Colonial conquests and the politics of normalization: The case of the Golan Heights and Northern Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

The space of exception has been extensively discussed as a location in which governing technologies are deployed through the suspension and manipulation of the norm. The scholarship on the subject has underscored the ways in which various localities can be encamped, which alludes to the dynamic in which spaces of exception can be shaped through the application of various means of sovereign violence that produces new and unpredictable norms. Building on this literature, the article analyzes the ways in which the exception is intentionally used in order to spatially construct the norm. Two case studies are discussed: Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights and the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus. The article's main aim is to show how the state of emergency, which provided the justification for deploying exceptional means—occupation and subsequent colonization—was domesticated. By domestication I mean a situation whereby the state of emergency is not fully negated, but rather rearticulated and redeployed in order to reshape the space and transform it so that it is concomitantly both threatening and normal. I go on to show, however, how despite the processes of spatial normalization the state of exception always resurfaces.

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This article examines how occupying forces deploy exceptional means to reconstruct contested territories so as to normalize and in thus way fortify their presence. Analyzing two case studies—the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights and the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus—I show that the objective of the normalization process has in each case been different. Israel normalized its presence in the Golan in order to incorporate this region into its own territory, while Turkey has been normalizing its presence in Northern Cyprus in order to craft it as Turkish without fully integrating it into its own body politic. However, and despite these differences, a similar rationale has in both cases led the core states—Israel and Turkey—to employ a twofold normalization strategy during the conquest and subsequent occupation.

On the one hand, the core states accentuated the geostrategic risks (real or constructed) embodied in the territories captured and presented them as constituting a threat that could be dealt with only through the imposition of a state of emergency and the deployment of exceptional means (e.g., ethnic cleansing, widespread destruction). On the other hand, and *simultaneously*, the

core states strove to transform these contested spaces and reproduce them as normal in order to render them non-threatening.

In other words, the core states present the spaces they had occupied as both an exception (a threat that needs to be controlled and managed) and simultaneously as normal. Examining how the strategies employed by the occupying states are informed by this tension, I show that the incongruity cannot be fully managed. The fact that these territories are colonized and are therefore constituted as spaces of exception is ultimately re-exposed.

Following a brief literature review and after justifying the comparison between the two cases, I analyze the impact of ethnic cleansing, destruction and reconstruction on how the occupied spaces were reproduced following the military conquests. I maintain that the practices used during the occupation constituted the space as a form of encampment that is bent on shaping each territory as a space of exception. I examine the strategies deployed to normalize the colonized spaces, emphasizing the important role of constituting the threat as external, while showing how various practices, such as tourism, have been deployed to produce a sense of normalcy. These normalization efforts should be conceived as a domestication strategy aimed at mitigating the spatial ramifications of transforming the territory into an encampment. By way of conclusion, the conceptual and spatial codependency of exception

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and norm within the framework of contemporary colonial conquests is revisited.

Spaces of exception, encampment and domestication

The state of exception has engendered considerable interest among geographers and critical theorists. Originally employed by Carl Schmitt in his critique of liberal regimes (1988), it has been discussed extensively both as a theoretical framework and as a paradigm for empirical research. Most of the scholarly literature concerned with this subject also invokes Giorgio Agamben's (1995) analysis of the concentration camp as a point of departure. Deploying the concept of *homo sacer* (sacred man or the accursed man), Agamben claimed that upon entering the camp a person's life can be taken without committing homicide. But, following Michel Foucault (1984), he argued that the biopolitics of the camp are oriented toward preservation of the inmate's life on the brink of death (Agamben, 1995: 28–29). Whether a Nazi extermination facility, a Soviet Gulag or a humanitarian relief center for refugees, the camp is a space wherein Schmitt's separation between norm and exception enters a zone of in-distinction as law and violence are no longer discernable from one another (Agamben, 2000: 40.1; Diken & Laustsen, 2005; Ek, 2006).

The scholarship on the space of exception has underscored the ways in which various localities can be *encamped*, which alludes to the dynamic in which spaces are shaped into an Agambenian camp through the application of various means of sovereign violence. In other words, encampment is the process through which a given space becomes a space of exception through different practices such as bordering (Amoore, 2006; Epstein, 2007; Sparke, 2006), systematic annihilation (Gregory, 2004), neglect (Shewly, 2013), or by being heir to a broader conflict (Boano & Martén, 2013). Encamped spaces can be formed as interstate frontiers (Hagmann & Korf, 2012), borderlands (Jones, 2009a) and enclaves (Jones, 2009b; Shewly, 2013) or urban localities (Schinkel & Van den Berg, 2011). In this sense we can understand the space of exception, not as a concrete location but as an ever-changing site which materializes through an "unlocalizable process of transformation" (Belcher, Martin, Secor, Simon, & Wilson, 2008: 599).

Current literature on encampment processes, criticizes the way in which the space of exception has been perceived and presented as a site where sovereign force is total and no resistance is possible (Jones, 2012), and accordingly points to the various conceptualizations of political agency that can be formed within spaces of exception (Ramadan, 2012). As Derek Gregory suggests in his examination of the military internment compound at Guantanamo Bay (2006), the space of exception is characterized by political subjectivity that may be (productively) shaped as well as repressed.[1]

The underlying theoretical claim in this literature is that the exception can produce new and unpredictable norms. Stuart Elden (2007), for instance, shows how paramilitary training camps can be reshaped into sites of resistance that subvert conceptualizations of territorial sovereignty and integrity. Another notable example concerns Palestinian refugee camps, which have languished in a state of temporariness for over 60 years and have been a frequent target for the exertion of extrajudicial violence (Ramadan, 2009a). These camps, however, also serve as sites for the forging national identity (Hanafi, 2008) and collective memory (Collins, 2011; Ramadan, 2009b; 2012), and bear the potential to proffer embattled inhabitants forms of autonomous governance beyond the supervision of the sovereign (Szanto, 2012). Similarly, an encamped urban sphere can become a space of defiance and subversion where norms are challenged and social and political protests unleashed (Ramadan, 2013).

Thus, encampment does not necessarily entail merely the suspension of the norm, since at times it can end up producing in unexpected and unintentional ways novel and even transgressive norms. As Benedikt Korf (2006) shows the practices used in the production of a space of exception can be (and, at times, are) applied to facilitate the realization of a particular utopian vision. Thus, spaces of exception may be reshaped as purified ideal places in accordance with the aims, intentions, and visions of those able to wield sovereign power (Giaccaria & Minca, 2011).

Spatial encampments have also been a focal point of research that does not necessarily engage with the conceptual framework of the state of exception. There is a developing body of literature that gauges the convoluted ways in which various colonial sites have undergone some form of normalization (Shigematsu & Camacho, 2010). One germane example pertains to the scholarly work analyzing the way the United States formed various sites in parts of the Pacific and Asia (Gillem, 2007), such as Guam (Herman, 2008), Pearl Harbor (Osorio, 2010), Bikini Atoll (Davis, 2005) and the Clark Special Economic Zone in the Philippines (Gonzalez, 2007).

Such works examine the economic, social, and cultural effects as well as colonial legacies of America's different encampments by investigating issues such as gender relations, ecology, architecture, memory and tourism, and reviewing what Lutz (2006) calls the topography of U.S power and how it produces various forms of militarized landscapes.[2]

According to Lutz (2006: 595), since contemporary colonial and imperial projects constantly work to disguise themselves there is a need to closely scrutinize how these projects are produced – cases, which Michael Lujan Bevacqua argues, represent a form of "colonial banality that continues to evade even the sharpest critical eyes" (Bevacqua, 2010: 33).

Thus, the dynamics through which the Golan Heights and Northern Cyprus were shaped as domesticated encampments are not unique. Similar processes can be identified in other colonial settings in North America, the Pacific, the Balkans or the Middle East. The analysis of the Golan Heights and Northern Cyprus domestication process contributes to our general understanding of how similar spaces of exception which were shaped as normal sites are constructed and deconstructed.

More specifically, building on the insights of the body of literature that discusses how contested colonial sites are normalized, the aim of this article is to examine how the Golan Heights and Northern Cyprus can improve our understanding of the processes in which exceptional encampments are normalized. Concentrating on the co-existence (rather than replacement) of exception and norm, in the following pages I analyze the way in which the exception is *intentionally* used in order to spatially construct the norm through a process of *domestication*. Domestication denotes a situation whereby the state of emergency which provided the main reasoning for the occupation and subsequent sovereign control is not negated, but rather rearticulated and redeployed in order to reshape the space and transform it so that it is concomitantly both threatening and normal.

I also show how in both the Golan and Northern Cyprus two distinct practices—ethnic cleansing and spatial demolition—became part of the overall process in which the occupied territory was encamped and later domesticated so as to constitute the contested space as normal. Consequently, two interconnected processes are examined here. I begin by describing how the state of exception was produced and employed to garner legitimization and support and then show that it was used spatially to reproduce the contested space in order to domesticate it. The duality of the practices used to shape space in order to rationalize the ongoing presence of the occupying state and reconcile apparent incongruities as well as the tensions and contradictions that