



South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal

6 | 2012
Revisiting Space and Place: South Asian Migrations in Perspective

What Kind of Place is this?

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/samaj/3446>

DOI: 10.4000/samaj.3446

ISSN: 1960-6060

Publisher

Association pour la recherche sur l'Asie du Sud (ARAS)

Electronic reference

Tristan Bruslé, « What Kind of Place is this? », *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* [Online], 6 | 2012, Online since 28 December 2012, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/samaj/3446> ; DOI : 10.4000/samaj.3446

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What Kind of Place is this?

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Tristan Bruslé

- 1 Behind the razzle-dazzle images of Qatar investing in sporting events and teams, in the luxury sector or in building new cities, lies another reality, far less flattering to the little emirate¹. In Qatar, the daily life of hundreds of thousands of migrants, who make up over 80 % of the total population, is marked by confinement and relegation. These migrants live in what is known locally as *labour camps*, a form of 'dormitory labour regime' (Ngai & Smith 2007) for so-called low qualified workers. A major part of the total foreign population is thus forcedly accommodated in places where no one would ever choose to live given the desolate environment of the *industrial areas* where *camps* are located and the often overcrowded and filthy conditions in the *camps* themselves. The Nepalese, a recent yet large migrant population, are among the million workers who strive to make a living for their kin at home, often enduring daunting working and living conditions.
- 2 The vast literature about migration to the Gulf countries (for recent updates, see Baldwin-Edwards 2011, Gardner 2011, Kamrava & Babar 2012) rarely focuses on the housing conditions of migrants as such with the exception of Gardner (2010a), an issue that has been better addressed by human rights organizations. Human Rights Watch (2012) regularly denounces the legal treatment of migrants with regard to work issues and also attracts public attention to concerns about living conditions in the *camps*. More recently, in the wake of the decision to organize the 2022 Football World Cup in Qatar, the International Trade Union Confederation has launched public awareness campaigns to promote migrants' labour and union rights.² Qatar also has its own National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) that publishes annual reports on human rights.³ Although some parts are devoted to migrants' problems (misuse of the sponsorship system,⁴ nonpayment of wages) and despite NHRC recommending stricter checks concerning cases of abuse, the situation on the ground has not changed much. Each day, more than a hundred Nepalese workers go to their embassy to complain about unpaid wages, exploitation, a runaway sponsor, poor housing conditions or inhumane treatment. Ultimately, global media and

international organizations focus their attention more on migrants' housing conditions or legal issues concerning the sponsorship system than on Qatar's use of a particular type of accommodation to control migrants' movements. The latter may have been overlooked due to the difficult access to *labour camps*. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the question of housing does not seem to be a priority for researchers, let alone decision-makers and western investors in Qatar.

- 3 The sponsorship system, with its 'structural violence' (Gardner 2010b), is one of the powerful means that Gulf countries use to keep migrants under control. It constitutes a major factor of migration 'governance, at the crossroads between states' and individuals' interests. But what about the *labour camp*? So far, the *labour camp* has not been considered essential to the functioning of the Qatari economy. I put forward the hypothesis that one of the key devices for managing migration in the Gulf, and in Qatar in particular, lies in the segregationist model of *labour camps*.
- 4 As a biopolitical device used to accommodate and control migrant workers' bodies, the camp has indeed taken on spatial and ideological dimensions. It is located on the edge of cities, and it fulfills a function for those who designed and organized it and for those who live in it. Although biopolitics relates to power over a population, in our case, the population and its assigned territory merge under strong structures of domination imposed by State laws. In this context, my interests lie in sharing the view of the majority of the population living in Qatar, the voiceless majority 'from below'. This term refers to 'transnationalism from below' used by Portes (1997) to describe cultural changes, changing relations to the nation-state and ordinary people's resistance to domination. In Qatar as in the rest of the Gulf, *camps* can be considered as 'little spaces [that today] offer a more accurate portrayal of the city' (Elshestawy 2010: 54), given the demographic domination of those who live in such a setting.
- 5 In order to understand the relationship between migrants' agency and structures, I have chosen to study space and everyday life as an entry into the world of migrants (see Rigg 2007 for a broader approach in the global South). My endeavour is to understand how the *labour camp* can be seen as a 'space of exception' (Agamben 1998) where exclusion is the norm. The *labour camp* will be considered as the main locus of life where structural forces and individual agency give way to the creation of spaces that need to be qualified. In such a constrained setting as the legal regime governing migrants and the camp as a place to live, how do migrants build and appropriate these spaces? How are we to qualify these new places for living? The globalization of labour flows does not lead to the homogenization of places (Appadurai 2005): the local, or translocal, which is linked to global dynamics at every level, becomes the main site where places are built. Migrants do not make places out of nothing but are inserted into a system of places over which they have no control. When meanings and values are attributed to space, the latter become a place (Creswell 2008). Place-making is thus at the heart of an individual's tactics to make life bearable. Places are built through spatial strategies involving intentional actions or the non-intentional repetition of mundane actions (de Certeau 1980). Places can thus be regarded as part of a process that results from the interaction of commoners' everyday practices with the space designed by the elite (Lefebvre 1974).
- 6 What could be described as an unusual situation—living in a *labour camp* in the Gulf—has become a common experience. Studying everyday life involves trying to give meaning to something which, *a priori*, is not significant (Highmore 2002). The course of daily life is based on values and qualities which make its everydayness (Highmore 2002). Everyday

life connects to meta-geographies of global flows of migrants, of capital and of raw materials. Focusing on the micro-geographies of subalterns makes the life of migrants appear to be determined by meta factors but is also a means of revealing migrant's agency in a context (*i.e.* structures) that is, *a priori*, not favourable to individual initiatives. 'Enclosure has emerged in recent years as a key process of neoliberal globalization' (Jeffrey, McFarlane *et al.* 2012: 1247). Therefore, a view *from below* is needed if we are to understand how this process is lived and meets resistance from those who form the often exploited bulk of transnational workers.

- 7 This article is therefore an attempt to understand how spaces are created by subalterns in a context where space conceived by elite practitioners severely limits any freedom to arrange it.
- 8 My research is based on four stays in Qatar (ranging from ten days to three weeks) and about twenty days in a labour camp.⁵ The camp is located in one of Qatar's industrial areas and is inhabited by 200 Nepalese men and a handful of Indians. I was allowed to live in the camp thanks to the Nepalese camp supervisor who gave me authorization.⁶ I was given a space in one of the portacabins so that I could share the daily life of migrants, with the exception of work. In this article, all the pictures and videos (in the footnotes) are mine. Although they are rather raw videos, they are meant to contribute to what the article sets out to demonstrate: they should help the reader acquire a better understanding of what living in a *camp* means.

Industrial area and the *labour camp*: spaces of exclusion as norms

- 9 Dynamics of migration in the Gulf are above all marked by a very strong imbalance in power relations between local populations and foreigners. Space is one of the sites that conveys this best.

Migrations in Qatar

- 10 Qatar is mainly inhabited by foreigners whose contribution to the wealth of the country is seldom recognized: the Qatari population only amounts to about 220 000, whereas the total population stands at 1.9 million.⁷ Qatar is thus completely dependent on foreign workers, who represent 94 % of public-sector employees and almost 100 % of the private-sector ones (Baldwin-Edwards 2011). This dependency on foreign labour, whether the qualifications, has not been reduced by the *Qatarization*⁸ of employment. This is particularly true for lower- and middle-level qualifications.
- 11 Of all foreign migrants, South Asians are visibly the most numerous, which at certain times and places gives the impression of being in a south Asian bazaar rather than in an Arab souk.
- 12 The first Iraq war led to the reorientation of the Qatar's sources of manpower (Kapiszewski 2006). South Asian workers, particularly Indian and Nepalese migrants, are the great beneficiaries of the policy of employing non Arabs and non Muslims, although the objectives of the migration policies have never been made public. The rise in international labour migration from Nepal has been non-stop since the end of the 1990s. Everyday, 1,600 workers fly from Kathmandu to the Gulf and to Malaysia, which are major

destinations for men and women seeking to improve their lives in Nepal, where opportunities are few and far between. In the fiscal year 2011-2012, more than 100,000 Nepalese migrants entered Qatar and, according to the Nepalese embassy in Doha, in 2011 and 2012 they numbered about 350,000.⁹ They are the first or second national community, yet barely visible compared to the Indians or Bangladeshis who run most of the retail shops.¹⁰ Nepalese migrants are mostly employed in low qualified jobs, in the building sector in particular. Of the 4,661 approved job offers for Nepalese workers published on the Nepal Embassy website from May 1st to August 25th 2011, only 0.3 % concerned highly qualified jobs. The overwhelming majority concerned semi-qualified jobs (36,3 %) such as masons, carpenters, drivers and unqualified jobs (63,4 %) such as workers or cleaners (Bruslé forthcoming).

- 13 Natural gas, which has brought prosperity to Qatar, is still the major source of income but plans for a reorientation of the economy are already under way. The foreign population, whatever their category, is working towards building a new Doha geared towards the knowledge economy, sport and conference events (Alraouf 2010). Qatar may therefore be regarded as a laboratory for neo-liberal urbanism in the sense that market laws combine with State laws to create an 'urbanism of spectacle' (Adham 2008). Yet this neo-liberal urbanism is also synonymous with great exclusion.

Enclosure, industrial areas and the *camp*: relegation as a policy

- 14 Like elsewhere in the Gulf (see Elshestawy 2010 about Dubai), social exclusion is growing as the number of foreigners constantly increases. Social and spatial segregation is nothing new in Qatar (Nagy 2006) but, with the migrant population is still on the rise, the process of spatial segmentation seems to be as active as ever and further heightened.¹¹ As in other realms of public politics, it is almost impossible to know which political decisions target such a fragmentation based on nationality, qualification and marital status. No texts or laws are available to sustain the hypothesis of a planned relegation of migrants. However, the materiality of landscapes and the observation of human settlements provide the researcher with a means of understanding the features of such a phenomenon.

Figure 1. The main Industrial Area of Qatar which is host to 261,000 migrants over 32.1 km² (Qatar Statistical Authorities 2010)



GOOGLE EARTH

Figure 2. Al Khor industrial area (September 2011).



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Figure 3. A *camp* made up of portacabins (September 2011)



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Figure 4. Another *camp*. On the left is the main building divided into fourteen rooms. The mess and the kitchen are on the right. The empty space in between is used to park company buses and for playing volleyball. (January 2011).



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- 15 The politics of migration in the Gulf, and in Qatar in particular, are geared towards non-integration.¹² Foreigners have no hope of obtaining Qatari citizenship and their political rights are non-existent. At the same time, migrant populations represent major

preoccupying issues for Qataris (Berrebi, Martorell *et al.* 2009). The fear of the South Asian bachelor and the perceived threat regarding national identity (Heeg 2010) have led to politics of spatial zoning and to the *de facto* eviction of low qualified migrant workers from mainstream places. In the 1980s the centre of Doha was left to migrants when the State was offering Qataris land and interest-free loans in the sprawling suburbs of the capital (Adham 2008). However, the heart of the city, which is overpopulated and poorly maintained, is now being retrieved and then partly destroyed and rebuilt to suit an up market population willing to live in a modern yet traditionally inspired Arab town (Rizzo forthcoming). The most significant aspect of segregation concerns spaces locally referred to as *industrial areas* that centralize all the polluting activities (warehouses, workshops, factories) and *labour camps* (*i.e.* workers' housing). Far from Doha and Al Khor town centres, these *industrial areas* epitomize the spatial eviction of migrants with their landscapes of desolation (Figure 2). Although Gardner (2010a: 57) talks about an 'organic or unplanned segregation of labour to the offstage zones of the city' (*i.e.* the Doha Industrial Area), I would be more of the opinion that there is a planned removal of low qualified workers.¹³ The distance to the town centers or the mall is accentuated by the lack or inefficiency of the public transport system. Men are practically stuck in *industrial areas* due to difficulties in getting out of them. In *industrial areas*, roads are left unmaintained; potholes dots the streets; abandoned cars and trucks lay everywhere (Figure 3). Piles of rubbish which are never taken away rot in the sun. As soon as the wind blows, dust flies everywhere. There are no trees, just as there is no night lighting. In sum, they are the total opposite of the image Qatar likes to show of itself as an ultra-modern country. As a matter of fact, there is room to house 920,000 workers, of which only 1.5 % are women (Qatar Statistics 2010).¹⁴ 41 % of men are between the ages of 25 and 34 and 72 % are aged between 25 and 44. The standard of education of 93 % of labour camp occupants (all non Qataris) is lower than secondary level, with women having a much higher level. Only 7 % of men can boast a secondary school or university education. No details are available concerning the types of jobs occupied by *industrial area* migrants, but these surely correspond to low or semi-qualified jobs. Although the population census tells us nothing about nationality, given that in 2010 the overall foreign population was 1.5 million, 62 % of all expatriates must live in labour camps. Hence this housing pattern is in no way incidental but forms the basis for managing unskilled migrants who usually do not have the choice but to live in these areas, where their company puts them.¹⁵ According to the Nepalese Embassy in Qatar, the Nepalese migrant population numbered 350,000 in 2011 and, as it is mostly constituted of semi-qualified or unqualified workers, we can estimate that 90 % of the entire population, that is about 340,000 persons, live in *labour camps*. The *camp* is therefore nothing unusual. It has become totally banal for hundreds of thousands of men who spend years working in the Gulf.¹⁶

- 16 The *labour camp* is the main piece in the puzzle of the migrants' confinement. It is where migrants spend most of their time outside their place of work. As a form of forced accommodation, camps are rented by employers to provide a shelter for their employees.
¹⁷ Although a major type of accommodation in the Gulf, the *camp* has not been yet the subject of in-depth investigations. Marsden (2008) and Gardner (2010) were the first to address the subject, with the latter differentiating between four types of *labour camp*: large and well organized, unstaffed apartment buildings, villas and other structures. In his typology, Gardner seems to overlook large and not so well organized labour camps that make up the bulk of lodgings in Qatar's industrial areas. Camps are privately run by

companies so that one camp usually corresponds to one company. Bigger camps run by contractors may host workers from several companies. At dormitory level and often at canteen level, the division among migrants is based on nationality. Locally known as *camp*, it is part of the migrants' vocabulary in the same way as *duty*, *overtime*, *boss* or *construction site*: entering the globalized world also means appropriating the language of the industrialized world where there is greater dispossession of time and of control of one's life than in the case of a peasant's life.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the exclusion of migrants does not apply only to these segregated forms of accommodation. Some places such as malls, the zoo, the souk or the Corniche promenade, are forbidden to bachelor workers on Friday, the only day off in the week. These 'family day' rules, as they are locally known, aim at preventing migrants with no family from roaming about places intended for family enjoyment. South Asian workers, who all are bachelors, are particularly targeted as other bachelors, whether Arab or Westerners, encounter no problems on entering malls. This leads to exclusion from mainstream society and space through the implementation of racist rules.¹⁹ South Asians pay the price for their representations as young bachelors in dire need of sex and therefore on the lookout for women. The private sector takes an active part in the perpetuation of the segregation system.

- 17 As spaces where the common rule of the law no longer applies, *industrial areas* and *camps* can be described as 'spaces of exception' (Agamben 1998). According to Agamben's notion of exception, we can assert that they are indeed included in a system (in the global labour market, in the Qatar economy) through their spatial exclusion. Their existence lies in this 'relation of exception', that is an 'extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion' (Agamben 1998: 18). These spaces lie outside mainstream places and outside Qatari law: they become the ongoing norm of exclusion.²⁰ 'Bare life' (Agamben 1998) is the life migrants lead, that is a life excluded from any political involvement and which reflects a lack of concern on the part of the authorities, especially regarding health issues. Even though sovereign power does not hold the right of death over migrants, as in Agamben's theory, the value of migrants' lives is close to zero. In Qatar migrants are deprived of space, of freedom of movement and ultimately of control over their own bodies with respect to sex and alcohol in particular. More broadly speaking, they are denied the right to live a decent life—that is in a clean and pleasant environment—, or at least a life with minimum privacy and more liberty. However, as migrants can leave their compound, the space of exception extends with the movements of the migrant's body, from the place of living to the zoo for example. The lack of control over the space they inhabit is characteristic of their lives in camps. The camp itself is a device that deprives men of choices.
- 18 *Industrial areas* and *labour camps* are despised by their inhabitants—'it's not a place fit for human beings' is a commonly heard statement—and feared by Qataris and highly qualified expatriates. They are imagined, created and built by the elite who implement a policy to render low qualified yet much needed workers invisible. Hence, they can be qualified as 'representations of space' (Lefebvre 2000), that is a space thought by urban planners and technocrats. This dominant space is made a lived and experienced space by commoners, through their (highly) constrained practices. As 'other spaces' (Foucault 1984), *industrial areas* and *labour camps* are both unknown to the majority of the local population and meaningful to their users or inhabitants. Both open and closed, they form a major part of Qatari space, although they have no formal status and are not considered as places where migrants lead a difficult life.

The pace of life, circulation in the camp and rooms: making the *camp* a place through daily routine

- 19 In the *industrial areas* and *labour camps* described above, migrants manage to lead lives made up of 'pleasure and pain' (*sukh ra dukha*), as I was always reminded, as if the migration experience was not that exceptional. In order to make their lives liveable, they take hold of their new living place and make it their own, one place among their numerous *loci* of living, in Nepal and Qatar. In order for a space to become a place, one has to practise it, to make it familiar and thus attribute values to it (Creswell 2008). Through the repetition of actions in space and time, everyday life is a potent determinant of building places. The spatial practices (Lefebvre 2000) described here structure the daily lives of migrants: by circulating, by residing, in a word by inhabiting, men build a new space that becomes their place. They have to find landmarks in a new place, far from village life that almost all Nepalese migrants are used to. What are the rhythms of the camp life like? How do men use the space of the camp in their daily interactions? How do daily activities contribute to creating places?
- 20 Trying to make daily life heuristically significant is all about observation and about what migrants say about it. One has to try and encompass all the mundane reality of life in a camp: eating, sleeping, playing, doing their laundry, doing nothing, etc. In sum, apart from the workplace which was not accessible to me, what matters are the ordinary paths in ordinary places. Defining the camp as an ordinary place might seem inept but it ends up becoming *de facto* commonplace for thousands of migrants who spend part of their active lives in the Gulf. The camp is not therefore uncommon but is part of Nepalese migrants' realm of experience: transnational labour movements contribute to creating new social spaces.

New life in a *camp*²¹

- 21 All migrants talk about the first impressions they had when they travelled directly from Doha airport to the *camp* with mixed feelings ranging between astonishment, excitement and apprehension. Most of them did not know what a camp was or that they had to stay in a room with eight or more comrades.²² The surprise of discovering a place so different from what they are used to is short-lived. As soon as they arrive, they are given a bed in a room. The men say that on the whole they were welcomed and did not suffer any discrimination from other workers. All newcomers learn to adjust to their new life quite rapidly. The study of the composition of rooms does not reveal any clear caste patterns. The camp is a place where traditional south Asian notions of discrimination (*bhedbhava*) are shunned. Even if upper-caste migrants know perfectly well who belongs to lower castes, no one dares to make any remarks or to refuse food from a low-caste member such as a *kami*.²³
- 22 In the camp where I stayed, checks by company representatives are slack, not to say non-existent. In fact, the migrants living in the *camp* run it. The camp boss supervises the work of one or two men who are supposed to clean the camp's corridors, toilets and public spaces on a daily basis. He reports to the supervisor (who reports directly to the company) but is not feared at all and shares a room with other workers. As far as the

Qatari authorities are concerned, they had so far never entered the camp except on one occasion to arrest a young man who had had sex with a Filipino maid and who had been denounced by her employer, because Qatari law forbids 'illicit sexual relations', that is outside marriage. He was immediately deported back to Nepal but not lashed, a punishment reserved for Muslims. Apart from such rare incursions by the State, proper checks on living conditions by one of the 150 Qatari labour camp inspectors have never been made.²⁴ When beds become vacant on the departure of a man, anyone can change rooms without asking for the camp boss's consent. The room setup is therefore based on common affinities: there are strong links between migrants who have spent many years together with some rooms housing only long sojourners.

- 23 Circulation in the camp is marked by a variety of movements to and from the rooms, to the mess or to the bathrooms. It is at the end of the day that moves in the camp reach their peak. Once again, there is no caste logic in commensality, accommodation and circulation. As in urban settings, men roam around inside the camp in search of entertainment, of friends or of peace and quiet. The impression of being in a village (*gaun*) is sometimes emphasized when men talk about the solidarity between each other and about the rumors going around: 'at night in bed, as we hear the others talk, we feel as if we are in a village, so that we do not think anymore about it'. Yet turning the *camp* into a living place through the daily routine is not equal to adding another layer of belonging.

Daily rhythms pace in the camp

- 24 The pace of camp life repeats itself almost invariably for the majority of workers. Only a few of them, such as drivers or those with slightly more responsibility have schedules that enable changes in timetables. Otherwise, the pace is always the same.
- 25 Migrants get up around 4.30 a.m. so that they are ready to leave at 5.30 a.m. Those on night shifts return in groups accompanied by drivers who spend their day coming and going to the camp. Some take a shower; others wait till the last moment before rushing off. They all grab a cup of tea and a piece of industrially made bread. Everything is quiet until the drivers start warming their bus engines. One after another, men dressed in company attire climb into the buses. Some prepare to settle down to sleep again during the journey to the office, which takes an hour. At 5.30 a.m. the buses leave the camp, their horns sounding to summon any latecomers.
- 26 The camp is now empty, except for the cooks and a few sick men. All is quiet. Cooks prepare the national Nepali meal made of rice and lentils (*dal bhat*) and fill tiffins that are brought to the workers at their place of work.
- 27 Then the camp sinks into lethargy. Nothing moves, there is no sign of life except for the few stray cats and dogs that hang around the industrial area. The heat becomes intense.
- 28 At 4 p.m., the first groups return from work. By 5 p.m., everybody is back in the camp. Up until 10 p.m. the camp is full of life. Men shout, run, play and go from room to room. It's a time when men look after themselves: they take a bath, wash and iron clothes (see video below) or do some gym. Volleyball matches are organized from time to time. In the portacabin given over to a cultural group since 2005, men prepare their next show with local Nepalese singers and dancers. Cooks prepare the evening *dal bhat* while some men prefer to cook their own food. At 8 p.m., the mess opens but the majority of men prefer to

have dinner in their own room. Once dinner is over, everybody washes their plate and takes it back.

29 This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document <http://samaj.revues.org/3446>

30 At 9 p.m. the communal areas gradually empty; men put away their carromboards and everyone takes to their rooms (see video below). The noise of the TV, music and laughter die down. At 10 p.m. hardly any sound can be heard in the camp. Some night-owls may carry on talking or drinking outside if weather permits.

31 For the first time since he got up, each worker is alone in his bed. Far from the pace of village life, camp life is above all dictated by the company. The same repetitive routine is largely perceived as a new and boring feature of a worker's life in Qatar.

32 This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document <http://samaj.revues.org/3446>

Daily routine and killing time: conditions of camp life

33 In his study about key thinkers of the everyday life theory, Highmore (2002) defines the everyday as a close landscape, a routine and a set of values and qualities. The standardization of time—a feature of Western modernity—, that can be seen in our case study, has led to “the repetition-of-the-same [that] characterizes an everyday temporality experienced as a debilitating boredom’ (Highmore 2002: 8). Killing time (*time bitaunu*) after work is indeed a major issue for *camp* dwellers (Figure 5). ‘Life in the camp is dull’ is a statement that is commonly heard and often confirmed by observing men who give the impression of being bored (see video below). ‘One hour seems like two hours [in Qatar]; time doesn’t pass here, whereas in Nepal time flies’: the dilemma of passing time is never experienced as strongly as on Fridays and at the end of each day when migrants come back from work and have to wait until the dinner is served. The question of occupying oneself is constantly raised and never completely solved. In a context where migrants are prevented from managing their own time, when they do have some free time, they find it difficult to handle. When migrants say that there is nothing to do in the *camp*, that the *camp* and industrial areas are not fit for human beings, they are alluding to the would-be life in Nepal which is regarded as easy. Indeed, the predicament of Nepalese migrants in Qatar lies in opposition to the seemingly easy-going life in their place of origin: ‘life abroad is so boring’. The paradox is that in Nepal too, especially given the sexual division of farm labour, men may also stay idle all day long. Yet there seems to be an idealization of life in the village. When speaking to the researcher, migrants attribute lofty values to village life, whereas life abroad is despised. However, many men—but not the majority—admit that their stay in Qatar was not out of obligation (*badhyata*) but out of a strong desire to see with their own eyes what a foreign country (*bidesh*) looks like, besides the money-earning aspect.²⁵

34 This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document <http://samaj.revues.org/3446>

Figure 5. Killing time on a free afternoon



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Figure 6. New vs. old technology to pass the time



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35 The routinization of life, and the feelings of boredom associated with it, is the consequence of migrants entering a transnational labour market. The new time management, imposed by another (*i.e.* the employer) as opposed to time in the Nepalese village where time management is imposed by the seasons, is illustrated by several aspects: contract duration, vacation times, weekly organization, Friday day off and free time. The dispossession of time is definitely a feature of the inclusion of migrants in a company-ruled world. Men feel this and complain about it. This is particularly the case when migrants talk about wandering (*ghumnu*). Besides access being barred to various places as mentioned earlier, the possibilities of walking round aimlessly are limited. Surveying the sandy, desolate landscape around Al Khor industrial area *camp*, Narayan B. remarked: 'where can I go? What is the point of wandering round here?' The impression of being trapped extends to the outskirts of the camp: 'there is only sand here, no parks, no greenery'. In Doha's *industrial area*, there is a small commercial zone run by South Asians: it looks like any Indian market and on Fridays it is teeming with thousands of men who come there to meet their relatives. Everywhere in industrial areas there are shops, and internet and phone booths where migrants can find basic necessities and services. However, getting to the bazaar is not always easy, as in the main industrial area, it can be more than half an hour's walk away in the hot sun. They do not often go to the bazaar after work, except sometimes on Friday to meet friends. The very act of wandering round aimlessly is thus rare, and is only done by newcomers who still express the need for a walk after work (see video below). Of course, modern life that Qatar symbolizes attracts men, mainly at the beginning, when their curiosity about new places is still fresh. After a few months, when men have visited a few malls or been to the beach, the lived space shrinks to the room and the camp.

36 This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document <http://samaj.revues.org/3446>

37 This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document <http://samaj.revues.org/3446>

38 Living in a new place also means new activities to pass the time. Earning money abroad provides access to cash that migrants did not have back home. The sudden availability of money opens up opportunities for spending and for integrating a nascent consumer society (Bruslé 2012a). Electronic devices such as mobile phones, smart phones, computers or DVD players have become part of migrants' lives and they discover that these items are a means to pass the time and, for a few of them, to enhance their personal status (Figure 6). Other activities in the camp include sports (volleyball, cricket and more recently bodybuilding), playing games (carromboard, cards) or watching movies (see video below). One topic that is clearly of critical importance is the absence of women. According to data from 2008, the mean age in the camp is 26, and the fact that it is impossible 'to talk to girls' (*ketisanga bolna*) or even 'to see girls' (*ketilai herna*), not to mention meeting girls, is hard to bear. In the privacy of their beds, men often turn to pornography. And finally, the camp itself has hidden spaces where migrants can drink alcohol. Despite this being illegal for labourers, the consumption of alcohol runs rife in camps. Whether it is whisky or beer bought on the black market, or locally brewed drinks or perfume²⁶, alcohol is readily available to workers. It is a way of 'passing the time' (*time*

pass garnu) that many young men take up after work. This activity is undertaken in hidden quarters, yet everyone in the camp knows who drinks and who does not. One worker even turned into an alcoholic in Qatar and ended up being stuck there: he has not come home for eleven years, as everyone told me.

- 39 All these free-time activities are organized and run by the men themselves. Politics of paternalism are almost non-existent. Contrary to some industrial companies in Europe in the 20th century who set such goals, in Qatar there is no ambition to educate or better the lives of migrants, particularly as far as their accommodation is concerned.
- 40 Nepalese migrants eventually learn to live in a fixed time span. Migration sets clear periods of time (at home/abroad, working days/Fridays), but time spent in migration becomes blurred. For migrants who have spent years in exile, it is almost impossible to differentiate between one year and the next because a migrant's situation hardly ever changes. The extreme routinisation of life therefore leads some men to use an inmate metaphor when talking about their lives in the camps.

Privacy, beds and the inmate metaphor

- 41 We have seen that the deprivation of freedom is very real: this deprivation also means a lack of control over space and the shrinking possibilities of appropriating public space. There is no simple answer then to the question about the limits between private and public space in the camp. Camps are designed by architects, and in order to create familiar spaces where they feel comfortable, migrants have to adjust to the accommodation system. The 'power of the everyday' (Rigg 2007: 11) helps us to understand at the same time how places are built by repetition, by circulation and by fitting spaces to the scale of the body. The 'everyday' is the where social and spatial transformations occur.
- 42 Even if human density in houses is high in Nepal, it is not as high as in a labour camp. How then is it possible to establish barriers or frontiers so that individual migrants can create some form of privacy? How do they manage to impose some distance from others? Spatial strategies are used by migrants to appropriate space according to a temporality that is, however, variable.

Rooms as places

- 43 The numerous *labour camps* I've visited are very similar to each other. In the *camp* I stayed in, the company provides for migrants' very basic needs. Each room is furnished with four or five double bunk beds but, apart from that, migrants find bare walls and emptiness on their arrival (Figure 7). In some *camps*, wardrobes are left at the disposal of migrants. Nevertheless, the migrant only receives a set of sheets for his bed which comes with a thin mattress and a blanket. In rooms where the occupants arrived only recently, the bareness is striking.

Figure 7. A typical room in a *camp*



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- 44 The absence of anything superfluous is, however, a sign that the occupants are newcomers. Migrants slowly contribute to making this space into places to live. The accumulation of material possessions takes place when a room has been occupied for a long period of time. The longer the migrant stays in the room, the greater the density of objects and decorations. This customization of rooms also applies to their maintenance. Old, cracked walls have to be repainted by the occupants of the room as the company does not provide for this. A timetable of the chores to be done—mainly vacuum cleaning—is pinned to the wall.
- 45 Room-based solidarity leads to the purchase of equipment such as a television set or a DVD player.²⁷ Cupboards, tables and chairs are either bought or picked up from somewhere and taken into the rooms if there is enough space. For convenience's sake, the configuration of the rooms is relatively standard. Beds line the walls while the space in the middle is shared public space which is used for eating, talking, lying down or preparing food. Many rooms have no table nor chair, much like in the houses in a Nepalese village. In the latter, there is an impressive number of religious symbols. In some camp rooms, migrants also set up small altars devoted to Hindu gods, where incense is lit every morning. However, in a strictly Muslim country where manifestations of polytheism are banned—despite the large Indian and Nepalese Hindu communities, there is no official temple—public religious demonstrations do not exist. Religious practice is limited to domestic spaces only.²⁸ Nevertheless, during the Nepalese festival of Dashain which celebrates the goddess Durga, the company provides workers with a few male goats (but grants no holiday) to be sacrificed in the camps.

- 46 The private or public status of rooms in a *labour camp* is ambiguous because rooms are open to outsiders according to the occupant's status. 'Famous' men—that is those who have been in the camp for years, who are not afraid to speak out and who take part in the camp's different activities—have no qualms about entering any room they like. Newcomers, those who are younger than the majority, do not really venture into rooms other than their own. They tend to be confined to the room where their bed is. Thus the frequentation of space also reveals power relations between migrants.
- 47 If we consider the room as a public space, the central part of it is devoted to commensality when necessary. Gathered together on the floor, men share their meal in a simple, informal way after possibly having cooked it in the room itself (see video below).

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- 48
- 49 The question of the transnational construction of a home can be addressed by examining the specificities of the rooms: are there any signs of *Nepaliness*? The decoration in the rooms also depends on the seniority of its occupants. Over time, migrants decorate the walls with posters but there is no apparent willingness to recreate a Nepalese house, especially since the interiors of Nepalese village houses are barely decorated. However, signs of belonging to Nepal are commonplace. Maps and flags of Nepal, writings in *devanagari* (the alphabet used for Nepali) make up a hybrid space where signs of national belonging are particularly present side by side with more international decorations (Figure 8). The presence of Qatari royalty as shown in Figure 8 may seem odd. Although the general feeling towards Qatar is ambivalent—migrants' living conditions and the respect they are shown are considered to be inadequate, yet their earnings may help them to secure a better future—the fact that the company belongs to the emir's step-family may explain why this poster is there.

Figure 8. Allegiance to Nepal, Qatar royalties and Shiva



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- 50 The room is perhaps the only space of freedom, where men can act without being controlled by the company and where the camp boss does not interfere. The room is the space of free and unconstrained time.

The bed as the last refuge: the new quest for privacy

- 51 The question of privacy, or the lack of it, is not really highlighted by migrants, since it is not a commonly held value in Nepalese rural society. In the high human density camp, privacy, although not discussed, is not easy to achieve. Private space shrinks to the minimum, that is to the bed: 'when a lot of people live in the same room, there is no individual space (*byaktikat thaun*). In the beginning it's difficult, then we get used to it. Wherever we are, it's all right'. Although the camp is not a comfortable place (*asuvista*), a migrant has to put up with it: resignation appears to be a major feature of a migrant's state of mind for they are fully aware that their bargaining power is weak.
- 52 The bed is the main piece of furniture in the room. It is, of course, used to sleep in, yet it is much more than that: it is a place where friends gather, a place under which things can be tidied up. It is the focal point in the room around which life is organized.

Figure 9. The bed, a place to share from time to time



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Figure 10. Privacy under the protection of the Qatari flag



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Figure 11. Memories from home in a private place



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Figure 12. The bed, a personal space



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Figure 13. Extending bed space, achieving a form of privacy



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- 53 Depending on the daily pace of the camp, the bed is either a public or a private space. Between the time migrants come back from work and the time after dinner, beds are used as sofas (Figure 9). Friends gather on them to play games on a computer or to watch online movies. The bed, especially the one at the bottom, is an open place for anyone wanting to chat or share moments with friends. However, at night it closes to become a private space where no one else but the owner is welcome. It becomes the only and the last refuge where a greater sense of privacy is achieved in many cases by closing off the space with curtains (Figure 10). Moreover, it is the only personal place there is, which is decorated according to one's personal taste. The young man in Figure 12 has appropriated it by writing his name and place of origin on the wall. Many men have indeed added extension to their beds so that they have a little more room (Figure 13). It is common for migrants to stick family pictures on the walls surrounding their beds (Figure 11). The bed becomes a nest where privacy is created and the distance to others is heightened. It belongs to a system of objects the migrant wishes to be surrounded by.
- 54 The quest for privacy and attempts to make one's own private space are above all constrained by the high density of men and of things. Although men create personal spaces where they feel comfortable—which might be regarded as a basic human condition for residing somewhere—a long time elapses before migrants can call it home because of the extremely derogatory values associated with Qatar.

'Qatar is like a jail'

- 55 The general context of Qatar and of migration is described as something compulsory (*majburi*), even if some migrants do admit that they came of their own free will, without having any financial problems back home. What then is the value of the inhabited place during the migrant's stay? One day, when I was asking Krishna D. how he felt about his life in Qatar, he told me: 'it's a tragic life, there is no freedom (*swatantrata*)'. Then, spontaneously, his friend Dil K. added: 'we're in prison (*kaidi*) here; we're in a cage (*pijara*). Even before we came here, we knew it was a jail, but we had no choice. We stay in prison two years and then we leave.'
- 56 Comments are often made about the absence of freedom. The feeling of being cut off from society is apparent in what migrants say about Friday restrictions for example. There is a widespread impression of being trapped and confined to one place which a migrant cannot leave without the company's consent. Although their stay in Qatar enables migrants to achieve some of the goals they had set themselves, the value of their stay is minimal. The camp itself, where men spend most of their time, is seen as a place where the obligation (*badhyata*) to be there is the only motive for staying. Although the camp is not despised in the same way as Qatar or the Industrial Area, it is because men regard it as a social setting where 'everybody gets on very well with each other'. The half-closed space of confinement is the space for making new friends, where a form of national belonging takes shape. It is also a space where an individual is emancipated, free of social pressure, regarding alcohol consumption or the lack of caste-based discrimination. Besides, staying abroad is a way of escaping marriage, or of postponing it: in 2008 the proportion of married men in the *camp*, aged between 20 and 24, was nearly half the figure at Nepalese national level.

Figure 14. Is the *camp* a soft jail? Barbed wire separating two camps



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- 57 A lack of freedom, control over the migrant's movements, high human density and little privacy may indeed lead the researcher to think about prison cells, although this is never said in so many words by migrants themselves. Meta-processes that envelop migrants and spatially constraint them make the inmate metaphor, which is used by some, a valuable clue to understanding how men envisage their condition. So how is the camp valued? How is it integrated in the life of migrants and in their migratory space? The word 'home' or 'house' (*ghar*) is never used to talk about the camp, even if the camp can sometimes be described as a village (*gaun*). In that sense, men emphasize the solidarity among coworkers, the familiarity of the place. The word *camp*, as used in Qatar, is equivalent to the word *dera* (temporary place) used by Nepalese migrants in India (Bruslé 2008) in that they both refer to the temporary nature of their accommodation. Generally speaking, migrants do not make a heavy affective investment in the *camp*, their room or their bed, except for a handful who have decided not to return to Nepal on a frequent basis. There are relatively few pictures of the *camp* on Facebook even though some migrants regularly post pictures of where they are. Pictures of it are not posted *per se* but are usually only a background to more valorising activities migrants may undertake (cultural programme, volleyball competition). The *camp* is therefore a spatial hiatus, which is not mentioned when a migrant returns home and seldom advertised. Camp life is not a subject of identification or of pride.

The *camp* as a hybrid place for a subaltern life

- 58 Just as Liechty (2003) talks about new public spaces in Kathmandu for the growing middle class, the *labour camp* can be considered a new place for a large part of the Nepalese lower

rural middle class. Transnational labour migration leads to the creation of new social spaces at the crossroads between states' logics of controlling foreign populations and individuals' strategies for managing their lives abroad. The 'politics of life' (Fassin 2009) of the Qatari government regarding migrants strongly impact the way Nepalese live their lives. The *camp* is a place where 'enclosure produces specific spatialities of inclusion and exclusion, these spatialities also [being] constituted by an *apparatus of biopolitical capture*' (Jeffrey *et al.* 2012: 1259). *Labour camps* in the Gulf plainly constitute a biopolitical way of managing migrant populations, of restricting their freedom of movement and of setting them apart. Migrants are physically excluded from mainstream society, segregated in places where their lives are considered worthless. As 'spaces of exception' (Agamben 1998), camps are the norm in an authoritarian political regime. They are both places of living and as such, the permanent state of exception these camps represent goes hand in hand with the normalization of life. The everyday routine annihilates up to the feelings of exceptionality. The repetition of the same course of time results in making foreign spaces familiar ones, yet this normalization is associated with disapproval.

- 59 International migration to Qatar does not actually lead Nepalese migrants to widen radically their horizons. Their understanding of the world may be enhanced but the fact that they are confined to *camps* prevents them from fully grasping the new world they are thrown into. Does this mean that dispossession consecutive to globalization, of manpower in our case, cannot be counterbalanced by place-making? In a context of exclusion, these *camps* are not highly valued places. They are despised and are not likely to be discussed even though these places of living are the source sometimes of successful migration stories. The little value attributed to the *camp* hints at the inherent ambivalence of the migration experience which is associated with values of modernity and of self improvement, and at the same time of exploitation and psychological difficulties. The everyday experience of workers stuck in high-density *camps* reveals a subtle adaptation and the making of strategies devoted to making life bearable. It also shows how a migrant's agency leads to some form of resistance based on acceptance and on circumventing the rules regarding alcohol consumption or pornographic movies. This inner, almost hidden resistance in camp rooms represents very individualistic answers to collective feelings of exclusion. The use of space does not correspond to the strengthening of bargaining power or to the enhancement of collective representation. Men leave little trace on their space of living and this is confined to their interiors. The spaces that are made the most significant reduce this yet again, to the room or the bed. Men act under strong institutional constraints, one of the most important being the temporary nature of their stay. Nonetheless, the *camp* somehow becomes a familiar place, where at least a form of village solidarity is created. Even though the appropriation of space is negligible, it forms an essential basis which is shared among the workers according the timetable imposed by their company. The biopolitics of migration leads to the creation of lived spaces that are part of migrants' everyday places. The *camp* becomes an integral part of a migrant's constricted lifestyle.

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NOTES

1. I am grateful to SAMAJ reviewers for the insightful comments they made about this article.
2. Through their 'Qatar: do the right thing' campaign, they even organized the first ever march for labour rights in Doha during the climate summit. See <http://www.equaltimes.org/report/qatar-grand-ambitions-wretched-lives> and <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article12507&lang=en>.
3. <http://www.nhrc-qa.org/en/>. It published a workers' rights book in 2009 which, for example, states that 'in each room, no more than four workers should be housed in normal housing camps'.
4. The sponsorship system (*kafala*) governs migration in the Gulf. It consists in delegating the control of migrants from the State to individual citizens who become legally responsible for migrants (Longva 1999). The migrant becomes totally dependent on his sponsor, especially concerning the right to change jobs, resulting in a very unbalanced relationship between the two.
5. My work in Qatar was funded by the National Research Agency under the program TerrFerme *Les dispositifs de l'enfermement. Approche territoriale du contrôle politique et social contemporain (ANR-08-JCJC-0121-01)*. For socio-economic data of the *camp* in 2008, see Bruslé (2010a).
6. For the supervisor, accepting my presence in the *camp* could be risky but he never gave me any recommendation. I think he permitted me to stay in the *camp* first because of a certain kind of gratitude for my empathy for Nepalese workers' fate, secondly because he knew that his company's bosses never came to visit the camp.
7. <http://www.qsa.gov.qa/eng/PopulationStructure.htm>. Data about nationalities are not made public so that the exact nationality-wise repartition of the population is impossible to know, see Bruslé (forthcoming). As a matter of fact the exact number of Qataris is also unknown.
8. The policy of the *Qatarization* of employment aims at reducing the dependency on foreign workers and at enabling Qataris to enter the job market. The goal of having 50 % of Qataris in the oil industry workforce should have been reached by 2050.
9. Even the Nepalese Embassy is completely dependent on data from the Qatar Ministry of Interior so that the exact figures are not known. At the beginning of 2013, I was told that 400,000 Nepalese migrants lived in Qatar.
10. For a history of the arrival of the Nepalese and their contrasted entry into the job market, see Bruslé (forthcoming). Hardly any study exists about Nepalese migrants in the Gulf, with the exception of Bruslé (2010a, 2010b, 2012, forthcoming) and Williams *et al.* (2012), the latter being more quantitative than the others.
11. Qatar will need another 1.5 million workers to complete the infrastructures for the 2022 FIFA World Cup (<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/07/24/228145.html>).
12. *Labour camps* in the Gulf countries were introduced by the Aramco Oil Company in the 1920s, on an American racially based pattern of lodging under Jim Crow laws (Vitalis 2009).
13. By November 1st 2011, all bachelor accommodation, that is single workers living in private houses, should have been vacated in all residential areas, which are family-inhabited zones. This trend of distancing this particular category of population is being reinforced by the creation of integrated bachelor or worker cities where all amenities (supermarket, mosques, recreation grounds, etc.) will be at men's disposal. Segregation is an ever growing process that reflects the will of the political authorities to herd a maximum number of workers away from city centres.

14. In the 2010 population census (www.qsa.gov.qa/QatarCensus), there was a special questionnaire for labour camp dwellers (with no questions related to family matters). Only one table about labour camps is available online. In the minds of Qatari decision-makers, the housing pattern corresponds to a single category of migrants, the bachelor. Many more workers, often employed by smaller companies, live in villas, apartments and other types of private accommodation: they are not counted in the *labour camp* population although their living conditions may be similar to those in *camps*.

15. Due to the low wages and to very high rents, no worker housed by its company wishes to rent private accommodation. Moreover, workers are ferried back and forth between their camp and their work places. Living elsewhere than the camp would complicate daily life.

16. It is difficult to obtain data about the mean length of stay of migrants in the Gulf countries. In the camp I visited, this varied from four to five years, although some men have stayed up to twelve years.

17. This type of migrant worker accommodation also exists in Southern China in the goods industry, in South Africa in mining, in Spain to host temporary agricultural migrants or in Canada on oil sand fields.

18. Even though a peasant's daily management of time is subjected to climatic constraints, it is not subordinated to a complex system of obligations and hierarchical reporting, according to a fixed timetable set by an employer. A farmer has more freedom regarding decision-making and choices in their everyday time schedule.

19. It is not openly racist because racial discrimination is forbidden by the Qatari constitution. Privileging families is a rhetorical positive stance that avoids pointing the finger at specific populations. Although I have not been able to determine whether these racist rules are legal or not, they also exist in Saudi Arabia and in Dubai and are definitely implemented at local level. The Qatari NHRC does not challenge the existence of these rules whereas HRW (2012) denounces its prevalence in the malls and on the Corniche.

20. Almost all laws related to migrants' lodging and *labour camps* are disregarded. There are very few *labour camps* inspections that are not considered a threat by landlords.

21. I cannot give a detailed socio-economic profile of the *camp's* inhabitants. However, in 2008, most men came from a rural background. 29 % of them had passed the School Leaving Certificate. As for their castes, upper castes (*bahun*, *chetri*, *thakuri*) were highly represented: 66.5 % of the camp population compared to 30 % of Nepal's population. Lower castes were under-represented, (see Bruslé 2010).

22. This raises questions about the transmission of knowledge about migration, when returnees do not recount everything about their experience in foreign countries to would-be migrants. It is typical of migrants returning home to embellish their stay abroad in order to gain prestige and consideration, in particular in the context of a significant 'culture of migration', defined by Ali (2007: 39) as 'those ideas, practices and cultural artefacts that reinforce the celebration of migration and migrants'. In Nepal, Gulf returnees' prestige is high and is a strong incentive for younger men to migrate.

23. However, according to witness accounts, once migrants return home, caste-based discrimination persists, because social pressure in villages prevents modes of behaviour from evolving.

24. Gardner (2010a) states that Qatari laws regarding *labour camps* are 'ineffective and ignored'.

25. There are diverse motivations for working abroad. Earning money is definitely a prime objective as wages are low in Nepal (a primary school teacher earns about 50 euros a month). In 2008, the basic average company wage (excluding overtime) in the *camp* amounted to 137 euros, but 65 % of workers earned about 80 euros. Taking into account overtime hours, the average wage was about 154 euros (Bruslé 2010). In 2011, in the *camp*, it was about 160-180 euros without overtime. According to Gardner (2011), unskilled workers' wages range from 100 to 180 euros.

The minimum monthly salary set by the Nepalese Embassy is 160 euros (800 Qatari Riyals) but 40 euros may be deduced if food and accommodation are provided. In 2009, Nepalese migrants in Qatar were able to remit 634 million US dollars, that is approximately 2,000 US dollars per migrant (Endo and Afram 2011).

26. An Omani brand of 'eau de cologne', called Luma, is available in all the shops in industrial areas. Although it is legal to sell it, bottles are usually hidden under the counter.

27. I have, however, noted over the last few years that the growing accessibility of and desire for personal digital appliances have led migrants to leave aside standard purchases.

28. Collective public demonstrations are forbidden under Qatari law. Neither the Nepalese Embassy nor the numerous informal Nepalese associations, even those representing the Maoists, would dare to organize a public parade. Instead, their strategy relies on remaining invisible from Qatari authorities.

ABSTRACTS

The lives of nearly one million migrants in Qatar are in a 'state of exception' (Agamben). Distanced from mainstream society, they live in *labour camps* situated in desolate areas. In a space designed to render low qualified migrants invisible, Nepalese people are among those who try to make theirs a temporary place. Spatial strategies of appropriation, from the camp to the bed in the room, are nevertheless limited by the structures of domination that migrants live in. Through the study of the everyday routine and spatial practices, I show that the *camp* does indeed bear ambivalent values, associated with jail, with village-like feelings or with the achievements made possible by migration.

INDEX

Keywords: Qatar, Nepalese, migration, accommodation, place-making, segregation

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