

THE CLOWN AND THE CAMP

Gods of the threshold in all its forms

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Introduction

“For Agamben, the refugee is perhaps the only thinkable figure for the people of our time, the only category and the central figure of our political history (Agamben, 2000). Faced with increased migratory pressures after the Second World War, territorial states in Europe have created an increasingly complex system of civic stratifications and migration management systems (Kofman, 2005) that is dependent on the figure of the asylum-seeker as a threat (Tyler, 2006). The results are millions of stateless people inside the territorial states (Bauman, 2002, 2003), inhumane changes in citizenship and migration policies (Walters, 2002; Evans, 2003; Harrington, 2005) and even more inhumane detention centres and other migration and refugee camps throughout the world (Perera, 2002; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2004; Diken and Laustsen, 2005a).”

- Richard Ek, 2006

Stemming from Richard Ek's (2006) explanation quoted above, I develop a way of understanding of two concepts that are vital to comprehend the processes that create the inhumane conditions mentioned and a specific mode of protest that deals with this problem. The two concepts: the camp and the clown, derive from my personal fascination with the migrant policies of the EU and Turkey, and how the figure of the clown has emerged as a mode of protest against authoritative structures that stem from aforementioned policies. The focus on the theoretical definitions of the camp and the clown helps us understand how they function in relation to each other. The research question this essay deals with is therefore: How can the camp and the clown be identified and how can the figure of the clown function in relation to the camp?

The Camp

The camp is explored with three different approaches. By expanding the definition of the camp, with the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben as a starting point, the concept is stretched towards new interpretations that open up to a reading of the camp in relation to the concept of the clown. First the camp is introduced from the perspective of Agamben's Homo Sacer. Second, the camp is understood as a corral. Thirdly, the camp is expressed in three different spatialisations.

The camp in Homo Sacer is based on the distinction between 'us' and 'them'. This distinction originates from the understanding of the politics of Carl Schmitt and is spatial through 'us - inside' and 'them - outside'. With this spatialised distinction the camp is defined as a state of exception. To elaborate further, whoever is the bearer of the power to define who is 'inside' or 'outside' is defined as the sovereign (Ek, 2006). Although, paradoxically, this sovereign is not defined by their *'capability to create, but rather to suspend law and order'* (Ek, 2006, p.365). Therefore, the decision of the sovereign to put someone else outside the normal judicial order is what creates the state of exception that defines the camp. Agamben (2005a) stresses that the sovereign standing outside the normal judicial order is still closely connected to it because the sovereign has the power to completely suspend the normal order. This summarized definition of the camp from Agamben's perspective allows us to understand the inclusion and exclusion from the normal judicial power that manufactures the camp. For Agamben (1998) what/who is in this state of exception, excluded from the normal judicial order, is not absolutely excluded

since there is still a relationship to the sovereign power (Ek, 2006). This is a form of inclusive exclusion from sovereign rule.

In their book *Theory of the Corral* (DUTCH: *Theorie van de Kraal* (2019)) van Reekum and Schinkel introduce a spatial metaphor to create an understanding of the theoretical framework behind fascism. In their analysis the authors use Walter Benjamin's definition of fascism to expand into their own description of what fascism entails. The corral (DUTCH: *kraal*), literally an enclosed space for cattle, is a biopolitical space in which populations are made to perform for the circulation of labor and capital (Schinkel & van Reekum, 2019, p.11). To the authors the theme usury is central to the understanding of the corral. This usury should be understood as the Dutch translation from the original text '*woekeren*', which translates to uncontrolled expansion in the growth of a plant. The usury we experience brings us into relationships with others and could highlight our differences far beyond the fence of the corral. This capture within the corral we are trying to escape, constantly. However, the continuous process of ordering is violently bringing everyone back into the corral. By drawing the parallel between the camp and the corral, the camp encompasses a wider variety of situations in which the inclusive exclusion is produced. The expansion of the concept of the camp as the corral allows us to highlight the immense biopolitical potential of the camp.

In the paper entitled '*Spatialising the Refugee Camp*' Adam Ramadan (2012) aims to go beyond the understanding of Agamben's perspective on the refugee camp and creates an analytical strategy for understanding refugee camp space (Ramadan, 2012, p. 65). It is argued that this specific analysis of a Palestinian case can be generalized. The three part interpretation offers new perspectives on the definition of the camp. Firstly, the camp is defined as a space of exception in which the host state's sovereign rule is at best partial and conditional. Second, it is an assemblage of social, institutional and diasporic relations and practices. Lastly, it is a space of enduring liminality circumscribed by a particular temporality that limits development and insists refugees seek home elsewhere (Ramadan, 2012, p. 74). Here the second description of the camp should be noted. The social, institutional and diasporic relations and practices that are part of the definition of the camp show that the camp does not only contain bare life, as Agamben's theories might suggest. These camp spaces are spaces of agency and struggle (Ramadan, 2012, p. 74).

With the three defining steps taken, we gain an extended understanding of the notion of the camp. From the relatively confined interpretation in *Homo Sacer*, the definition is stretched towards the biopolitical space of the corral and the spatialized definition of struggle and agency.

The Clown and the Camp

The clown is an intriguing figure in itself. Its existence triggers a vast array of emotions and it is therefore necessary to clearly define what this figure is and how it acts. Two different interpretations of the notion of the clown are examined. First the notion is expanded on by the work of Amoore & Hall (2013), who identify the clown as a form of protest or form of life that exceeds all forms of identity. Secondly, the clown is understood as the trickster, from the perspective of Lewis Hyde (1998), as an actor on the threshold.

In the first understanding of the notion of the clown, Amoore & Hall (2013, p. 97) '*offers an alternative way into thinking about the troubled proximity of sovereign power to its own resistance*'. The clown as a figure at the border inserts themselves into the outcome of the state of exception. In this position, all claims of identity made by many social movements are not present. The clown does not speak for anyone or aims to represent some political objective. Through gestures of provocation and playfulness the clown positions itself in such a way that they are situated in the contingency of the outcome itself (Amoore & Hall, 2013). The clown removes the certainty of what we think we know and creates situations that are unpredictable. Therefore, in the presence of the clown we find the capacity to 'make strange' (Foucault, 1988; Amoore & Hall, 2013). In their conclusion

Amoore & Hall (2013, p. 107) further elaborate on the clown and identities. The clown as a form of protest or form of life exceeds all forms of identity. Therefore, the clown is a metaphor for all forms of resistance and dissent to all social movements that demand 'for a being together based on a definitive 'we', a definitive foe, a clear end goal.'

In his book entitled 'Trickster makes this World' Lewis Hyde elaborates on his definition of the trickster. Hyde describes the trickster as a boundary-crosser. Through constant distinguishing, groups aim to articulate their social life. We put up internal and external boundaries, good or bad, clean or dirty, male or female, etc. According to Hyde, the trickster occupies a position at the gates of the city, the gates of life, on the boundary. At the gate, the trickster is the 'creative idiot, therefore, the wise fool, the gray-haired baby, the cross-dresser, the speaker of sacred profanities.' (Hyde, 1998, p. 7). Furthermore, the trickster is described as a figure of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox. In the next paragraphs Hyde (1998, p7-8) goes even further in his explanation of the trickster. The trickster is not only a boundary-crosser, but also a boundary creator. "... the best way to describe the trickster is to say simply that the boundary is where he will be found - sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing or moving it, but always there, the god of the threshold in all its forms."

Conclusion

We have opened up to multiple definitions of the camp and the clown. The camp is a biopolitical space, where identity plays an important role in the partial and conditional decisions of the sovereign. The camp as an assemblage of social, institutional and diasporic relations and practices, which are particular to identities, show there actually is agency and struggle in the camp, not just bare life. Exactly this role identity plays in the inclusive exclusion is what makes the clown a relevant method of dealing with the threshold of the camp. The clown is a metaphor for the resistance or dissent that exceeds all forms of identity or clearly stated end goals. This dissent therefore ridicules and makes strange the decisions of the sovereign when they suspend the normal order of judicial rule. Furthermore, we interpret the act of the clown as a trickster. Here the act of the clown is described more concretely. The clown is a boundary-crosser, a boundary drawer. The clown is a figure at the gates of the camp and interacts with its threshold.

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