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## **SWEDISH SUBURBS AS HETEROTOPIAS: TOWARDS A MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE OF PLACES**

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### **Abstract**

*Urban literary studies have become an important issue in contemporary multicultural Sweden, especially after the 70s, when the public housing project Miljonprogram ("Million Programme") was completed (1974). Nowadays, these areas are partly regarded as a political failure since they have become places of social and even racial segregation. A central cultural consequence of multiculturalism in Sweden is the so-called Invandrarlitteratur ("immigrants' literature"), mainly represented by second-generation authors. In this article, I will try to provide a concise but exhaustive understanding of how this kind of literature can reshape the Miljonprogram areas and define what Sweden is today. The aim is to show how these suburban spaces, through a chosen collection of three works, are narrated by immigrant authors not as sites, i.e. spaces as such, but rather as places, i.e. spaces whose meaning is provided by the (literary) subjectivities who live and act therein (Prieto 2013). Using the concept of heterotopia (Foucault 1986) and its defining criteria, I will investigate how these works perform a total reassertion of space, emphasizing the space described as rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari 2011) peripheries, i.e. the result of a sensitive relationship between self and space. This investigation is designed to reflect on how the perception of suburbs has changed from first to second-generation immigrant writers and it hopes to open a new research line in which stigmatizing dystopias can be replaced by heterotopias.*

## Keywords

Invandrarlitteratur, Heterotopia, Miljonprogram, Periphery, Migration

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## 1. Introduction

Migration-related literature is hardly considered as a consolidated literary movement, but rather as a fragmented grouping of writers with foreign roots, as in the case of Sweden, where a considerable part of such writers was nonetheless born and raised. Albeit not composing a literary group with its manifesto, the so-called *Invandrarförfattare* (“immigrant authors”) have often been ascribed to the category of “immigrants literature” even though not all of them experienced the moment of exile in the first person. As Behschnitt (2010, p. 80) notes, it is possible to speak of *Invandrarlitteratur* not only when “the subject of migration remains at the core of the definition”, but also when postmigrant “intercultural experience” continues to play a central role in the texts.

It is possible to distinguish between first and second-generation *Invandrarlitteratur*, but independently from these categories, immigrant writers have been grouped as a homogeneous movement, who was traditionally given “a position of low status in the literary field while excluding them from the realm of ‘literature’ as an art form” (Behschnitt, 2010, p. 80), and where their works were believed to be an authentic reproduction of autobiographical experiences (Trotzig, 2005; Behschnitt & Mohnike, 2007). This literature is typically identified as a set of works in which the main characters, especially in the stories of second-generation authors, are usually youth with foreign background, that critics have often framed as *Bildungs*-novels. The reality portrayed in second-generation *Invandrarlitteratur* constitutes a new “ethnic turn” in Swedish literature (Leonard, 2008), that took place in 2001 thanks to Alejandro Leiva Wenger’s short stories collection *Till vår ära* (“In our honour”). The common features of this new literary phase are the use of a suburban multi-ethnic sociolect and the negotiation of questions of cultural identity against the backdrop of a suburban environment, in particular *Miljonprogram* areas, which the majority of society still regards as a foreign world (see also Behschnitt & Mohnike, 2007). Many recent studies have focused on questions of identity, belonging and linguistic features. However, little information has been devoted to spatial issues, such as a critical description of the suburban environments where the stories are set. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the active presence of *Miljonprogram* areas in *Invandrarlitteratur* and the role they play in relation to the characters who live there and their feelings.

### 1.1. The *Miljonprogram* and its Presence in *Invandrarlitteratur*

*Miljonprogram* is the name of a housing project developed between 1965 and 1974 in Sweden, aimed to provide more residential opportunities on the cities' outskirts for the then quickly increasing Swedish population. This project was designed for working-class families, which should have found new idyllic and peaceful living spaces outside the city centre. These areas, too far away from the inner city, soon became "dormitory neighbourhoods" where people didn't know each other. Native Swedes gradually left these places and returned to more central and attractive residential areas, or moved to the countryside. Meanwhile, these cheaper neighbourhoods were "conquered" by a growing working-class of immigrated citizens, whose living conditions are still today not seldom compared to segregation. As Molina (1997) shows, working-class immigrants seemed and still seem to be forced to move to these areas (and stay there) due to the strong socio-economic unbalances that prevent them from moving to more central neighbourhoods (see also De Los Reyes, 2000).

During the 60s, these areas were considered places of *modern diversity*, but since the 80s they are regarded as places of *ethnic diversity* and cultural clashes (see also Tischmann, 2020). During the '90s, *Miljonprogram* areas began to be portrayed as dangerous and frightening by the media, to the extent that they have often been defined as "No-go zones" (for a critical analysis of this spatial trope see Milani, 2020). However, the coexistence of different ethnicities contributed to shaping a plural society in opposition to the homogeneous white middle-class native Swedish centre. Indeed, as suggested by Ciaravolo (2017, p. 43), while they were seen as places of ethnic diversity, "[s]ince the 1980s, the suburbs of Sweden's major cities [...] have become the concrete and symbolic place for the construction of a new multi-ethnic and multicultural Sweden".

Nowadays, Sweden's population is composed of almost 30% of citizens with any sort of foreign background (Statistiska Centralbyrå 2017), who are generally concentrated in *Miljonprogram* areas. Second-generation immigrant writers such as Leiva Wenger, Anyuru, Khemiri, Bakhtiari, Sattarvandi, etc., have often set their works in these areas, which posed a focus on *Invandrarlitteratur* specifically as a paradigmatic form of "suburban literature" (Behschnitt & Mohnike, 2007, p. 85) or, as Ciaravolo (2017, p. 43) notes, a literature that is "capable of renewing the cultural and literary system as a whole from the periphery". It is important to point out that not all immigrant writers have grown up in the suburbs of Swedish major cities. Only their works and imaginary characters are set in these territorial realities, of which they not only describe the

aesthetic appearance of buildings, infrastructures, streets, and underground stations, but also the social practices that take place there, and the emotional relationship between self and place.

## **1.2. Research Objectives**

In this article, I will focus just on this relationship, to provide more knowledge about how the *milieu*, i.e. the frame of action, can be a factor that helps to shape the self vis-à-vis Swedishness, through the analysis of specific excerpts taken from three literary works written by authors with foreign background: the novel *Det sista ljuset* (1995) by Theodor Kallifatides (“The last light”), the poetry collection *Det är bara gudarna som är nya* (2003) by Johannes Anyuru (“Only the gods are new”), and the novel *Still* (2008) by Hassan Loo Sattarvandi (“Still”).

The main objective of this article is to understand how these places are described, both from a positive and negative perspective, but it is important to point out that it is not my intention to analyse the suburban spaces in *Invandrarlitteratur* as what Behschnitt would call a “documentary expectation”, where “migration literature is supposed to give a real and individualised picture of the migrant’s life and culture” (2010, p. 81). My intention starts rather from a postmigration readership of changes, challenges, conflicts and processes (Ring Petersen & Schramm, 2016) that allow the construction and deconstruction of a place where drawing on McHale (1987: 45), “juxtaposition, interpolation, superimposition, and misattribution” help to constitute what he calls “other zones”, i.e. other spaces, *heterotopias*.

## **2. Methodology**

To carry out this investigation, I will compare the concept of heterotopia (that will be explained in the next section) coined by Michel Foucault in the famous lecture “Of Other Spaces” (1967, ed. 1986) given at Collège De France, with the excerpts from the works mentioned above. The excerpts I will analyse are carefully chosen descriptions of the suburban environments that play in the background of the stories. Concerning heterotopia, three aspects will be comparatively highlighted in the analysis, namely the body of “place” in Kallifatides, where the suburb of Rinkeby seems to live a life of its own, detached from the metropolitan life rhythms and linked to a global dimension of both belonging and loneliness; the “people” in Anyuru, where his verses focus on the synonymy between *suburban* citizen and *subaltern* beings; and finally the “feelings” in Sattarvandi, in which the presence of concrete buildings causes contrasting feelings of delirium and discomfort in the narrator. Each work analysed here provides a clear example of “other spaces”

and should therefore be framed as “a travel story – a spatial practice”, as stated by De Certeau (1988, p. 15). According to him, in a literary text, particular importance should be given to the spatial and geographic dimensions. As also pointed out by Lefebvre (2014, p. 291), “[m]odern spatial practice might thus be defined [...] by the daily life of a tenant in a government-subsidized high-rise housing project”. Starting from these pertinent theorisations, I intend to use the concept of heterotopia to determine new lines of research concerning literary high-rise suburban spaces narrated in *Invandrarlitteratur*.

Conscious that the choice of these three specific works may sound arbitrary since spatial descriptions of suburban environments can also be found in the work of many other authors, my argument is that Kallifatides, Anyuru and Sattarvandi focus as only a few have done on the thematization of suburban space in literature, allowing fruitful critical reflections with a comparative method.

As two of these three works are set in Stockholm’s suburbs, my intention is partly to apply Alexandra Borg’s thesis (2011) to present-day Sweden: her study about Stockholm’s urban fiction between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century reveals that the city’s “conversion into a metropolitan space compels a new form of literary expression, a sort of urban aesthetics”, which, I maintain, also holds for Stockholm today, since also suburban fiction is an integral part of a metropolitan literary expression, offering reflections towards a suburban aesthetic.

In this study, another theoretic concept that will follow throughout the text is Deleuze and Guattari’s *rhizome* (2011), which I intend to apply to the spatial trope of the periphery to define it as a place made up of multiple dimensions and not of simple unity. As I will try to show, all the three excerpts link the suburb to a specific declination of the rhizome, so much so that it is possible to speak of a “rhizomatic periphery”, a place intended as a set of relationships that oppose to the metropolitan centre just as the rhizome opposes to the root. The multicultural periphery is the place par excellence where it is not necessary to look for cultural, familial, or linguistic descendants ascribable to a native Swedish cultural identity. In the confusion of its multidimensionality, it makes no sense to look for “arborescent descendants” (2011) in the periphery, because this is a place of exile, of uprooted people, an “antigenealogical” place of *detritorialization*.

### **3. Literature Review**

“We are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of near and far, of the side-by-side, of the

dispersed”. With this quote, the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1986, p. 22) sanctioned that the present one is above all the epoch of space. In doing so, Foucault predicted what later scholars have called the “spatial turn”, a term in vogue since the 90s. By “spatial turn” is meant a new way of perceiving the spatial dimension, in both real-world and literature. The fact that Foucault sanctions the era of space is, first of all, to frame within a general change in paradigms already present in cultural, literary and geographical studies.

### **3.1. Geocritics, Postmodernity, Peripherality**

All these changes contributed to the creation of the interdisciplinary approach of Geocritics, that recognizes urban literary representations as a set of transgressive, border-crossing practices, establishing new sensitive relations between people and places. Geocritics moves its steps within Postmodernity, understood as a critical moment of transformation of forms, withdrawal from and contestation of inherited models in the wake of global social and political changes and, above all, the awareness acquired from Post-structuralism that nothing in the world has ontological stability. Focusing on how migration flows transformed Western metropolitan contexts, the term *peripherality* (Ameel, Finch & Salmela, 2015) is recently gaining popularity as a value that represents a modification in the centre-periphery relationship. *Peripherality* belongs to literary urban studies and it is aimed at describing how suburban environments in scholarly research define “disorientating experiences erupting from the margins of the city” (Ameel, Finch & Salmela, 2015, p. 6), although remaining “below the radar of Western metropolises and their canonized literature [...] largely out of sight” (2015, p. 1).

The reassertion of space is a consequence of this loss of ontological stability. A geocritical approach to a literary urban representation deconstructs old models and general rules of conceiving urban spaces, that are not seen as *a priori* dimensions anymore. Geocritics questions the relations between the nature of a given space, its existing condition, and the active, sensitive, and creative perception of the self. This turning point represents a moment in which critical readings deal more with the way social space, the city and the architectural landscape are represented in literary texts. The ontological instability mentioned above is, among others, postulated by McHale (1987, p. 26), according to which the representation of urban space in postmodern literature is characterized by an unbalance between the fictional and the real world. What emerges from geocritical analysis is that “it has become increasingly difficult or indeed impossible for the reader to decipher the ontological attributes of the described spatial environment, or the precise referential relationship

between the imagined story world and the actual world” (Ameel, 2020, p. 213). I argue that *Miljonprogram* areas are a suitable subject in this context (see also Leonard, 2011) due to their very recent, unstable but rich historical meaning, which allows for new narratives and iridescent spatial representations of a world that “flickers between presence and absence, between reconstructed reality and words on the page” (McHale, 1987, p. 159).

### 3.2 Heterotopia and Heterotopology

The concept of heterotopia, derived from Greek *hetero* (“different”, “other”) and *topos* (“place”), was outlined by Michel Foucault as a place outside all other places, a place that, although localizable, is different from any other place. Heterotopia is in few words a place of ontological dispersion, but it is not to understand as a “non-place”, like the more common utopia, from which it differs. Indeed, although heterotopias are definable as utopias with a precise and real place, Foucault specifies (1986, p. 24) that utopias are “sites with no real place. [...] They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case, these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces”. Conversely, heterotopia is a real place located within a specific territory, representing a contestation of all the places of society itself. For this reason, Foucault also defines heterotopias as *counter spaces*.

To identify a heterotopia, the French philosopher developed a sort of disciplined science, heterotopology, composed of six principles. Before listing them, I consider it necessary to emphasize that Foucault distinguished two main types of heterotopias: *crisis* and *deviation* heterotopias. The former are places reserved for people who are, in the broadest sense possible, in a state of crisis. Examples are adolescents, pregnant women, and the elderly, to whom I add marginalised immigrants since, in the neighbourhoods they inhabit, they feel the critical sense of *double exile*, i.e. the displacement from both their home and the host country (see also Wendelius, 2002). The latter, deviation heterotopias, are identified by Foucault as places in which individuals’ behaviour is “deviant about the required mean or norm” (1986, p. 25) of society. As examples, he lists retirement houses, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons. I add that neighbourhoods can also be included in the liminal space between the heterotopia of *crisis* and the heterotopia of *deviation* since *immigrantness* is a state of crisis and deviation in Western society, where being a non-white rootless exile in the suburbs implies a critical socio-economical subjectivity, a sort of deviation from the native “norm”, and a flagless state of being.

The six principles listed by Foucault are: (1) heterotopias are not specific to any particular

society, i.e., each society may have its heterotopias; (2) heterotopias can emerge or disappear in every moment in History assuming very different functions; (3) heterotopias are spaces of the juxtaposition of several places that are incompatible and foreign with each other; (4) heterotopias are combined with different experiences of time, shaping what could be termed as “heterocronies”; (5) heterotopias presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates and makes them penetrable. As Foucault (1986, p. 26) points out, some of these places “seem to be pure and simple openings, but they generally hide curious exclusions. Everyone can enter into these heterotopic sites, but that is only an illusion: we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded”; (6) heterotopias function about every real space, marking themselves as culturally definable, illusory spaces of any real site.

Based on these principles, Foucault provides more examples: heterotopias are places such as amusement parks, cemeteries, colleges, fairs, motels, museums, shops, theatres, etc. As we can see, the term refers to places that are very different from each other, where people behave differently and can feel contrasting emotions. At this point, one might wonder what these places have to do with Swedish suburbs. By listing these examples as heterotopias, Foucault does not intend them as *exclusive* models. He is well aware that “heterotopias obviously take quite varied forms, and perhaps no one universal form of heterotopia would be found” (1986, p. 24). In this regard, if one thinks of the Foucaultian specification of heterotopia as a place deriving from new conceptions of space, in which “extension was substituted for localization” (1986, p. 23), then a comparison with the multiethnic *Miljonprogram* areas becomes possible. Indeed, by drawing a parallel with the six principles listed above, we find that: (1) multiethnic suburbs exist in many other countries and are not a specific Swedish phenomenon; (2) suburbs arose in the past with a specific function, which then has been altered and transformed in its opposite. Moreover, suburbs are not typical of a single Historical epoch; (3) suburbs have an ethnic, cultural and linguistic heterogeneity that gives an idea of the juxtaposition of different places of the world reciprocally incompatible with each other; (4) suburbs are places where, due to cultural heterogeneity, people organize time differently and live according to different rhythms; (5) suburbs are places of opening and closing insofar as they are accessible, even though they are more closed and marginalised in public discourse, and remain, in some cases, outside the range of action of the political forces. As entering them gives the illusion of entering society, suburbs are places of exclusion and marginalization; (6) lastly, suburbs function about “all the space that remains” (Foucault 1986, p.



27), including the centre. By their historical background, which is relatable to their original planning, *Miljonprogram* areas were supposed to represent utopian alternatives to the centre, modern, regulated working-class idylls, positive *counter spaces*.

Heterotopias are places where our mood and our feelings can alter and perceive the environment differently, even the passage of time. Therefore, since from “other spaces” derive “other feelings”, it is possible to understand what Prieto (2013) means when he claims that we can designate any *site* as a *place*. The difference between the two terms is that the former is a place neutrally seen as such, while the latter is a place that takes on an affective meaning for the individual by establishing a meaning-generating relationship (see also Sarrimo, 2020). The *Miljonprogram* areas, as suburban residential spaces, are *sites*. In the next sections, however, I will show them as *places*, in which they show subjective relationships with the characters of the chosen literary works, highlighting conflicts between old and new coordinates of Swedishness.

It is worth clarifying that heterotopias are not supernatural worlds. On the contrary, heterotopias are existing places anchored to the “here and now” showing a different but possible world without falsifying reality. The concept of heterotopia in literature, therefore, brings with it the intention to experiment and explore the social order, the *status quo* of places, maintaining a relationship that is at the same time refractory but immanent. In this sense, quoting Westphal (2011, p. 59), literature is “the experimental field of alternate realities”. In this framework, following the French scholar (2011, p. 63), heterotopia is comparable to a “laboratory of the possible”, in that our world’s spaces find new existential opportunities as they are “seen/created from the Other” (Doron, 2008, p. 208). In accounting for my theoretical framework, I was also inspired by Blanchot (1982), who not only legitimized the idea of literary space but also theorized it as a notion evoking the break-out from what traditionally is referred to as *space*, made up of subjective representations of a different way of living the world.

#### **4. Data Analysis and Discussion: Heterotopias in *Invandrarlitteratur*: Emblematic Spaces, People and Feelings**

As suggested by Anne Heith (2018), contemporary Sweden is a country that can be narrated in new spatial forms, as immigrant writers try through their accounts to provide a different narration of the surrounding cultural, social, and linguistic environments. In the next sub-sections, I will examine textual excerpts to show how heterotopian suburbs in Kallifatides, Anyuru and

Sattarvandi define themselves respectively about the body of place, people, and feelings. Since the works analysed cover exactly thirteen years, a special focus will be devoted to how the perception and narration of the suburban dimension change from the first generation author Kallifatides to the second-generation voices Anyuru and Sattarvandi.

#### 4.1 Heterotopian Suburbs and “The Body of Space”: Theodor Kallifatides’ *Det Sista Ljuset*

Theodor Kallifatides was born in Greece in 1938 and emigrated to Sweden in 1964. He is the first author to be associated with the *Invandrarlitteratur*, of which he is defined the pioneer, not only for his debut novel *Minnet I exil* (“The memory in exile”) in 1969 but also for several novels written in Swedish, including *Det sista ljuset*. This novel reflects on post-migration identity, described through the figure of two Greek first-generation parents residing in the *Miljonprogram* suburb of Rinkeby, in Stockholm. They go through identity and cultural crisis after learning about their son’s suicide, but the thematic issue of the novel is a careful criticism of Swedish society, offering an intergenerational perspective on the life of a family in exile that changes with the socio-cultural structure of Stockholm through the 90s.

Rinkeby’s representation in *Det sista ljuset* is such that the periphery reaches the contestation of its self-image and any “projection [or] [...] ‘objectification’ of knowledge” (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 289), feeding its nature of space radically other in contrast to the centre. An example of this is the following description of Rinkeby provided by Kallifatides (1995, p. 119):

Han tog alltså tunnelbanan och när han kom ut till Rinkeby förstod han vad biskopen hade menat. Det var som att flytta till ett annat land. Knappt någon människa omkring honom talade svenska. Den gatulösa förorten levde ett eget liv. På torget kunde man köpa varor från alla håll i världen. Det fanns en energi i luften och samtidigt ett avståndstagande som man lätt kunde misstolka som saknad.

“Then he took the subway and when he got to Rinkeby he understood what the bishop meant. It was like moving to another country. Very few people around him spoke Swedish.

The suburb without roads lived by its own life. In the square, you could buy goods from all over the world. There was an energy in the air and at the same time a distance that could be easily misunderstood as absence”. Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.

Analysing this excerpt, Leonard (2011) had already noted that Swedish suburbs were comparable to heterotopia. Although he focused on heterotopia of *crisis* (see above), analysing this fictional cross-section of Rinkeby’s life, I will concentrate on the general concept of

heterotopia by providing in which way it is possible to detect some of its principles enunciated by Foucault: Rinkeby provides radically different ways of conceiving interpersonal relationships, in which also the use of the dominant linguistic code, i.e. standard Swedish, is subverted through the juxtaposition of foreign languages and cultures (the “incompatible places” mentioned by Foucault) and reduced to a mere exception (“very few people around him spoke Swedish”). Rinkeby is a place of closure because it gives the narrator the impression of being in another country, a country “without roads” (“absolutely different” from any other space), but it is at the same time a place of opening as it shows connections with every corner of the world (“you could buy goods from all over the world”). Rinkeby is a place of opening and connection also because, if very few people spoke Swedish, then other foreign languages could be heard in this global periphery. Furthermore, by organizing life and coexistence practices in different ways, Kallifatides’ Rinkeby takes on an oppositional relationship with the centre, becoming a place where the normal conception of time and space is contested by rhythms and exchanges of multilingual and multicultural encounters. In Kallifatides’ Rinkeby we are witness of heterocronies through an “absolute break with [...] traditional time” (Foucault, 1986, p. 26).

This generally enthusiastic description mirrors the widespread genuine interest in multicultural artistic production that arose during the ‘90s in Sweden, especially towards the suburban culture in general, when the hip-hop group of The Latin Kings gained popularity and stimulated a growing fascination towards an exotic multicultural world. This enthusiasm seems to emerge from Kallifatides’ description even though Rinkeby, so the text, is also described as a place of *avståndstagande* (“distancing”) evoking a sense of *saknad* (“absence”). The reason for such an atmosphere may reside in the fact that Rinkeby is so different from the centre that it could be felt like a puzzle made of a myriad of fragments assembled from several regions of the world. Therefore, Rinkeby could be misinterpreted as an “absence” inasmuch as it is a fragment, a sort of enclave, a place that simultaneously is and is not in Sweden. The absence Kallifatides refers to can perhaps be interpreted as an absence of an image or the concrete body of Sweden as a whole. In this sense, Rinkeby is a heterotopia as space outside “the required mean or norm” (Foucault 1986, p. 25) in its fragmentary dimension. A fragment is something mutable, uncertain and, therefore, distressful. Although being a set of fragments, Rinkeby seems to be absent from Sweden because it mirrors the essence of the entire world, placing itself more as a *pan-o-topia* or *imago mundi* (Ameel, Finch & Salmela, 2015, p. 3) than a *heterotopia*. Starting from this description, it is

possible to frame Rinkeby as “both and also neither [...] space apart from the order of everyday life combining multiple spatial functions or symbolic meanings in one site” (Ameel, Finch & Salmela, 2015, p. 7).

As observed by Molina’s (1997) and Milani’s (2020) investigations, stereotypical classifications as “immigrants areas”, “problem areas” and “No-go zones”, are images that have produced (in)visible boundaries in the cities, corroborating the idea of a scientific subdivision of urban space into ethnically differentiated areas. The hard and unchangeable image of Rinkeby as *utsatt område* (“vulnerable area”) that was arising in the 90s is contrasted in *Det sista ljuset*, where it is described as a crossroad of accents, colours and smells, a suburb where the difficult relationship between centre and periphery emerges in its positive sides. In this passage, indeed, we notice the difference between what Lefebvre (2014, p. 291) called a *representation of space* and *representational space*, i.e. the difference between the planned space of “technocratic subdividers and social engineers”, and the “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of [...] writers [...] which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate”. Kallifatides’ Rinkeby may also be associated with Lefebvre’s *differential space*, where old relations are dissolved and new ones take place, a “new space [that] cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences” (2014, p. 293).

The north-western suburbs (among others Rinkeby) are reachable from the centre via the famous *blå linjen* (“blue line”) of Stockholm’s underground, which is described in Kallifatides (1995, pp. 5-6) as follows: *Tunnelbanan mot Akalla och Tensta kallades inte längre Orientexpressen utan Safaritåget. Den allra senaste tiden hade någon skämtare försökt införa namnet ”Den transsibiriska järnvägen” med tanke på alla nyanlända ryssar* (“The metro towards Akalla and Tensta was no longer called Orient Express, but Safari-Train. Lately some jokers have tried to introduce the name “Trans-Siberian Railway” because of all the Russian newcomers.”). The subway, which is the means of transport that catapults people from the centre to the suburbs and vice versa, is called in three different ways: Orient Express, Safari-Train and Trans-Siberian railway. The different ways of calling, and therefore conceiving the subway, are names that not only convey an attribute of the places it crosses, but are also a mirror of a rethinking of the city’s structure, where evoking images of Orient, Safari or Siberia is a reference to anything that is not Swedish, and thus incompatible with the mainstream image of Stockholm. This incompatibility not only confirms the idea of Swedish suburbs as spaces of opening, but it is also characterized by

a series of social, ethnic (increasing presence of Russian migrants) and discursive relationships that have been created over time around these places, providing a visual scheme of how cultural differences increase with increasing distance from the metropolitan centre.

As it comes out from these descriptions, Kallifatides' Rinkeby recalls the concept of rhizome developed by Deleuze & Guattari (2011). The narrated Rinkeby corresponds to a rhizomatic place as "a continuous or intensity region, which develops on itself avoiding any orientation on a culmination towards an external end".

Concluding my first section with a focus on "space" about heterotopian suburbs, thanks to Kallifatides *Miljonprogram* areas become an authentic experimental laboratory of literary productions bound, within a few years, to break into the national artistic panorama. As shown by Helgesson, there was great expectation towards the new multi-ethnic literature: "It is worth keeping an eye on this combination of existence from subclass and avant-garde in the new Swedish literature. *Miljonprogram* areas have [...] managed to become complex literary environments, detailed images of the current history of what is [...] delimited from Sweden" (2004, pp. 63-64).

#### **4.2 Heterotopian Suburbs and "People": Johannes Anyuru's *Det Är Bara Gudarna Som Är Nya***

In this sub-section, I will turn to the analysis of heterotopian suburbs from the point of view of "people". I will resort to Johannes Anyuru, born in 1979 in Sweden to a Swedish mother and a Ugandan father. Anyuru connects to Kallifatides by indirectly recalling the Safari image through the wild and exotic *topos* of the jungle in his debut poetry collection *Det är bara gudarna som är nya*. In Anyuru's conception, however, neighbourhoods are monotonous places surrounded by steel and concrete, where marginalisation and distrust rule. Indeed, the poet describes the suburbs and the people therein as follows (2003, p. 55): [...] *Djungler av stål, oljiga svarta fiskar ligger/ skimrande kastade på trottoaren/ inslagna i blött tidningspapper* ("Jungles of steel, oily black fish / they lay glittering on the sidewalk / wrapped in wet newsprint").

Albeit indirectly referring to Kallifatides' Safari metaphor, Anyuru's perspective is more pessimistic. The comparison between the suburbs and an exotic place like the jungle makes sure that the whole city escapes hyperrational definitions, simultaneously denying the idea of cities as safe, easily passable places. As it is known, the jungle evokes images of inhospitable places, populated by hostile creatures. Linking incompatible dimensions as land (the jungle) and sea (black fish), Anyuru seems to resort to a heterotopia of deviation, a place where the proverbial

mobility freedom of the fish is negated, as people seem to be trapped there, outside their habitat. In these short verses, the fish metaphor mirrors the bodies of the immigrants who inhabit the suburbs. Their oiliness may refer to an image of slippery and constant instability, while their black colour refers to the immigrated citizens' dark skin. Anyuru's fish do not seem to have access to the much-proclaimed mobility; on the contrary, they are thrown on the sidewalk of the steel jungle, imprisoned in newspaper sheets. Framed in a postmodern dimension, Anyuru seems to highlight that the progress guaranteed by the *Miljonprogram* was just the beginning of crisis and dehumanisation. Faced with a functionalist architectural technique, individuals undergo an anthropological mutation. Here, we see an image of the suburbs as closed and isolated heterotopias, where people bear the burden of displacement.

Anyuru returns in another work (2018) to the bodily figure of the fish to describe the condition of the immigrants, in which he claims that there is a deeply rooted speech in Sweden for which the non-white citizen always feels alien and exposed to the gaze of the others and, as such he is a creature out of place as, so Anyuru, an "octopus fished on land". Also, this image portrays the immigrant as a fish living in an endless double exile, in a transit dimension in which the individual is not in his place, and where 'home' is a fragment, i.e. every- and nowhere simultaneously. The wet newspaper may, in turn, represent the asphyxial power in which those who live in heterotopia remain subjugated, diseased, and atrophied. Blackfish does not belong to the society of the country they populate: as they are not natives, they are indisputably a different kind of fauna. The steel jungle becomes a metaphor of Lefebvre's *representation of space* (2014) that intervenes on the subaltern body. According to Foucault's fifth principle of heterotopology, the Subalterns enter a place with the illusion of entering Swedish society, but they remain on the threshold of its entry door as "guest[s] in transit" (Foucault 1986, p. 26).

Similar to Kallifatides, Anyuru also allows a connection to Deleuze & Guattari's *rhizome* (2011), inasmuch as his description of the periphery as a steel jungle evokes an image of it as a place of organic, confused, unpredictable, flourishing, heterogeneous, and uncategorizable propagation, which are qualities that the two French philosophers ascribe to the rhizome. Unlike Kallifatides, Anyuru dismisses the "colourful" enthusiasm characterizing public expectations towards multi-ethnic Sweden, which seemingly disappeared when second-generation voices proposed a different and disillusioned perspective on *Miljonprogram* areas. Although not all of them have inhabited these areas in the first person, second-generation immigrant authors show

nevertheless a more complex and problematic perspective on multi-ethnic suburbs, compared to a first-generation author like Kallifatides who had, however, grasped the complexities of such places.

In summary, Anyuru's lyrical portrait of *Miljonprogram* shows a claustrophobic counter-space that crystallizes the individual in the image of the blackfish. Drawing on Foucault (1986, p. 22), Anyuru's heterotopia of deviation suggests that the present one is indeed also the epoch "of the dispersed". Thrown on the sidewalk, Anyuru's fish evokes Kristeva's concept of *abjection* (1982), described as the condition of an individual outside of the paradigm, deprived of his agency and disempowered or, as Butler (1993, p. 243) further elaborates, an individual who is *cast out* from society and lives in "unliveable and uninhabitable zones of social life, which are nevertheless populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject". In a few words, Anyuru's jungle of steel shows residual spaces, where the "residual" and "deviant" (foreign) beings of society reside.

#### **4.3 Heterotopian Suburbs and "Feelings": Hassan Loo Sattarvandi's *Still***

The third and last aspect of this study links heterotopias to "feelings", that I will analyse through Hassan Loo Sattarvandi, born in 1975 in Iran and emigrated to Sweden at the age of three. The general premise in this last sub-section is that Foucault (1986) also discussed the process of *desanctification* of space, which is to regard as a fracture in the distance between, among others, "public/institutionalized" and "private" space. Drawing on Bachelard, Foucault stated that there are not empty homogeneous spaces anymore: they are now filled with our perceptions, dreams and passions that allow us to contest a set of rules that govern our lives according to "a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down" (1986, p. 23).

By highlighting the centrality of individual sensitivity in the relationship between "self" and "environment", Sattarvandi's *Still* is an example of *desanctification* of a place. In my analysis of this novel, I will try to give continuity to the results of a study recently carried out by Sarrimo (2020) who, inversely, calls the urban literary setting a *dystopia*. *Still* tells the story of Nemo – novel's self-narrator – a young unemployed who spends his days in the company of friends with whom he abuses drugs and resorts to violence to settle neighbourhood conflicts with other groups. In Nemo's perception, the surrounding environment – accentuated by drugs – plays a fundamental role in determining his mood. For example, he strongly highlights the feeling of panic and

frustration generated by the monotony of functional and unattractive concrete buildings in Hagalund, a north-western suburb of Stockholm, where the story takes place:

[...] *ibland visste jag inte ens var jag var, var jag stod, vad jag såg, vem jag såg och allt omkring mig var byggt på samma sätt, med samma färger och vi som gick omkring i detta gick i samma takt, med samma blick, och samma – samma – samma och inne, innanför bröstet vaknade tristessen mer och mer och paniken spred sig ut i kroppen och känslolösheten var där och inget kunde döva den nu [...].*

“[...] Sometimes I didn’t even know where I was, where I stood, what I saw, who I saw and everything around me was built in the same way, with the same colours and when we went around with the same step, with the same look, and the same - same - same and inside, inside the chest woke up the sadness and panic spread more and more around the body and the numbness was there and no one could silence it now [...]” (Sattarvandi, 2008, p. 121).

In contrast to the marvel felt by the self-narrator in Kallifatides, this excerpt shows a negative, even nihilistic resignation about the suburb. It is important to note the continuous repetition of *samma* (“same”) as an attempt to emphasize the depersonalizing monotony of *Miljonprogram* buildings, in which Nemo loses cognition of both his location and himself.

Indeed, identity and spatial issues are central themes in *Still*, in which the name of the protagonist, Nemo, shapes an important intertextual link with a worldwide known literary masterpiece: as Sarrimo notes (2020, p. 62), “Nemo is Latin for Nobody but is also the main character in Jules Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. In Verne’s novel, Nemo [...] lives on his submarine *Nautilus* where he rules as sovereign. [...] Sattarvandi’s Nemo is Nobody, living in limbo or exile. [...] He is trapped”. Just as Verne’s Captain Nemo lives isolated from the world in his *Nautilus*, Sattarvandi’s Nemo lives in what I would call a ‘*terra firma*-submarine’, the submerged Hagalund far from the rest of the society. This *Nautilus*-Hagalund becomes a space where society’s requirements – by the perfect heterotopia – are not met. On the contrary, they are challenged. The urban submarine in which Nemo lives is, therefore, a place that has a metaphorical similarity to the Foucaultian heterotopia *par excellence*, the ship, a “floating piece of space” (1986, p. 27)

Nemo’s Hagalund is lived from a personal perspective that describes the space, for its chromatic, stylistic and rhythmic monotony, with feelings of panic and delirium such as to cause him physical damage that he transfers to the objects of the surrounding environment: *några timmar*



*senare [...] gick [vi] [...] förbi de gråtande blåa husen och in i ett tomrum [...]; [...] och där inom mig skrek de tomma intetsägande höghusen i sin blåa falska fasad* (“A few hours later [...] we passed [...] in front of the crying blue buildings in a space”; “And there inside of me the insignificant buildings screamed in their false blue façade”) (Sattarvandi, 2008, pp. 42, 199). Feeling imprisoned just as Anyuru’s black fish, Sattarvandi’s characters are surrounded by buildings that act as living bodies, depicting in detail the ruined inner landscape of the self. The events narrated do not take on the value of experience as something that settles in the memory, but rather everything is reduced to a mere circumstance that determines a superficial pileup of meaningless actions. Nemo and his friends are simultaneously at one with the place they live in and profoundly alien to it. The steel-concrete jungle where the characters are trapped establishes with them a strong empathic relationship, it reflects their feelings of senselessness and, therefore, cries and screams. Here, probably more than in Kallifatides, we grasp the active and sensitive relationship between the self and the external world, in which the expressionistic Hagalund’s description is not separated by Nemo’s personal feelings and perception. Nemo sees his feelings reflected on Hagalund’s buildings, but these, in their turn, contribute to shaping his mood.

It emerges clearly that Hagalund is not just a background, but rather a central and influential topic within which its inhabitants become members of a mechanism of a destructive (post)modernity. As sharply noted by Sarrimo (2020, p. 68) after analysing this same excerpt in her study, “being in Hagalund amounts to being powerless, subjected to a power that never shows itself”. Analysing such a tough reality and a condition of deep psychological distress, Sattarvandi’s novel seems to approach the social realism postulated by Behschnitt (2010), even though the author also takes up the heritage of postmodernist experimental prose that lends itself well to the almost psychedelic descriptions of the Swedish suburbs.

The protagonists’ movements are very limited, they never leave Hagalund, which turns into a living prison, a place of internal exile that, like a mirror (identified by Foucault as another example of heterotopia), reflects the feelings of the self on building façades and vice versa. These feelings, however, do not trigger any development, they provide no *Bildung*. As the title suggests, everything remains still, and the mistrust felt by Nemo remains as he shows no interest in changing society (he refuses to vote) and himself (he refuses to participate in professional training courses provided by the employment office). In such a mood of both social and spatial paralysis, therefore, he can’t but perceive the surrounding environment as monotonous and eternally equal: [...] *allt*

*blev likadant, första gården var likadan som andra gården, andra gården var lika menlös som den tredje gården och den fjärde gården var exakt lika intetsägende som den första gården* (“[...] everything became the same, the first yard was the same as the second yard, the second yard was just as harmless as the third yard and the fourth yard was exactly as meaningless as the first yard”) (2008, p. 33). In this passage we notice how the words *gård* (“yard”) and *likadan/lika* (“same”) are repeated frequently, as to underline the monotony of space and its senselessness (*menlös/intetsägende*). With all its identic yards, Hagalund is very much a place of disorientation and frustration, a cacophonic delirium of intertwined labyrinths of concrete.

As Sarrimo (2020, p. 56) tried to show through the concept of *dystopia*, the narrated Hagalund mirrors and refracts Nemo’s feelings, representing a place with no perspectives. Not completely unlike Sarrimo, but still moving away from her use of *dystopia*, my suggestion is that Hagalund emerges as a rhizomatic heterotopia, a *mental* space where the sensorial experiences of the characters about the *representation of space* (Lefebvre, 2014) make it possible to abandon the *hic et nunc*, deterritorialize the ‘self’ by a simultaneous sense of both belonging and alienation, and question every other space of society. Along with Anyuru, Sattarvandi writes from the perspective of the postmigrant writer, i.e. “the ‘second-generation immigrants’, [who] do not so much mark the phenomenon of migration as that of the aftermath of migration” (Yildiz, 2012, p. 170). As postmigrant writer, Sattarvandi shows a gloomier perspective on multi-ethnic suburbs after the “ethnic turn” in Swedish culture, in opposition to the almost idyllic description by first generation Kallifates. As it emerges from Anyuru’s and Sattarvandi’s texts, modernity has come to be synonymous with the crisis of the “far” and “dispersed” (Foucault, 1986, p. 22), i.e. the citizens in double exile from both home and host country, who “experience space as an obstacle, as a resistant ‘objectivity’ at times as implacably hard as a concrete wall” (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 293).

## 5. Conclusion and Final Discussion

Stockholm is regal, conservative, the cradle of Swedish spirit. Its periphery, on the other hand, represents the myth of a failed utopia. What Borg (2011) has called the *Stockholmsmyt* (“Stockholm-myth”, a literary construction of urban experiences narrating the early 20th century Stockholm as a symbol of Swedishness) also finds its anti-myth, i.e. the postmigration narratives of the periphery between 20th and 21st century, resulting from a discursive construction that portrays the suburbs as the complete opposite of the old mythical, homogeneous and metropolitan

Swedishness. In opposition to the centre, the suburbs are constructed in public discourse as places of precariousness and danger, inhabited by individuals who undermine the myth from within. Nevertheless, these are also places that show the transformation from that bourgeois homogeneous “big town” of the last century to the current one, with its suburbs and its new citizens, which enlarge Stockholm and Sweden’s boundaries, real or imaginary.

However, for their cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity, suburbs are still regarded as the radical negation of the traditional image of Sweden. Similar to the spaces included in the concept of *peripherality*, combined with heterotopia, these areas “share a quality of apartness” (Ameel, Finch & Salmela, 2015, p. 7). Giving these environments a privileged space in contemporary Swedish literature, it is possible to grasp how the immigrant authors also manage to perform a political narrative, from the perspective of those who are Swedish, not necessarily born in Sweden and raised in the *förort*, but bringing divergent interpretations into play that go beyond the boundaries of the unilateral, uncritical narratives of contemporary Sweden, emphasizing how social inequalities may be place-bound (Sarrimo, 2020, p. 75).

I have tried to show it in Kallifatides with a positive and optimistic focus on “place”, in the attempt to describe suburbs as places essentially different based on Foucault’s six principles of heterotopia. I tried to show it also by focusing on “people”, in the much darker image of the blackfish in a steel jungle formulated by Anyuru. Drawing on Foucault’s conceptualization of the ship as typical heterotopia, I have also tried to show through Sattarvandi that suburbs too can be floating, or better, can appear as submerged pieces of space, as they are enclosed in themselves and isolated from the rest of the country. The three works I have analysed show that space, as Lefebvre (2014, p. 289) puts it, “[...] is irreducible to a ‘form’ imposed upon phenomena, upon things, upon physical materiality”.

However, the periphery has not only heterotopian, but also rhizomatic characters (Deleuze & Guattari, 2011), which I find appropriate in a critical analysis of literary urban places in (post)migration literature. As Amodeo (1996, p. 107) notes, in such a context it is possible to speak of a “rhizomatic aesthetic”, which “arises from cultural contacts, from the overlapping of cultural traditions and from cultural mixtures [...] in which, however, a clear distinction between [...] foreign and native is hardly possible because of the manifold and unpredictable interdependencies.

Analysed in the critical and theoretical frame applied here, *Miljonprogram* areas appear as places where people can simultaneously feel both at home (near, side-by-side) and in an unfamiliar

place (far, dispersed). Concluding, Ameen, Finch & Salmela (2015, p. 7) stated that “city peripheries are part of the everyday life of cities rather than special sectors as Foucauldian heterotopias are”. I believe that both dimensions are not mutually exclusive, as heterotopian peripheries can be and are part of a city’s everyday life. Thus, heterotopias too are a central and defining part of society. In the wake of more recent studies (see Sarrimo, 2000; Tischmann, 2020), this investigation aimed to raise new research questions on critical literary studies and their development in migration-related Swedish literature, with a focus on whether heterotopia as a critical concept will find application in this context.

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