

Inside the tent: Community and government in refugee camps

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Abstract

Refugee camps are increasingly managed through a liberal rationality of government similar to that of many industrialized societies, with security mechanisms being used to optimize the life of particular refugee populations. This governmentality has encompassed programmes introduced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to build and empower communities through the spatial technology of the camp. The present article argues that such attempts to 'govern through community' have been too easily dismissed or ignored. It therefore examines how such programmes work to produce, manage and conduct refugees through the use of a highly instrumentalized understanding of community in the spatial and statistical management of displaced people in camps. However, community is always both more and less than what is claimed of it, and therefore undermines attempts to use it as a governing tactic. By shifting to a more ontological understanding of community as unavoidable coexistence, inspired by Jean-Luc Nancy, we can see how the scripting of and government through community in camps is continually exceeded, redirected and resisted. Ethnographies of specific camps in Africa and the Middle East enable us both to see how the necessary sociality of being resists its own instrumentalization and to view the camp as a spatial security technology. Such resistance does not necessarily lead to greater security, but it redirects our attention to how community is used to conduct the behaviour of refugees, while also producing counter-conducts that offer greater agency, meaning and mobility to those displaced in camps.

Keywords

community, governmentality, power, refugee camps, resistance

Introduction

Camps for refugees and the internally displaced are meant to provide spaces of security for individuals and communities at their most vulnerable. They exist explicitly to provide for the survival of those in greatest need. As the Sphere handbook notes,

Shelter is a critical determinant for survival in the initial stages of a disaster. Beyond survival, shelter is necessary to provide security, personal safety and protection from the climate and to promote resistance to

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ill health and disease. It is also important for human dignity, to sustain family and community life and to enable affected populations to recover from the impact of disaster. (Sphere Project, 2011: 244)¹

The hospitality provided by camps thus aims at something more ephemeral than survival, allowing recovery and providing dignity and the sustenance of ‘goods’ such as family and community. They go beyond the provision of ‘components’ displaced populations are missing: ‘Camps replicate an entire support system’ (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 115). As this suggests, programmes are increasingly being developed by those administering camps (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Oxfam) that deliberately seek to build, encourage and foster community (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 23; UNHCR, 2007: 184, 213).

As we shall see below, such programmes can easily be dismissed as naïve and misguided, based on misunderstandings about camps and the options they allow. In contrast, I suggest that these programmes are part of wider attempts by what Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose (2008: 88) would call ‘advanced liberal’ societies to *use* a particular construction of community in efforts to better manage, maintain and thus secure human life. Community has become a target and tactic of forms of governmentality that do not necessarily involve the state. I use this term in the Foucauldian sense, whereby ‘governmentality’ refers to the various ways and means by which a population’s conduct is directed, managed and controlled: ‘to govern, in this sense, is to control the field of action of others’ (Foucault, 2002: 341). Using community to govern has the effect of reducing the obligations of formal governmental institutions through a ‘new emphasis on the personal responsibilities of individuals, their families and their communities for their own future well-being and upon their own obligation to take active steps to secure this’ (Rose, 1996: 327–328). Thus we see the rise of ‘government through community’ in ‘the instrumentalization of personal allegiances and active responsibilities’ (Rose, 1996: 332; see also, Miller and Rose, 2008: 90; Rose, 1999: 176). This article argues that community has now also become a tactic of government used to secure life within the spatial technology of the refugee camp.

Far from being the exception that is becoming the rule (Diken, 2004; Diken and Laustsen, 2005: 17–18), spaces of encampment for the displaced are in this sense becoming increasingly normalized. The liberal rationality of government through which they are managed is similar to that of many industrialized societies (see Duffield, 2001), involving the use of ‘security mechanisms ... installed around the random element inherent in a population of living beings so as to optimize a state of life’ (Foucault, 2004: 246; see also Bell, 2006: 151). One of these security mechanisms is the refugee camp, and I argue that one of the tactics that camps increasingly make use of is a particular and highly instrumentalized account of community. Camps are thus part of wider techniques of ‘global liberal governance’ that use security as a way of creating and regulating political subjects (see Bell, 2006; De Larrinaga and Doucet, 2008; Dillon, 2004; Dillon and Reid, 2001; Salter, 2008). What makes this liberal is the focus on efficiency and economy in government (Gordon, 1991: 24) – the aim of ‘governing through encouraging the autonomous existence and self-regulation of populations’ (Dillon and Reid, 2001: 47). However, community is always both more and less than what is claimed of it, and this slipperiness means that community always redirects and undermines attempts to use it in an instrumental fashion. I argue that, as Martin Coward (2009: 80) inspired by Jean-Luc Nancy puts it, such attempts to foreclose, contain and *use* community are ‘only ever a covering-over, effacement or destruction (that leaves ruins and memories)’. While examining the aims of the UNHCR and refugee NGOs can reveal how community is circumscribed and used to govern, a more ontological account of community reveals it as a ‘constitutive heterogeneity that leaves any enclosure continually unravelling in the “loose ends”’ (Coward, 2009: 85). Such unravelling is revealed in the counter-conducts generated within particular camps.

The article proceeds by first examining how community has been treated in refugee camp literature – more specifically, how that literature has ignored community’s role both as a tactic of government and as a form of ontological coexistence that resists instrumentalization. The second section investigates the use of community in the former sense, as a means by which displaced populations are managed and controlled within highly regulated spaces. I turn to three interrelated and cross-referential guides and handbooks on the spatial planning of these spaces: the UNHCR’s (2007) *Handbook for Emergencies*, the Sphere Project’s (2011) handbook *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards for Humanitarian Response*, and Oxfam/shelterproject’s *Transitional Settlement: Displaced Populations* (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005).² Together, these guides form something of a manifesto or template for the government of camps through community. The final section shifts to an ontological register, examining how the attempted use of community by liberal governmentality is just one articulation of a more primordial structure of coexistence. As Nancy (1991: 58) has argued, in this understanding ‘community resists ... in a sense, it is resistance itself’. The sociality of being resists its own instrumentalization. The scripting of and government through community we see in camp spaces produces a range of unintended consequences, counter-conducts, and contestations of community, security and the camps (what they mean and how they work). These are illustrated ethnographically (a way of taking the camp seriously advocated especially by Agier, 2008, 2011, and Rygiel, 2012) through a look at existing work by ethnographers on three very different camps in Tanzania, Kenya and Lebanon.

Camps and the missing community

Many accounts of refugees and camps are understandably pessimistic in relation to community. Hannah Arendt’s (1973: 297–298) famous observation that refugees are figures who have lost the right to have a right is partly based on the fact that refugees have *lost* the protection of their state-based community. But, while refugees who are permanently resettled have the possibility of gaining the protection of a new community, those in camps are often liminal figures in an extraterritorial space, between clearcut sovereignties (see Agier, 2011; Ramadan, 2009, 2013). Camps can form in-between places, based on land ceded or leased by the host state to the temporary jurisdiction of the international community, generally represented by the UNHCR (see UNHCR, 2011: 121, 221) or the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Such territory may be taken away at any time. This precarious insecurity is illustrated through camps’ frequent absence from official maps: the three UNHCR sites at Dadaab, despite being built almost two decades ago, covering a radius of 15 kilometres and being densely populated by nearly 500,000 refugees in 2011, do not appear on authorized maps of Kenya (Agier, 2011: 135).

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the work of Giorgio Agamben (1995, 1998) has provided such inspiration to scholars theorizing the refugee camp as a space of sovereign power and exception producing bare forms of life that rule out political community (among others, see Edkins and Pin Fat, 2005; Hanafi and Long, 2010; Hyndman and Mountz, 2007; Orford 2007; Perera, 2002). The most extreme forms of this interpretation conceptualize camps as ‘non-places’ or ‘abstract spaces’ that ‘fail to integrate other places, meanings, traditions’ (Diken, 2004; Diken and Laustsen, 2005: 86). Upon entering one, a refugee is relieved of his or her identity, abandoned to a state of exception, excluded from the law (both national and international), though included by being at its mercy (Diken and Laustsen, 2005: 84–87). Within the camp’s biopolitics of humanitarian control, refugees are reduced to a bare form of life that merely maintains and manages their raw biological existence (Agamben, 1998: 133; Diken and Laustsen, 2005: 86). Others, such as Jenny Edkins (2000, 2003), are more circumspect in generalizing, though Edkins traces the ‘form of the camp’

through its Nazi incarnation, to famine camps in Africa and refugee camps in Kosovo. In each, ‘we find people who are produced as *bare life*, a form of life that can be killed but not sacrificed, a form of life with no political voice’ (Edkins, 2003: 195–196, 2000: 11).

The apparent necessity of referring to Agamben in these contexts (noted by Owens, 2009: 567 and Ramadan, 2013: 67) has recently been challenged from a variety of perspectives. As Nicholas de Genova (2010: 37) argues, the gain in the currency of Agamben’s thought has ‘entailed a certain inflation and consequent devaluation’. His work is used to overgeneralize, flattening important distinctions. ‘Studies of real-world refugee camps cannot be reduced to a formulaic reading of spaces of exception filled with silenced, disempowered *homines sacri*’ (Ramadan, 2013: 68). While Ramadan argues that such a picture may work better for Western asylum detention centres (see e.g. Edkins and Pin-Fat, 2005; Orford, 2007; Perera, 2002) than for camps in Africa and the Middle East, it cannot account for the diverse spatialities of irregular migration and the various forces (economic, social, political, etc.) that produce camps (as noted by Agier, 2011: 39–59; Isin and Rygiel, 2007; Millner, 2011). In this sense, Agambenian exceptionalism has been criticized for being fundamentally depoliticizing and erasing sociopolitical struggles (Huysmans, 2008: 175), thereby replicating rather than challenging orientalist mappings (Rygiel, 2012: 808) and forming a political dead-end (Walters, 2008: 193). It is not only the space of the camp that is inadequately represented, but also the subjectivity of the refugee, which is rendered passive (Papadopoulos et al., 2008: 199; Rygiel, 2011: 4), with little capacity for agency or resistance (Andrijasevic, 2010: 149; Papastergiadis, 2006). As William Walters (2008: 188) puts it, Agamben-inspired accounts foster ‘a rather one sided and flattened conception of migrant subjects. Things are always done to them, not by them’. It is thus difficult to see how politically useful such accounts can be (Owens, 2009: 569).

While I agree with these criticisms, this article has a slightly different concern: as well as being depoliticizing and flattening in rendering refugees and camp space, the work discussed above also appears to rule out the possibility of community within camps. Community is difficult to conceive of in a realm of pure domination and necessity, and is rarely mentioned in accounts taking their lead from Agamben. However, those accounts complement Jennifer Hyndman’s dismissal of NGO community-building projects in refugee camps. What these well-meaning programmes fail to ‘account for is that a refugee camp is not a self-identified community. It is an institution generated by the international refugee regime’ (Hyndman, 2000: 137–138). The mechanisms of discipline and ‘containment’ make camps ‘enforced “colonies,” not communities defined by voluntary association’ (Hyndman, 2000: 140). Community here seems to demand free choice, that it be self-identifying, voluntary and self-organizing, an intuition shared by others (see Franke, 2012: 19–20). It seems that the restricting, repressive power exercised through camps means they are spaces without even the *possibility* of community, agency or politics (Agier, 2008: 29–30). As Edkins (2000: 19) implies, community is something that is destroyed *before* one enters the camp – thus, camps are necessarily spaces only of bare life, without the politically qualified life possible within a community. While ‘camps as communities may be desirable, this notion of community is not viable’ (Hyndman, 2000: 143).

There are at least two major problems with this account of community. First, it ignores the fact that more is at stake in community-building programmes within camps than well-meaning failure. Rather, these programmes are generating and making use of a particular account of community for the purpose of better managing refugee conduct. As Ilcan and Lacey (2011: 91) find in Oxfam’s poverty-reduction efforts, such programmes render ‘communities as zones for it [Oxfam] to investigate, document, interpret, and ultimately transform, while making its [the target population’s] members aware of their allegiance to the community’. This is an instrumentalized articulation of community working as one of several tactics of government within the spatial security technology

of the camp (the subject of the next section). What makes this exercise of power especially seductive is that it works with, and is parasitical upon, the normative conception of community favoured by Hyndman, as something we can choose, engage in and work upon. It is an enticing way of managing behaviour because it works through something that even the critics of refugee camps agree is a 'good': community.

Second, Hyndman's conception of community relies on individuals as initially separate from one another, who then choose to link themselves, to use their common identity markers (language, religion, culture, etc.) to produce a 'we', a common being. But, this account ignores the ontological relationality of being, the fact that we are never pre-social individuals who can *choose* whether or not to join our individual selves together. Rather, as Nancy (2000: 30) has observed, being is always 'being-with'. We never choose to come into relation with others; rather, as singularities we 'compear' – we come to being *with* others, through our exposure to and with others (Nancy, 1991: 58). In this ontological conception, community is not something that is *added to* being, something an individual can elect whether or not to engage in or work on; community is the inevitable result of the unavoidable sociality of being. I would argue that the instrumentalized account of community as an advanced liberal tactic of government is simply one articulation of a more primordial social relation. Community as necessary coexistence is thus both more and less than Hyndman's normative conception or the Foucauldian nominalist understanding – more because it is a more originary phenomenon; less because it is not a *thing*, an entity, that we can lose, gain or set aside (Nancy, 1991: 35). Such a fundamental relationality is arguably what the Nazi concentration camps sought to destroy; community is that which resists – hence community *is* resistance. As Coward (2012: 476) puts it, all attempts to articulate community in political regimes and ideas 'are constantly being unworked by the constitutive inalienability of alterity'. Similarly, community resists and unworks attempts to use it as a tactic of advanced liberal governmentality.

But, the classical conception of community as a bonding of what was separate to create something new (see Coward, 2012: 468) is shared by much of the literature critical of Agamben. In studies of Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, community is sometimes referred to unproblematically (Hanafi and Long, 2010), or treated as something created by Palestinians 'under conditions of duress' (Sanyal, 2011: 885; see also Ramadan, 2010).³ Often, community is understood as something the refugee or asylum-seeker in a camp is necessarily excluded from as a constitutive outside (Darling, 2011: 263), though the gap may be bridged through moments or practices of solidarity (Johnson, 2012: 125–126; Millner, 2011: 321). At other times, camps seem to be reminders 'of what can happen when one transgresses outside the boundaries and loses their political community' (Isin and Rygiel, 2007: 198). Elsewhere, Kim Rygiel's (2011: 10–15) fascinating work treats community as something that, though temporary, makeshift, transitory and precarious, is produced by the refugees and asylum-seekers she examines in Calais. Like Walters (2008: 184), Rygiel (2012: 814–815, 2011: 7) sees irregular migrancy as potentially heralding new forms of community and resistance. However, for both Rygiel and Walters, while community appears to be a matter of cooperation and organization, living, negotiating and even resisting *together*, the concept is not fully explained or interrogated.

An exception to this trend is Fiona McConnell's (2009) work on the Tibetan 'community-in-exile'. While at times treating this as a relatively unproblematic community, McConnell's work changes when adopting a governmentality perspective on the management and control of Tibetan refugees. Here, she finds that the Tibetan government in exile has sought to 'foster a very particular kind of population in exile: a cohesive, united and homogenous community which shares a single national identity' (McConnell, 2012: 87; see also McConnell, 2009). While McConnell does not put it in these terms, the Tibetan government in exile exercises creative power in constructing a controllable community out of diversity in order to better make its case to the international

community. My argument as it proceeds in the next two sections differs from McConnell's in two important ways. First, my focus is on the way camps are designed to work as spatial security technologies that use a series of tactics to produce and manage a population rarely subsumable under a single national identity. This is the focus of the next section. From the claim that community is being scripted and used as such a 'mechanism of security' (Foucault, 2007: 7), it does not however follow that I believe that community in camps as a self-organizing, self-identifying homogeneity is possible. Thus, second, I question what precisely is at stake in such a conceptualization of community, and what happens when we look at community more ontologically. In the final section, I go beyond a nominalist reading to argue that community as an ontological *coexistence* will always resist its own instrumentalization. Thus, not only does the governmentality, or 'the conduct of conduct' (Gordon, 1991), within camps breed counter-conducts, but community as a structure of being exceeds its being put to work. Ethnographies of specific camps thus demonstrate how community and refugees adapt to and overflow the boundaries of their containment imposed by camps.

Governing camps: Mobility, statistics and community

Randy Lippert (1999: 308–314) argues that the governmental rationality exercised over refugees has changed in recent decades from disciplinary mechanisms towards the use of modern, advanced liberal tactics. This change, which can be characterized as a partial and incomplete movement from camps as spaces of discipline to camps as spaces of security (see Foucault, 2007: 1–27), reflects changes in the way other spheres were governed in industrialized societies from the 1980s, from welfare to health (see Miller and Rose, 2008).

The shift in rationalities is also visible in programs introduced in 1990 to 'empower' inhabitants of refugee camps in Africa, schemes in which refugees are imagined becoming more responsible for their own relief and development and less dependent on regular aid. The resemblance here to the contemporary critique of welfare for 'the poor' within nations of the modern West is remarkable. (Lippert, 1999: 313)

As within Western states, it was discourses of 'community' that were often mobilized to carry this shift. This movement is also identified in what Ilcan and Lacey (2011: 30) call the 'global aid regime', where 'technologies of agency target the poor with programs of self-empowerment and community orientation'. This section examines what I referred to in the introduction as a kind of manifesto for the management of refugee camps: a set of three interrelated and cross-referential UNHCR and NGO guides and handbooks on the planning, building and infrastructure of these spaces. Here, the role of community as a tactic emerges, though not with camps 'giving way to refugee "communities" as ways of both envisioning and governing the conduct of refugees' (Lippert, 1999: 313). Rather, governmentality operates by a series of security mechanisms to optimize the lives of refugees; community becomes just one such tactic within a range of other governmental techniques. I outline how this operates to encompass community especially through two means: the production of a space in which the movement of refugees can be both encouraged and controlled; and the production and calculation of the refugees as a population through statistics and indicators.

Spatial control of mobility

Foucault (2007: 6) argues that mechanisms of security operate by inserting the phenomena in question 'within a series of probable events'. Similarly, the attempt to map and govern the spatial mobility of refugees begins before a crisis has even taken place and while the displaced are 'in

transit': the 'contingency phase' of an operation is designated the 'period before an emergency which is yet to occur but is likely to happen' (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 41). While the 'displaced population' is in the process of being displaced, a phase of 'influx management' governs the 'process of supporting and guiding the transit of displaced populations away from danger, and towards appropriate TS [transitional settlement] options' (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 357). If this mobility is correctly and preemptively conducted, it allows for a better 'reception' and securing of the displaced by ensuring sufficient capacity is available on site. However, this means maintaining control of the 'influx' – that is, the movement of the displaced before that movement even begins. To facilitate this, a 'network of support and pre-registration facilities' are erected, consisting of 'way-stations, transit centres, and reception centres', each with sufficient protection, capacity and clean water (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 258). A fictitious example allows this situation to be 'mapped' in terms of how each facility stands in relation to the others (see Figure 8a in Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 359). Here, the broad 'direction of flight' is identified by a large arrow and various paths designate where movement is safest as well as the distances involved (half a day's walk between each facility). The 'movements of vehicles and people should be organised into an efficient system' at each transit point along the route (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 359).

We can see here that, as devices that control mobility, camps are extended spatially far beyond their apparent boundaries. Indeed, they arguably extend to the very moment and place of displacement. Each facility along the line of flight is individually mapped out,⁴ with areas for assembly, registration, health screening, distribution centres, food preparation, latrines, accommodation and departure. Minimum spatial standards are specified for each, with reception and transit camps requiring at least 3m² per person (though Sphere Project, 2011: 259, suggests 3.5m²), at least 100m² per 500 people for food preparation (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 361) and at least 100m from accommodation to refuse disposal (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 366; UNHCR, 2007: 223). These maps are organized around small arrows that direct the movement of refugees through each facility, from their guarded entry to their guarded departure. The aim is for quick, efficient and safe circulation through each facility, allowing the 'influx' to be managed effectively. The UNHCR (2007: 172, Annex 6) even provides a 'Registration Layout' concept map, with arrows moving the refugees from their waiting areas, through 'admissions' to 'registration desks', back to waiting areas and on to the computerized data-entry and photo desk.

A great deal of advice is offered on the spatial planning and organization of camps. It is emphasized that the creation of a 'master plan' is essential (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 368; UNHCR, 2007: 206). This is an overall site plan, regularly updated, marking boundaries, subdivisions, infrastructure and facilities (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 382), but also including information on the social organization of the refugees as well as topographical and planimetric surveys (UNHCR, 2007: 215). This allows for continuity of control despite the rapid turnover of international staff. A range of minimum standards set out in each document (compared in Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 278–279) cover, among other things, the location and number of tap stands, latrines and showers, as well as details of fire breaks, distances between buildings and blocks, and number and location of refuse containers and pits (Sphere Project, 2011: 239–259; UNHCR, 2007: 206–211). The headline figure in each case is that the minimum surface area is 45m² per person, including infrastructure and household agricultural plots (Sphere Project, 2011: 257; UNHCR, 2007: 210). This creates a mathematics of protection, where the size of the space is determined by the numbers to be secured. Thus, 20,000 people – and all advice is to avoid camps larger than this – generates a space whose dimensions are as follows: '20,000 people x 45m² = 900,000m² = 90 hectares (for example, a site measuring 900m x 1000m)' (UNHCR, 2007: 211).

What is not really shown in these guidelines is the way that, once set up, camps work to control and limit movement. From the transit and reception centres onwards, Agier (2011: 150) notes that

refugees are ‘processed’ through categorization procedures. In multi-ethnic camps such as Maheba in Zambia, which expanded with a range of different ‘arrivals’ after it was ceded to the UNHCR in 1971, refugees must wait in squalid and overcrowded conditions after registration before being taken to the ‘zone’ in which they are thought to belong (Agier, 2011: 120–126; see also Malkki, 1995: 137). Even without zonal constraints, there is often highly restricted movement beyond a camp’s boundaries. While Palestinians in Lebanon have experienced both relative freedom (from 1968 to 1975) and stark confinement (from 1982 to 1995) in different periods (see Peteet, 2005: 6–11), the remoteness and isolation of Mishamo in Tanzania and Dadaab in Kenya has always severely restricted mobility. Here, movement is also regulated through the use of leave passes (Malkki, 1995: 138) and identity documents (Horst, 2006: 23).

For Hyndman (2000: 140) and Agier (2008: 29), such camps cannot form communities because refugees have little control of their own movement or space. Yet these spaces and their management are, according to their guidelines, firmly structured around the maintenance and reproduction of a particular conception of community. The UNHCR specifies that the ‘basic planning unit’ for the organization of camps is the family, and ‘larger units’ then ‘follow the community structure’ (UNHCR, 2007: 106, 186). The space of a camp should be organized around ‘the smallest module, the family’, and then built up through a community (approximately 16 families or 80–100 people), followed by a ‘block’ (16 communities), a ‘sector’ (4 blocks), and the camp as a whole (4 sectors) (UNHCR, 2007: 216). Site-planning should always thus be ‘bottom-up’, reflecting the wishes of the community and its need for infrastructure, rather than the desires of the administrators (UNHCR, 2007: 213). Each family plot includes room for at least a kitchen garden to enable a move towards ‘self-sufficiency’ and ‘independence’ – thus we see the ‘space of government’ becomes the community, including the ‘active and responsible’ individual and family (Rose, 1996: 335). The camp’s use of community thereby embodies the ‘privatizing responsibility’ that marks advanced liberalism’s method of governing the global poor (Ilcan and Lacey, 2011: 44). Interaction between groups is actively encouraged through spatial design, which suggests that communities ‘are not closed form, e.g. square shaped, but resembling more of an H-shape, where both sides are open for better interaction with other communities’ (UNHCR, 2007: 213). Taking all this into account, then, an idealized subdivided camp is organized with a ‘community’ at its base in *Transitional Settlement* (see Figure 8e in Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 380). Far from making community impossible, the spatial structure of camps can go to great lengths to cultivate and capture a particular understanding of it, even with the restrictions on mobility it simultaneously enacts. Emphasis is placed on ‘rebuilding’ community and ‘community development’ (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 404–408). However, these mechanisms are also part and parcel of the second group of governmental tactics operating to control refugee camps.

Statistically producing and controlling population

Foucault (2007: 11) observed that governing behaviour through ‘security is exercised over a whole population’ rather than just individuals. Thus, the second set of techniques for governing the security of refugees through a camp mechanism is the camp’s contribution to forming a displaced *population*, which can be known and controlled via its aggregation, calculation and disaggregation into different categories of subjectivity. Rather than concentrating on the individual human body alone, biopower and governmentality is ‘massifying’, focusing on phenomena that can be measured and calculated on the basis of birth rates, mortality rates and the fertility of a population (Foucault, 2004: 243). Furthermore, biopolitical interventions are not aimed at the individual who might live, die or give birth, but at the general level of these phenomena – modifying the mortality rate or stimulating the birth rate (Foucault, 2004: 246). It is therefore not surprising that those

administering camps explicitly refer to the ‘disaster-affected population’ (Sphere Project, 2011: 9), ‘displaced population’ (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 1) or ‘refugee population’ (UNHCR, 2007: 73–74) as the subject of their action.

Much as with the spatial tactics observed earlier, the production of the refugee population occurs before arrival in a camp. The ‘preparedness’ and ‘contingency’ phases of an operation are largely about the collection of information on the population to be secured (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 40–42). The connection Foucault draws between governing through biopolitical security mechanisms and populations characterized by contingency has been examined by Dillon (2007: 45–46) and De Larrinaga and Doucet (2008: 523–525). Here, it is the range of population statistics and their uncertain movement that actually produces an emergency requiring the spatial technology of a camp in the first place. ‘Emergency indicators’ generate ‘crisis’ through measurements, by far the most important of which is the mortality rate. If this is greater than 2 per 10,000 of the population per day, an emergency exists and camps may be required. Another key indicator is child nutrition: an emergency exists if there are ‘10% with less than 80% weight for height’ (UNHCR, 2007: 64, 546). Such ‘calculative practices’ have become a hallmark of the way in which UN development operates more broadly (Ilcan and Philips, 2010). The aim is not to secure individual refugees; it is to ensure that mortality rates fall and child nutrition rises.

The phases and spatial ordering of camps make these measurements and interventions a matter of efficient administration. Thus, ‘influx management’ demands ‘regular updating of sufficient, accurate and timely information on the size, position, and composition of the influx of displaced people’ (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 357). For this reason, each way-station, transit centre and reception centre outlined above is equipped with at least a preliminary registration capacity. Each space is a matter of care *and* control (Malkki, 1995: 231): offering rations, water and a health screening, but also counting refugees to determine ‘influx rates’. Without these, camps cannot offer the security-as-optimization-of-life that their various tactics are directed towards. Each facility keeps refugees alive while forming them as a ‘displaced population’ – a known, calculated mass. In fact, this is a never-ending construction exercise, just as registration is a ‘continuous process’ (UNHCR, 2007: 158). Registration operates through four phases, from the determination of the strategy, through the collection of information and distribution of cards, through computerization using *ProGres* software, and finally to ‘verification and updating’, which by its nature cannot end (UNHCR, 2007: 162–165).

The registration and production of a population is enabled by the spatial governmental techniques already outlined. Beyond this, a key part of the registration process (phase two – the collection of information) can only be ‘conducted on a “fixed” population. This means that the group on whom more detailed information will be collected needs to be temporarily frozen’ (UNHCR, 2007: 163). Problematically, it is in the interest of refugees to be ‘unfixed’, to register several times and receive more rations, thus fixing necessitates greater coercion than normal. This traditionally operates through the use of tokens and wrist bands (UNHCR, 2007: 163), though fenced enclosures were previously used to ‘fix’ and headcount the population of Dadaab (Hyndman, 2000: 128). While those fences were ripped up by refugees, the very continuous nature of the registration process shows a more subtle subversion of these mechanisms: if the ‘fixing’ of a population were ever successful, ‘verification and updating’ would be unnecessary. In other words, its repetition as a method of control demonstrates its ineffectiveness to ensure total control. Yet security mechanisms do not aim for complete surety and mastery, but rather an average optimality, or a ‘bandwidth of the acceptable’ (Foucault, 2007: 6; see also Salter, 2008).

The production of a ‘displaced population’ is not, however, meant to be entirely ‘top–down’. Rather, much like the spatial control of mobility, it aims to involve and thereby *produce* community within camps. The UNHCR (2007: 82) emphasizes that a major change in protection over

recent decades has been that refugees ‘must be involved at the heart of decision-making concerning their protection and well-being’. Indeed, the UNHCR has put in place a ‘community development approach’ that sees all displaced individuals as ‘resourceful and active partners’ in their protection (UNHCR, 2007: 182). This includes their consultation on the siting of camps (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 127–128), as well as the provision of goods (food and non-food items) and education (UNHCR, 2007: 415). The aim of such community programmes is explicitly constructive, as it is emphasized that traditional structures may have ‘broken down’ and programmes like ‘participatory assessment’ help to ‘mobilize communities’ (UNHCR, 2007: 182–183).

The community-building and participative approach of the UNHCR is both laudable, as an attempt to develop solidarity and agency among refugees, and suspicious, as a recognizable technique of advanced liberal government. For Ilcan and Lacey, such ‘community-targeted empowerment’ simply uses ‘community’ as another ‘collective label’ (like ‘villagers’ or ‘the rural poor’) allowing for more effective government (Ilcan and Lacey, 2011: 14, 26). Certainly, what aid agencies call ‘communities’ are utilized as a smaller unit of the displaced population to better control it. Accordingly, the UNHCR’s ‘actions’ surrounding community ‘empowerment’ include gathering information on control of resources and decision-making structures in order to ‘systematize the information to build a picture of the population profile’ (UNHCR, 2007: 185). However, more than just a collective label, community is used to shift responsibility towards refugees themselves, to make them part of their own security management – the aim of mobilizing communities is explicitly so that they can ‘enhance *their own* protection’ (UNHCR, 2007: 183, emphasis added). As noted earlier, this is a tactic of government we see in many industrialized states (Miller and Rose, 2008: 88), which moved away from the state provision of welfare and social security towards an emphasis on individuals and groups taking responsibility for *themselves*. Thus, a particular understanding of community is brought forth, or is invested with new values such that refugees can govern themselves and each other *through* their personal ethics, collective allegiances and obligations (Rose, 1999: 176). We can see this movement towards self-responsibilization in the recent emphasis on ‘community resilience’ in Western security strategies (see Chandler, 2012). In this sense, community is used to supplement the top-down production and control of a population, adding what Rose (2000: 1399) calls ‘ethopower’ – working through the ethos and values of a responsible, self-governing community – to existing exercises of biopower.

Refugees are thus no longer just another ‘stakeholder’ in their own protection (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 30–31): their constitution as a ‘community’ (within a population) allows for more control to be exerted. They become a subject of more subtle intervention. Traditional power structures within the displaced community can be utilized, but also constantly interfered with (as they are ‘not necessarily fair’; see UNHCR, 2007: 106, 186) to suit the gender and minority concerns of the UNHCR and NGOs. These organizations are able to exploit community capacities, resources and labour to a greater degree, while ‘empowering’ refugees at the same time (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 195). Community ‘participation’ and ‘involvement’ becomes a matter of actively changing behaviour and habits on issues such as personal hygiene through ‘providing information to the community on life in their new situation, which may be markedly different from their previous experience’ (UNHCR, 2007: 106–107). Producing, encouraging and ‘empowering’ community is thus enfolded within wider forms of governmentality that aim to secure life and thus impinge on every element of refugee existence.

Uncontainable community

Drawing out these advanced forms of governmentality that make use of community in managing refugee camps is not to claim that they are entirely successful. Unlike discipline, the security

mechanisms of governmentality do not solely regulate or restrict movement, but also *enable* circulation and distribution of ideas, goods and services (Elden, 2007: 565; Foucault, 2007: 44–49). Camps are thus spaces in the sense of ‘sphere[s] of coexistence of a multiplicity of trajectories’, where previously unrelated people and things come into contact (Massey, 2005: 63; see also Ramadan, 2013). For this reason, as spaces they produce unexpected and unintentional outcomes, potential emergences of the new or novel (Massey, 2005: 71). Meanwhile, any attempt to conduct will inevitably find correlative counter-conducts (Foucault, 2007: 196). As I shall examine later, just as the attempt to manage behaviour through camps utilizes community, so community is a mode by which this is resisted and countered. Thus community, understood non-instrumentally as an ontological sociality, always resists and surpasses its attempted instrumentalization.

It is questionable how such an instrumental reading of community (as a tactic of government) can work with, or alongside, a more ontological understanding (being as being-with). Foucault’s understanding of power is necessarily ‘nominalistic’ (Foucault, 1998: 93), and therefore particular local operations of power and resistance are immanent in each other: ‘there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions’ (Foucault, 1998: 95–96). Such a locus appears to be what I am claiming for community as coexistence. However, such a role would, once again, seek to impose a purpose, teleology or programme on community and would itself be resisted. Rather, I argue that, as Arnold Davidson (2011: 28–30) claims, counter-conducts are closely connected to Foucault’s conception of ethics as an *ethos* – a ‘way of being’ directed towards oneself and others. The supplementation of a nominalist reading of community as a tactic of government with Nancy’s more ontological understanding thus fleshes out the originally relational aspect of a critical ethos of counter-conducts – our way of being and conducting ourselves is always a way of being-with and conducting-ourselves-with-others. Community as unavoidable sociality is thus the ethical-ontological background against which these security mechanisms, conducts and counter-conducts operate. It is not their ‘source’, but it perhaps shows that more is at stake than security as the optimization of life. While security mechanisms using community aim to enhance life, Nancy’s insights suggest that being (as being-with) will always exceed the boundaries imposed upon it, revealing the unstable, insecure foundations of such security. This section examines how such resistance operates, how community in camps has undermined and countered the spatial and statistical techniques that govern through community. To do this, I turn to ethnographic accounts of refugee camps in Africa and the Middle East. Theoretically informed studies of specific camps illustrate the ways in which they can produce a range of unintended, unexpected counter-conducts. I focus on three examples of how community exceeds the borders imposed by the governmental strategies of camps: card games, social networks and the giving of meaning.

Card games

Many stories of resistance appear in the form of disruptions to governmental techniques of producing a fixed population through spatial constraint and statistics. Indeed, as we saw, the very need to ‘fix’ the displaced population was in part due to resistance to calculative tactics. Thus, common strategies used by refugees to secure more rations include the double-entering of names on lists, registering in more than one zone or village, adding fictional family members, and declining to register deaths and departures from the camp (Peteet, 2005: 72). It is also common for parts of a family’s rations to be sold or traded for foods more in line with local preferences (Agier, 2011: 152–153; Horst, 2006: 82–83; Sanyal, 2011: 881–882).

More subversive, however, are what Horst calls the identity/ration ‘card games’ played by Somali refugees and Kenyan locals in and around Dadaab. Such games are a counter-conduct produced by the difficulty of fixing and restricting the identity and community of refugees. For

example, when individuals and families leave the camp, it is common for them to leave their ration cards with family or friends (Horst, 2006: 94). These can then be used to increase the ration received by the remaining family, while any surplus can be traded. More importantly, the card itself can be traded at local markets for money, goods and services. Because of the access it provides to food and services, such a card is a precious commodity and sought after by less affluent local Kenyans. Moreover, owing to Dadaab's location close to the Somali border, it is often difficult for Western authorities in the camp to distinguish between Somalis and Kenyans, let alone between refugees and non-refugees (Horst, 2006: 23). One official in Ifo camp in Dadaab claimed that of the 45,000 claiming rations, around 11,000 were local Kenyans (Horst, 2006: 95). Such manoeuvres are not necessarily moments of solidarity between the refugee and the local population (Johnson, 2012; Millner, 2011), but are counter-conducts produced by the interactions of different trajectories and circulations that camps as spaces allow and encourage.

Manipulation of control through such 'card games' can also increase wider mobility and the options available to refugees. Thus, a particularly prized exchange for a ration card would be for a Kenyan identity card, which allows the possibility of travel throughout Kenya. In a similar way, Malkki (1995: 153–183) outlines the pragmatic and often ingenious means that Burundian Hutu 'town refugees' in the Kigoma region of Tanzania found for manipulating their identity – changing religion, intermarriage, vague identity descriptors – in order to appear invisible and thereby increase their freedom. 'Card games' thus act as a metaphor for the shifting, creative management of refugee identity and community. They indicate the way that the interactive sociality of community overflows apparent boundaries of nationality and ethnic origin, as well as camps' statistical and spatial governmental techniques.

Transnational networks and flows

A particularly important way in which these boundaries are exceeded is through transnational social networks and remittance flows. Peteet stresses the role that cash remittances played in the options available to Palestinians who remained in refugee camps, especially remittances sent by relatives working in oil-producing Middle Eastern states (Peteet, 2005: 80, 175; see also Doraï, 2003; Ramadan, 2013). These also contributed to the burgeoning global articulations of Palestinian community, for which such camps were important nodal points. However, a more developed analysis of networks and flows is offered by Horst's examination of the Dadaab Somali refugees and their 'nomadic heritage'.

Horst argues that Somalis have a long history of living with insecurities and have developed a set of coping mechanisms (a 'nomadic heritage'). These involve frequent movement to greener pastures, strong social networks that entail obligations of assistance, and the spreading of investments to reduce risk. She argues that these mechanisms have not only survived in the camps but have 'now acquired a transnational character' (Horst, 2006: 2–3). Social networks are 'complex human relations in which individuals negotiate and at times switch (power) positions, in order to survive' (Horst, 2006: 237). They function on the basis of transactions that spread information, services and resources, beginning with family but also encompassing clan members, neighbours and the proximate needy. Coalitions based on such networks are neither stable nor unitary, but are continually being built and rebuilt (Horst, 2006: 63–70). Such ever-shifting networks, connections and flows demonstrate the uncontainability of community, the inalienable sociality that 'leaves any enclosure continually unravelling' (Coward, 2009: 85). They thus counter attempts to conduct by exceeding and undoing the UNHCR's and NGOs' instrumental articulations of community. Nor are they formed from self-selecting individuals choosing to form a collective. Rather, such networks can sometimes help the vulnerable regardless of identity markers through systems of *qaaraan* (a

sharing of expenses) or *shoolongo* (a savings and loans activity) (Horst, 2006: 103–104); equally, they may offer no help whatsoever to the most needy (Horst, 2006: 74).

It is clear, however, that Somali refugees in Dadaab rely on a wider and looser sense of ‘community’ than that used by much camp literature, the UNHCR and NGOs. Importantly, this community increasingly flows across national as well as camp boundaries. While Dadaab, like many camps, is ‘excluded and isolated ... this does not inhibit transnational connections’ completely (Horst, 2006: 123). Thus, the introduction into Dadaab, from 1998, of two technological developments, the *taar* and the *xawilaad* (electronic and radio technologies facilitating money transfer), has led to a vast increase in the flow of information and money into its camps. The *xawilaad* in particular is operated by Somalis, and almost solely for the sending of Somali remittances (Horst, 2006: 130–133). Firm statistics on remittance flows are impossible to find or research properly because *taar* and *xawilaad* operate illegally, while recipients are suspicious of questions, fearing they arise from attempts to tax or inhibit such flows. Nonetheless, Horst estimates that around 10–15% of Dadaab Somalis benefit from *xawilaad* remittances directly, while ‘a large majority of refugees, say 70%’ benefit indirectly (Horst, 2006: 157). These flows are used to give the displaced more options, from starting businesses or funding education to assisting others, further changing the space of Dadaab. Yet they cannot be contained or even *known* by the statistical and spatial mechanisms for producing and controlling refugee communities.

Giving meaning

One of the options that transnational flows give to refugees is the ability to reinvest in the space of the camp, in terms of business and infrastructure. Such investment can add layers of meaning and markers of identity to these spaces. Camps have been described as ‘non-places’ that do not integrate other places, meanings and traditions (Diken and Laustsen, 2005: 86), yet ethnographers show that camps are spaces with a plethora of meanings, demonstrating the agency and uncontrollability of community. A beautiful description of such a layering of constructed meaning, and one that required no monetary investment whatsoever, is given by Malkki of Mishamo in Tanzania. Mishamo is a remote camp set up to protect the enormous influx of Hutus fleeing from Burundi following successive massacres by the ruling Tutsi in 1972. In researching Mishamo, Malkki (1995: 54) found that every aspect of the refugees’ mundane experience – from the construction of the camp itself to the daily violence and hierarchies of power, the education, agricultural production, and visits by UNHCR grandees – was examined and interpreted through the ordering device of a ‘mythico-history’ of the Burundi Hutus. This mythico-history recast daily life in Mishamo into a ‘constellation of meaningful relations’ surrounding concepts of good and evil, purity and corruption, which made life, space and events understandable to all (Malkki, 1995: 107).

Far from destroying meaning, Malkki argues that Mishamo’s spatial, modular form and isolated geographical placement had the effect of nurturing, concentrating and distilling narratives into a singular account of Hutu history. Organized as grid-like, numbered villages, connected by paths that were never entirely monitored (see the maps in Malkki, 1995: xx–xxii), it operated less like a panopticon and more like a spider’s web: the spread of information and stories along these paths meant anything happening within the space of the camp was trapped, digested and fitted into the Hutu mythico-history. For example, the visit of a UNHCR official was reinterpreted as another benign foreign power (like the earlier Belgian colonists) being tricked by the Hutus’ Tanzanian repressors (like the Tutsis before them). The ‘perpetual, self-conscious circulation of ideas and knowledge’ thus produced a very standard interpretation of exile, the camp and the Hutus place within it. While a form of community that was certainly recognizable and discernible to Western audiences (given its nationalist form), this was far from susceptible to instrumentalization. Indeed,

any innovation or event was met with suspicion and translated according to the good/evil, purity/corruption matrix. Thus, far more than merely a 'device of containment and enclosure', contrary to expectation and intention the camp space 'grew into a locus of continual creative subversion and transformation' (Malkki, 1995: 237).

A very different account of the production of meaning in supposedly blank spaces can be found in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon (see Peteet, 2005; Ramadan, 2010, 2013; Sanyal, 2011). Peteet's detailed study in particular shows that camps vary not just geographically, but also temporally – Shatila camp looked completely different in the initial period of exile (1948–1968), in the era of Palestinian resistance (1968–1982), and after its violent recrafting and subjugation (1980s and 1990s). Throughout the history of the Shatila camp (which was set up in 1949), 'the spatial device of the camp simultaneously engendered transformations in Palestinian community and identity' (Peteet, 2005: 29). Initially, meaning was given to these spaces through their organization according to villages of origin. Thus, refugees imposed 'their own sense of spatiality on the camps, crafting a microcosm of Galilee'. Indeed, four generations on from displacement, Peteet (2005: 100–101) still found children defining themselves as being from villages in Galilee they had never seen. During this period, the necessity of identity cards and checkpoints was also productive of lines of inclusion and exclusion that starkly reinforced the 'placemaking' of the refugees (Peteet, 2005: 128).

While villages were a point of departure for placemaking, they were gradually 'overlaid with other sorts of space', from the institutional (distribution centres and schools) to informal social gatherings (*dawaween*), intervillage marriage venues, and the markets and bakeries that produced an embryonic national cuisine (Peteet, 2005: 116–117). Layers of meaning appeared through the readoption of the rural peasant Palestinians' chequered head scarf (the *kuffiyeh*), as well as the production of communal arts and crafts incorporating Palestinian flags and maps in jewellery and home decor (Peteet, 2005: 149–150; Ramadan, 2013: 73). At its height, and unlike that generated in Mishamo, this resistant meaning-giving was not exclusive or nationalistic. Interactions and solidarities were formed across camp boundaries, and it was rarely clear where the borders of camps like Shatila lay (Peteet, 2005: 137). A much wider sense of community solidarity formed, encompassing Westerners working in the camps, Lebanese on the outside and those sending remittances from abroad (Peteet, 2005: 134). This resistance would eventually be crushed by a combination of outside forces, with truly horrific results in Shatila (see Fisk, 2001: 359–400). Nonetheless, Palestinian camps in Lebanon remain perhaps the archetype of how community continually resists and exceeds the governmental strategies put in place to manage, direct and control it.

Conclusion

This article has argued for the need to give greater attention to the role that community plays in the government of refugee camps, as well as in resistance to that government. As we turn our attention to this element of camps as spatial technologies of government, it is revealed that they are not as exceptional as is sometimes claimed, but are increasingly governed by security mechanisms similar to those of advanced liberal societies. When we supplement this Foucauldian-inspired reading of community as a tactic of government with Nancy's ontological understanding of community as an unavoidable coexistence, however, our focus is drawn to the ways in which such security mechanisms are always being overturned and exceeded. This is not to say that such counter-conducts are necessarily 'good' or unproblematic: 'card games' can destabilize local populations and conditions within refugee camps; transnational remittance flows raise social tensions and inequality in camps while often funding armed resistance; meaning-giving led to exclusive, dangerously nationalist sentiments in Mishamo, with local resentment and the near

annihilation of Shatila. The politics of community within camps are produced through this ambiguity, risk and uncertainty. Community thus has the capacity to overturn the camp as a spatial security technology. But, equally, its irruptive and disruptive capacity can also enable a more *politically* optimal form of life for refugees, with greater agency, meaning and mobility gained through the sharing of a space of coexistence.

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Notes

1. The Sphere Project was set up by NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in 1997 to 'develop a set of universal minimum standards in core areas of humanitarian response' (Sphere Project, 2011: ii). The result is the Handbook, the third edition of which I refer to here.
2. *Transitional Settlement* forms a set of 'guidelines' for agencies 'concerned with the transitional settlement needs of displaced people and their hosts' (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 1). The term 'transitional settlements' attempts to get beyond the focus solely upon 'planned camps' (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 7), but the range of options suggested covers my broad use of the term 'refugee camp'. This publication is the result of a collaborative project between Oxfam and the University of Cambridge's shelterproject (see www.shelterproject.org), funded by the UK Department for International Development, using materials developed with NGOs such as Shelter Centre, Engineers Without Borders and Architectes Sans Frontières (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: x–xi). Making constant reference to the Sphere Project and UNHCR handbooks (see e.g. Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 13–14), *Transitional Settlement* is an exemplary piece of interagency governmentality, involving all 'stakeholders' in the planning and management of the camp space (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 30–31). This makes the guidelines a useful example of the way advanced liberal forms of management tend to 'govern "at a distance" ... by establishing networks, links, or partnerships with state and non-state actors' (Ilcan and Lacey, 2011: 51–52).
3. At other times, Ramadan (2013: 70–73) prefers the term 'camp-society', a more ephemeral idea privileged precisely because it is 'not a monolithic body with a single, pure identity', but 'contingent, in process' and liminal.
4. For an example of a way-station, see Figure 8b; for a transit centre, see Figure 8c; and for a reception centre, see Figure 8d (Corsellis and Vitale, 2005: 363–366).

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