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The depoliticisation of asylum seekers: Carl Schmitt and the Italian system of dispersal reception into cities

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ABSTRACT

Moving beyond the usual engagement of geographers with the work of Carl Schmitt, this paper utilises his conceptualisation of the political depoliticisation under liberalism and political order as spatial division to investigate the situated practices of depoliticisation of asylum seekers. The paper takes as its case-study the recent systemic shift in the Italian system of reception, from containment in reception centers CARA to urban dispersal reception SPRAR. Drawing on interviews and focus groups involving seventy asylum seekers, we identify one practice of depoliticisation connected with urban dispersal: atomisation. This spatial division of asylum seekers from each other results from three mechanisms: tensions with the local community, the allocation and management of asylum seekers in flats by SPRAR organisations, and the individualisation of reception programs. In so doing, we find the foreclosing of the political in the asylum seekers being precluded from a collective way of life and, consequently, a collective capable of political action. As they cannot constitute the public enemy, asylum seekers only remain as private adversaries, which effectively evades the friend-enemy distinction and the risk of political disorder and conflict.

Keywords: asylum seekers, urban dispersal reception, Schmitt, depoliticisation, friend-enemy distinction, Italian reception.

Running headline: The Depoliticisation of Asylum Seekers

INTRODUCTION

Urban dispersal programs of asylum seekers' reception are underway in a number of European countries – including Italy, the focus of this paper. Following the *Urban Refugee Policy* (2009), which first acknowledged and extended protection to urban refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) released the *Policy on Alternatives to Camps* (2016) advocating the avoidance of establishing camps and the early phasing out of existing camps. This policy contends that alternatives to camps and, specifically, urban reception foster the social inclusion of asylum seekers and the reconstruction of their individual autonomy. Drawing on similar arguments, two European Directives (2013/32/EU and 2013/33/EU) aimed to homogenize procedures and norms of reception in all member states and progressively expand urban dispersal reception to all countries. Consequently, both the UNHCR (2013, 2015) and Italian Government (G/1519/1/14) have advocated for a restructuring of the Italian system of reception recommending “a further implementation of an integrated and dispersed system of reception, on the model of the network SPRAR (System of Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees), thus surpassing the current model, focused on large collective centers, represented by CARA (Reception Center for Asylum Seekers)” (UNHCR, 2015, p.15). To date, there are 638 active SPRAR projects across the country providing reception to 25,743 forced migrants that have formally entered an asylum request [i]. Services include: cultural and linguistic mediation, multicultural activities and awareness initiatives involving the host community, health, social and legal assistance, orientation services for the independent search of employment, formative opportunities and housing. The SPRAR Central Service (Rome) coordinates the allocation of asylum seekers to different municipalities and projects. Local authorities adhere to the SPRAR network voluntarily in partnership with private actors and NGOs, which deliver the services and provide accommodation, preferably into flats or small-size structures in central areas of cities. Indeed, such urban accommodation is seen as key in most dispersal reception narratives to promoting the individual autonomy and social inclusion of asylum seekers.

With the expansion of urban dispersal reception, literature has increasingly recognized and explored the “political tension between the policing role of cities and the potential for politicisation”

(Darling, 2017, p.186) whereby the city is, in fact, where both the socio-political order and contestation are more likely to emerge. According to this literature, politicisation encompasses all those insurgent acts that challenge an established order including “minor political acts” like the informal practices of asylum seekers in cities (p.189). Moreover, becoming present to political authorities and to one another is deemed essential to the politicisation of asylum seekers (Isin, 2012; Sassen, 2006). Conversely, policing has been discussed as assigning positions and governing distributions through the categorization of asylum seekers and the “material practices of dispersal” (Darling, 2014, p.78) such as the regulation of mobility, housing and the provision of services which fix locations, impose mobility and define distributions (Darling, 2011; 2014; 2016; Gill, 2009). In this sense, accommodation would be instrumental to the depoliticisation of asylum through “the construction of a perceptual order” (Darling, 2014, p.75) and the framing of asylum within managerial discourses that “constrain the possibilities of political debate” (Darling, 2016, p.231). Finally, urban dispersal reception would deter the political potential of asylum seekers through the production of disciplined subjects (Darling, 2011) and their marginalisation (Schuster, 2005).

Indeed, the asylum seeker is traditionally understood as an element of uncertainty and insecurity, threatening the legal and social order of a state (Uitermark & Nicholls, 2014, p.975) and, existentially, its national identity (Bigo, 2002). Therefore, the politics of asylum situates in the “global post-politics of security (and fear)...[It] is pre-emptive risk management, to make sure that nothing disturbing really happens, that ‘politics’ does not take place” (Diken, 2004, p.90). Crucially, a long line of research – from literature on refugee camps to studies of dispersal reception – has shown that the asylum seekers are relegated “outside the normal remit of rights and responsibilities, and of a political voice” (Darling, 2009, p.652). Thus, when the *polis* ceases to be the antithesis of the *refugee camp*, conceptualised into a rigid duality of politics and post-politics, and asylum is no longer conceptualised against the singular authority of a past sovereign, a new and interesting venue of research opens up: one in which urban politics and its inherent tension of politicisation and policing gain renewed centrality in order to challenge the notion of a generalised post-political condition of asylum.

Some scholars have recently put forward the need to revisit this accepted knowledge and explore “the ways in which depoliticising tendencies are embodied, reproduced and reinforced” (Darling, 2014, p.75). As Gill (2010) notes, “essentialist conceptions” of the state have been predominant in refugee studies for which the city has been considered a backdrop of political action decided elsewhere. Instead, alternative notions of the state as “multilevel governance” or “social relations” could better shed light on “situated, everyday practices in the (re)production of state effects” determined by the “agency of social forces and social actors in the exclusion and subjugation of refugees and asylum-seeking communities” (pp.632-636).

We contribute to this research agenda by exploring and discussing the “situated practices of depoliticisation” (Darling, 2014, p.73) of asylum seekers in the dispersal system of reception of the Province of Foggia, in Southern Italy. As we explain in the methodology section, a case-study approach suits the aims of our research. The paper draws on focus groups and interviews conducted with seventy asylum seekers from the reception center CARA and four local projects of dispersal reception SPRAR, plus five directors of reception. The SPRAR and CARA systems of reception are substantially diverse, above all, because the first should provide a number of services beyond accommodation, as explained above. However, it is precisely from comparing the experiences of asylum seekers in the two systems that we identify the situated practices of depoliticisation specific to the contextual implementation of the SPRAR projects.

Importantly, we construct an analytic framework using the work of Carl Schmitt, which enables us to further problematise previous understandings of politicisation and depoliticisation, such as those reviewed above. Drawing on Schmitt’s famous essentialisation of the political as the friend-enemy distinction, we illuminate the foreclosing of the political as asylum seekers in the dispersal system of reception are left in an ambiguous state as neither friends nor enemies of the local communities. In fact, we demonstrate that urban dispersal reception removes the spatial division between asylum seekers and local communities and imposes a new spatial order which releases the agency of social forces and social actors in the depoliticisation of the asylum seekers. Tensions with the local community, the allocation and management of asylum seekers into flats by the local organisations and the individualisation of reception programs produce situated practices of

atomisation. Thus, as they are prevented from a collective way of life, asylum seekers are not capable of political action and they cannot constitute the public enemy. Instead, they only remain private adversaries, which effectively evades the risk of political disorder or conflict.

Aside from our main contribution to literature on depoliticisation, the paper engages with two additional fields. Firstly, we address a gap in literature on dispersal reception, which has left unexplored the complexity of urban reception experiences and “assumptions of dispersal as a ‘sensible’ response to asylum accommodation” (Darling, 2017, p.183). The paper emphasises that *contextual conditions* – exemplified by the agency of the local community and local organisations managing SPRAR projects – rather than the system of reception per se are determinant of the asylum seekers’ experiences. Thus, our contribution is twofold. On the one side, we complement previous studies underscoring the relevance of place, neighbourhood and community for asylum seekers’ recovery and integration (Brun, 2001; Hynes, 2009; Kibreab, 1999; Netto, 2011; Robinson et al., 2003; Spicer, 2008). And on the other, we suggest the inadequacy of policy discourses presenting dispersal reception as the most sensible response to asylum seekers’ accommodation, regardless of the local context of reception. In doing so, we shed light on the complex urban politics of asylum, which results from the interplay of local social forces, beyond state politics and the ‘multigovernance’ structure of reception.

Secondly, the paper contributes to a renewed engagement with Schmitt’s work in political geography suggesting that there is scope for contemporary readings and applications of Schmitt’s ideas. The next section discusses the growing reception of the author’s work and illuminates our choice to build an analytic framework from Schmitt’s concepts of the political, politics and depoliticisation under liberalism. These are presented in the following section before the research design and our empirical findings.

A RENEWED ENGAGEMENT WITH CARL SCHMITT

Over the last decade, the reception of Schmitt’s work has grown, from Anglophone Political Theory to International Relations; and, because of increasing engagement with his later, explicitly

spatial work, a 'spatial Schmitt' has emerged (Minca and Rowan, 2015, p.269). Some geographers have therefore engaged with his writings (e.g. Legg, 2011), but only a few specific aspects have been approached, so that "there is scope for further and more systematic investigation of Schmitt's spatial thought in Geography, and not just later works such as *The nomos of the Earth* (2003)" (Minca and Rowan, 2014, p.A1). The limited engagement with Schmitt's ideas is perhaps due to a general reluctance to fascist and radical conservative thinkers (p.A2). Schmitt was, in fact, notoriously associated with the Nazi party (Barnes and Minca, 2013; Elden, 2010). However, there are arguments for a more nuanced reading of Schmitt's intellectual project. Recent research into his early World War I journals reveals that Schmitt promoted, and had faith in, liberal conceptions of the individual at various times in his life (Rogers, 2016, pp.126-127). He actually never wrote for traditional right-wing journals, but in fact had consistent dialogue with leftists and Marxists (Balakrishnan, 2000, pp.23, 102). Thus, because Schmitt manages to be of great interest and use to leftist and radical-democratic projects today (Dyrberg, 2009, Kennedy, 1987 & Mouffe, 2005), exploring his work has great significance for the history of political ideas and, in particular, the complex "relationship between 'the spatial' and 'the political'" (Minca and Rowan, 2014, p.A2).

Schmitt's work is perhaps best known in geography and refugee studies for its influence on Giorgio Agamben's work on the space of exception as a topological relationship between the inside and outside of law (Belcher et al., 2008; Edkins, 2000; Ek, 2006). Since Agamben (1998; 2005) utilises *the camp* and *the refugee* as paradigms to explain the biopolitical relationship of political abandonment, he has quite naturally become the main referent for scholars dealing with refugee studies. Indeed, Agamben's observation that the refugee lives on a threshold between inside and outside of the political community (zone of indistinction) could be seen as a prescient insight into the current transition of many reception systems towards urban dispersal reception, where refugees increasingly experience this double condition of inclusion and exclusion. What is the rationale, then, or even the need for turning to Schmitt's political theory which was never concerned with refugee and urban politics? Crucially, Agamben's account of *the refugee* as a paradigm of biopolitics has been critiqued for failing to reflect the real lived experiences of situated refugees (e.g. Sanyal, 2012, p. 636). In fact, for Agamben political abandonment is desubjectification of humans which blurs political

distinctions and produces biological life. Thus, understood as *bare life*, the refugee is part of a *refugee population* where the individual is suspended from his ontological status as subject and disempowered of politically meaningful action (Butler, 2004; Ek, 2006). However, and to the contrary, in our empirical investigation we observed the foreclosure of the political occurring through what we call ‘practices of atomisation’, which individualise the asylum seekers and prevent them from engaging in collective political action. Consequently, we turn to Schmitt’s work because such practices are better explained by his post-political account of depoliticisation rather than a biopolitical account of political abandonment.

Among other theories of depoliticisation we engage with Schmitt’s work for two main reasons. First, we believe it is better suited to understanding practices of foreclosing of the political as opposed to political disavowal described by Rancière (1999). In fact, Schmitt’s work constituted a theoretical basis for thinkers of the post-political condition characterising Western democracies after the Cold War, like Mouffe (2005) and Žižek (1999) (Minca and Rowan, 2015). In response to Rancière (1999), Žižek (1999) contended that “political disavowal is exceeded by post-politics which no longer merely represses or contains the political, but pre-emptly it through its foreclosure” (Gill et al., 2012, p.512). This is not to say that disagreement is disallowed or entirely repressed, as we will show through empirical examples. Nonetheless, the case-study provides evidence of attempts to “reduce” asylum seekers’ “complaints to their particular content” so that they are prevented from developing into universal claims and political moments (Žižek, 1999, p.204). It is precisely this foreclosure of the political that we seek to investigate. The second reason for turning to Schmitt rather than thinkers of post-politics proper, like Mouffe or Žižek, lies in Schmitt’s original concept of the political as “a sphere of human relations structured around conflict” (Minca and Rowan, 2015; p.273). We believe that the ‘conflictual’, ‘existential’, ‘situational’, ‘concrete’, even ‘physical’ qualities of the political described by Schmitt reflect well the social tensions observed during the fieldwork, as-well-as many populist parties articulating anti-refugee positions on the basis of protecting the ‘collective way of life’. Moreover, Schmitt’s account of depoliticisation under liberalism through pluralism and the merging of state and society resonates with our search for situated practices of depoliticisation through

the “agency of social forces and social actors in the exclusion and subjugation of asylum-seeking communities” (Gill, 2010, p.632).

DEFINING THE POLITICAL, POLITICS AND DEPOLITICISATION

In order to present Schmitt’s particular conceptions of the political and depoliticisation under liberalism, we return to his early and highly influential text *The Concept of the Political* (2007) in which Schmitt develops his conception of the political as a sphere of human relations defined by the friend-enemy distinction and theorizes the foreclosing of the political under liberalism. Importantly, this text is perhaps where Schmitt is most concerned with political relations within the state, as opposed to between states. Therefore, it suits the purposes of a research agenda which explores practices of political and spatial division occurring within the state in its pluralistic and associative form, not by the state as a unitary sovereign power.

Schmitt wrote *The Concept of the Political* as a polemic against liberalism precisely because it attempts to evade the political due to its inherent risks. Thus, Schmitt seeks to resuscitate the meaning of ‘political’ as an independent domain of human action and thought by providing a “sense of a criterion” to understand the intellectual boundaries in which something called ‘politics’ can operate (Schmitt, 2007, p.26). Hence, his contention that “the specific political distinction to which political action and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy” (ibid). The enemy is “the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible” (p.27). Schmitt is precise in defining the enemy on existential grounds: he represents the strongest possible “existential threat” with the potential to destroy one’s way of life (ibid). Conversely, the political friend represents the strongest possible existential bond: he shares your way of life, confirms your political identity and constitutes the same political entity. Without friendship, Schmitt believes politics is merely a facade for perpetual state aggression (Slomp, 2007, p.202).

This brief understanding of political actors enables us to now explore where friends and enemies derive their political meaning. Quite crucially, for Schmitt the enemy cannot be decided upon

a prior norm, but derives his political meaning from an “existential threat” faced by a “concrete situation” (p.27). While the political has its own distinctive criteria and rationality, politics is not an autonomous or isolated domain: it does not occur in a vacuum (see for debate, Frye, 1966; Moore, 2010; Sartori, 1989). Conversely, the political derives its “reality and power from the respective central domain” of a concrete historical situation (Schmitt, 2007, p.87). Hence, the notion of Schmitt’s concept of the political as “‘situational’ and ‘concrete’, even ‘physical’, [and] also implicitly spatial” (Minca and Rowan, 2015, p.273), which attracted the attention of geography. Furthermore, for Schmitt only the *collective* can decide who their enemy is and “the enemy is solely a public enemy” (Schmitt, 2007, p.33); that is, a collective enemy. People do not fight for “one’s way of life” but for a “collective way of life”. While a collective can fight to protect their way of life, a private individual can only decide whom they hate and with whom they quarrel. In this case, because they only have individual adversaries (*inimicus* or *ἐξοδός*) and there is no collectivity, association or disassociation, there is no enmity (*hostis* or *πόλεμος*) in Schmitt’s terms (ibid). Importantly, while Schmitt overtly discusses the fighting potential of a collectivised people, there is a subtle undercurrent demonstrating that a collectivity of people is also essential for constructing public policy. Referencing Hegel’s dialectic idea about “quantity transforming into quality”, which is a thoroughly political concept for Schmitt (p.62), he contends that it is required for a grouping of people to be politically unified not just to fight, but also to constitute a politically significant counterforce that demands and influences public policy.

The negative anthropology of Schmitt, which posits conflict as a feature of the human condition, has not to be read as a celebration of conflict. Quite the opposite, it pre-empts Schmitt’s theory of politics as “the art of ordering” (Minca and Rowan, 2015, p.272). For the purpose of this paper, it is crucial to retain Schmitt’s idea of political ordering for managing conflict through spatial division. In fact, as Minca and Rowan put it, for Schmitt “the political did not simply take place in space but itself produces a particular form of political spatiality defined by the division between friends and enemies...the political is always spatialised along the lines of a ‘concrete’ division between inside and outside” (p.273). Hence the friend-enemy distinction as a spatially inside-outside relation performed, at least originally, by the sovereign authority. *The Nomos of the Earth* (2003) is where Schmitt articulated his more mature elaboration of the fundamental relation between the

political and space. Here, he defines *nomos* or the “normative order of the earth” as “the immediate form in which the political and social order of a people becomes spatially visible” (p.70) manifesting through “fences, enclosures, boundaries, walls, houses and other constraints” (p.43). We thus see that practices of line drawing – which define an inside from an outside – are central to Schmitt’s concept of the political: precisely, lines of spatial division are essential to the production of a political community which is capable of political action and, in the extreme case, of conflict. For example, Schmitt thinks of the national border as a “physical manifestation of the sovereign decision” through which the political community of the state identifies and defines itself while at the same time identifying and managing the enemy (Minca and Vaughan-Williams, 2012, pp.759-761).

However, Schmitt is explicit that liberalism erodes the state’s capacity to effectively spatialize the political because it locates pluralism within rather than between states (1999, p.204). In this case, it is no longer possible for the sovereign authority to identify the existential threat represented by the enemy and to delineate the inside-outside distinction that would manage conflict and establish order. Simply, the state loses its unity, as the enemy is not only external but, also, internal to the political community. This does not mean that friends and enemies finally engage in political confrontation or conflict. Instead, the political is now evaded through pluralism and association: under these novel conditions, state and society penetrate each other, which strips the state of its monopoly on politics and thus makes the political indecisive or something to be feared. Moreover, this transformation enables the liberal state to embrace all domains of societal and human life: in an ironic twist, the liberal state becomes a total state “consistent, namely, in the insatiability of its demand for state control of the individual...he should be able to do everything, yet allowed to do nothing” (Schmitt, 2007, p. 23).

In fact, central to Schmitt’s critique of liberal pluralism is the idea that liberalism forecloses the political through the production of the individual subject, one that “does not want to leave the apolitical riskless private sphere. He rests in the possession of private property, and under the justification of his possessive individualism he acts as an individual against the totality” (pp.67-68). This individual is akin to the political romantic to whom every political event is existentially irrelevant, so that “even the greatest external events, a revolution or a world war is, in itself, of no consequence to him” (Balakrishnan, 2000, p.22). Under theories of pluralism and association, Schmitt

argues that it is simply inconceivable that an individual could be compelled to fight because he/she is simply invested in too many other domains and groups. In fact, pluralism denies the decisive nature of the political “by stressing, time and time again, that the individual lives in numerous social entities and associations” (2007, p.41), which then make other domains (e.g. economic, religious, moral) as decisive, or indecisive, as the political. For example, recourse to humanism is essential for liberalism because it denies existential friendships and enmities and subsequently evades the political. Thus, under liberalism, a subject does not have any political recourse through any meaningful or substantive political identity but simply because they are an abstract human, or perhaps worse, because they have an economic value or contribution that society seeks. Without any political glue collectivising people together, Schmitt defines the liberal state “quantitative total state, total only in the sense that it invade[s] every area of life... but lacking in any unifying idea” (Minca and Rowan, 2015, p.275).

In the remainder, we will discuss the empirical material from our case-study engaging with the selected reading of Schmitt’s work presented above. We will show that, whilst it removes the spatial division between the local community and the asylum seekers, urban dispersal reception imposes a new spatial order which releases the agency of social forces and social actors – the local community and local organisations – in the depoliticisation of asylum seekers. Through situated practices of atomisation, the asylum seekers are prevented from constituting a collective public enemy. Thus, the friend-enemy distinction is evaded and politics is foreclosed.

As we discuss the possibility that urban dispersal reception imposes a new spatial order that is no longer a fixed inside-outside relationship, it is necessary to question whether we can utilise some of Schmitt’s ideas beyond the explicit scope of the author, who never theorised about refugee and urban politics. We argue for a positive response for at least three reasons. First, Schmitt’s conceptualisation of spatial division is perhaps more flexible than how it is usually understood. Some commentators suggest that Schmitt’s theory of power is topographical as political order corresponds to a fixed spatial division of inside and outside of the law, whereas Agamben’s space of exception is a topological relationship traced by a moving line (Gregory, 2004) which defines emergent and dynamic geometries (Belcher et al. 2008). Yet, in the *Nomos of the Earth*, together with the national border, Schmitt names “fences, enclosures, boundaries, walls, houses and other constraints” (2003, p.43) among the lines

which spatialise and produce a political community. Thus, even if his theory of power is interpreted as topographical instead of topological, it seems that the topography of inclusion-exclusion is not strictly the topography of national borders. Thus, we can imagine Schmitt's political collective being constituted by multiple practices of line drawing below the nation-state, such as at the scale of the city or even of the accommodation unit. Second, Schmitt is explicit that under liberal pluralism the state loses its capacity to identify the public enemy and to perform political order through an inside-outside spatial relationship. However, as we have seen, other practices of political foreclosure neutralise the risk of political conflict under pluralism and association. As Schmitt's political theory is spatialised, such practices of depoliticisation must also be spatialised. For example, the spatial performance of pluralism would be the spatial indistinction between friends and enemies. The lack of a spatialised collective enemy entails the atomisation of enemies in space, which may constitute the spatial performance of those liberal practices of individualisation described by Schmitt. Finally, Schmitt's intellectual project certainly reflects the historical moment of its conception, when it was still possible to conceptualise a "congruence between sovereignty, law and space" (Minca and Vaughan-Williams, 2012, p.767). As a result of profound changes, borders have become "strangely mobile, porous, invisible, virtual", and the contemporary enemy able to "materialise... here or there, in a space-in-between" (pp.769-770). Nonetheless, Minca and Vaughan-Williams suggest that engaging with Schmitt's work still emphasises how "current bordering practices reflect *both* sedimented logics of division *and* new manifestations of spatial order" (p.768). As these scholars, we believe that there is scope for contemporary applications of Schmitt's ideas.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Case-study analysis is defined as "an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2003, p.13). Because it produces context-dependent knowledge, it is essential for theory making in the social sciences and geography that have rarely, if ever, succeeded in producing context-independent theories (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Rose, 1997; Simons, 2009;

Yin, 2003). A case-study approach should be undertaken when the researchers wish to explore *contextual conditions* because they believe that they may be “highly pertinent” to the object under investigation (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Clearly, this is the case of our research agenda, which puts the situatedness of depoliticisation practices at its core. Concerns regarding transferability, dependability, credibility and validity (Abercrombie et al., 2006) have stemmed from some basic misunderstandings of what research and case studies are all about: in fact, case study analysis is not meant to produce “statistical generalisation”. Instead it provides “analytic generalisation” wherein the empirical results of the case/s can be compared to, and contrasted with, previously developed theory (Yin, 2003: 32). Our findings allow us to challenge accepted theoretical wisdoms, such as the notion of a post-political condition of asylum and the dominant policy discourse of dispersal reception as the most sensible response to asylum accommodation, regardless of the local context of implementation.

The case under study is the Province of Foggia (Puglia), in Southern Italy, where fieldwork was conducted between June and July 2015. It was selected for two main reasons. First, Puglia constitutes a significant case: in January 2015 it ranked third among Italian regions for number of asylum seekers into the SPRAR network and hosted three out of six reception centers CARA in the country (MDI, 2015). Second, working in the Province of Foggia provided some advantage of accessibility, which constitutes a main issue in refugee studies (Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 2007): in fact, the CARA of Borgo Mezzanone (Foggia) was the only reception center in Puglia that did not function at the same time as a detention center. Therefore, asylum seekers’ exit and entrance were subject to few restrictions, so that we could informally access asylum seekers and conduct interviews just outside the fence of the center. Thus we worked with two separate units of analysis: thirty-five asylum seekers from four SPRAR projects, all living in flats, and thirty-five asylum seekers from the CARA of Borgo Mezzanone, which is situated about twenty kilometres away from Foggia. We adopted multiple strategies to recruit respondents relying, when possible, on informal contacts and gatekeepers in order to extend our pool beyond the contacts provided by formal organisations. We observed sampling criteria relative to the length of settlement (minimum three months), gender (male) and age (18-40). In fact, the vast majority of forced migrants in Italy correspond to this profile. When considering these criteria, we needed to exclude from our research one SPRAR project specialised

with female and family care. All other SPRAR projects in the Province have been included in the study.

Data was collected through focus groups and in-depth follow-up interviews. Separate focus groups were conducted with asylum seekers from the two reception systems and usually involved four participants. Due to methodological and ethical concerns regarding refugee research (Journal of Refugee Studies, 2007), the focus group was considered suitable because it allowed asylum seekers to participate in a collective narrative, to familiarize themselves with the research topic and the researcher, and eventually to develop a feeling of trust. Individual follow-up interviews enabled respondents to discuss personal issues in a safe environment and allowed triangulation with focus-group material. Additional relevant information comes from the participatory element of this research. Since all interviews took place either in the SPRAR flats, the park or the surroundings of the reception center, we could observe how the asylum seekers interacted with each other, the local community and the managing organisations in their spaces of reception. Furthermore, we interviewed the directors of the four SPRAR projects, and the director of the reception center who accompanied one of us on a guided visit of the center, which required official permission by the Prefettura.

It is important to note that the CARA and the SPRAR systems operate alongside the CAS network involving a wide range of ‘extraordinary’ or ‘emergency’ reception facilities – from urban flats and houses to medium and large scale buildings such as hotels in disuse etc. Indeed, CAS facilities host the largest number of asylum seekers in the country: 77.7%, in October 2016 (ANCI et al., 2016, p.17). However, we chose to work with asylum seekers from the CARA and SPRAR systems because the restructuring of the Italian system is articulated in policy papers as a systemic shift from the CARA model to SPRAR. Thus, our research investigates the situated practices of depoliticisation that this shift may entail when SPRAR projects are implemented in *contextual conditions* similar to the case-study.

Finally, to better understand the policy discourses underpinning dispersal reception, we scrutinized three policy documents: UNHCR *Policy on Alternatives to Camps* (2016); UNHCR note on the European Directive 2013/33/EU (2015); and the SPRAR Manual (2015), which sets the principles and directives of the Italian dispersal system of reception.

SITUATED PRACTICES OF DEPOLITICISATION

The atomisation of asylum seekers as private adversaries

Centrally, the *Policy on Alternatives to Camps* (UNHCR, 2016) argues that dispersal systems engineer a reciprocal feeling of friendship between a refugee and local communities. Reflecting on the rationale for camps, the policy explains that public order, security and tension with the local community arising from economic scarcity justify the operational logic behind camp construction (p.4). The essential ethos for camps is thus one of perceiving the refugee as a potential enemy to the host State, its law and citizens. However, challenging this position, the policy clearly refutes the image of the refugee as a threat to the indigenous way of life and establishes a narrative of the refugee as a potential friend to local communities, which is better realized through urban forms of reception: “where people work, study and play together, they are better equipped to resolve difference and live peacefully” (p.5). Ultimately, it is envisaged that the refugee becomes a “member” of local communities (p.12) stressing that including refugees in national structures and local infrastructures can bring a “sustainable”, “efficient”, and “greater lasting” positive impact to the receiving communities (p.5). The same notions are found embedded in the SPRAR Manual, which states that the Italian dispersal system pursues “a wider notion of social inclusion: increasing beneficiaries’ sense of belonging to the community and leading to the positive cohabitation of the urban social tissue” (SPRAR, 2015, p.50). Dispersal reception is, thus, presented as a two-way strategy for social inclusion with positive long-term impact on local communities and local welfare. Social inclusion is pursued by providing instruments such as orientation to territorial services, Italian classes, and activities facilitating socio-cultural exchange and formation, which foster the active participation of asylum seekers into local communities (pp.42-51). Concomitantly, local networks of support involving all social actors and institutions are essential to realizing social inclusion (pp.49-50). Thus, SPRAR projects should “analyse local communities and social actors” (p.42) and stimulate “networking mechanisms” (p.28).

From our empirical investigations, however, we found that reality on the ground was quite different. Interviews with the directors and some social workers of the SPRAR projects underscored that dispersal reception was failing to provide asylum seekers and local communities with the necessary instruments to realize social inclusion. The reasons for such failure were many, including delays in receiving public funds, lack of economies of scale in service provision, and, most importantly for this paper, both the lack of any services that gathered the local and refugee communities together and resistance by the local communities to the asylum seekers. As a result, situated practices of atomisation were individualising the asylum seekers, enabling their self-identification as private adversaries.

Seventy asylum seekers were asked to describe and define the general attitude of the locals on a ranked scale of *welcoming, tolerant, indifferent, intolerant or openly hostile*. Among respondents from the reception center CARA, answers ranged from tolerant to indifferent to intolerant. They described the attitude of locals as ‘a general resentment’ towards foreigners. Instead, all SPRAR beneficiaries declared perceiving intolerance or open hostility and were more specific when asked to interpret the reasons for the locals’ attitudes indicating lack of education and of experience abroad, misinformation by the media, tendency to stereotype, and fear of the unknown:

“In eight months, I haven’t had any single [friendly] encounter in the neighborhood”, reported an asylum-seeker from Gambia who spoke good Italian. *“They have a very backward mentality, very anti-migrants. I realized they cannot see the positive that migration could bring here. At best, they see us as needy people. And most locals, it seems they are not ready to see black people. We are the first here. I don’t see racism but I see lack of education”* (SPRAR-33).

Indeed, many respondents pointed out that they had been allocated to secondary towns or to neighborhoods of Foggia that had no previous experience of migration - describing their neighbors as “hostile”, “scared” and “preoccupied” because of their presence. Moreover, the SPRAR projects did not provide any services to “create bridges” between the asylum seekers and the locals.

Analysing interviewee narratives, it emerged that by living in urban areas, SPRAR beneficiaries were, thus, more vulnerable than CARA beneficiaries to the attitudes of the local community and were

more aware of the social dynamics that constituted barriers to their social inclusion and friendship. Indeed, dispersal reception – *devoid of the “networking mechanisms” that the SPRAR manual deemed central to their social inclusion* – exposed asylum seekers to constant adversarial encounters with the local community in their neighborhoods, and also in the streets, the parks and the squares of the city. A number of respondents referred to episodes of harassment; pointing out that this did not necessarily manifest through verbal or physical attacks. As a Ghanaian respondent typically stated:

“People look at us like animals. Sometimes you see them change their walk because they don’t want to cross you... Children run away... You walk behind someone and you hear them saying: ‘Look at your back. Pay attention’. We are not speaking about racist acts, but this is what happens every day. In the street it is where they make you feel different” (SPRAR-25).

Various episodes were discussed as harassment, from the local residents who did not acknowledge the asylum seekers’ greetings to physical attacks: in fact, two flats were vandalized during the time of our fieldwork and in the six months before. Furthermore, an exercise of mental mapping conducted independently with respondents from both systems of reception revealed that SPRAR beneficiaries living in Foggia were not more familiar with the city, its services and public spaces. Often, they indicated the same few paths and places traced and attended by the CARA asylum seekers – the second hand market, the park with free wi-fi access and the Mosque – meaning that SPRAR recipients living in the city did not feel more confident in occupying public space when they lacked a collective:

“I’m afraid to walk alone in the city”, explained a respondent from Pakistan. *“The way from the station to the Mosque is all I know in Foggia. At the station I meet a group of asylum seekers who I know they are headed to the Mosque and I follow them. I have no confidence to move alone”* (SPRAR-11).

Eventually, it became clear that asylum seekers in the SPRAR system tended to suffer from voluntary self-confinement, just like asylum seekers in the reception center:

“I come downstairs and I sit on the doorstep”, affirmed an asylum seeker from Ghana, living in one flat in the city center. *“All my life is spent from upstairs to downstairs. All we do is eating and sleeping. That’s it. All days are the same... It doesn’t make sense to go out. I wouldn’t know*

who to speak with.” (SPRAR-24).

This and similar reports clearly echoed those of the asylum seekers in the reception center CARA:

“When I go to Foggia, I feel a complete outsider. When you say hello to somebody and the person does not even look at you... when you want to ask for information and the person passes over... you are not encouraged to go to Foggia by yourself. Who could I speak with?” said a respondent from Ivory Coast (CARA-2) before another participant of the focus group concluded: *“...you go, you observe people passing by, but you cannot be part of it. That’s why we have stopped going to the city”* (CARA-3).

In sum, most asylum seekers from both systems of reception reported being perceived as a threat by the locals and, thus, felt threatened by the latter. However, this was far worse for those dispersed into the city who, having been more exposed to adversarial encounters, often reacted by self-confinement into the private sphere of their flats. We can therefore see how the new spatial order imposed by urban dispersal released the agency of the local community, which produced the spatial atomisation of asylum seekers with depoliticising effects. In the remainder we explore two distinct, but connected situated practices of depoliticisation that prevented SPRAR recipients from constructing a collective capable of political action, leaving them as private adversaries as opposed to the political enemy in Schmitt’s terms: first, the loss of a collective way of life; and second, the individualisation of reception programs.

The loss of a collective way of life

The CARA of Borgo Mezzanone is close to a rural village 20 kilometres away from Foggia. It has a recognised capacity of 627 individuals, but it was formally hosting 636 at the time of our research, plus an indefinite number of migrants informally occupying the reception center and/or its surroundings. As the fence of the reception center might be regarded as a line physically separating an inside from an outside, it had effectively produced a collective of asylum seekers capable of political action. Immediately, we noted that asylum seekers in the reception center had relatively free agency in

space. Mobility was subject to few restrictions, and breaks in the fence allowed entering and exiting the center any time of the day. Security checks did not occur and, in fact, policing personnel were regarded as a merely symbolic presence. Most notably, within these spaces asylum seekers organised everyday routines and activities in an attempt to overcome the poor accommodation and services provided. For example, many chose to cook their own meals, which necessitated purchasing ethnic food and utensils, and for that they set up an informal market inside the reception center selling products obtained from scavenging or bought at the second hand market in the city. These coping strategies enabled asylum seekers to gain some control over their own way of life and, crucially, to produce a collective. In fact, the organisation of everyday routines and activities in space became collective efforts that tightened social relations of support and constituted solidarity nets operating in the short and long term. In the words of one asylum seeker who had experienced both systems of reception:

“In the CARA there is a psychological advantage: you immediately realise you have to take care of yourself. Soon you start helping yourself and you start networking” (SPRAR-33).

As we would expect from our reading of Schmitt, we found that the collective effectively triggered political acts by the asylum seekers. First, they engaged in a series of informal activities that the managing authorities, social workers and military body tolerated even though they were essentially prohibited: for example, small informal businesses selling items or providing services such as bike repairs and hairdressing. In fact, it was the CARA director who showed us some of the small shops explaining that they had eventually accepted this “self-organisation” inside the center. Importantly, such activities ensured that the asylum seekers reproduced a collective way of life on their own terms, which, according to Schmitt, necessarily pre-empts the political. Most notably, they managed to celebrate Ramadan, for which they had bought a goat that they kept and killed just outside the reception center fence. Other acts of disobedience included negotiating the allocation of newcomers to the housing units according to criteria of common language, ethnic background, etc. Many were informal squatters in the reception center: former guests that had returned after travelling to other parts of Italy and found hospitality in the houses of countrymen:

“We have chosen to live together”, reported the three asylum seekers from the Ivory Coast (CARA-1-3) “as we are all Ivorians. We have imposed this. We have said we would not live with anyone but Ivorians or francophone people” “If they moved me, I would go, but I would immediately come back to my initial place. Nobody controls. Sometimes I host a friend from Foggia. Nobody controls”.

Furthermore, the presence of a collective was visible in the asylum seekers’ capacity to articulate their individual complaints into universal claims. Some demonstrations had occurred during the year preceding our research: CARA residents protested about the length of bureaucratic procedures and the incessant rejections of asylum requests by marching from the reception center to the police headquarters in the city. Another time they protested by blocking the entrance to the officers working in the reception center. Although such uprisings were infrequent, and often unsuccessful, the asylum seekers in the reception center demonstrated that they could articulate individual complaints into universal claims and engage in political acts.

Conversely, except for a few occasions, asylum seekers in the dispersal system SPRAR were largely disempowered and depoliticised. This, we contend, was the product of a new spatial ordering that prevented them from constituting a collective way of life and a political collective through mechanisms of spatial distancing and spatial management attached to the allocation and regulation of flats. The local organisations managing SPRAR projects are responsible for renting the flats, allocating the asylum seekers to different apartments, and establishing a regulatory contract that asylum seekers must sign upon accepting the reception programme. Through the allocation of asylum seekers into flats, the SPRAR organisations could effectively influence the capacity and terms of asylum seekers gathering into a collective. For instance, some directors reported that they were specifically separating asylum seekers of similar ethnic origins or language. Although some argued that this was for the purpose of stimulating the integration process – in the first instance, within the flats themselves – it resulted in the physical separation of asylum seekers who would more easily establish a collective. Indeed, some directors affirmed that whilst they did not mind allowing countrymen and people of the same language to share a flat, they would definitively separate the “problematic” and “contestant” ones from their peers. Moreover, organisations intervened in the

ordinary routines of house management by arranging and imposing turns for housekeeping, supervising bedrooms (both for cleanliness and use) and finally, through retaining some level of control over the shopping for food and other everyday items. In many cases, we also noted that flats were missing common spaces and enough furniture and appointments such as chairs and dishes, which could enable asylum seekers to gather in the same space. Consequently, it emerged that the SPRAR recipients found it impossible to manage the house according to a collective way of life. Significantly, none of the flats celebrated Ramadan.

The allocation of asylum seekers into flats and the management of flats by the organisations can thus be interpreted as situated mechanisms of depoliticisation that operate spatially by distancing the asylum seekers in the city. In this case, the spatial division is no longer a gesture of line drawing defining an inside-outside relationship between the asylum seekers and the local community, but a gesture of atomising the asylum seekers *from each other*. Indeed, we noted that asylum seekers of the same SPRAR project tended to know each other and organise activities together *only* when their flats were located in the same neighborhood, which we observed only in two cases. Yet, in the most extreme case, asylum seekers were atomised not only between flats but even within flats. In fact, it emerged that the management of the flat by the organisations produced tensions amongst the asylum seekers regarding housekeeping, the maintenance of space, and even the distribution of food and water. Certainly, physical proximity and the capacity to manage space were essential for asylum seekers to collectivise. In fact, in two cases we found asylum seekers constituting a collective way of life and, crucially, a collective capable of political action. For example, twelve asylum seekers living in two flats in the same block organised a collective saving of their pocket money (2.5 euros a day) to install and use the Internet, which gave them access to essential information and entertainment. Further, they cooked, ate and spent free time together in the flats or in public spaces. As they asserted, gathered into a collective, they were able to raise complaints with the director of their SPRAR project regarding the lack of some reception services and the length of bureaucratic procedures. Quite similarly, a group of francophone asylum seekers of another SPRAR project living in two flats of the same neighbourhood had occupied the office of the SPRAR organisation refusing to leave it until the director would regulate the missed payments of their pocket money. However, beyond these

exceptional cases, we found asylum seekers being spatially atomised and thus prevented from constituting a collective.

The production of the individual

Thus far, we have described the lack of a collective as a result of two mechanisms: tensions between asylum seekers and local communities determining numerous cases of self-confinement to flats and the allocation and the management of asylum seekers into flats by the SPRAR organisations. Importantly, a third mechanism produces the atomisation of the asylum seekers: the individualisation of reception programs.

The *Policy on Alternatives to Camps* (UNHCR, 2016) embeds the rationale for urban reception strategies in the logic of enabling refugees as *individual subjects*. Scrutinizing the policy text reveals that: first, the conventional operational logic for camp construction understands the presence of the refugees as obedient and manageable; second, the camp gathers the refugees as a population instead of a refugee in the singular; and third, refugees are not active agents in their lives – as the use of the passive verbs stresses: “a camp is any purpose-built, planned and managed location or spontaneous settlement where refugees are accommodated and receive assistance and services from government and humanitarian agencies. The defining characteristic of a camp is some degree of limitation on the rights and freedoms of refugees” (p.12). Conversely, alternatives to camps are not defined for what *they are* but, rather, for their *enabling effects*: “they will be defined by the degree to which refugees are able to exercise their rights” (p.4). Here, every refugee is enabled to act as an individual and “make meaningful choices regarding their lives” (ibid). Similarly, the Italian dispersal system of reception has embraced this idea: “territorial projects of the SPRAR network need to establish, follow and monitor a personal project of reception for any individual received, with the primary objective to support each individual’s progression towards autonomy and social inclusion” (SPRAR, 2015, p.19). Indeed, the SPRAR Manual posits that “[i]t doesn’t exist any one-size-fits-all formula to design a project of reception,” recognizing that every SPRAR project is charged with individuals and their singular needs, which may not necessarily coincide with their asylum status (pp.19-20). Thus, projects

of reception need to be tailored to asylum seekers as individual subjects, *not* to asylum seekers as a population.

By referring to Schmitt's conceptualisation of depoliticisation under liberal pluralism, we contend that individualising reception may have depoliticising effects on asylum seekers. Schmitt argued that under liberal pluralism state and society merge: pluralism thus expands the reach of state control over the individual. A similar argument can be made regarding the dispersal system of reception under study and its depoliticising effects. In fact, we found that, whilst locating the asylum seekers into the local community, dispersal reception released the agency of social forces. As described above, for most respondents the contact with the local community sealed the impossibility of an existential friendship; quite the opposite, they felt threatened and controlled by the locals in public space, which determined numerous cases of self-confinement to flats. Moreover, individualised programs of reception were essentially reduced to the organisations allocating and managing each individual asylum seeker in the flat. Thus, we found that the operational logic, which the *Policy on Alternatives to Camps* associates specifically with the construction of camps, trickled down to different levels and multiple actors of dispersal reception: from the central authority deliberating on the allocation of asylum seekers into cities to the local organisations. Crucially, these could implement even more pervasive forms of control because of their closer relationship with every individual asylum seeker:

"In the reception center nobody will ask you 'What is going on?', 'Who is that man? Why did he come here?'" explained a respondent from Afghanistan who had stayed in the CARA center before entering the SPRAR system. *"Here we are six people, they know us...we are like in prison. We haven't freedom, because the organisation says 'do this, don't do that'. We need to obey"* (SPRAR-21).

Ultimately, as the state retreats from a centralised position, we see state functions passing on to social forces and social actors. In this process, an increasingly broad and profound power controls each asylum seeker, permeating all domains of his life.

Indeed, we suggest that dispersal reception depoliticises the asylum seeker exactly as Schmitt argued regarding the liberal state, by producing an individual subject who is indifferent to political action as he does not want to leave the security of the private sphere. Interestingly, the vast majority of SPRAR interviewees proffered that they would not risk complaining about nor report any inconvenience caused by the dispersal system because they feared they would lose favor with the SPRAR organisation and, consequently, their place in the system. As one Ethiopian asylum seeker clearly described regarding his “fear of punishment”:

“I don’t feel home in this place and in this house where we cannot decide when to wake up, to clean the flat and even to turn the ventilation on... But we don’t complain. We are afraid they push us out of the project. We have no choice to go anywhere else. So we have to stay silent” (SPRAR-7).

Even asylum seekers that had been housed in a former garage without windows – that clearly did not meet the housing criteria expected of a SPRAR accommodation – believed that they could not risk complaining as “you better get on well with the SPRAR director”. As they explained: it was the SPRAR director who would decide whether-or-not to extend the stay of an asylum seeker for another six-month period after a contract had ended. Interestingly, according to the SPRAR Manual, extension should be contemplated *only* in exceptional circumstances. However, the SPRAR directors that we interviewed confirmed that renewing the contract at least once was common practice, and explained that they would decide on the basis of the progress made by the asylum seeker in terms of individual autonomy and social inclusion – establishing if he was in need and worthy of another six months in the program. Yet, crucially, the asylum seekers did not acknowledge this criterion and believed that the SPRAR directors were more inclined to renew contracts for those who had shown more compliance with the organisation. As a result, they would not articulate their complaints as universal claims for fear of losing their right to protection. In this way, reception, protection and asylum at large ceased to be political.

Furthermore, Schmitt argued that the liberal state forecloses the political by embracing all domains and producing the individual subject as one who participates in all domains but the political.

This is, indeed, another effect of dispersal reception, which introduces pluralism and association in the management of asylum seekers. In fact, reception in SPRAR is intended as a period of orientation to all domains of life in the territory, amongst which the economic occupies a prominent place. For example, the organisation is supposed to work with each asylum seeker in the completion of his CV and in providing formative opportunities and training in partnership with local teaching institutes and employers. Moreover, as demonstrated above, the organisations interact in all other domains of asylum seekers' life – even the religious. This is because the controls and the regulations imposed by the organisations actually define the boundaries of asylum seekers' participation in all domains and this has depoliticising effects.

By observing the interactions between asylum seekers and operators, it emerged that the organisations were making continuous attempts to foreclose, reduce or redirect the political discussion. Often, asylum seekers who raised complaints or asked questions about their political status were told: “it's not the time” or “it's not the right moment” or there are “more important issues to discuss” or “other activities to do” because “reception is far more complex than issues of asylum”. Thus, in some respects, participation in other domains was negotiated against the political. Furthermore, it became increasingly clear that, due to the SPRAR organisations' mediation of all domains of reception, the asylum seekers did not know to whom to address their complaints:

“We do everything through the organisation. If we go to the municipality they don't know how to deal with us. They say ‘speak to the organisation’, and sometimes the organisation is our problem, so to whom shall we speak?” (SPRAR-26, from Guinea).

In sum, by operating at the individual scale and by pervading all domains, the SPRAR organisations were mediating all other spaces of politics and effectively foreclosing the politicisation of the asylum seekers.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have demonstrated that urban dispersal reception imposed a new spatial order, no longer corresponding to a fixed inside-outside relationship performed by a sovereign state authority. As we have shown, this novel spatial order released the agency of social forces and social actors in the depoliticisation of asylum seekers. In fact, we have described the depoliticising effects of tensions with the local community, processes of allocation and management of asylum seekers into flats, and the individualisation of reception programs, all of which produced situated practices of atomisation that precluded the asylum seekers from a collective way of life and, importantly, from engaging in collective action. As a result, the asylum seekers could not constitute the public enemy but instead remained only private adversaries, which effectively evaded the risk of political disorder or conflict.

Significantly, elaborating and applying an analytic framework from the work of Schmitt, the paper has contributed to previous understandings of politicisation and depoliticisation of asylum seekers. In particular, drawing upon Schmitt's notion of political, we have suggested that an existential, concrete and physical bond, represented by a collective way of life, is necessary for the politicisation of the asylum seekers. From this perspective, being present to one another and engaging in informal practices of building shelters, urban scavenging etc. (Isin, 2012; Sassen, 2006) are politically meaningful because they both impose one's way of life and claim for a public policy regulating the coexistence of two ways of life.

Furthermore, the paper has offered a different argument from previous accounts of depoliticisation as the product of state politics or the multigovernance structure of reception through practices of mobility, accommodation and service provision which fix locations and define distributions (Darling, 2011; 2014; 2016; Gill, 2009). In fact, we have shown that the new spatial order imposed by the SPRAR system had depoliticising effects because it released the agency of the local community and local organisations managing SPRAR projects. Thus, the paper has challenged the general notion of a post-political condition of asylum, illuminating the ways in which depoliticisation

practices become embedded, situated and reproduced through the contextual implementation of a reception system.

By emphasising that *contextual conditions*, rather than the system of reception per se, are determinant of the asylum seekers' experiences, the paper has addressed a gap in the literature on dispersal reception (Darling, 2017, p.183). Our evidence aligns with previous studies underscoring the relevance of place, neighbourhood and community in the asylum seekers' experiences of urban reception (Brun, 2001; Hynes, 2009; Kibreab, 1999; Netto, 2011) and illuminates the complex urban politics of asylum, resulting from the interplay of local social forces. Thus, we suggest the inadequacy of policy discourses presenting dispersal reception as the most sensible response to asylum seekers' accommodation, regardless of the local context of implementation. We therefore contend that the SPRAR Central Service should work closely with key actors of urban politics, urban planning, local organisations and local communities to realise the aims of the SPRAR system, as articulated in policy discourses: social inclusion and empowerment of the asylum seekers.

Finally, the paper has contributed to a renewed interest in Schmitt's work beyond the limited engagement of geography with his later, more explicitly spatial, writings (Minca and Rowan, 2014). In fact, we have discussed notions from *The Nomos of the Earth* within an analytic framework that largely draws upon Schmitt's earlier text *The Concept of the Political*. This has enabled us to understand practices of political foreclosure occurring *within* the state in its pluralistic and associative forms, not simply by the state as a sovereign authority. Further, we have argued that, because Schmitt's political theory is spatialised, the depoliticising tendencies of pluralism and association are always necessarily spatialised. Accordingly, we have suggested that the spatial performance of the depoliticising effects of urban dispersal reception is atomisation.

In doing so, we have utilised Schmitt's ideas beyond the scope of the author, arguing that Schmitt's conception of spatial division is perhaps more flexible than how it is usually understood. Hopefully, then, our contribution demonstrates that contemporary practices of spatial division "reflect *both* sedimented logics of division *and* new manifestations of spatial order" (Minca and Vaughan-Williams, 2012, p. 768), making the case for further contemporary readings and applications of Schmitt's work in political geography.

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