



Geographies of the camp

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ABSTRACT

Facing the current growing global archipelago of encampments – including concentration, detention, transit, identification, refugee, military and training camps, this article is a geographical reflection on ‘the camp’, as a modern institution and as a spatial bio-political technology. In particular, it is about the past and present camp geographies and the apparatus of dispositifs that make them an ever-present spatial formation in the management of custody and care characterizing many authoritarian regimes as well as many contemporary democracies. I especially focus on the works of Paul Gilroy, Giorgio Agamben and Reviel Netz to discuss camp spatialities, the normalization of camp geographies, and related biopolitics. In doing so, I advance the argument to resist on present-day proliferating manifestations of camp and ‘camp thinking’, calling for the incorporation of ‘camp studies’ into the broader field of political geography to considering the geographies of the camp as constitutive hubs of much broader, modern geopolitical economies.

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This article is a geographical reflection on ‘the camp’, as a modern institution and as a spatial biopolitical technology. In particular, it is about the past and present camp geographies and the apparatus of *dispositifs* that make them an ever-present spatial formation in the management of custody and care characterizing many authoritarian regimes as well as contemporary democracies. It is also about the normalization of these very geographies, and the related need to incorporate ‘camp studies’ into the broader field of political geography, not merely as spaces of exception, but rather as constitutive hubs of much broader geo-political economies or, as Reviel Netz would put it, as part of specific ecologies of modernity based on the attempt to realize forms of total space and total mobility control (Netz, 2004).

In the summer of 2014, in preparation for this article, I was re-reading once again Primo Levi’s *If this is a man* (1991). While doing so, I was surrounded by a crowd of people at the beach simply enjoying their holidays on a Croatian island, like every summer. A sense of banal and reassuring normality was pervading that quiet landscape of leisure. My first thoughts went to the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa, in Southern Italy, where desperate asylum seekers often land on a beach populated by tourists serenely bathing in the sun, before being brought into the infamous identification camp on that same island, or being dispersed to other camps across Italy (see, for examples, Cuttitta, 2012; Di Benedetto, 2007; Dino, 2006). Sometimes these floating bodies reach the shore

to die namelessly, other times they try to escape the police to avoid being interned, in both cases provoking a momentary disruption in the routinized slow pace of the holiday goers (Kitagawa, 2011). In any case, the overall normalization of ‘the camp geographies’ into and by the banal spatialities of vacationing, in Lampedusa, as in many other locations in Europe and elsewhere, is testimony to the almost invisible but real incorporation of the camp into our everyday practices, leading to the difficulties we encounter in relating the experience of the camp to the political landscapes of normality that regulate our daily practices.

There is a passage of Levi’s narrative that struck me particularly at that moment. It is where he refers to the memory of the camp and the impossibility of recounting the experience to his friends and family back home:

“It is my sister here with some unidentified friends, and many other people. They are listening to me and it is this very story that I am telling... I also speak diffusely of our hunger, and of the lice-control, and of the kapo who hit me on the nose... It is an intense pleasure, physical, inexpressible, to be at home, among friendly people, and to have so many things to recount; but I cannot help noticing that my listeners do not follow me. In fact, they are completely indifferent: they speak confusedly of other things among themselves, as if I was not there” (Levi, 1991: p. 64).

This brief observation, almost a philosophical one in Levi’s otherwise very factual account, struck me for two reasons, both

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related to the main argument of this paper: first, the fact that the camp, its experience, somehow seems to belong to the realm of the unspeakable, and therefore brings up questions about the possibility of testimony and especially about what, literally, ‘remains of Auschwitz’ (to use Agamben’s expression, 1998); second, it made me wonder: how are we, after Auschwitz, still able to metabolize the camps and remain fundamentally indifferent to their presence, implicitly rendering them as part of our everyday geographies? Or, to put in another way, what sort of mechanism is in place that allows ‘the camp’ to be normalized, to operate in some cases just next door to where we live?

Nazi and Soviet camps, but also first and foremost colonial camps, were clearly experimental laboratories for the new (bio) political technologies of control and exploitation implemented by those regimes. What was experimented in those enclavic spaces is still at the core of important debates in the humanities and the social sciences today. However, the most urgent question that inevitably emerges from those debates is the following: what is being experimented and produced in the contemporary camps proliferating around us? What is the current growing global archipelago of encampments – including concentration, detention, transit, identification, refugee, military, training but also leisure and recreation camps? (On contemporary detention and transit camp geographies in Europe see Migreurop’s website: <http://www.migreurop.org/>). These seem to be fundamental questions about the relationship between biopower and camps of all sorts and nature, which I believe geography and geographers cannot easily avoid.

In this paper I would like to reflect in particular on the biopolitical imperative that seems to be at the core of all camps. I also intend to interrogate the relation between these camp spatialities and broader contemporary geopolitical issues, by asking whether the camp, as a spatial formation, may indeed be considered the global nomos of our age. If so, what could actually be the theoretical (and urgently political) implications for our discipline facing the actual geographies of exception imposed precisely by the proliferation of new camps globally? I will try to do so first by briefly discussing the most recent developments in what I tentatively describe as ‘camp studies’. I will then draw on the work of three authors who have discussed the camp and its spatialities in important ways, offering arguably some of the most pertinent responses to the questions at the core of the present paper: (1) Paul Gilroy and his post-racial approach to camp thinking; (2) Giorgio Agamben and his conceptualization of the camp as a paradigmatic space of sovereign exception; and (3) Reviel Netz and his ‘environmental ecology of Auschwitz’ based on the history of the barbed wire.

I will look at how their work speaks to the urgency of a geographical understanding of the camp and the related need to develop a tentative spatial theory of the camp, which is one of the objectives of a much larger project about the bio-geo-politics of modernity that I have been engaging with in the past decade or so (Giaccaria & Minca, 2015a, 2015b). This will lead to my concluding remarks, and to a few considerations about the meaning of the camp in order to reflect on the *Arcanum imperii* of modernity (as suggested famously by Agamben) and its historical spatial formations of biopower, but also, perhaps more importantly, about today’s biopolitics and its consequences for geography ‘facing the camp’.

Camps, today

During the International Geographical Union (IGU) Regional Conference held in Krakow in August 2014, where the argument here developed was presented in the form of a *Political Geography*

Plenary Lecture, I had the opportunity to visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex once again, this time with a guided tour available to the conference participants. During these ‘tours’ one is never sure whether the rather disturbing display of material remnants to which the visitor is exposed is a way to enable reflection on the horrific threshold of modernity that was passed with no return in that site, or, instead, a way to somehow remove the experience of the camp, subtly isolating in an aura of exceptionality the ‘evil’ political economy rotating around what is considered the ultimate camp, the ‘capital’ of the Holocaust (Hayes, 2003). I intend to discuss the Auschwitz-Birkenau guided walk and the related tourist and heritage industry machinery elsewhere. Here, I would rather recall Auschwitz-Birkenau as the largest and most comprehensive camp complex realized by the Nazi mind, conceived to represent not only the engine of an entire industrial region but also the core of an entire continental geography. Nazi Europe was indeed planned and built around a true archipelago of camps:

“the entire geography of Jewish Europe [...] revolved around the death camps [...] as killing institutions, [and] the geographical reach of the death camps (in particular that of Auschwitz) was remarkable. The death camps killed people coming from the entire continent—all the way from Greece to Norway, from France to the Soviet Union. This was based on a geography of concentration and transportation spread across the continent” (Netz, 2004: p. 219).

Netz, in his path-breaking description of the environmental history of the barbed wire, dedicates many pages to examine the rationale behind the political and economic geography of the Nazi and the Soviet Gulag archipelagos. He recounts that when Stalin died in 1953, 2.5 million detainees were still interned in camps, in a system that some calculate may have claimed the life of about 12 million individuals since its inception (Netz, 2004). Nazism and Stalinism were indeed murderous totalitarian regimes, but camps were also created and implemented in most Western democracies all through the entire 20th century, and even today.

According to ethnologist Orvar Löfgren:

“It is tempting to name the twentieth century the era of camps: summer camps, auto camps, nudist camps, wilderness camps, fitness camps, trailer camps, baseball camps, holiday camps all proliferated. And other, more menacing, kinds of camps appeared: correction camps, military camps, refugee camps... although these two categories of camp belong to very different spheres, they have elements of a common structure – the idea of large scale, detailed planning and control, self-sufficient communities with clear boundaries. Management experiences, as well as blueprints of Tayloristic planning, are in constant circulation between the different kinds of camps” (2003: p. 245).

Detention camps, transit camps, concentration camps, refugee camps, training camps and tourist camps are to be found everywhere (for a discussion on leisure camps in relation to contemporary biopolitics see, Diken, 2004; Diken & Laustsen, 2004a, 2004b; Edensor, 2006; Minca, 2009, 2011). They all seem to be driven by a variable mix of custody, care and control, at times involving explicit and/or implicit forms of violence. All around Europe, we are for example faced with the proliferation of identification or transit centers for asylum seekers which often turn into real detention centers. The present day archipelago of such camps is powerfully illustrated by the maps produced by the *Migreurop* network (see <http://www.migreurop.org/>). The striking similarity between these cartographies of ‘schengenized’ Europe punctuated by endless

detention enclosures and those marking the Nazi archipelago of camps in the early 1940s is disturbing to say the least. All these different camps were – and in many contemporary cases remain – part of a set of broader political technologies, aimed at controlling mobility and ‘governing life’ through coercion and direct or indirect violent means. These are often presented as a necessary form of social prophylaxis; that is, interventions fundamentally concerning the health, the security/safety and in some cases even the ‘improvement’ of the social and political body of the nation (see Werner, 2003a, 2003b). They were and still are the reverberation of a distinct (albeit in many cases only implicit) mapping of race and culture, translated into real cartographies of people – people to be located in their proper places, or displaced, if not eliminated (for example via policies of forced ‘repatriation’).

Giorgio Agamben has famously and somewhat controversially claimed that the camp is the ‘nomos of our time’ (1998), a claim to which I will return later in the paper. However, the ‘camp concept’ (and the related set of practices) is certainly not new. In order to understand its origin, Paul Gilroy (2004) and many others suggest that one must consider the functioning of the colonial political economies. For Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen (2004a: p. 17),

“the camp is, first of all, a temporary site, a spatially defined location that exists only for a limited period. This definition is confirmed by the first camps setup by the Spaniards in Cuba in the 1890s and by the British during the Boer War in South Africa. These were followed by the development of homelands: Bantustans, those large ‘camps’ within white South Africa, by the Soviet Gulag, and by the Nazi concentration and death camps. As such, the story of camps is part and parcel of European history and cultural identity.”

It is indeed not by chance that the first concentration camps were created in the colonies between the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, where the concentration of an entire population soon became a consolidated practice.

About 10 years ago, I published an editorial on Progress in Human Geography entitled *The return of the camp* (Minca, 2005). It was a reaction to the Guantanamo Bay camp complex, and it represented my first written engagement with the work of Agamben. But Guantanamo was not a true ‘return of the camp’, since as noted above ‘the camp’ has never disappeared from sight during the post-war decades. However, what the appearance of the Guantanamo perhaps did was to visibly bring the concentration camp ‘back home’, and to assign it a pivotal role in a broader geography of terror and ‘protective custody’ implemented by the US government. In Cuba but not of Cuba, the Guantanamo Bay detention enclave is there to remind us that the camp is still among us, almost as a totemic space of exception of the early 21st century, the pivot of a global archipelago of imprisonment (Martin & Michelson, 2009; Mountz, 2013; Mountz, Coddington, Catania, & Loyd, 2013) that includes the dark geographies of extraordinary renditions (Gregory, 2004, 2006a; Minca, 2007; Reid-Henry, 2007), somehow forgotten by the media in recent times but still operating (Butler, 2006).

If the 20th century was ‘the age of the camp’, as Zygmunt Bauman (1989) also famously stated, the beginning of the 21st Century is then according to Agamben, Gilroy and many others the time when the camp, as a spatial political technology, may be virtually found everywhere. It is a time when ‘camp thinking’ may have become, albeit in new forms, pervasive in the fields of politics and culture (see also Goffman, 1961). This is precisely why Gilroy has been urging ‘the many of us’ forced to live ‘between camps’ to be prepared to resist the camp and camp thinking altogether, while always keeping in mind the historical but also functional

connection between the camp and colonialism, nationalism, Fascism as well as their biopolitics of race and culture (2004: p. 98).

Recent studies have even gone as far as describing all society ‘as a camp’ (Amoore, 2006, 2008; Diken & Laustsen, 2006). Some see the city as a camp (see Al-Qutub, 1989; Perouse de Montclos & Kagwanja, 2000), while others, following Agamben in particular, have discussed the camp as the political paradigm of our time. The camp is in fact the pivot around which spins what Agamben calls the biopolitical machine. The camp is often described as a limbo, as an extraterritorial spatial container with a void at its core, a void in constant need of being filled with/by human material, ‘biological substance’ (Agamben 2002; Giaccaria & Minca 2011a, 2015a, 2015b). Camps are also read as part of broader attempts at governing life by translating people, all people, into population, into figures, a mere biological matrix, as aptly illustrated by many scholars of biopolitics today (Agamben, 2002; Campbell and Sitze, 2013; Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2004; Mbembe, 2003). Camp spatialities are implicitly, or sometimes very explicitly, aimed at producing a specific socio-biopolitical body and ‘a remnant’, that is, the leftovers that the operations of the camp generate by selectively ‘cutting’ into the population at large in order to cleanse and protect that same body. As a consequence, the most urgent questions today regarding the camp are about the nature of such a biopolitical body, of the remnant, of ‘human disposal’ (Agamben, 2002; see also, Giaccaria and Minca, 2011b, 2015b; Gregory, 2006a; Holquist, 2003; Minca, 2007, 2015; Tyner, 2009, 2012).

The camp was and remains fundamentally connected to ideas of care/custody/protection, in line with the biopolitical objectives of what again Bauman (1989) has defined as the “State’s human gardener”, and with the attempts of not only all totalitarian regimes but also many Western liberal democracies to constantly ‘improve’ the biosocial sphere (see, among, many others, Esposito, 2010; Werner, 2003a, 2003b). In relation to this, we should perhaps ask whether the present day operations of biosecurity – somewhat expanding ‘camp thinking’ in many aspects of social life – are nothing but, once again, interventions of prophylaxis, attempts to protect and purify the socio-political body? Questions of biosecurity and global health are in fact assigning center-(political)-stage again to interventions aimed at the definition and the protection of life (and death), while engaging with new interpretations of the human body in relation to the possibility of bio-mapping offered by the new technologies, and of population management allowed by the implementation of biometrics (Amoore, 2006; Vaughan-Williams, 2008). The threshold between life and death is therefore not only constantly questioned, but also located at the very core of biopolitical considerations about the judicial order, and the relationship between individual rights – including that of residing in one country or location – and the collective body politic (Bauder, 2014; De Genova & Peutz, 2010; Kelly & Morton, 2004).

Camp studies

Critical scholarly work on camps has followed a proliferation of camps during the last decade or so. Broadly speaking, these more intense engagements on the part of social theorists (including human geographers) with the ‘spatialities of the camp’ (see Diken & Laustsen, 2006; Ek, 2006; Gregory, 2006a; Martin, 2015; Minca, 2006; Ramadan, 2009, 2013) may be associated with the effects of two major events. First, the war on terror and the new global geographies of exception imposed by the Bush administration and its agencies in the wake of the terrorist attack of 9/11. Second, the impact on political theory and philosophy – and on political geography – of Agamben’s *homo sacer* project, an impact that may be explained in terms of, but not limited to, Agamben’s capacity to speak directly to the consequence of the biopolitical regime,

imposed nationally and internationally by the Bush Doctrine and pre-emptive strategies (1998, 2002).

Diken and Laustsen, in their widely cited *The culture of exception* (2004a), speak of 'sociology facing the camp' (also the subtitle of the book) and of the potential impact of the proliferation of camps on how we should practice/use social theory. In a similar vein, it seems appropriate to ask how geography has faced the camp in the last decades. With no pretention to comprehensively review the vast and rich, albeit still relatively fragmented geographical literature on the camp, it may be helpful to recall here some key related themes and questions that have clearly emerged in the last decade or so and that are, I believe, of great relevance for those concerned with the present conceptualizations of this spatial formation.

The majority of work dealing directly or indirectly with the camp also engages with the relationship between biopower and violence and, more generally, with questions of biopolitics and the related spatial regimes of exception. A significant amount of research thus has been focused on refugees, asylum seekers and the associated identification, transit and detention centers (see, among many others, Gill, 2010; Mountz, 2011; Mountz et al., 2013; Shewly, 2013). Another research focus is on the constitution and the actual management of humanitarian geographies and related encampments (Arendt, 1958, 1998; Elden, 2006a; Fassin, 2005), including the actual practices of redefinition of the principles of citizenship (see Isin & Turner, 2002) and of individual rights in regimes of emergency – humanitarian and of other kinds – which often rotate around specific sets of camp spatialities. This body of work has also stimulated research on the so-called carceral geographies (see, Felder, Minca, & Ong, 2014; Moran, 2012, 2013; Moran, Pallot, & Piacentini, 2011; Moran, Piacentini, & Pallot, 2012), commonly preoccupied with new forms of concentration camps, prisons and detention centers related to past and present global politics (Gregory 2006b).

From a theoretical point of view, many of these interventions investigate questions of disciplinary powers, largely relying on broader Foucauldian interpretations. They understand the camp as a form of biopolitical governance, a 'spatial' political technology. In doing so, they also interrogate the production and the isolation of 'bare life', regularly touching on questions of sovereignty and sovereign power. Empirically, this has resulted in a growing interest in past and especially contemporary spaces of exceptions in all their forms and aspects (Agamben, 2005; Diken & Laustsen, 2004a), including work on airports and other transportation hubs (see Adey, 2007, 2009), enclavic tourist spaces (Minca, 2009, 2011), global mobilities (Gogia, 2006; Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006), gated communities (Diken & Laustsen, 2004b) and borders (see, among many others, Basaran, 2010; Van Houtum & Boedeltje, 2009; Van Houtum et al., 2010). Related to these are studies on the processes of militarization of the everyday via bordering, surveillance, racial profiling and biometrics (Amoore, 2006; also, Muller, 2004a, 2004b, 2008), together with the production of the 'geocoded worlds' that tend to read our daily living environments as spaces inhabited by mere biological bodies, figures, graphs, fictional 'complex adaptive systems'.

Important research in relation to camps has also considered new strategies related to global health and biosecurity, together with their impact on the management of migration, medical emergency, the welfare state crisis and post-disaster political economies (see among others, Sparke, 2009a, 2009b). All these fields are strongly affected by the implementation of new biotechnologies. The engagement with the geographies of biopolitics and the spatialities of the camp has drawn fresh attention to the historical role of the state, for example in the attempted realization of what Amir Werner (2003a, 2003b) has described as the 'landscaping of human gardens', that is, the implementation of the grand geographies

of the bios directed towards the crafting of a perfected social and biological national body. This results in policies in some cases explicitly aiming at producing a 'new man', as it was the case with the Nazis (Fritzschke, 2008).), as well as introducing biogenetics to the elaboration of new forms of governance, of (total) life governance.

In this respect, Gilroy (2004) rightly highlights how, after Auschwitz, the traditional tendency to think in terms of bioregions, typical of many regimes, is not over, but we simply find those same spatial ontologies having replaced race with culture in determining the right place for the right people. The effort in translating people into population (Philo, 2001, 2005, also 2012), typical of the calculative rationalities implemented for so long by all biopolitical regimes (see for example Elden, 2006b on the Nazis), has thus not disappeared. It simply has taken different forms, normally presented as an intervention in the biomedical and biosecurity fields (see Sparke, 2009b), or as the preservation of specifically localized cultural heritage elected to global significance (Macdonald, 2006). Finally, works on camps and biopolitics have emphasized the need of a geographical perspective to consider the presumed existence of new forms of anthropogenesis (Agamben, 2001; Minca, 2011) or, more precisely, on the crisis of anthropos (Rabinow, 2003). This concerns the whole philosophical reflection on the post-human and on the thresholds between the human and the non-human, which has gained strong currency in the humanities and which is interrogating the deeper nature of the bios today, in geography and beyond (Esposito, 2008, 2010; Minca, 2015).

With this very broad and certainly incomplete picture in mind, I now would like to turn to three authors who have approached the theorization of the camp and its spatialities in different but, in my view, very convincing ways, all providing what I deem important responses to some of the most compelling questions mentioned above: (1) Paul Gilroy, who, in his *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (2004), proposes a post-racial approach to the camp. He suggests that camp thinking, still so present in our cultural and political categories, must be denounced and dismissed, since it is a genuine product of the relationship between colonialism, nationalism and fascism; (2) Giorgio Agamben, who famously declared the camp to be the *nomos* of our time, and presented it as a permanent state/space of exception; and (3) Reviel Netz, whose enticing genealogies of the barbed wire and the related ecologies of modernity offer the ground for what he describes as an 'environmental ecology of Auschwitz'.

I consider their work particularly important for my argument for two main reasons: first, they provide a robust theoretical framework for the understanding of contemporary biopolitics; second, they all identify the camp as the site, as the actual and metaphorical space, where some of the key processes at the origin of the present-day crisis of modern political institutions come together and show their most violent face.

Tentative theories of the camp

Between camps

"...in fulfillment of the organic imperative, the integrity of imperial nations was actively re-imagined to derive from the primordial particularity of premodern tribes. [...] I want to call the resulting national and governmental formations 'camps'. [...] The name emphasizes their territorial, hierarchical and militaristic qualities rather than the organic features that have been more widely identified as the key ingredient in the antidote they supplied to mechanized modernity and its dehumanizing effects" (Gilroy 2004: p. 68)

There exist a clear convergence on the part of Gilroy, Agamben and Netz in recognizing the colonial origins of the concentration camp. All three cite the Boer War in South Africa and the Spanish-American War in Cuba as the two historical sites/events where the camp, the concentration camp, was initiated. These three authors also place a particular emphasis, although expressed via different argumentative routes, on the relationship between the emergence of the camp and the emergence of new calculative technologies – of population control and management – together with new strategies aimed at producing a new kind of total space, again, based on the governance of life, of both individual and collective life.

Gilroy, in particular, insists on 'the camp' as essentially a site where the intersection of colonialism, fascism and capitalism have generated new forms of biopolitical intervention, fundamentally centered on race. This is true for Nazism as well: what Nazism did, for Gilroy, was in fact to bring *homo sacer* to Europe, that is, to apply the biopolitical technologies previously experimented in the colonies to the old continent and on (some) European people. The relationship between German colonialism and Nazi expansionism is indeed now widely accepted and demonstrated (see, among others, Zimmerer, 2015). Gilroy wonders to what extent the German military, academics and doctors who contributed to implement Nazi genocidal policies had previously operated in the colonies and acquired some of the technologies later adopted in the operations aimed at the Final Solution (for the involvement of geographers in this 'transfer of knowledge' see Herb 1989, 1997; Wolf 2015; Zimmerer 2015). Incidentally, it is also well known that the Nazis were explicit about having been inspired by the US colonial model. Comparisons were made frequently between the American Far West and 'their' Euro-Asiatic Far East, between the treatments of the local populations and their resources (Kakel, 2013). In the colonies, the future Nazis learned a great deal about not only how to exploit people and resources, but also about race division and the breaking down of the human species into a biological hierarchy that was applied by all colonial powers to the subjugated populations (see Gilroy 2004). It is in the colonies that they apprehended how to de-humanize the Other in order to exploit it/them with not much remorse (Wolf, 2015).

'The camp', not by chance invented and widely realized in the colonies, in this perspective, may thus be seen as, on the one hand, the materialization of the intersection among colonialism, eugenics and biopolitics (see, among others, Ewen & Ewen, 2006); and on the other, a strategic and symbolic hub of the new geographies of total space produced by the complex politico-industrial system comprised of nationalism, fascism and capitalism in the 20th century. This is why Gilroy invites us to keep on reflecting on the camp, and on the geographical and anthropological ontologies at the origin of the camp in relation to the biopolitics of present day capitalism:

"camp thinking: 'the camp mentalities constituted by appeals to race, nation, and ethnic difference, by the lore of blood, bodies, and fantasies of absolute cultural identity, have several additional properties. They work through appeals to the value of national or ethnic purity. Their biopolitical potency immediately raises questions of prophylaxis and hygiene...' (2004: p. 83)

Gilroy also warns us that what he calls 'camp thinking' has not disappeared today, and that, as noted above, in too many cases racial categories have been simply replaced by cultural ones. As a consequence, the nation state is all too often still presented and conceived as a sort of 'camp', an orderly field of people and culture to be cultivated, controlled, protected and preserved in order to avoid contamination and corruption. But the camp is the

experimental laboratory where life has been and continues to be inscribed into order, into real and imagined spaces. And this is precisely why many of us are constantly located 'between camps', and are consequently subject to the biopolitical imperative that in the camp finds its theoretical and material origin and justification (Agamben, 1998; Minca, 2007, 2015).

This is also why, for Gilroy and many others, we need to reject camp thinking and all camps with their fundamentally racist ontologies. He therefore suggests responding to the camp with what he describes as a post-humanistic, post-national, post-racial, post-anthropological approach to the definition of 'our place in the world' and to all definitions of us-not-post-colonial-as-yet (2004: p. 83 and thereafter). This is also, finally, why we need to resist any analysis of the Nazi archipelago of concentration camps – and of their victims – that is in isolation from the histories of colonialism and capitalism. At the same time, we must be aware of the legacy, the presence and the effects of the camp geographies that still populate our everyday territories (see, for example, Amore & Hall, 2013).

The nomos of the camp

In his *Homo Sacer* project, Agamben extensively theorizes the camp as the paradigm of our time, as the nomos determining the new spatialities of sovereign power; again, the camp as the experimental laboratory of contemporary biopolitics:

"the birth of the camp in our time appears as an event that decisively signals the political space of modernity itself. It is produced at the point at which the political system of the modern nation-state, which was founded on the functional nexus between a determinate localization (the territory) and a determinate political- juridical order (the State) and mediated by automatic rules of the inscription of life (*nascita* or *nazione*), enters in a lasting crisis, and the State decides to assume directly the care of the nation's biological life as one of its tasks." (1998: pp. 174–175)

For Agamben, the concentration camp appears every time we normalize the exception, every time we give it a permanent location:

"when our age tried to grant the unlocalizable a permanent and visible localization, the result was the concentration camp. The camp is thus the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule and gains a permanent spatial form" (1998: p. 37).

Agamben's work, as the by now vast and rich secondary literature demonstrates, becomes very influential in the wake of 9/11 and the war on terror launched by the US administration, with which a new global archipelago of camps and spaces of exception are created (see Agamben, 1998, 2005). But in reflecting on the camp, Agamben also importantly engages with Nazism and its biopolitical ontologies. In particular, he examines the production of what he famously calls 'bare life', a biopolitical substance that is the end product of the total politicization of life, of any attempt to qualify life, to isolate in all of us something merely biological, distinct from our political existence (Agamben, 2005; also, in geography, Giaccaria & Minca 2011a; Minca, 2007). This explains why he places particular emphasis on the modern definitions of 'lives worth living', and on modern anthropogenesis that he describes as the process of attempted identification of the threshold between human/animal in all humans (Agamben, 2001).

The *Homo Sacer* project arguably tries to take further Foucault's work on the micropowers of biopolitics, and Arendt's speculations on totalitarianism. Critically drawing on Carl Schmitt and Walter Benjamin, Agamben identifies in the sovereign exception the process in which Foucault's and Arendt's projects may potentially come together and produce a new theory of modern (bio)politics. The paradigmatic site of this merging is indeed 'the camp'. The camp is also, for Agamben, the space where a specific topology of power is produced in order to complement the 'classic' trilogy of modern politics: territory, population and nation.

"The camp is thus the place within which" an unprecedented absolutization of the bio-power *di far vivere* ['to make live'] intersects with an equally absolute generalization of the sovereign power *di far morire* ['to make die'], such that biopolitics coincides immediately with thanatopolitics" (Agamben, 2002: p. 83).

Understanding 'the camp' is, for Agamben, crucial today because it represents the actual site where the arbitrary workings of the sovereign exception become visible and permanent and where the naked life of the *homo sacer* – the individual who can be killed without committing a crime – is produced via the 'structure of the Ban' (Agamben, 1998; also Minca, 2006, 2007). The camp, in this theory of sovereign power, is the actual space where citizenship may be arbitrarily put into question, where people are translated into mere biopolitical bodies. The camp as a political technology is precisely how de-subjection is made operational and possibly taken to its extreme manifestations, to the point of producing in the Nazi concentration camps, biopolitical individuals that are half alive and half dead. These are the 'biopolitical substance' that Agamben, after Levi, calls the *musulman* (2002).

The camp is finally where the threshold between life and death, and the qualification of a life-worth-living is constantly negotiated, reinvented, tested on real people and real bodies (how to explain otherwise that committing suicide in Guantanamo is considered by the US military as an act of propaganda (Risen & Golden, 2006), and that forced feeding is crucial 'not to let the inmates die', in this way keeping control over their own right to live or die? (see Johnson & Lubin, 2013)). The concentration camp, in Agamben's reading, is thus the ultimate laboratory where biopolitics turns into thanatopolitics, where people may be treated as merely members of a population (and translated into pure numbered living bodies, like in Auschwitz), and where race (or 'culture' in same case today) allows for the caesura/cut into the body politic that endlessly separate life into its political and biological essence.

The camp is also a topology of power that, in the name of custody and protection, isolates its inmates from the rest of society, in the attempt to cleanse the body politic from their corrupting or compromising presence. This explains to some extent the prophylactic and symbolic meaning of Guantanamo as part of the broader war on terror. But it also explains the extensive, pervasive and constantly increasing use of biometrics today, especially in governing people's mobility, in classifying them accordingly to new – often implicit sometimes very explicit – discreet principles of normality. Something that is also made possible, I would like to claim, because of the ghostly presence of the camp in the background (for example, in international airports, in order to keep 'in custody' individuals whose identities are questioned).

This is perhaps why for Agamben (1993) the refugee is today a key figure to understand the crisis of the state and of its biopolitical model, since the increasing number of stateless people and their uncertain status as well as the difficulty in assigning them a fixed and spatially stable identity are something that makes the crisis of the 'political present' strikingly visible and dramatic. And the camp

is all too often the state's response to this uncertainty; also embodying its parallel desire to 'contain' (read: control) the mobility of bodies with no clear identity and fixed location within the confines of the topographies of detention that have made the camp such a key modern political institution. The biopolitical treatment of refugees and their frequent internment into a spatial limbo, marked by the ambivalence of a permanent temporariness, reflects perhaps an incapacity on the part of the institutions governing these movements to go beyond the modern structure of sovereign power, and to reproduce, albeit in novel forms and under novel labels, exactly that same structure that has made the camp and the production of bare life a consolidated presence in many Western democracies.

Barbed wire

For Netz, as noted above, the establishment and the subsequent proliferation of the camps in the 20th century may be read as part of the broader histories of the barbed wire, and of this latter's relation to new forms of capitalism. His genealogical account of the barbed wire, Netz argues, is also an 'Environmental history of Auschwitz'. For Netz,

"History is embodied. We sometimes think as if history is made of names, dates, and ideas that interact in an abstract space of relations and influences. But history is not at all abstract: it is a matter of flesh-and-blood individuals interacting in material space" (2004: p. 228).

"the barbed wire was invented for a reason: because an entire panoply of technological advances led in a single direction, and possibly arose – and with it, the desire – to control space not merely as a sequence of isolated points but in a total way extending across the plane" (2004: p. 233).

In this genealogical framework, the camp must be intended as a specific technology of control and production of space:

"as in military history, barbed wire made its entry into political history in the Boer War, when the concentration camp was invented [...] certain political structures were built around this new tool, taking advantage of the new opportunities opened up by the concentration camp" (2004, pp. 129–130).

The topologies of the camp are thus presented by Netz as manifestations of specific global geographies of capitalism, originally based on the dramatic changes occurred in the rural political economies of the US during the 19th century and the related new technologies of space and motion control that followed those changes. The microcosm of the camp – whose genealogies he traces back to the creation of the ranch to transform the American West into a total capitalist space controlled by the financial centers on the East Coast – may be read as an extreme expression of a modern capitalist macrocosm, of the broader capitalist production total space. This, through the use of barbed wire and the advent of the railway had transformed, in the second half of the 19th century and in the decades to follow, the entire American landscape and, eventually, the modern ways to wage war and control people, globally. These changes were, again, the expression of specific and historically determined ecologies of modernity, resulting from a clear shift in the political technologies of capitalism. Such ecologies are what made the camp necessary and soon an ever-present spatial formation in the landscape of Western powers, especially in the colonies.

Drawing extensively on the examples of the Soviet Gulag archipelago and the Nazi camp system, Netz convincingly illustrates

their political economy and their related broader geographies. The biopolitical interventions centered on the creation of endless forms of camps had, Netz claims, in both cases a national and transnational spatial reach (see also, among others, Mazower, 2009). Nationally, both the Nazis and the Soviets normally presented them as forms of hygienic intervention; again, as a form of spatialized prophylaxis to preserve and give shape to the socio-bio-political body (on this see also Holquist, 2003). Internationally, for example for the Nazis (and, today, for US imperialism), they were part of an entirely new global geography of exception. Read in the light of Netz's environmental histories of modernity, the camp is to be understood, again, as a strategic spatial technology of the political. The camp is closely and crucially related to not only the history of barbed wire, but also the widespread use of iron and of the railway and, at the same time, the result of the dramatic changes that occurred in the US rural landscape and the military of Western powers.

Barbed wire/camps are thus presented by Netz as part of the same environmental history and the production of the same capitalist ecology, affecting both animals and humans with the same techniques. They were aimed at obtaining an extensive and intensive control of their motion, and they necessarily implicated the use of violence to educate, cleanse, contain, segregate. Camps, in this analysis, were laboratories where a new kind of animal, and then a new kind of people, were produced, but also where specifically modern topologies of power were aimed at reinterpreting the fundamental relationship between the human and the animal realms.

The proliferation of the barbed wire and the camp in fact crucially contributed to shaping and implementing theories and practices related to the government of life, of all forms of life. Camps, then, were seen as true experimental sites, but also as hubs, as pivots of extended networks producing specific political economies, which are based on archipelagos of imprisonment and encampment conceived to spatially separate people, to fix social categories and their meaning and to control motion and life.

“...unarmed humans, subdued and controlled by barbed wire, differed greatly from soldiers. They do not issue violence but are passive recipients of violence. They are reduced to flesh and in a sense become a mere biological receptacle for pain and disease” (2004: p. 130).

Netz provocatively concludes by suggesting that perhaps without the barbed wire, and the environmental ecologies that made it so important and globally diffused, Auschwitz would have possibly never happened. This is something of a shocking statement, but also a fascinating, interpretative line that forces us to consider the camp not merely as a space of exception. The camp is rather a key political technique fully integrated into a certain kind of capitalist space, a certain kind of bio-geopolitics originating in the colonies and then imported into Europe, with the imprisonment of animals and (certain racially and politically determined) humans, to violently constrain their mobility and manage their ‘bios’.

Would a different ecology of modernity, not based on the barbed wire and the camp have been possible? Can we learn to think ‘outside the camp’ today, in a time of pervasive biogenetics and biosecurity?

Geographies of the camp

After this reflection what appears clear to many of us preoccupied with the analysis of the ‘political present’ is that, most likely, the camp, in spite of Auschwitz, has not disappeared; on the

contrary, it is still proliferating in different forms around us, continuing to play a key role of spatial political technology in the management of people's mobility and custody. The camp is still an integrative part of the micro and macro geographies of power that characterizes the broader biopolitical projections of many Western democracies today, not to mention those enforced by authoritarian regimes. But the camp is also an invisible but effective presence in the everyday landscapes of many of us, as a possible irruption of the exception into the banal spatialities produced by our juridical orders, orders that may always be suspended in (perceived) situations of emergency, by selectively affecting (and isolating in real or virtual camps) subjects deemed to be potentially dangerous or lacking a clear identity.

The geographies of contemporary camps in Europe and in the Mediterranean, for example, are clearly illustrated by recent work (see, among others, Cuttitta, 2012) and bring the shocking realization that the camp still represents a fundamental spatial technology in governments' attempts to manage the dramatically increasing fluxes of migrants and refugees, especially but not only via the routes crossing the Mediterranean (Darling, 2009, 2010, 2011). And this is precisely why, Gilroy insists, we cannot morally accept to ignore the camp (2004: p. 87 and thereafter) – we all must be politically aware of the existence of camps next door, of camps among us. And this is also why there is arguably a growing need for a spatial theory of the camp or, perhaps better, for spatial theories that might help us understand the actual workings of the camp. If we accept that geography is indeed necessarily ‘facing the camp’, we should perhaps feel the urgency to engage with some of the questions with which I opened this article and to which I would like to return in this conclusion, proposing them as potential fields of enquiry for our discipline, faced as it is today with the powerful effects of contemporary camp spatialities.

If the camp is a biopolitical laboratory, as argued by the three authors discussed in the previous section, what is being actually experimented in our present-day camps? In fact, if the camp, as Agamben suggests, is a permanent space of exception, a juridical limbo, it is also a biopolitical machine spinning around an empty core. However, this ‘empty core’ needs to be constantly filled with ‘biological substance’ in order to continue playing its pivotal role in the related geographies of imprisonment: is this the fundamental reason why Guantanamo cannot be closed down? Guantanamo is, in fact, still there, facing all of us every day, as a permanent confirmation and warning not to forget that the camp is always possible, since it is the fundamental pivot of something greater, pervasive and genuinely global. Arguably, camp spatialities determine in a crucial way what happens ‘inside’, but they also affect the production of the political geographies outside the camp. The camp is double-edged, like barbed wire. We are indeed all affected by the presence of camps. New security threats continue to impose on all citizens the potential irruption of the camp into their personal trajectories, for example via the implementation of biometrics on our bodies at borders and airports, but also via racial profiling, insurance calculations, health care metrics and potentially arbitrary preemptive detention. After 9/11, we all inhabit new bio-geographies, populated by both virtual and very real camps. However, the ways in which individuals are actually exposed to this possibility greatly differs depending on nationality, social class, ‘racial profile’, gender, their overall embeddedness within territorial political institutions and their place of residence. This is why we need to continue reflecting on the logic of the camp, on what kind of space is produced by the contemporary archipelagos of encampment, and how ‘camp thinking’ contributes to the production of new selective political geographies of race and culture, as suggested by Gilroy and many others (2004: p. 83).

The camp, then, is a site for the production of total space, of a new dialectics between order/disorder, where protection, care, custody, detention, eviction, displacement, forced identification and other forms of mobility constraint and population governance tend to merge and reflect broader strategies related to the changing welfare state, to issues of global health, to the militarization of everyday spaces, to the colonization of individual and collective bodies via biosecurity interventions. The camp is thus a true political technology, determining the actual practices of citizenship today, and governing motion, governing life in important ways.

This is perhaps why the refugee is considered by many a key figure to study and understand the biopolitical today, since it is by definition a figure suspended 'in-between camps', though all too often actually detained in camps, with no clear status, no clear destination, a threshold figure of the crisis of the political today. If the refugee represents the materialization of the crisis of the modern state that is still founded on the trinity birth-nation-territory, as famously stated by Agamben, the creation of further 'transit' camps seems to be the only institutional response at present to the management of stateless people. Once again, it is as if by spatializing the 'refugee problem' within the apparently fixed and reassuring topographies of the camp, the topologies of power that continue to produce the refugee would be isolated or magically disappear from sight.

In light of the main arguments proposed by this article, a few final considerations are perhaps in order. Geography is indeed facing the camp today and must engage with its deeper spatialities. Biometrics and bio-surveillance are rapidly blurring traditional state borders and practices of bordering are becoming clearly more pervasive, although often less visible. Dead spaces of (bio)metrics, new bio cartographies and actual bio-geometries are constantly reproduced to monitor and control our movements and sometimes even our individual behavior, while they have the capacity of penetrating even the most banal of our practices. In doing so, they are supported by new technologies that fundamentally reconceptualize the human body, the 'bios in us', while we are constantly translated by their calculative rationalities into a spatialized 'population', into numbers, into pure biological entities; our flesh is (electronically) being stamped again, to provide the substance of a brave new (geocoded) world populated by presumed 'complex adaptive systems' applied to people and their landscapes of the everyday. Health, biosecurity and anti-terrorist strategies, in case of but not limited to emergency, continue to create new camps, while 'camp thinking' continues to operate by replacing race with culture, as noted by Gilroy (2004, see especially Chapter 1), and to produce new forms of 'bioregionalism', still active and ambivalently supported by institutions nationally and internationally: Bosnia, Ukraine and Palestine come to mind, to mention a few recent crises.

By quietly observing this, by complying with the biosecurity *dispositifs* as well as by co-existing with Guantanamo or refugee centers in all of Europe, frequently next door, are we actually acting as by-standers? For example, when faced with cases like that of the Bosnian rape camps (Boose, 2002; Stiglmayer, 1994), where women had become literally biological war zones, how should we have operated/reacted as critical thinkers, in particular as critical geographers? Life, death and their threshold are constantly being reinvented and spatialized in the camp, and therefore in constant need of geographical readings. The gorgon of the camp, its fundamental thanopolitics, and the very reproduction of necropolitics to speak with Mbembe (2003), all require genuine political commitment, good critical theory and substantial and provocative empirical work.

Derek Gregory, in his work on the biopolitics of war, has shown very clearly how the geopolitics of the naked body is still implemented in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond (2004, 2006a,

2006b). For Gilroy, biopolitics translates literally "inscribing life into land and order" (2004). For Netz (2004: p. 228), "history takes place as flesh moves inside space; it is thus, among other things, about the biology of flesh – as well as about the topology of space". As critical scholars and privileged citizens, drawing inspirations by these authors' suggestions, we should therefore always denounce all manifestations of 'camp mentality'. We should resist all discourses presenting (and practicing) the state as a camp, and all forms of normalization of the exception, that appears always, somehow, to pertain to others-from-us.

This is why we should never stop asking who and what is the 'biopolitical remnant' that we all are confronted with today, about 70 years after the Soviet army entered Auschwitz-Birkenau to witness that a true threshold of modernity had been forever passed. If the Nazis brought colonial horror to Europe via the camp, who and what is brought today into the camps populating our cities, airports, public spaces? And which form is the camp really taking? Is the refugee camp the ultimate experimental laboratory for the production of the new biopolitical space required by the present structure of sovereign power? Is the contemporary refugee this biopolitical remnant? Are we all becoming potentially (although selectively) refugees by willingly entering the magic world of biometrics? Finally, how are the geographical and anthropological ontologies that generated colonialism, eugenetics (and Hitler) and the related political technologies of capitalism manifested today? For how long shall we let them silently continue their production of endless new camps and consequently new camp victims?

I would like to invite the reader to return for a moment to Levi, who, in closing his last book, *The drowned and the saved*, one year before passing away, famously writes: "Auschwitz happened, therefore it can happen again, everywhere [...] I do not think that the combination of factors allowing for the Nazi genocidal project will return [in identical fashion]; rather I suggest that we should never forget Auschwitz to avoid the contemporary proliferation of those conditions that made it possible, perhaps in different places and different forms" (1989). This is why, I think, geography cannot stop interrogating the camp.

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