

Subjects or agents? Camps, contests and the creation of ‘political space’

Abstract

The ‘Urdu-speaking population’ in Bangladesh, displaced by Partition in 1947, and made ‘stateless’ by the Liberation War of 1971, exemplify some of the key problems facing uprooted populations. Exploring differences of ‘camp’ and ‘non-camp’ based displacement, this paper represents a critical evaluation of the way ‘political space’ is contested at the local level and what this reveals about the nature and boundaries of citizenship. Semi-structured and narrative interviews conducted among ‘camp’ and ‘non-camp’ based ‘Urdu-speakers’ found that citizenship status has been profoundly affected by the spatial dynamics of settlement. However, it also revealed the ways in which ‘formal’ status is subverted - the moments of negotiation in which claims to political being are made. In asking how and when a ‘stateless’ population is able to ‘access’ citizenship, through which processes and by which means, it reveals the tension, ambiguity and conceptual limitations of ‘statelessness’ and citizenship, unearthing a reality of partial, shifting and deceptively permeable terrain. In doing so, it also reveals the dissonance and discord (constitutive of an ‘us’ and ‘them’ divide) upon which the creation of ‘political space’ may rely. Citizenship functions to exclude and, therefore, it is very often born of contestation.

Keywords:

Citizenship, statelessness, camps, Agamben, Bangladesh.

Abjects or agents? Camps, contests and the creation of ‘political space’

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states, that ‘all people have the right to nationality’. However, the number of people who are not considered nationals by any state under its laws (‘de jure’ stateless persons) are estimated at between eleven and fifteen million across the globe (Goris, Harrington and Kohn, 2009; Refugees International, 2008). These numbers only provide a partial picture. It is almost impossible to calculate all those who are unable to prove their nationality or, despite identification with a nation, lack the security and protection which citizenship can provide: refugees in camps, exiled minorities, those internally displaced (IDPs), expelled or detained. These ‘dehumanised’ individuals, without any political system to offer them protection, have been the subject of a growing body of scholarship and increasing academic concern. Variouslly portrayed as ‘bare life’ (Agamben, 1998; 2005), ‘human refuse’ (Bauman, 2004), ‘pariahs’ (Varikas, 2007) and ‘urban outcasts’ (Wacquant, 2007), this article attempts to give nuance to their representation and the understandings of ‘statelessness’ it reflects. Agier (2011, p.18) describes ‘statelessness’ as “a premonition, even a preparation, for complete ‘human superfluity’” in the sense in which the suppression of life is historically and politically prepared by the suppression of rights. In doing so, he suggests that the key question we face is that of the management of ‘the undesirable’ on a planetary scale, and the processes of ‘humanitarian government’ at play in the many present forms of ‘encampment’ across the globe today. Displaced, ‘stateless’ and camp-based populations are likely to increase in line with global instability, growing regional inequality and international migration. “If all this continues...camps will no longer be used just to keep vulnerable

refugees alive, but rather to park and guard all kinds of undesirable populations” (Agier, 2011, p.3).

Giorgio Agamben’s concept of the ‘state of exception’ (2005) has been adopted within critical migration and refugee studies to investigate contemporary forms of ‘encampment’; mapping the ways in which programmes of immigration control in the West, and the regimes of citizenship that underpin them, ensnare ‘irregular migrants’ in the indeterminate space of ‘the camp’ (Walters, 2008; Diken, 2004; Diken and Lautsen, 2006; Ek, 2006). It is a body of work which draws our attention to the ambiguous grey zone or ‘zone of indistinction’ neither inside nor fully outside the social and legal order, and as such, always and inevitably both.ⁱ While the assumption, however, is very often that it is (international) refugees who are ‘encamped’, in the context of *internal* displacement, the ambiguity of the ‘in-between’ that Agamben describes is very often marked. The movement of people *within* national borders occupies an increasingly significant position in the context of national and international politics, and if the camp materializes wherever there is a materialization of ‘the state of exception’ (Agamben, 2005), camps for the internally displaced should be seen as important spaces of enquiry. The interstitial social locations occupied by their residents raise a number of questions regarding the meaning of citizenship, and invite us to radically rethink understandings of political community. Positioned in this interstitial zone, Agamben argues that only the erasure of the division between People (political body) and people (excluded body) can restore humanity to the globally excluded who have been denied citizenship. The abject space of the camp is here ‘a space for naked life’ (Agamben, 2005, p.41).

This article argues that, while the reality of the world today may well be the reality of the camp, and this is a reality with prospects that are highly pessimistic (Agier, 2011), ‘encampment’ is a phenomenon of multiplicity and varied material, social and political realities. The Agambian logic which renders abject subjects as ‘naked life’, and the ‘jargon of exception’ (Huysmans, 2008) which this has spawned, suppresses a political reading of the camp, ignoring the complex social relations contained within. Thinking the camp ‘from below’ is not to diminish its significance, but rather to underscore its power. It requires us to take the camp itself as a social and political space (Rygiel, 2011), and to understand that while it may be many things it is not determined. It may represent both the most intense forms of intolerance and demonstrate the most intimate forms of cultural dialogue (Keith, 2005). It may be abject and alienated, but it is not inert. It is a historically structured, social and political space in which a “dynamic agonistic account of power-relations” (Walters, 2008, p.188) must be re-inserted. The ‘camp-dwellers’ of this study are seen staking a claim and narrating themselves into the nation, and the camp, consequently, will always be a site of contested meaning.ⁱⁱ

Chatterjee’s (2004) observation that citizenship will take on two different shapes, the ‘formal’ and the ‘real’, and that the negotiated instability the ‘real’ represents may be exaggerated in postcolonial space, makes reference to a well-rehearsed duality evident in the citizenship literature. This takes the form of work that emphasizes a ‘formal’ and legally coded status alongside more ‘substantive’ examples of socio-political engagement. His concept of ‘the real’ disrupts a reductive rationality in which “the latter is seen as a condition of possibility of the former” (Isin and Nielsen, 2008, p.2), however, the ‘negotiated instability’ through which the ‘real’ plays out remains insufficiently explored. Agamben’s (1998; 2005) influential binary between ‘political beings’ and ‘bare life’ relies

on a similarly crude and one-dimensional reification which naturalizes citizenship.

Reflecting upon times and spaces in which such a neat duality may not be very useful, this article argues that the exceptionality of the camp and the denials of ‘formal’ legal status its conditions must be represented not only through the politics of control, but also the politics of resistance. In exploring the dynamic between individual agency and structural constraints, my research suggests that the camps of Bangladesh do not function as bounded physical or conceptual spaces, in which denationalized groups are altogether divorced from ‘the polity’. Instead, ‘acts of citizenship’ occur at the level of everyday life, as the moments, claims or contests through which ‘formal’ status is transgressed. In asking how and when a ‘stateless’ population is able to ‘access’ citizenship, through which processes, and by what means, we are able to identify the ‘non-citizens’, ‘aliens’ and ‘outcasts’ who make claims to political subjectivity. Doing so reveals the tension, ambiguity and conceptual limitations of ‘statelessness’ and citizenship, unearthing a reality of partial, shifting and deceptively permeable terrain.

This paper therefore considers the camp in its double depiction: first, as an abject space whose subjects are excluded from the ‘formal’ political domain, and second, as a site of claims-making in which the political can be created. It reveals the camp as a space of contestation and negotiation in which agents make strategic calculations even in the most difficult circumstances (Andrijasevic, 2003). However, the paper also questions the complex social processes through which political subjects are formed. In the context of irregular migrants in Northern France, Rygiel (2011) reflects upon social solidarities formed in camp spaces which ‘decompose’ traditional understandings of citizenship. I take this further to consider the fractured, ambiguous and highly discriminatory nature of claims-making processes too. Consequently, I do not propose to merely reclaim the camp

through the agency of its subjects but to reveal the dissonance and discord (constitutive of an ‘us’ and ‘them’ divide) upon which political subjectivity may also rely. The camp is certainly a space of social relations, but these are formed through inequality as well as solidarity; through contest as well as through cohesionⁱⁱⁱ.

The spatialization of citizenship in Bangladesh

The UNHCR estimated that in 2008 around forty-two million people worldwide were ‘victims of forced displacement’. These figures include only *recognized* refugees and internally displaced persons; many millions more remain uncountable or unacknowledged. Official statistics regarding ‘encampment’ are even more limited.^{iv} None include the so-called ‘self-settled camps’ which have been occupied in times of war, conflict or famine across the globe. Precarious, informal, invisible and sometimes illegal this type of ‘self-organised refuge’ of provisional shelter has been described as “the most borderline of sites” (Agier, 2011, p.39). The settlements occupied by ‘Urdu-speaking Biharis’^v in Bangladesh today provide one example of such conflict-induced ‘self-organised’ refuge. First displaced in the unprecedented dislocations that followed from the Partition of the Indian Sub-continent in 1947, ‘Bihari Urdu-speakers’ in East Bengal were displaced for a second time following the War of Liberation in which Bangladesh was born.

It is commonly accepted that, during the War of Liberation in 1971, as many as three million Bengalis were killed by the Pakistan Army (Paulsen, 2006). The horrors of the war, and the trauma it left behind, cut through the Bengali imagination and, following the birth of Bangladesh in December of the same year, the entire ‘Urdu-speaking community’ were branded Pakistani collaborators and socially ostracised. Thousands were arrested,

executed, or forced to flee and many ended up in temporary camps that emerged around the country. Some of these were established by the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), but the majority developed on an ad hoc basis in the desperate search for safety. Today, the ‘Urdu-speaking population’ of Bangladesh is often assumed to be entirely camp-based. However, as my research (2006-9) revealed, around 90,000 ‘Urdu-speaking Biharis’ have been able to establish themselves outside the camps. Some of these individuals avoided dispossession in 1971 through the wealth, status or connections they were able to claim at the time (termed ‘outsiders’ for the purpose of this discussion). Others moved into the camps but have since acquired the capital to leave (those ‘in between’). And almost 160,000 still live in the 116 ‘Urdu-speaking settlements’ that remain today (‘insiders’). In May 2008, at the High Court of Bangladesh, the entire ‘Urdu-speaking population’ were finally granted citizenship. Empirical research with this ‘community’ as it negotiates the lines drawn between legal status and statelessness captures an important historical moment.^{vi} Those living outside the camps are increasingly integrated with Bengali society and occupy a range of positions within a complicated social hierarchy. Social and economic divisions between the ‘camp’ and ‘non-camp’ based ‘communities’ have, therefore, been growing. Moreover, for thirty-seven years laws of ‘ius solis’ and ‘ius sanguinis’ (both of which have recognised legal value under the Citizenship Act of 1951 and Citizenship Order of 1972) were undermined by a civil status effectively constituted on spatial grounds.

‘Urdu-speakers’ in Bangladesh today exemplify some of the key problems facing uprooted populations. This article analyses a very specific site of ‘camp’ and ‘non-camp’ based displacement to consider how citizenship status is affected by the spatial dynamics of settlement. In illuminating empirical and conceptual issues of relevance to lived spaces of

‘statelessness’ across the world, it represents a critical evaluation of the way ‘political space’ is contested at the local level and what this reveals about the nature and boundaries of citizenship.

1. Abject spaces.

Since 1972, the ‘Bihari’ camps in Bangladesh have certainly functioned as ‘states of exception’ in ‘formal’ juridical terms. While those ‘Urdu-speakers’ who retained their houses also retained their civil status, those living inside the camps were disenfranchised:

I accepted citizenship just after Liberation...because I was living outside the camp. There were others like me outside the camps, we all got citizenship. Those in the camps couldn’t, they had nothing (Ali Reza, ‘outsider’, 44, Dhaka).

Those ‘Urdu-speakers’ who avoided the camps were accepted into the nation in all ‘substantive’ respects. They even had access to the right commonly understood as the most directly tied to ‘formal’ citizenship, and the most difficult to acquire (voter registration) (Brubaker in Delanty, 2000; Soysal, 1994):

People who live outside the camp have been voters since the war but those who live inside have not been...Those who live outside they were getting every single facility (Mr Akhtar, ‘insider’, around 40, Dhaka).

Along with voter rights, came the dominant ‘markers’ of such rights:

I never asked for my rights from anyone. The Government gave them to me automatically. I have always had a passport and have travelled to Bangkok, Malaysia, India, Pakistan and Singapore....I have always been living outside (the camps) that is why I got the facilities of a citizen (Parvez, 'outsider', around 50, Dhaka).

Those inside the camps, however, had none of these advantages. They were not registered on voter lists until the 2008 High Court ruling, and were denied access to Government schools, jobs or health facilities throughout this time:

We were informed that the Government suspended our citizenship rights in the camp...Before (2008) there were big differences between those that lived in the camps and those that didn't. Those outside had all the rights of citizenship and those in the camp had none (Mr Akhtar, 'insider', around 40, Dhaka).

A range of further economic and social rights have also been difficult to access. In the words of the 2008 High Court Ruling, those in the camps "are constantly denied the constitutional rights to job, education, accommodation, health and a decent life like other citizens of the country."^{vii} The inability to access Government schools has been thought by many to have represented the most debilitating impediment to social mobility. In the absence of a Government alternative, the fees charged by non-Government schools would normally be too high. Government jobs have been even more of a chimera, but problems are not limited to Government employment alone:

You can't get Government jobs living in the camp and some non-Government jobs too – they ask so many questions and if you say you're from the camp you can't get the job (Md. Khalid, 'insider', 72, Saidpur)

Consequently, the majority of 'camp-dwellers' are forced to work in the informal economy but even this isn't easy; problems may not be limited to finding jobs but surviving discrimination within them:

We are getting paid less money because we are living in the camp. This happens all the time, because we are valueless ('dhula'). If they want to give us a job they can, otherwise they say 'no, no, we don't have jobs for camp-dwellers'. People who live here they will earn hardly 100 taka (less than £1) for the whole day. We are working for them like a cow (Samida, 'insider', 40, Saidpur)

A camp identity therefore appears to be the source of the problem, over and above ethno-linguistic discrimination. The camps themselves attest to the existence of marginal spaces in which the subjectivity of a person can be transformed from that of a citizen or a political subject with 'the right to have rights', to an abject subject whose very right to have rights is suspended (Isin and Rygiel, 2007; Rygiel, 2010; Arendt, 1951). Agier (2011) describes the 'empty place' inhabited in such marginality as defined by an 'amputated relationship', that of an individual without a state. However, such 'abject spaces' are not necessarily apolitical ones and different global settings challenge some of the physical and conceptual frames of their depiction.

Replacing ‘the city’ as the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West, ‘the camp’ emerges in the demarcation or distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ (Diken and Lautsen, 2006), but whether or not a paradigm which rests fundamentally on the dual order of in/exclusion can ever truly do justice to the indeterminacy of the ‘in between’ is a question that must be answered. The representation of ‘stateless’ populations, and Agamben’s analysis in particular, have been criticised for offering little scope for social and political agency, engendering forms of ‘naked life’ which render a rather flattened conception of migrant subjects (Walters, 2008). In examining movement between the camp and the world outside, among other strategies of subversion, the power of the camp is underscored through, in part, the urgency to leave. While this may not challenge Agamben’s ‘camp’ as an important metaphor for modernity, it does raise questions about the boundaries of his narrow simplification.

2. Political spaces

According to critics, while one can today be an environmental, sexual, cosmopolitan or consumer citizen, the absence of legal status, “makes these ostensibly new ways of being or becoming citizens flimsy, if not ineffective” (Isin and Nielsen, 2008, p.1). Legal status is considered the tangible, concrete, relationship between subjects that make it possible to mediate social relations through law; that which makes possible the articulation of needs as claims, and wrongs as injustices (Donald, 1996). This neat and tidy picture may be representative of the conceptual reification that has been accused of de-politicising or naturalising citizenship (Billig, 2003; Sieder, 2001). It certainly does little to capture the reality of indeterminate, messy and mutable boundaries between legality and illegality presented here.

Since the 2008 High Court ruling, national ID cards have been distributed to ‘Urdu-speakers’ living in the camps (those outside, of course, already have them) and it is thought that around eighty per cent of ‘camp-dwellers’ have claimed this marker of ‘formal status’. Unexpectedly, however, this research discovered that the majority of these ‘camp-based’ individuals had acquired ID cards, and even passports, long before the ruling. Before 2008, camp residents simply used an outside address (normally that of a relative) and in relation to ID cards the process is apparently very straightforward. Passports have only been obtained by the more socially mobile camp residents, but the majority of interviewees, male in particular, had an ID card long before they were officially granted citizenship:

Yes I will vote in the upcoming election. I voted in the previous election, with a fake address. It’s very easy to hide your address and cast your vote... I have also had a passport for 11 years with which I have visited India 10/12 times...The Police Special Branch investigate every application, whether or not the address is correct. I used the address of my relatives outside the camp so it was real and I didn’t have a problem, but if they had said no I would have had to bribe them 750taka. That was 11 years ago, now I would have to pay around 3,000 taka, and if it’s urgent you have to bribe them 6,000 taka! (Shamim, ‘insider’, 28, Dhaka)

Eleven years ago, 750 taka would have been something few could afford. The number of individuals who have gone to great lengths to obtain a passport in this way illustrates its perceived value, not only in facilitating movement, or as documentary proof of status, but

also in reinforcing a sense of belonging (Redclift, 2011). As became evident, it was not just ID cards and passports that were obtained surreptitiously:

(Before the ID cards) If we used a fake address we could get a bank account...but now we can do business legally, we can do everything more legally now (Mr Akhtar, 'insider', around 40, Dhaka).

One man I spoke to revealed that he was even able to get himself on the voter roll, simply by keeping the term 'camp' from his address:

I cast my vote in 1990...I went to the Thiano's office (the local commissioner) and the Thiano said if you are a resident of Saidpur show me your school certificate. In the school certificate it said 'Niamodpur, Chamra Godam', that's what the area is called, so on the certificate it doesn't say the word 'camp' (he lives in 'Chamra Godam camp'). At that time I couldn't have got into school with a camp address. I felt very happy when I first voted. I felt proud. I felt I was a citizen of Bangladesh (Md.Majid, 'insider', 30, Saidpur).

In addition, as the interviewee below explains, with a bit of money broader discrimination can be circumvented:

I have had (a passport) for ten years. I applied for a passport at the Passport Office. The authority investigated my address, verified that and gave me the passport. I wrote my camp address on the form for the passport. Many people are getting passport...*but we have to manage the Police*, we gave them money (a bribe) for

giving us a passport. Not only that six or seven people got Government jobs living in the camps, with the support of the Police, but *obviously we have to manage Police and local administration* (Naim, 'insider', 60, Saidpur – emphasis added).

More surprisingly perhaps, people who already had an ID card using a fake address have, in some cases, continued to use these rather than obtaining a 'real' one since the ruling:

Before the High Court ruling I had an ID card made anyway, with a fake address. I kept this one (rather than getting an official one after the ruling)...it seemed better (Mala, 'insider', around 34, Dhaka).

In areas such as employment a 'real' ID card, obtained using their actual (camp) address, could be more of a burden than a benefit:

VR: Why do you not have the camp address on your card?

Shamim: It's a friend's address. I think Geneva camp address would cause problems. If you went to get a passport, people would try not to give you the passport. Outside address is a valuable address, it's good for me to get jobs etc. (Shamim, 'insider', 28, Dhaka).

I applied for a couple of jobs but I haven't received an interview card yet. On our ID cards we have the camp address which makes it difficult to get jobs. Even the birth certificate by the city corporation (Dhaka City Corporation) they do not allow us to get with a camp address. I was working to register births in the camp at the commissioner's office but the commissioner refused to register them because they

were camp-dwellers. This was one or two months ago (i.e. after the High Court Ruling) (Sajid, 'insider', 28, Dhaka).

Isin and Nielsen argue that citizenship needs to be investigated in a way that is irreducible to either (legal) status or (substantive) practice. Rather, it requires a focus on those 'acts' when "subjects constitute themselves as citizens, or better still, as those to whom the rights to have rights is due" (2008, p. 2). Movement outside the camps, or the decision to acquire a 'fake' ID card, could both be seen as 'acts of citizenship' in the sense that they are about claiming rights, enacting oneself as a citizen. By re-articulating 'political space' in this way, individuals are making declarations generative of political subjectivity that challenges our understanding of political community. As Peter Nyers argues:

(The) identity conferred on (non-status migrants and refugees) is one that historically has been excluded from the political domain. Non-status people not only lack the full range of citizenship rights, but they are also denied the opportunity to express themselves as political beings...the problem is as much conceptual as it is legal: it turns on the fact that historically citizenship has been the identity through which claims to political being are enacted (2008, p.162).

Here in the camps, without formal recognition, political being has been enacted at a number of levels. Movement between physical spaces is one such example and the position of those who have left the camps, straddling relationships and influences, inside and out, is therefore particularly illuminating. The data presented here speaks not only to the camp as a political space; it also emphasises the idea of movement and mobility as an important element within the creation of such space (Rygiel, 2011). It is, after all, very

often through movement outside, or the pretence of such movement, that political subjectivity is achieved. As the quotation below suggests, movement outside the camps is about claiming citizenship and, as a result, achieving something more profound:

We moved from the camp four years ago...we get many advantages living outside, like voter ID, and an address that I can give freely to people...We got self-respect from others living outside (Tuni, 'in-between', 27, Dhaka).

The relationship between the two - rights and respect - is murky terrain. Once that physical boundary is crossed, and status transgressed, a range of opportunities and relationships become available. For those who moved into the camps at the time of war, and have worked and saved to leave, clearly 'integration', in all its forms, is valued. Consequently, those 'in between' have employed a range of strategies to subvert their status, to become something else, and to be accepted by society. In the previous example 'physical integration' represents a route to rights and recognition, although it is not the only form of 'integration' generative of political inclusion:

(My husband) got his voter card in 1990. He was working in a market dominated by Bengalis and he registered himself as a voter with a fake address. It was through the connection with Bengalis that he was able to get the voter registration. He also campaigned on behalf of different political parties; he was quite involved in politics (Mala, 'insider', 34, Dhaka).

The search for some form of 'integration' is at the heart of both examples, although Mala articulates a process which is much more fluid. In her story social interaction with

Bengalis, and relationship building, is a way of gaining the capital necessary to enact oneself as a political being (forms of capital generation that are largely the preserve of men). The quotation below demonstrates a further form of political negotiation, to which women again have limited access. Circumvention, rather than 'integration', constitutes the 'black way':

In 1976 there was a repatriation from Chittagong. Government employees were taken to Pakistan. I accompanied them in a vessel. I took their stuff on my shoulders like a labourer and hid in the vessel's toilet for about twelve hours. I reached Pakistan and lived there for about forty days...I went to Pakistan several times through 'black way' without passport in 1980, 1984 and 1988...once through the border at Jallo and once through the border at Kashmir. At that time it was easy to cross the border if you pretended to be a farmer – with a knife and crops and in your hand...I went to India, Pakistan and Nepal without a passport (Delwar, 'insider', 50, Saidpur).

The experience of 'Urdu-speakers' requires us to ask how rights are taken and borders crossed, and in doing so disturbs some established rhetoric. The strategies people use to cross these boundaries are assorted and interlinked. They occur in all areas of daily life, as negotiations are made and statuses subverted:

Acts of citizenship may be cultivated by, or may transgress, practices and formal entitlement, as they emerge from the paradox between universal inclusion in the language of rights...and inevitable exclusion in the language of community and particularity on the other (Isin and Nielsen, 2008, p.11).

They deconstruct the duality of socio-political engagement, and emphasize the fluid and slippery reality of access. Here non-citizens, aliens and outsiders are no longer simply helpless pawns; they demand a radical shift in focus. The object of attention becomes those constitutive moments, enactments and events “when a new identity, substance or relationship of citizenship is brought into existence” (Walters, 2008, p.192). This draws our attention to the contrast between citizenship as it is ‘bestowed’ upon ‘camp-dwellers’ by the High Court Ruling of May 2008, and citizenship as it is ‘enacted’ through movement outside the camps, through acquisition of a ‘fake’ ID card, and at the polling booth itself. It allows us therefore to better understand the space of citizenship, and how those lacking formal rights occupy or negotiate that space.

Perhaps the ‘naked life’ engendered through deportation, displacement or disenfranchisement, is not so naked after all? As Walters contends, what is needed is greater sensitivity to the diverse and often relatively minor ways in which ‘non-status’ individuals are constituted, and constitute themselves, “not just as subjects capable of acting, but as political subjects” (2008, p.191).

Fractured solidarities: contestation and difference

The growing interest in the emergence of alternative spaces of population control, management and detention has invigorated theorizing about the political action of subjects living in such spaces (Nyers, 2003; Nyers, 2008; Diken, 2004). Within this body of work, it has been suggested that what is significant about migrant struggles over the meaning of the camp is fundamentally that it puts social solidarities back into this space (Rygiel,

2011). This creates a vision of politics based on social relations, in which the rights and ability of migrants to build, and become members of, 'community' is a necessary step upon which to enact citizenship.

I contend however, that in the fight for political subjectivity, it is very often disunity as much as unity that marks the creation of 'political space', and there is danger in romanticising the solidarity produced in abjection. As 'Urdu-speakers' in Bangladesh navigate a complicated social world, and struggle to earn the economic, social and cultural capital to leave the camps, 'outsiders' distance themselves not only from these spaces, but the friends and relatives within them:

We have relatives outside the camp too. They are in a good financial position so they don't communicate with us. They are not in touch with us. They always lived outside (Sajid, 'insider', 28, Dhaka).

I don't feel bad that (my relatives outside) are in a better position...The only thing that makes me feel bad is...they have fear to introduce us to their society. One of my cousin's daughters got married in a good family. My cousin didn't invite me to the wedding because we are living in the camp. If once the bridegroom's side came to know that, they would have refused the marriage. It's happening with us always. They have fear for that. But he did say sorry to us and explain why he didn't invite us. We said that it's ok, we don't mind, but it hits our emotion. We felt alas if we were wealthy this wouldn't happen. Just because of living in the camp my blood relation refuses me (Delwar, 'insider', 50, Saidpur).

No account of citizenship can evade the fact that it was originally constituted in order to exclude and subordinate (Delanty, 2000). The marking of inclusion and exclusion is fundamental to the making of citizenship and, as Zamindar (2007, p.11) argues “without any representable limit with which to construct this national difference” it is always an ambiguous process. As part of this process, a narrative of blame, constructed by Bengalis and ‘Urdu-speaking outsiders’, has produced those in the camps as responsible for their rejection. They have been understood as of a collective political voice that is ‘Pro-Pakistani’, despite internal political divisions, and until 2008 the label ‘Stranded Pakistani’^{viii} confirmed their responsibility:

People who are living in the camp think that they are Pakistani...that’s why they were disenfranchised and distinguished from the others. People who are living outside of the camps always think that they are Bangladeshi (Mr Gulzar, ‘outsider’, around 60, Saidpur).

Accordingly, a story of *self*-segregation and isolationism is common among ‘outsiders’, and forms part of a much broader social discourse which combines the ‘camp-dwellers’ failure to access education - and the ‘innocence’ and ‘illiteracy’ produced - with their ‘dependency’ on the state:

They (‘camp-dwellers’)...haven’t been very interested in sending their children to school, they are interested to send them for work instead. They try to prevent their children from going to school because they think it is not needed for them...They aren’t very much interested to move outside. They are waiting for relief in the

camps. For a long time they have had lots of facilities for free and they have just got used to this (Najmal, 'outsider', 30ish, Saidpur).

Goffman (1968) argued that stigma theories are constructed in part to explain the inferiority of a particular group and in part to account for the danger they represent. Such theories enable society to understand his/her 'defect' as just retribution for something previously done, and consequently a justification for the way we treat them. As he explains, those who suffer stigma sometimes also suffer blame:

If you want to change yourself you can. If you do not want to no one will come and change you. The camp-dwellers do not want to change themselves (Shabana, 26, 'outsider', Dhaka).

Why a narrative of 'blame' and 'responsibility' has become a 'standard version' (Malkki, 1995) through which the present situation of the 'camp-dwellers' has been incorporated into the past (and the past has been inserted into the present) is of some significance here. Not only does it form part of a larger social discourse which works to reinforce the danger 'camp-dwellers' represent, it also functions to explain the superiority of 'Urdu-speaking *outsiders*' and those '*in-between*' from those who remain in the camps, highlighting an 'us' and 'them' divide. In doing so, it draws a distance and difference *within* an 'ethno-linguistic community' on the basis of class, education, space and, in the end, civil status. The 'acts of citizenship' we see some 'camp-dwellers' perform are not available to all. As we have seen, purchasing a passport prior to 2008 was an expensive business, and renting outside the camps requires capital assets not everyone can claim. Agency, resistance, and with it, rights, are mapped onto material inequalities through the further access to capital

assets they function to provide or deny. As such, the social space of the camp becomes itself a source of stigma and it is a narrative of blame which builds distance between the stigmatized and those outside. It is, therefore, this very 'us' and 'them' divide which underpins the declarations of political subjectivity movement outside the camp represents.

The material presented here suggests that social solidarities and community cohesion are not the automatic bi-products of subordination; the fight for rights is very often a fight indeed. It is necessary instead to attend to the variability of 'abject spaces' (Walters, 2008). From the hundreds of African IDP camps revealed by each new conflict, famine or natural disaster; to the military-humanitarian camps holding Afghan asylum-seekers in Australia; the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the occupied territories; or the transit centres, waiting zones, or administrative detention centres emerging in Europe and North Africa - "the situations vary greatly and are always in flux" (Agier, 2011, p.38). The historical, spatial and material specificity of such sites determine the social and political relations that constitute them. Consequently, the creation of 'political space' on the part of those excluded will often be a fractured, ambiguous and highly discriminatory process. The 'acts of citizenship' produced will always be dependent on cross-cutting variables of gender, generation, social status and power. Citizenship functions to exclude and it is, therefore, very often born of contestation.

Conclusion

The difference between having and not having citizenship is very clearly blurred (Ong, 2006b) and traditional abstract theorisations of citizenship leave little room for these paradoxes. While it is true that the law will remain "an important site for the on-going

contestation of the imaginaries and boundaries of the nation-state” (Sieder, 2001, p.218) citizenship is about more than citizenship law. As Ong (2006a) has argued, the space of citizenship is not one of singularity or dichotomous opposition, but a shifting and flexible ensemble of heterogeneous calculations, choices and exceptions. In a desire to find definite breaks between the stable and the unstable it is sometimes easy to overlook the complex human tensions involved (Ong, 1999). The fluidity of the relationship between processes of movement in space and access to rights of citizenship represents a bleeding together of social and legal frameworks which challenges our understanding of citizenship. Until now the space of citizenship has failed to recognise the ‘non-citizens’, aliens and outcasts who can, through complicated accommodations and creative alliances, occupy or negotiate that space. In the camps of Bangladesh, members of the ‘excluded body’ are seen ‘actualizing their humanity’ and ‘political space’ is created at the level of the everyday.

Agamben’s camp has been considered a concept that offers critical theorists a paradigm of the complex and ambiguous location unwanted and unauthorized migrants occupy today, and Agamben has been described as the pre-eminent theorist of the interstitial (Walters, 2008). ‘Bihari’ camps certainly attest to the existence of ‘abject spaces’ (Isin and Rygiel, 2007, p.185), but the “pure, absolute and impassable biopolitical space” (Agamben, 1998, p.123) does little justice to the dynamic and contested quality of citizenship illustrated here. The camp does not function as a bounded physical or conceptual space in which denationalized groups are altogether divorced from ‘the polity’. ‘Camp-dwelling Urdu-speakers’ rendered ‘stateless’ since 1972, constantly cross the boundaries between acceptance and rejection. They may be neither citizens nor non-citizens in any tangible sense, gaining access and being denied access in different contingent and contextual moments. They may be traumatized by horrendous experiences but they are active social

agents, developing strategies to cope and fighting for their interests (Ahmed et al, 2004).

The indeterminacy described does not, therefore, necessarily produce ‘statelessness’ as the de-humanized, passive, space his paradigm paints.

Liberal theory’s vision of the law as society’s text (its “rational mind” Goldberg, 2002 p.6) has masked the role of the state in its construction (Sieder, 2001), but it has also removed its subjects. Citizens’ rights will not only be contested in the courts, but in the actions and activities of those constituted outside. The ‘acts of citizenship’ we see some ‘Urdu-speakers performing, help us understand how those captured outside a given socio-political order *interrupt* that order, appropriating forms of political subjectivity for themselves (Walters, 2008). I would argue, however, that use of the term ‘acts’ requires consideration. As Isin (2008) explains, the choice is constitutive and deliberate. It is expressive of the singular moments when individuals accomplish a ‘rupture in the given’ (Isin, 2008). A ‘rupture in the given’ is not how my informants expressed these processes of change. They are not articulated as singular, discrete moments of acceptance, but indistinct, complex negotiations through daily life. ‘Claims’ and ‘contests’ would better reflect the multi-layered terrain of social in/exclusion, and therefore the on-going and continual, process of assent and denial, dissonance and struggle. Re-articulating the concept as a ‘claim’ for ‘political space’ helps us to explore how this contest is fought, how we are *constituted* as citizens. The course is not from exclusion to recognition, from discrimination to acceptance, from non-citizens to fully complete and effective citizenship.

While my research is not sufficiently celebratory to vitiate the ‘gloomy’ image of the camp Agamben describes (Walters, 2008), I believe it provides some critical provocation. The territory of statelessness should not be mistaken for a settled identity, irregular migrants

seek by and large to be regularized, and ‘Urdu-speakers’ are no exception. In the desire to leave, the power of the camp is underscored, and the notion of the camp as the symbolic separation of social groups (as much as the material) is re-affirmed, but so is the mobility around its borders. The camps own internal stratification provides an insight into the meaning of citizenship and ‘statelessness’ and illuminates the “decentred and diffuse dynamics” (Stepputat, 2001 p.310) that characterise the creation of ‘political space’. A dynamic account of social and political relations must be re-inserted into representations of the camp, as claims are made, contests fought and, perhaps most critically of all, the marking of in/exclusion continually produced.

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ⁱ The camp names a space that is formally outside the juridical and political order but, because it captures its subjects outside, is never a condition of pure externality (Agamben, 2005, p.40).

ⁱⁱ The article is based on fieldwork conducted in Bangladesh between 2006 and 2009 as part of a PhD in Sociology at the London School of Economics (LSE). It involved sixty-four in-depth semi-structured interviews (conducted in Urdu and Bengali with camp and non-camp based 'Urdu-speakers'), ten case study narrative interviews with camp and non-camp based 'Urdu-speakers', twelve semi-structured interviews with local community leaders and political representatives and one civil society focus group. Through the process of interviewing I encountered a level of warmth and hospitality that I was quite unprepared for, and developed friendships that I hope to keep. Complete strangers let me into their homes, offered me food and told me their stories. Stories that were sometimes very difficult and often very moving were told with a level of honesty with which I was continually amazed. Thanks and acknowledgment here must go to my research assistant Noor Islam. As a valued, respected well-known 'in-betweenner', with charm and humour in abundance, interviewees were in the presence of a friend. With his help, learning how to let go and give people the space and time to say what was meaningful to them was an important adaptation I had to make. On occasion, removing structure in the context of a 'semi-structured interview' proved a vital way of putting uncomfortable interviewees at ease. Given the space to say what was important to them, and the time to do so at their own pace, people were, on the whole, very keen to talk about their lives as the extracts here demonstrate. I can only hope my analysis does justice to their experiences.

ⁱⁱⁱ How broader social processes of 'integration' relate to the acquisition of citizenship is examined in the author's current research.

^{iv} Statistics regarding refugee camps proper have to be supplemented by camps for the internally displaced, which together have been estimated as housing around 12 million people in 2007 (Agier, 2011). This does not, of course, include transit zones, reception centres, waiting zones, cross-border points, or the many other constellations of encampment.

^v The label 'Bihari' literally means a person originating from the Indian state of Bihar. In practice it is used in reference to all those Urdu-speaking migrants, from Uttar Pradesh (UP), Orissa, West Bengali, Bihar and elsewhere, who moved to East Pakistan between 1947 and 1971.

^{vi} The research on which this article is based took place in the period leading up to the ruling and in its immediate aftermath.

^{vii} 'Md. Sadaqat Khan (Fakku) and Others v. Chief Election Commissioner, Bangladesh Election Commission', Writ Petition No. 10129 of 2007, Bangladesh: Supreme Court, 18 May 2008, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a7c0c352.html> [accessed 10 July 2011].

^{viii} The label 'Stranded Pakistani' was coined shortly after the war and has been commonly used in press and official documents since this time although elements of 'Urdu-speaking society' consider the term outdated, misleading and derogatory.