

RESEARCH REPORTS

European Cities and Temporary Protection Statuses: A Multi-sited Ethnography of Housing Practices in Turin and Berlin

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Research in Progress

Introduction

European societies are currently witnessing an increase of legal statuses that are temporarily limited, among which there are those related to asylum rights.

The existence of such statuses represents a theoretical challenge to the notion of citizenship as the background against which migration has been read so far: in terms of rights, holding such statuses is still understood as being ‘less than a citizen’. Consequently this leads to unequal access to the city, both in terms of rights and resources. Also, inclusion of newcomers in western societies has been traditionally based on the notion of citizenship and because such notion is being challenged by the ongoing social transformations triggered by changes in the labour market and the welfare system it appears to be relevant to explore such concept through the category of migrants, which best represents the area where tensions on citizenship are being displayed (Mezzadra 2001). Building on the interpretation of citizenship as a practice, rather than only as a set of rights or a sense of belonging (Bosniak 2000, 2006), it important to look at this category of people in Europe, particularly because temporary protection statuses can be interpreted as an example of the fraying edges of citizenship.

In order to elaborate on the challenges confronting the concept of citizenship, I aim to explain why people holding a temporary protection status face such inequality in access to the city, and why this inequality is being reiterated: why a status that should be a guarantee of protection and allow access to rights is turned into something that produces instead marginality and exclusion. How do individuals face such inequality?

The Urban Scale

The growth in the number of temporarily protected individuals living in European cities and the difficulties that they face is leading to an emerging interest in studies that focus on the experiences of displacement in urban settings. In literature these people are commonly referred to as ‘urban refugees’. Unlike refugees living in internationally managed camps, they live in self-contained urban settlements and rely much more on domestic rights legislation.

Although their rights should be converted into effective access to services by the hosting State, very often the translation of these rights into real entitlements is missing, and urban refugees become a marginalized category among the urban poor.

Methodological Aspects and Research Settings

I am currently involved in a multisite ethnographic research on the housing practices of people with a temporary protection status in two European cities, namely Turin and Berlin. I have chosen to focus on the housing issue for two main reasons. First, because the notion of *home* is a crucial one, particularly when considering individuals that have fled their country and are in the process of getting acquainted with the local society. Second, because I am considering housing as an important means through which citizenship is concretely lived in everyday life. Therefore, I am looking at the notion of citizenship from its edges; that is, from the point of view of persons who are not citizens of the country they are living in, though being entitled to a set of rights that should allow them to participate in the social life of the local society. In both cities access to the field was achieved through associations that work with refugees. In Turin, the precarious living conditions have led about 600 people with temporary protection status to live in squats. These forms of housing thus play a relevant role in my fieldwork, which currently includes some shadowing activity in order to better understand the everyday life of temporary protected individuals in relation to urban space.

The choice of the cities to carry out my research did not happen *ex-ante* but was the result of a preliminary fieldwork. Starting from Turin, a city in north-west Italy, where previous research had been carried out on asylum seekers coming from Libya during 2011, two main questions emerged that lead me to develop my current research project. I asked, what happens once a protection status is granted to a person? How is it implemented? What does it actually give access to?

Indeed, much has been written about asylum seekers as persons who are experiencing an existence 'in between' legal statuses, and about how this affects their lives in terms of severe psychological stress and social marginalization. This topic has been addressed from different perspectives, among which the policy perspective is very strong (ECRE and UNHCR Reports, Houle 2000). What still appears to be underexplored (and undertheorized) is the individual perspective combined with a wider look across European countries¹ and especially the relation between people having obtained a temporary protection status and the implementation of rights (Morris 2003).

Because the right to asylum in Europe is still implemented according to national criteria, it is important to ask about the differences in accessing basic rights for temporarily protected persons in European cities. It is also important to assess the ways and extent to which their mobility challenges the functioning of the nation bound asylum systems. Since this topic appears to be underexplored, my research has an explorative connotation and preliminary fieldwork was very useful to develop the research questions. The focus on Turin and Berlin allows not only a deeper understanding about how rights for temporarily protected individuals are implemented in Italy and Germany, but also puts the two countries in a dialogic relation because of the intra-European mobility of temporarily protected people that connects these two cities. Berlin is the destination of many people holding a temporary

¹ Korac's work (2005, 2009) on the networks of refugees in Amsterdam and Rome is an exception.

protection status issued in Italy. They have named themselves the ‘Lampedusa in Berlin’² and have started asking recognition of their rights, especially their right to stay.

Preliminary Findings

Given the qualitative nature of my study, the following considerations are bound to the cases I have observed and cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, although mine is still a work in progress, some aspects are emerging that, if confirmed by further ethnographic evidence and analysis, could raise questions about certain assumptions that are usually made about refugees. Two special assumptions can be addressed so far; namely, the so often assumed lack of resources among refugees and their being more bound to a national setting than other migrants. In very general terms, what is emerging is the relevance of intra-European mobility in refugees’ attempt to build a livelihood. In Italy, refugees are experiencing severe discrimination and exploitation in the labour market alongside extremely precarious housing conditions. For this reason, many decide to move to other countries with the expectation of finding better living conditions. Therefore, as for other migrants, there is an important link between spatial mobility and social mobility; movement across national borders turns into a strategy to improve one’s life condition. It also has strong implications in terms of housing, as it requires the establishment of, or the reliance on, a network of individuals living in different European cities. Moreover, such mobility is most likely to become structural, as it is bound to the need of renewing the documents; the time span depends on the status that a person is legally entitled to and can vary between one, three or five years.

I am currently spending my fourth month doing ethnographic fieldwork in Turin. It will be followed by ethnographic fieldwork in Berlin beginning in June 2014

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² Lampedusa is the southernmost Italian island where large numbers of immigrants arrive by boat.

ECRE European Council on Refugees and Exiles (1999). *Bridges and fences to integration: Refugee perception of integration in the EU, Task force on Integration*. Available at: http://www.refugeenet.org/pdf/bridges_fences.pdf

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On the Sectarian Dynamics of Law in South Lebanon: A Research Report

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This three-year project under the 'Rita Levi Montalcini Programme' (Formerly known as the 'Comeback of the Italian Brains Programme') departs from existing lines of research, appreciating the role of socio-cultural influences in explaining political strategies, responses and behaviours. The main aim is to develop a better understanding of this phenomenon, looking at the close relationship between religion and the socio-cultural. More specifically, the aim is to identify these factors, with reference to the dynamic link between identity constructions, the socio-cultural and religion, with an emphasis on the interconnections between identity representation and property law in the proposed *loci*.

Intensive theoretical and region-specific readings related to the research topic were undertaken first at the Department of Political Science of the University of Pisa and, then, at a number of research institutions, including a month at the Saint Paul Institute of Philosophy and Theology in Harissa, Lebanon. Fieldwork was conducted in two settings, the Christian quarter of the city of Tyre and the Southern Christian Lebanese village of Alma el-Chaab on the Israeli border.

Interviews were carried out with political and religious leaders and representatives of the South Lebanese Christian community groups (Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics and Protestants), among focus groups (Steward and Shamdasani 1990, Greenbaum 1997, Barbour and Kitzinger 1999) and with cultural organizations. These interviews were carefully aimed at addressing the core theoretical *foci* of the project and were based on previously agreed-upon questions and areas of interest. The information thus collected was finally categorized and analysed in order to assess continuities and discontinuities in the attitudes toward communal identity and land transactions and to place the resulting analysis in the project's theoretical framework and research objectives.

The relationship between land, property, and culture has been widely investigated (Firth, 1939, Macpherson 1962, Gluckman 1965, Bloch 1975, Ryan 1984, Hann 1993, De Soto and Anderson 1993, Pardo 1996, Ziff and Rao 1997, Dewar and Bright 1998, Kalinoe and Leach 2000), including in the specific regional area (Gilsenan, 1996, Shamir 1996, Pottage and Mundy 2004, Chatty 2006, Mundy and Smith 2007) and with reference to the formation of the different Lebanese identities over time (Longrigg 1958, Zamir 1985 and 2000, Salibi 1988, Khazen 1991 and 2000, Braude and Lewis 1992 and above all Spagnolo 1971 and 1977). In the literature on nationalism there has been a significant tendency to conflate religion and ethno-nationalism (Durkheim, [1893]1984, Zulaika 1988, Zubaida 1989, Kellas 1991, Turner 1991, Hastings 1997, Dingley 2007). While I recognize that there are structural problems in the wider Middle East scenario, including Lebanon, I do not aim to address this issue directly. My research aims to look specifically at the use of land in divided communities, considering that the motivation to act comes from the social-cultural environment of the individual and his or her group (Dingley and Mollica 2007). This environment structures the individuals, giving them identity and a set of values that defies Western norms as it leads them to place group interest over individual interest.

In my work I refer to Durkheim's use of the concept of religion as a representation of society-nation, so that it becomes the legitimate role of religion to sanction relations (Durkheim [1893]1984, Dingley 2007 and 2010). In this, I follow Gellner's use of Durkheim's sociology (Gellner 1983 and 1994). However, the relation between socio-economic factors is common to most early social theorists; see, for example, Weber's thesis on capitalism and Protestantism (Weber [1905] 1976). Specifically, this research suggests that we should be looking at the socio-political dynamics that impel individual activists. A primary concern, among them, is to involve the home audience in the struggle at a symbolic level, which implies a kind of communal impetus that Westerners find difficult to comprehend.

This research project addresses highly contentious issues in Middle Eastern communities. Special attention is paid, here, to the Christian minorities of South Lebanon, who live in areas where they see themselves and are seen by others as demographically insignificant. However, as demographics change, disputes arise over what should be a fair distribution of representation. This lack of social bonding is reflected in property sales and the flouting of formal law via local social norms. I am investigating how this is acted out every day in the way land transactions are controlled not through state-administered legal processes but through local mechanisms of social control, which give legal sanction to community-level actions. Thus I will critically engage with a major paradigm of democratic consociational models (Lijphart 1968 and 1999, Kerr 2005, O'Leary 2009).

This goes to the heart of the institutionalized tension and contradictory multi-cultural nature of many Lebanese mixed areas. What may look like a way to unite a country (Lebanon) at the national level may well have the opposite effect at the local level, which in turn weakens the national fabric by maintaining inter-religious divisions. This process prevents the formation of a 'collective consciousness' capable of uniting a people; the

formation, that is of an inclusive nation. Under such circumstances, the state may exist as a set of institutions but it is meaningless in terms of people's daily lives.

This continuing research will examine how each community develops a sense of religious affiliation with the land, so that it becomes part of a communal heritage that traditionally precludes the sale of land to others. Both inter-community and trans-national networks are thus often mediated by the religious authorities, which are seen as the legitimate recognized authority (Mollica 2006, 2008 and 2010). Land control, which has become an extension of religious calling in each ethno-religious group, is the unifying factor that provides coherence for the individual at the expense of any inclusive identity in people's daily lives.

Finally, this research aims to produce new knowledge on ethno-religious conflicts and to develop inter-disciplinary material on ethnic tensions in the Middle East, particularly on the issue of religious divisions as reflected in property law in divided communities. Findings resulting from this research are being used for teaching purposes at the University of Pisa. The research findings will be presented on 23 May 2014 at an International Conference on Divided Societies organized in Pisa under the auspices of the 'Rita Levi Montalcini Programme'. A dedicated website will later be established.

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