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Translocational belonging in urban peripheries among the postmigrant generation: San Siro and the trap/drill subculture of Milan

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the construction of translocal belongings among postmigrant youth in urban peripheries, by analyzing the latter's musical subculture treated as expressions of identity for racialized and marginalized young individuals. Focusing on the case of the trap ensemble Seven7oo associated with the San Siro neighborhood of Milan, an intertextual reading of everyday urban spaces, personal narratives, musical and social media content is undertaken to unpack core themes shaping identity constructions of postmigrant youth living in peripheral landscapes. This is done so through the triangulation of ethnographic fieldwork in the neighborhood of San Siro, online ethnography of Seven7oo members and their followers, in-depth interviews, and song lyrics treated as personal testimonies of children of immigrants growing up in marginalized areas of a rich European metropolis. It is argued that three themes are salient across different sources of data, namely a. situated childhood suffering as a glue for translocal collective identity, b. prevalence of translocational bonds against the negation of national belongings, and c. (digital) marketing of fast-track mobility in overcoming stigmatization and marginalization.

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Seven Zoo è famiglia
Seven Zoo è culto
Seven Zoo è tutto
Le autorità contro di noi
I quartieri contro di noi
Il quartiere senza regole
La torre di Selinunte la puoi guardare dai balconi
Abbiamo visto la fame
Abbiamo dovuto stringere i denti per arrivare a fine mese
Ed è per questo che non saremo mai alla pari
Senti che flow c'hanno le case popolari¹

(Seven7oo, Intro 2022²)

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On 2 June 2022, a rave party called ‘Africa in Peschiera’ was organized on TikTok and held on the coast of Lake Garda in north Italy. Thousands of young Italians with a migratory background poured into the touristic town of Peschiera, reclaiming their African heritage through trap music and dance. The event eventually generated a mass brawl and clashes with police forces, also involving cases of harassment towards young white women. The episode sparked a nationwide debate, being appropriated to justify varying political standpoints ranging from the failure of integration and social inclusion in Italian society to the securitization of migration and outright racist arguments. In the aftermath of the event, participants commented in a national newspaper:

What happened was shameful; those harassment cases were terrible. But why is the spotlight only turned on when there is chaos? Do they wake up only now to discover the rage and the violence that these guys are venting? No one ever had mercy on us from the moment they stacked us in the worst neighborhoods to identify us better as immigrants, as Africans for life. In the end, they were successful. They made us believe we were more African than Italian.³

The collective feelings of anger, lack of recognition, and lack of life prospects for children of immigrants growing up in marginalized urban neighborhoods with structural disadvantages are elaborated by another commentator: ‘It’s a ghetto not only in terms of buildings, but of perceptions, opportunities, words, stigmatizations, and prejudices that continue to imprison us, with no way out. New rappers like Sacky, Babygang, Neima Ezza let us vent our unease’.⁴ These names that are part of a trap ensemble from Milan have come to represent the frustration of racialized young Italians living in marginalized neighborhoods under conditions of vulnerability, all of them in their early twenties with a migratory background and translocal ties.

At this juncture, the study explores the intersection of urban marginality and translocational belongings of postmigrant youth by investigating the trap/drill subculture in a European urban peripheral setting. Here, the term ‘postmigrant’ comes to signify the younger generation who, despite not being migrants themselves, ‘have experiences of migration as personal knowledge and shared memory’, and as a result, experience a different form of discrimination and racism (Ohnmacht and Yıldız 2021, 150). This is done so through a multi-method investigation of the Milanese neighborhood San Siro and a musical ensemble of trappers associated with this urban area called *Seven7oo* (pronounced seven-zoo). Most of them children of immigrants, the musical group has branded their ensemble with reference to the administrative area of Municipio 7 (encompassing the neighborhoods of Baggio, San Siro, and De Angeli) from the metropolitan area of Milan, interpreted through their personal experiences of growing up in this social space: like a zoo, being under constant surveillance from an outside gaze while struggling to survive on the inside. The phenomenon of *Seven7oo* appeals to young individuals who come from similar economic and transnational backgrounds with shared experiences in urban peripheries in Italy and beyond. It is this nexus of marginalized urban landscapes, racialized youth, and artistic productions of self-expression that the article seeks to shed light upon constructions of identity. Despite the vast literature on immigration, urban spaces, and multiculturalism in super-diverse cities, it has been claimed that ‘social and political significance of artistic practices in general, and musical forms of expression of STGI [second and third generation immigrants], in particular, have been understudied’ (Martiniello 2019, 995). The reflections proposed in

what follows are embedded in a broader sociopolitical context, marked by an unprecedented rise of far-right and populist right actors on the political scene in Italy coming to secure a majority with the 2022 national elections. The victory of the *Fratelli D'Italia* post-fascist party, in alliance with the populist right *Lega* party, unites ethnonationalist and nativist actors capitalizing on the securitization of migration.

As such, the paper seeks to expand our understanding of identity-building and a sense of place through an investigation of the relationship between urban landscape and music produced by postmigrant youth. It has been argued that the multifaceted experiences and multi-layered belongings of such youth are yet to be explored, given their growing demographic presence in different national contexts (Andall 2002; Hawthorne 2022). While there have been pioneering works at the intersection of music and urban spaces (DeNora 2000; Kubrin 2005; Martiniello and Lafleur 2008; Roy and Dowd 2010), on 'second-generation' and their constructions of belonging (Andall 2002; Barwick and Beaman 2019; Colombo and Rebughini 2012; Hawthorne 2022; Kyei, Koomson-Yalley, and Dwumah 2022; Levitt 2009; Somerville 2008), on rap/hip-hop and self-expression of racialized youth (Cuzzocrea and Benasso 2020; Frisina and Kyeremeh 2022; Grassi and Sánchez-García 2021; Magaraggia 2022), so far there have been limited efforts to bridge these overlapping dimensions to investigate complex forms of belonging developed by children of immigrants living expressed through urban musical subcultures. As such, the article seeks to contribute to the existing literature by analyzing the translocational construction of identity by marginalized postmigrant youth through an investigation of a musical subculture associated with peripheral landscapes. An intertextual reading of urban life that triangulates different sources of data, including ethnographic observations, social media content, narrative testimonies, and song lyrics, offers a novel methodological perspective that can capture the centrality of online-offline continuum in the construction of 'translocational belongings' (Anthias 2009) by postmigrant youth. It is argued that three themes emerge most strikingly as a result of a systematic analysis of these complementary data undertaken through MAXQDA, namely a. *situated childhood suffering* as a 'glue' of translocal collective identity, b. prevalence of *translocational bonds* over national belongings, and c. *the (digital) marketing of fast-track social mobility* in overcoming stigmatization and marginalization. In what follows, the article will first provide a theoretical discussion and outline the research design. It will then offer a socio-spatial analysis of San Siro, followed by the central themes emerging from the data and concluding with reflections on places beyond.

Translocational belonging in urban peripheries: musical self-expressions, urban marginality, and the postmigrant generation

Music is a form of social interaction conveying cultural assumptions, a rich albeit largely understudied field of political expression that is particularly salient in ethnic minority groups' musical and artistic self-expressions in multicultural societies (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008; Roy and Dowd 2010). Music is a powerful tool in the construction of one's identity, as a medium in which individuals can link the text with context as a result of a deliberate meaning-making process, also as a means of demarcating 'us' versus 'them' (DeNora 2000; Roy and Dowd 2010). The transnational belongings of children of migration, coupled with experiences of discrimination, have been voiced through

their music acting as a marker of identity. These musical productions also enrich local cultures where they take place through hybrid cultural formations, broadcasted to places beyond thereby reaching a wider audience (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008).

The rap/hip-hop genre comes to the fore at the intersection of urban marginalities and racialized youth, for voicing everyday struggles and future aspirations of young individuals facing severe structural disadvantages. Explicating the American experience of urban youth living in marginalized neighborhoods, Kubrin cogently states that ‘[t]he inner city affords limited avenues for adolescents to obtain the types of social status and social roles available to youth in other environments’ (2005, 362). In these peripheral landscapes with limited opportunities to participate in community life alternative forms of status acquisition are developed, including physical power, skillful use of street vernacular, and displays of material wealth usually obtained through illegal activity. The subculture of trap and drill associated with the younger generation is the offspring of rap and hip-hop culture: they not only offer a new sound but also give voice to a whole new generation and a new set of social issues. The word ‘trap’ is derived from the African-American slang of Atlanta, denoting a house where drug dealing and other illegal activity was managed in a black neighborhood, developing as a subgenre of rap.⁵ Instead, the more recent arrival of the subgenre *drill* from black neighborhoods of Chicago has been deemed one of the most important cultural phenomena of urban youth.⁶ While trap predates drill and is seen as its predecessor, these interconnected genres took on mainstream music around 2010 to the point that some claim they have replaced pop music.⁷

It is pointed out that within rap and its sub-genres, as cultural products of glocalised urban scenes, a sense of belonging to one’s neighborhood becomes a common thread for marginalized youth in global peripheries (Grassi and Sánchez-García 2021). The Italian trap scene widespread among urban youth has likewise been ingrained in the theme of accelerated social mobility, deviating from middle-class ideals of gradual material accomplishment, and emerging from disadvantaged urban contexts (Cuzzocrea and Benasso 2020). The insightful work of Frisina and Kyeremeh (2022) investigates how racialized youth in Italy self-express through rap music and slam poetry as new forms of political anti-racism undergirded by their diasporic political imagination, whereby local forms of belonging in shared urban spaces and local dialects help cultivate a sense of place against discriminatory citizenship laws (Ibid.).

As mentioned at the outset, this musical genre brings together testimonies of urban marginality as well as experiences of migrant communities, in particular, children of immigrants. In city life, urban marginality manifests itself through outside gazes looking into stigmatized neighborhoods seen as ‘no-go zones’, which are often associated with ‘undesired’ migrants, ‘dishonored’ minorities, and working-class families (Wacquant 2016, 29). No-go zones, in turn, impose cognitive borders on those who inhabit them, becoming a form of confinement from which powerless groups cannot escape: ‘In the postmodern city, the strangers mean one thing to those for whom “no go” areas (the “mean streets”, the “rough district”) means “no go in”, and those to whom “no go” means “no go out”’ (Bauman 1995, 10). Notwithstanding their marginalization, urban peripheries often marked by superdiversity (Vertovec 2022) host everyday practices of multiculturalism, as ‘micro-publics of compulsory intercultural negotiation’ (Harris 2009, 191) in which postmigrant youth undertake an active role in. Hence, children of immigrants often become more ‘native’ in European metropolises as active agents

compared to their non-migrant counterparts, and thus, tend to develop an elevated sense of belonging to the city at the neighborhood level where the locality is imperative for identity-building, as opposed to national belonging or allegiance to the state (Barwick and Beaman 2019).

At this juncture of space and identity, the study focuses on the identity construction of postmigrant youth living in urban peripheries, who tend to be characterized by ‘ambiguous positionings and discontinuities’, and for whom mobility and multiple belongings have become the normality (Ohnmacht and Yıldız 2021, 151). These individuals who do not wish to be reduced to a ‘migration background’ skillfully author multiple positionings and novel forms of belonging (Ibid.). To make sense of the different scales of attachment employed by postmigrant youth, the concept of ‘translocational belonging’ proposed by Anthias (2009) proves to be helpful in capturing multiple embeddedness and multiple ties. The concept opts to thereby focus on positionality in social spaces with their own dynamics of inclusion and exclusion rather than membership to various ethnic, religious, or cultural groups *per se*. The concept of translocality was first introduced by the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996). Emphasizing the role played by locality (i.e. locatedness), the concept simultaneously transcends state-centric and ethnocentric approaches by accentuating socio-spatial processes that travel across borders. As such, translocality highlights the interconnectedness between places and actors to offer a form of transnationalism that is more grounded (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013). Hence, unlike transnationalism, here the importance of location comes to the fore in understanding the ‘situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales’ (Anthias 2008, 15). In this process, global cultural flows as sources of references and symbols of identification play as much a role as situated experiences in localities for transnational young individuals who bind these two dynamics in innovative ways (Colombo and Rebughini 2012), becoming particularly evident across digital spaces. Especially when it comes to young individuals, identities and belongings are never static but always in a process of re-negotiation and fluidity, taking plural or hybrid forms (Andall 2002). Moreover, the multiple attachments that are nourished growing up can manifest in transnational forms of racialized or bicultural identities (Somerville 2008). Whilst managing several cultural repertoires effortlessly, children of immigrants are simultaneously subject to different forms of racial and class hierarchies from the homeland of their parents (Levitt 2009; Ohnmacht and Yıldız 2021). Moreover, they may reject low-paid and low-status jobs of the kind their parents had to take on in the host country, at times developing an oppositional culture to conventional processes of social mobility (Andall 2002). It is precisely at this intersection that postmigrant youth raised in transnational social fields (Levitt 2009) have found a medium of self-expression through the trap and drill subcultures in European metropolises.

In Italy, discussions on postmigrant youth belonging tend to evolve around the country’s controversial citizenship laws premised on the *jus sanguinis* principle that deprived many young Italians with different ethnic backgrounds born and raised in Italy of citizenship (Hawthorne 2022). Andall (2002) argues that in the urban spaces of Milan where everyday forms of racism and discrimination are on the rise, the postmigrant generation has tended to identify with their minority ethnic group whilst developing a more complex approach towards Italian society at large. The ‘multi-positionality’ of these young social actors within diasporic spaces juggles both the local and the global

contemporaneously. In sum, this article opts to unpack ‘identity processes’ (Somerville 2008) for children of immigrants in marginalized urban settings from a translocational perspective (Anthias 2009). In order to do so, the intersection between urban spaces accommodating superdiversity and the sub-genres of trap/drill are investigated among the postmigrant generation in the city of Milan.

Methodology

The study is premised on an intertextual reading of visual and textual data, collected through the triangulation of different data sources, including online and offline ethnography, in-depth interviews, and song lyrics, which complement one another to consolidate the validity of the arguments presented and enhance theory building (Flick 2017). The employment of such methodological pluralism (Della Porta 2014) adds depth to the analysis and captures the multidimensionality at the intersection of urban spaces and musical productions, as well as the online–offline continuum. The resulting corpus has been systematically analyzed through the research software MAXQDA, providing the possibility to code different types of data in a single analysis through thematic coding (Flick 2009, 320), with the objective of tracing analytical themes in the construction of identity by postmigrant youth living in urban peripheries. The analytical section reflects the rich variety of data, thereby offering a multidimensional depiction of the main themes, whilst offering those examples that are most relevant with the argument presented.

The research took off with ethnographic fieldwork in the neighborhood of San Siro,⁸ mainly in the area of public housing also referred to as *il Quadrilatero* due to the quadrilateral layout of these buildings, urbanistically and cognitively separated from the rest of the neighborhood, which is instead characterized by luxurious housing and middle-class inhabitants. During the fieldwork, everyday routines of the inhabitants, urban materialities embellished by various sorts of graffiti, and cognitive borders demarcating urban spaces among different socio-economic profiles were explored, as socio-spatial processes for identity. My positionality in the field has been defined by my identity as a Turkish migrant woman, living in a different city in northern Italy, therefore with scarce initial knowledge of the neighborhood except for the stereotypical mediatic depictions.

As a result of the ethnographic fieldwork, contact was established with civil society actors in the neighborhood, who work with postmigrant youth from the area, including parish oratories, social collectives, and voluntary associations working in the fields of unemployment, after school support, legal aid, and intercultural activities. These contacts led to expert interviews with representatives of various associations and youth social collectives in San Siro as key informants, and then to in-depth interviews with young individuals from diverse backgrounds, 18–25 years of age, who were either from San Siro or musicians with close personal ties to the Seven700 ensemble.⁹ Two of these young musicians had been in the same youth detention center in Milano as some of the Seven700 crew members. These personal accounts provided invaluable insights into the complexities of living in an urban area demarcated as a ‘no-go zone’ (Wacquant 2016), in which daily life is characterized by superdiversity (Vertovec 2022).

In addition to the fieldwork and interviews, song lyrics produced by Seven700 were systematically chosen according to their focus on social issues and spatial experiences, and then analyzed as textual data.¹⁰ Lyrics of the music produced by ethnic minorities

in multicultural settings can convey deep political meanings about everyday instances of discrimination, negotiations, and other social or political concerns (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008). In fact, it is argued that even the language chosen for the lyrics can have political significance according to the social context (Ibid.), which, in the case of Seven7oo, offers interesting insights given the artists' mixing and matching of Italian, French, Arabic, and English. The lyrics chosen for the study have been produced either by individual artists from the Seven7oo crew, including Ronda Da Sosa, Sacky, Neima Ezza, Vale Pain, and Keta, or from the collective album that narrates their experiences in the neighborhood. As a form of self-expression and auto-narration, this textual art form was treated as a personal and/or collective account of the crew that articulates cross-cutting themes such as stigmatization, difficult childhood, economic hardship, criminality, fame, brotherhood, the city, the neighborhood, and transnational ties.

Lastly, online ethnography was conducted following the Instagram profiles of Seven7oo artists, their group account, their individual accounts, their most active followers with public accounts, and finally fan accounts dedicated to them.¹¹ Although data collected on digital platforms have not replaced the significance of offline corporal spaces in the formation of one's identity, the triangulation of online and offline data has provided invaluable insights into the social phenomena investigated. The digitalization of social relations (Drucker and Gumpert 2012) is a prevailing factor, especially for the younger generation also referred to as 'digitarians' (Cuzzocrea and Benasso 2020). Online ethnography was fruitful in allowing the researcher to trace not only the themes through which the artists connect with their followers, but also their counter-hegemonic self-representations against stigmatization by mainstream media and institutional actors, as well as their transnational ties through international accounts of post-migrant trap/drill culture from European peripheries. An analysis of San Siro's peripheral landscape and the central themes of identity construction that emerged as a result of this multi-method inquiry are summarized in the following sections.

The peripheral landscape of San Siro

On my first day in San Siro, I arrived at the neighborhood by metro and got off at Piazza Segesta, the station nearest to the *Quadrilatero* public housing area. In this small square, the first two things I noticed were an international French-Italian private school well-known in Milano, and across from it, a chic French-themed café embellished with flowers where middle and upper-middle-class families with children attending the school hang out, often speaking in multiple languages (Italian, French, and English). Not quite the scene I was expecting from what I had read in the newspapers as 'the most dangerous neighborhood of Milan', I continued walking and took a turn when I realized I had not mistaken the metro stop: the long line of identical dilapidated buildings from the 1940s belonging to *ALER*,¹² urban graffiti in different languages on walls, a group of young males smoking hashish daytime in a children's park, and mothers speaking in Arabic as their kids play in a ramshackle playground. In the background, I noticed large piles of furniture stacked in various corners of the street as visible displays of frequent evictions and house occupations. Hence, juxtaposed to a middle-class transnational social space was what can be considered from an outside gaze a translocational 'no-go zone' *par excellence* (Anthias 2009; Wacquant 2016).

The proximity of these two vividly contrasting social spaces belonging to the same neighborhood seemed almost surreal: one frequented by ‘better-off’ Milanese from transnational backgrounds speaking French and English besides Italian, and the other pertaining to racialized and marginalized migrant groups which, notwithstanding their similar command of multiple languages and cultures, were likewise embedded in translocal dynamics, yet living under conditions of extreme poverty and instability. Echoing Levitt’s insights (2009), despite their mastery of several cultural repertoires, these individuals were subjected to overlapping racial and class hierarchies. Some students from the private French school with whom I engaged in an informal conversation warned me that ‘this is not a very good neighborhood’, recommending I ‘better take the metro to go visit City Life or Duomo’ (Fieldnotes, 27 May 2022). The City Life district, 15 min walking distance from the Quadrilatero, is the high-end area pertaining to upper-class Milanese where some of the wealthiest Italian celebrities, such as the Italian rapper Fedez and famous influencer Chiara Ferragni, have chosen to live. The starkly contrasting socio-economic inequality that surrounded the inhabitants of the Quadrilatero validates the ‘zoo’ analogy of the musical ensemble as a ‘no-go’ zone for outsiders and a ‘no go out’ zone for the inhabitants (Bauman 1995). Inequality understood not only on the redistributive level but also in terms of a lack of recognition, provided fertile ground for rage as a central motif in the songs of Seven7oo:

We are not millionaires, *sons of immigrants* raised among shots. Business never been even, you see things and you learn, big brothers hand-cuffed. The peace of Gandhi, the war, and the *stares*. Mama, don’t worry, don’t wait for me I will be late, being rich, *richer than the others*.¹³ (Neima Ezza, *Essere Ricchi* part 3, 2018, *emphasis added*)

The heart of the Quadrilatero is the emblematic *Piazza Selinunte*, which is, for the most part, frequented by groups of young males with similar outlooks (branded outfits, a small bag worn across the torso, and a beanie hat or a cape) alongside the regular presence of police forces. Upon entering the square, one notices an *Emergency* mobile clinic, an Italy-based international humanitarian NGO that usually works to provide free medical treatment to victims of war and poverty, next to the famous *Selinunte* tower with graffiti drawings of human figures as shown in [Figure 1](#). This is the setting where many videos of the Seven7oo crew take place right next to *Via Zamagna*, the street most associated with their artistic persona.

The neighborhood is marked by the highest number of middle-school school dropouts for individuals aged from 15 to 19 in the wider Milan area (Bonini and Santigati 2017). According to one of the most comprehensive studies in this neighborhood (Cognetti and Padovani 2018), approximately 40% of its inhabitants live in extreme poverty, juxtaposed with a background of public housing managed by the regional institution ALER Milano and large numbers of occupied dwellings. Functioning as a first place of arrival for many migrants in Milano, demographically the neighborhood exhibits the characteristics of super-diversity (Vertovec 2022) when it comes to the ethnic and religious composition as the basis of everyday intercultural practices. Demographically, Municipio 7 of Milano, which San Siro is part of, is composed primarily of an Arabic community of North African countries, together with East European migrants alongside the Roma community, as well as residents from Latin America and Asia (in particular residents from the Philippines and China).¹⁴ The residents of San Siro are 48.7% of foreign



Figure 1. Piazza Selinunte (Photo taken during fieldwork, 15 July 2022).

origins represented by 85 different nationalities, with 37.2% of foreign residents from Egypt, 10.4% from Morocco, 9.5% from the Philippines, and 6.1% from Peru.¹⁵ The characteristic of superdiversity is visible also in everyday urban life in the presence of migrant-owned businesses, textual graffiti in foreign languages, and ethnic music. To this background, a new generation has arrived as the offspring of first-arriving migrants, born and raised in urban marginality, economic fragility, unstable housing, and stigmatization. Despite their disadvantageous circumstances, these young individuals often author high levels of intercultural skills and multiple languages.

The neighborhood of San Siro is one of the most important urban scenes in Italy for rap music and its trap and drill sub-genres, where micro-criminality has led to reductive media portrayals equating the presence of working-class migrants in urban peripheries with a threat to public security (De Angelis 2021). The artistic work of Seven7oo in this context provides a sense of belonging and a source of pride for the postmigrant

generation in the neighborhood, as vividly exemplified in a photographic exhibition where middle school kids describe themselves on top of their portraits taken in places of their choosing by a professional photographer. Echoing insights provided by Barwick and Beaman (2019) that local forms of belonging are essential for postmigrant youth, a young boy from a different ethnic background expresses his attachment to the neighborhood stating ‘I live in this neighborhood, and I love it a lot. I have my friends and family here. I never want to leave my neighborhood’, next to which he wrote ‘7zoo’, indicating the trap ensemble. Other portraits of children from different backgrounds posing in the main piazzas include writings in Italian, Arabic, and English, as testimony to their intercultural linguistic skills (Levitt 2009), alongside writings of their feelings and symbolic references of identity: ‘future?’, ‘anger’, ‘feeling/not feeling at home’, the postal code of San Siro, negative opinions about the police, and names of various Seven7oo artists such as Babygang and Keta (Fieldnotes, 4 June 2022). Thus, on the one hand we observe in San Siro translocation belongings of postmigrant youth embedded in the locality with ties to different geographies (Anthias 2009), on the other hand the salience of a ‘gang culture’ internalized by these adolescents through the musical culture of the social space in which they inhabit (Kubrin 2005). These intertwined themes lucidly illustrate the interconnectedness of identity, urban space, and the musical subculture of trap/drill for postmigrant youth growing up in this European periphery (Grassi and Sánchez-García 2021).

From urban spaces to musical lyrics: the postmigrant generation in peripheral landscapes

Situated childhood suffering as the ‘Glue’ of a translocal collective identity: the trenches

Since I was I child, I swear, Baby used to sleep on trains. I wouldn’t go home, because it brought more problems. It seems like yesterday, how many times the cops woke me up. (Babygang, *Treni* 2021¹⁶)

Children of immigrants in San Siro, some of whom coming from families that experienced stark downward mobility in the host country, spend their childhoods in urban environments marked by extreme poverty, everyday and structural racism (Andall 2002; Levitt 2009), adverse housing conditions with very small spaces per family, lack of institutional support, insecurity, micro-criminality often linking the country of origin and the host country (Grassi and Sánchez-García 2021), and no reliable future prospects. This shared urban experience is referred to as ‘the trenches’ using the original English term, which is the translocational glue that unites postmigrant youth with counterparts in other European peripheries as the context in which one’s identity is formed from early childhood:

We come from the trenches, remember it by memory ... I don’t see my father anymore since they arrested him. I was a child, my mom used to cry ... I came in a boat, burqa Maghreb, [lyrics change from Italian to Arabic] Tunisian boy in the streets. (Seven7oo, *Running* 2020¹⁷)

This backdrop, therefore, connects the phenomenon of San Siro with other urban peripheries through the musical narratives of postmigrant youth (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008),

who share similar histories of suffering as children in some of the wealthiest cities around the world as lucidly demonstrated in Figure 2: ‘There was once a boy, who made money on the streets. With goods on his scooter, he sold stolen goods. He didn’t go to school much, and when he did, it went badly. Half saint, half criminal’ (Sacky, *Ora d’aria* 2020¹⁸).

On top of socio-economic challenges prevalent in urban peripheries, children of immigrants suffer double injustice due to additional obstacles they face compared to children of non-migrant families, with limited cultural and social capital, alongside everyday and structural forms of racism:

If you come from an economically deprived family, if you come from a family context where Italian is not spoken, so you have extra difficulties at school, you will be angry because you see your classmates enjoying certain privileges that you can’t have. Then, you live in a



Figure 2. Instagram post of Sacky showing a boy picking up clothes left on the street with the comment ‘We are not equal’ (29 September 2022).

context where you are stopped by the police everyday because you are not Italian, since you are seen as a suspect. (Interview with volunteer legal consultant in San Siro, 29 September 2022)

A major problem connected with growing up in an environment of instability undoubtedly relates to citizenship status. Due to the discriminatory character of the current Italian citizenship laws (Hawthorne 2022), a large number of postmigrant young individuals lack citizenship status until they reach the age of maturity, which is further exacerbated if the family arrives in Italy undocumented. As put by Dario, an 18 year-old from San Siro with migrant parents, regularization or the lack thereof profoundly affects housing conditions:

We came here from another country without documents. Now, I am in the process of obtaining Italian citizenship since I am 18. We [him and his mother] are finally stabilized, so we don't have to change houses every 5 months. (Interview, 28 June 2022)

Moreover, the accumulation of such social, economic, and legal problems ultimately creates the ideal basis of a 'no go out zone' (Bauman 1995):

The difficulty to access various services becomes a serious barrier and risks turning the neighborhood into a ghetto from which one cannot get out of. With women, this is even more evident. Moving out just a couple of kilometers becomes a big issue. (Interview with social worker in San Siro, 27 June 2022)

Notwithstanding the young demographic profile of the neighborhood, especially with respect to young males constituting 16% of the residents in the Quadrilatero compared to the average of 14% for the wider Milan metropolitan area (Izzo 2020), there is a visible lack of spaces and practices dedicated to these individuals:

Most of the families of the rappers, like other families in the neighborhood, have had a long migratory experience. So, if the boys were not born here, they were most certainly raised in this neighborhood where there seems to be a problem for adolescents. San Siro became a young neighborhood, the medium age decreased with respect to the rest of the city, but there is a lack of youth centers. This issue never attracted attention until these boys started to cause trouble. (Interview with social researcher in San Siro, 2 November 2022)

Dario concurs with this observation, noting his personal experience growing up: 'I have frequented the local parish oratory since I was 7. In this neighborhood, there aren't many choices. Either you are abandoned on the streets until your parents get back from work, or you go to the oratory' (28 June 2022). Likewise, Leila, a 19-year-old young woman with migrant parents living in San Siro, stated:

These adolescent boys come from very problematic families. I come from one of them and know what it's like to have an absent father. The lack of support, problems at home. You cannot create a well-functioning generation with all these problems. (Interview, 6 July 2022)

These personal testimonies provide glimpses into everyday life in an urban peripheral landscape, offering little support or life prospects for children of migration growing up with household problems on top of structural injustices. As such, the testimonies of growing up in these social settings offer invaluable insights for linking musical texts to translocal urban contexts (DeNora 2000). This collective urban experience is defined by postmigrant musical artists as *the trenches* coming to connote place-based childhood suffering shared by similar young individuals situated in European urban peripheries.

Translocational bonds against national belongings

I dreamed of America, I remained in Africa
 All they do is polemic, no one does politics
 This is Italy, welcome hermano [brother in Spanish] in Italy.
 (Babygang & Ronda, *Boy* 2021¹⁹)

'It is difficult to feel at home in Italy', adds Leila from San Siro, who had to live between Morocco and Italy throughout her childhood (Interview, 6 July 2022). Reflecting on the downside of 'multiple belongings' (Anthias 2009; Colombo and Rebughini 2012) as a prevalent feature of postmigrant experiences, she adds: 'You belong to a different world whether in Morocco or Italy, because for Moroccans you are Italian, for Italians you are Moroccan. It's frustrating'. (Ibid.) Such expressions echo Somerville's argument that multiple belongings tend to lend themselves to racialized or bicultural identities (Somerville 2008). The role played by the location and the specific context when it comes to the constructions of identity by children of immigrants is even more accentuated in a third country, where a sense of Italianness is imposed externally. Mohamed from Milan born to migrant parents and has command of the Italian, French, and Arabic languages comments: 'I lived one year in France, and there they were making fun of me. They used to call me "Italian" due to my accent, when in fact I was originally Moroccan, and laughed at me' (30 November 2022).

Besides discriminatory citizenship laws for postmigrant youth are everyday forms of racism (Frisina and Kyeremeh 2022), who are constructing a complex sense of identity through everyday negotiations (Andall 2002). As put by Miranda working in San Siro as a legal volunteer where her children go to a school with the majority of pupils from a migratory background:

The second-generation doesn't sufficiently identify with their country of origin because they are different. Maybe they don't even speak the language of their country of origin well. They can't be Italian either because the process of acquiring citizenship is too long. They also have a distinct culture, tradition, and religion that distinguishes them from the identitarian element of 'Italiannes'. I believe this is a very difficult situation, the kids experience this reality with lots of suffering. Adolescence is very hard with such additional problems. (Interview with Miranda, 29 September 2022)

At this conundrum of belonging/non-belonging for postmigrant youth, a salient theme emerging from the triangulation of different data sources is a sense of *translocational belonging* (Anthias 2009) against collective disappointment towards Italianness or Italian citizenship. It is at this juncture that the locality poses itself as a significant social space for a sense of belonging, where one can feel 'a network, a kind of family where you help one another' (Interview with Leila, 6 July 2022). Likewise, Dario claims: 'I feel a sense of belonging to this place. Good or bad, I know everyone. I don't feel like I will leave this place where I was raised and for which I feel affectionate' (28 June 2022). Hence, postmigrant youth undertake a bottom-up situated response in negotiating and constructing a sense of identity, where the immediate locality provides a social anchor, where transnational dynamics of their lives are ever more embedded in and interpreted by local dynamics (Anthias 2009).

Translocational ties are further elaborated through the musical expression of Seven7oo, providing a sense of pride in belonging to a peripheral neighborhood that

has hitherto only been recognized in relation to crime. Such pride is felt by the young inhabitants who were previously invisible subjects in a European metropolis, now coming to be represented by internationally-viewed music videos:

Certainly the young rappers and trappers have expressed a sense of belonging to this neighborhood. It was the first time that someone attributed an identity to a neighborhood. Because in the last 10–15 years, I had the impression that who inhabited the neighborhood wanted to distance themselves from it, wanted to negate any form of belonging to it. (Interview with Antonella, social researcher in San Siro, 2 November 2022)

Likewise, it was suggested that the everyday shared experiences at the face-to-face level of encounters in the neighborhood, often rich with intercultural engagements immersed in superdiversity (Harris 2009; Vertovec 2022), furnished a sense of belonging that is often negated at the national level (Barwick and Beaman 2019):

San Siro is a communitarian enclave where people greet each other on the street, more so for people that have come from other countries, especially from North Africa as they have a prevalent presence here. There's a sense of belonging to a neighborhood where you feel comfortable. (Volunteer legal consultant in San Siro, 29 September 2022)

The centrality of a bottom-up form of belonging to the locality is lucidly reflected in the ensemble's group name as well as in their posts shared in their social media accounts and music videos, always referencing San Siro, 7th municipality of Milano, and the postal code of this urban area as a form of collective identity for postmigrant youth from urban peripheries (Online ethnography, May 2022-January 2023). This observation is supported by expert interviews, attesting to the prevalence of translocational ties expressed in online spaces:

The central of Milan is exclusionary. Instead, the neighborhood is home where they go to the square to meet their friends, where they went through difficult times. Here, there is a bond. They always refer to the 7th zone, in music videos, hashtags, on Instagram, in trap music. There is a tangible sense of belonging. (Interview with Zara, member of a cultural association in San Siro, 7 November 2022)

Here, it is worth underlining that contrary to the argument of the postmigrant generation being 'natives of the city' where attachment to the wider city comes to the fore (Barwick and Beaman 2019), Seven700 testimonies demonstrate how they face segregation and stigmatization at the urban level, in response, constructing an identity at the neighborhood level instead.

Belonging to the locality by postmigrant youth is not an inward-looking primordial attachment to place, but one that is connected to places beyond, embellished with what Harris (2009:, 191) calls 'micro-publics of compulsory intercultural negotiation'. Such translocational belonging espoused by the music of Seven700 also offers a form of anti-racism (Frisina and Kyeremeh 2022), in which membership to a given ethnic or religious group has less significance than the collective experience of 'street life' in the neighborhood among individuals of various origins: 'There isn't discrimination based on where you come from, ultimately when you are on the street doesn't matter much if you are white, yellow, green, or blue' (Interview with Marco, a young musician from the trap/drill scene of Milan, 28 November 2022). Personal experiences of the Italo-Moroccan trapper Babygang expressed in his work attests to growing up in an

intercultural environment (Harris 2009), where everyday interactions among different ethnic and religious communities continued into troubled adulthood: 'I remember when we were kids, we played door to door with Sinti. Then we grew up, always with Sinti. We played poker, but behind bars' (Babygang, *Cella 1* 2019²⁰).

Hence, place-based attachment to a locality that anchors transnational ties to places beyond (Grassi and Sánchez-García 2021), juxtaposed with everyday intercultural exchanges within (Harris 2009), are two intertwined themes that unite postmigrant youth from urban peripheries through their musical production and collaborations. Online ethnography has demonstrated the rich interconnections of Seven700 artists as well as their followers with postmigrant artists from different European peripheries, exemplified by the ensemble's frequent visits to other European metropolises and, in turn, their hosting of international artists in San Siro. Another indicator of translocal tie established and sustained in digital spaces is the presence of social media accounts uniting the peripheral experiences of racialized postmigrant youth from different settings, who share similar constructions of identity and belonging, exemplified by the Instagram accounts '*quartiere b.b.*' and '*zona.banlieue*'. As illustrated by Figure 3 above with respect to the celebration of Ramadan at San Siro by Seven700, who happened to be hosting the young British trapper *Central Cea* for a collaboration, postmigrant artists from European peripheral scenes collaborate and interact frequently in intercultural settings, whose ties are expended across the online-offline continuum. The intensified use of digital platforms by young individuals renders such interlinkages even more relevant, where they manage to skillfully navigate:

Thanks to social media, there are international connections, ties among different artists, collaborations that were not possible before social media. It's the first time that there is a European scene of artists from various neighborhoods that unite to share the same experience with different notions. (Interview with Lorenzo, producer from the trap/drill scene of Milan, 19 December 2022)

Such a finding is novel in demonstrating not only translocational ties among artists as children of immigrants in European metropolises but also how the creation of a translocal collective identity in the everyday life of the neighborhood is extended onto online spaces of encounter.

Stigmatization, racialization, and the marketing of fast-track social mobility

I was a Moroccan eating cous cous, now I am a Moroccan with millions of views.
(Babygang, Treni 2020)

Prolonged and collective experiences of stigmatization and racialization for children of migration growing up in conditions of structural inequality of urban peripheries give way to a search for alternative status acquisition (Kubrin 2005), involving forms of accelerated social mobility (Cuzzocrea and Benasso 2020). In the setting of San Siro, the juxtaposition of two extremely opposing socio-economic profiles has undoubtedly exacerbated the everyday visibility of social inequalities. This reality accounts for the rage and frustration, and the call for social retribution:

The central theme that unites these artists is a sense of revenge and reparation. As children of immigrants, the second-generation, they feel this fire of retribution inside them.

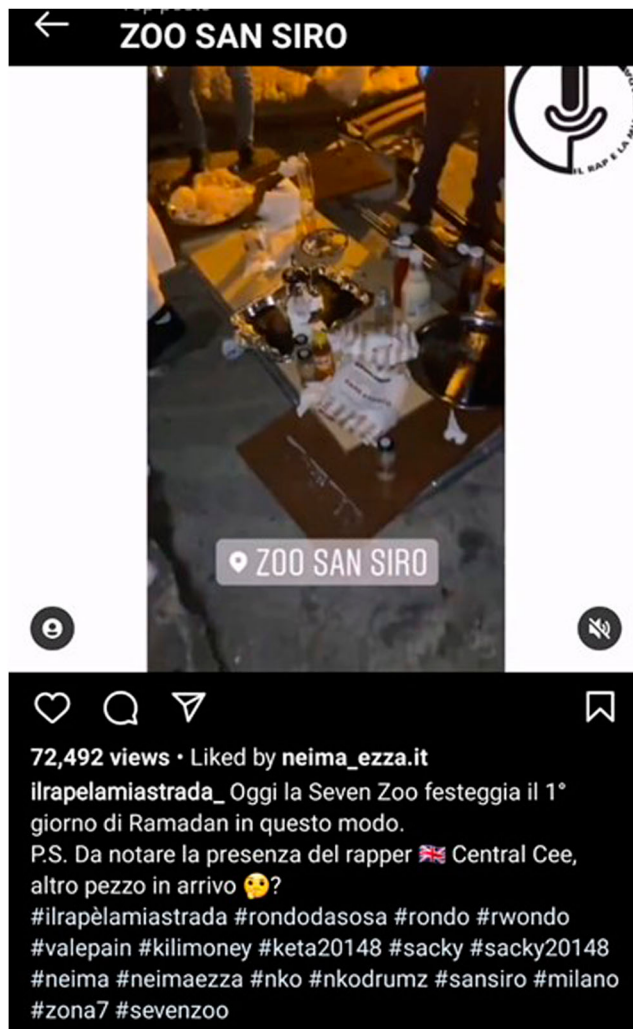


Figure 3. Seven7oo crew celebrating the first day of Ramadan together in the neighborhood, with the participation of the British trapper Central Cee with whom they have recently collaborated (13 June 2022, Instagram).

Often, economically, they cannot pursue a normal life since they do not have the possibilities and opportunities that a person born in Italy has. If we are to talk about urban areas, San Siro is definitely abandoned by the municipality of Milan. If you consider the dilapidated public housing around Piazza Selinunte, in less than a kilometer you will find the beautiful new area of *Tre Torri* [City Life]. Maybe they leave their houses to take a walk and see all these people richer than they are and that creates questions. (Interview with Lorenzo, producer from the trap/drill scene of Milan, 19 December 2022)

These observations on feelings of injustice and relative deprivation are also reflected in the lyrics of Seven7oo, who underline cognitive borders between peripheral neighborhoods and the well-off city center where they become racialized protagonists of city life, bringing undesired differences to white middle-class spaces:

When guys of the periphery go to the center ... we are intruders because we do not dress like them, we do not talk like them, we do not move like them. And they know it very well, just as we do. (Neima Ezza, *Perif Documentario*, 2020²¹)

According to a young postmigrant inhabitant of San Siro:

These adolescent males that form a type of gang, not like the American ones but ones that cause damage such as smashing windows ... In my opinion, these groups of young guys need a lot of help from educators. But all we hear on the news is a group of 'North Africans' causing trouble, which incites more hatred. (Interview with Leila, 6 July 2022)

The experience of 21-year-old Mohamed from the same musical scene as Seven700 with close ties to the trapper crew substantiates his peer's observations:

My parents got divorced when I was little, so I went back to Morocco and then after a year turned to Italy again. After I failed my first year of high school, I found myself in a bad place. I committed a crime, I took substances, and I was arrested. Until a year ago, I was going in and out of jail. (Mohamed, 30 November 2022)

The everyday visibility of the relative deprivation these individuals undergo, often culminating in exclusionary encounters as racialized and stigmatized figures in cityspace, form the basis of their engagement with micro-criminality in the absence of any reliable life prospects: 'These guys usually go on to break the law, committing crime mostly because no public or private institution provides them any other possibility to create a real future' (Interview with Lorenzo, 19 December 2022).

Mistrust towards law enforcement is the last in the line of a long history of generalized mistrust towards public and private institutions by individuals growing up with problems due to lack of necessary documents, deprived of primary services such as health and education, and not receiving the adequate pedagogical support or social inclusion as migrant children from fragile backgrounds: 'Milano knows I'm a bandit, I don't care about the cops, middle finger. Legend in San Siro, no one touches us. Fuck the police, fuck Beccaria [youth detention center]' (Sacky, *Bandito* 2019²²). Growing up with multiple forms of marginalization, illegal means of upward mobility are naturalized (Cuzzocrea and Benasso 2020; Kubrin 2005), inevitably leading to accumulated rage towards institutions being canalized against police forces. Such frustration and disappointment with institutional actors were also expressed by thousands of Seven700 followers when the Milano Municipality decided to cancel the group's album launch in Piazza Duomo due to security concerns. This decision provoked an outpouring of anger and feelings of injustice on the part of the postmigrant Milanese youth prevented from having a presence of their own in the city center. The following comment was made by Keta from Seven700 in a live broadcast on Instagram following the event: 'Allah is big, inshallah. Like a little child being robbed of candy by an adult. Since our childhood, who knows us also knows what the real street is. It's not the time to silence what we are singing' (27 May 2022, Instagram Live). During the broadcast, Keta's followers wrote comments in support of his frustration, expressing feelings of mistrust and rage towards Italian institutions through comments such as 'The Italian state is shit' and 'Fuck the Italian industry' (27 May 2022, Online fieldnotes). Eventually, followers and fans of the trap ensemble, most of them from peripheral neighborhoods, filled up the main square of Milan as shown in [Figure 4](#) in a deeply symbolic act of claiming their right to the city as racialized subjects, disobeying the ban imposed by the municipality.

Given the socio-economic context of European urban peripheries where relative deprivation is so stark and unbearable for a group of individuals, coming mostly from migrant communities living under conditions of extreme poverty in some of the richest metropolises on earth, accelerated upward mobility is sought either through illegal means or fame. With a childhood immersed in systemic racism and urban segregation, one (legal) means that the peripheral life offers as a fast-track escape from deprivation is music: ‘My future? With lots of money! [Laughter]. Being in a good state with my family, having a car, being free ... Having lots of money and being famous because I like to make music’ (Interview with Mohamed, 30 November 2022). Mohamed’s aspirations are voiced in the lyrics of Seven7oo: ‘I will be so rich, I will buy myself this whole block’ (Seven7oo, *RAP* 2022²³). This observation confirms Andall’s argument (2002) that children of immigrants tend to reject the low-paying jobs their parents had to take, instead cultivating an oppositional stance towards conventional social mobility.



Figure 4. Banned album launch in Piazza Duomo (27 May 2022, Seven7oo Instagram account).



Figure 5. 'Feel the flow of public housing' (26 May 2022, Instagram post of Seven7oo account).

Hence, micro-criminality or music are understood as the only two alternatives to achieve a middle-class lifestyle, whereby the gang culture as part of the genre trap/drill is rebranded and marketed in the music of SevenZoo as the urban rage of the postmigrant generation left with no other resources for status acquisition (Andall 2002; Kubrin 2005). The labeling of children of migration from urban peripheries as potential criminals feeds into this narrative which the artists reappropriate and reinterpret as a form of defensive identity that is marketed alongside their music: 'Bro if I'm not a rapper, I'll be a criminal. I already said so to the social worker. She answered saying I'll go to the court' (Babygang, *Cella I*, 2019). Figure 5 below shows the crew members posing inside a prison cell as part of their new album campaign, exemplifying the digital marketing of 'gang culture' associated with their music and concomitantly with their neighborhood. This type of digital self-branding is a means to appeal to youth with similar backgrounds, whilst turning postmigrant frustration into profit.

Conclusion

The article has explored the translocational constructions of identity by marginalized postmigrant youth through an investigation of a musical subculture associated with peripheral landscapes, thereby furnishing significant insights into the question of social inclusion, urban segregation, and complex identities of youth growing up in translocational circuits. Given the existing rich body of scholarship on urban peripheries and experiences of children of immigrants delineated at the onset, this research has sought to contribute to this nexus with its focus on the musical subculture of postmigrant youth that concomitantly cultivates a feeling of attachment to the immediate neighborhood and connects them with postmigrant youth elsewhere sharing similar experiences in other peripheral settings. The novel intertextual reading of different data sources that have been triangulated for the analysis has captured the online-offline continuum between urban spaces and digital practices that undergird the formation of translocal belongings. Thus, the phenomenon of Seven700 embedded in the social space of San Siro offers a stimulating case for understanding self-representations of racialized and stigmatized postmigrant youths, ever more under the spotlight in Italian society. On the one hand, they voice the failures of national institutions and other figures of authority when it comes to integration projects, equal opportunities, and a sense of national belonging, despite being either born and/or raised in Italy. On the other hand, their rhymes speak about the economic hardship these young individuals endure while growing up, feelings of insecurity and eventual numbness that they have collectively undergone, solidifying the bonds of their situated 'brotherhood' tied to the neighborhood, which unites them with transnational counterparts in other European peripheries.

As children of immigrants, these artists express the struggles of seeking to construct bottom-up identities through translocal belongings, whilst undergoing structural as well as everyday forms of discrimination in the host country. Such struggles are voiced through the music of a new generation of trap/drill artists in Europe, who not only practice translocational ties actively in their music business, but also re-brand and market the rage of racialized youth, reaching millions of followers through social media. As such, the study also demonstrates how different means of fast-track mobility are proposed as an escape from 'no go out zones' through digital platforms. Hence, the article sheds light not only on the city of Milan, but also on other European cities hosting a growing number of youths with migratory backgrounds from urban peripheries by an intertextual and interspatial analysis that triangulates visual, musical, and narrative forms of data that mimics the everyday reality of the postmigrant generation.

Notes

1. Translation into English: Seven Zoo is family, Seven Zoo is cult, Seven Zoo is Everything. Authorities are against us, neighborhoods are against us, the neighborhood without rules. You can watch the Selinunte Tower from balconies, we saw hunger, we had to grit our teeth to get to the end of the month. This is why we will never be equal. Do you feel the flow of public housing?
2. The music video of this song can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBxDZmUfe3I>.

3. Hassan (pseudonym) cited in Karima Moual, 'Ragazze molestate, la rabbia dei figli degli immigrati: "Noi più africani che italiani, ma siete voi a farci sentire così"', in *La Repubblica*, 6 June 2022 (translation by the author).
4. Fatima (pseudonym), age 18, cited in Karima Moual, 'Ragazze molestate, la rabbia dei figli degli immigrati: "Noi più africani che italiani, ma siete voi a farci sentire così"', in *La Repubblica*, 6 June 2022 (translation by the author).
5. For more information on trap culture, see: <https://online.berklee.edu/takenote/trap-music-where-it-came-from-and-where-its-going/>.
6. For more information, see: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20210607-the-controversial-music-that-is-the-sound-of-global-youth>.
7. For more information, see: <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/2-chainz-explains-why-pretty-girls-like-trap-music-talks-his-bucket-list-and-benihana-193850/>.
8. This method has culminated in a total of 191 pages of fieldnotes together with 186 images produced during the fieldwork by the researcher.
9. In total, 15 interviews have been conducted, 8 with experts working with young groups in San Siro, and 7 with young individuals either from the urban area or in contact with Seven700 members from the same musical circle. The interviewees have been duly informed about the scope and objectives of the study and have provided either written or verbal informal consent. The latter was mostly due to the reluctance on part of the interviewee to sign a bureaucratic document. All interviewees are anonymized. Such alterations have not distorted the scholarly meaning.
10. In total, 48 song lyrics from the ensemble have been analyzed.
11. Online ethnography has been undertaken for a period of 9 months (from May 2022 until January 2023), producing a total of 351 Instagram stories and posts involving a multidimensional corpus blending visual and textual data, which have been analyzed with the help of MAXQDA.
12. *Azienda Lombarda per l'Edilizia Residenziale*, regional agency that manages public housing assignments.
13. Translated from Italian by the author. For the full lyrics, see: <https://genius.com/Neimaezza-essere-ricchi-pt-3-lyrics>. For the music video, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roz3rB1FWYk>.
14. For more information, see *Comune di Verona Stranieri Residenti 2021: genere, nazionalità, municipi*, available at: https://www.comune.milano.it/documents/20126/2313917/stranieri_naz_sex_municipi_2021_e_tot.pdf/16380c96-4556-96c7-56cb-284b64f0f393?t=1644565137477.
15. For more information, see Rete Sociale Sansheroes (2019), *Istantanee di San Siro: presente e futuro del quartiere*, available at: https://issuu.com/52340/docs/istantanee_2019.
16. The music video of this song can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KC0a56LIGM>.
17. The music video of the song can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7aJpCyv2jo>.
18. The music video of the song can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWgpJJn9cd4>.
19. The music video of the song can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vD3H95eGzGY>.
20. The music video of the song can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEWSusrNi_g.
21. The music video can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ci2vYQieK9c>.
22. The music video of the song can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aoltW7-x8o>.
23. The music video of this song can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLio4hKXcfM>.

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