suited to them for the interview to be conducted. Three interviews were conducted in person with one interview conducted over the phone and another conducted through messaging on the Airbnb website. All in person interviews were conducted in public cafes. All interviews were conducted by me in English, except for one which was conducted in French (at the participant's request) with the help of a translator. Interviews took anywhere from 20 minutes to 2 hours. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the participant.

Interviews were semi-structured with the guidance of an interview guide (see Appendix C). Interview questions were geared towards determining the basic background and demographics of participants, establishing a general narrative of how and why participants began Airbnb hosting, assessing the financial and organizational realities of Airbnb hosting, and collecting subjective descriptions of participants' experiences hosting.

Ethical Considerations

To protect the identities and livelihoods of the Airbnb hosts interviewed, participants were guaranteed complete confidentiality. No identifying information such as names, nationalities, professions, or specific locations of Airbnb listings will be published. After taking detailed notes, all interview recordings were destroyed. It was made clear to participants before the interview was scheduled that there was no material incentive for participation. Participants were given several clear opportunities, both before and after the interview was conducted to ask me questions about the nature of my research and what I intended to do with their interview data. While I made all efforts to respect participants' rights to informed consent, confidentiality, and protection from harm, the nature of my recruitment methods and interview procedure brought up other ethical considerations which are worthy of further discussion.

Online Recruitment. As outlined above, I recruited Airbnb hosts using a messaging feature on the Airbnb website which allows users to contact hosts as long as the user specifies a date range they are interested in booking the listing for. Thus, to be able to send messages to hosts over the Airbnb website, I had to select an arbitrary date range and "request" to book one of the host's listings. While I explicitly said in my recruitment message that I was not interested in booking (see Appendix), this could be construed as deception of participants considering that the website forced me to act as if I wanted to book the hosts' accommodations. Indeed, many hosts contacted "approved" my "request" to book but never responded to my message, suggesting that they did not read it or did not understand that I was not interested in booking. In these cases, I let the host's "approval to book" expire after 24 hours, and I believe that while this

recruitment method might have caused some momentary confusion for some hosts, it did not inflict any financial or emotional harm. The deception of participants was not chosen but rather forced upon me by the constraints of the Airbnb website, and hosts face no penalization for declining requests to book or having their approvals to book expire. Host profiles on Airbnb do show how responsive the host is to messages (the percentage of messages they respond to and how quickly they respond), so if a host chose to ignore my message it could have negatively impacted their profile in this way. However, all a host would have to do to prevent this is send me a short message declining an interview, after which I ceased communication with the host.

During recruitment, several Airbnb hosts messaged me with some amount of anger that I was using the Airbnb website to recruit participants for research. Evidently, one of these hosts reported me to Airbnb and I received a message from Airbnb Customer Services requesting that I cease recruitment of hosts through Airbnb's website. See Appendix B for the full message, but the justification was generally that hosts use the Airbnb website to run their businesses and that it was inappropriate and disruptive for me to use Airbnb's messaging feature for any purpose other than booking accomodations. Luckily, this message came at the end of my recruitment phase and I already had enough interviews that I no longer needed to message hosts on the Airbnb website. I am sharing this in the interest of full disclosure, but nonetheless maintain that using Airbnb's website for the purpose of recruitment for research is not necessarily unethical and does not pose any significant harm to those contacted. Airbnb hosts are not a vulnerable population in any sense and the Airbnb website is not a private or sensitive online community which must be protected. Using a non-exceptionalist approach to online recruitment which advocates for treating online recruitment methods as ethically the same as offline methods, messaging an Airbnb host without the intention of booking their accomodation is no more unethical than calling the work telephone of a landlord without the intention of renting their property (Gelinas et al., 2017). In either case, the person receiving the message might be annoyed that the recruitment message is not related to their business endeavors, but simply receiving a message certainly does not inflict any harm in and of itself. While it is not ethically irrelevant that my recruitment messages may have violated the terms of use of the Airbnb website (as evidenced by their request that I cease recruiting), these terms of use were not democratically chosen by site users for purposes of ethics and mutual respect, but rather were set by a multinational corporation for the purpose of sustaining their business model and the labor relations it rests upon. Indeed, as Gelinas and others point out in their discussion of the ethical implications of online terms of use:

"A possible ethical concern with approving recruitment strategies that conflict with published terms of use is the lack of respect for the site itself, or the owner(s) of the site. However, such considerations are not within the purview of IRBs: the mission of the IRB is to protect the rights and interests of research participants. Since the site or site's owners are not research participants (or potential participants), it is questionable whether IRBs should refuse to approve strategies merely on the grounds that they do not show sufficient consideration for sites or site owners, rather than research participants or potential participants. This is especially the case when complying with the terms of use yields no increase in participant protection and

indeed denies individuals the chance to participate in potentially beneficial research." (Gelinas et al., 2017, p. 10)

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

Considering that the sample of Airbnb hosts interviewed in this study cannot be taken as representative of all Airbnb hosts in Tangier, both due to the small sample size and the fact that the sample was significantly skewed towards Airbnb hosts who speak English and live in the area, this data cannot be used to make generalizable statements about the Airbnb economy in Tangier or the actors involved in it. However, the qualitative interview data collected is still valuable in illustrating how complex and diverse the motivations and business models of Airbnb hosts are, helping to complicate simplistic macrostructural narratives of touristification and gentrification by grounding them in concrete socio-economic formations. These five interviews with Airbnb hosts, taken as idiographic case studies, are useful not because they are able to definitively prove or disprove anything about global capitalism or neoliberal urbanism but rather because they offer alternative ways of thinking about and imagining these global processes on the individual scale. Unlike massive entrepreneurial and neoliberal endeavors like urban mega-projects, the micro-entrepreneurialisms of Airbnb hosts in Tangier occur outside of the direct control of the regularizing state or financial institutions, making their entrepreneurial ventures just as idiosyncratic as the biographies and backgrounds of the hosts themselves. Indeed, entrepreneurial platform capitalisms like Airbnb create a disparate, isolated, and divided labor force which by its very nature resists all generalization due to its discontinuity and lack of shared conditions. What follows is a set of observations and themes from interviews which, while not generalizable, help to illustrate some of the realities of Airbnb hosting in Tangier.

Observations

Backgrounds: Entrepreneurial Inclinations & Pre-existing Skills. While none of the hosts interviewed were professional landlords or associated with the real estate business in any way, many of them had pre-existing educational backgrounds, entrepreneurial inclinations, or other skills which influenced their interest in Airbnb hosting and made them better suited it. None of the hosts considered Airbnb hosting their main profession or career, but often their primary careers and hobbies overlapped significantly with their side business of hosting.Two hosts interviewed had educational backgrounds in hotellerie and hospitality, and another host had a degree in business. Several hosts also described enjoying interior design and renovation as a hobby. Although it took different forms, many of the hosts interviewed had what can only be described as an entrepreneurial streak-- a general interest and history in entrepreneurial endeavors. Two hosts interviewed had their own start-up companies and another host pieced together several other entrepreneurial side jobs such as selling clothing. A major skill which almost all hosts interviewed had was mastery of several languages. Interviews were mostly conducted in English but most hosts interviewed also spoke French, Arabic, and Spanish. One

host even worked as a translator from time to time. With guests coming from all over the world, being a polyglot was a significant advantage for hosts.

Acquiring Property: "Investment" vs "Luck". The reasons and ways that Airbnb hosts acquired their properties were surprisingly diverse. For two of the hosts interviewed, their properties were acquired with the specific intention of renting them over Airbnb, without the hosts ever intending to live there or use the property for any other purpose. These hosts had learned about Airbnb through friends or through the internet and had acquired their properties as conscious "investments", planning from the start to renovate them and rent them over Airbnb. However, other hosts interviewed acquired their properties without any entrepreneurial plans and sometimes without specific plans at all. One host said he acquired his property "by luck" when an acquaintance asked him if he wanted to buy it-- he had no idea what he was going to do with the property but nonetheless considered it an investment. The three hosts who did not acquire their properties with the original intention of renting over Airbnb all had some intention to live in the properties. One host from a European country moved to Tangier when he retired and purchased a large house for him to live in, only afterwards deciding to rent out a few rooms over Airbnb. Another host from a European country purchased her house in Tangier with the intention of living there half the year, but then plans changed and she had to stay in her home country year round. The status of ownership of property was also different between hosts: two hosts owned their homes, two had mortgages, and one rented the property from a landlord.

Motivations: Business Endeavor & Lifestyle Choice. The motivations which hosts had for renting their properties over Airbnb were often complex and not as simple as turning a profit. Indeed, one of the more surprising themes from the interviews was how little many hosts were making from hosting in terms of financial gains. Only one host considered Airbnb to be his primary source of income, while two hosts admitted that 10% of their income or less came from Airbnb. While making some extra money was not irrelevant to any of the hosts interviewed, it certainly was not the sole motivation of many of the hosts. Even hosts whose sole motivation was money did not begin hosting as an planned entrepreneurial business endeavor but rather as a way to repurpose property which they had acquired but could not use themselves. For example, one host who purchased his property with no specific plan other than to maybe live there one day invested a huge amount of time and money into renovating and decorating the property. While he did this renovation without the original intention of renting the property over Airbnb, he soon realized that he would not be able to move to Tangier for many years and saw Airbnb as a way to defray some of the costs of the property's mortgage and the money he spent on renovating it. This host did not make any profits and had little interest in the hospitality components of hosting-- his motivations were simply to salvage some of the money he had poured into a property he could not use. Another host who lived in Europe acquired her property with the intention of living there herself and began renting it over Airbnb only when her plans changed and she decided not to live in Tangier.

For at least three of the hosts interviewed, the decision to rent over Airbnb was motivated in large part by non-monetary considerations such as the lifestyle and the

transnational social interactions being an Airbnb host afforded them. As mentioned above, many hosts had pre-existing skills or interests in hospitality and entrepreneurialism and were attracted to hosting over Airbnb because they genuinely enjoyed renovating properties, meeting new people, and acting as informal tour guides. The host for whom Airbnb was his primary source of income admitted that he made significantly less money hosting than he made in his previous profession, but he chose to quit his job and host over Airbnb because it had fewer time constraints and allowed him to make his own schedule. One host said that money was not at all related to his motivations to host, and that he hosted purely because he loved meeting people from around the world, saying, "Instead of me going elsewhere to travel, they're coming to me. I host them, we exchange ideas, we talk. It's a type of travelling". Another host who is retired and rents out several rooms in his home described how he would frequently socialize with his guests, taking them out to cafes and bars and getting to know them.

Labor, Time, and Energy. Apart from one host who lives in Europe and hires a property manager in Tangier, all hosts interviewed worked almost entirely alone and did most of the labor of Airbnb hosting themselves. All but one host hired a cleaning service from time to time, but apart from this the labor of renovating, decorating, maintenance, and hospitality was all performed personally by hosts. For two of the hosts interviewed (the two who had full time jobs and did not hire a property manager), the amount of labor, time, and energy hosting required of them was a significant burden. One host who does not live in Tangier and travels frequently for work only has about 12-15 guests a year and never turns a profit considering the cost of his mortgage and renovations. When asked why he did not try to host more guests, he identified a lack of time and energy as the major barriers, saying that due to his full time job he cannot be, "100% focused on renting this apartment". Another host, when asked if he would ever consider expanding and renting more properties over Airbnb, said that the problem was not a lack of money to invest in new property but a lack of time to renovate the property and host additional guests. For another host, the barrier to expanding and renting more properties was not time or energy but the difficulty of finding suitable business partners. This host rented his property from a landlord, and said that it was a slow and difficult process to build trust with the landlord and get him to be comfortable with Airbnb. While the landlord did not manage the property or split the labor of hosting in any way, his approval and understanding was still necessary for this host to use this property for Airbnb.

This is unsurprising, but the labor relations of Airbnb hosting and the nature of the online platform meant that most hosts interviewed did not know any other Airbnb hosts. Indeed, some hosts I interviewed spent a long time after the interview concluded asking me questions about the business practices of the other hosts I had talked to. Generally, hosts had little knowledge of how other hosts did things or the proliferation of Airbnb's in Tangier. One host told me that an Airbnb, "could be you neighbor and you'd never know".

CONCLUSIONS

In their research on transnational gentrification, Thomas Sigler and David Wachsmuth (2016) suggest that when global redevelopment and entrepreneurial capital is connected with local demand for tourist housing and services, it in some sense bypasses urban and national scales by funneling foreign capital directly into localities without the intervention of urban or national institutions. The case of Airbnb in Tangier somewhat confirms this: the Airbnb hosts interviewed engaged in transnational entrepreneurialism outside of the direct influence or control of either urban or national governing bodies and, apart from bank mortgages, outside of international financial institutions. As of now, Morocco still has no specific policy on or taxation of Airbnb. Airbnb guests from all over the world streamed in and out of hosts' accommodations, launching the local areas they came to experience (such as the old Medina) into the global scale without directly transversing or experiencing the urban or national spheres. However, while interviews reveal that the disparate and isolated entrepreneurialisms of Airbnb hosts seem to occur without the mediation of urban or national governing bodies, I argue that urban and national scales and state interventions within these scales represent a sort of scalar umbrella under which these mirco-entrepreneurialism can occur. The non-institutionalized micro-entrepreneurialisms of Airbnb hosts form organically and on their own terms at the local and interpersonal level, but can only do so because of the macrostructural interventions of Morocco and Tangier's state institutions. Morocco's aggressive touristification strategies and removal of barriers to purchasing real estate along with Tangier's mega-projects and medina restoration aimed at foreign tourists are what created the conditions for a booming Airbnb business in Tangier. While neoliberal urban restructuring and entrepreneurialism in Morocco have been authoritarian and state-led on the macrostructural scale, these interventions have created the possibilities for organic, disparate, and unplanned mirco-entrepreneurialisms such as Airbnb.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Language

What follows is the message which was sent to Airbnb hosts via the Airbnb website's messaging feature:

"Hello! I am an American sociology student studying in Morocco for the semester through the Center for Cross-Cultural Learning in Rabat. While in Tangier, I am doing research on Airbnb and how important it is for cities. I am not interested in booking your Airbnb, but would you be willing to be interviewed for my project? Interviews take thirty to sixty minutes and can be held at the time and place most convenient for you. Let me know if you're interested! Thank you!"

Appendix B: Communication with Airbnb Customer Services

What follows is the message I received on the Airbnb website from Airbnb Support on April 16, 2019 (the name of Airbnb's representative has been changed for anonymity):

"Hello Jack,

My name is Halima, from Airbnb Customer Service. I wanted to talk to you about the message you sent to one of our hosts, asking her to make her an interview, but that you are not interested in booking her listing.

She contacted us because hosts doesn't want to receive this kind of messages. They use Airbnb to host, and manage their little business, but it can disturb hosts this kind of messages. Please, don't send more messages to our hosts asking them to make them interviews.

I am sure that, in other platforms, such as Facebook, you could enter a group about Airbnb hosting, and you could send them a message, so hosts can volunteer to make an interview with you. But don't send messages via Airbnb, please. If you have any question, don't hesitate to answer to this message. Thank you!"

I did not respond to this message because I did not have anything to say or clarify and I did not see any purpose in continuing communication with Airbnb Customer Service. I then received the following message from Airbnb Support on April 18, 2019:

"Hello Jack,
I am Halima from Airbnb again. If you don't have any question, I will solve this case now. I hope you received my messages about contacting our users. Have a really nice day!"

I also did not respond to this message.

Appendix C: Interview Guide

What follows is the interview guide I used to conduct interviews with Airbnb hosts. This guide provided a loose structure for the questions I asked but I did not adhere to it rigidly:

- *Demographics? Where are you from? How did you come to be here?*
- *How did you get into the business?*
  - *How did you come to acquire your property/properties? Why did you decide to rent over Airbnb?*
  - *How long have you been in the business?*
  - *Do you ever live in your Airbnb property/properties?*
- *How many properties do you rent?*
  - *What are these properties like? Private room or full dwelling? Apartment, house, or riad?*
  - *What did/do you do/pay for upkeep and redevelopment of this property?*
  - *Would you ever consider expanding and renting more properties?*
- *Approximately what proportion of your income do you make from renting this property?*
  - *Could you estimate your profits?*
  - *Did you rent this as long-term before? What is difference in profits?*
  - *Do you have other jobs?*
- *What is this neighborhood like? History?*
- *What are your clients like? Where are they from? How long do they stay?*
  - *Do you ever get any trouble?*
- *What do you like most about being an Airbnb host?*
- *What are some of the biggest challenges in being an Airbnb host?*