

# The Politics of Space and Place



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Edited by

Chiara Certomà, Nicola Clewer  
and Doug Elsey

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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The law locks up the man or woman  
Who steals the goose from off the common  
But leaves the greater villain loose  
Who steals the common from off the goose.

The law demands that we atone  
When we take things we do not own  
But leaves the lords and ladies fine  
Who take things that are yours and mine.

The poor and wretched don't escape  
If they conspire the law to break;  
This must be so but they endure  
Those who conspire to make the law.

The law locks up the man or woman  
Who steals the goose from off the common  
And geese will still a common lack  
Till they go and steal it back.

“Stealing the Common from the Goose”  
17th century commons poem (author unknown)



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## INTRODUCTION

NICOLA CLEWER, DOUG ELSEY  
AND CHIARA CERTOMÀ

In a world characterised by deep-seated, growing inequalities and highly asymmetrical concentrations of wealth and power, it hardly seems necessary to insist that the spaces through which we move and the places in which we live are thoroughly political, if not always explicitly politicised. Politics shapes the very homes, streets and cities in which we live, defining the spaces and places in which we are able to pursue our lives. From the national border to the wire fence; from the privatisation of land to the exclusion and expulsion of persecuted peoples; questions of space and place, of who can be where and what they can do there, are at the very heart of the most important political debates of our time. And yet, while the political character of the temporal nature of human existence is generally acknowledged – history has long been understood in political terms – we can all too easily fail to recognise, with adequate sensitivity and clarity, that the spatial dimension of our lives is also essentially political. In recent decades the risk of neglecting this insight has been mitigated by a wide range of scholarship that explicitly seeks to conceptualise space and place in political terms. For some years now, theorists working in the social sciences and humanities have challenged the idea that space is a fixed, unproblematic and inconsequential background against which history occurs.<sup>1</sup> Under the influence of a diverse array of critical scholarship, space and place have increasingly come to be regarded as not merely having an influence on social organisation but as socially produced in a variety of ways. This “spatial turn”<sup>2</sup> has fostered reinterpretations of social dynamics – as they manifest in the form of antagonisms, interactions, conflicts, collaborations and so on – which supplement, invigorate and contest temporally oriented

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the respective works of David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre and Edward W. Soja.

<sup>2</sup> I. Cool, D. Crouch, S. Naylor, J.R. Ryan, *Cultural turns/geographical turns* (Prentice Hall, Singapore, 2000).

analyses. In so doing, the spatial turn questions the philosophical tradition that, from the eschatological interpretation of holy texts, to Enlightenment notions of progress and the historical materialism of classical Marxism, considered time as the proper domain of social *telos*.

In the current historical conjuncture the pressing need for rigorous political analyses of space and place can hardly be contested. The buoyant optimism that once accompanied the free-market mania of the immediate post-Cold War period increasingly seems a distant memory. The unabashed sanguinity that marked many of the most vocal proponents of the uni-polar moment was nourished in part by the promise of a stable “flat Earth”<sup>3</sup> characterised by egalitarian economic competition and steadily increasing affluence driven by the free movement of capital. In the late 1990s the triumphant ideological rhetoric spouted by the proponents of the neoliberal project of economic globalisation made reference to an ostensibly cheerful image of a future world cemented together through radical market equality and the cosmopolitan bonds of liberal multiculturalism. Thoroughly contested at the time by a range of critical voices, this utopian vision has now all but faded away, rapidly replaced by the now ubiquitous “realist” mantra: “there is no alternative”. Today it is possible to discern the outlines of an emergent global order unified not by economic prosperity and liberal humanism, but by uncertainty, flux and the return of a politics of fear. Inaugurated by the disintegration of a financial bubble of global proportions, the ongoing worldwide upheaval produced by the banking crisis of 2007-2009 (or rather, the reaction to it) exemplifies the spectacular, if predictable, failure of financial capitalism to have produced a risk-free world of perpetual economic growth and endlessly expanding affluence. In many nations, bail-outs of insolvent banks have transferred an enormous debt burden from the private to the public sector, rapidly transforming an international banking crisis into a sovereign debt crisis which is now used by technocratic elites as a pretext for the imposition of a politics of austerity designed to further dismantle and privatise the remnants of the world’s welfare states. And yet this very failure is, in radically different sense, a resounding success and one which marks a continuation of a long established trend. As David Harvey has argued, although over the past four decades neoliberalisation has not proved to be very effective in ‘revitalizing global capital accumulation’, it has ‘succeeded remarkably well in restoring, or in some instances (as in Russia

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas L Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

and China) creating, the power of an economic elite.<sup>4</sup> In the process it has ensured the vast transfer of wealth upwards to a small privileged class and the vast increase in inequality both within nations and across the globe, alongside increasing profits and worsening working and living conditions in both the North and the South.<sup>5</sup>

The social fragilities and systemic inequalities engendered by the pathologies of neoliberal economic globalisation are entangled with and exacerbated by other crises, including global environmental degradation and the expansion and normalisation of the surveillance and counterinsurgency measures introduced under the pretext of the so-called “War on Terror”. This confluence of economic, ecological and political crises has been described by Christian Parenti as a ‘catastrophic convergence’.<sup>6</sup> Slavoj Žižek warns that if we do not find new forms of collective action to address these issues, ‘the most likely scenario will be a new era of apartheid in which secluded parts of the world enjoying an abundance of food, water and energy are separated from a chaotic “outside” characterized by widespread chaos, starvation and permanent war.’<sup>7</sup> The apocalyptic tone of such analyses cannot simply be dismissed as a rhetorical flourish; this scenario is already being played out before our eyes. In contrast to the cheerful image of future prosperity painted by the advocates of neoliberal globalisation in the 1990s, *this* world is marked by spatial manifestations of deep inequality where those with power and wealth increasingly resort to barricading themselves off from swelling ranks of the disenfranchised, sealing themselves inside enclosed enclaves of privilege whose creation simultaneously produces zones of exclusion.<sup>8</sup> Such separations are variously structured across national, ethnic and religious lines as wealth and poverty increasingly manifest spatially in both fortress communities and so-called slums. In societies battered by the vicissitudes of global capital, ghettoization and urban decay appear as the obscene corollaries of regimes of gentrification, development and the progressive enrichment of

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<sup>4</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19.

<sup>5</sup> See Beverly J. Silver and Giovanni Arrighi, ‘Workers North and South’, *Socialist Register* 2001, S. 53-76, 8 - 10.

<sup>6</sup> Christian Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence* (New York: Nation Books, 2011), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, then as Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), 84.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism*, ed. Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk (London: New Press, 2007); Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

elite minorities. Increasingly, the “flat” earth wrought by economic globalisation appears in the guise of a global population unified by the ubiquity of an expanding gap between rich and poor. This image of the first world in the third and the third in the first finds paradigmatic embodiment in the phenomenon of the growing numbers of “middle class homeless” living in so-called “tent cities” which have sprung up across the United States amidst the ongoing economic downturn.<sup>9</sup>

Although the symbolic potency of the growth of tent slums in the US is largely predicated on the fact that they exist within what is still the world’s wealthiest nation, it might be argued that they are in fact symptomatic of the archetypal way in which the inequalities which mark the current historical conjuncture are manifested in space. In his landmark text, *Planet of Slums*, Mike Davis draws our attention to an “epochal transition” of our era characterised by the rapid expansion of urbanisation concentrated in “slums”.<sup>10</sup> Davis argues that despite its roots in the industrial urbanisation of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe and North America, in many parts of the world, urbanisation has been “radically decoupled” from industrialisation. Indeed, he points out that in much of the so-called developing world, migration flows from countryside to city have remained high even in those societies suffering from severe economic recession. The expansion of slums under urbanisation-without-growth in developing parts of the world finds its counterpoint in the deterioration of public housing in many wealthy developed countries as government commitments to build, maintain and ensure access to quality, affordable housing vanish under the increasing hegemony of neoliberal policies.

As Davis eloquently argues, the growth of slums is indicative of the ways in which social inequalities are spatially articulated. The concentration of the global poor in slums and the accompanied segregation of the affluent in isolated communities gives rise to fragmented societies which are fractured by the physical manifestations of a seemingly ever increasing divide between the rich and poor. While Davis’s work draws much needed attention to the spatial inscriptions of widening wealth gaps, it is important to remain sensitive to the danger of such an analysis bifurcating the world

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<sup>9</sup> Oliver Burkeman, “US tent cities highlight new realities as recession wears on”, *Guardian*, March 26 2009, accessed 12 April 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/26/tent-city-california-recession-economy>; “A tale of tent cities”, *Irish Times*, April 3, 2012. <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/features/2012/0403/1224314291434.html>

<sup>10</sup> Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, (London: Verso, 2006).

into a unsophisticated binary characterised by a great homogenised mass of humanity – “the global poor” – on one hand, and an equally undifferentiated collective – “the urban rich” – on the other. The manichean hue of such a vision risks doing violence to the complex reality to which it refers. Nevertheless, to fail to adequately emphasise the deeply disproportionate concentrations of power and wealth which are such characteristic features of the current moment would be to court intellectual dishonesty. One of the central arguments underlying this book is that the cogency, relevance and normative potency of a contemporary politics of space and place is largely predicated on sustained critical engagement with the inequalities and exclusions that blight our world. In putting this book together, we have tried to balance the need for sensitivity to the subtle nuances and complex dynamics of the modern socio-cultural landscape with the ethical imperative to critique and confront the manifest injustices engendered by the expanding gap between rich and poor. In our view, these requirements are not at odds with each other, but if on balance this volume stresses the latter to a greater extent than the former, this discloses both the nature of our theoretical commitments and our conviction that ethics and politics cannot be neatly separated from one and other.

This book responds to the pressing demand to reflect on and engage with these issues. The chapters it contains chart the shifting dynamics of exclusion and inclusion as they are played out in space. The forms of exclusion addressed range from the politically motivated destruction of the individual homes of those demonised as dangerous, unclean or abject, to the economically driven transformation of urban areas designated for “regeneration” and architectural strategies employed to exclude and marginalise some while safeguarding and reassuring others. Exclusion is the primary theme of this text, but the diverse scholarship of the contributing authors demonstrates what may be all too easily overlooked: namely, how forms of exclusion can give rise to spatially oriented modes of resistance, social solidarity and the development of alternative ways of living. Resistance is found in the persistence of those who build and rebuild their homes and communities in a world which seems bent on their exclusion. Life on peripheries can give rise to new conceptions of citizenship and public space and well as to new political demands, and space can be (re)claimed in order to contest the domination of the future (Fig. 1).

The individual chapters in this book arise out of an ongoing discussion which began during an international interdisciplinary conference entitled ‘The Politics of Space and Place,’ which was held by the Centre for

Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics (CAPPE), University of Brighton, in September 2009. The event was built around a question that cuts to the heart of the issues adumbrated above: what might an analysis of politics which focuses on the operation of power through space and place, and on the spatial structuring of inequality, tell us about the world we make for ourselves and others? Written by an interdisciplinary collection of authors deploying diverse perspectives and methodological approaches, this book offers a range of critical analyses of the central questions raised by the politics of space and place. The book is structured around four central themes that speak to the core of these issues.

### ***Part One. Life on the Margins: Exclusion, Destruction, Resistance***

The opening section of the book, explores the operations of power and resistance at the micro level of the individual home and small community. The first two chapters – one set in Israel/Palestine, one in Italy – are case studies in the utilisation of political tactics of exclusion, destruction and erasure. They chart the manner in which the deliberate policy of destroying homes is utilised as a political weapon designed to spatially exclude Palestinian and Roma individuals and communities. In the case of Israel/Palestine, those exerting political control justify the destruction of homes by resort to discourses of terrorism, fear and the need for security and protection. In the case of the demolition of a Romanian-Roma camp in Milan, the actions of the authorities are excused by recourse to dialogues of safety, health, and fear. These chapters discuss the explicit and implicit political motivations offered by the political authorities while documenting the experiences of the victims of these policies. Both studies speak of the defiance and resistance of those who are persecuted but who often have no choice but to continue to build and rebuild their homes. In the third chapter of the section, the notion of homebuilding as a political act is taken up in a more emancipatory light, in an investigation into the auto-construction of public space and the spatial realisations of insurgent citizenship in Lima, Peru.

In Chapter 1, Katherine Hepworth draws on fieldwork into the unauthorised Roma camp in Milan known as Bacula in order to investigate the ways in which the “nomad camp” comes to be imagined and materialised as a symbolic-judicial space. The fieldwork was carried out in the context of a declared national “nomad emergency”, a time of intensified anti-Roma and anti-migrant rhetoric and persecution. Combining her research in the

camps with an analysis of new legislation and policies and media analysis, Hepworth outlines the ways in which government policies have created and then normalised the “nomad camp” as the model for Roma and Sinti housing before invoking it in order to declare a “nomad emergency”. Drawing on the work of Edward Said, Hepworth argues that the “nomad camp” is an imagined geography constructed on the basis of existing misconceptions and stereotypes and founded on the mistaken assumption that all Roma and Sinti are nomads, unable or unwilling to integrate into mainstream sedentary society. Situated at the periphery in the marginalised spaces of the city, the imagined geography of the “nomad camp” contributes to the production of an essentialised image of the Roma and Sinti as criminal, degenerate and unclean. Hepworth argues that the “nomad camp” operates as an abjecting geography which reinforces the perception of the Roma as “dirty” and “disorderly”, she employs the concept of abjection to explore the manner in which the imagined geography of the “nomad camp” is constructed, the humanity of the Roma denied and their harassment, mistreatment and eviction justified. While discussions of abjection and the abject may risk reinforcing the very processes they describe, Hepworth uses bell hooks’ concept of “homeplace” to explore the everyday domestic practices of Roma women which disrupt and resist the processes of abjection. Homeplace emerges as a fragile space the production and maintenance of which requires continual labour in difficult conditions and against the constant threat and actuality of eviction.

In Chapter 2, Terry Meade draws on work carried out in Israel/Palestine with the peace group, *Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions* (ICAHD) in order to provide a critical analysis of the demolition of Palestinian homes by the Israeli government. Meade investigates the structure and function of the legal and political mechanisms that enable the demolition of Palestinian houses in Israel and the West Bank, arguing that the immediate violence that accompanies the physical destruction of each home is supplemented and underpinned by a structural or “objective” violence that inheres in the planning policies, laws and rules which are used to displace people from their homes. Applying a theoretical framework developed by Jeff Halper, Meade understands the strategic use of zoning regulations, demolition orders, and the ability to deny building permits to constitute one layer of the “Matrix of Control” implemented by the Israeli authorities. In the context of the “Matrix of Control” Palestinian homes without building permits are treated as physical threats to the Israeli state. Meade argues that urban planning is increasingly used by the Israeli

government to affect simultaneous strategies of retreat and exclusion where the protection of Israelis is the imprisonment of Palestinians. Through case studies of individual families whose residences have been destroyed under orders from Israel's "Demolition Commission" or occupied by the Israeli military, he documents the severe mental and emotional impact of the invasion, violation, and destruction of individual homes, demonstrating that in the context of an ongoing cycle of illegal building and violent demolition the act of continually rebuilding one's home can become an act of political resistance.

In the third chapter of this section, Anna Plyushteva traces the evolution of public space in the auto-constructed peripheral neighbourhood of Pampas de San Juan, a residential zone in Lima, Peru. Focusing on the shifting function and meanings of public space, her study charts the neighbourhood's evolving significance, and explores the socio-economic, political and cultural pressures that continue to shape it. Viewing this neighbourhood from the perspective of the politics of space allows Plyushteva to widen the scope of her analytic focus beyond the categories to which social actors are often assigned (such as gender, class or race) in order to better encompass and explore the myriad spatial interactions, visions and experiences which unite them as integral constituents of the community. As well as squares, sidewalks and community halls, this chapter envisages public space as the spaces outside and between private dwellings, including the totality of such space as concept and ideal. Plyushteva's investigation reveals that the public areas of Pampas are not simply blank spaces within which social activity takes place, but are living, dynamic, and contested elements of the complex social fabric of the neighbourhood. This insight allows her to engage with changing meanings of urban citizenship in Pampas, as those who inhabit the area transform it from desert into city and themselves from "invaders" into citizens. Alongside these claims to "insurgent citizenship", Plyushteva explores the complexities of the intergenerational tensions that have emerged as the community struggles to grow and fulfill its aspirations within the context of external pressures and limited resources.

### ***Part Two: Securitisation***

The logic of securitisation is central to some of the exclusionary and destructive political policies explored in Part One. In this section this theme is taken up more explicitly by three authors whose work explores some of the ways in which modes of securitisation and fortification are

utilised in the interests of wealth and power. Securitisation is explored at three different spatial scales; at the level of the city, the nation and on the international stage.

In Chapter 4, Sylvia Nicholles focuses on the politics of aesthetics at the spatial level of the city, asking questions about how politics might be conceptualised in relation to sites of urban reproduction. Challenging the notion that the city plays a passive role in public-private partnerships for the provision of security, Nicholles argues that through urban planning, design and architecture, cities actively contribute to processes of securitisation by transforming the urban fabric into spaces designed to impose, maintain and reinforce specific narratives of order and safety. Nicholles focuses on the application of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) in the Yaletown area of Vancouver, a neighbourhood that is fast becoming a paradigm of North American inner-city development. Yaletown provides a timely example of how urban development and revitalisation can make use of processes of securitisation in order to exclude those who are deemed undesirable. Nicholles argues that Yaletown is a project of expurgation which shapes the space of the city in such a way as to transform the urban fabric into a landscape dominated by narratives of coherence, order and security. This development has important implications, especially for those who are not considered (or who do not consider themselves) part of that order.

Moving from a local to national level, in Chapter 5 Peter Minosh draws on the work of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben in order to examine the ways in which the complex relationship between sovereignty and subjectivity is articulated through American governmental architecture at home, at the border and overseas. The U.S. Embassy in Berlin offers a case study of government architecture abroad. Situated on foreign soil, the building is a fortified outpost with multiple layers of security it assumes a visibly defensive stance toward the host nation and its population. Tracing the origins of diplomatic privilege to early European colonialism and the birth of international law, Minosh argues that the embassy must be understood not only as a defence replete environment but also the materialisation of a particular conception of diplomatic privilege. In contrast to the embassy, the U.S. Land Port of Entry in Donna Texas is concerned with control rather than defence. The border crossing addresses two distinct populations, U.S. citizens and non-citizens, and is concerned as much with facilitating trade and exchange as it is with preventing the flow of unwanted goods and people. A range of technologically

advanced systems of control and surveillance are integrated into the structure of the border crossing but remain invisible to those passing through it. The Wayne Lyman Morse Courthouse in Oregon represents architecture at home. While the Embassy is concerned with defence and the border crossing with security and control, the courthouse must incorporate both of these aims into its design and planning. Here the everyday objects that form the shape and texture of urban life – including public art, planters and seating – are designed to satisfy a dual purpose; to improve the lived environment and everyday lives of the local population while also providing defence against the risks posed by the population itself. The subject here is viewed as that which needs to be provided for while at the same time as both a security threat and a means by which to defend against attack.

In Chapter 6, Aimi Hamraie adopts a more global perspective, critiquing the U.S. government's utilisation of spatial metaphors in relation to discourses around disability which seek to delineate whole nations and continents as threats to be dealt with via U.S.-led solutions. Hamraie invokes critical disability theory in order to evaluate the United Nations 2007 treaty, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Analysing the ideologies of space and disability in U.S. government documents concerning the CRPD, Hamraie investigates and compares prevailing discourses of space and vulnerability and the construction of symbolic geographies such as centre-periphery and inside-outside. In addressing the spatialisation of disability, her target is nothing less than the social construction of the notion of disability and its convergences with prevailing ideologies where disability is understood as an economic threat. Hamraie argues that the construction of disability in both governmental and activist discourses absorbs spatial difference into international norms while ignoring the global systems of power and privilege within which these norms operate.

### ***Part Three. Regimes of Regeneration and Gentrification***

In this section, the physical immediacy of power expressed through processes of securitisation in Part Two is contrasted with two analyses of the slower-moving – but no less powerful – processes of regeneration and gentrification. Despite different areas of geographical focus – one chapter focuses on the gentrification of the rural West in the United States, while the other concentrates on a case of urban regeneration in a town in the north of England – both studies indicate the manner in which space and

place are being transformed in light of the changing socio-economic and cultural demands and aspirations of capital. Both papers trace the remaking of place, highlighting the tensions and contradictions which arise from these transformations as they pit groups with different interests against each other. Although rooted in specific case studies, these analyses situate localised instances of urban and rural transformation within broader patterns of regeneration and gentrification, inclusion and exclusion.

Written by J. Dwight Hines, Chapter 7 focuses on the physical and symbolic restructuring of the American West under the processes of counter-urbanisation and rural gentrification. Positioning the transformation of the region within the broader context of the transition from industrial to post-industrial capitalism, Hines emphasises the class character of these transformative processes, arguing that formerly working and middle-class space is being remade by in-migrating members of what he terms the ex-urban post-industrial middle-class (PIMC), whose presence is accompanied by a shift in perspective from regimes of the production and consumption of *natural resources* and *commodities* to regimes of the production and consumption of *experiences*. For the PIMC newcomers, the region represents both an escape from the relentless pace of urban life in contemporary capitalist society and a means of differentiating themselves from members of other pre-existing segments of the middle and working classes. Hines shows that the latter is in part achieved by the PIMC creating and maintaining class distinctions which are defined by reference to the production and consumption of the experiences that are “proper” to the various subsets of the American PIMC. Building on Marx’s analysis of the semiotics of social difference in industrial regimes, Hines contextualises his analysis with reference to early studies of the English countryside. Recounting the transition of a Montana town from an industrial coal-mining town to a gentrified centre of recreational tourism, Hines compares this with similar processes which have occurred in the last two centuries with the “colonisation” of rural England by members of the urban middle class. This leads Hines to his case study of Livingston, Park County, Montana. By providing an ethnographic account of the activities and perspectives of members of the in-migrating PIMC, Hines documents the ways in which they have profoundly affected the landscape of Park County over the last 20 years, highlighting the fact that such people are actively engaged in the role of being producers of landscapes of experience.

In Chapter 8 Jonathan Aitken and Jane Brake bring together a series of “fragments” which relate a housing estate in the north of England. Born of the Industrial Revolution, the town of Pendelton was dominated by factories and densely packed, over crowded terrace housing. It was completely transformed when post-war “slum clearances” made way for a major regeneration project. Once heralded as a “state of the art” modernist development, the estate has now fallen into decay. Its population, marginalised and subject to social and economic deprivation, is dwindling, and the area is once more chalked for a major transformation. These plans, like those of the 1960s, promise to wipe out the dilapidated old infrastructure and the social problems which reside therein, creating a modern attractive and sustainable new community brimming with aspiration and opportunity. The fragments referred to in the title include extracts from architects, developers and interviews with residence, first hand accounts of walking through the estate, historical and theoretical reflections, diagrams and photographs. Employing a montage technique which juxtaposes these fragments across time and space, Brake and Aitken offer an original and sensitive account of the maligned and marginalised space of a working class housing estate which reveals the dynamic tensions between the conceived and lived landscape. Reflecting on the past and the present of the estate as it is refracted through these fragments, this chapter puts the current drive toward regeneration into a broader historical perspective prompting the reader to question both the motivations behind the redevelopment and its likely outcome.

### ***Part Four. Reconceptualising Space***

In this fourth and final part of the book we shift from the forms of exclusion detailed in the earlier sections of the book, to focus on alternative theorisations of space. The first chapter, written by Neil Ravenscroft, Andrew Church and Gavin Parker, questions the very foundations of private ownership of land and in so doing explores the basis of forms of exclusion as a function of capitalist modes of land ownership. Machiel Karskens utilises an ontological approach to question how spatial conceptions of Earth shape social and political concepts. He argues that a conceptual reformulation of human space at the macro level, from “spherical” to “flat-land”, may help to lead us away from forms of enclosure and exclusion and toward new forms of openness and connectivity. Together, these chapters suggest new ways of thinking about space and place, ownership and inclusion/exclusion. Their alternative conceptualisations

provide a means for rethinking the material and theoretical structures of the political arena.

In Chapter 9, Neil Ravenscroft, Andrew Church and Gavin Parker engage in a critique of the foundations of private property rights by deconstructing the supposed “evolutionary” development of Western property law. Drawing on Michael Mauss’s notion of the socio-economic gift relationship, they challenge Garrett Hardin’s thesis of the “tragedy of the commons”, arguing that property rights have not evolved naturally from competition over use of land but are instead an inscription on the land aimed at altering regulation from the common to the individual. According to Mauss, the “naturalness” of the institution of property is derived from its historic emergence through common convention. In contrast, Ravenscroft *et al* argue that land has an inherently multifunctionary character and tends towards common, rather than individual, regulation and use. They contend that the neoliberal rights frameworks that underpin contemporary property relations are not immutable and suggest that alternative understandings of the development and application of rights are necessary in order to address the central questions of whose land it is, and what it is to assert claims over it.

In Chapter 10, Machiel Karskens offers a theoretical analysis of the ontological characteristics of Earthly space in order to explore how they affect our basic social and political concepts. He contests the common post-modern notions of a multidimensional space where human beings live in a stratified mixture of natural, cultural, symbolic and mental domains; instead affirming that human space is two-dimensional: a spherical-flatland corresponding to the surface of the Earth. Recalling classic philosophical theories (from Aristotle, to Leibiz, to Derrida), Karskens explores the four ontological features he envisages as characterising Earth-space. The first he terms “connectability”, i.e. the possibility to connect each point of the surface with each other. In social terms connectability materialises in mutual and recursive relationships and is valued as the openness of socio-political phenomena. The second characteristic is “perspectivity”, which refers to the lack of any mathematical or physical centre, limit, or end on the spherical surface of the Earth. Perspectivity is an asymmetrical and centralising relationship which supports the use of a number of conceptual dualisms, including here and there, centre and periphery, foreground and background, etc. The third characteristic is “locality”. It allows us to localise every spot of the Earth surface in a particular space and gives rise to the very idea of strangeness, the being outside of a determined inside. The last characteristic is “overfilled and

loaded space” which pertains to the concrete presence of physical objects on the Earth surface. Their movement and the encounters between them determine, events in the socio-political domain called collisions or conflicts. In order to detect the political effects of these characteristics, Karskens applies them to the exploration of two key concepts in contemporary geographical research: enclosures (closed or walled spaces determined by locality and perspectivity) and emplacements (connections or junction originated by fields and connectability). Enclosures materialise the limited, self-folding, closed and homogeneous space; emplacements, on the other hand, are the dynamic, relational and connected places that lead to the irrelevance of the distinction between inside and outside. Their presence erodes the opposition between the private and the public and makes evident the impossibility of completely closed loci.

This set of collected works is intended as a modest contribution to an important and increasingly expanding body of literature which takes the relationship between the spatial and the political as a central theme. Bringing together scholarship from a range of fields, the publication aims to provide a space in which the insights provided by each of the chapters are brought into a productive and thought provoking dialogue. While the editors have opted for a diversity of perspectives over the presentation of a single coherent position, we should note that those involved in producing this volume are all European or North American and that the topics covered in the book are far from global in their scope. Neither of these things were intended at the outset but they are a reflection of both the books limitations and the ways in which, however unintended by the individuals involved, forms of exclusion and division remain stubbornly manifest within academia as elsewhere.

The editors would like to thank the chapter authors for their hard work and patience throughout the process of putting the book together. We would also like to thank all of those who have supported us during this process, with a special thanks to Bob Brecher, CAPPE Director, for his unfailing support, encouragement and advice, and to Toby Lovat for his insightful comments on the final draft. Finally, we would like to thank the team at Cambridge Scholars for their hard work, sound advice and professionalism.

**PART ONE.**

**EXCLUSION, DESTRUCTION, RESISTANCE**

## CHAPTER ONE

# ABJECTING GEOGRAPHIES: IMAGINING AND INHABITING THE “NOMAD CAMP” IN ITALY

KATHERINE HEPWORTH

March 2008. Alongside the metropolitan train line that each day brings thousands of commuters from across Milan’s northern hinterland into the centre 750 people live on ex-industrial land that had been left empty to await decontamination. 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. In the context of a national election campaign, bulldozers arrive to demolish the huts that had been carefully constructed from found and scavenged materials. After weeks of each day hearing an eviction threatened for the next morning only a hundred or so inhabitants remain. The others pre-empted the destruction of the settlement by dispersing to other peripheral sites in the de-industrialised hinterlands of the city. Many take shelter only 400 metres south of where they had formerly settled, reoccupying the area below the overpass of the ring road that marks the tacit border between Milan’s centre and the periphery. Bacula: the encampment takes its name from the overpass that provides shelter from the rain and snow, even while it funnels the wind through the settlement. Despite further evictions of Bacula in July 2008, the population of the encampment increased steadily until over 200 people were living in the encampment by the end of that year. The increase was the result of other, repeated evictions throughout Milan. In March 2009 these European citizens were evicted again and the space under the bridge was secured against further occupation.

*Zingari di merda. Fucking gypsies. They should go back to Romania.*

I heard these words spat out of the train window as I travelled into the centre of Milan on one of my first days in the city. Looking to see where these words were directed, I saw clothes and blankets draped over the tall

fence that lines the tracks, glimpses of what was then Milan’s largest unauthorised Roma encampment: Bovisasca. Only recently arrived in the city, I had no sense of how the proximities and distances between spaces noticed at speed translated cartographically or even psychically. By the time I had oriented myself, less than two weeks later, the camp is gone and I know it only through its traces: the daily vision from the train, growing collections of newspaper articles, and in the broken prams and toys, and piles of used gas bottles that I find when I finally visit the flattened site. From these traces, Bovisasca haunts the research. In the words of volunteers to the camps, Bovisasca was symbolic moment in space, a discrete site in the ongoing intensification of anti-Romani politics. It was also momentarily “home” to those that I later found living in Bacula.<sup>1</sup>

Bovisasca and Bacula were both sites within an evolving landscape of unauthorised and authorised Roma encampments scattered throughout the periphery of Milan. This conglomerate landscape of camps is comprised of a collection of tenuously occupied spaces that operate as material manifestations of the symbolic and juridical space of the “nomad camp”. This chapter outlines the progressive municipal and regional policies that introduced and then naturalised the “nomad camp” as the normative model of Roma and Sinti housing. It also briefly discusses the more recent national laws that invoked the “nomad camp” in order to declare a “nomad emergency”. These laws and policies will be explored in relation to fieldwork conducted in Milan between March 2008 and April 2009 to show how the juridical and symbolic space of the “nomad camp” comes to be materialised in the everyday spaces of Milan. In doing so, it will show how these material-juridical-symbolic spaces are employed in the regulation and abjection of those individuals and groups that are seen to inhabit them. In doing so, this chapter builds on Edward Said’s concept of the “imaginative geography” to argue that the “nomad camp” is a material-juridical-symbolic space that is engaged in an abjecting geography. This geography acts to place Roma and Sinti beyond the boundaries of sedentary society, and physically and symbolically expel them to the peripheral and marginal spaces of the city. The chapter then concludes

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<sup>1</sup> None of the encampments that are identified in this chapter remain. Furthermore, their eviction followed months of media publicity. As such, their location can be revealed here without placing the inhabitants at increased risk of eviction or police controls. For a film showing Bacula, with brief interviews with one of the inhabitants see the Amnesty website. Accessed 12 January 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/roma-forcibly-evicted-milan-settlement-20090331>.

with a discussion of the everyday domestic practices of Roma women to show how this abjecting geography comes to be both inhabited and resisted.

The exploration of the nomad camp as a material-judicial-symbolic space required a multi-faceted research methodology, which included participant observation in unauthorised encampments, an analysis of new legislation regarding “nomad settlements” and media analysis. The legislative and media analysis established the political context for the fieldwork, which was concentrated in the Bacula encampment introduced above. I accessed Bacula and other unauthorised encampments by volunteering with Naga, an organisation that has been active in Milan’s informal settlements for approximately 10 years. A local, secular organisation, Naga was formed in 1987. From its beginnings as a medical centre treating undocumented migrants, it has since expanded to provide these migrants with legal and social support. With my fieldwork focused on unauthorised encampments, I became associated with the *medicina di strada*, Naga’s mobile medical service. This service had begun in 1999, when an analysis of the data regarding the users of their primary medical centre showed that over 10% had spent at least a period of their early migration years living in informal settlements.<sup>2</sup> Although the *medicina di strada* was formed with the primary role of providing medical services throughout the city, it also acted as a bridge between newly arrived migrants and other social services. The benefits of my association with Naga were manifold, with the most significant benefits linked to the ability to situate the fieldwork conducted in Bacula in the context of the wider landscape of camps and their historical evolution.

The fieldwork corresponded to an intensification of anti-Romani and anti-migrant rhetoric which drew extensive criticism from Amnesty International, the EU Commissioner for Human Rights, various Roma Rights organisations and even the international media.<sup>3</sup> Under the umbrella of wider security

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<sup>2</sup> Naga, *La Citta Invisible: Rapporto Sulla Popolazione Delle Baraccopoli E Delle Aree Dismesse Milanesi* (Milan: Naga, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International “EUR 30/002/2008: Italy, Attacks on Roma Communities,” accessed 30 June 2011, [http://www2.amnesty.se/uaonnet.nsf/7e65f5b0a8b73763c1256672003ecdef/3a142f908d4fbd9dc125757b004d101a/\\$FILE/43000209.pdf](http://www2.amnesty.se/uaonnet.nsf/7e65f5b0a8b73763c1256672003ecdef/3a142f908d4fbd9dc125757b004d101a/$FILE/43000209.pdf); Amnesty International “EUR 30/002/2009: Forced Eviction, About 150 Roma People,” accessed 30 June 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR30/002/2009/en/51472d15-896d-4aa0-8aec-ba0357cddfe9/eur300022009en.pdf>; Council of Europe, *Memorandum*

decrees, the Italian government adopted the “Nomad Emergency Decree”, declaring a “State of Emergency with regard to settlements of nomad communities in the territories of Campania, Lazio and Lombardy Regions”. The Italian government appointed regional prefects with discretionary powers to implement the decree, and initiated a census of Roma camps that initially included the fingerprinting of minors.<sup>4</sup> The scope of this census was later changed following complaints from the European Commission that the collection of personal data was ethnically targeted and therefore contravened EU law.

The fieldwork took place in the context of this “nomad emergency”. The special powers and measures legislated in the Nomad Emergency Decree are not directly relevant to this discussion. More relevant is how the referencing of “nomadic settlements” in the title of the decree again invoked the abjecting geographies that are the subject of this chapter, repositioning these geographies relative to increasingly repressive policies and legislations. In discussing this escalation it is important to note that these laws are the culmination of progressive campaigns and policies that constituted the Roma as a public security threat.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the progressive intensification of anti-Roma policies and legislations actually preceded both Romanian accession and the increase in Romanian Roma numbers following the dropping of visa requirements in 2002. The

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*by Thomas Hammerberg, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe (2008); ERRC, Open Society Institute and OsservAzione, Violations of EC Law and the Fundamental Rights of Roma and Sinti by the Italian Government in the Implementation of the Census in “Nomad Camps” (2009); European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, The situation of Roma EU citizens moving to and settling in other EU Member States (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009).; For an indication of International media coverage refer to the Guardian and BBC over 2008 and 2009 in the UK, as well as the Economist for more specific critiques of Berlusconi’s government and policy.*

<sup>4</sup> Ministero dell’Interno, “Censimento Dei Campi Nomadi: Gli Interventi Per Superare Lo Stato Di Emergenza,” accessed 15 November 2011, [http://www.interno.it/mininterno/site/it/sezioni/sala\\_stamp/speciali/censimento\\_nomadi/index.html](http://www.interno.it/mininterno/site/it/sezioni/sala_stamp/speciali/censimento_nomadi/index.html), ———, “Le Misure Legislative Per La Sicurezza”, (2008), ———, “Il “Pacchetto Sicurezza”, (2008), ———, “Norme del Pacchetto Sicurezza e Collegati: Sintesi per Materia”, (2009), ———, “Legge 15 Luglio 2009, N. 94 Recante “Disposizione in Materia Di Sicurezza Pubblica”, (2009).

<sup>5</sup> Isabella Clough Marinaro, “Between Surveillance and Exile: Biopolitics and the Roma in Italy,” *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 1, no. 2 (2009): 275; see also P. Colacicchi, “Ethnic Profiling and Discrimination against Roma in Italy: New Developments in a Deep-Rooted Tradition,” *Roma Rights* 2 (2008): 35-44.

rhetorical declaration of a nomad or gypsy “emergency” first emerged in Rutelli’s 2001 campaign for the national leadership. At this time, the “emergency” was only invoked sporadically, against a more general preference for politicians to speak of a nomad or gypsy “problem” and on local issues of cohabitation, integration and employment. It was not until Veltroni’s 2007 national leadership campaign that “gypsies” and “nomads” went from being a fundamentally local problem to become a national emergency. This shift tapped into mainstream fears of a Romanian-Roma “invasion” following that country’s accession into the European Union on the 1st January 2007, and further escalated following the violent, mortal attack on an Italian woman by a Romanian Roma man at the end of October 2007.

The invocation of a rhetorical invasion was a disproportionate response to the actual numbers of Roma and Sinti living in Italy. Although exact numbers are impossible to obtain, it is widely agreed that there are between 120,000-150,000 living in Italy, of which 50% hold Italian citizenship. A further 20-25% of Roma are from EU member states, with the largest group of these from Romania. In other words, there are currently less than 35,000 Romanian Roma living in Italy, against a total Italian population of 60 million.<sup>6</sup> In order to inflate the numbers of Roma to emphasise a discourse of invasion politicians played on the popular and linguistic confusion between Roma and Romanian. Emblematic of this intentional conflation, in November 2007 Gianfranco Fini (the leader of the *National Alliance*) argued that between 200,000 and 250,000 Romanians should be deported from Italy on national security grounds.<sup>7</sup>

The scaling up of the “Roma issue” to a national emergency had ramifications at a local level. The appointing of regional prefects and a substantial increase in funding for the management of authorised and unauthorised encampments under the Nomad Emergency Decree legitimised (and made possible) the intensification of repressive and punitive policies. The most significant of these policies was the “zero tolerance” policy towards unauthorised camps. Although this policy had begun well before the announcement of the Nomad Emergency Decree,

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<sup>6</sup> OsservAzione, *The 'Latest' Public Enemy: Romanian Roma in Italy: The Case Studies of Milan, Bologna, Rome and Naples* (2008); Vitale (Ed.), *Contestualizzare l'azione pubblica: ricerca del consenso e varietà di strumenti nelle politiche locali per i rom e i sinti* (Teti: Milano, 2008), 7.

<sup>7</sup> OsservAzione, *The 'Latest' Public Enemy*, 9.