

Space of Refuge: constructing a spatial dialogue inside the Palestinian refugee camp

Samar Maqusi



ABSTRACT: Addressing spaces of refuge (refugee camps), especially as architects, has become quite a complex issue, mainly due to a protraction of refuge (including people and space), which resulted in the emergence of scenarios of inhabitation that surpass and transgress the established relief space (refugee camps) by international and government bodies. This paper aims to unravel the impact of host-government policies on the physical form of these camps, examining, in particular, the issues of control and vulnerability. Furthermore, the paper proposes an alternative method for analyzing these camp-spaces, specifically for Palestinian refugees, as well as suggesting new tools for designing and creating the necessary spatial interventions that can enhance the self-determination of Palestinian refugees and the potential of their camp spaces to offer resistance.

KEYWORDS: refugee camps, spatial politics, spaces of conflict, camp evolution, spatial installations.

The Palestinian refuge is a longstanding humanitarian problem which emanated from the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars. The first war saw the expulsion of more than 750,000 indigenous Palestinian people from their homeland and into Near East geographies where they frantically sought refuge. In place of the indigenous Palestinian people and space, a new people and space were being formed via the transfer of new – Jewish—populations from Europe. This “transfer” is still ongoing today with the aim of eliminating any trace of Palestinian identity since the 1948



occupation.¹ Within the mass of global displacement we are facing today, Palestinian refugee camps stand out as exemplary spaces of refuge to be studied.

According to UNHCR's (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) 2018 figures, there are 68.5 million people forcibly displaced worldwide today, of which, 25.4 million are refugees.² Some 5.4 million refugees, nearly a quarter of the total refugee population, are Palestinians. More strikingly, Palestinian refugee camps – a total of 58 official³ camps across the Near East geography (unrwa.org) – are the longest standing camps in recent history, now in their seventieth year of protracted refuge. Amongst scholars concerned with the Palestinian refuge, many (Khalili, 2005; Hanafi, 2010, 2012; Ramadan, 2010; Abourahme, 2015; Sheikh-Hassan & Hanafi, 2010; Peteet, 2005, 2015; Petti, 2013) view the Palestinian camp as a material witness to the historical conflict, and an incubator of the incessant regional and international hostilities. The former is embodied in the systematic destruction of camps across the hosting geographies, while the latter can be demonstrated by the continuing efforts of Israel. More recently the United States, aimed to compromise the Palestinian refuge by closing UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) that provides humanitarian assistance to these camps.

This paper is part of a more substantial PhD research investigating the *spatial politics* of the Palestinian camp. The research involved long-term fieldwork in Burj el Barajneh camp in Lebanon and Baqa'a camp in Jordan that represent Palestinian camps in two different hosting geographies, each emanating from the 1948 and 1967 Arab Israeli wars respectively. The spatial politics are studied by architecturally mapping the institutional mechanisms and discourse through which the camps were established, maintained, and reformed (by the host governments and the UNRWA), in relation to the refugees' own mechanisms of making space. These institutional mechanisms are analysed from the perspective of the camp's different forms of spatial "conditioning" by the authorities to maintain surveillance and control – through either its re-scaling to an ordered layout or, in many cases, eliminating it altogether, and imposing requirements for a new spatial order in its reconstruction. Furthermore, the PhD research investigates the nuances of making space inside the Palestinian camp, while negotiating both the institutional structures of management and control – represented in this research by UNRWA and the host governments – as well as the protraction of refuge which represents

the precarious political state – and grounds – that the Palestinian refugee finds himself/herself occupying. These negotiations with institutions, together with the struggle to maintain a livelihood in the face of political refuge, constitute what the paper defines as the *spatial politics* inside the Palestinian camp.

What emerges from this protraction of Palestinian refuge without any visible political solution in the near future is the “spatial scale,” which is at the intersection of space and politics and, in this specific case, between space and refuge. This spatial scale is the element by which both refugees and host governments engage with each other to negotiate and re-define power relations. UNRWA and host governments included a great deal of “absorbing a crisis” at the first instance of bringing order to the space inside the Palestinian camp. This absorption, which has lasted nearly 7 decades, was formulated around a spatial execution of intended re-settlement of Palestinians, but without the direct recognition of such spatiality – in particular, through the adoption and continuous rhetorical re-adoption of Resolution 194’s Paragraph 11 *Right of Return*,⁴ as the guarantor of political *verbal* correctness towards the Palestinian people. To maintain a flexible absorbing spatiality, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions specified, in loose political and legal language, the approaches for implementing a settlement project encompassing both economic and spatial integration in the respective host countries. Drafted by the UNGA, and carried out by UNRWA in the form of spatial practices, these resolutions clearly state the intention of re-settling the Palestinian refugees through programmes/projects of ‘economic integration’ and a spatialised mode of production founded on self-support, with the final intention of transferring the responsibility for works and relief projects to the host governments,⁵ thus terminating the role of UNRWA and further altering the legal status of the camp spaces and the refugees (UNRWA-A Brief History 1950–1982, p.32, UNRWA NY 1951,p.12).

One of the earliest forms of UNRWA’s elastic legal language was its adopted definition of a “refugee camp” in 1960: “A concentration of refugees and displaced persons which has been recognized by UNRWA as an official camp, which is operated by the Agency, and has in particular a camp leader and environmental sanitation services provided by the Agency” (UNRWA Archives, 1960). This definition retains a humanitarian language, acknowledging large scale space resulting from a crisis, and in need of aid and services. The definition then reformed into what

is adopted today by UNRWA as: “A Palestine refugee camp is defined as a plot of land placed at the disposal of UNRWA by the host government to accommodate Palestine refugees and set up facilities to cater to their needs. Areas not designated as such and are not recognized as camps.” The changing definition of the camp is clear: from one as a humanitarian space in need of aid services because of a conflict state, and caused by a displacement into other territories outside the previous habitat, into one where the camp resembles a space in need of “accommodation” services, through installed facilities which change over time inside the camp. The second significant change of the definition is the articulation of “space”: whereas the previous definition articulates *persons*, and *refugees*, the second adopted definition focuses on “bounded space,” *a plot of land*, and *areas*. In fact, this camp definition change, in some ways, established the grounds for increasing problems of “space” and “scale” inside the Palestinian camp. By drawing a clear line between what is camp and what is not, it affirms a changing approach towards the Palestinian camp, adopted by both UNRWA and the host governments. This change articulates the extraterritoriality of the Palestinian camp within the larger geography, thus enabling both UNRWA and the host governments to distinguish it, and validate their mechanisms of humanitarian order and control exercised inside a “distinct space,” which does not behave as other spaces. And because it is distinct, this allows those authorities to exercise mechanisms which can be extrajudicial yet justified within territoriality deemed “outside the other spaces” within that host geography. The camps thus become spaces where “power” is both exercised and experimented.

From a *Relief Scale* to a *Political Scale*

This *relief-scale* was created by overlapping the onset – designed – humanitarian UN parameters and resolutions over space. Refugees were expected to adhere to those parameters without encroachment on the external parameter; the camp border delineated by the host government, or the internal parameters delineated by UNRWA in the form of individual family plots of 96–100m² granted to each refugee family. Any encroachment beyond those dimensions would be deemed a violation by the UNRWA and host governments.

It is important to highlight here that those UN parameters were designed with

the intention to provide aid, as well as, mitigate a crisis—using spatial means—without the direct recognition of the *political* issues associated with said space and crisis. This disregard, elimination, and abandonment of the *political* by the UN and the host governments is what allowed the relief-scale to reform itself into another scale embodied in the transition of space regulated through a grid form, into one which transgresses those imposed parameters to create its own order, which is what this paper calls the *political-scale*. The actual process of transition involves a latent negotiation with the camp as refuge and territory by continuously expanding beyond the spatial standards of humanitarianism, through acts of “spatial violation.” These acts which involve encroachment beyond the standards is where the *political* resides. The *political* in this sense is the constant management of the political state of refuge inside a host geography of “right of use,” as opposed to ownership through spatial means. More simply, it is the acquired agency through the daily negotiation that the refugee encounters his/her space, whereby he/she is always in search of ways to stretch the pre-set parameters to respond to a need for more space to accommodate the natural growth of the refugee families over time. When these spatial violations proliferate to encompass the whole camp, the host government-refugee power relations get redefined, most often after a collective demonstration whereby the gendarmes engage in conflict inside the camp to quell such demonstrations of injustice, mainly citing the “burning tires” as a serious enough justification for such force. Yet, and since the camp’s spatiality grows into a scale beyond the original UN grid of control and surveillance, the host government resorts to negotiating a peaceful settlement with the camp heads. Examples of such conflictual engagements are demonstrated later in the paper.

Relief Scale

Relief tents, provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross as an emergency measure before the establishment and operation of the UNRWA in 1950, were the first form of shelter which decided the configuration of the Palestinian camp. The camp started as a defined plot of land, released to UNRWA from the host government for 99 years, whereby the Red Cross provided black relief tents to the refugee families, the tent size varying according to family size. The refugees would scatter their tents around their kinship, and preferably as close as possible to

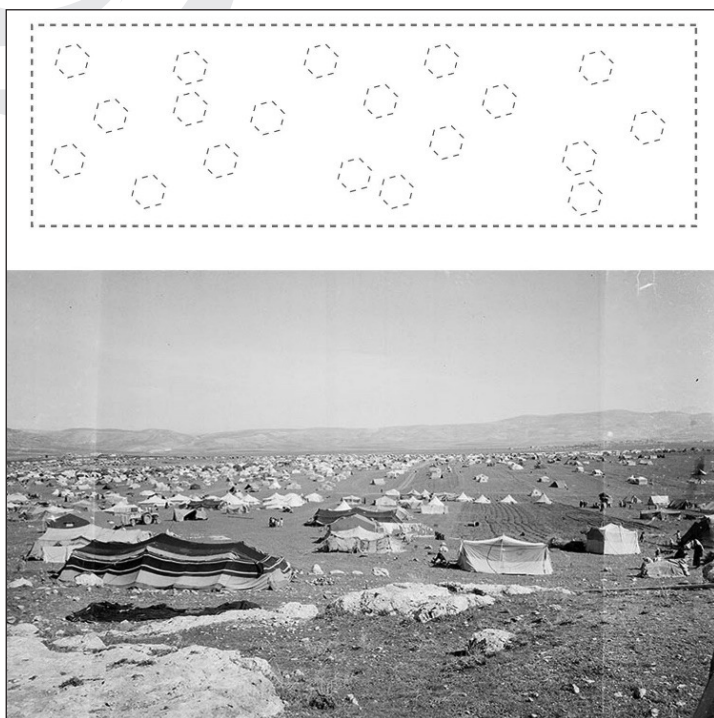


Diagram 1: 1948 Camp Layout. © Samar Maqusi, UNRWA Archives

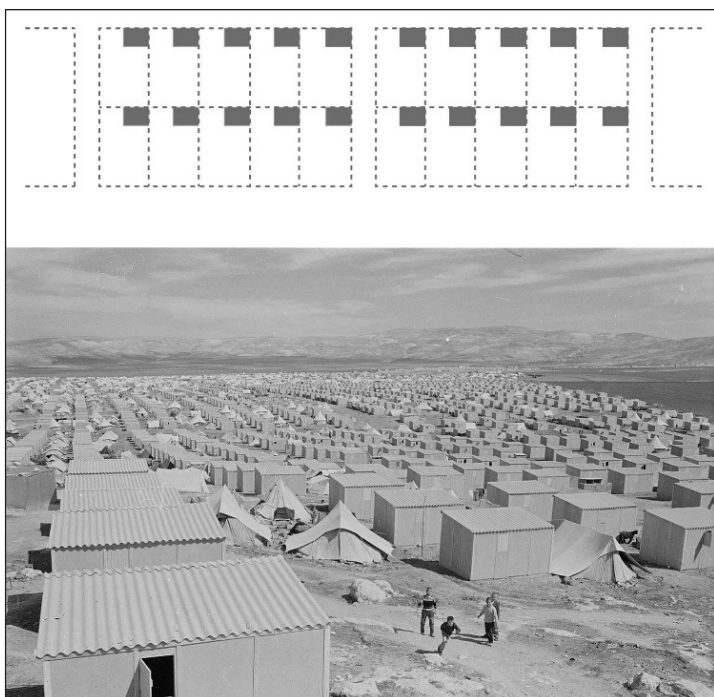


Diagram 2: 1950s Camp Layout. © Samar Maqusi, UNRWA Archives

relief services and facilities (see Diagram 1). Yet, after only five months of operation, UNRWA realized the urgent need to “develop rules and procedures and instructions to standardize action in all areas” (Assistance to Palestine Refugees, Interim report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, NY, 1951). This would become the *modus operandi* of UNRWA’s operations, one based on standards universally adopted across all five fields of operation,⁶ thus establishing an efficiency of economy and performance for the Agency.

Within a few years, and due to a lack of tents on the world market,⁷ as well as their fragility against what was starting to look like a prolonged refuge, UNRWA changed its spatial policy to one of organized-grid layouts, with pre-fabricated shelters, allocating a standard space-area of 96–100m² plot of land to each refugee family as a right-of-use (*intifaa*), which literally translates to usufruct, as opposed to ownership (see Diagram 2).

The implementation of this grid camp layout involved a re-organization of the “whole” of the camp, prompting UNRWA to disregard what was already built by the refugees themselves as a camp fabric, thus emphasizing the spatial relationship the refugees were meant to have with their space. The relationship imagined was one which is unpredictable for the refugees, but ordered and controlled by both UNRWA and the host governments: a negotiable apparatus which in effect excludes the refugees, and treats the space without regard to the inhabitants. This top-down approach was viewed as the most efficient in the context of UNRWA’s strained relief budget, and the host governments’ concerns regarding refugee resistance and violence.⁸

Political Scale

From the early 1960s until the mid-1970s, during the established presence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) inside Palestinian camps as sites for planning and managing the liberation and return to Palestine, concrete was pouring into the camp and many times subsidized by the PLO to ensure refugees quickly met their existential needs and could focus on achieving their emancipation. This meant that the PLO exercised management and governance over the camp, which led to a rapid transformation: from asbestos to concrete and the emergence of the early manifestations of “spatial violations” by extending walls beyond the 96–100m² ‘right-of-use’ plot demarcation (see Diagram 3).

As the 96–100m² ‘right-of-use’ plot-boundaries gradually filled-

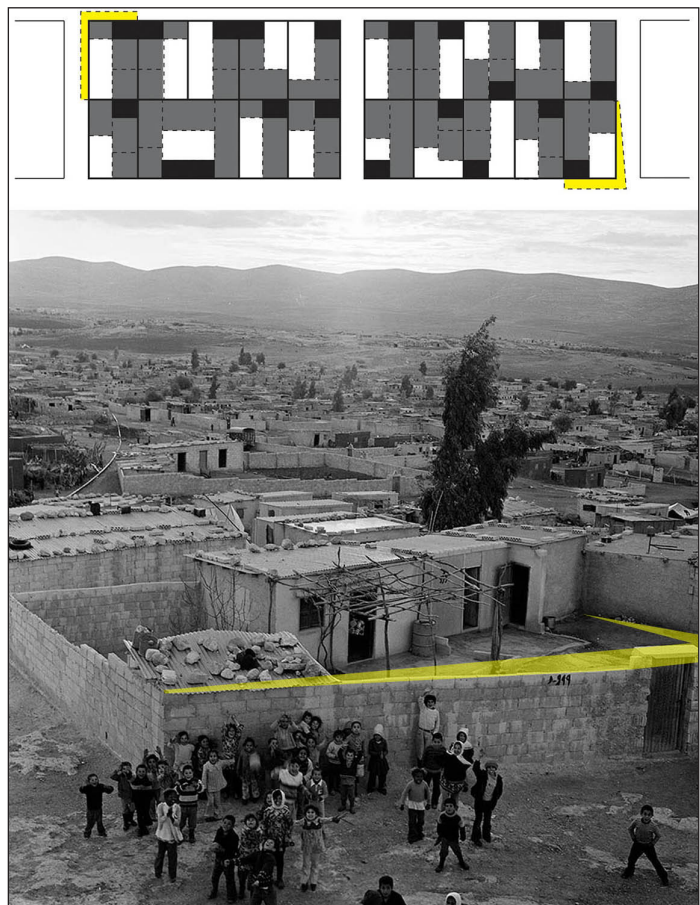


Diagram 3: 1960s-70s Camp Layout. © Samar Maqusi, UNRWA Archives



Diagram 4: 1970s Camp Layout. © Samar Maqusi, UNRWA Archives

up with concrete rooms, concrete would start to overflow beyond the wall in the form of thresholds. These thresholds (*Attabat*), where concrete appears as “excess,” were utilized to keep the muddy waters from seeping into shelters, and provide an outdoor social space. They would become the first ‘architectural-element’ to facilitate the changing scale of the camp (see Diagram 4).

This act of *spatial viola-*

tion through thresholds, not only began to redefine the “power relations” with the host government but was at the same time creating a space and scale beyond relief standards and notions of surveillance and control, to ones that are capable of politics. This new scale would expand spatial and socio-political notions, ones that are in need of constant negotiations inside the Palestinian camp, conscribing a scale which is expandable and amorphous. “The frontier between the social and the political is essentially unstable and requires constant displacements and renegotiations between social agents. Things could always be otherwise, and therefore every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities. It is in that sense that it can be called ‘political’ since it is the expression of a particular structure of power relations” (Mouffe, 2005, p.18).

As the horizontal planes became saturated with cement, the refugees devised another ‘architectural-element’ in the form of prefabricated external stairs to serve as a facilitator to vertical expansion, or *vertical spatial violation*. The external stairs are initially constructed out of temporary material, reserving the new encroached-upon space until it gradually morphs into cement. This material transformation is the moment when the demarcated “right-of-use” is truly delineated and re-

defined. A “vertical sphere” is now introduced to the spatial form in the camp and is already acting in spatial violations, in fact, one which is the product of the latter (see Diagram 5).

Today, and after 69 years of continued refuge, the Palestinian camp as “space,” and the Palestinian as “refugee” remain in a relationship that is co-constitutive. Yet, and due to the act of *spatial violations*, this relationship stays in flux, and continuously re-scales itself proportionally to economies of inhabitation and disputes of political refuge. Emanating from a culture of making space inside a regulated and protracted space of refuge, what has emerged today inside the Palestinian camp, as space and scale, is a clear demonstration of the impact of protraction of refuge over space (see Diagram 6). Here, refugees re-appropriated the architectural physicality of the camp over the span of 69 years, through producing space that challenged the United Nations’ imposed parameters and standards on space, including building materials and heights.

The physical form inside the Palestinian refugee camp does not take the form of the pure order of

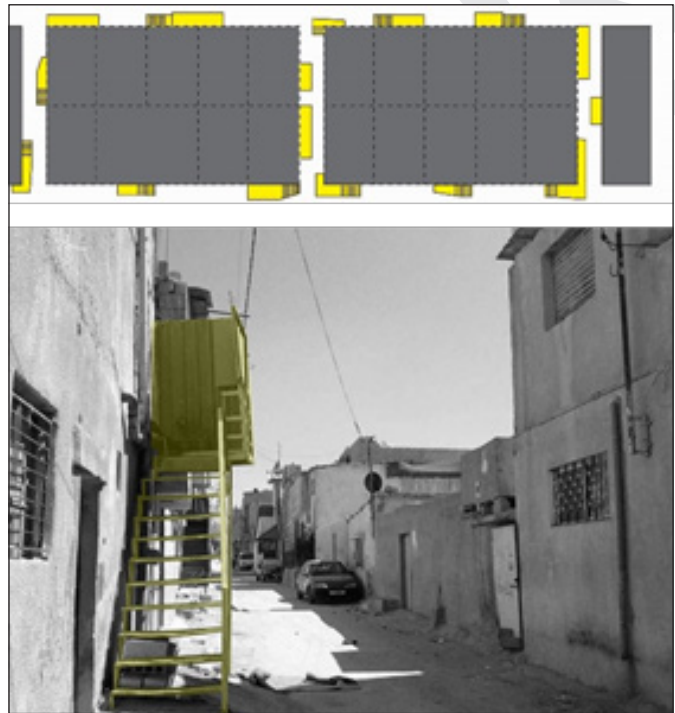


Diagram 5: 1980s-90s Camp Layout. © Samar Maqusi

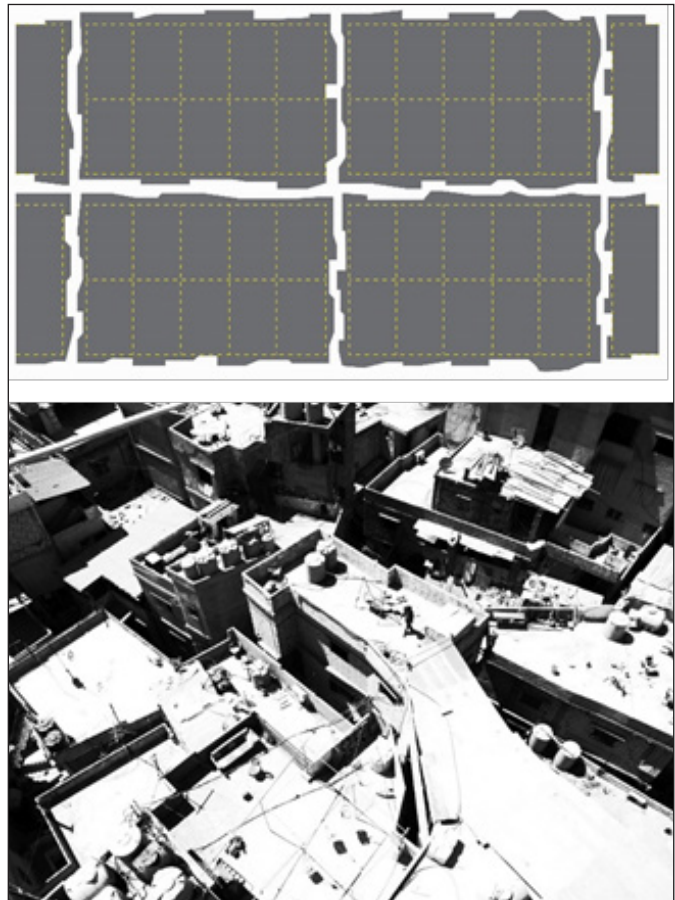


Diagram 6: Today's Camp Layout. © Samar Maqusi

architecture but instead, makes its own order out of “pure” need. Architecture in the camp is never built to attract or convince others of a possible new way of life, be it social, spatial, or economic, as one only finds himself building and inhabiting a camp space out of urgency. This, coupled with the constant contradiction camp architecture experiences with time (as protraction), ensures that any attempt at formally organizing the camp will fail, and will be met with instantaneous restructuring and deviation beyond formal lines by the refugees inhabiting the camp. This “deviation,” embodied in acts of *spatial violation*, is the actual *disruption* to UNRWA’s ‘relief scale’⁹ planned as a spatial conduct of organization, surveillance, and control of the camp space, while with every act of spatial violation there is an act of political instrumentalization happening at the same time, for as soon as the relief scale is relegated, it becomes a Palestinian one and the refugee becomes less docile in that space.

Historically, UNRWA was promoted as a humanitarian agency devoid of any political role concerning the refugee problem, and though it never accepted an official administrative character over the refugee camp, it effectively conducted itself as a governmental body inside the camp.¹⁰ By continuously trumping relief over the political, UNRWA has attributed to the proliferation of refugee acts and processes which take the role of addressing the *political* inside the camp. This role, which is very much political, takes on various forms of adaptability, yet at the same time, reserves an act of political resistance. The forms it takes are elastic assemblages, continuously forming and reforming as if trying to preserve the *political* inside the camp. Scale, interpreted on spatial and political terms plays a crucial role when negotiating and confronting the Palestinian refugee camp, and it mirrors the elasticity of this assemblage which decides the political role of the camp. This scale is very much material as it is political, and most strongly manifests itself in a spatial form which has the potential to become coercive.

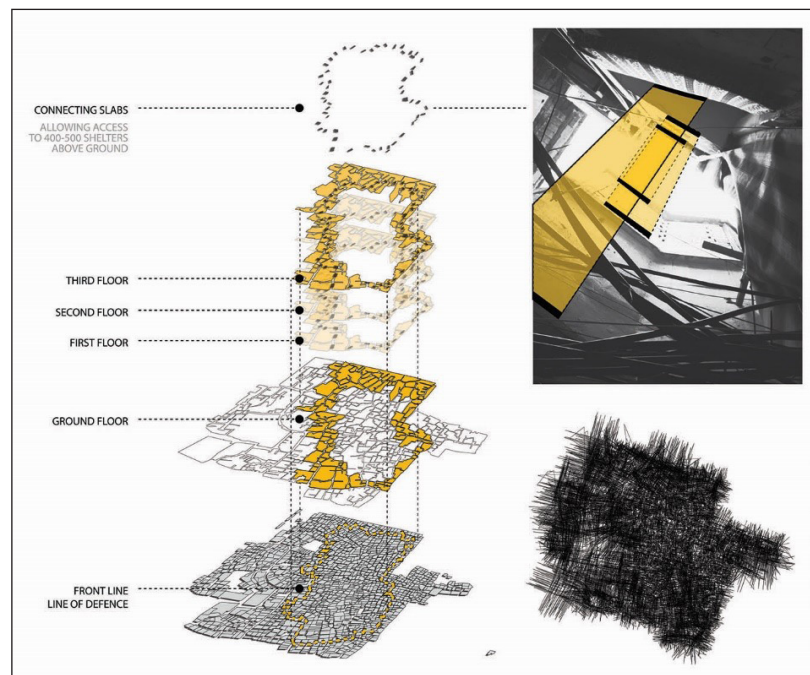
Economies of Spatial Violations Inside the Palestinian Camp

The *economy* of spatial violations, which produces the *political* scale inside the Palestinian camp, enters various modes according to the event at hand. In the case of Burj el Barajneh camp in Lebanon, the spatial “scale,” material x form, the

camp produced up until the War of the Camps (1985–88), proved to be a principal *element* in planning movement and military strategies. To help sustain the camp in the midst of arduous and violent confrontations, the refugees were able to build ultra-circular spatial pathways which surpass the vulnerable grounds and instead operate “above-ground.” *Abou Mohammad*, who participated in the War of the Camps, recounted the days of intense battlegrounds by stating:

When the Shi’a *Amal* militiamen would attack us, we would fight them from the underground shelters. Another group would be on the first floor, a group on the second floor, a group on the third, and one on the fourth, thus avoiding the disadvantaged ground level. The way we achieved this was through drawing up a map of the whole camp, we would then identify the various elevated shelter walls which come face to face with one another, and we would then make an opening on opposing walls while extending a wooden board between the openings, thus instantly creating a connecting pathway across different shelters. Once completed, we discovered that we could enter 400–500 shelters through these passageway without our feet ever touching the ground. I could roam the whole camp without my feet ever touching the ground. (Abu Mohammad, Burj el Barajneh camp, September 2014)

Diagram showing the Elevated Pathways the refugees constructed during the War of the Camps through creating openings between adjacent walls above-ground, and stretching wooden panels to act as bridges between the opening. The refugees created multiple ‘above-ground’ pathways which connected more than 400 shelters around the camp. The camp earned a reputation of being a maze-like space adopting a motto of “who enters is lost and who exists is reborn”. © Samar Maqusi



Responses to the “Political Scale”

The Palestinian refugees realized their inevitable protraction early on, and thus opted to build up their spaces by transgressing the UNRWA delineated lines, employing what I have called acts of *spatial violation*. These acts considered an official violation inside the camp by both the UNRWA and host governments are nonetheless tolerated and have enabled the refugees to construct a *Palestinian scale* in physical, architectural terms, which proved to be detrimental as it reached a spatial threshold over a protracted refuge deemed threatening by the host governments. This new scale, beyond UN and host country parameters, (see Rueff & Viaro, 2010) provided a camp tissue unequivocal to the refugee yet inaccessible to the host government security apparatuses. This new spatial condition prompted these host governments to adopt modes of spatial intervention meant to fragment and resize the camp's scale. This was made possible through opening new wide streets that divide the camp into smaller accessible areas (Achilli, 2015, p. 271), or, in some more violent cases, through the complete destruction of the camp, of which Nahr el Bared camp in Lebanon was the most recent case in 2007 (Sheikh Hassan and Hanafi, 2010).

Jordanian Response

The Jordanian government has been adopting a mode of “rescaling” the Palestinian camp in Jordan by opening (through widening) existing streets that cross the camp through its middle, dividing it into distinct parts and creating a matrix of wide roads scaled to a new scale, which allow for the quick entry of police and gendarme tanks into the very centre of the camp. The host government has adopted spatial “means of control”, which Deleuze and Foucault discuss elaborately in their work. Deleuze explains: “*You do not confine people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control. I am not saying this is the only aim of highways, but people can travel infinitely and “freely” without being confined while being perfectly controlled. That is our future*” (Deleuze, 1987). These spatial modes which control without explicitly confining, have proved very effective in the Jordanian context, allowing the host governments to instantly separate the camp from its surrounding by literally building elevated highways which circumvent the refugee camp.

Images showing a typical confrontation between the Jordanian gendarmes and Palestinian refugees in Baqa'a camp, whereby gendarmes retain their stationary position along the main street on the western edge, while refugees remain inside camp pathways at a 4m proximity as both engage in an open confrontation involving verbal denunciation, tire burning and the throwing of tear gas canisters. © Baqa'a camp

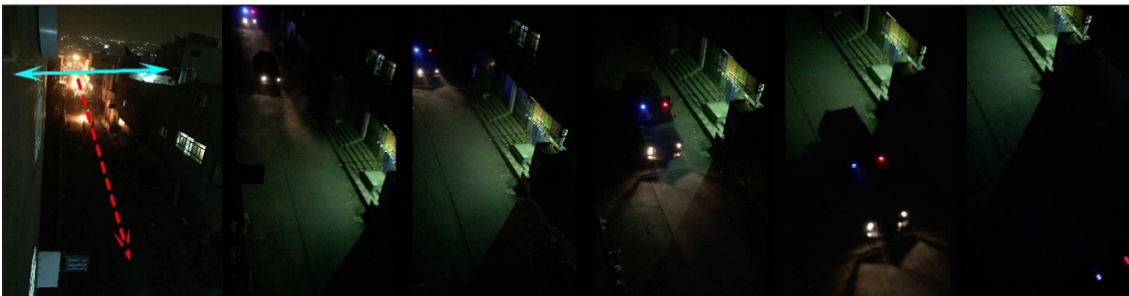


Traditionally inside Baqa'a camp in Jordan, the unfolding of confrontations in space has delineated spatial terms whereby the Jordanian gendarme station themselves along the western edge of the camp, and the refugees inside camp entrances, whereby they retain a 4-metre un-intruded space adhered to by both parties. According to refugee testimonies inside Baqa'a camp, never in the history of the camp have these conflicts resulted in the Jordanian Gendarmes' penetration into the camp's fabric,¹¹

However, the conflict would unfold differently in recent years, as a result of the newly opened "wide streets" which bifurcate the camp, providing the gendarmes tanks with a new spatial advantage which allows them to quickly and uninterruptedly enter the camp-tissue. As the gendarme tanks unleashed their soldiers, the refugees quickly dispersed, moving towards narrow and meandering pathways to mislead and escape the soldiers (keeping in mind the soldiers are not familiar with the camp's spatial tissue, thus the camp-scale worked to the refugees' advantage during the chase). Yet, it is crucial to highlight here that the advantages of re-scaling the camp was not only concerned with this direct and quick access, but also very much concerned with cost, less incurred cost, literally less monetary and personnel cost for the government security apparatus as it employs less number of, but more violent, mechanisms. The duration of the confrontation between the gendarmes and the refugees also decreased significantly.



Map showing the “new layout” for Baqa’a camp (c.2008) drawn by DPA (Department of Palestinian Affairs). The street in blue is the new street which was commenced in 2010 and now serves as the axial street dividing the camp into two distinct “top camp and bottom camp” areas as the refugees now refer to. This road construction caused the relocation of hundreds of refugee families to an area outside the camp’s legal borders. In red, I trace the new movement the Gendarmes tanks adopted to reach the camp’s fabric. © Samar Maqusi



Entry through the New Street --- Images showing Intifada Street on the last day of the Installation opening: (L) Refugees employing a common practice of enclosing entrances into the camp tissue by burning tires, (R) The Jordanian Gendarme tanks penetrating the camp through provided access from the new street into Intifada Street, a practice spatially new to the refugees. © Samar Maqusi

Lebanese Response

The Lebanese context has been the harshest among the five host areas for Palestinian refugees, mainly due to a violent history within Lebanon itself, and the on-

set refusal by the Lebanese government to grant Palestinians any civil rights. This has resulted in numerous historical scenarios whereby the Lebanese forces would engage in the complete destruction of the Palestinian camp. Rosemary Sayigh provides a more accurate account of Palestinian camps destroyed before and during the period of the Lebanese civil war, explaining: “Five camps have been destroyed: Nabatiyya, by an Israeli air raid in 1974; Tal al-Zatar, Jisr al-Basha, and Dbayeh by the Lebanese Forces in 1976 (though Dbayeh still stands and is still serviced by UNRWA, most of its original inhabitants have not been allowed to return); and Da’uq, the quasi-official camp at the heart



The aftermath of the 2007 conflict in Nahr el Bared, whereby the Lebanese army engaged in the complete destruction of the camp. © UNRWA

of Sabra, destroyed in 1985 by the *Amal* movement.” (Sayigh, 1995b, p.53) More recently, in 2007, Nahr el Bared camp experienced a similar fate when the Lebanese Army entered into a violent battle with *Fatah el Islam* militant group, whose members were said not to exceed 100 men.

Confinement Measures Inside Ein el Hilweh Camp, Lebanon

In recent years, the Lebanese government has embarked on a new ‘mode of intervention’ towards the Palestinian camp, through confining the camp by building cement walls which surround the entirety of the camp, of which Ein el Hilweh camp was the most recent example. The wall itself is made up of pre-cast cement pieces, very much resembling those used by the Israeli government to build its separation barrier. Although the construction of the wall around Ein el Hilweh camp was halt-

ed several times in response to Palestinian outcries, it was nonetheless resumed and the wall completed, which includes a number of Army watch towers as well. In addition, the Lebanese government installed ‘metal gateways’ at the end of numerous pedestrian pathways which lead to outside the camp, thus controlling the entry and exit of each person trying to exit or enter Ein el Hilweh camp. During my last visit to Ein el Hilweh camp in November 2017, I was able to discuss these new measures with different refugees inside the camp, to understand the impact they have generated and imposed on their daily lives. Fulfilling my expectations, to a certain degree most the refugees ensured me that the wall itself had not hindered their movement and daily operations inside and outside the camp. It is important to highlight here that, to enter Ein el Hilweh camp, like most camps in Lebanon, you are required to pass through a Lebanese military check point, whereby your identification is requested, and your car is subject to a being searched. Therefore, it is not very surprising that most of the refugees would not necessarily find an addition of a surrounding cement wall a hindrance, but more as a measure of “casting”, which is what was mostly relayed to me. “They want the outside world to think we are troublemakers, and a threat to everyone”, is what one of the refugees told me. It is unfortunately historically true, that host governments engage in mechanisms whereby they cast the refugees as the “threat,” emanating from the fact that they have been historically treated as the “undesirables.”¹²

As for the ‘metal gateways’, they truly act as surveillance and control thresholds, whereby you are still able to enter and exit the camp, yet your agency over that “threshold” has been stripped away from you and given to a Lebanese soldier who now, visually and physically operates this new “means of control.” Refugees have told me that in cases of conflict erupting inside or around the camp, these gateways have been closed, and re-entry to the camp prohibited. These gateways are not operated as confining architectural elements on a daily basis, yet, and during any conflict, they will facilitate the quick confinement and further violent oppression of the refugees who will find themselves trapped inside their space. It is this “facilitation” that is the desired output for the host governments, which I also identified in the case of Baqa’a camp in Jordan, whereby the Jordanian government embarks on constructing new, wide scales, to also facilitate the quick entry and control over the camp and the refugees, deeming all these architectural elements violent, and oppressive.



Images showing the new spatial measures built by the Lebanese government in and around Ein el Hilweh camp, Saida, Lebanon. (T) The cement wall seen from outside the camp, (BL) A section of the confining cement wall around the camp, (BR) An enclosed metal gateways at the end of a pedestrian pathway leading to the outside of the camp.



‘Space of Refuge’: Constructing a Spatial Dialogue Inside the Palestinian Camp

To be able to reveal and illustrate the current and historical spatial conditions of the camp, an intervention utilizing spatial means was required to transcend socio-political barriers. In addition, the *intervention* needed to plug into the existing spatiality of the camp, to be able to provide a genuine and constructive new space for dialogue inside and act as a new, yet harmonious element within the larger existing camp apparatus. ‘Space of Refuge’ emerged as a spatial installation concerned with negotiating space through space-making. This was done by constructing a spatial installation which directly addressed “scale” and “production of space.” By recreating methods and materialities of construction developed and used inside the Palestinian camp, “production of space” here is seen as a *process*

within a historical element, able to both produce new-current knowledge and reveal historical ones.¹³ In addition, a practise of transferring spatial knowledge between camps emerged as an urgent need, due to the fact that Palestinian refugees undergo systematic hindrance of movement, especially across camps, making it very difficult for most refugees to actually visit and experience the other Palestinian refugee camps, and further build an ethnographic and cultural knowledge which could encompass all 58 Palestinian refugee camps, and which can act as a form of resistance for the refugees. This spatial separation between the Palestinian refugees and their spaces of refuge across the Near East made it abundantly clear that a form of transferring the constructed spatial knowledge was needed. 'Transferring space and knowledge' is not only concerned with producing new camp spatial knowledge by undergoing an alteration but is very much concerned with an actual transference (in various forms) of the spatial knowledge between different camp spaces and between a camp space and other urban geographies concerned and affected by states of refuge (please see <http://samarmaqusi.com/index.php/work/space-of-refuge-london/>, and <http://samarmaqusi.com/index.php/work/space-of-refuge-symposium--london-/> for the 'Space of Refuge' event in London, March 2017).

'Space of Refuge'

Concept: The 'Space of Refuge' installation looks at the historical spatial production and subsequent evolution of Palestinian refugee camps, with particular focus upon unofficial acts of 'spatial violation' that have emerged because of the increasingly protracted nature of the refugee situation, with no sign of any political resolution to a condition that has existed since 1948. Through constructing and re-constructing spatial scales in both Baqa'a camp in Jordan, and Burj el Barajneh camp in Lebanon, the installations reveal the narrative of relationships between refugees and host governments using spatial means. Considering the precariousness of the Palestinian refugee camps, and the problem of addressing political aspects overtly inside these camps, the installations instead express their ideas through architectural forms and multi-media formats (including film and photography) in order to tackle critical issues, always with the aim of creating a more democratic form of dialogue. In short, the installations directly address issues of

inhabitation within camps in different host countries, thereby highlighting the question of what becomes of these urban spaces when they are left unresolved over a protracted period of time.

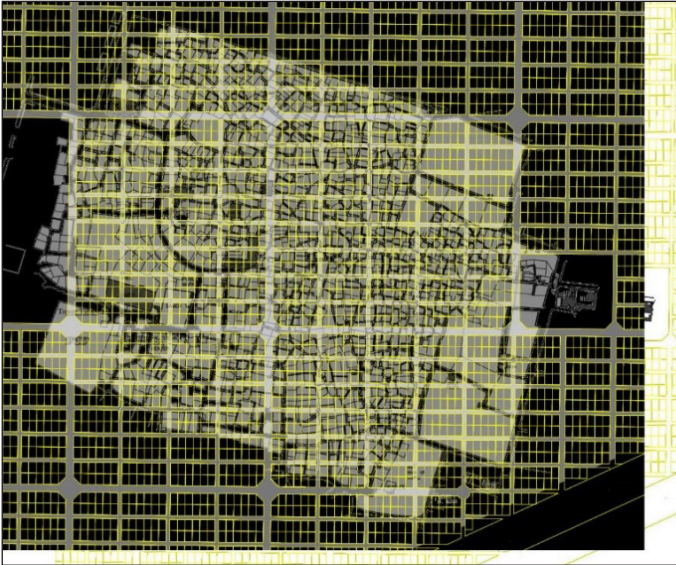
Baq'a Camp – Jordan

In the summer of 2015, and after two years of fieldwork in Baqa'a camp, aided by a group of volunteers – two architects and a filmmaker from London, and a group of volunteers from Baqa'a camp – we collectively built a spatial installation in one of the very few remaining 'active' public buildings in the camp, called *Jami'yet el Dawaymeh* (*Dawaymeh* Association). The building has been inactive for 22 years, and our installation event was the commencing event of its re-opening and re-activation. The *Jami'yeh* sits on an old UNRWA site which used to serve the camp as public showers when it was first established. As years went by, and refugees built their own amenities inside their UN plots, there ceased to be a need for public showers and restrooms, and thus those UNRWA service sites were left open and unused until an act of encroachment was committed. The *Jami'yeh* itself is a spatial violation encroached on a UNRWA site, re-appropriating it to become Palestinian.

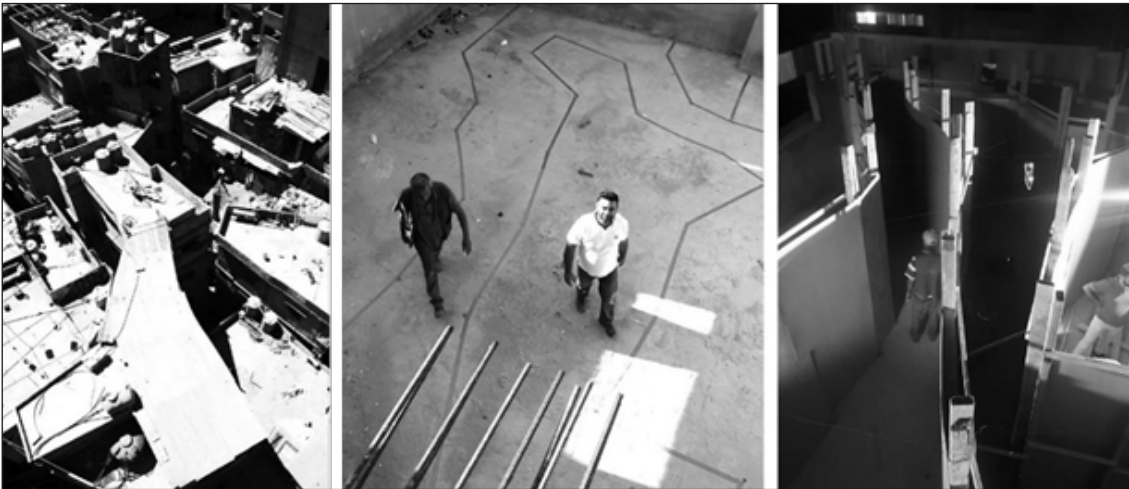
The act of building the installation was a process continuously investigating the parameters, be it socio-economical, cultural or political which determined the form and scale at which the camp developed into spatially today, and map their limits and thresholds. The installation is a superimposition of two camp scales by overlapping two spaces, the *Jami'yeh* itself was one scale demonstrating Baqa'a camp hosted in Jordan, and the spatial installation itself was the second scale demonstrating Burj el Barajneh camp hosted in Lebanon, through literally superimposing a section of Burj el Barajneh camp onto the roof of the *Jami'yeh*, the latter being the typical dimension of a UNRWA refugee plot of 100m². By doing so, the superimposition would reveal the spatial similarities and differences of these two camp-scales, and generate a dialogue concerning spatial politics in the Palestinian camp, through the act of space-making, *vis a vis*, scale-making.

The installation merges – by superimposing – two camp spaces from two different host countries (Baq'a camp in Jordan and the Burj el Barajneh camp in Lebanon) to produce a hybrid third-space, one which can create new relations of

social and political relevance which have the potential, irrespective of its scale, to proliferate into a new order of “power relations”.



A superimposition of two camp scales, Baqa'a in yellow and Burj el Barajneh in grey: Baqa'a camp's spatial scale (in yellow) still largely retains UNRWA's grid layout of 100-square-meter plots due to the Jordanian government's control over space inside the camps, while an opposite condition exists in Burj el Barajneh camp. The superimposition of maps clearly shows the intense encroachment and utilization of space in Burj el Barajneh camp, as compared to that of Baqa'a camp, whereby one yellow shelter plot in Baqa'a camp can intersect multiple shelters from Burj el Barajneh camp. © Samar Maqusi



Scale Superimposition

From left: aerial view Burj el Barajneh camp; intervention site in Baqa'a camp (100-square meter roof plot); superimposition built, Baqa'a camp, August 2015. © Samar Maqusi

The idea was to promote a spatial dialogue by re-creating a spatial scale, taken from Burj el Barajneh camp, and rebuilt within Baqa'a camp's spatiality to begin a negotiation based on how the Palestinian camp's spatiality operates on the ground, and what scale it needs to reach to provide the optimum negotiating agency for the Palestinian refugees, one which is very much political, including the creation of new terms with the host governments.



Images showing the gradual process of building up the roof scale, while responding to the contracting “working space”: (TL) Jami’yeh Roof with taped layout, Top Right: Commencing of the building process, (BL) most of the wall frames erected, (BR) final building stages, Baqa’a camp, Jordan 2015. © Samar Maqusi



Images from inside the installation in Baqa’a camp, showing refugees experiencing the new scale and engaging in architectural maps, as well as films documenting camp spaces from the 1970s to today. © Samar Maqusi, (TL) Ronan Glynn



Images showcasing the superimposition onto the public pathways, as a temporary act of spatial violations on the camp's exiting physical scale, whereby refugees are able to experience and inhabit the new scale as part of their daily movement. © (L) Samar Maqusi, (R) Ronan Glynn

Burj el Barajneh Camp – Lebanon

Burj el Barajneh never experienced the implementation of a “whole” UNRWA grid layout as Baqa’a camp did, it nonetheless underwent a re-organization through micro-scale grids, which were the 3m x 4m zinc rooms UNRWA supplied to refugee families (as material only consisting of zinc panels and wooden columns). Yet, the refugee families were required to adhere to the 96–100m² plot areas, though the application of this “plot layout” was never a comprehensive one as in Baqa’a camp.

In Burj el Barajneh camp, as opposed to Baqa’a camp, the installation needed to be built on the ground, away from ascribing it to one building or form, in the common space that has a pragmatic and continuous daily use. This obviously being to produce a superimposition of scales which could not only define the existing scale with a set of existing knowledge but offer new knowledge emanating from the existing ones which allow for the production of new subjectivities. By constructing

new scales – in the form of installations – on existing ones, not only is the existing form interrupted but so is the existing spatio-movement and circulation. This rupture in space and circulation – of material, movement, concepts, discussions, etc. – through the

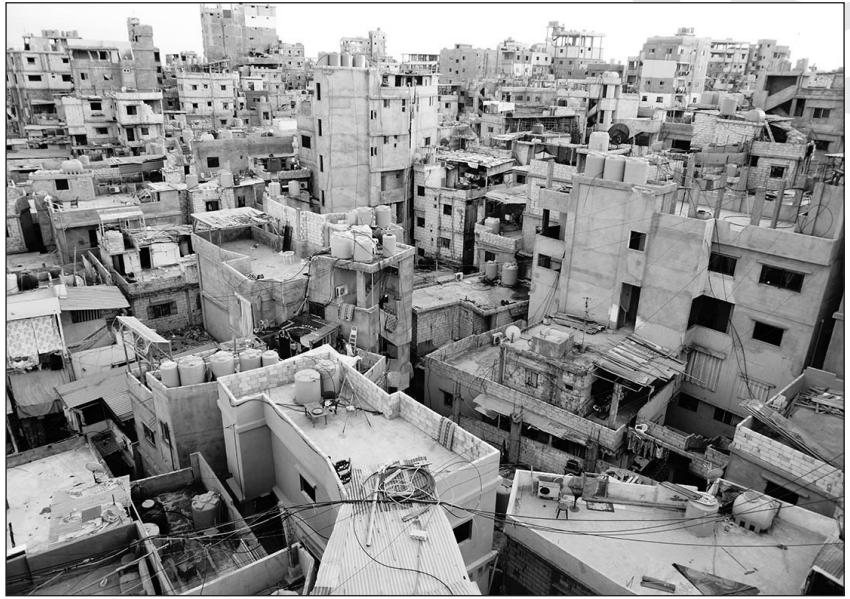


Image showing Burj el Barajneh camp's scale today, 2017. © Samar Maqusi

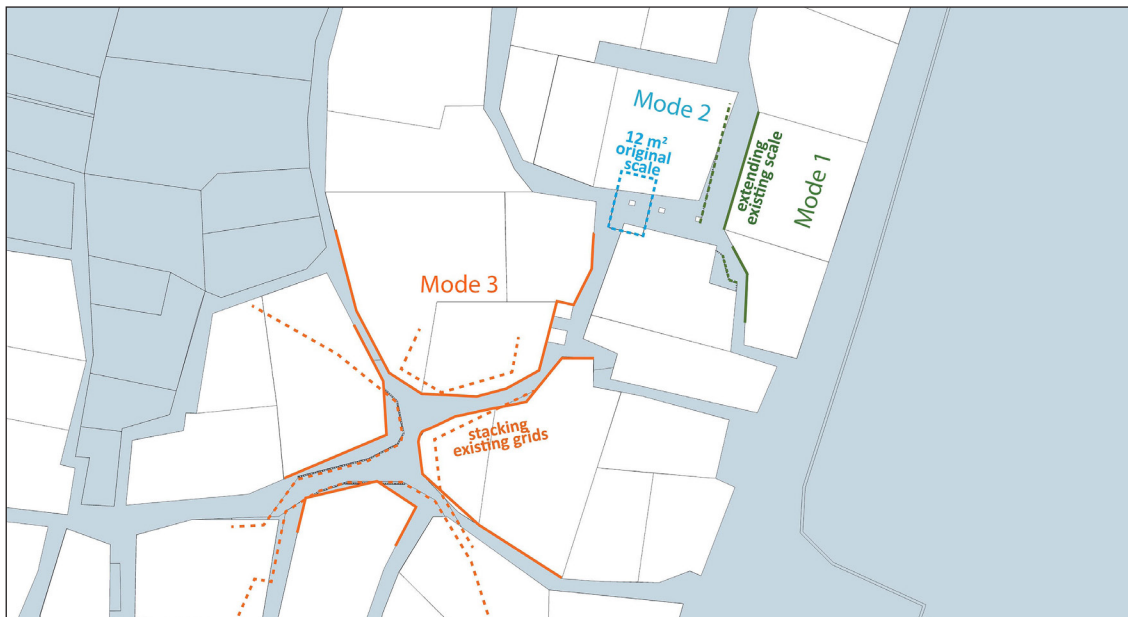
intersection of spatial scales, is exactly what this installation aimed to reveal and make visible.

Seen as an urgent need in the camp space and concerned with producing new knowledge through spatial forms inside the camp, I began to envision an exercise of “testing theory in the field” by literally transforming Foucault’s concept of grids and “lines of force” into real material forms on the ground.¹⁴

Three Modes

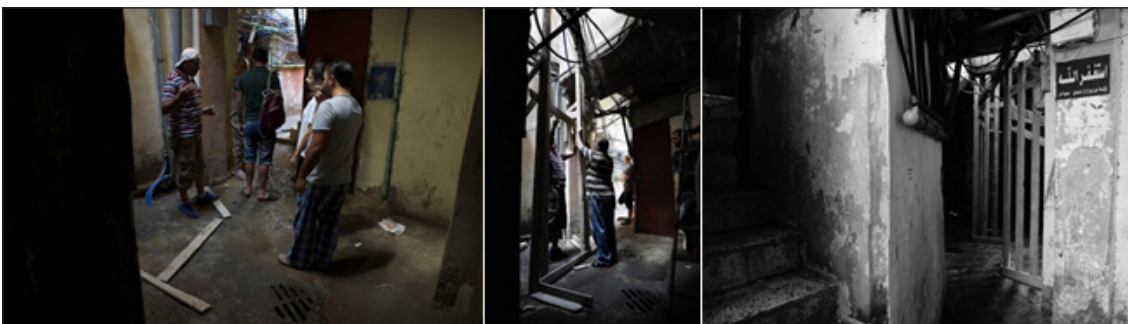
The approach to scale-superimposition in Burj el Barajneh camp differed from Baqa’a camp in that I opted to superimpose three different modes of spatial scales, each with the aim to produce different “scales” of discussion around space. The first mode involved extending the existing scale beyond the current spatial threshold, thus questioning the limits of space while concurrently revealing the ingenious skills the refugees possess in relation to building space within existing, compelling limitations. The second mode was a superimposition of the “original” UN scale the camp started from, which was the 12m²(3m x 4m) zinc room UNRWA provided for each refugee family, over the existing camp-scale, creating a literal rupture to the existing concrete forms the 3mx4m rectangle has caused in the act of intersection. This retraction to the original “applied” UNRWA scale-form in the camp allows us to retract our spatial dialogue to that first moment of scale-making

and demonstrates a superimposition of an “original” scale of efficiency, control, and surveillance over that of protracted refuge, organized armed struggle, and resilience. The third mode involved a direct application of a Foucauldian¹⁵ exercise, stacking the existing grid onto itself while applying a “shifting,” to intentionally mask (cover) certain areas on the ground and reveal new ones in the form of new, potential space and knowledge.



Map showing the installation site in Burj el Barajneh camp and scale-superimposition modes (in colours). © Samar Maqusi

Mode 1—Extending the existing form



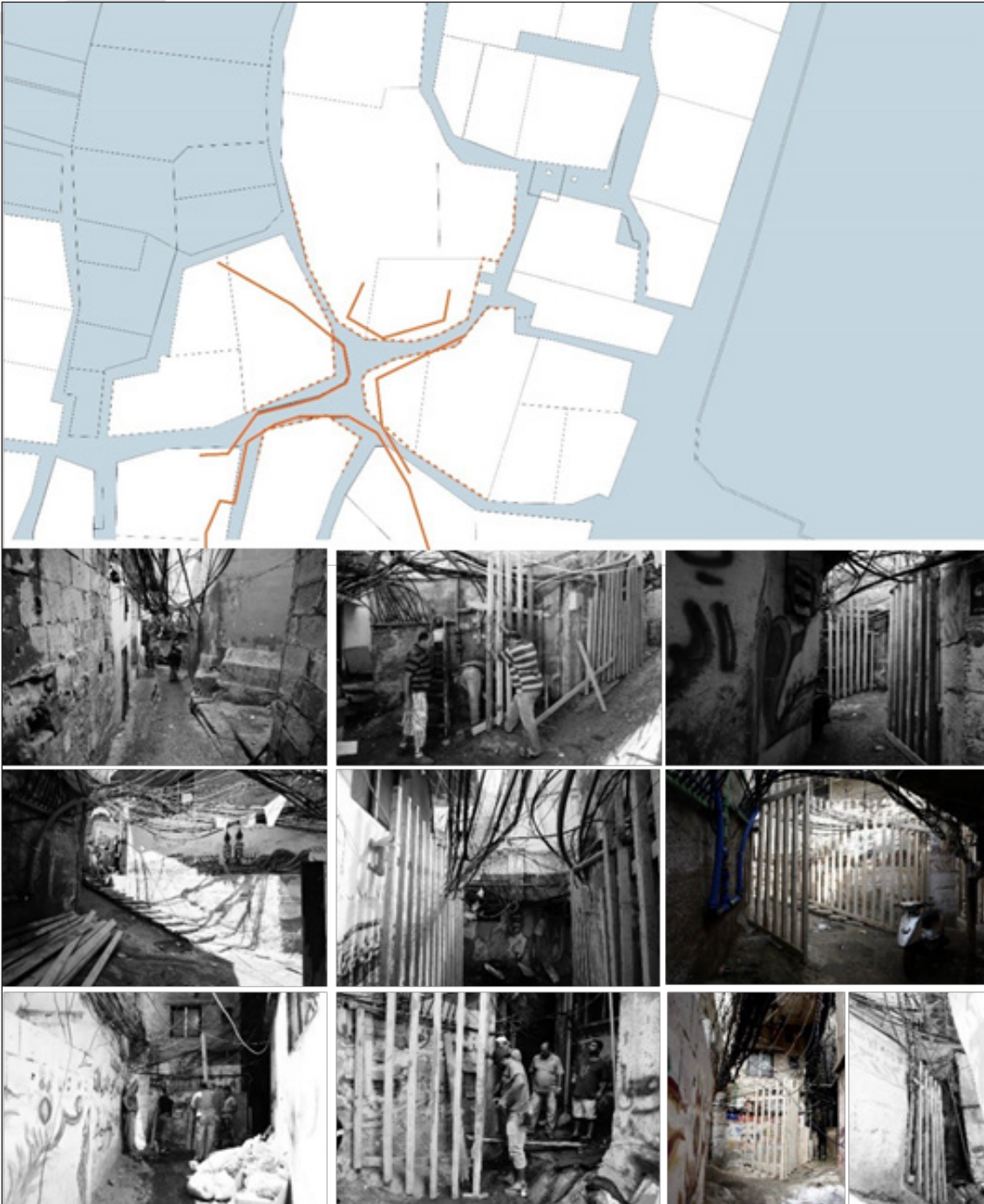
Mode 1, (L) Laying out the installation outline whereby extending the existing scale of the camp-form, (C) Constructing the installation, (R) Installation piece acting as another element within the larger camp apparatus. © Samar Maqusi

Mode 2—Superimposing the original UN-scale



Mode 2, Images showing the process of intersecting the original UNRWA-room (3mX4m), and which was the first scale to be imposed over the camp space, here intersecting with the existing generated camp-scale. © Samar Maqusi

Mode 3— Stacking the camp grid onto itself



Mode 3, Images showing Mode 3 construction which involved a Foucauldian exercise of stacking the grid onto itself while applying a shift in order to reveal new knowledge, emanating from the existing one. © Samar Maqusi

By constructing new scales – in the form of installations – upon existing ones, not only is the existing form interrupted, but the existing spatio-movement and circulation are altered as well, forcing the inhabitants to address the intervention as part of their daily inhabitation of the camp.

Images showing the camp inhabitants going about their daily lives, while encountering the installations along the way and engaging with them in different ways, some treat them as another natural element of the camp, while others address them as new operational devices within the camp's tissue. © Samar Maqusi



Interventions inside a complex and conflictual space as those of the camps, acquire various functions and have the potential to adopt numerous subjectivities depending on their localized socio-political geography within the camp, as well as, the materiality of the spatial network they have been inserted into. Yet, what remains a common element across different camp geographies, is the simultaneous production of space and conflict, a conflict which can become productive, as history shows in the refugee camps, in redefining existing power relations. The ‘Space of Refuge’ installations were imagined first as “instruments of knowledge”, and second as “potentials” grounded within the camp’s existing materiality and apparatus. As the installations were being built within a milieu of camp-processes, they performed as *devices* bringing together a compiled-historical knowledge, while also dispersing certain knowledge to create an alternative dialogue meant to fulfil a *need*, very much associated with refuge and justice inside the camp space.

Endnotes

- ¹ Please refer to Adalah's Discriminatory Laws Database for a list of Israeli laws. Access at: <https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/7771>.
- ² Please refer to UNHCR Figures at a Glance. Access at: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html>.
- ³ "Official" here refers to the "official recognition" by the UNRWA and the host governments that this specific space is a refugee camp, while there are numerous informal Palestinian enclaves outside the refugee camps. Those enclaves are sometimes serviced by the UNRWA such as in Yarmouk camp in Syria, though they remain officially non-camps.
- ⁴ The 'right of return' was first outlined in UNGA resolution 194 (III) on 11 December 1948, Paragraph 11 which "Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible." Paragraph 11 (Right of Return) proceeds to change by the continuous re-adoption of the paragraph in future UNGA resolutions while the "action verb" which begins each operative paragraph undergoes a change. This can be understood by tracing the evolution of the "action verb" from what was originally adopted in resolution 194 (III) as Resolves, into the word Recognizes (Resolution 302 (IV)) to Considers (Resolution 393 (V)), and then to Endorses (Resolution 513 (VI)). By doing so, it effectively scaled down the urgency of the political problem at hand.
- ⁵ See UNGA Resolution 302 (IV) paragraph 7, UNGA Resolution 513 (VI) paragraph 4, and UNGA Resolution 1018 (XI) paragraph 5.
- ⁶ UNRWA operates in five fields, including Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank.
- ⁷ "Unfortunately, tents are becoming almost impossible to find on world markets at any price, and the refugees are therefore being encouraged to put up small structures for themselves" (Assistance to Palestine Refugees, Report of the Director of UNRWA, #25, Paris 1951).
- ⁸ For more on this topic, please see Misselwitz, P. and Hanafi, S. (2010) Testing a New Paradigm: UNRWA's Camp Improvement Programme, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol.28(2-3), pp.360-388.
- ⁹ The 'relief scale' in this research denotes to the 100m² plots distributed to each refugee family and which form the larger grid of the camp.
- ¹⁰ For more on UNRWA's role inside the Palestinian camps, please see Hanafi, S. (2010) *Governing Palestinian Refugee Camps in the Arab East: Governmentalities in Search of Legitimacy*, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs American University of Beirut.

- ¹¹ This was related to me through interviews with refugees demonstrating and others living around *Intifada* street (the typical demonstration street), Baqa'a camp, August, 2014 and July, 2015.
- ¹² For more on this topic, please see Agier, M. (2011) *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*, Polity Press, UK.
- ¹³ For more on the 'historical element,' please see Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, Vintage Books, NY.
- ¹⁴ For more on Foucault's grids and "lines of force", please see Chomsky, N. and Foucault, M. (1971) *Human Nature: Justice vs Power*, The Chomsky-Foucault Debate, edited by Fons Elders: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wfNI2L0Gf8>, and *What is a Dispositif* in Deleuze, G. (2007) *Two Regimes of Madness*, Semiotext(e), NY.
- ¹⁵ Please refer to *Human Nature: Justice versus Power: Noam Chomsky debates with Michel Foucault*, 1971. Access at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wfNI2L0Gf8>.

References

- Abourahme, N. (2015). "Assembling and Spilling-Over: Towards an 'Ethnography of Cement' in a Palestinian Refugee Camp." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol.39(2), 200–217.
- Achilli, L. (2015). "BECOMING A MAN IN AL-WIHDAT: MASCULINE PERFORMANCES IN A PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMP IN JORDAN." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.47(2), 263–280.
- Agier, M. (2011). *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government* (D. Fernbach, Trans.). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972–1977* (Colin Gordon et al., Trans.) New York: Vintage Books.
- Hanafi, S. (2010). *Governing Palestinian Refugee Camps in the Arab East: Governmentalities in Search of Legitimacy*. *Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs*, Working Paper Series #1, American University of Beirut.
- Hanafi, S. (2012). *Enclaves and Fortressed Archipelago: Violence and Governance in Lebanon's Palestinian "Refugee Camps*. In *Lebanon: After the Cedar Revolution*. London: Hurst & Company. 105–121.
- Khalili, L. (2005). "Places of Memory and Mourning: Palestinian Commemoration in the Refugee Camps of Lebanon." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol.25(1), 30.
- Khalili, L. (2007). *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Misselwitz, P., Sari H. (2010). "Testing a New Paradigm: UNRWA's Camp Improvement Programme." *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28(2-3), 360-388.
- Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the political*. London: Routledge.
- Peteet, J. (2005). *Landscape of hope and despair: Palestinian refugee camps*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Peteet, J. (2015). Camps and Enclaves: Palestine in the Time of Closure. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29(2), 208-228.
- Petti, A. (2013). "Spatial Ordering of Exile. The Architecture of Palestinian Refugee Camps." *Crios, Critica degli ordinamenti spaziali*, (1), 62-70.
- Ramadan, A. (2010). "In the Ruins of Nahr al-Barid: Understanding the Meaning of the Camp." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 40(1), 49-62.
- Rueff, H., & Viaro, A. (2010). Palestinian Refugee Camps: From Shelter to Habitat. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28(2-3), 339-359.
- Sayigh, R. (1995a). "Palestinians in Lebanon: (dis)solution of the Refugee Problem". *Race and Class*, 37(2), 27-42.
- Sayigh, R. (1995b). "Palestinians in Lebanon: Harsh Present, Uncertain Future." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 25(1), 37-53.
- Sheikh Hassan, I., Sari, H. (2010). (In)Security and Reconstruction in Post-conflict Nahr al-Barid Refugee Camp. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.40(1), 27-48.