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DESIGN RESEARCH ESSAY

# Acts of Spatial Violation: The Politics of Space-Making inside the Palestinian Refugee Camp

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Refugee camps have been, and continue to be, highly polemical spaces to inhabit and study. Notions such as temporality, permanence, exception and camp-cities are used in academic publications in an attempt to understand the continued existence of these spaces. Scholars nonetheless have fallen short of presenting a historical narrative, or convincing argument, as to why and how these camps can ensure their continued operation within often violent and complex host geographies.

Refugee camps are not merely humanitarian spaces relegated to international aid programmes. On the contrary, due to their common protracted nature, they have evolved into some of the most dynamic and vital forms of built environment. The fundamental element which guarantees this vitalism, in socio-economic and political terms, is space and space-making. This essay, based on long-term fieldwork research in two Palestinian refugee camps – Baqa'a in Jordan and Burj el Barajneh in Lebanon – showcases the specific ingenious acts of space-making developed by Palestinian refugees throughout 73 years of forced displacement.

Furthermore, the essay introduces the notion of 'spatial violations' to describe the political act of space-making adopted by Palestinian refugees to overcome modes of 'management and control' by host governments and the United Nations. Scenarios of violence and economic development triggered by these acts of 'spatial violation' will also be illustrated, as will some spatial interventions designed and built inside these two Palestinian camps as part of this research project. The installations were designed as experiential architectural devices to provoke conversation around space and space-making across Palestinian camps.

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**Keywords:** Refugee camps; Palestinian refugees; displacement; United Nations; spatial violation; violence; architectural scale; spatial interventions; installations

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## Introduction

Within the seemingly inexorable global displacement of peoples, Palestinian refugee camps stand out as exemplary spaces of refuge. Not only do Palestinian refugees account for 23.5% of the world's refugees, they inhabit the longest standing contemporary camp spaces, spanning 73 years of forced and protracted displacement. Needless to say, there are many attributes of Palestinian displacement, and of refugee camps, which make them stand out as exceptional. Of these elements, this essay focusses on the spatiality of the camp, specifically its historical evolution and methods of production. It introduces urban spatial scenarios that surpass the traditionally imagined 'humanitarian' spaces of refuge, and instead locates Palestinian camps within the thresholds of city-like urbanity.

Indeed, the Palestinian camp in its architectural scale – developed over a long period – forces us to rethink architecture and architectural practice. It does so by demonstrating how space and space-making within a protracted humanitarian crisis are inevitably bound to become political tools, thus favouring geo-political considerations of international organisations and host governments over humanitarian concerns for inhabitants. As a result, refugee acts of constructing space emerge inside the camp to overcome both the de-politicization of the original crisis that created them, and the protracted nature of displacement. This is exactly what this essay is concerned with. It illustrates what happens on the ground when displaced people inhabit spaces of refuge 'designed and operated' by host governments and international relief agencies.

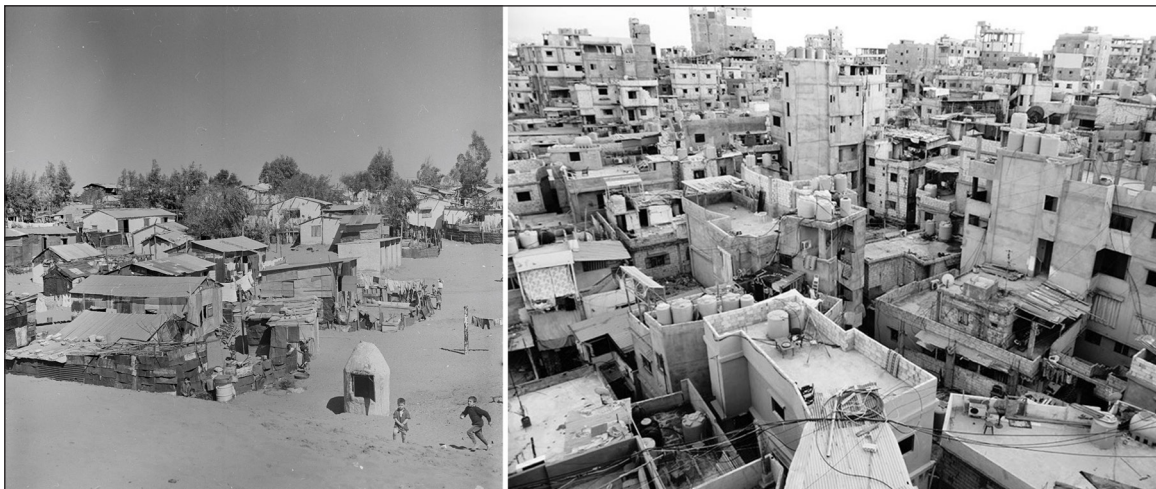
More precisely, the essay addresses a central research question: Why does the Palestinian camp look like it does?

Framed within a simplistic terminology of the first order of senses (i.e. the visual gaze), this question opens up a window into the depths of space-making inside the Palestinian camp – something which is rarely, if at all, investigated by architects and planners. To begin to answer it, one must engage in a sort of rewriting of the spatial history of the camp, effectuating a form of archaeology of knowledge in the Foucauldian sense. For Michel Foucault, knowledge always needs to be re-contextualized to reveal the conditions which gave way to it. By understanding the particular conditions, which are directly related to a specific space-time segment of history, the relationship between subject-object is revealed more accurately by tracing the nature of those relationships and their emergent counterparts. In other words, in studying space-making in the Palestinian camp, one must re-historicize the spatial narrative within a context of relationships rather than trying to impose a subject-object binary or cause-effect dynamic. This is crucial to understand the realities on the ground, whereby negotiations (i.e. the constant power play between stakeholders) became the primary element in creating the architectural scale and yet remain mobile and uncertain. The spatial history of space-making in the camp can only be understood through understanding this malleability of conditions and relations – where power takes form – outside any totalization of concept and narrative. Foucault asserts:

Archaeology tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules ... it is the task of the historian to rediscover on the basis of these isolated points, these successive ruptures, the continuous line of an evolution. [1: p. 138–141]

This methodology of producing knowledge requires one to relegate the subject and instead examine the conditions imposed on, between and across the subject: here conditions of violent exclusion, discipline, control, etc. It reveals, in spatial terms, how a humanitarian space of refuge can turn from the original 'relief-scale' into what can be seen as a 'political-scale' (**Figure 1**).

This transition from an ordered humanitarian space, regulated through a gridded format of refugee plots, into one which transgresses those imposed parameters is fundamentally a manifestation of power through spatial means inside the Palestinian camp [2: p. 48–50; 3]. The spatial means differ according to each stakeholder, with the three main stakeholders being the Palestinian refugees, the particular host government, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which oversees all camps in the region. Additionally, the physical and urban geography of the camp determines its social, economic and political thresholds, which in turn determine the modes refugees adopt for producing space. Albeit happening in different modes, what all Palestinian camps share in producing space are the adopted acts of what can be termed 'spatial violations', a concept coined within this essay. These 'spatial violations' aim specifically to overcome the institutional parameters of both the UNRWA and the host government, through the desire of refugees to build more space.



**Figure 1:** Early photograph (left) of Burj el Barajneh camp in 1950s Lebanon, showing a humanitarian scale embodied in UN plots of 96–100 m<sup>2</sup> each; more recent photo from 2016 (right) showing the 'political-scale' that has emerged over protracted displacement [Courtesy of author + UNRWA-ICIP Archives].

## Transfers of space and people

To begin to understand the Palestinian refugee camp, it needs to be placed within the historical narrative which decided its production. Palestinian camps were a spatial mechanism by the Israeli government and international decision-makers to sublimate a political right recognized within international law, while preserving superficial commitment to those laws by rehousing refugees in what could be portrayed as a humanitarian space. What developed instead was a continuous abnegation of the rights of Palestinian refugees through a humanitarian regime with no granted political mandate, and which serves to suppress their political consciousness and agency.

Palestinian mass displacement began in 1947–48, after Zionist militias had succeeded in expelling the British mandate from Palestine – later proclaiming a war against Palestinians. The result did not only involve a spatial displacement through refuge, but, at the same time, an active process of erasing what was once a Palestinian nation-state through simultaneous creation of a Jewish-Israeli nation-state. This meant that the Palestinian refugee underwent a dual process of spatial displacement and political de-legitimization.

In a conversation with Gilles Deleuze to commemorate the launch of the first Arab journal in France, *La Revue d'Etudes Palestiniennes*, Elias Sanbar expressed this paradoxical nature of Palestinian displacement in being simultaneously a displacement of people and land:

Palestine is not only a people but also a land. It is the link between this people and their despoiled land, it is the place where an absence and an immense desire to return are enacted. And this place is unique, it's made up of all the expulsions that our people have lived through since 1948. When one has Palestine in one's eyes, one studies it, scrutinizes it, follows the least of its movements, one notes each change which awaits it, one adds up all its old images, in short, one never loses sight of it. [4: p. 26]

The 'absence and immense desire to return' for Palestinians that Sanbar refers to is at the core of Israeli and international politics when engaging with the issue. In turn, Palestinian refugee camps become a spatial embodiment of such politics. Not only is there a dual process of illegitimization unique to Palestinian displacement, but in addition, the geography of host governments presents a scalar spatiality which the whole Arab world is tied to. Sanbar notes: 'We are unique deportees because we haven't been displaced to foreign lands but to the continuation of our "own place." We have been displaced onto Arab land where not only does no-one want to break us up but where this idea is itself an aberration' [4: p. 27].

Palestinian-Israeli strife can thus be argued to be firstly one of space, and secondly that of people. The first Jewish immigrant communities, predominantly coming from Europe in the late-1800s, did not integrate into the indigenous landscape but created their own spaces in the form of a *moshava* (colony), *kibbutz* (gathering) or *moshav* (settlement), all agricultural communities based on the concept of collective labour. Gradual immigration and space-making took place from 1882, and continues still as a mode of population transfer into Israel today, having morphed into urban Jewish settlements. Jewish presence hence manifested itself in the form of new communities with culturally organized spaces based on agriculture, yet programmed with the potential to grow and transform into future permanent cities, as many Israeli settlements-turned-cities prove today.

## The 'other' Palestinian space

As space inside Palestine was reshaped from a Palestinian one into a Jewish-Israeli one, new Palestinian spaces were simultaneously formed as camps (**Figure 2**). These spaces not only provided relief but also ensured the political problem impacted on bordering countries. From the onset, other host governments were acknowledged to be not only partners in relief but also negotiating agents for the permanent transfer of Palestinian citizens into their own economic systems [5]. This 'transfer' entailed a rigorous process, with various international missions seeking to propose the most feasible programme of absorbing Palestinian displacement within the Near East region, and thereby to minimize the violent nature of the crisis.

For example, prior to UNRWA being founded in December 1949, following recommendations by the Conciliation Commission [5], the latter realised the urgent need to first establish an Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East. The mission was tasked with surveying economic conditions after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, and it later made recommendations to the Conciliation Commission about sundry economic programmes which would enable 'developing' host countries to absorb the sudden economic blow of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees arriving after the war [6: para 28]. Heading the Economic Survey Mission was Gordon R. Clapp, Head of the Tennessee Valley Authority, a man involved in drawing up



**Figure 2:** The top images show incoming Jewish settlers to Palestine and the ‘immigration’ camps produced for them, while the lower images show the violent expulsion of the Palestinian people (crossing the Allenby Bridge into Jordan) and the refugee camps set up to absorb their mass displacement [Courtesy of <https://unitedstateofisrael.blogspot.com> + UNRWA-ICIP Archives].

policies in the 1930s to help the USA recover from the ‘Great Depression’. It is clear that from the outset, peace and stability in the region was envisioned through economic stability – this being given priority over the more difficult problem of finding a political solution. In fact, economic stability was considered the essential predecessor for the latter.

This is evident in the declaration of ‘right-of-return’ for displaced Palestinians, which still holds as the basis for political negotiations today – albeit having undergone several reformations in United Nations resolutions. The original text of Resolution 194 (III), written on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1948, maintained that the UN General Assembly:

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. [7]

The more active term ‘resolves’ was then changed to ‘recognizes’ (Resolution 302 (IV)) to ‘considers’ (Resolution 393 (V)), and the even vaguer term ‘endorses’ (Resolution 513 (VI)). This effectively scaled down the urgency of the political problem at hand, and more importantly, limited the associated responsibility which the international community was willing to exert publicly to address Palestinian displacement.

Economic integration of Palestinian refugees also translated into the title of the UN agency involved, whereby the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR) became the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) [8]. This reformulation is inscribed in the letter ‘W’ in UNRWA, yet it is not merely an addition of a letter, of course, but a replacement of one kind of programme and agency with another. The change transformed it from an ad-hoc relief-focused body into one meant to institutionalize a ‘relief’ programme by translation into a ‘works’ programme. UNRWA was

hence designed to urge refugees to become economically self-supporting, with the aim of discontinuing the need to offer relief, and paving the way for the winding down of the need for the agency altogether [5].

On the ground, however, the physical formation of the Palestinian refugee camps was by no means a straightforward one, involving several episodes of refuge into spaces within Palestine itself (in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip) as well as, more often, in the nearby host countries of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Thus, Palestinians found themselves grappling with existential determinations inside what was an actively violent geography. Indeed, the Palestinian camp as a constructed space is not straightforward either. This is because displacement and refuge can never be encapsulated within one system of management and operation as it involves a very large number of people actively moving and negotiating their survival, something which involves personal agency and subjectivity. The condition ensured the emergence of counter-scenarios to those designed for humanitarian management and control by UNRWA and the various host governments.

In this sense, Palestinian displacement resulted in the creation of three broad typologies of 'other' Palestinian space in the Near East: the 'official' camp registered and serviced by UNRWA; the 'unofficial' camp, not registered yet still serviced by UNRWA; and the 'gathering', not registered and not serviced by UNRWA while exceptions exist. Of the three typologies, this essay is concerned with the 'official' Palestinian refugee camp, and as such it focusses on two representative examples: Baqa'a camp in Jordan and Burj el Barajneh camp in Lebanon.

The very first calls of establishing safe spaces of shelter for Palestinian refugees came from relief agencies initially embodied within the International Red Cross and the American Friends Service Committee. Within a few years, and especially once the UNRWA began operation on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1950, a large number of official camps were established across the Near East, with the movement of refugees to those camps being provided by UNRWA or host governments. Once inside the Palestinian camp, there were two distinct material factors which had a direct relationship on how these camps evolved. The first factor was the availability of land, i.e. the actual delineated grounds, and the second was what would sit on those grounds. In the history of the Palestinian camp, the former always determined the form of the latter, not least due to the politics of the host government. For example, in the case of Burj el Barajneh camp in Beirut, the material grounds on which they camped was hilly topography formed of red sand. One resident recalls:

When we arrived to Burj el Barajneh camp, we were confronted with a large sandy hill, and the bravest would be the one to climb the top and anchor his tent there. That's what we all did. We kept climbing until we reached a high enough point, then we would flatten the spot with our hands and make a flat ground to erect our tent ... At the time, friends and relatives would ask each other to erect tents side-by-side to ensure we become neighbours, but now ... I wish we had never done that, and instead built apart so that we could have gained more space in the camp. [9]

Host government policies surpassed spatial parameters by entering into social, economic and political issues. How these parameters came to play a decisive role in the physical and political evolution of the Palestinian camp will be described in the following sections of this essay. The analysis of this historical trajectory, while overlapping with UNRWA's own development, as well as with UN resolutions, definitions, treaties and conflicts, is intended as an attempt to paint a more accurate picture of why the Palestinian camp looks like it does.

## Acts of Spatial Violation

The Palestinian camp – as with all other official refugee camps globally, for that matter – involves a costly and resourceful humanitarian regime. However, Palestinian refugees are confined under the umbrella of UNRWA whereas everywhere else in the world refugees are attended to by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The difference between UNRWA and UNHCR is quite stark, not only in the populations they serve, but in the very mandate they operate within. UNRWA's mandate is 'to carry out direct relief and works programmes for Palestine refugees' [10]. This is deliberately a non-political mandate, but one focused on providing services. On the other hand, UNHCR's mandate is politically framed: 'The High Commissioner [shall] assist ... governmental and private efforts to promote voluntary repatriation or their assimilation with new national communities' [11: para 8(c)]. UNHCR's mandate thus allows it to negotiate on behalf of the refugees for a political solution to their situation, but UNRWA's mandate denies it that sense of agency. Yet regardless of the problematic history of UNRWA, it nonetheless remains a lifeline for many Palestinian refugees. As an official body, its very existence is linked to the Palestinian refugee camp as a lived space, both of them being direct bi-products of an ongoing crisis. This was made evident in the

relentless calls by former Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to dissolve UNRWA in an attempt to dismiss the refugee problem altogether [12].

To write about the 'other' Palestinian space – namely the refugee camp – we must approach it as both 'camp' and 'space'. A camp-space is clearly more than a camp, and more than a space: it is everything that emerges between those two terms, establishing a relationship which can exist in either agreement or disagreement. The term 'camp' denotes a condition, a state around which programmes, standards, and regulations are designed, whereas 'space' refers to the actual geography, grounds and materials through which the physical state of camp takes form. Initial manifestations of this relationship between 'camp' and 'space' arose through the standardization of UNRWA's programme for spatial delivery. After only five months of operation, UNRWA realised an urgent need to 'develop rules and procedures and instructions to standardize action in all areas' [13]. This then became UNRWA's *modus operandi*, one based upon standards that were universally adopted across all its five fields of operation, thus establishing an efficiency of economy and performance. But, how can one calculate what a humanitarian space should be? Taking inspiration from the revolutionary model of production espoused by Fordism and the 'managerial revolution' in the USA, the two key elements which define 'efficiency' are time and cost [14]. It is these that make efficiency calculable and measurable in a specific currency: framed by the concept of 'profit' where the aim is monetary, or 'political' in the case of the Palestinian camp.

Spatially, the Palestinian refugees began to demarcate their camp-spaces from the onset of their forced removal, and to do so they built family and clan collectives to ensure protection and empowerment during a precarious time. This had a direct effect on the shaping of the camps, as these groupings of refugees would retain themselves spatially after arriving at a camp. Additionally, some camp locations were decided by refugees pre-emptively, claiming their land through basically squatting on it. This was decided through a clan leader leading a group to a specific area with available resources, or through existing personal contacts, trade and familial. The majority of the camp-spaces, however, were allocated by host governments and delegated under UNRWA's disposal in terms of 'right-of-use' – a fundamental 'right' while UNRWA is able to transfer to refugees inside the camp.

From the onset, the camps were perceived as relief sites by UNRWA, with its goal of resettlement, and as resistance sites by Palestinian refugees, whose goal is returning to their homeland. Resistance is not a static notion, but a highly active and operational one. The Palestinian refugee camp today remains a site of operational resistance, yet, due to the protracted nature of refuge, it is inevitable that the form and mode of resistance has taken on different shapes. Hence the following mapping scenario will demonstrate the elastic and operational notion of resistance, and the spatial forms it has constructed within a space of protracted displacement.

## Mapping spatial violations

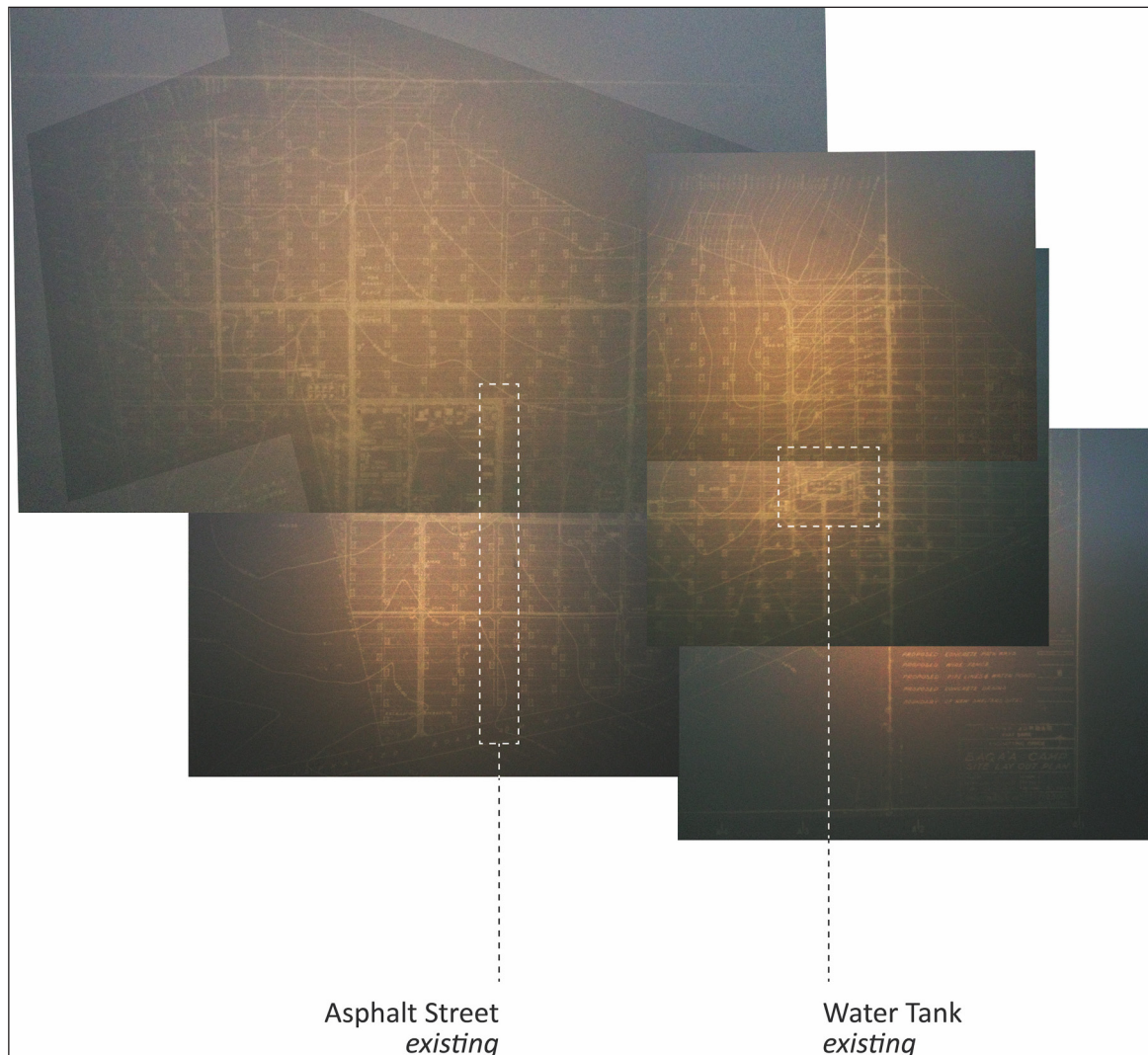
In his essay titled 'On the Critique of Violence', Walter Benjamin offers a luminous definition of violence as 'means' when he writes: 'All violence, seen as a means, is either law-establishing or law-upholding. If it claims neither label, it forgoes, of its own accord, all validity' [15: p. 13]. This explanation of violence, as the means to create new legal status, became a spatialised one inside the Palestinian camp. It was utilized by refugees to establish new terms of relationship with host governments and with UNRWA. The reason for this is that the Palestinian camps are in constant process of construction and destruction, postulating space as an ever-operating element within the camps, and one which is conspicuous and the most visible act of remonstrance for inhabitants. This deems the historical narrative of the spatial evolution of the Palestinian camp to be an orator of the stages of forced departure, initial precarity, and long protraction, while at the same time also the orator of resistance, struggle, and potential for what Gilles Deleuze calls a 'creative act' [16].

Inside the Palestinian camp, physical form is not taken from the 'pure order' of architecture, but instead makes its own order out of 'pure need'. Coupled with the constant contradictions that camp-spaces experience over time, it forces residents to live in a constant state of uncertainty. This 'uncertainty' takes on serious spatial and subjective form inside the camp, whereby refugees are constantly building up their camps through their personal investment, yet, if faced with the over-riding political question (i.e. the right to return to their homeland), they would be very quick to abandon their shelters, shops, pathways and the camp altogether. As displacement continues, the requirements to achieve this balance change, as does the physical scale of the camp: it means that a camp in a condition of protracted displacement disrupts the initial relief-scale of order without completely abandoning it. Instead, it rotates and extends itself over the relief-scale, resulting in a new ordered space and scale, perceptible only to those who build and inhabit it – i.e. the

Palestinian refugees. Thus, any attempt at formally organizing the camp-space will fail, and will be met with instantaneous restructuring by the refugees for their own political needs.

Each Palestinian camp thus has its own specific contextual history which would play a major role in determining its future architectural scale. For example, the Baqa'a camp in Jordan – just north of the capital, Amman – sits on a site said to have been intended as an army base. Thus, it seems that the site's spatial qualities, in a depressed valley controlled from all sides, best suited the Jordanian government's desire to control the second large wave of displacement emanating from the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Fayez Abu Fardeh tells of what he saw on the ground when first arriving after Baqa'a camp was set up in February 1968: 'We entered the site and there was asphalt. This was planned for an army base; they were going to build a prison before we arrived. The rest of the land was agricultural' [17]. He pointed to a large concrete water-tank on the original camp map (Figure 3), which was already existing when refugees arrived, and added 'the first wave of refugees to arrive in Baqa'a camp, my family being amongst them, were sheltered in four large tents, erected on the site which was surrounded by existing asphalt streets' [17]. This became the site of UNRWA's distribution centre where refugees could collect relief material, including food and clothing, because the asphalted pathways could be used by aid trucks.

These spatial details of Baqa'a camp indicate that such mechanisms of confinement and control were consciously used by host governments. Baqa'a camp was one of six 'emergency camps' set up in Jordan in response to the second forced displacement, and the majority of its initial inhabitants in fact came from three refugee camps established in 1948 in Jericho in the West Bank – namely Aqabat Jabr, Ein el Sultan,



**Figure 3:** Photograph of a map of Baqa'a camp as drawn up at the United Nations' headquarters in Vienna, dated 1969. On the right is the large concrete water-tank which existed on the site when refugees first arrived [Courtesy of UNRWA-ICIP Archives].

and Nwei'meh (the last of which was completely emptied of refugees so is no longer a camp). From the start, Baqa'a was meant to be a large-scale camp which could absorb as many refugees as possible within one space, and hence the Jordanian government simply abandoned its previous plans of building an army base there.

After crossing into Jordan via the Allenby Bridge (known as King Hussein Bridge on the Jordanian side), while Israeli shelling continued over their heads, the refugees heard of tents being erected for them at Karameh and Ma'addi in the Jordan valley, those being two towns close to the bridge. Given the close proximity of Ma'addi and Karameh to the border, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which by 1968 had become a visible and unified entity, soon organized itself a presence amongst the refugees in preparation for armed revolution. Om Waleed described her memories of PLO resistance fighters (*Fedayeen*) being joined by fighters from Iraq, Syria and other neighbouring Arab countries, and using the camp to hide and launch counter-attacks on Israeli forces along the border. She told of incidents of people being able to sneak back into Palestine during this chaotic time, and showed me her now grown-up son, Sameer, who had been born in Ma'addi during their brief stay there, before then moved on to the Baqa'a camp. It is truly remarkable to hear of a child's birth, meant to be a moment of joy and exhilaration, during a historical moment where life and death were constantly interchangeable, and with no glimpse of what was to come.

In Lebanon, inside the Burj el Barajneh camp near to Beirut, a different historical narrative unfolds. According to the book, *Burj el Barajneh Camp: Suffering and Hope*, ten Palestinian refugee families arrived in the Burj el Barajneh area even before UNRWA was established, and they who sought the help of the local head (*Mukhtar*), Hassan Ahmad el Sabbi'. The book notes that the *Mukhtar* in turn facilitated the granting of some land from private owners to the refugees free of charge, since the landowners wanted to aid the Palestinians in their plight. The *Mukhtar* also erected seven tents for refugee families, bearing the cost personally. In addition, Abdel Aziz Al Harakeh, *Mukhtar* of the neighbouring area, el Manshiyeh, played a pivotal role in facilitating the accommodation of refugees at Burj el Barajneh, and was formally appointed at one point to perform a 'survey' of refugees by 'applying a mark on each tent surveyed using dissolved lime substance' [18: p. 34]. This scenario however proved spatially detrimental to the future camp-space, as the first refugees in Burj el Barajneh formed such close relationships with the local chiefs that they were able to form a spatial strategy which affected the plots available for later refugees coming into the camp, even after UNRWA officially took over the camp services.

## The six maps

From these two cases, we can see that the story of each Palestinian camp began as a defined plot of land, typically released to UNRWA by the host government for 99 years. Refugees tended to place their tents in relation to kinship and preferably as close as possible to relief services and facilities. Within a few years, however, due to a lack of tents on the world market [19] and because of their fragility in what was starting to look like it would be a prolonged displacement, UNRWA changed its spatial policy to one of organized gridded layouts. From the 1950s, therefore, the camp layout consisted of prefabricated shelters on standard 96–100 m<sup>2</sup> plots of land allocated to each refugee family as a 'right-of-use' (*intifaa*), which literally translates to the legal term 'usufruct' – the use of someone's else land as opposed to owning it oneself.

'Right-of-use' could be argued to be an extension of a traditional form of land-sharing which had existed in Ottoman Palestine called *mashaa'* (meaning 'open field' or 'common'). This concept entailed dividing agricultural lands between the village families, with the plots being reassigned every 5–10 years to ensure each family had the opportunity to benefit from the differing topography. The use of *mashaa'* produced a culture within Palestinian villages whereby peasants could construct a relationship with space as a communal entity, formed and reformed to benefit every villager. Ownership was transient, existing mainly in each family's private residence. The Palestinians arriving in the refugee camps, being overwhelmingly peasants, thus brought with them this intrinsic sense of communal space and inhabitation, enabling them to adapt quickly to their new space of refuge [20].

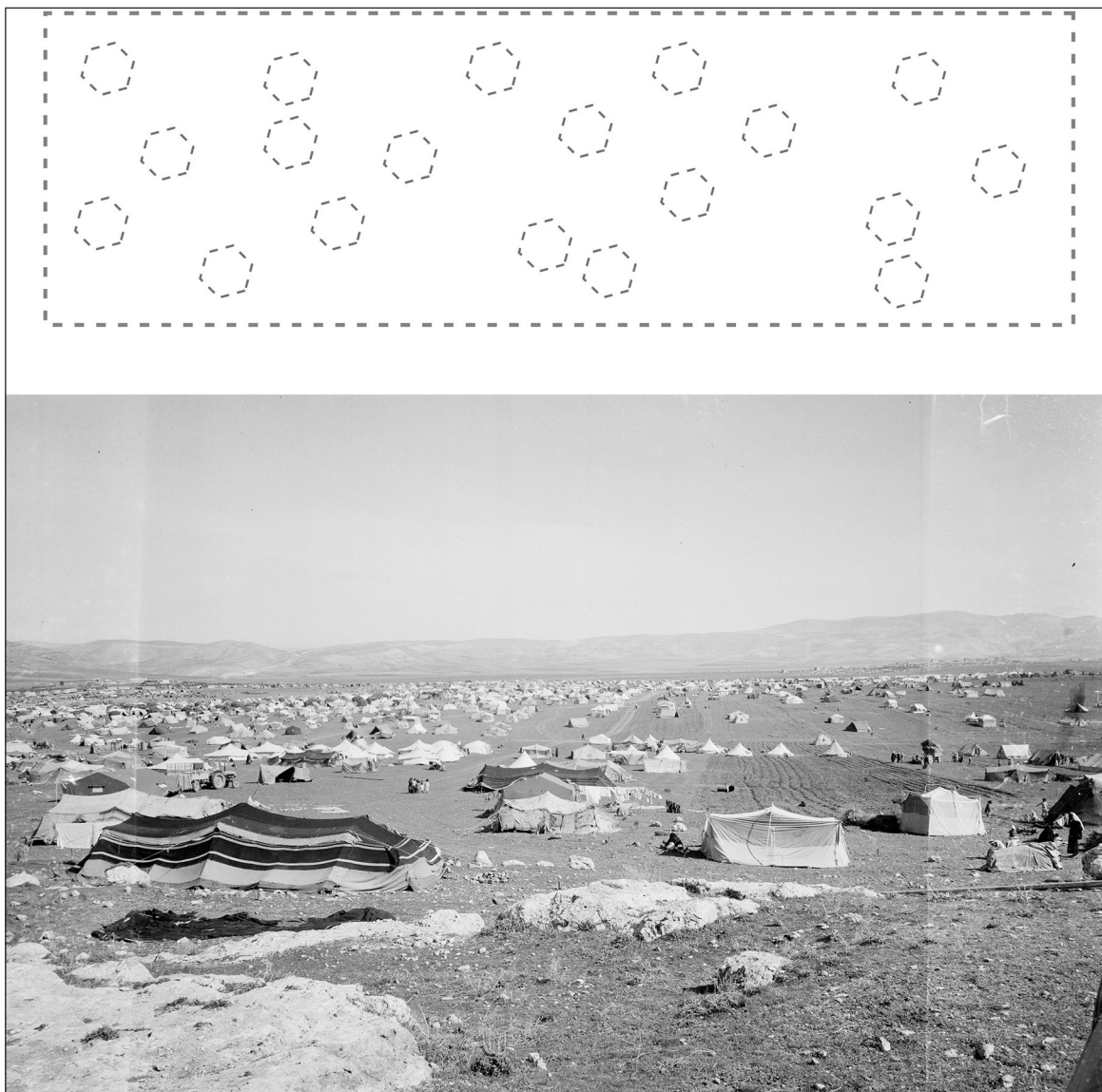
UNRWA's policy of dividing the camp through 'right-of-use' plots hence marked a turning point in spatial policing. Each refugee family was expected to adhere to their plot boundaries, and thus in turn the concept of *ta'adiyat* (meaning 'encroachment') became introduced into the spatial terminology of the camp as a different mode of spatial production. The concept of *ta'adiyat*, which I term as 'spatial violations', thus applies to any spatial encroachment which transgresses beyond the 96–100 m<sup>2</sup> 'right-of-use' plot boundary without having obtained an official permit. These acts of 'spatial violation' can be traced back in the Palestinian camps to the very first moment that tents were distributed amongst refugees as relief shelters. According to interviews with refugees in Baqa'a and Burj el Barajneh camps, if you belonged



to a powerful clan, or if you were then employed by the Red Cross or UNRWA, or if you had been able to bring money with you from Palestine and could use it for bribery, it meant you had leverage to secure bigger tents and more space [21].

Spatial deviation beyond the 'right-of-use' demarcations, embodied in 'spatial violation', created actual disruption to UNRWA's orderly relief-scale based on the 96–100 m<sup>2</sup> plots. Their relief-scale was planned to organize, surveil and control the camp-space, yet with every act of 'spatial violation' there was political instrumentalization happening at the same time. As soon as the relief-scale is subverted, it becomes instead a Palestinian scale, and refugees become less docile in that space. This is why I argue that 'spatial violations' operate, within the political economy of the camp, both as space and as refugees. The following sections will illustrate that through space-making via acts of 'spatial violation', Palestinian refugees ensure that they too have a role as a negotiator within the established power-relations, as demonstrated in the refugee-host country relationships.

To understand this argument, it is necessary to look at the development of the camp-space phase by phase. As noted, in the layout of the original 1948 camps, each refugee family would erect its own tent, largely placing it in kinship groups (**Figure 4**). In doing so, the refugees would ensure both social familiarity and empowerment within the newly established socio-spatial fabric of the camp. In fact, this type of 'kinship distribution' was encouraged and often employed as a distribution method by UNRWA. It does so



**Figure 4:** Photograph/diagram of the 1948 camp layout in Baqa'a showing a haphazard layout of tents that corresponds to previously arranged refugee groups along a kinship or village basis [Courtesy of UNRWA-ICIP Archives + drawing by the author].

to minimise social conflict inside a suddenly gathered group of refugees who were outraged at their unjust and forced spatial displacement. Additionally, it helped UNRWA to locate and survey refugee families more efficiently. Hence, the first materialization of the Palestinian camp was in a haphazard layout of tents within a defined boundary. Each family was entitled to a tent correlating to a refugee number that entitled them to relief services inside the camp, guaranteeing their inclusion within UNRWA's list. Camp boundaries produced lines of social, economic and political tension with those refugees forced to live 'outside the camp', and in this way the boundaries played an instrumental role in scaling down UNRWA's humanitarian service by deeming refugees outside the camp as illegible for some of its aid services, including at times education and healthcare.

By the 1950s, however, the scale of the social alliance within the camps was commensurable with the scale of the space being inhabited (**Figure 5**). Not only did refugees now erect their own tent-shelter, but they quickly accepted the reality of displacement – separated from the rhetoric of temporariness and permanence – by independently reforming their refuge material into more solidness, offering resistance as opposed to permanence. For example, during the early years of Burj el Barajneh camp, inhabitants would apply bitumen to their tent-canvas to mitigate the harsh winter and summer climates. After a heavy storm one winter which destroyed most of the camp tents, the Lebanese government by the mid-1950s began permitting the use of 'calculated' building materials, through UNRWA, with each refugee family being provided with 13 zinc sheets and 10 wooden columns.



**Figure 5:** Photograph/diagram of the 1950s camp layout in Baqa'a showing UNRWA's grid layout of 96–100 m<sup>2</sup> plots, and with each plot having a 12 m<sup>2</sup> prefabricated room for the family to live in [Courtesy of UNRWA-ICIP Archives + drawing by the author].

Refugees in Burj el Barajneh were quick to plug into this change, and began privately to purchase bags of cement to solidify them into concrete blocks and floors. Interviewees said that families would surround the perimeter of their zinc-sheet shelter with these cement blocks for protection. Each cement bag was only meant to produce 30–40 blocks, but refugees were able instantly to scale-up the material economy of cement, instead making 50–60 blocks per bag, which then allowed them to build more space. As building more space was prohibited, the extensions were constructed at night, away from the eyes of the Lebanese government, and were covered by makeshift facades to conceal the cement walls being built behind (**Figure 6**). At this point, the Lebanese government was aware of the rapid rate of construction by Palestinian refugees, and so banned any kind of construction inside the camp without a permit, which was hard to obtain. It assigned its gendarmes to conduct internal raids to monitor any transgressions, and imposed punishment on those caught in violation [18: p. 36]. This solidification of building material inside Palestinian camps is often misrepresented and overstated by academics as a polemical, controversial act because the use of solid material is assumed to signify ‘settlement’, thus jeopardising claims of a ‘right of return’. But in fact, for



**Figure 6:** Photograph showing various materials that refugees incorporated when erecting the facades of their shelters inside Burj el Barajneh camp, such as fabrics and zinc sheets to conceal the concrete walls being built behind [Courtesy of UNRWA-ICIP Archives].

Palestinian refugees, solidifying their built material was an initial act of 'pure need' that was required before any aim to end their displacement. An excerpt from an UNRWA report in 1951 showed that the efficient use of materials had become paramount in the Palestinian refugee camp: 'Much experimenting has been done with different types of roofing, which is at once the most expensive and the most difficult part of the construction. Roofs have been made with wood beams covered with flattened asphalt barrels, cement tiles, corrugated iron sheets, reeds and plaster' [13: n. 75–79].

The son of the original owner of the first falafel shop in Burj el Barajneh camp, opened in the late-1950s in the Ghabsiyeh quarter, told of this history of shelters inside Burj el Barajneh camp:

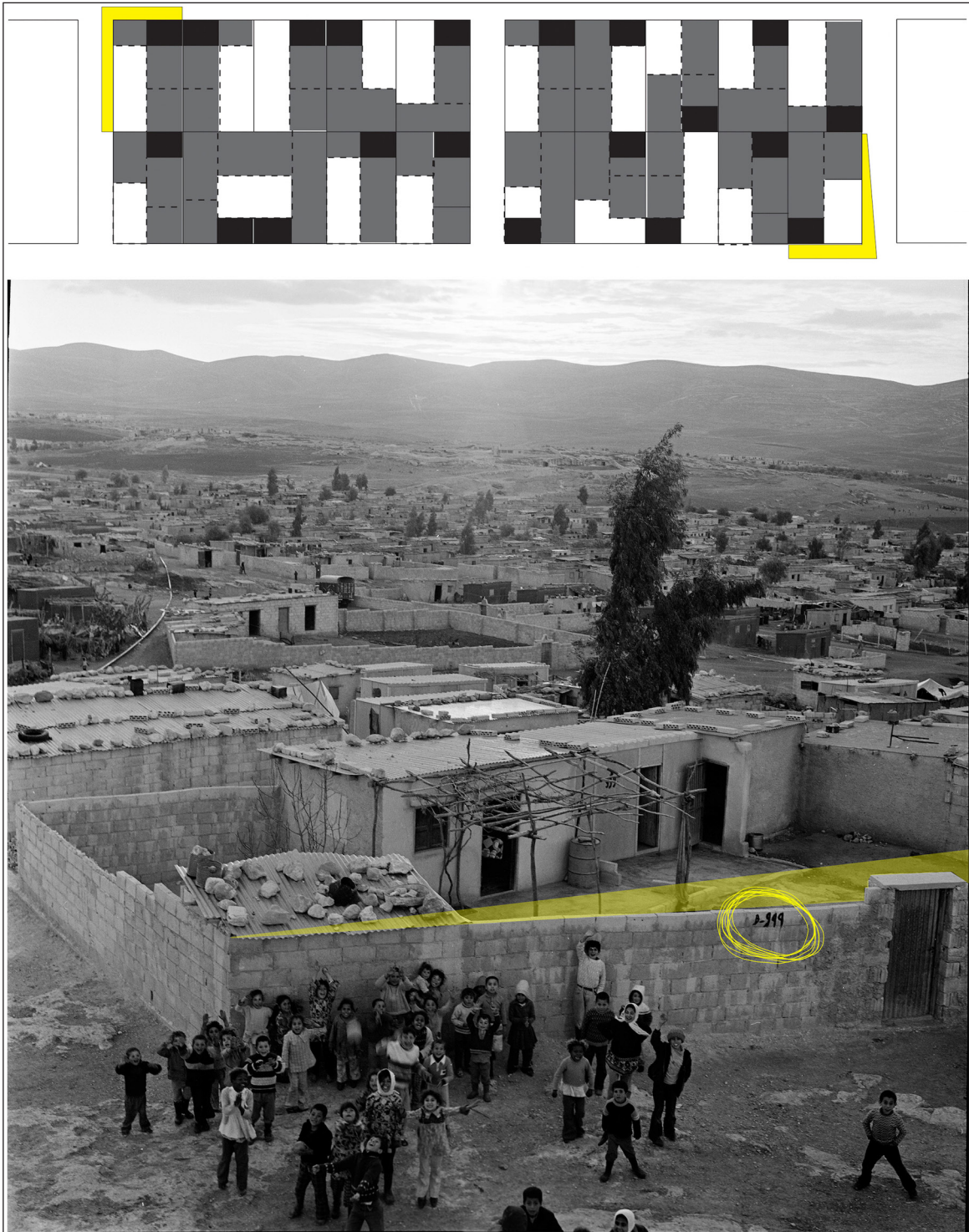
The tents did not last long, as refugees who became able monetarily began to build up slowly. In fact, what happened is that we transformed from a tent into zinc shelters/rooms (also provided by UNRWA), and then refugees who had the means would start to build up concrete walls inside the zinc, so as to conceal it from the Lebanese authorities who would roam the camp during the day in search of violators. Refugees would sneak in building materials at night and build at night, so that when the Lebanese authorities came the next day, they would find it already erected and so have to accept the reality. To avoid scuffles with the officials, the refugees never expose the concrete or stone materials. Instead, they would collect cheese and olive-oil metal boxes, often times obtained where many refugees were working, such as Jaber and Ghandour workshops. They would cut them open to make a flat sheet, and plaster the sheet over the concrete or stone to hide the material. We also innovated a mechanism to build foundations using empty gas tanks which we filled with mud and built a solid room on top. This change of materials provided refugees with protection from weather and trespassers, such as thieves ... and now, as you see, the camp is made up of accumulations of concrete rooms.'

By the 1960s, Palestinian refugees were becoming spatially self-supporting (**Figure 7**). Until then, UNRWA had not provided internal amenities such as water and sanitation for refugee plots. Aware however of the pride and conservative social values of refugee families, alongside the frustration and difficulties of having to use public toilets and showers, especially for women exposed to danger at night-time, it was now seen as only natural – indeed an existential need – to allow refugees to construct amenities if they could meet the cost. This addition of new amenities, whether made of scrap metal or wood or concrete blocks or canvas sheets, meant that refugee plots were no longer purely UNRWA structures. It proved another pivotal moment for the transformation of the Palestinian camps, in terms of space and people, since the refugees now had to ensure economic provision for themselves if they wanted to translate that into spatial provision inside their plots.

Thus from the early-1960s, and correlating with the presence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) inside the camps agitating for a return to Palestine, concrete poured in. This concrete was often subsidized by the PLO to ensure refugees could quickly meet their urgent existential needs, and then focus on achieving emancipation. It led to many 'spatial violations', with walls being realigned beyond UNRWA's 'right-of-use' demarcation of 96–100 m<sup>2</sup> plots. From this point, UNRWA's role in the camps was reduced to providing aid services, rehabilitating shelters and emergency responses. Spatial production had in effect become a refugee product. The UNRWA 'relief-scale' camp layout was disrupted, and began morphing into a new scale that reflected the spatial, economic and political needs of the refugees and their mass struggle.

Hence, by the 1970s, not only had concrete rooms proliferated, but also 'spatial violations' started to flow beyond plot boundaries in the form of *Attabat*, meaning 'doorsteps' (**Figure 8**). These *Attabat*, as physical demonstrations of 'excess' concrete, served mainly to keep muddy waters from entering the shelters while also providing spaces for outdoor social interaction. As such they became the first architectural elements to alter the scale of the camp as whole, making it a truly Palestinian space, and this in turn helped to trigger new forms of refugee agency that redefined the power relationships with host governments – creating thereby a scale beyond relief standards, and which was now capable of political action. This emerging new architectural scale hence expanded spatial and socio-political notions, in a state of constant negotiation that was expandable and amorphous. In her book, *On the Political*, Chantel Mouffe notes:

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. [22: 18]



**Figure 7:** Photograph/diagram of the 1960s camp layout in Baqa'a showing the first material additions inside the UNRWA plots to provide internal amenities for refugee families, and the re-alignment of plots as acts of 'spatial violations' [Courtesy of UNRWA-ICIP Archives + drawing by the author].

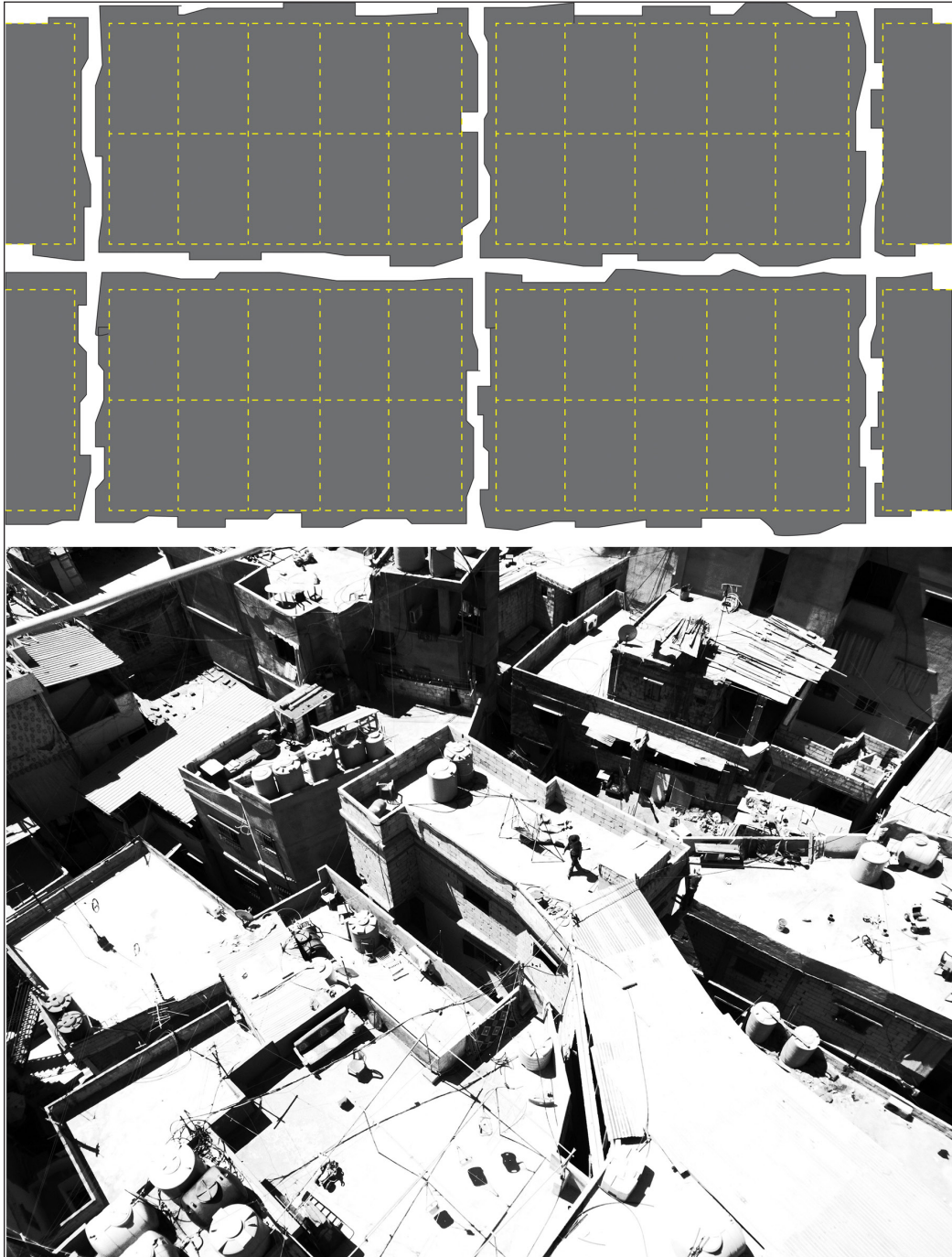
By the 1980s and 90s, the horizontal planes of Palestinian refugee camps had become saturated with concrete rooms and doorstep, and so a new kind of 'spatial violation' emerged vertically (**Figure 9**). Refugees now used another architectural element in the form of prefabricated external stairs that could facilitate upwards expansions. These external stairs tended initially to be constructed from temporary materials, enabling encroachment onto spaces above, and were then slowly replaced by concrete steps. A 'vertical sphere' was introduced to the camp-space, playing an instrumental role in shaping the spatial economy that will be noted later. Today, after more than 73 years of continued displacement and refuge, the Palestinian camp as 'space' and the Palestinian as 'refugee' remain in a relationship that is co-constitutive, fuelled by the continuous acts of 'spatial violation' (**Figure 10**).



**Figure 8:** Photograph/diagram of the 1970s camp layout in Baqa'a showing that most refugee plots were now filled with concrete rooms, and thus concrete had started to overflow outside the plots in the form of *Attabat* ('doorsteps') which kept out muddy water and served as outdoor social spaces [Courtesy of UNRWA-ICIP Archives + drawing by the author].



**Figure 9:** Photograph/diagram of the 1980s–90s camp layout in Baqa'a which, with the horizontal plane now saturated, the refugees adopted architectural elements to allow for vertical expansion. Light metal stairs (left) gradually morphed into solid, concrete stairs (right) [Courtesy of UNRWA-ICIP Archives + drawing by the author].



**Figure 10:** Photograph/diagram of today's camp layout in Baqa'a, showing that it has now become a 'Palestinian-political' space in that it facilitates a spatial economy beyond the residents' economic and social means [Courtesy of the author].

A vital difference between humanitarian architecture and refugee architecture is that the former assumes order through an abstracted generic space, whereas the latter creates its own ordered space over protracted displacement, as the Palestinian camps show. By creating new power relations through acts of 'spatial violation', the perceived order of the UN's layout has been disrupted to generate a new order produced by Palestinian refugees – one in which camp relations and assemblages act in harmony, facilitating the socio-politics of everyday life. However, this new order still has violence inscribed within it, as it remains exposed to the threat of destruction by external sovereignty to maintain spatial control. Palestinian refugees therefore accept a degree of violence in every act of 'spatial violation' they make, emanating from an unwillingness to submit to the imposed boundaries of humanitarian bodies and host governments, as manifested as an attestation to a sense of freedom [23: p. 292].

## The Palestinian scale

The political negotiating agency in Palestinian camps takes the form of a constructed 'scale' that reshapes the power relationship between refugees and host governments, precisely because the latter find the spatial element of the camp to be the hardest to control and penetrate. The state of protracted displacement that the Palestinian refugees live in could be argued to initiate both acts of 'spatial violation' and the sometimes violent responses to them from host governments. Nonetheless, for the most part, UNRWA and host governments have to tolerate the 'spatial violations', enabling refugees to construct a 'Palestinian-scale'. This toleration is informed, and can be said to be political – and indeed could be argued as an intentional move to ensure UNRWA does not need to develop any policies or rules for these acts of encroachment, absolving them from responsibility [24]. For host governments, on the other hand, the aim appears to be twofold: firstly, the recognition that 'spatial violations' are necessary for refugees to survive within a space of hardship, thus managing the crisis and frustration by allowing refugees to build more space and experience a better livelihood; and secondly, it provides the host government with an excuse for mass removal or even destruction of large sections of the Palestinian camps when deemed necessary to assert control.

The overarching quality, or state, shared by all Palestinian refugee camps is that they are all 'spaces of refuge' unlike any other spaces within their respective host countries. They possess historical and current elements which deem them 'other', or 'exceptional', as Giorgio Agamben argues in his book, *Homo Sacer*. Nevertheless, these elements do not fit with Agamben's overly determined concept of sovereign elements that aim at excluding while including. Instead, and because of the human aspect which Agamben rarely refers to – i.e. the social, and sociality – there are other material and historical elements that make the Palestinian camp-space multifaceted and operable within a shifting and precarious condition. The operability of the camp is principally spatial, even when it is manifested through other social, economic or political acts, since all these acts exist and operate within the camp-space and as such are inscribed to that specific space.

For example, the selling and renting of space occurs inside the Palestinian camp, and indeed is very much active. This has caused the emergence of a quasi-legal process of spatial transactions, whereby transactions are documented by the appropriate administrative bodies in these camps. In Jordan, the selling of camp shelters is 'recognized' through the Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA), which officiates in the transition of water and electricity rights to the buyer, as opposed to the selling of land or space as it must legally remain in the status of 'right-of-use'. This is true for all host governments, thus the original refugee name ascribed to the refugee shelter remains as the sole proprietor of that shelter, regardless of how many times it might be sold. It creates a form of socio-spatial exceptionality which is overlooked in Agamben's analysis, a form forged by refugees and recognized by host governments. This exceptionality allows the camp-space to perform in a real-estate economy, while at the same time designating it as immobile in the sense that it remains locked to a refuge status, one which is at threat of instant erasure of the camp. In talking to Adel Hamdan, the former Director of Palestinian Affairs in Baqa'a Camp, he pointed out that although such transactions are not legal they are nonetheless official, even if UNRWA and the DPA refuse to recognize these contracts [25].

What this means for the Palestinian camp-space is that it has been able to forge an independent spatial market based on economic resistance through refuge. In doing so, this has nonetheless exposed another vulnerable layer of the camp's spatiality. On the one hand, it has created social animosity inside the camp, whereby some refugees feel that the selling of the shelters is a sign of political abandonment of the Palestinian cause (**Figure 11**). On the other hand, this spatial market had caused many private landowners of the original camps to pressure their governments to relocate the refugees because they find themselves unable to reap the profits from urban development.

The spatial economy produced from acts of 'spatial violation' takes on a different mode in the case of Burj el Barajneh camp (**Figure 12**). The spatial scale (material times form) produced in the camp up until the 'War of the Camps' from 1985–88 proved to be a key element of survival during that deadliest violent episode. Abou Mohammad, who fought in that battle, pointed out that the dense vertical scale in Burj el Barajneh by the mid-1980s allowed refugee fighters to move around at higher level to defend the camp:

In armed combat, you always want to avoid the ground, as being on the ground makes you an easy target for snipers. In addition, and because the whole of the camp was targeted, we had to improvise a form of movement which would allow us to roam the entire camp on different levels. This is why we created the elevated walkways by penetrating vertical walls. [26]

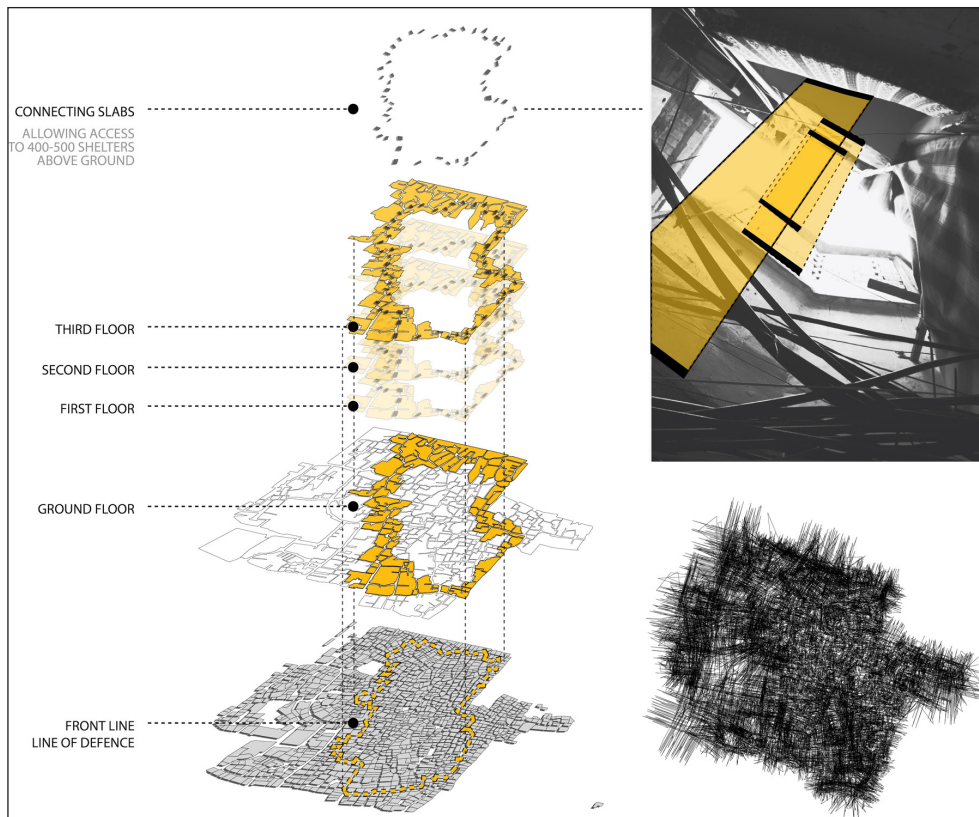




**Figure 11:** The shelter shown in the photograph at the top has the words 'For Sale' inscribed on its walls, whereas the writing on the lower shelter states: 'This house is not for sale. No to settlement' [Courtesy of the author].

He explained the mechanism that was offered by these improvised elevated walkways:

When the Shi'a Amal militiamen attacked 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 opening multiple fronts while avoiding the disadvantaged ground level. The way we achieved this was through drawing a map of the camp: we would then identify the various



**Figure 12:** Plan showing the 'elevated walkways' inside Burj el Barajneh camp built in disregard of UN demarcations, thus creating a 'political-scale' as a spatial tactic which enabled multiple levels of movement of fighters during the 'War of the Camps' [Drawing by the author].

elevated shelter walls which came face to face with one another, and we would make an opening on opposing walls, extend a wooden board between the openings, thus instantly creating a connecting bridge across different shelters. Once completed, we discovered that we could enter 400–500 shelters through these passageways without our feet ever having to touch the ground. I could roam the whole camp, without my feet ever touching the ground. [26]

Within the regime established by UNRWA, the spatial economy of acts of 'spatial violation' have an impact on policies towards the camps. Evident examples are the reconstruction of Jenin camp in the West Bank and Nahr el Bared camp in Lebanon. The latter was completely destroyed by Lebanese forces in 2007 as means to eliminate the Fatah el Islam militant group, said to have been a foreign entity of around 100 men who entered the camp just months before the conflict. During the conflict with the Lebanese army, the group took advantage of the dense and intimate architectural scale to move around covertly. This tactic of resilience, enabled spatially, was used by Lebanese forces as the controversial reason they had to completely destroy the camp [27; 28; 29; 30]. In other words, the Lebanese army felt it had to destroy the homes and livelihoods of over 27,000 Palestinian refugees just to quell the threat from a 100-man-strong militia group.

The subsequent reconstruction of Nahr el Bared camp involved a rigorous negotiation process between the Palestinian refugees (through the grassroots creation of the Nahr el-Bared Reconstruction Commission for Civil Action and Studies) and the Lebanese government. Negotiations revolved around two main issues. The first was the right of these refugees to return to their camp and not be resettled elsewhere – as in the cases of Nabatieh (destroyed in 1974), Tel Al Zaatar (destroyed in 1976), and Jisr el Basha (destroyed in 1976). The second issue was the demand for compensation of destroyed spaces in accordance with what refugees had built thus far, instead of just resorting back to UNRWA's outdated reconstruction standards. Those standards were seen now as far too sub-standard, with just 32.2 m<sup>2</sup> for a 1–2 person shelter, 46 m<sup>2</sup> for 3–5 persons, and 59.8 m<sup>2</sup> for a 6+ person home [31].

The Lebanese government agreed to both requests, while upholding their demand that the new camp had to be built to a new scale which included roads a minimum of 4 metres in width to enable army tanks to enter if needed (**Figure 13**). It could be said that these negotiations were purely spatial, as there was no change involved in the civil or legal status of the refugees – instead it was just about a change to their space.



**Figure 13:** Reconstruction of Nahr el Bared camp showing the old scale before destruction (left) and the new scale (right) as demanded by the Lebanese government [Courtesy of UNRWA-ICIP Archives].

It is precisely this economy, resulting from acts of 'spatial violation', which produces the 'political' in these camp-spaces and allows them to become embroiled in lucrative deals.

### Host government responses

Continuous episodes of destruction and reconstruction places the Palestinian camp in a perpetual state of 'spatial nascendi', meaning forever being born. The fact that Palestinian refugees have been completely sidelined in negotiations and decision-making on issues at the geo-political level means that their camp is their sole space for negotiating their rights – albeit always open to violence. Host governments are aware of this fact and thus they adopt a 'management and control' approach [32: p. 117–147; 33: p. 34; 34: p. 69–70; 35: p. 114]. This 'management and control' operates on the premise that Palestinian refugee camps constitute a constant threat to state security. In turn, this prompts host governments to address the issue of security from Palestinian refugees while ignoring the crisis of continued displacement caused by Israel's refusal and international bodies to implement UN resolutions since 1948 calling for the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland.

This intentional disregard towards implementing the UN resolutions only worsens instability in the host country. Inside his base in Ein el Hilweh camp in southern Lebanon, Brigadier General Mahmoud Issa (aka Lleno) observes that the 'Lebanese'— by which he includes its government and people – 'deal with us from a security perspective' [36]. Indeed, the Lebanese government had just announced that it would be building a wall around Ein el Hilweh camp to confine 'trouble-makers' who were using it as a hiding place. This policy of 'management and control' has historical roots in host countries like Lebanon. During the Palestinian Liberation Organization's presence in the camps in Lebanon, before the 'War of the Camps', the production of space inside the camps was directly linked to armed struggle. The PLO, the main organizer of this armed struggle movement, provided materials and often labour for refugee families not just to rebuild destroyed properties but more importantly to erect strategic spaces of resistance. In this sense, the act of refuge (in living out displacement) and resistance (in living out armed conflict) became one, and inhabited one space. The events of 'Black September', the bloody conflict between the Jordanian government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, lasting from September 1970 to July 1971 and resulting in the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan (moving to Lebanon), created a change in the Jordanian presence inside Palestinian camps. It switched towards intelligence infiltration and information gathering via secret agents within the refugee populations, creating a hostile environment and violent clashes occasionally inside the camp boundaries.

In both Jordan and Lebanon, however, the host governments much prefer to use spatial means of control rather than resorting to costly armed confrontation. Road planning is seen instead as a way to apply the required level of control over the Palestinian camps, for as Gilles 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.

[37: 322]

Highways as a spatial mode of controlling without explicitly confining, have proven highly effective in that host governments are able to instantly separate the camp-space from its surroundings, literally cutting off spatial ties. In the Jordanian context, the government has adopted a policy of rescaling the Palestinian camps by widening existing roads that cut through, thereby dividing the camps into distinct parts at a new scale that allows for the quick entry of police and tanks into the very tissue (**Figure 14**).

Confrontations between Palestinian refugees and Jordanian gendarmes are thus common in Baqa'a camp, usually as part of refugee demonstrations or protests. At times, groups of teenagers burn tires just outside the camp boundaries as a show of revolt and discontent about their unresolved condition. Historically, the Jordanian government's spatial response has been to stationing gendarmes along the camp entrances on the western edge and the two opposing groups would remain behind a 4-metre deep, unintruded no-go zone. Within this 4-metre 'tension space' a violent interchange of name-calling and stone throwing by refugees and the firing of tear-gas canisters by the gendarmes takes place, lasting until one side retreats out of exhaustion. The Jordanian police are very cautious about entering the camp because they know they would be at a disadvantage due to its dense fabric and scale, curtailing their ability to chase and arrest refugees.



**Figure 14:** Map showing the newly opened streets (in blue) in Baqa'a camp, Jordan to creating wider roads for the rapid entry of tanks into the heart of the camp [Drawing by the author].

At times however the no-go zone is breached. In Summer 2015, during my fieldwork research, bitter protests erupted inside the camp in support of Mohammed Abu Khdeir, the 16-year-old Palestinian boy who was kidnapped and burnt alive by three Israeli settlers in the West Bank. This time the conflict unfolded differently, with the gendarmes using the newly opened wider street that now bifurcates the camp to drive in their tanks (**Figure 15**). Once the tanks were able to reach the interior of the camp fabric, the gendarme soldiers were unleashed chasing after refugees, whom in turn quickly dispersed, moving towards narrow and meandering pathways to mislead and escape the soldiers.

### Constructing Space inside the Palestinian Camp

Confronted with the reality that camp-spaces are being physically altered by host governments to hinder their potential collective agency, it was clear that the urgent issue inside the camp was not about architectural form but how space operated socially, economically, and (most importantly) politically. This became my guiding approach as I began from 2015–16 to design spatial interventions inside both Baqa'a camp in Jordan and Burj el Barajneh camp in Lebanon. Given the importance of overt politics within Palestinian camps, what became clear from my fieldwork was the need to discuss socio-political determinations of spatial layouts on camps and refugees. Thus the interventions utilized spatial means to critically debate the condition of prolonged displacement and to create a spatial network predicated on sharing spatial knowledge. My spatial installations were required to plug into the existing spatiality of the two refugee camps so they could act as new, yet harmonious, elements of dialogue within the larger camp apparatus. Two initiatives emerged: 'Space of Refuge' as an exhibition about negotiating space through space-making methods, and '*Attabat*' served as actual built architectural insertions intended to bring back a form of public sociality through 'spatial violations'.

The 'Space of Refuge' exhibition aimed explicitly to link Baqa'a and Burj el Barajneh camps by addressing issues of inhabitation in the two host countries, and by showing what had become of their spaces over a protracted period of displacement. It presented the historical spatial production and subsequent evolution of Palestinian refugee camps with particular focus upon acts of 'spatial violation'. To translate this spatially, I used a 'superimposition of scales' based on actual spatial readings as built devices to transfer spatial knowledge between the two camps, and between these camps and global cities. As such, they were designed as mechanisms to reveal the 'political' inside each camp by exposing the narratives of the relationships between refugees and the host governments in Jordan and Lebanon. Once the spatial installation was built in each camp locale, altering space and movements in the camps, it instantly assumed a violation in two ways, a spatial one and an intellectual one. Architectural form had to be built to enable inhabitants to experience the interventions physically in the exhibitions.

The first iteration of 'Space of Refuge' was in Baqa'a camp in 2015, built in collaboration with members of the refugee community in the disused structure of the Jami'yet el Dawaymeh (Dawaymeh Association). This building had been idle for 22 years, because the Jordanian government regarded it as being too political, and so the exhibition was the commencing event of its reactivation. Now it was again able to open its doors to the public after its board members agreed to the Jordanian government's demand to rename it as

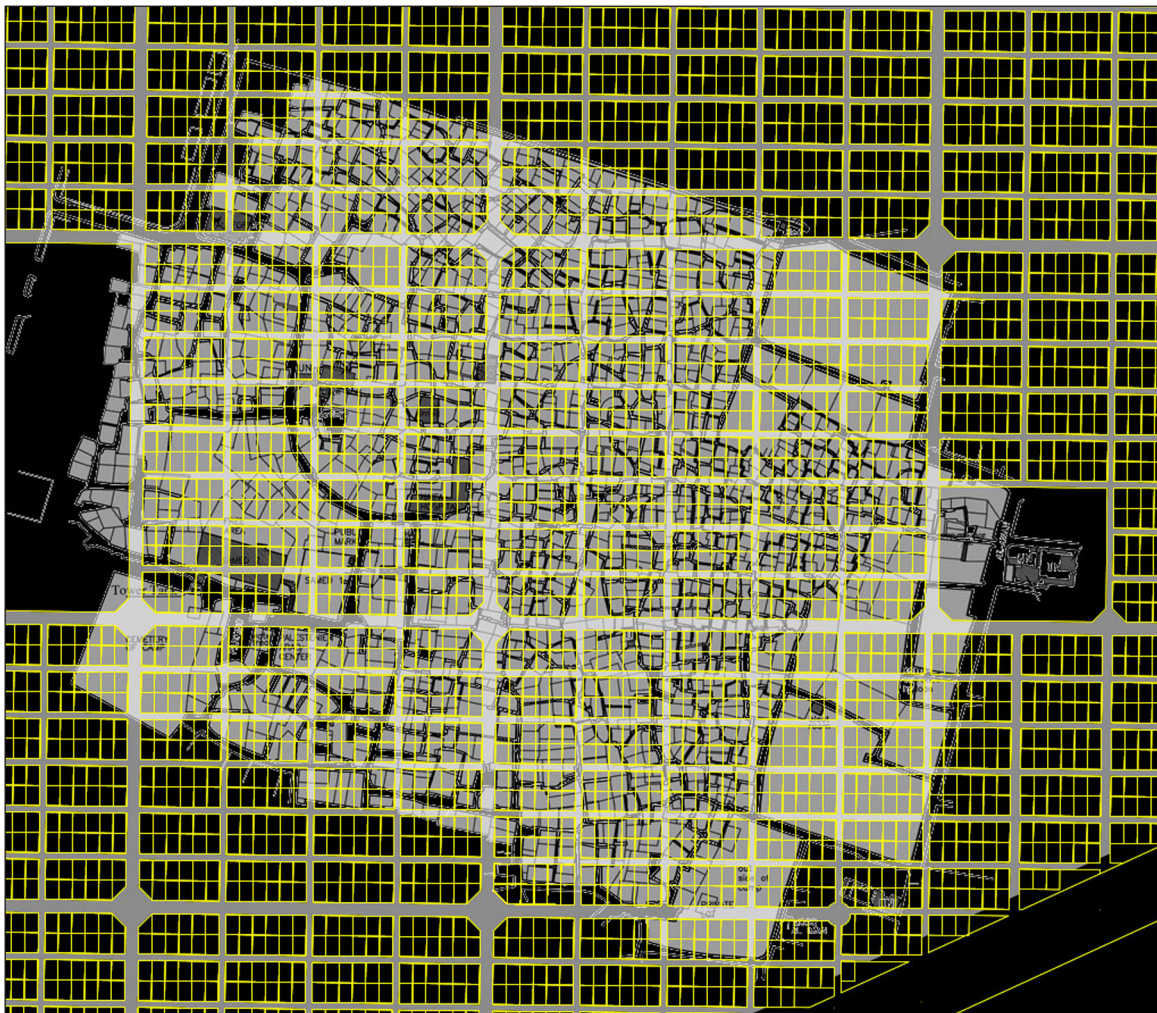


**Figure 15:** Photographs showing the 4-metre 'tension space' maintained by the Jordanian gendarmes and the refugees inside the camp and (bottom) showing entry of tanks into the heart of the camp enabled by the created wider roads [Courtesy of the author].

a cultural association rather than a political association. The Dawayneh Association had originally served as a gathering point for refugees from the Palestinian village of that name, destroyed during the 1948 Arab-Israel War, aiming to support their social, cultural and political existence. As such it was a typical form of public collective space found inside Palestinian camps, and its building was in fact a 'spatial violation' that encroached upon an old UNRWA site for public showers, re-appropriating it as a Palestinian political space.

The concept for the exhibition installation was a literal superimposition of two camp-scales on top of each other by overlapping fragments from both camps. The Dawayneh Association itself provide one scale since it occupied the typical UNRWA dimension of a 100 m<sup>2</sup> refugee plot, while the second scale, built in timber and clashing with the former, replicated the densely built scale of Burj el Barajneh (Figures 16 and 17). It was mainly the young refugees who volunteered their time and labour to construct the installation, resulting in a dynamic process of collectively constructing architecture and knowledge, while at the same time immersing themselves in a relational exchange of histories, ideas and stories with some volunteers from London.

Part of the experimental intention of the installation was to test the thresholds of space and knowledge allowed inside Palestinian camps in Jordan. To no-one's surprise, the Jordanian Central Intelligence Agency approached the head of the Dawayneh Association as soon as they received notification of the exhibition's construction. The Jordanian intelligence officers were concerned that it would revive memory of the troubled history of Palestinian presence in Jordan. After a couple of hours of implicit/explicit interrogation, and saved by the fact that Mu'awiya Hdeib, who was director of the Dawayneh Association at the time, had obtained a



**Figure 16:** The superimposition in the 'Space of Refuge' exhibition of the two different camp-scales of Baqa'a (in yellow) and Burj el Barajneh (in grey) reveals that the former's original 'relief-scale' still largely pertains, due to the Jordanian government's strong control over space, whereas the opposite condition exists in Burj el Barajneh camp, with what is now multiple encroachments and an intense use of space [Drawing by the author].

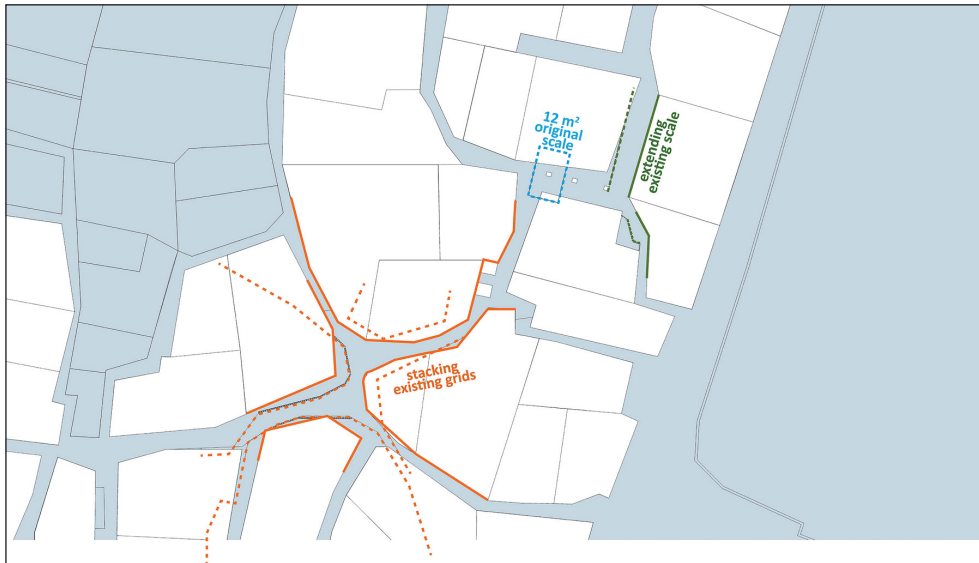


**Figure 17:** Photographs of the 'Space of Refuge' exhibition in Baqa'a camp in 2015, showing the superimposition of the Burj el Barajneh camp-scale and residents roaming the installation while viewing projected films of the spatialities of other camps [Courtesy of the author and Ronan Glynn].

permit from the Jordanian Commission for Social and Cultural Services to host the event. Hdeib was allowed to leave, but was asked always to inform Jordanian intelligence about any future planned events by the Association, and further, to refrain from events that explicitly addressed Palestinian refugees inside Jordan. He was also instructed to hang a picture of Jordan's king and a Jordanian flag inside the event space [38].

Next, the 'Space of Refuge' exhibition was transferred to Burj el Barajneh camp in 2016 (**Figures 18 and 19**). Interestingly, because of the way it was founded through negotiations with local landowners, Burj el Barajneh never experienced the full-blown UNRWA gridded layout as did Baqa'a camp. It nonetheless was organised through the micro-scale grid of the 3-metre x 4-metre zinc-clad rooms which UNRWA supplied to refugee families, yet the implementation of the plot layout was never comprehensive.

Given that the intervention in Burj el Barajneh was a continuation of that in Baqa'a camp, intended to engage in a transfer of space and knowledge between the two camps, the philosophy and format of the exhibition was rethought to interact with Burj el Barajneh's camp-scale. Confronted by the historical trajectory of the dense urban development in Burj el Barajneh, the spatial installation needed to be built on the



**Figure 18:** Map of the 'Space of Refuge' exhibition in Burj el Barajneh camp in 2016, indicating the installation site in Sa'iqa Square and the various superimposed scales [Drawing by the author].



**Figure 19:** Photographs of the 'Space of Refuge' exhibition being built when it was moved to Burj el Barajneh [Courtesy of the author].



ground within communal space with a continuous everyday use, rather than ascribing it to one building or shelter. This enabled a different superimposition of scales, this time in three different modes, each aiming to produce different 'scales of discussion' about spatial conditions. The 'first mode' questioned the limits of horizontal space by revealing the ingenious skills the refugees possess in terms of new buildings; the 'second mode' involved the superimposition of the original camp-scale in the form of the 12 m<sup>2</sup> (3 metre x 4 metre) size of UNRWA's shelter room on top of Burj el Barajneh's current layout, as an act of intersection; while the 'third mode' involved the direct application of a Foucauldian model whereby the current grid was stacked onto itself at the same as applying a 'shift' between the grids to mask off certain areas on the ground and reveal new potential spaces and spatial insights [39].

Bringing construction material into Palestinian camps in Lebanon is not permitted without an official permit, something that Palestinian refugees are rarely granted. Since the exhibition was working in a 'grey' meta-legal zone of permissible construction, the materials we could use to build the installation had to be found among those available inside the camp-space itself. This avoided the need to buy construction material from outside the camp, which would have made our intervention visible to the Lebanese gendarmes stationed at camp entrances. Hence we opted to use *marayen* (the Arabic word for wooden scaffold poles), since they are available in such large quantities inside Burj el Barajneh.

Once the exhibition's three modes of scalar superimposition had been built, we projected films of Baqa'a camp during and after the construction of the similar installation there, as a means to transfer spatial knowledge (**Figure 20**). Most refugees in Burj el Barajneh, and Lebanese camps generally, are prohibited from traveling because they are still considered stateless, with no form of identification beside their official refugee card.



**Figure 20:** Further photos of installations in the process of being erected for the 'Space of Refuge' exhibition in Burj el Barajneh [Courtesy of the author].

This means that overwhelmingly in Lebanon while Palestinian refugees have heard about other camps, they have no real image of what those other spaces look like or how they operate in their respective host country.

Turning now to the second spatial initiative that I used in these two camps, the *Attabat* ('doorsteps'), these were (as noted previously) one of the very initial forms of 'spatial violation'. *Attabat* take the form of an architectural element – being made of concrete in a rectangular block and being attached to the front elevation of the shelter, protecting it from rain and sewage water. The impact of *Attabat* on the Palestinian camp-scale was crucial, since it enabled the refugee, and thus the camp-space, to adapt to and resist the physical scale imposed on their dwellings, at least in the horizontal plane. *Attabat* took on the form of a concrete overflow beyond the UNRWA refugee plot in a desire to create an interactive social space, and, in the event of conflict, a physical impediment for any outsiders entering the camp.

The humble *Attabat* was thus imagined by Palestinian refugees as a permanent intervention inside the camp, a 'spatial violation' which affects the camp's 'political-scale'. As such, they have the potential to continue to grow, unless of course confronted by large-scale conflict. Therefore, I tried to imagine a new kind of *Attabat*, one which could also provide potentially a new sense of materiality. This was achieved by proposing to carve out a tree-pit space from the *Attabat* to host a growing plant, and thus compensation for the lack of any greenery inside the residents' plots – or in the camp-space as a whole, for that matter.

For the *Attabat* for Om Waleed's shelter, we created a simple linear design according to her wishes (**Figure 21**). Within an hour of beginning the construction process, with the concrete being mixed by her Syrian neighbour who had lived in the camp for just a year after fleeing the conflict in Syria, I turned around to look at the commotion surrounding me. Surprisingly, there were now two more unplanned *Attabat* being built in unison, creating a spatial harmony – for as soon as the group helping with construction realized we had purchased more concrete than needed for Om Waleed's *Attabat*, it was an instant decision that the 'excess' material be utilized to construct more doorsteps along that street. In the case of Abu L'Abed's *Attabat*, we engaged instead in replicating forms from Burj el Barajneh camp, as a form of transferring spatial knowledge (**Figure 22**). In Burj el Barajneh, lines are never straight, but rather are angled to respond to the camp-scale there. This decision puzzled many. Everyone who passed by during construction stopped to point out that our lines were not straight, assuming we had built it wrongly: after all, in the highly gridded Baqa'a camp, straight lines are seen as the correct, natural form. Yet once we explained the connection to Burj el Barajneh camp, a dynamic discussion would ensue about order, scale and 'spatial violation'.



**Figure 21:** Images of Om Waleed's *Attabat* in Baqa'a camp as built in 2015 [Courtesy of the author].



**Figure 22:** Images of Abu Al'Abed's *Attabat* in Baqa'a camp, also erected in 2015 [Courtesy of the author].

### Conclusion: Towards a New Camp-Scale

Spaces that emerge out of a crisis, let alone violent displacement, will remain inherently violent. This is very true for Palestinian camps, not only because of the forced displacement of refugees but also due to the continual and inexorable refusal of these refugees to regard re-settlement as in any way diminishing their 'right to return' to their homeland. Thus, in the Palestinian camp, to quote Paul Hirst: 'Fighting may be episodic, but the possibility of conflict is constant' [40]. It is also important to note that the 1948 War, which led to the creation of the Israeli state, inflicted a violent rupture to Palestinian spaces and customs by erasing over 600 villages, many of them then replaced with Jewish-Israeli spaces and customs.

As I sat with Hajjeh Om Sharar during a summer night in Baqa'a camp in July 2014, she spoke of her memories of her first years in the camp as we sipped our hot tea. What was significant to her was the alterations of social and cultural behaviour by the new spatiality of the camp. The layout and materiality of this new space caused the women in the camp – who overwhelmingly came from Palestinian villages – to adjust. Hajjeh Om Sharar told me, as she held her loose white headscarf: 'Back in the Palestinian village, women had to dress much more conservatively when in public.' She then tightened her scarf in a knot and placed it where her neck met her chin to show me the extent of coverage previously, while noting:

But in the camp, the wadi' [situation] of having to share public restrooms and showers, even with men, forced people to quickly become pragmatic and ease certain customs as there were other more serious matters to confront. We even started to pull up the bottom of our thobe [Palestinian traditional dress], and would knot it underneath our waste-belts so that we were able to walk in the muddy grounds of Baqa'a camp with our boots on.' [41]

Although Palestinian space and culture has adapted to its new condition of being outside Palestine, it nonetheless remains in a state of flux (**Figure 23**). Palestinian refugees, whether living inside or outside the camp-space, are unwilling to settle the ground beneath their feet. Their current life and imagined future are both attached to a question of justice – or rather, injustice. In the Palestinian camp, this question of justice takes on extreme forms because the camp-space is itself a pure embodiment of justice un-attained.



**Figure 23:** Palestinian displacement did not only involve a violent spatial removal, but also a forced reformulation of the customary social traditions and behaviours of village life in a new setting [Courtesy of UNRWA-ICIP Archives].

This is precisely why the Palestinian camp remains a space where the re-escalation of violence is a constant potential. To have a form of livelihood within such uncertainty, refugees continue to invest in their shelters, and their camps, while always willing to abandon them 'without looking back', with this being a common sentiment expressed in Baqa'a and Burj el Barajneh irrespective of their different host countries.

While seemingly a violent sentiment, this willingness to abandon a fully equipped refuge space is precisely because it exists in two modes: violence of time, and violence of space. Because of the camp's aberrant qualities, Palestinian refugees conceive and live out a different form of time and space. To understand this better, we need to think of time inside the camp in a Bergsonian sense. Thus, whereas most people understand time as a measurable entity (minutes, hours, days, years), Palestinian refugees speak of it more in affinity with Henri Bergson's theories. For Bergson, one must talk of duration and not time, as duration makes no separation between present and past, and is instead 'the continuous life of a memory which prolongs the past into the present' [42: p. 38]. Indeed, memory in Bergson's explanation is not merely a frozen scene tucked away in some mental archive, but very much a 'life' that continues to roll in synchronic motion with the present, striving towards an imagined future. Both duration and simultaneity constitute our world. To live a duration inside a situation of prolonged displacement means to continuously manage the past and present in a highly dynamic way to figure out one's current state, while also not losing sight of the future. Inside the camp, therefore, the experience of time becomes different. This is not because refugee camps somehow condense time or temporalize it in a space meant to exist temporarily: on the contrary, the 73 years of Palestinian camps show that it is in fact the opposite of temporality just as much as the opposite of permanence. It is hence this fickle state, which resides between temporality and permanence, in which Palestinian refugees are able to capture and grant time with a physical, architectural form. This is done through the proliferation of acts of 'spatial violation' that are intended to express this specifically vital, dynamic state of duration for those living in the camp-space (**Figures 24, 25 and 26**).

In the academic sphere, while some studies of spatiality inside Palestinian camps do exist, they lack a detailed and critical reading at the micro-scale of space-making. Thus, despite their useful contribution to refugee studies, spatial studies like those by Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, Ismael Sheikh Hassan, Abreek-Zubiedat and Luigi Achilli, all remain within a generalised urban scale which misses the historical



**Figure 24:** These recent images show the *Attabat* for Om Waleed and the lower images the *Attabat* for Abu Al 'Abed now enriched with greenery [Courtesy of Abu Ahmad and Mohammad Nabulsi].



**Figure 25:** The proliferation of other *Attabat* around the Baqa'a camp can be seen in this 2017 photograph, following the lead set by this research project [Courtesy of Mohammad Nabulsi].



**Figure 26:** Photographs of 'spatial violations' in Nahr el Bared camp in 2012 after its reconstruction, with the yellow highlighting showing how refugees instantly constructed space beyond the parameters laid down by UNRWA and the host government [Courtesy of UNRWA-ICIP Archives].

developments in the production of the Palestinian camp-space. This essay is the first to challenge the usual spatial narrative about Palestinian refugee camps by adopting a form of 'archaeology of knowledge' that traces these successive practices of space-making. Acts of 'spatial violation' thereby emerge as an entirely new concept with which to understand how the Palestinian camp constructs its architectural shape and guarantees its political agency. Additionally, this study introduces new sources of research material including historical maps, fieldwork drawings, personal spatial narratives, and spatial interventions designed and built inside the camps to help residents and academics grasp the processes that are happening. Lastly, this essay links to cities globally through an act of knowledge exchange which transferred the exhibition installations to a gallery in central London [43].

As architects and urban designers, we often find ourselves thrown off-track by our received knowledge when thinking about issues such as the space, design and behaviour inside places such as the Palestinian refugee camp. This is because we are trained to approach the camps in the same way that UNRWA and host governments do, assuming that design of form and scale will inevitably produce a particular mode of life. However, if we have learned anything from Palestinian camps, it is that spaces are people, they are cultures and customs, they are durations, and, most importantly, they are socialities [44]. Situating our conception of space in such terms when looking at the Palestinian camp allows us to better understand the continued existence of those camps and why Palestinian refugees invest in them yet would quit them in a heartbeat. It is the question of justice in pure physical form.

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### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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