Durable camps: the state, the urban, the everyday

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Introduction

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At the beginning of the 21st century, camps constitute an increasingly prominent feature of social landscapes across the world. There are different types of camp formations, such as, among others, refugee camps in Africa, the Middle East and Asia; camps and 'villages' for Roma, Gypsies and Travellers (hereafter RGT) in Europe; and camps and centres for undocumented migrants and asylum seekers in Australia, Europe and the USA. Although regularly built as emergency devices for the management of displaced and undesirable populations, and justified as temporary necessities, camps often turn into durable socio-spatial formations whose logics of functioning and effects are articulated at the intersection of global, state and urban scales. This Themed Special Feature (hereafter TSF) offers a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of distinctive and varied camp formations in the Middle East, Western Europe and the USA. The project started in August 2013 with the conference session 'Urban Camps from a Global Perspective: Resources, Livelihoods and Governance' that we organized and chaired at the Annual Conference of the International Sociological Association Research Committee 21 on Urban and Regional Development. This TSF develops and problematizes the discussions that emerged during and after our session.

We conceptualize camps as durable socio-spatial formations that displace and confine undesirable populations, suspending them in a distinct spatial, legal and temporal condition. We dissect these features in both the management of camps by various ruling agencies and in the everyday lives of camp inhabitants. From this perspective, camps constitute heuristic prisms disclosing such wider social processes as (1) the creation of varied regimes of permanent temporariness; (2) the crystallization of national, racial and ethnic classifications, formations and projects; (3) the making and unmaking of frontiers and borders within and beyond the urban; and (4) the struggles over meanings, rights and belonging wrapped around the categories of citizen, refugee and asylum seeker. In this introduction, after discussing the main theoretical approaches to camps, we will address these four processes showing how each of the five papers engages some or all of them.

Durable camps: an interdisciplinary debate

Although the very first camp formations that we are aware of were used for military purposes (Hailey 2009, 2), in the 19th century, camps started playing a central role in the management of civilian populations. While some scholars argue that this first occurred in Cuba's mid-1890s Spanish colonies (Kotek 2005; Rahola 2003), others date it further back to the early 19th-century French colonies (Césaire 2004, 34–35;

Costantini 2007, 263). Beyond this disagreement about dates, camps were initially built with the explicit purpose of confining colonized civilian subjects in order to prevent uprisings. Soon, other colonial rulers recognized camps' governmental efficiency, which was strengthened by the barbed wire—in 1900 Lord Horatio Kitchener adopted them during the Boer war in South Africa, and four years later the Germans did the same in Hereroland, that is, today's Namibia. Thus, camps were imagined, built and employed as an effective way to displace and confine colonized, raced subjects outside the national (metropolitan) legal order. After the First World War, and increasingly as decolonization unfolded, camps started being adopted also in the metropole as tools for the control of the internally and internationally displaced. Hannah Arendt's (1951) preoccupation with camps was consistently related to the nature of human rights, which according to the philosopher could not guarantee any real protection to stateless subjects. Her interest was primarily driven by questions about citizenship, membership and belonging in light of the Nazi totalitarian project, including its efficiently woven camp system of concentration and extermination.

Contemporary philosophers have continued to address these questions in relation to camps. One of the most prominent of those voices is Giorgio Agamben (1998, 2000, 2003), whose effort of bringing together Schmitt, Benjamin, Arendt and Foucault's thinking has elicited an intense and increasingly interdisciplinary debate about camps across the social sciences. Unfolded primarily over the last 10 years, the debate has involved Geography, Politics, Sociology and Social Anthropology. The geography/ies of the camp, largely predicated upon the synthesis between *Ortung* (localization) and *Ordnung* (order) that is embedded in Schmitt's (2003, 42) concept of '*nomos* of the earth', have been the focus of insightful dialogues between Agamben's theorization and perspectives coming mostly from critical geography and critical geopolitics (e.g. Diken and

Laustsen 2002, 2005; Ramadan 2009). This research stream has detected in Agamben's (1998, 95) well-known notion of the camp as 'the *nomos* of the modern' a specific spatial formation, which is at the core of 'geographies of exception' (Minca 2005, 407). More comprehensively, Agamben's notion of 'the state of exception', and the camp as the space in which that 'state' becomes the rule, has inspired a new 'spatial theory of power, sovereignty and displacement' (Ek 2006, 364).

With his call for 'an urban anthropology of camps', Agier (2002a, 2002b, 363; emphasis in original) has challenged scholars to go beyond an engagement with Agamben's philosophy: '*urban* ethnography … was intended to make it possible to go further than can be done with a philosophy of camps, no doubt a critical philosophy but a philosophy without *subject*' (see also Bauman 2002; Malkki 2002). Agier (2002a, 322) interrogates camps, especially refugee camps, from an urban lens, fundamentally asking one question: 'can the refugee camp become a city in the sense of a space of urban sociability, an *urbs*, and indeed in the sense of a political space, a *polis*?' While the 'urban debate' triggered by Agier's call has tended to frame camps in opposition to cities and to conceptualize them as ultimately deficient or incomplete urban formations (e.g. Malkki 2002), it has also opened an analytical space for looking at camps beyond assumptions about passivity, victimization and top-down management (see, e.g. Bauman 2002, 343).

Recent works in anthropology, sociology and geography have used this urban lens as a point of departure to explore issues of citizenship, rights and political action in camps (Grbac 2013; Sanyal 2012, 2014; Sigona 2014; Ramadan 2012; Retcliff 2013). Thus, for example, Grbac (2014, 20–25) has extended urban debates about 'the right to the city' to the claims that refugees make about the places they inhabit. Similar to Grbac's 'right to the camp', Sigona (2014) has used the concept of 'campzenship', which mirrors the concept of 'citizenship',

to address a case of political agency among camp inhabitants. Along similar lines, Sanyal (2010) has explored how camp inhabitants engage in informal practices such as squatting usually tied to urban configurations.

This TSF continues this engagement with the complex and varied (dis)articulations of camp formations on the one hand and the urban on the other, calling for an urban scholarship on camps. While much of the current debate is based on refugee camps and its inhabitants, we strive to establish a comparative approach to camp formations beyond refugee camps, heeding in this way Malkki's (2002, 355) call for 'critical comparisons and analytical linkages' between 'devices of care and control' (353). Comparing refugee camps to other camp formations for undesirable populations allows detecting common aspects of various geographies, legal statuses, regimes of governance and everyday experiences. It is also a step toward a broader comparative approach to the management of undesirable populations. Indeed, camps' functions of containment and control of the undesirable directly speak to the management of marginal urban formations such as ghettos and hyperghettos (Wacquant 2008), within the same tension between welfare/humanitarian and police/military interventions. We also keep together forms of management and everyday ways of living, calling attention to the links between the structural and experiential dimensions of regimes of permanent temporariness. While the above-mentioned works have attempted to establish the urban and political features of camps, a fuller understanding of the conditions under which and the forms in which camps become incubators of urban processes and camp inhabitants think and act politically requires bringing together top-down forms of management, ranging from securitized humanitarianism to neoliberal governance and the formation of everyday practices, claims and relationships. It also requires situating camps within broader historical and contemporary racial formations in their various permutations,

thus linking spatial and racial processes as they unfold at the level of both governance and everyday life.

Durable camps: four processes

This TSF addresses four processes: (1) camps' regimes of permanent temporariness; (2) camps as racial formations; (3) camps and their connections to other spatial processes: frontiers, borders and cities; and (4) camps, citizenship and subjectivities.

Camps' regimes of permanent temporariness

Camps' condition of permanent temporariness is central to how they are planned, managed and experienced. This condition is the result of a plurality of factors and social forces—first and foremost ruling agencies' actions, but deep-rooted understandings of sovereignty and statehood also play an important role, as does spatial confinement. In particular, state and non-state ruling agencies typically perpetuate camps' temporariness, benefiting from it for the sake of controlling undesirable and dispossessed subjects. The temporariness of camps plays a key role in projects as varied as territorial occupation, ethnic domination and the pursuit of neoliberal governance. All five papers of this TSF shed light on the ways in which camps permute from emergency temporary devices into durable socio-spatial formations. A key example is Herring and Lutz's analysis of the USA's large homeless encampments as the products of long-term penal and welfare urban policies for the poor, within the context of chronic shelter shortage. In the early 2000s Seattle, for example, the police relocated a number of organized encampments *27 times in two years*, before fixing them in precise urban locations and embedding them into the urban fabric. In a country hosting 5393 carceral facilities and where '1 every 31 citizens is detained, on probation or on parole' (Sassen

2014, 65), the flexible and arbitrary imperative of neo-liberal governmentality sharply informs the logic of these durable encampments.

Similarly, Picker, Smith and Greenfields' analysis of the 50-year-long formation of camps for Roma, Gypsies and Travellers (hereafter RGT) in Italy and the UK sheds light on that highly flexible imperative. Since the 1970s, state authorities have built those camps as emergency and temporary devices for both sedentarizing seemingly deviant subjects and providing them with culturally appropriate housing. Yet these places have regularly turned into permanent sites of confined deprivation and exclusion, ultimately becoming handy devices for the management of urban marginality through arbitrary governance actions. Katz's historical–political analysis shows how the establishment of the Israeli state was accompanied by the formation of camps, which permuted from temporary to permanent constructions. Her analysis of two camp formations, Yerucham for arriving Jewish migrants, which was built top-down by the state and Rachame, for Bedouins, which was set up by its own inhabitants, compares their trajectories from 1948 to the early 2010s. In the specific case of Rachame 'village', or makeshift camp, she shows how the Israeli state never officially recognized the camp, hence strategically forcing its inhabitants into a permanent state of precariousness governed by arbitrary surveillance and often state violence.

Permanent temporariness also characterizes Fontanari's paper, which discusses the experiences of asylum seekers in a German *Wohnheim*, that is, a type of camp formation where asylum seekers are waiting for their application to be processed. The author shows that in their waiting, camp residents experience time as a dimension which is detached at once from the future, and from linearity, instead solely reduced to an indefinitely permanent temporary dimension. Finally, Pasquetti's ethnography of the interplay between humanitarianism and militarism in and around a Palestinian refugee camp is another key example of how camp governance can strategically impose durable regimes of temporariness in order to control populations deemed deviant and dangerous. From a comparative perspective, the author approaches on the one hand a camp formation, i.e. a refugee camp, involving ruling agencies such as the army and a humanitarian organization whose mandate or presence is bound to be temporary but becomes permanent, and on the other hand, an urban formation, i.e. an urban district, which is well embedded within a state and under control of state law enforcement agencies that are not supposed to go away.

Camps as racial formations

Camps' colonial origins inscribe camps squarely within the history of race; not only of race as governing project, but more broadly, as 'political theology' (Goldberg 2009, 254). Here the colonial connection is structurally related to 'chang[ing] the heart and soul', namely, the biopolitical neoliberal project that Margaret Thatcher first envisaged about 30 years ago. The current proliferation and diversification of camp formations across the globe account for the extent to which that project is succeeding. Camps are able to reduce their inhabitants to mere abstractions deprived of subjectivity and peculiarity because camps, like prisons and ghettos, forcibly lump people together, fixing them onto a chthonic socio-spatial order that is sustained by a doxa according to which seclusion is a necessary response to a seemingly threatening global and urban disorder. Scholars have extensively studied how non-European urban contexts are permeated by the logic of race as a socio-spatial ordering principle. Yet, the same cannot be said about European urban contexts. Picker, Greenfields and Smith extend this focus on race and the urban to Europe, specifically to the 'Gypsy camp'. By looking at the UK and Italy, the authors argue that the Gypsy camp can heuristically be viewed as a

'spatio-racial political technology', contextualizing the racist assumptions behind its very origin within the 20th century's shift from colonial to metropolitan ideologies and technologies of governing social heterogeneity.

This TSF's focus on specific spatio-temporal fixities that camps are able to manufacture and effectively maintain speaks to broader questions of racial state projects and to the interplay between race, nationhood, territory and space. Ethnic hierarchies proliferate within and among camps, as in Katz's detailed comparative historical analysis of Yerucham and Rachame. While on the one hand the dehumanization of Mizrahi Jews (Eastern Jews) in the Yerucham camp is safely kept in place and maintained due to the structurally isolating effects of the camp, the Israeli state's attempt to de-Arabize its territory reduces the Bedouins inhabitants of Rachame from a segment of a displaced indigenous population into an ethnically stigmatized grouping. Ultimately, both camps establish ethnocratic regimes, contributing to shaping the national(ist) territorial order of things. Finally, in her comparative analysis of a Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank and a Palestinian segregated district in an Israeli city, Pasquetti draws attention to the role that agencies of control, ranging from military agencies to humanitarian organizations, play in the formation and preservation of broader systems of racial domination.

Camps and other spatial processes: frontiers, borders and cities

Camps are clearly connected to both the making and unmaking of 'external' borders and the formation of 'borderscapes' at the local level, especially within cities (Lebuhn 2013). A focus on camps offers a privileged perspective on how 'the policing of borders' and 'the production of boundaries' are intertwined at the global, state and urban levels (Fassin 2011). Of the five papers, Fontanari's article on the system of camps for asylum seekers in Germany is the one that most explicitly engages the literature on borders. Rejecting 'the Fortress Europe' thesis, Fontanari shows how the German camps for asylum seekers contribute to produce an intricate 'border space' within and between European cities. She emphasizes how this European 'borderscape' has distinct spatial, legal and temporal features that affect how asylum seekers negotiate their everyday lives and how they experience both the camp and the urban environment around them. The Israeli–Palestinian case also points to the link between camps and the making and unmaking of both 'external' borders and urban borderscapes. Focusing on the formation of a Jewish migrant camp and a Bedouin camp in the context of the establishment of the Israeli state, Katz argues that camps are a privileged spatial–political tool for conquering contested 'frontiers' as they allow to distribute and concentrate different populations according to their respective positions of wanted insiders or unwanted outsiders within 'ethnocratic' state projects. In a complementary way, comparing displaced Palestinians in a West Bank refugee camp and Palestinian urban minorities in an Israeli city, Pasquetti shows how 'geographies of displacement' are complex border formations including both camps and cities. Finally, the urban and the camp converge in Western European 'Gypsy camps' under a precise zoning ideology's gaze relegating the 'Gypsies' at urbanity's very edge. This sanctioned spatial division-cum-isolation, as shown by Picker, Greenfields and Smith, produces spatial partitionings which perpetuate the largely uncontested conviction that RGT natural territorial belonging is the camp, rather than the city.

Camps, citizenship and belonging

Refugee camps are currently the key sites for theorizing camp formations. While studies of refugee camps have offered important insights into issues of control, access to

resources, political action and membership under conditions of permanent temporariness, they have quite uncritically paired up camps and refugees. However, camp formations cut across the static legal divide between refugees and citizens. Read together, the five papers of this TSF offer an original approach to camps beyond the paired concepts of camps and refugees, looking at how race, ethnicity and nationhood (e.g. the case of RGT in Europe and Palestinian Arab populations in and around Israel) and class (e.g. the case of homeless citizens in the USA) trigger the formation of camps and shape camp experiences among citizens. This does not mean that camp inhabitants' legal status is not a key axis for exploring how camps work and how life within them is negotiated. For example, Fontanari's study of camps for asylum seekers in Germany clearly shows that the distinct legal status of rejected but not deported asylum seekers deeply permeates all aspects of these asylum seekers' lives as well as their relationships with others, including German citizens and authorities. Yet, a comparative focus on camps such as the one we develop in this TSF is a necessary step for understanding how camp formations relate to experiences of citizenship and feelings of belonging. What do camp formations tell us about the identification and treatment of 'unworthy' members of the citizenry along axes such as class and race? And how do these 'unworthy' citizens experience their citizenship within camps? How do they make sense of their (non)belonging? What are the common features of camps across the legal categories of citizens, refugees and asylum seekers? By looking at camps as diverse as homeless encampments, 'Gypsy camps', refugee camps and camps for asylum seekers, this TSF addresses these questions from a comparative and global perspective. Further, by showing that camps are durable socio-spatial formations for the control not only of refugees but also of 'unworthy' and 'dangerous' citizens, this TSF opens up a comparative line of inquiry

on camp inhabitants and other types of 'urban outcasts' (Wacquant 2008).

Durable analyses

With this TSF we propose to bring camps from the periphery to the core of Urban Studies. The five articles we include in the TSF and the four processes we have discussed above—i.e. various regimes of temporariness and precariousness; racial and ethnic ordering mechanisms; bordering, partitioning and closures; and citizenship and inclusion/exclusion—establish a solid analytical bridge between the camp and the city, and by extension between encampment and urbanism. Moreover, due to the increasing proliferation of camp formations globally, camps serve as magnifying lenses through which understanding global forces of social change that take place in distinct socio-spatial configurations at the edges of various socio-economic and political systems. Sassen's last work articulates this point at length by focusing on the specificities and functioning of the 'systemic edge,' i.e. 'the site of expulsion and incorporation', arguing that 'the extreme character of conditions at the edge makes visible larger trends that are less extreme and hence more difficult to capture' (2014, 211; see also Agier 2014, 18).

There is a nexus between the proliferation of increasingly different forms of confinement, and the ways we imagine our rights and freedoms. All forms of encampments included in this TSF are to some extent infrastructural productions/refractions of certain ways of conceiving social and political life. Both ruling powers and camp inhabitants participate in these imaginative actions, and shape precise spatio-temporal contexts through situated material, symbolic and discursive practices. As emerges in all the articles, the asymmetric relations between the two groups and between their related imaginations forces us to keep questioning the fixity of those socio-spatial formations, their alleged inevitability and their concrete

functioning, both in terms of legal orders legitimizing them and political and administrative practices, idioms and forms of knowledge ruling them. Our aim here is therefore to contribute to ever more intensive, informed and inspiring dialogues and debates about old and new forms of confinement that maintain a bounded similarity with urban space, life and in general social processes. Hence, for us, the question David Harvey often asks 'What kind of city do we want to live in?' is intimately bounded to an idea of the future in which reflections and actions questioning those very urban, state and everyday durable socio-spatial formations would never come to an end. And where a truly responsible utopian stance on urban life and in general on human thinking and acting would keep on motivating enduring analyses, which would ever more effectively undermine the taken-for-granted nature of the social world. Urban Studies are particularly well positioned for this endeavor, not only as a multidisciplinary, critical and dynamic academic field, but also due to their established tradition of bridging critical analysis, social movements and policy practice.

Disclosure statement

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