RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Essence of Urbanity. Live on the Fortified Border

## S. Dalzero

### ABSTRACT

In the idea of the border as a meeting place, space can be conceived in inclusive and multi- identity terms, transforming itself into an interesting catalyst for forms of territorial imagination. These contexts attest to architectures and territories linked to them as separating factors in which complex and contradictory aspects are intertwined determined by physical, normative, functional and socio-cultural conditions. Starting from this, the present study moves in search of the territorial repercussions put in place by the border closure in a process of continuous transformation that conquers over time the form of flexible filter made up of open and other closed systems that adapt to the logic of collaboration and the coexistence of antinomic and oppositional aspects. A spatiality with an unusual organization appears, poised between going and staying, which has its roots in the uncertainty that determined it and which is the reason for a settlement process that coordinates a coexistence between opposites architectural system with a particular character. Examining the borderlands in the context of urban planning and architecture, the constitutive thought offers a singular interpretation in the form of spatiality with a suspended character, uncertain between controversial temporariness: in a present of permanence and a future of abandonment. The study is therefore in contrast with the stereotyped vision of staying on the circumscribed limit to a despotic and totalitarian spatiality (typical of first reception camps) and presupposes instead, an objective-critical observation of how people live, how they move, how they use these places.

**Keywords:** architecture, boundary, city, inhabit, territory.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The present study progresses through comparisons analogies between an urban reality and a different one, informal and far from any pre-established image that is discovered in suspended living, poised on the border barricaded between States and Nations. It is at this point that a rash forward is demanded, an attitude of disobedience, of insubordination and mutiny towards all those who would like us unaware and we have to seek the 'truth', its identity and correct 'reason' where two border territorial identities come in contact and the wall divides them, implying a short circuit that delineates a third place: antinomic, controversial and willing to host the 'misunderstanding', the contradiction as the matrix of everything. So, the barricaded border land appears as: constellation of that visible which, in the instant of transformation, allows us to recognize and guess its demiurgic plan animated of several fragments which, in fact, lead it to the rational or to the irrational, to the legitimate or to the illegitimate, to sharing or condemnation.

Therefore, a question of choices suggested by the inventiveness of designing and which should have, as its primary purpose, the staging of the reason for which everything is done, in order to give an appropriate response to a need, to a peculiarly practice of a use poised between temporal and stable, between formal and informal, between inclusive and exclusive, in short: between antinomic forms typical of living on the barricaded border. For this we hope for a re-signification (re-information) of these border realities in order to restore identity and character to any possible settlement that is structured in uncertainty and opposition. A reconnection, which from a state of fact pushes to prolong itself in action that takes place through the logic of a present time and also refusing the claim of a scientific rigor in favor of a fuzzy thought or, a polyvalent logic, a logic in which a degree of truth can be attributed to each proposition.

One could say: reinterpreting reality in particular forms with small but still disruptive shifts of 'meaning'. Certainly, we don't want to propose doing and thinking as a cure, palingenesis, purification, but rather to hypothesize a disillusioned, concrete spatiality made up of stories and fragments stitched up by the movement itself of the project, far from that doing enclosed, often, in an irritating and sterile authoritarianism. Ultimately, a planning approach that interprets the staying on the limit as the vocation of a culture founded on connections, on relationships as if it was a symphony capable of recomposing the differences and contrasts in a territory, mostly intended as: surface drawn by signs and words, meanings

and banalities, always the same and always different. Then enough with an idea of a field that cancels out any complexity since the character of place hides itself in the impossible space that holds together, in a paradoxical way, things that no one would have ever imagined close or that, until now, have never been considered. No part is as it always was; no form declares its 'so and not differently' and the architecture is a synthesis of the community rhythm, it defines the settlement and territorial structure with a planning approach that is careful to favor a development colonized by the diffusion of oppositional, antinomic and alterable thought. It is therefore clear that at the basis of this analysis of territoriality on the barricaded border, a settlement reality is discovered which, with the pass of time, conquers a form of controversial urbanity that could be said: 'essence of urbanity'.

So, the present study advances an architectural-territorial observation capable of violating the wall, of going beyond the border closure and offering, through a systematic and rigorous cataloging, a critical-objective reading of those elements that identify the border aspect, inhabited in an informal and antinomic form. Also in light of the fact that out of the approximately thirty-five million migrants fleeing wars, persecutions, economic inequalities, totalitarian regimes and much more, about half live in 'suspended' realities set up at the gates of closed and fortified countries along the borders, therefore demonstrating how the present study does not concern the exception of the event but the custom that invests millions of people condemned to live trapped in a land where they find a first contact with something similar to an idea of 'Home', of urbanity. For this reason, all the places are observed, mapped and redesigned (starting from the most famous and interesting ones up to the most recent ones and again from the temporal image) of which they are highlighted: the incidences and the roles assumed within the barricaded borderland that slowly reveals the signs of an informal and informal living which, at the same time, recognizes a mutual agreement between attraction and repulsion.

## II. KINETIC ABACUS

The study proceeds with the choice of case studies one of which will be taken as an example in this paper as it bears the voice of signs and traces that become manifest of that informal living characteristic of living on the barricaded border. The Sahara wall is the case chosen in particular for its controversial territorial repercussions, which for over forty years has been affecting a people, the Saharawi who live in a land that is not theirs in the Algerian south. Here it is no longer possible to ignore the actions and reactions that have taken shape in the place and that have given shape to a dwelling on the edge of a reality that, at times, easily lends itself to being understood as a warning for other more recent territorial divisions. which appear on the margins of countries nestled between their territorial limits and therefore can be evaluated as an architectural-urban laboratory. It is no longer possible to remain indifferent to the role that the phenomenon of border construction leads to a spatial transformation in terms not only of accessibility and connection but also of unexpected settlement definition.

Then, it is suggested a cognitive process that proceeds by comparisons, analogies and references to urban-architectural studies already widely addressed regarding that dualism typical of global metropolises in which two opposite settlement models face each other: that of the rational and ordered city (today increasingly in crisis) planned and that the informal city, recognized as a possible paradigm of the city of tomorrow. Therefore, emblematic expressions which are identified, for example, in the Latin American metropolises where the dialectic between the 'two cities' is revealed in the effectiveness of some figures that can feed new housing paradigms. In this way, a possible key of understanding the border dimension is conquered in which, today more than ever, there is an upsetting overlap of different and opposing elements that in their continuous addition consolidate their staying and reorganize the housing fabric that is acquiring another shape of unstable spatial configuration. The anarchic and parasitic nature of these places and the impulses towards self-construction of the communities that inhabit them determine an urban dynamism that seems to be lacking in the modern, planned and ordered city that comes from the past. In a certain sense, the conceptual matrix on which this 'dual city' that sees the organization and configuration of the extemporary settlements inhabited by migrants, waiting on the wall, a hybridization in its form and organization itself. In fact, it is precisely starting from a pre-established, despotic, ordinary and ordered system, given by the first reception camp that a freer and more self-built settlement space is advancing, typical of the unexpected and informal city of the settled migrant community.

The result is an utopian component which, although due distances, refers to that of the informal city of Latin America which identifies its mythography through the design regeneration it experiences. In fact, this aspect suggests, in the settlements at the territorial limits, a possibility of re-signification of space and living in the balance and now used as instrument with which to interpret the signs and potential of a living on the border that is shown analogous, in some aspects, to the informal rooting typical of slums all over the world. Following the matter of the architectural-urban studies in particular referring to the informal city of Latin America, this study moves its steps to research those aspects identifying the character of living suspended

on the barricaded borders which, at first, are in the state of temporariness which, however, go to assume (with the persistence of the waiting state at the wall) an antinomic settlement form and always referred to the border closure.

On closer inspection, in fact, the extemporaneousness with which the former fields are applied to the contemporary scene and are recognized in the acceptance of predefined and uniform forms only, they, over time, crumble the rigid structure and organizational definition. Therefore, starting from that first organizational 'cage' of the camp, they are outlining, in a disharmonious game of rules and violations, a reality of living that develops precisely starting from the broken rule. So, anarchic places appear in which the land has no cost, no value whatsoever and in which the organizational-formal system orchestrates itself in concert with the extemporaneous and unforeseen needs that, progressively, conquer degrees of freedom connected to an essential variable of compositional thought: time. It is precisely starting from this variable (correlated to the spatial one) that main differences between one case and the other of inhabited territoriality on the barricaded border are discovered, from which the choice of case studies derives denoting the territorial repercussions in a particular and representative way that the border closure, with its living in balance, leave on the territory with the elapsing of time.

The organizational architectural observation of these lands, read in relation to the wall and therefore to the denial of movement, can be considered, in some ways, pioneering, since the status is observed without any prejudice and it is accepted the uncertainty, the antinomy as intrinsic value are accepted. Nothing escapes the gaze of a critical and objective 'architect-scientist' who, from a formal and structural point of view, reads and interprets the dynamics put in place and then unmasks their mechanisms, reasons and prospects for future developments. At the end, the attempt advanced by this study is to build an atlas, an impartial abacus that collects the signs, forms, spatiality of this divided earth, subject to sudden and even cumulative mutations, in a game of actions and reactions, it discovers that it cannot build a real cumulative list but to outline a 'kinetic abacus' willing to include spaces and objects, causes and effects intended as useful 'witnesses' on which to base the compositional thought of the 'dual city', multiple and alterable near future.

## III. FROM CAMP TO CITY

On closer inspection, the territorial repercussions on the barricaded border recognize, at the beginning, forms of settlement typical of the refugee camp (constricting, by the leveling organization and imposed precisely where heterotopia reigns) which, over time, are acquiring the shape of a city or rather of proto-city. Not a few scholars have played on the camp-city' dichotomy. Among these there is the philosopher Giorgio Agamben who writes in Homo Sacer: "The camp is the space that opens up when the state of exception begins to become the rule. In it, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporal suspension of the order [...] now acquires a permanent spatial arrangement [...] The camp, as a displacement localization, is the hidden matrix of the politics in which we still live, which we must learn to recognize through all its metamorphoses, in the waiting areas of our airports as well as in certain suburbs of our cities" (Agamben,1998, 170). Having said that, we understand the inhabited reality in response to the border closure which, although only emergency, risks falling into dangerous formal and spatial generalizations regardless of the issues of each place and its peculiar political-social identity character which, on closer inspection, today, limits itself to recognizing only three categories, of which the most obvious is probably the most widespread, namely a humanitarian space intended to protect the refugees waiting on the border of barricaded countries. Among other things, the camps are to be understood as areas easy to control and in which assistance is transformed into government of the other, devoid of any link with time and space and in which refugees find themselves condemned to a life in waiting, dependent on the initiative of others and deprived of any freedom of movement or cultural-identity expression. Ultimately we recognize nothing more than jumble of tents and rags, miserable and precarious in which it is not possible to develop any sense of community or settlement and administrative value that can prove to be independent from the hegemonic one. In short, a settlement repercussion caused by the border closure that in the first instance recognizes a passive spatiality in the camp, engulfed in the idea of limit and order imposed by the supreme governmental will that follows nothing but the antinomic dynamics of action and reaction typical of border fortification. In other words, one remains imprisoned in the idea of ambiguousness that arises from and depends on the wall, consequently delineating a synergistic game of contrasts and connections that determine an unexpected urban reality which, from the severe grid of first curtains, all equal and predefined, conquers form of 'dual city', of multiple and antinomic city. For this reason, the approach starting from the usual theory of control and of coercive closure has been rejected, and (starting from the case studies) a different reading is proposed, a reading that is outside the link to the idea of the first reception space commonly understood and proceeds by understanding and unmasking its formal-spatial-organizational architectural peculiarities which reveal the semi-urban state, with something nomadic and something permanent features, which it is assuming. For this reason, the camp is identified as a laboratory, an

experiment useful to prefigure the city of tomorrow, the city that is discovered in the 'suspended time' at the barricaded border. (Fig. 1.)
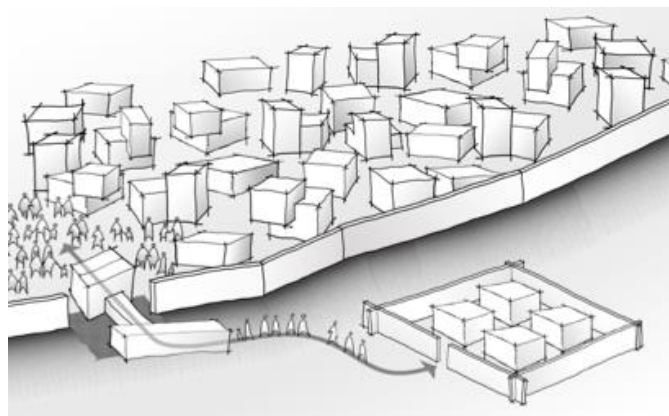


Fig. 1. Re-territorialization of migratory flows first in the informal city inhabited to the wall and confined beyond and then, once the wall is breached, imprisoned in the first reception camp and once again confined and isolated where, in a 'permanent temporary', it develops a more complex, articulated and 'identity' settlement system that refers to that first informal city in which, little by little, a more complex settlement system has made its way through which, by hybridization, dialogues with the settled territory.

On closer inspection, in fact, the camps offer a first idea of settlement stability which, however, short-circuits with the passage of time, dissolving in the arbitrary disorder, paradoxically resulting from the rigid grid of the initial checkerboard camp that is taking on an informal form and structure and slowly blurring its boundaries going to integrate with the surrounding area. In short, the space-time interlude, that emerged at the barricaded border, is being lost in the place and in the self-constructed formal-spatial flexibility given by the parallel, informal and unexpected city that creeps in where the pre-existing city is interrupted and the border is there: 'behind the corner'. Therefore we observe an antinomic spatiality which in its very formation consists of somewhat stable and somewhat unstable housing units, sometimes 'artisanal and sometimes industrial' but in any case representative of the character of the people that, on one hand originates nomadic, with a strong community identity and far from the commonly understood nationalist spirit, and on the other hand is stable and with a cultural-territorial identity value that comes from the past. In the case study of the Sahara wall it is noted that the Saharawi, since that first violent uprooting, have proved faithful to their own community identity, firm in not falling into that indistinct mass of 'displaced people'. The inevitable disorientation caused by the stampede, due to the looming Moroccan militias and finding themselves in a 'silent' and inhospitable desert expanse as the Algerian Hammada is, did not prevent them to come together and to create an environment of the value of ' home'. Starting from that nomadic idea of social organization, led by the Polisario, the Sahrawis have thus started a dynamic and participatory mechanism which, thanks to their strong community character, has led to the definition of a very different spatial and administrative political otherness from the host one of the Algerians and also from the aseptic internationalist one, typical of the first reception camps.

Despite the temporal-spatial suspension that still persists in this reality of barricaded border, the Sahrawis have traced a camp structure with unusual aspects in which the value of social identity has revealed itself to be the first rule and, today, a value that binds everything and prefigures a specific camp image from which it is possible to glimpse a different, peculiar way of living on the border. In particular, starting from a pre- established spatial attribution which sees the Western Sahara wall as a compromised horizon and which conquers a spatial order over time, starting from the indeterminacy with which it began, it finds the order in the nominal correspondence of the wilayas and dairas urban order that comes from its social-cultural identity and that moves away from the disorientation of people uprooted from their land and catapulted beyond the border, into an unknown desert land with a forbidden horizon. In other words, driven by the desire to defeat spatial temporariness, the 'uprooted people' are looking for forms of settlement stability, so much so that, according to what told by the Sahrawi engineer Tateh Lehbib, in the camps it is difficult today to perceive whether one is in a refugee camp or in a whatever poor village of the Saharan tradition. We must certainly not fall into deception: the impression is only apparent, in fact, disharmonies and dissonances appear which are not found in a commonly understood stable stay and which in this case denote the settlement project that refers to the wall and which in the antinomic character is structured.

On the other hand, focusing on everyday life and how Sahrawis live their environment, it is easy to find differently developed urban values whose degree of variability comes into play in its own process of 'territorial domestication'. Therefore, it is necessary to slow down, measure, morphologically evaluate the presence or absence of those signs that make stable-unstable living into a form of city so as to be able to identify the forms and structures of these settlements that differ or conform to the idea of urbanity commonly understood. The architectural territorial analysis object of this study does not only concern the

selected cases but, in some ways, are a useful means of providing the tools and to lead to the discovery, with an acquired awareness and awareness, of other settlement realities on the border built between States and Nations in which millions of 'traveling people' live and who are forced to a state of misery and settlement constraint, or to live in camps with an ordinary checkerboard configuration to which it is now necessary to give an urban architectural response as strategically and consciously developed as possible. So, the case studies are simple means, voice, or rather: real revealers of a process of urban development, social and cultural growth capable of outlining an unprecedented image of antinomic living typical of the 'citizen refugee' and of the border city that is advancing more and more on the forbidden horizon.

## IV. ESSENCE OF URBANITY

All these observations show how the daily activities of 'unexpected' living on the barricaded border give shape to particular spatiality that is orchestrating a careful organizational system that is only partially lost in the disorder given by the multiplicity of public and private spaces, open areas and others closed and that, in any case, refer to that strategic plan that divides the settlement area into districts and neighborhoods, each of which with its intended centralities (in the specific case of the Saharawi camps, for example in: wilayas, dairas and barrios), as places of meeting, sharing and above all places of identity of civilization, of administrative and health units and also for the distribution of basic necessities. Unlike the idea of the camp as a place of exception, dominated by misery and control, a dimension of 'normality' makes its way despite the condition of settlement abnormalities on the barricaded border that, at times, recognizes the main ingredients of the pre-established city as roads and houses made of durable structures and materials such as stone, concrete.

An idea of urbanity advances in its becoming a 'place', in its being a space of encounter and sharing, of stratification and multiform and changing mixing. Settlements for migrants recognize a certain degree of urbanity in the way in which the settlement spatiality is organized, is divided into different spatial areas ranging from districts to neighborhoods, and then again from the private environments of residential units, enclosed within their own spatial limits, to the public ones, identified in the commercial areas or in the administrative, health and school places that refer to the stereotyped idea of an ordinary, planned and controlled city. So, an image of the camp advances, understood as an expression of the 'essence of urbanity' which as a model (as demonstrated through the case studies) refers to other settlement realities which, in forms as different as they are analogous, appear at the limit of fortified borders that are becoming more and more immovable, compact and above all frequent in many parts of the world.

At this point it is undeniable that observing particular cases from ancient history and of certain relevance allows us to understand settlement forms which, still in the primeval state of the first reception camp, conquer, over time, a more complex and articulated form and structure, with public and private, with stable and other temporary buildings and which, at times, mimics the idea of the city commonly understood of which it represents its essence. The attentive choice of the case studies therefore proves to be strategic in the implementation of a conscious and aware reading of living on the border, foreshadowing settlement forms free from the straitjackets of control, limitations and submissions to suggest a future image of other urbanity, of 'urbanity in the making' as if it were an 'a priori' of the city of tomorrow, of the border city with a multiple identity, made up of contrasts and orchestrated assonances all in a game of actions and reactions that begins with the wall and that finds in space identifying morphological expression.

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