The Refugee as not Homo Sacer: 
Generating personas of 21,000 Palestinian Refugees living in Camps in Lebanon

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INTRODUCTION

Refugee condition and spaces in the past have been analysed and observed through Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben’s observation of bare life and refugee camps by political geographers, anthropologists and architects, to name a few, state of exception begins to become the rule and gains a permanent spatial form. Thus rendering the inhabitants to suffer ‘bare-life’ whereby they are stripped off their identity, independence and all rights that would be granted to one residing outside a space of exception. Dating back since the late 1940s, Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon are a credible model to challenge this view.

My research focuses on three camps, Shatila, El-El Hweh and Nahr El Bared and are used to examine despite a supposed authority of a single sovereign power there are complex power struggles between various parties from host governments to humanitarIan agencies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), NGOs and also refugees themselves whom personalise, organise and contest the camp.

This exploration of the materiality and social and spatial development of these camps advocates for a more personal and less statistical perception of camps, thus providing critical insights on how refugees are merging within the community and becoming part of the urban fabric.

CONCLUSIONS

Palestinian camps are truly “the background model for research on present-day camps” and a way for us to look further from the Agamben totalitarian observation of refugee camps and grant us to realise that one cannot overlook the social and cultural activity that erupts in those spaces of exception.

Upon taking this contemporary observation one can see how due to location of the camp interested in building a home would need to “seek approval from the owner of the top flat whose permission costs between 2000 and 3000 US dollars”. This therefore supports the view that Shatila has developed to become “a space in objective to the Agambenian understanding” that we can no longer describe Palestinian refugees as the “Homo Sacer” - “an outcast, one whom it was pollution to associate, who dared to take no part in any identification”

"Agamben’s concept of bare life indeed is frail but need anchoring empirically” as through an exploration of these long existing refugee camps we can “demonstrate that refugees and others exposed to the camp are at once excluded and marginalised while simultaneously being able to create new identities, communities and political projects”

REFERENCES


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