Confined to the threshold

The experience of asylum seekers in Germany

Elena Fontanari*

Paper presented at the international RC21 conference 2013
Session N. 24: Urban camps from a global perspective: resources, livelihoods and governance

*Phd in Sociology at Graduate School in Social and Political Science, Milan
via Pace 10, 20122 Milan, Italy
e-mail address: elena.fontanari@unimi.it or e.fontanari@gmail.com

Abstract

The session to which this abstract is summited is the number 24: Urban camps from a global perspective: resources, livelihoods and governance.

The topic of this paper concerns the system of immigration control in Europe and the situation of asylum seekers in Germany as case-study.

The theoretical context relates to the phenomena of immigration in relation to globalization, the first effect of which is the production and proliferation of new boundaries. The border itself has changed shape and nature with respect to its classical conception; its shift towards the interior has created border spaces within the national territories themselves. These new border-spaces have been the field of my research, i. e. the *Wohnheim* in the region of Brandenburg. And the protagonists of my research are the asylum seekers, a group historically joined to the structure of the camp (Arendt 1967, Agamben 1995).

The management of asylum seekers in Germany is developed through a system of three types of camps: reception centers, group homes (*Wohnheim*) and deportation prisons. Asylum seekers are moved from one camp to another, trapped in a system that put them in *confinement* through the restriction of mobility (*Residenzpflicht*) and the prohibition to work.

The aim of my research was to understand the matrix of these places, their logic, and what effects they have on people. The qualitative methodology allowed me to understand the experience of the border, through an analysis of the spatial, temporal and relational dimensions experienced in everyday life. Each of this three dimension was grasped through the tool of ethnography and above all through deep interviews. From this analysis I'll show that the people confined in the *Wohnheim* live in the conditions of a *threshold,* being a typical action of borders the creation of a "space between".

My interest was not solely limited to describing these places and the interactions within them, but included learning of the power relations at the base of these places. To grasp relations of power, one must remain physically in the midst of them, and the methodology of *action-research* was aimed at this purpose. This analysis was focused on the law ruling this places, a law that continues to reproduce, thanks to its action, the true essence of these places: spatio-temporal universes of waiting separated from "normal" society. The decentralized system of the camps is managed and controlled by administrative law, whose central roles are carried out by the office for foreigners (*Ausländerbehörde*), and by the administrative officer in charge of the *Wohnheim*.

The concept of *threshold*, therefore, is transversal, it is not understood only in its spatial sense, but also as the experience of those who inhabit these places (psychological and identity-related dimension). But above all, *threshold* as a legal-political status: in fact, the status of the inhabitants of the camp plays the key role, and proves to be the real boundary. The status of the people who inhabit the camps is the key to unmask the logic, the matrix and their existence. People who do not belong, forced to live on the threshold while waiting for the door to be opened to 'normal' society, to what is lawful, to the *City*. They live on the threshold of the law, in the *limbo* of citizenship.

The theme of citizenship is therefore central, as the sole vehicle for recognition in our society, without which one is not a "person", but only biological life. The emptying of the "legal person" - or its reduction - is the necessary condition for confinement of persons in camps, an operation that is still legitimate and accepted in our democracies. And this is possible if the border area, which is a division of the political space of sovereignty from the legal space of jurisdiction, is reproduced within our territories causing the legal boundaries of rights to take a step backwards in order to put specific categories of people and places under a special regime of legal and extra-territorial status, and this is possible through administrative practices.

Introduction

The theoretical context into which my work is inserted relates to the phenomena of immigration in relation to globalization, the first effect of which is the production and proliferation of new boundaries. European policies such as the Schengen and Dublin policies, together with the imposition on a global scale of a post-September 11 security paradigm, have led to the development of new control systems both along the external border and within national territories. Analysing the migration policies carried out by the European Union, a scenario, which makes it possible to talk about a "global regime" of migration control and governing, is outlined. This control system is considered "global" because the cooperation between States and secret services on specific issues – such as terrorism or immigration – is supported by other non-institutional actors, which don't exercise, directly, any form of sovereignty. Therefore, a structurally hybrid regime of sovereignty exercise, by different political actors such as national States, supranational organizations such as the European Union, new global actors, takes shape (Mezzadra 2004).

One of these new global actors is the IOM – International Organisation for Migration – which, through some practices such as *border management system*, assisted voluntary returns and skill development work in third countries, plays a key role in the international regime of control. So, the idea of *migration management* as a new way of managing immigration has developed on a global level. Borders, therefore, become also areas of testing and innovation of control and governing technologies (Andrijasevic, Walters 2010). This wide change in the management of immigration – and perhaps of policies in general – favours technocratic rules and managerial dynamics rather than social work, which is informally delegated to non-state actors (Ambrosini 2012). Since these polices take place in a technocratic field, the use of borders as instruments of selection and reproduction of hierarchies through the inclusion/exclusion dynamic is allowed.

Nowadays the "border" political issue, in a globalized world, cannot be disassociated from the matter of movement and regulation of population, so that the border is detached from the aspect which had characterized it for centuries, i.e. sovereignty (territorial borders). In recent times, border has become an instrument of biopower, and its biopoliticisation is marked by political worries, by transformations and measures through which it becomes a preferred instrument for a systemic regulation of population in its national and transnational aspects – movement, health and security. Border and its control, so, assumes a "filter function" which also modifies the structure and nature of borders that don't limit themselves only to delineating a perimeter anymore. Border's control is a machine with an array of technologies, simple and complex, old and new, which include passports, visas, transit areas, laws, regulations, medical authorities, immigration offices etc., and it hasn't assumed a stable and definitive structure yet (Walters 2004). The concept of border is therefore central to approach contemporary migration phenomenon and its relationship with host societies.

The *border* has changed shape and nature with respect to its classical conception; its shift towards the interior has created border spaces within the national territories themselves.

Border has been the analytical concept that has guided my work, considering it a key to interpreting the "reality" of my research. I consider the "border" as the product of social relations underlain by relationships of power. This concept has several ambiguities of meaning, which can be grasped through an etymological analysis. Composed of two parts, *cum* and *finis*, it means to separate by connecting, or to unite because it separates. With a more in-depth analysis, one makes the word *finis* is supposed to be derived from the word «funis» which semantically corresponds to the Greek τέλος, "aim" and "end", whose Sumerian form is *tilla* (from which the German word *Ende*, "end" is derived); according to Greek dictionaries the "limit" or "sea turning point" meaning which the Sumerian word *til* carries is derived from its Akkadian form *tallu* which means "demarcation's line", "dividing barrier". It is interesting to note that the Sumerian word *tilla* has, in its history, also the meaning of "to dwell", "to live", Sumerian forms *tin* and *din*, whose evolution corresponds to and crosses the word *panū*. The latter has the same base as the preposition *pān* ("forward" / "before", "vor" in German), which calls to mind the meaning "that is between", "space which is in the middle of something". So the ambivalence of this concept is found also in the way in which the border presents itself: as a line or a space; with, in addition, the *to dwell* element which is new and interesting.

Furthermore, if we are to deal with borders, we must investigate the relationship of power that creates them, that is, those who trace their contour on the terrain, and who establish the legitimacy of authority within that space (Zanini 1997). It is interesting to underline that since the border often occurs as a result of a power relationship, inherent in its meaning is the concept of *crisis* (etymology: κρίνω means "to divide", "to interpret", "to decide legally"). Since the border has a highly relational character, it changes with the changes in social relations. Today it has changed its relationship with spatial constraints (territorial); its relationship is no longer so immediate, having becoming immaterial and supra-territorial. The supra-territorial boundaries can crystallize in space (asylum seeker's and displaced person's camps, or detention and deportation centers), or in other cases they are bound to the body of individuals (legal status or rights to which an individual can have access). (Cuttitta 2007).

Over the last few years the use of these two forms of control has increased: on the one hand the camp (of detention, or of "reception"), on the other hand the proliferation of different forms of temporary legal status. In both cases *temporariness* is the essential characteristic of these new immigration management and control measures, which exclude the possibility of a definitive stay of migrants from the "host" civil society's imaginary. These new "border places", "frontier spaces", located inside national territories have been the field of my research. The purpose of the research has been to understand the matrix of these new spaces, their logic (internal power relations and relations whit the external world), grasp borders produced by these places (not only material) and understand the consequences of their action on subjects who cross these places.

Structural and theoretical borders of the *camp*.

Sociologist Zygmun Bauman divides the world's population between people who have the freedom to move (cosmopolitan elite who don't know neither borders nor frontiers, a minority of people who live beyond and outside any territorial restriction), those who can't choose whether to move or to stay, those who are barred from the freedom of movement, forced to live in a closed, limited and constraining space. If the letters decide to challenge this "rule" they become illegal or clandestine immigrants (Bauman 2001). Instruments and technologies of control over individual's mobility are applied at the external frontiers of nation-states, beyond these frontiers (externalisation) and inside national territories. Cities with their transformations, new global actors in which the intersection between global and local takes place (Sassen 2004), reflect these changes; their spaces are divided into a series of fortified places in which more and more sophisticated barriers mark a sharp distinction between wealthy society (which "fortifies itself") and "terror places" where the police fights new criminalized "poor people" (Davis 1990, in Colombo, Navarini 1999). For these reasons cities have become places in which important processes of space and border categorization and scaling take place, and within them control strategies are broadened and expanded (Lebuhn 2012). It's not surprising that NATO has prepared a strategy to win what is by now a social war on a global scale. Through the document called "NATO URBAN OPERATION IN THE YEAR 2020, 37", it lays down the guidelines that all the member states will have to follow, to prevent and avoid any possibility of revolt in the suburbs of cities. The fact that an international military organization has paid attention not to other States but to the interior part of our cities, to the suburban areas where migrants live and to the *slums* of world's big megalopolis, demonstrates the transformations just described. Cities are therefore the new places in which wars will be fought, whose purpose thus changes, since wars aren't linked to territory annexation and control any more, but rather to economic-political purposes. And the first subjects who are involved in the centre of this "new war" are those who "don't belong", migrants or second and third generations. So, the relation between urban *space* and state *power* has given new strength and centrality to the immaterial borders of legal status. As a matter of fact, citizenship is also the criterion used by the state to regulate and control the belonging of individuals to their own civic space (Zanini 1997); so, the urban space is partitioned and fragmented, reproducing the fractures created by citizenship's borders. In this context, refugee camps on the margins of cities, reception centers for asylum-seekers, these half-closed and half-open structures, don't have to be considered as separate spaces, but as post-urban territories, stressing, so, this normative relation between citizenship and city (Alsayyad, Roy 2006).

In the literature, the best-known author who has dealt with camps is Giorgio Agamben. In my work I don't intend to consider the Italian philosopher's theory in its entirety, but some theoretic reflections have been sources of inspiration and important keys of interpretation. In *Homo sacer* Agamben formulates a theory of sovereignty whose concept of exclusion trough inclusion – or inclusion through exclusion – is interesting for this work. According to Agamben what is excluded is not completely without relation to the rule; on the contrary, it

maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of *suspension*. This form of suspension is fundamental, since it implies a direct action by someone who suspends (a power); as a matter of fact, the "exception" word's etymological root *ex-capere* grasps the real meaning which is not simply excluded but is rather truly "taken outside". Camps are interpreted as exception spaces, excluded from the "center" but that always maintain a close link with the rule (the sovereign ban). Agamben sees in the form-camp the extreme demonstration of that relation between space and power established by the modern state to control and act on individuals' bodies. It is possible to observe an intersection between processes that concern the development of citizenship as instrument of state control – relation birth/nation – and the use of specific exclusion/inclusion structures. At the center of these relations and power practices, Agamben gives great importance to political refugees, since they represent, in the modern nation-state legal system, a so worrying element just because, breaking the continuity between man and citizen, birth and nation, they throw modern sovereignty original fiction into crisis (Agamben 1995).

This relationship that refugees have with nation-state and its law on the territory had been highlighted by Hanna Arendt when she considered a stateless person or a refugee as an "outlaw", and when she highlighted that deporting and putting people to death wouldn't have been possible without having before removed the legal status of people, of citizen (Arendt 1967). Legal condition of subjects who live in camps, is the crucial point both in Arendt's works and in Agamben's one. As well as in other theories, in which the difference between a superior humanity with powers and rights and "another" humanity made up of *subjects* at the service of the former one was reaffirmed, linked to post-colonial studies which have demonstrated that the first time in the history of humanity camps appeared was in a colonial context (Rahola 2003).

The camp, therefore, is the instrument par excellence through which power – in this case sovereign (power) – acts in an attempt to control the masses of refugees inside national territories, joining purposes of reception, control and exclusion from national territory and from public opinion sight in only one instrument. The concept "camp" used in this work refers to a broad analytical concept more than to an idea of closed structure. The fact that "camp-form" is not understood as a "form" in a strictly structural sense – neutral frame or matrix – but rather in the dialectic meaning of a "principle that concretizes" (Rahola 2003), makes it possible to grasp the element of the camp that always comes back, in the past as in the present. It means that camps, from the first moment they appear and every time their particular confinement is used, outline a *threshold*, a political border definitively crossed. The use of the camp *dispositive* (i.e. apparatus) can be also traced back to a deeper characteristic of modern biopolitics traced by Foucault, i.e. the modern state's pretension - compared to the form of power of the Ancien Régime – of "making live" and "letting die", increasing control, order practices, normalization (Foucault 2009). Foucaultian perspective has been very useful in this work to analyze the new control dispositive used by the different power relations, which aren't often as evident as detention centers' walls and barbed wire, but they mingle and fade into residence accommodations for asylum seekers, or on their own bodies in the form of legal statuses.

Methodology

The choice of Germany as a place of research came from my experience in Berlin in an association[1] that works with immigrants and asylum seekers, which allowed me direct access to the field of research. In addition, after review of the literature, the fundamental role of this nation in guiding EU policies regarding immigration and political asylum appeared interesting. The work was divided into two parts, a first part which traced the historical and juridical path of immigration in Germany, which resulted in a genealogy of the immigration camps, and a second part, a work of empirical research.

Germany, historically, has always managed immigration through a strong state regulation, from Poles in the 19th century until *Gastarbeit* in the fifties and sixties (Sassen 1996). The basic principle of migration policies was to consider migrants "guest-workers", which according to the labor market needs were obliged to stay (*Zwangsarbeit*) or were repatriated (*Rückkehrzwang*) (Terkessidis 2000). The central idea of this policy was the temporary stay tighten up by dispositives of migrant control and management, and by specific structures, i.e. residence camps and detention and expulsion camps. It is curious that the birth of these two structures apparently with different purposes happened in parallel in the twenties, making, so, borders between the different functions more indefinite. The camp has always been in Germany, with different characteristics and functions, a constant instrument of management and control of foreign population (Weinmann 1990), even though inhabited time after time by different categories of people its logic has always been remained similar. Isolated structures organised to accommodate migrants, but also to facilitate the control of their mobility, preventing them from moving with the aim of settling in the German territory; the clear purpose was to ensure the temporariness of their stay. Since the eighties German migration policy has been focusing on asylum seekers, considered, in the public and political debate, "liars" because actually they would be "economic migrants"; this attitude is caused above all by the fact that the origin of asylum seekers has changed, they don't come from Europe anymore but from "Third World" countries. As we have said before, asylum seekers are a group that historically has always been joined to the structure of the camp (Arendt 1967). They are a social category produced by national and international relations that led to the birth of the nation-state developed according to the new criterion for membership: citizenship-territory-nation. A refugee is therefore the one that does not belong, who is outside the legal order, who is an "out-law". For these reasons, he finds the camp as his only spatial area in which to place himself, the space outside of the "normal" legal ordinances.

Since the 80's until today, the management of asylum seekers in Germany is developed, in fact, through a system of three types of camps: reception centers, group homes (*Wohnheim*) and deportation prisons. Asylum seekers are moved from one camp to another, trapped in a system that them in *confinement* through the restriction of mobility and the prohibition to work.

The aim of my research was to understand the matrix of these places, their logic, and what effects they have on

---

1   The association is in Berlin and is called Kub: Kontakt und beratungstelle für Flüchtlingen und MigrantiInnen

people. Empirical research was carried out in two phases, a first ethnographic study to understand the camp as a form seen from the outside, and a second investigation conducted through in-depth interviews with subjects (who live in the camp), to understand the camp as a form experienced from the inside. Making interviews was fundamental because, referring to Foucaultian methodological approach, in order to understand power relations, a discourse on neutrality and totality hasn't to be done, but it is necessary to start from a position inside relations of force to give voice to subjects who live in the shadows and who haven't any rights ("knowledges from below" or "subjugated knowledges") (Foucault 2009). Furthermore, since I was interested in the experience of people who live the border, interviewing was the most appropriate research technique, as a matter of fact, listening to interviewees' discourse allowed me to grasp borders and make them intelligible. In order to understand border experience I identified spatial, temporal and relational dimensions, which I tried to understand analyzing aspects of everyday life.

Since I wasn't interested just in the description of these places and in the interactions inside them, but also in unmasking power relations at their base, it was necessary to stay "inside the camp". The twofold role I had inside the camp, on the one hand I was a researcher, on the other hand I was an activist of the association, led, through the shared work done daily in the camp, to the building of a close relationship of trust and confidence. The bonding between me and the *protagonists* of my research could be formed also thanks to an additional aspect, that is to say the fact that I am a "foreigner" in Germany too. My language problems and my condition to some extent similar to the my research's protagonists one made the relationship between me and respondents more equal; without obviously deny the existence of a great difference of status between me and them. My methodology, so, in some respects, is close to the *action research* one, whose purpose is to bring together the intervention aiming at changing the social situation and the production of knowledge (Unger 2007). This type of research, since it investigates power relations, can't exclude a total integration of the researcher into the camp and into the dynamics of relationships. The relationship between the researcher and protagonists has never been definitive, there was a continuous redefinition of relation borders, a "game" in which roles were never fixed. This approach is part of a more general change into social research, in which qualitative methodology is used in what isn't considered an explanation of reality (hypothesis verification) anymore but an emerging and recursive interpretation of processes in which knowledge is produced through a dialogue exchange between the observer and the observed (Melucci 1998).

Research's results

Entering into the heart of the research, the first dimension investigated was that of space. Space understood not as form, but as a producer of forms in structuring interactions within it (Simmel 1908). Since I consider the space as *experience,* I wanted to grasp how space had been lived socially. On a first consideration it is possible to highlight that the German system of asylum seeker management has focused on the control of space and

mobility. Spaces are parceled out in the whole German territory and asylum seeker mobility is controlled, through the decentralized system of camps (first reception centers, *Wohnheim*, deportation prisons) and through the *Residenzpflicht* (residency obligation) (Pieper 2004). The camps, moreover, are located in suburban areas or in the wood, and they are often deteriorated and decaying buildings or former military barracks; this condition leads to increases the level of exclusion. The social organization of the inner space is the following: there aren't any communal rooms, but just bedrooms, corridors, kitchens and collective bathrooms.

> «It is difficult. There aren't any communal rooms, I spend a lot of time in my bedroom. Outside it's very cold, where can I go? There isn't any big city, and it is necessary to go to HL. on foot because there aren't any buses» (Interview with Mr A.)

As a consequence the public space is almost never lived, just the private space is. However, the latter isn't a reassuring place because of the total lack of *privacy* (shared rooms) and because of a too narrow living space (12 square meter rooms). For these reasons these places aren't perceived as apartments, but as prisons; this is a sign of the effects of spatial and material borders of these buildings, this borders reflect themselves to the inside, shaping the social life of the inhabitants. This perception is due also to the borders that these buildings develop and project towards the outside: spatial isolation also implies a social isolation which, supported by restrictions on mobility, creates a segregation much stronger than that that could be created by just material supports (the doors of these buildings are, in fact, open).

> «No, in a so isolated place!! If I were in E. [a nearby small town] it would be different, there you can go out, meet people. That's why I often go to E. and to S. because, so, I can be among people. And there are a lot more possibilities also to work, for example, or German courses, to learn the language. Here, in a place like this, it isn't possible! So isolated in the middle of the forest, there aren't any people, any human beings, and bus stops…it is necessary to walk so much before finding one, and then also at night, you must go back on foot, and you are in the wood…it's also dangerous living here. It's difficult, it's difficult» (Interview with Mr B.)

Therefore, an independent space, separate from the "outside", takes shape, also because of other borders present in everyday life: *vouchers* in place of money, the prohibition of working in the "normal" society, which doesn't apply in the "exceptional" space of the camp, where, instead, there are the "occasional works" whose function is jut to fix materially the camp itself, to strengthen its borders, to confirm its "exceptional" existence compared to the "normal outside". The lack of contact with the "outside" world is also due to the absence of the Internet and of telephones (virtual windows of access to the world); there is only television which contributes to the development of an attitude of passivity.

> «If you live there for a couple of months, you begin to have that feeling…a strange feeling and you don't want to go out, to go outside anymore. If you go outside you just go shopping and then you go back home immediately. But, pay attention, more or less the two thirds of the time, you sleep. You sleep or talk to your roommate, you cook, then you eat and if you have television in your room you can watch Tv. But going out or going for a walk…no. We don't want to do these things» (Interview with Mr. X)

Also the temporal dimension, which plays a fundamental role, makes the camp a closed system compared to what is outside. Also in this case, by time it is meant individuals' experience and perception, and not measurement. As the camps are "waiting areas", they assume the spatio-temporal dimension as simple extension and pure duration, conditions totally lacking of linearity, of becoming (Rahola 2003). A first factor is the expansion of time, which is described by interviewees as long and slow, perceiving a day as two months. A second factor is future perception, which is detached from reality (use of conditional tenses, "if it wouldn't be like that"), showing how the inhabitants live only the present of the camp. Perception of future plays a fundamental role to understand how the temporariness of the camp becomes definitive, i.e. how subjects interiorize the spatio-temporal dimension which the power of the camp imposes on them. Therefore, the temporal *continuum* is lost, it becomes a spatio-temporal *unicuum*, which confirms the nature of these places, i.e. closed systems in which these dimensions have a direct effect – a power – on subjects.

This independent spatio-temporal universe has some effects on interactions inside it. I analysed the relation dimension from two perspectives. If relations with the outside are investigated, one notes a great difficulty for *Wohnheim* inhabitants of breaking down the borders which separate them from the outside world, borders that as previously discussed aren't the material ones. Racist attitudes and attacks by local inhabitants, together with some episodes of institutional discrimination (in public places such as in hospitals or buses), lead *Wohnheim* inhabitants to self-segregation in the camps for fear of going out, because of their feelings of insecurity, and because they don't feel accepted as *foreigners*. Relations inside the camp are, instead, ambivalent, they oscillate between solidarity (food sharing) and real conflicts. The element of proximity, fundamental for the development of human relations, is present, but it is nullified by the sense of indeterminacy, precariousness, and fear which freezes individuals in their bedrooms where they wait for "something", a letter, a permit to go out (or enter into the "reception" society). In general, I noted the presence of weak bonds among people and the lack of deep feeling of sharing a common condition; the experience of asylum seekers is, indeed, lived individually. Furthermore, it was interesting to note that in this space there is a reproduction of inequalities present in the "normal" society. For example gender inequalities: if you are a woman you run the risk of being attacked like in the "normal" society, with the difference that in these places people feel more insecure, because ambiguity reigns, there isn't a particular internal organization, and people have less freedom, they are compelled to live in closed spaces which cause further discomfort and insecurity. Be in a camp, which hasn't a real social organization inside, since it is considered just a waiting place and not a social space, causes more insecurity than a "normal" condition outside it.

From this analysis it is possible to note that *Wohnheim* inhabitants live in a condition that can be considered the *threshold* condition. One of the effects caused by borders is the creation of a "space between", and dwelling this space means living the threshold experience. The *threshold* hasn't just a spatial component, but also a temporal one: phase of transition, the not belonging neither to one thing nor to another one. Asylum seekers are a

category that doesn't belong, since they don't belong to their origin country anymore and they don't belong to the "new" society yet, they are waiting; and this wait takes concretizes in the *Wohnheim* space. But the threshold condition also involves to identity, intended as the subject's capability for admitting he seeing himself as an autonomous individual able to act and give sense to actions; this capability can be lost in these border places (Colombo, Navarini 1999). Wait, uncertainty, precariousness, fear, inactivity, temporal condition reduced to the present of the camp, they are all conditions that lead to think too much. The protagonists of my research often stressed that the biggest problem in the *Wohnheim* is that "you think too much". And thinking too much you run the risk of losing yourself in the labyrinth of your mind, and to go out of it you risk taking refuge in alcohol.

> «But usually, usually there's nothing to do, for this reason you sleep until 11, because what else can you do? That's why people drink alcohol in the Heim. Do you know what happens? People drink alcohol and listen to music all night long, until the morning and then they sleep during the day. Because of too much stress…what do you do during the day if there's nothing to do?»   (Interview with Miss M.)

The reference to "madness" is very frequent. But this madness isn't illness, it's the loss of one's own subjectivity, i.e. the loss of the freedom of choosing and building one's own self in the world; it's not being at the center of the word anymore (Basaglia 1961).

> «That you are there and you don't know what will happen. Maybe you receive the refusal, this letter… but when, when it arrives, and what can happen after, no one knows. How one can keep on living, no one knows. You stay there, and you wait, you just wait. You wait that this letter arrives, that's what drives you crazy!»   (Interview with Mr. W)

And this is nothing else than the action of camp power, which destroys the space as interaction and life place in which man is at the center of his world, transforming him in a simple object placed in space. Furthermore, this power deforms and deletes any internal dimension of time, which is that of action, of mind, of soul (Sofsky 1995).

That's why *confined* on the *threshold*, because there is the action of a power. But it is necessary to go more in depth into the concept of *confined* and unmask power relations which take place in these places, and which reproduce and control them, and allow their existence. A power is always present in a space, and most of the times it is supported by a law. Also in a waiting place there is a law that continues to reproduce, thanks to its action, the essence of these places: spatio-temporal waiting universes separate from the "normal" society. Frontier areas, "no man's land", that is to say a place in which everything resembles ambiguity (Zanini 1997). And there is nothing more ambiguous, undetermined and unclear than spaces governed by administrative law, grey area of law as discretionary, space deprived of political sense, as technique. The decentralized system of camps is managed and controlled by administrative law, whose central roles are played by the office for foreigners, the *Ausländerbehorde*, and by the administrative manager of the *Wohnheim*. The role of these people is only to administer, they aren't social workers but bureaucrats, who are merely supposed to oil the wheels of the bureaucratic machine, making sure they don't break. On the one hand, the presence of this formal

relationship between camp inhabitants and administrative staff, reinforces the border between those who are outside and those who are inside, strongly marking the division line between the logic of society "outside" and the indeterminacy and uncertainty of the space inside the camp. An example of that is the role played by the watchman: he is on the doorstep and controls the entrance, defining, so, the border between inside and outside, but his action is limited to the control of that line, without entering the space of the *Wohnheim*, what happens in that space neither interests nor concerns him. This determines, again, the nature of these spaces, which are places of anonymity, precariousness and insecurity, in which everything can happen.

But, on the other hand, this border between administrative staff and camp inhabitants, which apparently is due to an absence of contact, actually, sometimes can have some effects of depersonalization, deindividualization, and subjugation, typical of the total institutions of Goffman (Goffman 1961). This is the case of domination relation between the *Wohnheim* manager and its inhabitants, who call him *Chef*. This nickname already explains partly the power relation mentioned above: he through small decisions that have consequences for the everyday life of the inhabitants of his *Wohnheim*[2], in favor of those who have a "good" behavior and against those who have a "bad" behavior, establishes a relationship based on generosity and gratitude, and not on duty and right. In this way there is a polarity between *coercion* and *paternalism*, typical of the residence institutions for marginalized people (Basaglia 2005). The discretion with which the *Chef* can operate, is the same with which every single functionary of the *Ausländerbehorde* decides on people lives, through the granting or not of a permit to move, the extension of a status, the provision of German courses, the delivery of a letter in time, the correct writing of a name, etc. These are the toughest borders to overcome that asylum seekers face in the German territory, the borders produced by administration.

But there are even deeper and more central power relations which help to understand the existence of specific borders and of the space in which these borders act. The latter can be identified through the question that Anna Arendt and Giorgio Agamben asked themselves during their studies: who goes into the camps? The status of people who inhabit the camps is the interpretation key to unmask the logic, the matrix and the existence of this camps. We are talking about people who don't belong, forced to live on the threshold waiting for the access door to be opened to "normal" society, to what is lawful, to the City. Those who can't have this access live outside the legal system, which suspends itself in an exception state that becomes a rule: stateless people of Arendt, Jews of Agamben, subjects of colonies of Rahola. These people are outside the logics of the inclusive model. *Wohnheim* inhabitants are asylum seekers and *Duldung*; the latter represent, more than anyone else, this category of temporary not-belonging which has become definitive. The status of the *Duldung* ("tolerated") is not a residence permit, but a suspension of deportation for those denied residency, but who cannot be deported for various reasons, and are thus *tolerated* in German territory. The condition of these subjects is interesting because they are numerous[3], they represent that shift which happened in legal systems (firstly the German one and then the

---

2   For example how much occasional jobs are paid, changing or not room, and other types of little favors.
3   In 2002 they were about 200.000, in 2010 they were 87.000.

European ones) in which the right of asylum was moved from the constitutional field to the administrative one. *Duldung* has become, nowadays, a rule and it prevails over political asylum. It's the rule which suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and only in this way the latter becomes a rule, maintaining a relationship with the first one (Agamben 1995). The *Duldung* represents the example of another phenomenon that is spreading throughout European policies in the immigration field: the progressive introduction of *humanitarian* criteria (accompanied by the idea of assistance) which don't support but replace *political* criteria (in this case asylum status). The *Duldung* had been introduced to give a legal "status" to those who couldn't be deported for humanitarian reasons, since deportation could always have been applied if these humanitarian reasons should disappear. In this way, these people live a definitive temporariness, knowing that they can't build their life because they can been deported in any moment, stopped on the threshold among the paper walls of their documents. These documents could give them the possibility of obtaining the residency permit but at the same time they would procure the "keys" to their deportation. These people live in a condition of norm suspension, under the continuous pressure of deportation and with the awareness that they can't cross the doors that give access to the City; they live in a threshold of the law, in the limbo of citizenship.

> «I have the *Duldung*. And it's difficult, because it is renewed every month, every month and a half. Every month and a half I go to the *Ausländerbehorde* to have the *Duldung* renewed and they ask you the passport, they tell you to go to your embassy and take your passport. But we haven't documents. This is the *Duldung*. With the *Duldung* you always have fear, because you don't know what could happen the next day. You aren't serene with the *Duldung*. They don't let you work, I have had it for a year, and they don't make me work, they don't make me move from Brandeburg and I can't come to Berlin» (Interview with Miss N)

The condition of the *Duldung* calls to mind some Kafka's characters, like the country man who in the parable *Before the law* spends all his life on the threshold of the open door, waiting for the watchman to make him enter the Law; or like K. a character from *The Castle* who faces a labyrinth journey through different borders hoping to enter the Castle and to be, therefore, accepted. All these characters ask for, try to, enter and be recognized (Kafka 1914, 1926).

Conclusions and open reflections

The central theme of this work is citizenship as the only vehicle of recognition in our society, without which you aren't a "person", but just biological life. The emptying of the "legal person" – or its reduction – is the necessary condition to confine subjects to the camps, an operation that is still legitimated and accepted in our democracies. And it is possible if the frontier area, which represents a distinction between the political space of sovereignty and the legal space of jurisdiction, is reproduced within the national territories making legal borders of rights move back in order to put specific categories of people and places under a peculiar regime of legal and extraterritorial status; and it is possible through administrative practices (Campesi 2011). That's why the camps are a sign of a crisis, the crisis of an inclusive model that considers citizenship as the only access to rights, to

being a "person". The action of the border in this case is to divide (crisis from κρίνω, "to divide") people who have right and those who haven't right; the latter are *confined* waiting to know if they are recognized or not, placed in a legal-spatial threshold which controls the entrance to the City. The latter is the legal and political space in which our society 's challenges take place. The "city" has always been intended as the place of freedom: since its birth, it had been freedom from domination links and from feudal obligations, and it was built and founded just by people who didn't belong to the established (feudal) order, but they were *foreigners*, outside the legal system. For this reasons it is important to understand, nowadays, the role played by the City in an epoch in which the inclusive model is facing a crisis because of big change phenomena, such as globalization and migration processes. That common thread that subtly units the *city* with the concept of *freedom* seems, nowadays, to be in crisis because of the introduction of dispositives of control and security systems used in urban spaces, with the purpose of controlling and regulating the population and their movement, and it demonstrates that the inclusive model in crisis doesn't want to to be rethought but defended with weapons. Closing the border and "hiding the misunderstanding" making the other invisible, hiding it from sight or leaving it outside the door, «is precisely the strategy that causes and maintains the threat alive» (Bencivenga, 1992. in Zanini 1997).

The challenge that migrants with their movement pose to our democracies is to consider and rethink the City as a space of "tolerance", intended in the etymological sense of the word as «limit within which a divergence is possible», which gives the idea of a movement inside it and of relations that clash and meet. Giving space and time, or taking new spaces and times, so that these interactions and conflicts that are produced can create a new balance. Our urban spaces, in fact, despite the different systems of control, are crossed by a large population of migrants who participate to our economies and create new social spaces even where they wouldn't be allowed to create them. In this paper there isn't the analytical level of the *agency*, since just a first part of a more extensive research, in which this level of analysis will also be concerned, is presented.

The camps for asylum seekers, although they have open doors, are characterized by a deep *confinement*, both in the spatio-temporal dimension and above all in the legal-political one linked to the legal status. However, the involved subjects attempt to resist and overcome the action of these borders and their success in doing it indicate the continuous tension between a will of control and regulation by the state power and the capability of resisting and having creativity of the subjects who move in the urban space, showing that citizenship is also a social practice from below (Isin 2008). And it's curious that this challenge has been posed just by the figure who founded the City, the *foreigner*, a category that is based on the idea of movement, the only prerogative for a change.

Bibliography

– Agamben, G., *Homo sacer. Il potere sovrano e la suda vita*, Einaudi, Torino 1995

– Alsayyad, N. and Roy, A., *Medieval modernity: On citizenship and urbanism in a global era*, in Space and Polity, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1– 20, April 2006

– Ambrosini, M., *Immigrants and health services in Italy: solidarity beyond the law*, Conference "Access denied", Amsterdam, March 2012

– Andrijasevic, R. e Walters, W. , *The international Organisation for Migration and the interneational government of borders*, in Enviroment and Planning D: Society and Space 2010, volume 28, pages 977-999.

– Arendt, H., *Le origini del totalitarismo*, Edizioni di Comunità, Milano 1967

– Basaglia, F. (1961), *Ansia e malafede. La condizione umana del nevrotico*. In Franca Ognaro Basaglia (a cura di) *Franco Basaglia. L'utopia della realtà*, Einaudi, Torino 2005

– Basaglia, F. (1961), *Ansia e malafede. La condizione umana del nevrotico*. In Franca Ognaro Basaglia (a cura di), *Franco Basaglia. L'utopia della realtà*, Einaudi, Torino 2005

– Basaglia, F., *L'utopia della realtà*, (a cura di) Franca Ongaro Basaglia, Einaudi, Torino 2005

– Bauman, Z. *Dentro la globalizzazione. Le conseguenze sulle persone*, Laterza, Roma- Bari 2001

– Campesi, G., *Borderscapes of Imperial Europe. Space, law and politics at the European periphery*. In *LoSquaderno*, n.22 *Exploration in space and society*, Dicembre 2011

– Colombo, E., G. Navarrini, *Confini dentro la città. Antropologia della stazione centrale di Milano*, Guerini, Milano 1999

– Cuttitta, P., Segnali di confine. Il controllo dell'immigrazione nel mondo-frontiera, Mimesis Edizioni, Milano 2007

– Dal Lago, A., *Non-persone. L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale.* Feltrinelli, Milano 2009 (prima edizione 1999)

– Devis, M., *City of Quartz*, Verso, London 1990 (tr. it. *La città di quarzo. Indagine sul futuro di Los Angeles*, Manifestolibri, Roma 1993), in Colombo, Navarini 1999

– Foucault, M., *"Bisogna difendere la società"*, (a cura di) Mauro Bertano e Alessandro Fontana, Feltrinelli, Milano 2009

– Goffman, E., *Asylums*, Einaudi, Torino 2010 (prima edizione 1961)

– Isin, E. F., *The City as the site of social*, in Recasting the social citizenship, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2008

– Kafka, F., (1914), *Davanti alla Legge*, in *Il Processo*, Kafka, F., (1925), Einaudi, Torino 2005

– Kafka, F. (1926), *Il castello*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2008

– Lebuhn, H., *Bürgerschaft und Grenzpolitik in den Städten Europas Perspektiven auf die Stadt als Grenzraum* , in Forum Wissenschaft n.2, Juni 2012, BdWi Verlag.

– Melucci, A., *Verso una sociologia riflessiva*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1998

– Mezzadra, S., *I confini della libertà. Per un'analisi politica delle migrazioni contemporanee*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2004

– Pieper,T., *Das zentral Lagersystemfür Flüchtlinge. Scharnier zwischen regulären und irregulären Arbeitsmarktsegmenten*, PROKLA, Zeitschrift für kritische Sozialwissenschaft, Heft 136, 34. Jg., Nr. 3, 2004

– Rahola, F., *Zona definitivamente temporanee. I luoghi dell'umanità in eccesso.* Ombre Corte, Verona 2003

– Sassen, S., *Migranti, coloni rifugiati. Dall'emigrazione di massa alla fortezza Europa*, Feltrinelli, Roma 1996

– Sassen, S., *Le città nelle economie globali*, il Mulino, Bologna 2004

– Simmel, G. (1908), *Der Raum und die räumliche Ordnung der Gesellschaft*, in Monika Eigmüller; Georg Vobruba, *Grenzsoziologie*, Wiesbaden, 2006

– Sofsky, W., *L'ordine del terrore. Il campo di concentramento*, Laterza, Bari 1995

– Terkessidis, M., *Migranten. Über 100 Jahre Einwanderug,* Europäische Verlagsanstalt/ Rotbuch Verlag, Hamburg 2000 (p.10-37)

– Unger, H., Block, M., Wright, M. T., *Aktionsforschung in deutschsprachigen Raum*, Veröffentlichungsreihe der Forschungsgruppe Public Health Schwerpunkt Arbeit, Sozialstruktur und Sozialstaat Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB) , SP I 2007 – 303

– Walters, W. , *Welcome to Schengenland. Per un'analisi critica dei nuovi confini europei*, in S. Mezzadra, *I confini della libertà*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2004

– Weinmann, M., Kaiser, A., Kraus-Schmitt, U., *Das natinalsozialistische Lagersystem*, Zweitausendeins, Frankfurt am Main 1990

– Zanini, P., *Significati del confine. I limiti naturali, storici e mentali.* Mondadori, Milano 1997