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Urban atmospheres of terror

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ABSTRACT

This essay advances an affective agenda in urban geopolitics that studies the everyday felt experience of urban terrorism. It takes as examples the relations between the spatial politics and affective atmospheres of Place de la République (Paris) and Place de la Bourse/Beursplein (Brussels) in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 2015 and 2016. Intersecting feminist geopolitics and non-representational geographies, the essay bridges geographical studies of experience and affective atmospheres with experiential accounts in urban geopolitics. It argues for a renewed conceptual engagement and scholarly focus on the affective dimensions of urban geopolitics and security, that highlights the contested and unequal topographies of everyday experience in the aftermath of terrorism in urban Europe.

1. Introduction

Between 21:20 and 21:40 on November 13, 2015, Paris was hit by coordinated shootings and suicide attacks. The attackers first targeted the Stade De France, then proceeded south through the 10th and 11th arrondissements firing on the customers and staff of six restaurants. At 21:40, three gunmen stormed the nearby Bataclan Theatre and took the audience hostage. By the time the police stormed the building and the hostage situation was over at 00:18, the attacks killed 130 people. During the shootings, the *terrasses*, the outdoor sitting areas outside Paris' cafés and restaurants, became empty. For many, the attacks targeted the core of Paris' public life: sitting *en terrasse*, eating, drinking and socializing.¹

That same night, then French President Francois Hollande declared the state of emergency (*état d'urgence*) across Metropolitan France and Corsica, ordering the closure of national borders. Across the Paris region, he declared, "some places will be closed, circulation may be banned, and there will also be searches that could be decided throughout the Ile de France" (Le Cain, 2015). This translated into a reinforced presence of police and army on the streets; home arrest for individuals deemed public danger; police searches of premises believed to threaten public

security; and the dissolution of gatherings in public space.

The next day, several house raids took place 300 km away, in the Brussel municipality of Molenbeek. Here, police apprehended five suspects of the Paris shootings. A week after the Paris attacks, the security alert across the Brussels Capital Region rose to maximum level. Koen Geens, the Belgian minister of justice, advised the population to stay vigilant amongst "a serious and imminent threat" (Ponsaers and Devroe, 2017) against the city. Consequently, Brussels was placed in lockdown for five days. Before the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, a lockdown was an unprecedented spatial intervention² in a post-1945 European city. Public transport, cultural venues, schools and universities, shops and restaurants were closed and some 500 soldiers were deployed across Brussels (Ponsaers and Devroe, 2017). Four months later, on March 22, 2016, three suicide bombers, all residents of Brussels, detonated two nail bombs in the departure hall at Brussels' Zaventem airport. Shortly after, an attack at Maalbeek metro station in the city centre killed 35 people. This was the deadliest attack in Belgian modern history,³ and Brussels was again placed in lockdown.

The attacks and the resulting state of emergency and lockdown were wide-reaching physical projections of state security on the urban space by way of its reorganization and militarization. These measures rely

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¹ #jesuienterrasse quickly spread on social media as a sign of defiance to terror and reclaiming convivial spaces after the attacks.

² The first lockdown of an entire city took place after the Boston bombings of 19 April 2013. Previously, partial lockdown of neighbourhoods took place in the aftermath of the Cronulla Riots in Sydney in 2005.

³ Previous events of terrorism in Brussels included the attack on the Jewish Museum of Belgium on 24 May 2014 when four people were killed, and a raid on a terrorist cell in Verviers on 15 January 2015, when two suspects died.

both on infrastructural hardening and on attempts to stop movement in dense and highly networked cities. For a Brussels police officer,⁴ for example, lockdown was “a way of clearing space” to ‘freeze’ space and thus ensure police control. While Brussels’ lockdown was a temporary but total measure of mobility curtailment, Paris’ state of emergency was less pervasive, but more prolonged, and lasted until late 2017.

This, however, is only part of how counterterrorism works in contemporary urban Europe. Lockdown and state of emergency are more than physical interventions altering the mobility, continuity and openness of urban space in an attempt to curb security threats. They are also interventions that alter the felt experience of a city. In this essay, we move beyond the territorial, infrastructural and technological considerations that shape much of the geography debate on (counter-)terrorism and cities (Coaffee, 2003, 2004, 2019; Graham and Wood, 2003; Ljungkvist, 2020) and start to highlight instead its experiential implications. Based mainly on two weeks of exploratory observation in Paris and Brussels in 2016, and on subsequent further research in both cities by one of the authors, with this essay we attempt a conceptual agenda for an atmospheric urban geopolitics of terrorism and its aftermath in European cities. The events in Paris and Brussels sparked an emerging literature addressing victims’ mental health (Bartholomew, 2016), memorialization (Milošević, 2017), and changes to affected communities’ daily lives (Gensburger, 2017). This literature primarily relies on both discursive as well as more sensory (Pufleau, 2019) approaches. Via an engagement with feminist geopolitics literature, this essay further develops this literature on the everyday strategies of living after terror and brings it into a more structured conversation with established literature in urban geopolitics and experiential geographies.

It is important to define terrorism and counterterrorism as key terms, but also be critical of the differentials that these terms create especially when considering (counter)terrorism acts and measures within urban spaces. A number of European countries and the UN high Commissioner for Human Rights (2008) define it as the use of violence to intimidate and provoke fear in the wider public for the purpose of influencing or disrupting a government in the pursuit of a political or ideological aim. We cannot however ignore the unequal declensions of this definition within racialized politics of threat, especially in light of how terrorists’ modus operandi has changed in the past decade towards ‘soft’ crowded everyday targets that are physically and socially embedded and normalised in the wider urban fabric and therefore difficult to defend with traditional measures like ‘rings of steel’ or structural reinforcement (Coaffee, 2017, 2022). As they are part of specific geopolitical strategies and agendas, terrorism and counterterrorism are charged terms. While the spatialities and relevant actors of these agendas shift over time and locales, the threats that they address are continually racialized and gendered. These include the framing of individuals or groups as suspicious of/susceptible to violent extremism (Fadil, Ragazzi and de Koning, 2019; Nguyen, 2019); the racialized and gendered representations and rhetoric around terror threats (Bhattacharyya, 2008) and the neoliberal politics of alignment of queerness with agendas of normative nationalism during the War on Terror (Puar, 2007); and the unequal impact of counterterrorism policing and raiding in terms of degrees of intimidation, fear, and even physical damage and harm to specific spaces, communities and bodies – notably in the case of surveillance, counter-terror raids and house searches (Hergon, 2021; Fregonese, 2021).

Using as examples the dynamics in and around Place de la République in Paris and Place de la Bourse/Beursplein in Brussels, we advance the conceptual and analytical significance of studying the collective experience of urban space in the aftermath of terror. Adopting what Anderson defines “a politics attentive to the affectivities of war and security” (2010: 231), we employ the concept of *affective atmosphere* to explore how (counter)terrorism feels, in the spatial context of the two chosen sites. We appreciate the difficulty of defining atmosphere, and

refrain from naming - hence bounding representationally - something that is evanescent by nature. Atmosphere is elusive to define. It is often referred to in everyday speech as a mood, aura, ambiance, or sense of place, but has gained more elaborate conceptual connotations as something more ambiguous, that exceeds a quantifiable presence contained in and/or occupying a bounded place. It is beyond the scope of the essay to review its etymology (Gandy, 2017) and disciplinary use (Wigley, 1998; McCormack, 2008; Anderson, 2009; Griffero, 2014; Thibaud, 2015; Bille and Simonsen, 2019). Rather than as a uniform entity that can be given an overarching name (Anderson and Ash, 2015), we take affective atmosphere as a *relation*, created and recreated across different spaces, politics and materialities and always “ongoingly and in emergence” (Sumartojo and Pink, 2018, p. 17). Recognising that “most existing accounts of atmosphere have not sufficiently accounted for its emergence in actual configurations of people’s ongoing worlds, and that atmospheres cannot be divorced from the specific feelings that are part of them” (Sumartojo and Pink, 2018, p. 22), our analysis departs from notions of affective atmospheres as emotive charges ‘hovering over’ their environment as “spatially poured out” excesses (Griffero, 2014, p. 16). Instead, we focus on the situated (and politically charged) nature of atmospheric attuning and transitions. Seen spatially as “a form of ‘envelopment’” (Anderson, 2009, p. 80), atmospheres emerge in the relations between human and non-human materialities in ways that enable or hinder certain outcomes (Ahmed, 2014; Leff, 2021). This approach allows us to trace connections between the geopolitical and the phenomenological, by accounting for the non-discursive elements, human and non-human affordances, materials and technologies that compose the everyday experience of the city in times of terror.

The first part of the essay reviews and develops the growing but still understudied connections in the academic debates around urban space, affect and geopolitics/security. Here, we tease out and connect experiential accounts within urban geopolitics, and empirical engagements with geopolitics within geographies of experience. We particularly draw on feminist geopolitics’ earlier denunciation of the “relatively little empirical attention to the experiential, emotional and everyday dimensions of global terrorism” (Pain, 2014, p. 532). We also use our previous research on (post)conflict cities (Laketa, 2016, 2018) to link feminist approaches, geographies of affect and urban geopolitics in studying what are certainly not open urban conflicts, but are nonetheless highly violent events leading to a militarization of urban space and changing the urban experience for residents.

We then move on to consider some of the methodological challenges of using atmosphere as a medium into the felt experience of terrorism and security responses. We argue that an atmospheric approach allows us to better account for the changing modus operandi in current terrorism against everyday urban soft targets and the consequent alteration of the ordinary urban experiences for lay residents (Coaffee, 2017). Therefore, we propose to engage with atmosphere not exclusively as a top-down governing of collective moods by the state (Adey et al., 2013; Anderson, 2010), but as a set of attunings at multiple scales and involving multiple actors (Sumartojo and Pink, 2018), and politics.

Subsequently, we zoom into Paris’ Place de la République and Brussel’s Place de la Bourse/Beursplein in order to ground our theoretical and methodological position. Here, we consider a combination of atmospheric modalities in the aftermath of the attacks, within the extant spatial politics and histories of the squares, and in light of everyday acts of response to and/or resistance against state security measures. We then consider the longer-term impact of the attacks on wider urban atmospheric geopolitics, and their incorporation and suture into a different embodied urban experience. We end this section by discussing the employment of situational awareness and sensorial reflexes in wider strategies of vigilance and resilience as part of urban security agendas. These examples illustrate the mutual analytical purchase of atmospheric approaches and urban geopolitics in setting a conceptual agenda for more comprehensive studies of (counter)terrorism and its aftermaths in cities in Europe.

⁴ Conversation with Police Fédérale officer, Brussels, 22 June 2016.

2. Cities, Geopolitics, and atmospheres

Cities in Europe constitute ‘soft targets’ of terrorism, and their built and social fabric are deeply reshaped by counter-terror security responses to threats.⁵ Critical urban analyses of counterterrorism and resilience (Coaffee, 2003) write vastly on these urban spaces of security, focusing on their physical, infrastructural and planning aspects (Coaffee, 2003, 2004; Coaffee and Wood, 2008; Graham, 2010a, 2010b; Luke, 2004). This literature has often connected with that of urban geopolitics: an interdisciplinary field that for the past two decades has focused on the trans-scalar “intersections of urbanism, terrorism, and warfare” (Graham, 2004, p. 191) and on understanding the links between global politics and localized urban violence. However, much urban geopolitics work has remained, until recently, mostly focused to militarised contexts, as well as techno-centric and pauper of ordinary and sentient agencies (Fregonese, 2017). While urban geopolitics is central in expanding critical understanding of military technologies (Graham, 2008; Slesinger, 2018), infrastructures (Bishop, Clancey, and Phillips, 2012), surveillance (Graham and Wood, 2003), politicised planning (Weizman, 2012; Yefachel, 2006) and border/mobility control (Graham, 2010a, 2010b), it has also been criticised for missing out on everyday and ordinary topologies (Harris, 2015). This paper draws on a more diverse and interdisciplinary scholarship that addresses everyday life in cities at war (Macek, 2009), in cities experiencing post-conflict polarization and politicised planning (Lysaght and Basten, 2002; Bou Akar, 2018) and on the increasing dynamics of securitization (Ochs, 2011), providing a way of understanding how the militarised city is *actually experienced* by its residents.

Here, we particularly focus on literature using notions of affect to account for the ordinary and intimate geographies of (in)security. The affectivities of urban built environment draw attention to the level of the body (Griffiths and Repo, 2018), the experiential (Pasquetti, 2019) and the sensorial (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2016) as crucial for enacting and contesting political violence.

International Relations and security studies have acknowledged and theorized a research gap with regards to emotions for at least twenty years (Crawford, 2013), but this has remained widely conceptual and limited to elite-level accounts rather than ordinary publics (Hall and Ross, 2015). More recently, disciplinary debate has become critical of those approaches and has called for a rethink of how security and global politics pose research questions and design their methodologies around emotional dispositions and affect (Åhäll & Gregory, 2015; Hutchinson, 2013) beyond the individual and towards collective and shared dynamics.

Meanwhile, in political geography, feminist scholars have been central for understanding the affective, everyday (Pain, 2009), and corporeal (Fluri, 2014) dimensions of geopolitics and security. In 2009, Pain denounced how “The burgeoning area of emotional geographies has remained curiously separate from discussions in political

⁵ Terrorist attacks have decreased globally from 2017, due to the defeat of ISIL on the battlefields and its financial and recruitment losses. However, terrorism trends are uneven worldwide, regional variation must be appreciated, and while global trends are improving, the highest numbers of terrorism-related deaths still occur in conflict-ridden regions of the world and especially in Iraq. With this regional context in mind, we must recognize nonetheless that the attacks in France and Belgium came at a peak of deadly terrorist activity against civilians in Europe, as 2016 was the deadliest year since 2002. The number of deaths by terrorism in Europe went from “14 deaths from 129 attacks in 2002, to 826 deaths from 630 attacks by 2016” (The Institute for Economics & Peace, 2017: 49). More widely, 2016 was also “the most deadly for terrorism for OECD member countries since 1988” excluding the 9–11 attacks (The Institute for Economics & Peace, 2017: 3). While the Covid-19 pandemic reduced the amount of crowded spaces in cities and thus the opportunity for terrorist attacks, it remains to be seen how the threat will evolve in the aftermath of the pandemic (European Union Agency for Law Enforcement, 2021).

geography” (2009: 477). The growing field of feminist affective geopolitics (Laketa, 2016; Gökarişel & Secor, 2018) and anthropology (Luna, 2018; Navaro-Yashin, 2012) is also key to our reflections as it brings attention to the affective materialities of violence and (post) conflict (Dixon and Marston, 2011, p. 446).

Feminist writing on the city that has laid groundwork for uncovering how the private and the public spheres intersect in urban space, and feelings of fear and insecurity in the city have long been a subject of feminist and queer debates in urban geography (Alexander & Pain, 2011; England & Simon, 2010). We find these debates relevant in addressing how the prevailing forms of gender, racial and class inequalities in European cities are crucial to understand the felt experience of the aftermath of terrorism across diverse urban communities. However, while dissecting how processes of securitization “shape and are shaped by banal, everyday practices and are experienced in uneven ways depending on one’s social positioning” (Massaro and Williams, 2013: 751), feminist geopolitics have less frequently or less explicitly engaged with the literature in urban geopolitics (for notable exceptions see Katz, 2007; Massaro, 2015; Griffiths and Repo, 2020). Here we seek to advance feminist engagements with urban geopolitics, particularly when considering the latter’s lack of attention to the embodied and experiential.

In the wake of the War on Terror, Pain (2009) argued that emotions such as fear have been represented - including by work in critical geopolitics - as universal and homogeneously interpreted. This view, Pain continues, overlooks how emotions are *actually* experienced in “the everyday sites where emotions and geopolitics meet” (Pain, 2010, p. 226).

Despite terrorism in Europe increasingly targeting everyday urban spaces, its impact on the city’s everyday experience is still little explored (Laketa, 2021). We therefore update and develop Pain’s approach to the grounded geopolitics of emotions, beyond the confines of fear and into the more diffuse and multifaceted constellation of affective atmospheres that the aftermath of terror conjures up in the everyday experiences of the city.

The development of non-representational theory (NRT) in human geography (Thrift, 2008) and the proliferation of cultural geographies of affect, atmosphere and experience, brought what is perhaps an opposite lacuna to the un-experiential accounts of urban geopolitics: a paucity of empirically grounded research into (geo)political issues. Early NRT agendas aimed to expand the operational field of affective technologies from the corporate to the political (Thrift, 2008, p. 26), including “the political use of rhetoric [and] the geopolitics of fear” (Pile, 2010, p. 12). Still, the engagements of NRT with geopolitics have been sporadic, with a focus on media representations as vehicles of understanding connections between politics and emotions and, consequently, we know little of how mediatic amplifications are actually experienced by target publics and how these experiences vary across different contexts and groups (Laketa, 2016).

The concept of affective atmospheres, understood as “a class of experience that occurs *before* and *alongside* the formation of subjectivity, *across* human and non-human materialities, and *in-between* subject/object distinctions” (Anderson, 2009, p. 79), has brought attention to the phenomenological body and the level of experience. However, it has done so in a way that often produces a depersonalized politics. Growing geographic literature accounts vastly for the atmospheric in leisure and consumption (Edensor, 2012; Shaw, 2014), urban stress (Winz, 2018), travel and mobility (Bissell, 2010; Lin, 2015), and art (Engelmann, 2021) but here we agree with Griffero (2019) that it has been so far “difficult to talk about atmospheres and politics – especially democracy [and] the lack of in-depth studies on political atmospheres” (Griffero, 2019, p. 157).

Atmosphere is a significant component of governance of emergencies and contingencies (Anderson & Adey, 2011), but despite crucial work on surveillance (Adey et al., 2013; Klausner, 2010) and anticipation of emergency (Anderson & Adey, 2011), anglophone geography on

atmospheres remains predominantly in the realm of cultural geography. Other studies of political atmospheres use the concept to address practices of policing of air space (Feigenbaum and Kanngieser, 2015), as well as protest crowds (Wall and Weizman, 2019).

More widely, studies of war have attended to *atmospherics* as part of a wider sensorium of war and conflict (see also Gordillo, 2018) that includes training olfaction to augment the sensing capabilities of soldiers (MCSorley, 2020) and counterinsurgency practices of ‘winning the sentiments’ of the mainstream population in a warzone (Belcher, 2011; see also Adey, 2014). Atmospherics as a concept has also been employed to analyze the mechanics of air power and ecological violence in war (Gregory, 2011) and, historically, meteorological and affective considerations around the use of propaganda balloons during the cold war (McCormack, 2018). While these atmospheric studies predominantly engage with the operationalization of physical atmospheres at the scale of the state, we consider it a useful corpus of literature that can act as a connector to imbue more geopolitics into cultural geographies of experience, and bring less mechanistic and more embodied notions of atmosphere into critical geopolitics.

With this paper we wish to problematise further the affective dimensions of the aftermath of terrorism in two ways. First, by conceptually expanding the phenomenological perspective “from the bounded human subject towards more porous forms of urban sentence” (Gandy, 2017, p. 369) that include banal actors other than official state responses. Second, by inquiring about the wider space/time of atmosphere, and about the differential in experience of terrorism and its aftermath among urban communities, in a way that re-calibrates the experiential landscape of the city in the long-term aftermath of terror. Affective responses to terror have been recently explored around the atmospherics of remembrance and collective commemoration of the victims of attacks (Closs Stephens et al., 2017; Closs Stephens et al., 2017). These studies highlight the emotions of shared grief and solidarity that emerged in the aftermath of terrorist attacks in European cities, and explore the forming of, what Closs Stephens et al. (2021) call the “communities of senses” around the event of the commemoration. While recognising the knowledges and techniques (Anderson, 2010) at work to anticipate/calibrate collective anxieties, we widen the focus beyond the affective event of the attacks and their commemorations and onto more mundane atmospheric attunements in the terrorised city. Researching urban geopolitics atmospherically reconnects with previous invitations (Rokem and Boano, 2017; Rokem et al., 2017) to look beyond geopolitics as the equivalent of armed conflict (Antonsich and Hoyler, 2019) and engage instead with wider scholarly theories and historiographies of “the entanglements of affect with modernity and the production of urban space” (Gandy, 2017, p. 369).

Finally, we share Yael Navaro’s critique, developed during her fieldwork in Turkish border towns in physical proximity and within the affective scope of the Syrian conflict, of how affect literature is also embodied in specific ways in anglophone academia and need to be diversified by “more actively embrac[ing] the fieldwork dimension of our work in further crafting affect studies” (Navaro, 2017, p. 213) beyond “well-established theoretical patrilinealities” (Navaro, 2017, p. 213). While remaining aware of what might escape us in the field, nurturing the grounded aspects of our research allow us to both tap into the affective dimensions of the geopolitical and contribute to diversify and ground affect theory with real-world cases.

2.1. Researching atmospheres of terror beyond state security and fear

“Psychologically, for the city there’s a before the attacks, and an after the attacks.”

Psychologist, Nuit Debout protest camp, Paris, May 2016

This comment was shared with us by a psychologist offering free mental health advice to her fellow citizens at the Place de la République

in Paris. While we do not seek to exceptionalize terrorist violence and prioritize it in relation to other violences and conflicts in cities (Pain, 2014), we take this comment as a starting point for our initial exploration of how the everyday felt experience of cities is widely reshaped by terrorism. Our reflections stem from two exploratory visits conducted over the course of two weeks, in May and June 2016 - in Paris and Brussels, respectively. This exploration was allowed by an institutional seed fund for site visits, and pilot research, in view of more substantial future projects.⁶

Neither of us had previously researched in either of these two cities and, therefore, we were admittedly limited in our direct contextual knowledge. However, as two white female scholars working across the anglo/non-anglo academic environments, and one of us with direct experience of war and protracted conflict, our previous respective research on the affective geographies of (post)conflict cities has undoubtedly shaped and to some extent enabled our critical observation across the accepted divides between what are generally considered as ‘ordinary’ or ‘peaceful’ cities outside conflict zones (Rokem, 2016; Fregonese, 2021). Our existing work highlights how intensities of feelings are shaped by and in turn shape dynamics of conflict escalation and delicate post-conflict situations. This allowed an empirically rich understanding of the more-than-representational – often less blatant but not less crucial – spatialities of everyday life in the (post)conflict city, when until recently the literature has been often dominated by discursive and representational approaches, or by a focus on militarism and extreme violence. We thus approached the two sites of Place de la République and Place de la Bourse bearing a particular sensitivity towards everyday life in urban conflict zones and the increased securitization and militarization of urban Europe amidst terror threats.

Over the course of these exploratory weeks, we held scoping conversations with 13 individuals including police officers, victim liaison officers, psychiatrists, protesters, and with a number of scholars who are also residents and often witnesses of the violence and its aftermath in Paris and Brussels. While informed conversations with scholars and officials – the majority of which were arranged through a snowballing from initial scholarly contacts initiated by the researchers – were held in offices or cafes and would last about an hour, other, more fleeting conversations were deliberately in situ: in or around the squares, at protest encampments, at citizen help stands, and in neighborhoods more or less directly affected by the lockdown or state of emergency. The participant sample was left deliberately broad to encompass a variety of inhabitants, experiences and perspectives on the attacks, in line with the exploratory nature of the two visits, and as our scope was bringing the variety of the sample around a working notion of *atmosphere* and see what perspectives came into view. More generally, the two weeks spent in Paris and Brussels saw daily anti-government marches (Paris), a terror alert with temporary lockdown (Brussels) which turned out to be crumbled biscuits in a fake suicide belt, the festival-like activities of *Nuit Debout* in Paris, a wider operation of urban regeneration in Brussels, and the commemorative reminders of the attacks. Due to the nature of our daily walking trajectories in the two cities, to the spatial context of the attacks, and to their wider urban histories which we discuss later, Place de la République and Place de La Bourse/Beursplein emerged as apt empirical foci.

We both walked together and sometimes separately to and from the squares, noting our experiences of the ongoing events. We would then reconvene to share our thoughts, photographs and notes during fieldwork and afterwards, when preparing presentations and beginning the writing process. This way, similarly to the work by Closs Stephens et al. (2017), we worked through our respective “space-times of atmospheres”

⁶ While this publication was under review, Fregonese became PI on the ESRC/ORF project *Atmospheres of (counter)terrorism in European Cities (ES/V01353X/1)*. Laketa is PI on the SNSF Ambizione project *Terrorism and the city: affect, space and violence in urban Europe*.

and reconcile our “knowing in” through our field walks and visits, and “knowing about” as our notes and thoughts took shape successively (Sumartojo and Pink, 2018, pp. 45–46). In order to grasp the affective atmospheres, as other than bounded entities, we approached atmosphere as a *relation of attunement*: “a spatial experience of being attuned in and by a material world” (Bille et al., 2015, p. 35).

The methodological and positional challenges around researching atmospheres have been widely documented (Vannini, 2015). Affective atmospheres are collective phenomena that are diffuse and often unnamed but are, nevertheless, registered through the sensing body. Different atmospheres can coexist, propagating in parallel or ‘rubbing along’ by different combinations of bodies or objects (Anderson and Ash, 2015). Naming atmospheres as bounded entities - although heuristically necessary in order to answer research questions (Anderson and Ash, 2015) - risks at once reducing them to systems of representation and losing sight of atmosphere’s very own capability to coexist and shift. Approaching affective atmospheres as sets of relations, rather than fixed entities, allows us to focus on what atmospheres do, rather than what they are or mean. Doing so allows us to offer reflections on their social and political ramifications in the city. This also means recognising their elusiveness, their potential to shift and to coexist, as well as what might escape us in the field.

To address this elusiveness methodologically we rely on the analysis of the relation of different elements, human and non-human materialities, on the two sites analysed below. In particular we analyze the built environment and organisation of physical space at the two sites, the presence and organization of security technologies and practices, the contextual activities, socio-spatial practices and feelings expressed by urban publics, as well as our own sense perception. Here, therefore, we adopt atmosphere as an apt epistemological medium to tap into the particular current operational context of urban terrorism, whereby attacks against highly securitised targets, implying intricate logistic, training and preparation give way to low-tech, low preparation attacks against crowded but not secured places (soft targets). This makes such attacks difficult to predict and avoid, as well as spatially more elusive as potentially happening anywhere in the city: on pavements, in cafés, on bridges and in the transport network. Therefore, the present exploration not only overcomes representations and manifestations of fear as an individual and identifiable emotion (Pain, 2009), but also exceeds atmosphere as a bounded “mode of control” (Sumartojo and Pink 2018: 27) achieved through specific material interventions by the State (lockdown, armed guards, barriers and so on), and as a neat top-down calibration to instill a sense of security in the public.

Here, the everyday performances of security, the “routinized, barely noticed reminders of terror or the threat of an always already presence of terrorism in our midst” that Katz (2007: 350) calls *banal terrorism*, are developed, taking Katz’ notion of *banality* into the less-than-material and sentient dimension of the militarised urban landscapes of terrorism and security. Concealing the often uncomfortable financial and political networks sustaining terrorism, banal terrorism, argues Katz, also shapes common sense around what constitutes terrorism and who is regarded as terrorist and ultimately shapes the politics that “at moments of crisis [...] authorize such things as a suspension of civil liberties” (350). Katz’ reflection tackles how securitization produces fragmented, unequal, and divided urban spaces and how, what Katz calls “citadelization”, “def(ies) the meaning and essence of urban life – of open cities” (354), in ways that recall urbanism in conflict zones.

While we focus on Paris’ Place de la République and Brussels’ Place de la Bourse/Beursplein, we appreciate the importance of other poignant sites for the circulation of affective atmospheres after the attacks. This is especially evident in the neighbourhoods of Molenbeek in Brussels and the Parisian suburb of St. Denis. These two areas were also the sites of intensive counter-terror police operations, house raids and house arrests that had a considerable impact on the local population and buildings. These racialized security agendas disproportionately affect the residents of these neighbourhoods, and predominantly its Muslim and

Arab communities. While aware of the unequal impact of terror and security responses in different sites, we selected the two squares - Place de la République and Place de la Bourse/Beursplein - as they became sites of rapid and more or less spontaneous collective responses to terrorism in 2015 and 2016 and thus constitutive part of diverse and often rapidly shifting atmospheres. Historically, they hold differently important roles in their respective urban geographies, as hubs for national republican values and landmarks along protest routes (*République*) and built expressions of colonial wealth (*Bourse*). Both sites have also recently undergone substantial regeneration. Most importantly, the two squares turned into fulcrums of contestations and renegotiations of state security discourses, where not only we could observe the collective attunement to a new experience of the city in light of the attacks, but also explore how the techniques of lockdown and state of emergency were “encountered, lived, witnessed and resisted” (Anderson, 2010, p. 231). While these squares were central in the development of diffuse post-terror atmospheres, we ought to be careful not to de-race (Legg, 2020) the politics of this diffusion: who is and/or can be present on those squares, how and with what effects, are always entangled with race, class, gender, and mobility status. In line with Pain’s (2009) call for deconstructing generalised and disembodied notions of fear in critical geopolitics, a similar agenda must be pursued for the urban geopolitics of terrorism and security responses. As “the majority of the atmospheres literature focuses on a racially undifferentiated United States, Europe, and Australia, within which race is not deployed as an analytical category” (Legg, 2020, p. 778), the effects of terror/-security must be seen for their unequal declensions across spaces and bodies.

3. Affective atmospheres of fragmentation and rupture

The evening after the Paris attacks, crowds spontaneously gathered on Place de la République to mourn and commemorate the victims, despite the authorities’ calls for staying indoors. People lit candles, laid flowers, chalked graffiti and left mementos around the Marianne statue standing near the centre of the square. République became a popular site for connecting emotionally with others and reflecting on the events. Despite lingering fear and anxiety, crowds of residents took to the square, and this mobilised a range of affective atmospheres that gradually but deeply changed the sense of the square and the connection with its publics. The “affectual change of place” (Edensor, 2012, p. 1119) in the aftermath of the attacks ought to be contextualised within the spatial configuration of the square itself. Affective atmospheres are never purely precognitive, immaterial, and free-floating: they are also contextually specific, co-shaped by the spatial genealogies in which they are entangled (Edensor, 2012). The square sits by the 10th and 11th arrondissements, where the attacked *terrasses* are. République also holds an important place in Paris’ radical and revolutionary historical geographies as a protest landmark on the “République-Bastille-Nation triangle” (Tartakowsky, 2014, p. 147). During several decades, République was a roundabout with the Marianne statue at its centre, bisecting two public garden islands and allegorically separating the public from the republican values embodied by Marianne. In 2008, however, the square entered a project of urban renovation launched by former mayor Bertrand Delanoë (2001–2014) and was pedestrianised in 2013. Redesigning République included, crucially, turning it into a multi-use, adaptable space (Fleury and Wuest, 2016). The new layout eliminated the car roundabout, decluttering and adding continuity of movement and sight and accessibility from/to adjacent arrondissements (Fleury and Wuest, 2016). A focus on pedestrian and cycle traffic aimed to change the *ambiance* of the square to a calmer one (Frearson, 2014), while reinstating Marianne in the centre. Atmospheres are diffused by objects and bodies in an environment weighing upon one another and atmospheric shifts are shaped by changes in the configuration of objects and bodies (Anderson and Ash, 2015). The redesign of République and of its *ambiance* created therefore new user affordances (ways people

inhabit space (Gibson, 1977)) and enabled new ways of feeling.

In the aftermath of the attacks, we argue, these affordances facilitated affective atmospheres that turned République into a “place of contemplation for the French and the passing tourists” (Medina, 2016) and, since March 2016, into a hub for *Nuit Debut*, a protest movement against government labour policies, but importantly, also against the state of emergency. Accessibility, multiplicity and continuity were three crucial mediums for shaping the affective tonalities (Thibaud, 2015) resonating on/in/from République after the attacks. First, enhanced accessibility allowed it to become a site where people convened after the attacks from the adjacent arrondissements to which the square had been reconnected. People felt they “had to do something”, as a local activist told us, to share grief, flooding the square and establishing it as a place emotionally connected to the attacks. Secondly, the architects’ intention to create multiple uses turned into a different conglomeration of human and nonhumans (pedestrians and cyclists, water, trees, Marianne, smooth paving, café) allowing, in the aftermath, different and coexisting atmospheres: commemorative gatherings, solidarity displays, memorials, or simply standing in contemplation. One participant “felt at peace” going out after the attacks and being close to people in uncommon ways. They recalled people being kind to each other, even hugging and supporting one another.

Thirdly, the spatial and visual transparency of the square (obtained through the urban renewal outlined above) allowed both a continuity of experience, and the swift development of “tipping points” (Anderson and Ash, 2015, p. 46) at which a specific atmosphere is subsumed by another, very different one. Within a wide square that had become uncluttered by design, the diffusion and shifts of contrasting atmospheres in the aftermath of the attacks, happened fast. As the night set in on 15 November, a sudden loud noise of explosions disrupted what had been until then a relatively quiet, candle-lit contemplation on the square by people gathering there despite the state of emergency. Suddenly, “thousands of people run out of the square, towards the Canal Saint Martin, shouting ‘Run!’ ‘stay down!’. Some people fall. First instinct: rush into the first open door of the first café.” (Tual, 2015). Footage from the time⁷ shows how in a matter of seconds, people who were paying their respects at the statue of the Marianne and chanting slogans and songs including the national anthem, started screaming and fleeing the scene, stomping onto tributes, with noises of smashed candle holders and flower wrap crackling under people’s feet. What turned out to be a false alarm – a group of people throwing firecrackers near the crowd, it was later revealed – hit a sufficient threshold that perturbed the distribution of bodies and objects on the square, and conjured up a change of atmosphere. The sound of explosion, and the lack of identification of its source, compounded by the darkness, intervened into the still crowd, the silence and chants, the candles and tributes. Thus, tension and panic quickly overtook the previous atmosphere of contemplative calm. Here, what Anderson and Ash (2015) describe as “tipping point” - the point at which an atmosphere is prevaricated by a new dominant one - was passed.

Edensor argues that “lighting is a crucial ingredient in the atmospheric qualities of nocturnal space” (Edensor, 2012, p. 1119): however, contrary to Edensor’s (2012) account of festive illuminations, the contemplative candle-lit atmosphere on the ample and uninterrupted square of République quickly intersected with panic, fear and anxiety. Such a sudden shift towards panic and fleeing has been explained by commentators as the sign of a still traumatized population still on high alert and susceptible to latent reactions to relatively banal events (e.g. firecrackers). In non-representational terms, we can research the volatile situation on the square as *background*: a diffuse and collective lived and shaped (rather than inert and given) backdrop to affective life. By conceiving of the square as a background, we can account for the coexisting, contrasting, and tipping atmospheres of the square - shaped

and altered by “not only what we pick up but what we do not pick up” (Ahmed, 2014).

The relationality of affective atmospheres was further exemplified by events on Place de la Bourse/Beursplein following the suicide bombings at Brussels’ airport and Maalbeek metro in 2016. Here, residents also gathered in the afternoon following the attacks. “I just needed to do something, and it seemed like a natural place to go” said one Brussels resident explaining this particularly powerful and spontaneous public coming-together of residents to cope and grieve in the aftermath of violence. Again, a socio-historical genealogy of the Bourse in Brussels is important in shaping affective atmospheres. The square is centrally located, opposite the impressive 19th century Brussels Stock Exchange Building. The ornate building is a symbol of Belgian colonial wealth, an embodiment of traditional national values. Importantly, the square is a site of recent urban renewal seeking to increase pedestrian traffic and open the space to multiple social practices (Hubert et al., 2017). However, unlike Place de la République, it was still undergoing renovation at the time of the attacks and of our observations. Particularly, the opening of public space as a place of fluid encounter and its “under renovation” status facilitated the emergence of community through shared feelings at a time of high tension. On March 22nd, 2016, during lockdown, residents began to fill the now pedestrianised square and to chalk messages conveying different and contradictory emotions. The messages people wrote spoke about anger, hate and insecurity, but also about love, resistance and togetherness, shaping affective atmospheres in ways that defy a single narrative (see also Closs-Stephens et al., 2021). The square became a site for people to literally and symbolically express a composite of contradictory feelings of fear, anger, and sadness, as well as love and hope, stemming from collective – and yet multiple and intersectional – experiences of terrorism. The chalked messages altered the very materiality of the square, its physical presence, as residents began to actively shape and intervene on the affective atmospheres.

Importantly, the affective atmospheres of the two squares were also shaped by acts of explicit defiance and resistance against both the terrorist acts and resulting securitization. These were performed by occupation and re-claiming of public space for gathering, to defy fear, express togetherness, make sense of grief, or simply “do” something. The following section addresses these collective yet multiple and embodied acts, as part of the way urban life resumes in the longer term in the light of terrorism and the security responses to it, and the way these events become integrated in it.

4. Affective atmospheres of suture and integration

We approach République on our second evening in Paris, six months after the attacks. The entrance to the République metro station is closed since a demonstration on 1 May saw a serious confrontation between police and the protesters and a fire. The square is heaving nonetheless: with Marianne still covered in commemorative mementos from the attacks, the space is filled with the activities of the social movement *Nuit Debut* (“Up all night”). *Nuit Debut* has been active as an encampment since March 31, 2016 to protest against the labour reform bill⁹ and against the state of emergency and its detrimental effects on particular groups of the population. If the state of emergency created security atmospheres through emptiness via preventing gatherings in public space for security reasons, *Nuit Debut* created a counter-atmosphere by filling those spaces through encampment and occupation. While there is the sense of a collective atmosphere on the square, the encampment is diverse: besides people camping with their tents, there are those managing the food stalls, others managing information points on topics spanning legal advice, ecology, feminism and literature. We stop to listen to a public debate, in another corner of the square there is music. People stand, stroll and talk, all under the watchful eyes of riot police by Boulevard Voltaire, which a group of activists defined as “imposing the *ambiance* [onto the occupants] through their position of attack”. Alcohol is forbidden and municipal authorization for *Nuit Debut* is granted only

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2LOmnlDQkk>.

until 10pm.

The affective politics of *Nuit Debout* conjoin both resistance against the neoliberalisation of the state employment law, and against the extraordinary powers conferred to the authorities by the state of emergency and their micro-scale effects on specific portions of the population (Mechai and Hergon, 2020). Night-time provides a strategic space and time of creativity for the protest movement, but we argue that, in order to discern the dynamics of space and rhythm of these activist practices, it is crucial to situate them within the atmospheres of fragmentation and rupture that surfaced with the attacks.

Since its arrival on the square, there have been violent confrontations between *Nuit Debout* and the police, with episodes of tear gas use. During our visit, there were clashes between police and demonstrators leading to 1000 arrests and 300 police injured, prompting an “anti-cop hatred” counterdemonstration by the police unions.

While the atmosphere of tension and mutual provocation between *Nuit Debout* and the police was evident, many participants acknowledged the protest movement brought people together in ways that complicated the atmosphere on the square after the attacks. Making a point of being in an open public space during a state of emergency that curtailed people gathering in public and, as one of the young activists on the square explained, “provoked a feeling of being in the process of doing something important”. The role of Place de la Republique as a landmark in Paris’ geography of public protest is encompassed by these activist as a component of the atmospheric purchase of the place: for them, *tenir la place* (“to hold the place” – but place also meaning *square* in French), is not only a statement of their presence against the government reform plan and against the security forces stationed outside the square, but also an attempt to bring people together to somehow resist the state of fear that the authorities have attempted to install since the attacks: “*On a changé l’ambiance*” (we changed the atmosphere) they tell us while sitting on the steps on the southern side of the square; with the spatial presence of *Nuit Debout*, the media attention has shifted from the fear of terrorism to a scrutiny of the actions of the French state and its proposals for the reform of the employment laws.⁸ One of them states “we are afraid, but we have started to say ‘we don’t care’”.

Yet, in the words of a psychiatrist we spoke to that same evening, vulnerability and exposure to a potentially ubiquitous terrorist threat were still felt on the square. We came across the psychiatrist during our walk on the square that evening, as they ran a stall on the square to bring attention to the wider issue of how the French mental health care system will be impacted by the labour law reform that *Nuit Debout* is against: “There is a trauma and Place de la Republique gives hope to the people traumatized by the attacks. It gives hope to come out of the trauma”, the psychiatrist tells us. The example of République is telling of how people actually navigate and make sense of urban terror and its shifting atmospheres as well as atmospherics, and how these landscapes ‘are experienced and made present to the lives that live them’ (Adey, 2013, p. 52), such as ‘the atmospheric affects of [...]something like an occupation, or the resonances constituting political change’ (Adey, 2013, p. 53).

The psychiatrist continued to outline what we can see as topographies of urban fear in the aftermath of the attacks. They point out how the city of Paris is seen as a dangerous place from the outside, whereas many inhabitants of Paris consider the banlieues as the location of danger. They also point to generational differences in experiencing fear, with older residents being often marginalized in the aftermath of an attack, despite being one of the groups in need of most care, not only due to old age, but because the sounds, sights, state of emergency, curtail of mobility and the overall experience of the attacks often trigger the resurfacing of memories from past wars (including WW2), producing a sense of fear compounded by prior experience in excess of the present

terror as “‘memories of the past were sedimented into atmospheres experienced in the present” (Sumartojo and Pink, 2018, p. 9).

In line with Pain’s (2009) argument that fear of terror is never a homogenized global feeling, the topographies of fear outlined by the psychiatrist and by the activists on the square, are spatially varied, contextual, and intersectional. Similarly, the atmospheres propagating on the square were not passively imprinted by some top-down and state-driven view of fear. They were instead multifaceted and, most importantly, carrying their own potential and agency, and thus “open[...] the possibility for resistance, non-compliance or subversion of established ways of doing or thinking about things that have privileged different people in often unequal ways” (Sumartojo and Pink, 2018, p. 127).

Differently from Place de la Republique, Place de la Bourse/Beursplein seemed quiet during our visit in June 2016, three months after the attacks and the lockdown. Aside from tourists, there was little movement. The redesign of the square was incomplete: temporary fences sealed off the square to cars, making it feel more like a one-off town festival than a long-term spatial re-design. Threat seemed at once vague and palpable as we attended to our own sensorial experience. A few police officers were patrolling the area, while armed military guarded the nearby metro station. People spoke quietly. When one merchant started loudly calling one passer-by down the street, his voice broke through the hushed space and disrupted the subdued atmosphere so that everybody turned to look. Several residents we talked to said they avoid the city centre due to an eerie sense of discomfort they experience, including the square. The source of discomfort seemed to vary: for some it was the presence of migrants and homeless persons confounded with a classed and racialized sense of “uncleanliness”; others explained how the sight of soldiers and armored vehicles contributed to unease and mistrust. The physical proximity to Molenbeek was also often addressed. These different bodies, objects and discourses came together to form affective atmospheres of discomfort following the attacks and the lockdown. In quantitative terms, this resulted in significant loss of revenues for the city’s hotels, stores, and restaurants, amounting to losses of nearly 1 billion euros in federal tax revenues during the first half of 2016 (Kroet, 2016). Behind the numbers lies a changed experience of the city. One long-time Brussels journalist spoke to us about the felt dimensions of the lockdown and the impact it had on her everyday life in the city. During a conversation at her office, the journalist struggled to find words to explain her radically changed experience of the city, bringing attention to sensorial experiences such as an eerie sense of quietness during and following lockdown as well as a creeping state of vigilance that continues to affect her everyday socio-spatial practices of walking to work, shopping and socializing in the city. “I’m always thinking about what the next target could be”, they explained to us. For the journalist, Place de la Bourse/Beursplein and the city centre were places actively avoided. The journalist spoke about a series of strategic actions adopted to manage threat in daily life, such as avoiding taking the metro, refraining from large public gatherings, changing foot paths to work and so on.

Affective atmospheres are shared, relational and collective phenomena, and as such they cannot be reduced to overarching namings, subjective emotions or as conjured up in isolation. Rather, affective atmospheres are formed in relations between bodies and objects in ways that are open-ended and unstable. As shifting, indeterminate constellations, they are always a site of struggle as different actors intervene and shape them, whether consciously or unconsciously. Through these interventions and practices, affective atmospheres become sites of urban geopolitics. One of the most interesting city-led interventions came from the need for “re-branding” and “improving the image of the city” from the emerging media depictions of Brussels in terms of “urban chaos” and “clash of civilizations” discourse (for e.g., Voeten, 2015). As part of this, the City of Brussels Communication Center initiated a #BXLOVE campaign (Bruxelles, 2017) in an attempt to shape or even stage (Bille et al., 2015) the affective atmospheres of the city. The campaign was especially evident on the square. A temporary booth (Fig. 1) was setup to

⁸ Those proposals were ratified in November 2017: <https://www.gouvernement.fr/en/labour-law-reform>.



Fig. 1. Credit to Sunčana Laketa.

inform citizens about the development of the city's grand and contested urban re-development program through pedestrianization of the area (Hubert et al., 2017) and to sell memorabilia, such as #BXLOVE T-shirts, badges and magnets. Rather than transient and ephemeral, the chunky letters on top of the booth worked to aesthetically instantiate, fix and almost demand the feelings of love. Seen in this way, the sign performatively re-affirmed unity and integration as a response to the fragmenting experience of threat (Bille and Simonsen, 2019). The narrative of love is imbued with messages of resilience and defiance through which the city asserted its identity.

If we consider #BXLOVE campaign as one, discursive, element in the constellation of affective atmospheres on the square, there is nothing predetermined or unidirectional about the relations being formed there. In other words, it does not tell us if and how the campaign is successful in mobilizing the affective atmospheres of love. For one, it is clear not everybody is equally affected by the narratives and performances of love on the square. The emotional and the affective experience is always dependent on previous experiences and embodied knowledge. Affective atmospheres are of course perceived in body-specific ways, and intersect with subjectivities that are racialized, ethnicized, and gendered (Ahmed, 2014; Legg, 2020; Russell, 2017). As previously argued, it is important to consider the unequal politics of diffusion of affective atmospheres and to question of who is present on the square, how and with what effects and at the expense of which groups feelings such as "love" are promoted and supported. The contestation of the affective atmosphere of love in the face of terror was elaborated to us by one Brussels resident who came to live in the city some 20 years ago, as she was fleeing the war and armed conflict in her home country. She spoke how she actively defied grass-roots initiatives for coming together on Place de la Bourse/-Beursplein. "I am not doing any of those kissing and hugging that they're doing at the Bourse!", she said. She opposed the performances and

practices of love and unity on the square, stating "we are at war and we should take it seriously!". As a former refugee and a victim of war, this resident explained to us how the events in Brussels triggered previous traumas and re-activated memories and embodied knowledges of war. Here, we see how experiences of violence and conflict travel between different sites and bodies, shaping and re-shaping the affective atmospheres of terror/security. Moreover, memories of conflict resurface and shape her experience of the city, as her subjectivity is re-assembled in and through an affective atmosphere.

A consideration of the longer-term impact of terrorism on the urban atmospheres ought to reflect back to the State's role in mobilizing felt experience to deal with emergency. Here, we argue that, increasingly, the everyday experience and awareness of one's environment is being enrolled- at least in the example of Paris - in official security measures. Here we present one of such measures was activated in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, as a way to deal with a contemporary terrorist threat that has evolved to be perceived as ubiquitous and impossible to predict and totally prevent, as outlined earlier. *Plan Vigipirate VIGilance et Protection des Installations contre les Risques d'Attentats Terroriste à l'Explosif* is part of France's anti-terrorism strategy. It originated in 1978 as a centralized rapid response mechanism, within the context of IRA and Red Brigades terrorism. In 1981, *Plan Pirate* enabled the protection of sensible targets. The plan was activated in 1991, during France's participation in Operation Desert Storm in Kuwait and was never lifted. In its latest iterations, *Vigipirate* aims to create a "culture of vigilance" encompassing "all the national actors - the state, the local authorities, enterprises and citizens" (Gouvernement.fr n.d.). But the plan is also reliant on "a culture of individual and collective security, expanded to the whole of civil society" (Gouvernement.fr n.d.). The realm of the individual citizen appeared within *Vigipirate* in 2014, allowing "people to appropriate the anti-terrorist struggle, by putting in place a 'culture of vigilance'" (Romano, 2015). In the history of *Vigipirate*, the responsibility for detecting threat and implementing security has shifted from traditional state actors to individual citizens. In a series of informative materials released in 2016, the everyday (banal) spatialisation of counterterrorism by the state through *Vigipirate*, goes beyond physical urban interventions, and relies instead on the individual's pre-cognitive experiences ("good reflexes", SGDSN, n.d.) to detect threats. One's own intuition (*fiez-vous à votre intuition*) and attentiveness (*être attentive aux autres et à son environnement*) (SGDSN, 2016) are mobilised here to sense and detect threats, in a way that recalls the situation awareness increasingly enrolled into urban counter-terrorism military strategies (Krasmann and Hentschel, 2019). The realm of the non-linguistic and experiential are thus put at the frontline of agendas of urban security and resilience, as sense and intuition are rallied to identify, amidst the complexity of everyday urban environments, inconsistencies that signal threat: "Know the configuration of the living spaces and sites that you usually attend: building, street, neighbourhood, layout of buildings, layout of spaces, paths and emergency exits; get into the habit of observing your environment" (SGDSN, 2016, 25).

Vigipirate also invites to observe people, behaviors and objects that seem out of place, notably: unusual curiosity and prolonged observation towards building features and layouts; unusual or unseasonal clothing, and the presence of suspicious packages or vehicles at unusual times.

The evolution of *Vigipirate* resonates with the restructuring of contemporary practices of urban security around the "central organising metaphor" of resilience across western Europe, where "the governance of resilience [is] putting the onus for preventing and preparing for urban security challenges onto institutions, professionals, communities and individuals rather than the state (Coaffee, 2017). The process of re-scaling of counterterrorism, and "progressively 'responsibilising'" (Coaffee, 2013, p. 248) non-state actors against threats is known in western contexts. The example of *Vigipirate*, however, suggests a further wave in the evolution of resilience, chiming more with the "active engineering of pre-cognition" described by Thrift (2008: 25). *Vigipirate* scales down counter-terrorism responsibility further, by enrolling the

individual's sentient experience. Thus, we suggest that a further wave in the evolution of resilience is among us, where - in light of a ubiquitous terror threat to urban soft targets - the realm of the felt, non-cognitive, intuitive and experiential is mobilised as part of agendas of individual and continuous vigilance and perceptiveness.

There are clear urban geopolitics at work within schemes like *Vigipirate*, and behind the intuitions, situational awareness and interpretation of intangible aspects of one's environment that are enrolled by *Vigipirate's* culture of vigilance. What and where are the situational changes that denote threat? Which presences and absences embody atmospheric shifts that signal danger? Which actions, objects or behaviours are considered 'out of place' and whose vigilance and intuition are considered as legit? Whose reflexes, in other words, are the *good* reflexes?

The question of where fear is located, and whose fear is legitimate is entangled with issues of race, class and gender which often tend to normalise fear as a white and universalised sentiment and leave out other forms of fear by the non-white population (Nielsen, 2019). While our analysis focuses on the atmospheric attunings on and around the two squares, we also recognize how these dynamics are part of a wider urban geopolitics where the effects (and affects) of terror and security responses are always unevenly distributed (Martin, 2010). These unevenness is implicated in longer histories of urban inequality and neoliberal dispossession (Badiou, 2016; Dikec, 2013) and in rather different atmospheres - legal, policing, surveillant and even militaristic - that are encountered in places associated with the terrorist threat, such as the Parisian suburb of St Denis and the Brussels neighbourhood of Molenbeek. As a "shorthand term to denote certain groups of the population (and problems seen to be associated with them) who live in peripheral social housing estates" of French cities (Dikec, 2013: 28), the French banlieues bear security connotations of threat especially since the 1980s, linked to historic immigration and the supposed 'non-assimilation' of non-European (and often Muslim) residents with republican values (Dikec, 2013). Dikec has argued that places like the French banlieues are the product of a specific framing of space, sustained by the deployment of a compounding system of legal "sensible evidence" made of crime statistics, categorization of offences, and technologies of surveillance, that make it possible to put immigrants and the banlieues "in the category of dangerous things" (Dikec, 2013) and normalise the targeting of specific groups. Similarly in Brussels, counter-radicalisation initiatives and urban regeneration overlap around the area of Molenbeek, which is characterized by "concentrated non-White poverty, overcrowded, (relatively) cheap or social housing, high youth unemployment, and foreign residents" (Saberi, 2019, p. 6). In other words, the *Vigipirate's* tropes of suspicion and vigilance compound already existing wider urban politics of race, gender and ethnicity (see also Benjamin, 2018) with the depiction of terrorist bodies and, in doing so, normalise racialized geographies of danger and threat (Bhat-tacharyya, 2008; Groothuis, 2020; Ragazzi, 2017).

5. Conclusion. For atmospheric approaches to terrorism

This essay has argued for an atmospheric urban geopolitics: one that maps the everyday felt experiences and affective dynamics of terrorism and security responses in the city. We have drawn on feminist and non-representational theories, both emphasizing the conceptual and methodological purchase of embodied experience. However, an embodied and experiential approach does not preclude accounting for how state power contributes to shape urban atmospheres of terror and its aftermath.

Lucy Easthope, a UK expert in disaster response and emergency planning, reveals that there is a complex hidden state-led geography of designated emergency response points, assistance and support spaces in UK cities "that could be readied in a few hours in the case of an attack" (Lucy, 2017). More importantly, Easthope stresses that besides planning for the spatiality of emergency, there is also a degree of state-led

planning of the aesthetics of the aftermath of a disaster like a terrorist attack (such as the "I [Heart] Manchester" signs hung around the city centre after the attack against the Manchester Arena in May 2017) and what we would call here the performativities (e.g. presences and features at solidarity vigils) that set the tone of the attack aftermath. This degree of state intervention is aimed at pacifying the city in the politically and socially volatile aftermath of the attack. This is, the kind of state manipulation Pile (2010) warns us to further scrutinize.

While thinking through the atmospheric implications of the aftermath of terrorism for the ordinary residents of two urban areas in ways that go beyond the state, we still find ourselves dealing with the presence and power of official sovereign actors. We therefore draw this essay to a close emphasizing Pile's argument that "the presumption that the powerful can manipulate the non-cognitive [...] needs greatest attention" (Pile, 2010, p. 14). Our concluding argument is that, despite the imposing nature of measures like lockdown and state of emergency and the very different ways different communities and publics relate to counterterrorism and (in)security, the atmospheric landscapes of the aftermath of terror result from the interplay of multiple state and non-state, human and nonhuman actors that interact in complex and unpredictable and often contradictory ways, contributing to the atmospheric landscapes we have described. Through our initial exploration, we have aimed to link the atmospherics of the aftermath of terror on the public squares of République and Bourse/Beursplein in Paris and Brussels with their (geo)political meanings. As Sumartojo and Pink point out, the eminently political purchase of thinking in terms of atmospheres, is that it allows us not only to

"identify what it feels like to be part of an audience for political campaigns that seek to create or exploit fear, [...] in binding us together and calling for action or decision. It can also help us understand how individuals, including ourselves, might fail to be moved by them in the ways clearly intended by their designers, and how this failure can comprise an act of resistance or exclusion. (Sumartojo, 20181003, p. 123).

We explored only a minimal part of what are granular and unequal landscapes of everyday experience in the aftermath of the attacks. In the future, systematic research and empirical data are needed to identify the intangible, everyday and long-term (re)attunings between residents and their urban landscapes in the aftermath of terror, that go beyond the state governing of emergencies. We argue that these attunings are encountered not just in the emotionally charged crowds of more or less official commemorative gatherings, but most importantly in the everyday and vernacular lived experiences of residents: altered trajectories through the city, new routines, the experience of coming out of lockdown and dealing with different forms and politics of fear, trauma and grief, and even resurfacing memories of previous violence. In these pages, we have drawn attention to the politics of fear, emergency and vigilance that propagate with the atmospherics of the terrorism aftermath, thus updating the call by feminist geopolitics to "reconceptualize the relationship between emotions and global issues in a way that challenges the hierarchical, procedural scaling of emotions that characterizes much work on the war on/of terror" (Pain, 2009, p. 480) and that emphasizes the often "marginalized groups who are central to the patterning, nature and implications of global fears" (481). However, in "making room for agency" (Pain, 2009, p. 474) and highlighting how fear is resisted, re-engaged, or compounded, we have also aimed to step beyond fear as a bounded emotion, and instead accounted for more elusive and variegated atmospheres as "dynamic and changing configurations that allow analytical insight into a range of topics when we begin to think in, about and through them" (Sumartojo and Pink, 2018: 2). Here, the atmospheres of terror aftermath envelope and propagate drawing on contextual spatial politics, but also end up eluding and exceeding those politics, and into further sensory and imaginative understanding that are shaped intersectionally and unequally through

multifaceted realities.

Encompassing urban geopolitics and studies of affective atmosphere, we offered a view of the urban lived dynamics of (counter)terrorism that rebalances the former's lack of sentient accounts, and the latter's paucity of geopolitical topics and grounded empirical research.

Atmospheres are indeterminate in the sense that there is nothing fixed, stable or easy to pin down when we address these relations. However, it does not mean they have no analytic purchase for understanding urban geopolitics. On the contrary, it testifies to the importance of affective atmospheres as political mechanisms. The affective atmospheres on République and Bourse/Beursplein are produced through the interrelation between physical and human elements (built environment, objects, technologies individual bodies, crowds, geopolitical discourses and narratives, and practices of policing and securitization), but they cannot be reduced to any single element. As such they are sites of contestation between different state and nonstate actors attesting how managing affective atmospheres became the matter of urban geopolitics: a regulatory sphere within the militarization of cities in face of ubiquitous security challenges.

Be it protracted conflict, terrorism, pandemic, or natural disaster (Cloke and Conradson, 2018), atmospheric approaches offer new cartographies and counter-cartographies of predominant views of resilience. Resilience as a strategy and ideology of resuming back to 'normal life' is often purported as the only option for 'winning the battle' against terrorism (Friedmann, 2017). However, whose normality do we advocate, in the aftermath of extreme violence? What is 'normality' in a state of emergency? What does 'normality' become in the wake of lockdown - be it after a terror attack or after a pandemic? What deeper, non-cognitive dynamics are missed out by agendas of resilience when we are faced with individual and collective ruptures like those provoked by current challenges of terrorism, natural disasters or pandemics?

We employed atmosphere to expose what has been so far silenced in urban geopolitics and studies of urban security. Notably, how atmosphere and the felt experience of place is a crucial level at which to map how larger scale (geo)political processes play out in local urban sites, and specifically, in our case, to understand how terrorism is experienced, individually and collectively, but in unequal ways. Tapping into the atmospherics of the reorganization of urban space in the aftermath of terrorism allows us to develop the research agenda of urban geopolitics into the experience of violence.

Atmospheric urban geopolitics, then, map the diffuse felt experiences that narratives of resilience often fail to capture: ordinary acts of healing, mourning, remembering, contemplating, letting go, or simply doing something by doing nothing. These deserve being taken seriously as intimate, emotional, and affective sites to learn from, to negotiate and to contest the urban landscapes of violence, threat and security. They are the affective potentialities that face, express and incorporate a *different normal*. It is in these sites where both the individual histories and wider geopolitical grievances underpinning terrorist acts coalesce, and the atmospheric landscapes of (counter)terror take shape.

Declaration of interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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