CHAPTER 9

ABJECT SPACES: FRONTIERS, ZONES, CAMPS

Engin F. Isin and Kim Rygiel

Abject spaces are those in and through which increasingly distressed, displaced, and dispossessed peoples are condemned to the status of strangers, outsiders, and aliens (e.g., refugees, unlawful combatants, insurgents, and the conquered) and stripped of their (existent and potential) citizenship (rights of becoming political) in various emerging frontiers, zones, and camps around the world. There has been a veritable outcry against the fact that these people have been reduced to a status without human rights. Yet their being human has not seemed to matter much to the states and their laws that have condemned them to these states of inexistence (figure 9.1). What is the logic of these abject spaces and how do we investigate the practices that sustain them?

Theorizing Abject Spaces: Arendt, Again

While Guantánamo Bay has become a symbol of U.S. oppression and human rights abuses since 2002, abject spaces—extraterritorial spaces where international and national laws are suspended—have spread throughout the world in the past decade as spaces for holding refugees, asylum seekers, deportees, combatants, insurgents, and others caught in the new global policing and policies net. These spaces include various frontiers controlled by state authorities, zones where special rules and laws apply, and camps where laws are suspended. We refer to these as abject spaces to indicate that those who are constituted through them are rendered as
neither subjects nor objects but inexistent insofar as they become inaudible and invisible. How do we account for and respond to the production of such spaces? Much has been written about Agamben’s consideration of the camp as the nomos of the modern. More than a decade ago Agamben suggested that if the camp was the space in which the most inhuman events had happened, the response has been to ask, “how could it happen?” But this question makes it impossible to ask another: “What is a camp? What is its juridico-political structure that such events could take place there?” From this question Agamben proceeds to illustrate that the inhuman could only take place when the camp was constituted as a space of exception, that is to say, a space where the existing juridico-political logic is suspended and replaced by an alternative logic. More significantly, this alternative logic itself becomes the rule. In other words, the camp as a state of exception becomes the rule but, as exception, remains nonetheless outside the normal order. The camp is therefore not simply an external space. Rather, the logic of the camp is its immanence. The state of exception is, by the very fact of its exclusion, included in the juridical order. It is this immanence that enables the camp to confute its fact and law in and through which anything becomes possible.

For Agamben the state of exception also pertains to bare life. What is significant and dangerous about the modern order, according to Agamben, is that as the state of exception becomes the rule, “the realm of bare life—which is originally situated at the margins of the political order—gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, bios and zoe, right and fact, enter into a zone of indistinction.” For Agamben, then, the camp becomes that space where politics becomes biopolitics and “bare life,” not the citizen, the subject of politics. Agamben then suggests, “It would be more honest and, above all, more useful to investigate carefully the juridical procedures and deployments of power by which human beings could be so deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime.” It becomes impossible to decide between fact and law in the camp because exception and rule become indistinct. If this is true, Agamben says, then we find ourselves in the presence of a camp every time a space is created where it becomes impossible to distinguish between fact and law, exception and rule. Agamben astutely observed almost a decade ago that the logic of the camp as a space of exception had already materialized into most benign spaces in airports and cities. While Agamben is absolutely essential for understanding the frontiers, zones, and camps that have been created since he wrote about the logic of the camp, we suggest that these new spaces cannot be understood with the logic of
exception. We want to argue that the logic of the camp as set out by Agamben does not—or cannot—account for the novelty of the kinds of spaces that have been created. The logic of exception that prevailed in the internment camps that Agamben interprets as the nemo of the modern, as we shall see, is not quite helpful for understanding frontiers, zones, and camps of our times. This is partly because, as we shall see, Agamben’s focus on the logic of the camp is historical; he essentializes the camp, rather than investigating how the camp works in all of its material, experiential, and diverse forms. As abject spaces, frontiers, zones, and camps are often created with the intent of “protecting” the displaced and keeping them simultaneously “away” from both danger and state territories. While the camp functioned, as Arendt noted, as a space in which undesirables were eliminated after denationalization and denaturalization, frontiers and zones function as spaces where subjects are “processed” as inexistents—noncitizens in waiting.9 If the camp was a space of abjection where people were reduced to bare life, the zones, frontiers, and camps of our times are abject spaces, spaces in which the intention is to treat people neither as subjects (of discipline) nor objects (of elimination) but as those without presence, without existence, as inexistents, not because they don’t exist, but because their existence is rendered invisible and inaudible through abject spaces.

It is precisely in this difference that abject spaces are not spaces of abjection but spaces of politics. Thus, it is possible to imagine certain spaces of inexistence where abjection could be resisted. Besides the camp, there are also autonomous and semiautonomous zones where the rule of law is suspended and other logics enacted like the logic of “cities of refuge.” Derrida’s proposal for a concept of cities of refuge is an example of a space of exception where the rule of law of the state is suspended for hospitality, a hospitality that is not extended by the state but made possible by the city.10 The revival in recent years of the sanctuary movement in Canada and across Europe are good examples of the sort of practice that “cities of refuge” might include.11 Agamben, however, is unable to shake himself off from the logic of the camp as the only space of abjection. As a result, he is also unable to imagine spaces of exception that serve against abjection: his conception of the city is nebulous and enigmatic precisely because it is trapped in the camp.12 Agamben wishes that “European cities would rediscover their ancient vocation of cities of the world by entering into a relation of reciprocal extraterritoriality.”13 Agamben names this space as reciprocal extraterritoriality or even territoriality as a new model of international relations in which the guiding concept would no longer be the rights of the citizen but the refuge of the singular. Agamben suggests that

“[t]his space would coincide neither with any of the homogenous national territories nor with their topographical sum, but would rather act on them by articulating and perforating them topologically.”14 The irony is that such spaces are already appearing in Europe and North America as frontiers and zones and in the form of what we call here abject spaces. States are entering into reciprocal relationships to create these spaces in which extraterritorial, or even better extraterritorial, relations are being created. European cities too are rediscovering their ancient vocation in sequestering, detaining, and regulating bodies by entering into reciprocal relations with each other.

To understand the logic of what we call “abject spaces” as opposed to “spaces of abjection” such as represented by Agamben’s camp requires investigating these spaces as both spaces of abjection as well as spaces of resistance, and the thoughts and practices that sustain them. Our investigations of frontiers, zones, and camps reveal how different kinds of abject spaces employ different strategies to reduce people to abject inexistence, not only creating varying conditions of rightlessness but also making different logics and acts of resistance possible.

We would then be well advised to take Rancière’s protest against Agamben (and Arendt) on this issue seriously.15 Rancière argues that by following Arendt so closely Agamben takes the capacity of being a subject away from those who are caught in the camp, rendering it an altogether apolitical space. The opposition between bare life and political life hinges on an ontological trap. Rancière notes that “[i]n this space, the executioner and the victim, the German body and the Jewish body, appear as two parts of the same ‘biopolitical’ body.”16 Rancière argues, “Any kind of claim to rights or any struggle enacting rights is thus trapped from the very outset in the mere polarity of bare life and state of exception.”17 He argues that this logical flaw is already present in Arendt.18 He refers here to Arendt’s observation that

[If a human being loses his political status, he should, according to the implications of the inborn and inalienable rights of man, come under exactly the situation for which the declarations of such general rights provided. Actually the opposite is the case. It seems that a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as fellow-man.]19

Rancière takes issue with Arendt, arguing that for Arendt either the rights of the citizen are the rights of man—but the rights of man are the rights of the unpolarized person; they are the rights of those who have no rights, which amounts to nothing—or the rights of man are the rights of the citizen, the rights attached to the fact of being a citizen of such and such
a constitutional state. This means that they are the rights of those who have rights, which amounts to a tautology.20

As we shall see, Rancière confuses Arendt’s observation here regarding the paradox that is human rights with her argument that a politics cannot be founded on human rights. It seems to us that Rancière misses Arendt’s essential insight: despite its weightiness as a discourse, human rights are in fact meaningless in and of themselves, becoming significant only within the context of “a right to have rights,” that is, with the right to first exist as a political subject. Arendt does not equate the rights of man with the rights of the unpoltizized person, as Rancière suggests, but with the person denied the right to become a political subject, an argument that is, as we shall illustrate, very close, ironically, to Rancière’s own.

In contrast to his interpretation of Arendt, Rancière argues that “the Rights of Man are the rights of those who have not the rights that they have and have the rights that they have not.”21 Rancière explains that if the rightless “could lose their ‘bare life’ out of a public judgment based on political reasons, this meant that even their bare life—their life doomed to death was political.”22 He suggests that because Arendt and Agamben begin with the assumption of the clear distinction between sōe (“bare life”) and bios (“political life”) they “sort out the problem in advance.”23 Rather, for Rancière, “the point is, precisely, where do you draw the line separating one life from the other? Politics is about that border.”24 The problem lies in assuming that “the rights belong to definite or permanent subjects.”25 This approach omits the fact that politics lies precisely in that moment wherein one becomes a political subject by enacting or claiming “the rights one does not have” rather than in some already given status with rights. The consequence of this approach, Rancière suggests, is that “the political space, which was shaped in the very gap between the abstract literalness of the rights and the polemic about their verificiation, turns out to diminish more and more every day.”26 Rancière’s argument here is that the condition of abjection and rightlessness should not be confused with the condition of being political, that is, with the capacity to act as a political subject, for the abject may be without rights but this does not negate their ability to act as political subjects. It is in the very claiming of rights—the rights that one does not have—where one enacts one’s political existence. Finally, it is precisely in abject spaces like the camp, according to Rancière, where such politics occur “shaped in the very gap between the abstract literalness of the rights and the polemic about their verificiation.”27 Rancière’s argument here is an important corrective to Agamben’s interpretation of Arendt and his view of the camp, but we would argue that it is actually much closer to

Arendt’s own argument where she insists that what is denied to people reduced to statelessness is the right to have rights, which, she argues, is more fundamental than the specific rights of justice and freedom.

In the insightful chapter “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man” in her book The Origins of Totalitarianism, Arendt traces the emergence of the question of minorities in Europe and raises questions about the very possibility of human rights, or, rather, the very possibility of founding a politics on human rights. She argues that minority treaties by which “stateless” peoples were to be protected in the early twentieth century were themselves a product of the logic of sovereignty and racialized conceptions of the homogeneity of population and rootedness in the soil that undergirded it.28 The status of statelessness could only make sense under conditions where freedom was associated with emancipation symbolized by a nation corresponding to a state. For dominant groups in European states the question of minorities dangerously and rapidly converged on assimilation or liquidation.29 She interpreted this tragic process as the conquest of the state by the nation whereby the state was transformed from an institution of law into one of the nation.30 She thus arrived at the conclusion that

[n]o paradox of contemporary politics is filled with a more poignant irony than the discrepancy between the efforts of well-meaning idealists who stubbornly insist on regarding as inalienable those human rights, which are enjoyed only by citizens of the most prosperous and civilized countries, and the situation of the rightless themselves.31

It was impossible to bring any of these rightless people under statute law precisely because the state, now conquered by the nation, produced the condition of statelessness and hence the question of minorities, refugees, and the rightless in the first place. And all efforts to define their rights as inalienable human rights proved ineffective.

Arendt locates the origins of this paradox in the very Declaration of the Rights of Man. While on the one hand the source of the rights of man was “man” himself (as opposed to God or tradition), the guarantor of such rights could only be a people: “man hardly appeared as a completely isolated being who carried his dignity within himself without reference to some large encompassing order, when he disappeared again into a member of a people.”32 Man was man only insofar as he was a member of a sovereign people, and being a sovereign people was increasingly defined as being rooted in soil and with a state. “The whole question of human rights, therefore, quickly and inextricably blended with the question of national
emancipation; only the emancipated sovereignty of the people, of one's own people, seemed to be able to insure them.”

The significance of her argument, and its poignancy then as now, is that human rights proved ineffective not because of ill will or intention but because of the logic of sovereignty of the nation-state. Her argument was not, Rancière argues, a revival of citizenship rights (civil, political, and social) enshrined in nation-states but to call into question the logic of sovereignty that undergirded citizenship and made the denial of those rights to certain groups possible. Arendt’s reference to Burke, which troubles Rancière, was meant to illustrate the prescience of Burke’s insight rather than arguing in defense of his conservatism and the return to tradition. On the contrary, as her argument about the definition of citizenship as “a right to have rights” makes clear, Arendt, like Rancière, argued that “something much more fundamental than freedom and justice” is at stake when humans are deprived of the right to have rights; that is to say, the right to speech, opinion, presence, and action, in effect, the rights to being political.34

When Arendt speaks about the dark background of mere givenness she means to critique the logic of sovereignty that takes the mere existence of humans and turns it into the foundations of a nation. By contrast, the foundation of a state (not a nation or nation-state) for Arendt would then be to militate against mere existence with what she calls human artifice: the state as a result of our common human labor.35 When people are forced out of the political, they lose “all those parts of the world and those aspects of human existence” that are the products of human labor.36 “This mere existence, that is all that which is mysteriously given us by birth and which includes our bodies and the talents of our minds,” cannot justify equality because “[w]e are not born equal; [b]ut we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights.”37 Equality is not given but is a product of human labor—negotiation, struggle, compromise, defeat, victory—all that is human, all too human ways of being.

Approaching frontiers, zones, and camps that have appeared in the past few years reminds us of the emergence of minorities and refugees in the early twentieth century. While the logic of sovereignty that undergirded the camp and the spaces that corresponded to it are similar, the abject spaces that have emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century appear different. As much as we feel horror at the appearance of such spaces, we also argue that investigating the logic that underpins them and the practices that sustain them is absolutely essential for revealing these spaces as political spaces. As if responding to Arendt’s argument that human rights are meaningless without the ability to claim political existence, these new abject spaces govern precisely by attempting to prevent individuals from exercising political subjectivity by holding them in spaces of existential, social, political, and legal limbo. We interpret the rendering of certain people as invisible and inaudible as nothing less than a rendering of these people as inexistential and we understand those spaces in which they are so constituted as abject spaces.

While this logic of inexistence is common to all forms of abject spaces, frontiers, zones, and camps each intervene in this process of rights making in different ways. In the case of frontiers and zones, the focus is on halting the ability to enact rights. Recalling Rancière here, it is precisely when one enacts “the rights that one does not have” that one becomes a political subject. As Rancière explains, “[t]hese rights are theirs when they can do something with them to construct a dissensus against the denial of rights they suffer.”38 Historically, citizenship has always emerged first as a practice and only after as legal status. Groups excluded from legal definitions of citizenship entitlement (slaves, women, the propertyless, etc.) have always made their claims to citizenship first by acting as political subjects and demanding “the rights that they do not have.” Only by acting as citizens in this way has the legal status of citizenship broadened its boundaries to newcomers. Frontiers and zones abject, then, by attempting to halt this very process of citizenship making by incapacitating subjects from claims making. This is done through strategies of silencing such as geographical and social isolation. Abjects, like the Iraqi man in the photo with which this chapter opens, know only too well these strategies of silencing. Suturing one’s eyelids and lips in protest visibly marks the pain, which is this denial of subjectivity. But it is also an act of resistance, reclaiming political subjectivity out of this very act of silencing. Denied legal citizenship status, and with it “the ontopolitical status of a speaking being,” abjects “have to interrupt the dominant political (speaking) order not just to be heard, but to be recognized as a speaking being as such.”39 The act of suturing (along with the hunger strike that results) is an act by which the nonspeaking abject transforms his very own body (his own “bare life”) into an act of resistance.

If frontiers and zones are designed with the intention of preventing the abject from acting as a political subject, camp spaces work with a different logic of internment. Through internment, political subjects with legal status are turned into those “who have not the rights that they have,” a necessary first step in order to be able to strip away this status, thereby turning these political subjects into abjects. As Arendt observed, denationalization and denaturalization were necessary first steps in making the extermination of Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and other “undesirables” thinkable and possible. Similarly, new forms of the camp, such as Guantánamo Bay, render citizens and nationals in legal limbo as “enemy combatants,” denying them the rights that come with citizenship and nationality—even with criminality. After all, as Arendt noted, the status of criminal might be preferable for
that migration is, formany, simultaneously a strategy of resistance and an attempt to better one’s life conditions through mobility.44 It is in this context, then, that frontiers should be understood as abject spaces; they are, in the first instance, attempts at controlling migrant agency in transit spaces, spaces that migrants have to some extent created.45

This section exemplifies emerging frontiers in which various subjects are not only stripped of their citizenship rights (of their origins), but also given ostensibly differentiated citizenship rights (in their destinations). The logic behind such spaces is to prevent the abject from exercising social, political, and economic rights, recognizing that the ability to do so is a first step in becoming political and claiming legal citizenship status. The logic behind such governmental thought in producing such spaces, however, is one of human rights, and more specifically of protection, that is, that indeed new rights are being extended to those who would otherwise remain rightless. This logic condemns those who are caught in its web to a state of being neither objects nor subjects but abjects; those whose inexistence is secured by virtue of their transient and suspended state.

We see this logic, for example, in the U.K. government’s new proposal for a global asylum system based on two types of zones: “Regional Protection Areas” and “off-territory Transit Processing Centres.”46 Regional protection areas are to be set up near conflict zones producing major flows of people, and under UNHCR responsibility to be located in Turkey, Iran, northern Somalia, and Morocco.47 In contrast, processing centers are to be located along the external borders of the European Union in countries such as Romania, Croatia, Albania, and Ukraine and are meant to be extraterritorial processing areas where people’s asylum claims could be processed, preventing the need to actually travel to the countries in which they wish to request asylum.48 We can also consider the heavily regulated and controlled border zones such as the U.S./Mexico border as poignant examples.49 The example we wish to highlight here, however, is Australia’s excised offshore places and processing centers. Like the United Kingdom, Australia’s plans also depend on creating extraterritorial spaces in which to “house” asylum seekers and other migrants in a space of social isolation away from, and off the territory of, the Australian state where they might more easily exercise certain social, political, and civil citizenship rights.

In 2001, the Australian government passed legislation to deter refugees (especially those smuggled in without valid documentation) from reaching its shores. As part of this legislation, Australia removed certain territories from its “migration zone” as a way of circumventing international refugee law and its own national immigration law and responsibility to process asylum seekers. These territories act as spaces permitting indefinite detention
with limited judicial review as a way of bypassing judicial procedures normally applying on the Australian mainland. These territories, called "excised offshore places," include Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands in the Indian Ocean; Ashmore and Cartier Island in the Timor Sea; and "any Australian sea installation or offshore resource (such as an oil rig)." 51

In addition to "excised offshore places," the Australian government has also made arrangements with several Pacific islands to establish "offshore processing centers," essentially amounting to the "subcontracting of detention to poorer neighbouring states (the so-called 'Pacific Solution')." 52 Here asylum seekers, especially those entering "illegally" or "expelled" by the Australian government (like those arriving by boat) may be turned away to these places and held in facilities similar to detention centers and refugee camps to await the processing of their asylum claims. Persons detained in these camps are denied such civil and political rights as "contact with the outside world," "freedom of movement," and "due process guarantees" like independent legal counsel. 53

Like zones of protection, these offshore places interrupt the process of citizenship and rights making by rendering asylum seekers into abjects through social isolation in detention centers where they are less likely to be able to exercise citizenship rights such as the right to legal council, speech, and access to social services and community. Whereas zones of protection operate by creating extraterritorial spaces that function as buffers, offshore places work by redefining state territory as either no longer falling under state jurisdiction (e.g., excised offshore places) or as extraterritorial space purchased on a second territory and often under the responsibility of a third party like an international organization. Either way, these technologies create frontiers that keep threats to the state and its sovereignty at a distance.

What is then the logic of all these zones of protection, regional protection areas, excised offshore places, offshore protection areas, and protection borderlands that we call frontiers? It is not that there is an inexorable logic that is enacted through these diverse forms of population control and regulation but that they are assembled together to create frontiers in and through which subjects are denied possibilities of constituting themselves as political subjects without being reduced to objects. These frontiers through which people are constituted as abject have become spaces with their own logic. Rather than focusing on how these spaces violate the human rights of abjects, it makes more sense to us to emphasize the ways in which these spaces attempt to incapacitate these people from constituting themselves as subjects with rights to have rights. These spaces render subjects with an inexistnt status that is without voice, without speech, without presence, without reason—in effect, without the capacity of becoming political and thus deserving of even a right to have rights. Yet, it is in these abject spaces that the dominant regimes of democratic states are also made visible—and rendered so by the very same abjects they have tried to constitute. For the abject continue to act as political subjects exercising the rights they do not have whether it is in acts of suturing mouths, setting boats on fire in order to be picked up and brought to the Australian shores, or attempting dangerous border crossings. It is through these acts that they render themselves existent and present while simultaneously exposing the web of strategies and technologies of otherness that attempt to render them inexistent.

Zones

The logic that assembles frontiers can also be found in spaces that we call zones. These zones are spaces where abjects live under suspended rules of freedom as spaces of inexistence. Unlike frontiers, whose logic is to keep out and away those threats to state sovereignty via extraterritorial arrangements, zones are spaces nested within state and city territories. These include zones within cities to which various subjects are dispersed but then live under some form of conditional freedom and surveillance. These are zones of inexistence insofar as abjects who inhabit them are constituted as inexistent subjects in a state of transient permanence.

While refugees living in many cities of the world have been called "an invisible population" whose needs are often overlooked even under UNHCR programs, the plight of refugees, especially in European cities, concerns us here. 54 In Paris, squatter camps have emerged in downtown centers like Alban-Sartagne and near the Channel ports. These "unofficial open-air transit camps" are referred to as "mini-Sangatte" after the infamous, now closed, Sangatte detention center. 55 Young men gather around these sites by day and disperse to nearby building sites to sleep at night. 56 These growing transit camps are, in part, the response of migrants to the crackdown by France and Britain on refugees crossing the Channel to seek asylum in Britain. The asylum seekers find an occasional meal through the Salvation Army but fear staying overnight in hostels because of police harassment. 57

In Britain, rejected asylum seekers find themselves in similar situations, suddenly turned out onto and left to sleep in the streets, without access to social services. The U.K. government provides housing to some asylum seekers awaiting their claims to be processed. Once a negative decision has been reached, however, they may find themselves suddenly turned out overnight onto the street without a place to sleep, benefits, and even the right to work. 58 In these cases, asylum seekers are literally turned into the
homeless without rights to social services and the right to work. What is particular to abject spaces nestled within cities is the way states use these spaces to make the failed asylum claimants “disappear” into the streets by rendering them invisible, inaudible, and ultimately inexist, thus limiting their access to many of the citizenship rights that become available by virtue of being in and of the city.

Other abject spaces nestled within the city include various detention centers. In the past decade democratic states have introduced increasingly restrictive means of dealing with refugees and migrants including the growing use of detention centers. These detention centers range from “asylum hotels” or “induction centers” to “accommodation centers” to “removal centers.”

Removal centers, also known as “closed centers,” are often privately run, prison-like holding centers where people are kept behind barbed wire and denied rights of movement, with limited access to legal rights and time outdoors just as in prison, with one well-known example being Scotland’s Dungavel Immigration and Asylum Centre. In contrast, “open centers” permit asylum seekers freedom of movement and house both “illegal” immigrants as well as asylum seekers either awaiting deportation or the processing of asylum claims, with one example being Belgium’s Le Petit Chateau. There are also “departure” or “expulsion centers” to hold those awaiting deportation such as those being built by the Dutch government which, in 2004, ruled that it would “deport within the next three years 26,000 asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected.” Criticized by human rights organizations for violating international refugee law, the law has elicited mass protest and hunger strikes, one Iranian asylum seeker even sewing closed his eyes and mouth in protest. Finally, there are detention camps, like the infamous Woomera camp in Australia, discussed by Anne Orford in chapter 10, or Sangatte in France, which will be further discussed in the section on camps. Of particular interest to us here, however, is the example of “asylum hotels” and “induction or reception centers.”

In 2002, the U.K. government announced plans to build new reception or induction centers to house asylum seekers for the first week after their arrival, giving them a physical exam and information on asylum procedures, before moving them to large-scale accommodation centers where they would be housed while waiting for their claims to be processed. The plan was to use various hotels (popularly referred to in the press as “asylum hotels”) as induction centers. One such example is the Coniston Hotel in Kent. However, protest from neighborhood residents led to the eventual decision to abandon the project because of a lack of proper public consultation. Yet, the response of public protest also reveals the ways in which a logic of inexistence—this time enacted through discourses of hospitality (asylum and accommodation)—is thrown into crisis as local residents object to asylum seekers as guests in a hotel, “a hospitable space traditionally reserved for paying guests, such as tourists.”

As a result of, and in order to mitigate against, further protests from inner-city neighborhoods around the use of hotels as induction centers, the U.K. government also proposed building a network of accommodation centers to house incoming asylum seekers waiting for their claims to be processed. These centers are to be built in rural communities, the logic being that since inner-city have shouldered most of the responsibility for asylum seekers in the past, other parts of the country should now assist. Moreover, the government notes that such centers would be an improvement to its current practice of housing asylum seekers in leased houses and flats by enabling faster processing of cases, “lessening the impact on social services” and “providing closer contact with asylum seekers.” The centers are to provide all the basic services to asylum seekers in one spot so that they “will not be dependent on local services” such as education, health, transportation, legal services, and “purposeful activities and voluntary work.” These euphemisms are designed to mask the fact that the authorities want to render asylum seekers inexist, making it impossible for them to become subjects by becoming part of the daily life of cities, which is achieved, in part, by accessing government services. Harkening back to medieval European cities, these detention centers function as a new form of the ghetto, a technology of segregation whereby subjects are constituted as strangers and outsiders rather than subjects with rights to have rights.

Detention centers represent a continuum of holding spaces for asylum claimants where the logic is initially one of protection and welcoming by the state. This logic shifts to one of transition, where claimants’ lives are put on hold in accommodation centers that “accommodate” by providing basic services all in one spot as they await a decision on their status. Finally, at the other end of the continuum are removal and expulsion centers. Here the logic is one of incarceration with the state seeking to punish the “bad,” failed claimants, now no longer deserving of state protection and the “human rights” that it confers. Detention centers reveal that if the logic of human rights is to give rights to asylum seekers by granting protection then the flip side of this is to remove these rights through expulsion centers.

Like frontiers, zones also govern by restricting the ability of people to enact certain citizenship rights that they may have access to despite not having formal citizenship status and rights. Unlike frontiers, however, which work through the creation of extraterritorial spaces, zones are nested within cities and states. What is particular to these spaces is that cities are spaces
where abscents have been more successfully able to make claims to rights to the city (as compared to the state) by virtue of being able to practice many citizenship rights despite not having formal citizenship status. Thus, the logic of zones is to act as a filter in the citizenship-making process, “weeding out” the “bad” or illegitimate (i.e., “illegal”) asylum claimants by segregating them in enclosed spaces where their rights and access to social networks can be severely curtailed. Failing deportation, abscents experience a transition in subjecthood in these spaces from claimants deserving of human rights under the protection of the state to criminals with limited rights to finally being rendered invisible by being made homeless. Because the logic of awarding human rights to some also makes it possible to deny them to others, we would argue that it would be more effective to focus attention on the way these spaces operate as political spaces, that is how they prevent abscents from claims making to the rights that they should, but do not, have.

**Campos**

We now reconsider Agamben’s idea of the camp as a new paradigm of biopolitics. We illustrate different kinds of camps than those Agamben considered as paradigmatic: rather than focusing on camps that reduced subjects to bare life, we consider camps as states of inexistence that function as reserves in which subjects and their rights are suspended temporarily, in transition from one subjecthood to another.

The number of people kept in such reservation zones around the world is staggering. For example, of the 20 million people currently receiving assistance from the UNHCR, approximately 12 million are refugees living in camps or similar conditions. Yet, we are specifically concerned here with refugee camps in democratic states. While we focus in detail on the example of Guantánamo Bay, it is only the most recent example of the type of large-scale detention camp becoming all too common across states. Other examples include the Woomera detention center in the South Australian outback, a desert camp that operated from 1999 to April 2003, designed to hold about 400 people, but holding at times as many as 1,400 asylum seekers, some for as many as three years, in desperately poor conditions. Similarly, France’s Sangatte asylum camp (1999–2002) near Calais is yet another example of this type of camp that was designed to house growing numbers of asylum seekers found sleeping on the streets of Calais as they tried to cross to Britain through the Channel to seek asylum. Intended to hold around 800 people before its closure in 2002, it often held between 1,300 and 1,900 in overcrowded conditions, with as many as 67,000 asylum seekers passing through Sangatte.

Following Woomera and Sangatte, Guantánamo Bay is the most recent example of such camps. A U.S. naval base leased from Cuba, Guantánamo Bay has been used since 2002 for military detention camps that imprison suspected al Qaeda and Taliban “terrorists.” The U.S. government claims that those being held are beyond U.S. law and the constitutional rights they would be afforded as prisoners on American soil. Guantánamo currently holds some 650 foreign nationals from over 40 different countries, many arrested in Afghanistan in 2002. These men (and some children) are being held without charge or trial, denied the right to legal counsel, and subject to degrading and cruel conditions such as solitary confinement and intensive interrogation without the presence of a lawyer. Not only have most men not been charged but the United States refuses to clarify their legal status, referring to them as “enemy combatants” in order to be able to hold them indefinitely without recourse to the courts. The United States refuses to grant these detainees prisoner of war status or to clarify their legal status in front of a tribunal as required under the Third Geneva Convention (Articles 4 and 5). Instead, the United States plans to try detainees by military tribunals, which Amnesty International notes “do not meet international standards for a fair trial” since they are “not independent and impartial courts,” “curtail the right of appeal,” and “allow a lower standard of evidence than ordinary civilian courts in the USA.” These tribunals are capable of handing down the death sentence.

Given the lack of legal rights and due legal process, the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Spain, for example, have negotiated for the rights of their nationals to be repatriated for trial. In other cases, repatriation might expose detainees to the risk of torture or execution in their own states (e.g., China, Yemen, and Russia). On April 20, 2004, the U.S. Supreme Court heard Rasul v. Bush and Hamdi v. Bush, two cases brought forth by the Centre for Constitutional Rights (CCR) on behalf of detainees at Guantánamo Bay. The cases are based on the principle of habeas corpus, that is, that no one may be imprisoned without a clear basis in the law. The petitions argued that Guantánamo detainees have the right to know the charges against them and to a fair trial so they may defend themselves against charges. On June 28, 2004, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that detainees should have the right to access U.S. courts in order to challenge their detention. This challenged the U.S. government position that it has the right to hold indefinitely foreign nationals without due legal process.

Campos function as reservation zones where the rights of subjects can be suspended as a first step in stripping away their status as political subjects in order to render them as abject. In contrast with both frontiers and zones,
camps intervene in the process of rights making differently. Rather than focusing on ways to hinder the practice of claims making (although this too is obviously restricted in such spaces), camps intervene by revoking status, that is by transforming the status of those “caught” from subjects to objects. The logic of refugee camps is one of giving human rights and protection to those who have lost their rights. Yet, this logic condemns these refugees to living in varying degrees of transient permanence in inhospitable conditions, in other words, to living in a state of inexistence. Camps attempt to undermine the politicization of refugees by transforming their status to one of “not-quite-refugees” or “refugees-in-waiting.” Similarly, detention camps like Guantánamo are used to remove individuals from their political communities into holding areas where they are kept in legal limbo, without recourse to appeal either as citizens or on the grounds of human rights, except in circumstances where their own countries intervene on their behalf. As Elizabeth Dauphinee argues in chapter 11, the camp as abject space enacts a logic that has as much to do with those of us with legal citizenship status as it has to do with the abject. The camp functions as spectacle—they put the abject on display as a reminder of what can happen when one transgresses outside the boundaries and loses their political community.

Abject Spaces as Spaces of Inexistence

We argued in this chapter that the rights of the righteous ought to be interpreted other than as human rights. The chapter has sought not only to illustrate frontiers, zones, and camps as abject spaces but also to consider the question of how they should be investigated and what kinds of politics they occasion other than human rights politics. Through Arendt and Rancière, we illustrate the kinds of politics and the kinds of new political subjects that emerge in these spaces that render humans neither as subjects nor objects but as abjects—condemned to inexistential states of transient permanence in which they are made inaudible and invisible. Yet abject spaces also expose and render visible and audible various strategies and technologies of otherness that attempt to produce such states of inexistence. The exposure of this logic becomes a significant act of resistance. We see Derrida’s “cities of refuge” as acts of resistance, for example, not only through sanctuary movements but also through initiatives such as the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” campaigns that have been adopted in cities across the United States and underway in Toronto, Canada, and the “Sanctuary City” initiatives adopted by the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts. These initiatives aim to make cities more hospitable to nonstatus peoples by forbidding city workers to ask about a person’s status, or reveal it to other government officials, to ensure that all residents of the city, regardless of status, are able to access essential services without fear of arrest and/or deportation.

If such acts of resistance illustrate the way we might begin to think about acts and spaces of becoming political through which to resist abstraction, then Arendt’s and Agamben’s insights about the camp’s centrality to the nation-state system also invite us to examine our imaginings of the international system. The camp as state of exception makes the rule of the nation-state system possible by being “home” to all those undesirables left without political community, expelled from their nation-states. This includes more than 10.4 million refugees, 1 million asylum seekers, 9 million stateless peoples, and 20–25 million internally displaced people worldwide. As we demonstrate, the increasing number and the novelty of frontiers, zones, and camps as abject spaces certainly suggest that it may be time to look at the international system from the vantage point of the abject as more appropriately being a much more complex picture. Rather than a system of sovereign, contiguous, discrete, and exclusive nation-states, we are witnessing the reemergence of a patchwork of overlapping spaces of greater and lesser degrees of rights and rightlessness, abject spaces and spaces of citizenship being nested within each other.

Notes

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3. Ibid., p. 170.

4. Ibid., p. 9.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p. 171.


16. Ibid., p. 301.
17. Ibid., p. 301.
18. Ibid., p. 298.
22. Ibid., p. 303.
23. Ibid., p. 303.
24. Ibid., p. 303.
25. Ibid., p. 306.
27. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 270.
30. Ibid., 270.
31. Ibid., p. 273.
32. Ibid., p. 275.
33. Ibid., p. 279.
34. Ibid., p. 291.
35. Ibid., p. 296.
36. Ibid., p. 300.
37. Ibid., p. 300.
42. Ibid., p. 307.
43. Ibid., p. 307.
53. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
78. Ibid., p. 2.
79. Ibid., p. 5.