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Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk

A No-Camp Policy: Interrogating Informal Settlements in Lebanon

As fewer refugees move into formal camps, what kinds of non-camp spaces are emerging and how does that challenge the ways in which we understand the management and politics of refuge? This paper seeks to shed light on this question through an analysis of informal settlements in Lebanon. The Syrian crisis has displaced millions of people, most of whom have moved into neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The Lebanese government, faced with a longer history of Palestinian camps and their militarization has refused to allow the establishment of official refugee camps for Syrians. As a result of this 'no camp' policy, Syrians are forced to either live in private rented accommodation in towns and cities throughout the country, or in informal settlements (ISes) built on private, often agricultural land. These informal settlements are built and developed through a complex assemblage of humanitarianism, hospitality, security, economic and political considerations. In this paper, I look at the physical and social spaces of informal settlements in the Bekaa Valley, Eastern Lebanon, examining how differential access to aid, support, security and tacit recognition by the state has led to variations amongst them. In doing so, I expose how an informalized response to the crisis through a system of deregulation is enabling refugee spaces to emerge that are visible, yet unrecognized, flexible, yet precarious. These spaces destabilize the city/camp dichotomy by drawing together elements of both. In engaging with debates on informality, the paper contributes to a growing critical literature on refugee geographies and seeks to expand beyond the reductive narratives of refugee camps, thereby offering insights into refugee futures in increasingly uncertain times.

Keywords

Introduction

On a bright morning, as we drove on the road to Zahle from Bar Elias in the Bekaa Valley, my research assistant pointed out a cluster of white tents just off the highway. It wasn't a particularly large cluster; only a few dozen tents were visible, but it was one of many scattered across agricultural fields that could be seen from roads and highways crossing the Bekaa valley. She noted that these were some of the informal settlements for Syrians. Perhaps it was because I had not anticipated seeing the settlements so close to the road that I thought it was a strange sight- white sheets clustered behind buildings, amongst farmlands, these tents were simultaneously hidden and visible, symbolizing perhaps, the fate of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, being made invisible through governmental policies, yet being starkly present through their sheer numbers.

Since 2011, over a million Syrians have crossed into Lebanon due to the on-going civil war in their country. Lebanon and Syria have historically shared a relatively open border, which has made

crossing into Lebanon a far easier process than migrating into Jordan, which also shares a border with Syria. The two countries have also had a long and contentious history[1], and Syrian workers have, over the years, come to Lebanon to work in agriculture, construction and other trades. With the war erupting, however, this relationship has undergone further changes. Until 2015, the movement between Syria and Lebanon has been fairly unrestricted, following the long-established policies of not requiring visas at the border. Many families have also extended unconditional hospitality to refugees. However, as numbers have continued to grow, and the crisis has become more protracted, it has caused growing tensions between refugees and local communities. Refugees have added pressure to families already struggling to cope economically, and overwhelmed infrastructure and resources in many parts of the country (Fawaz et al., 2014; Government of Lebanon and United Nations, 2014; Yassin et al., 2015). Furthermore, although many Syrians fled to Lebanon due to the war, they have not been classified by the Government of Lebanon (GoL) as refugees but as displaced persons or de-facto refugees- categories that do not offer any legal protection in Lebanon, a country that is also not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention (Bidinger and et al, 2015; HRW, 2016; Naufal, 2012). The magnitude of the crisis has also played into larger existential politics in the host country. After 1 million Syrians were officially registered in the country by summer 2014, the Lebanese government decided to restrict the migration of Syrians into the country by creating stricter visa and work requirements. These include requiring a sponsor and paying $200 per person to renew residency status(HRW, 2016)[2]. The financial costs of these have been particularly burdensome to poorer Syrians, most of whom have stopped renewing their papers and now live in the country illegally (ibid). The lack of legal protection or status has created a deeply marginalizing situation for them.

A key aspect of Lebanese policies towards displaced Syrians has been the refusal to allow the establishment of formal refugee camps by humanitarian organizations. As a result, innumerable informal settlements have proliferated across private agricultural lands. An informal settlement is defined as "… a settlement that was established in an unplanned and unmanaged manner, which means they are generally unrecognized. There may or may not be an informal or formal agreement between landlords and residents of the settlement. The 2015 Lebanon Shelter Sector Strategy formally defines an Informal Settlement as: 'Unofficial group of temporary residential structures, often comprising of plastic-sheeting and timber structures and can be of any size from one to several hundred tents. Informal Settlements may have some informal community-led management.'"[3] These informal and transient spaces offer a degree of flexibility to residents, in that they can work, move in and out of ISes at their own risk. Interestingly many of these 'informal settlements', also incorporate spatial features and governmental practices similar to 'camps', such as forms of screening and

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[1] Including the Syrian occupation of Lebanon that only lifted in 2005.

[2] These policies have been modified as of earlier this year and they waive the annual $200 residency fee for Syrians provided "they registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) before January 1, 2015, or obtained residency through their UNHCR certificate at least once in 2015 or 2016" (HRW, 2017). The policy nevertheless continues to exclude nearly half a million Syrians who are not registered with UNHCR. See https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/14/lebanon-new-refugee-policy-step-forward

[3] Definition taken from https://data.humdata.org/dataset/syrian-refugeees-informal-settlements-in-lebanon. Last accessed 2nd January, 2017.

policing of residents, but without the formal legitimacy granted to them either through the state or humanitarian organizations. This 'informality' of status and of materiality also has variations, which is contingent on the ways in which humanitarian organizations, landlords, and the state intersect with each other. This situation gives rise to the key argument of this paper: that given the increased decampment of refugees and their move into other non-camp spaces such as cities, we need to pay closer attention to the role of informality in their production. Through careful spatial analyses, we need to interrogate how these settlements inhabit the grey space of legitimacy and what that means for the future of refugee politics and humanitarian governance.

While theorizations on the refugee camp are useful in the study of these spaces, they are inadequate, in that they fail to account for the ways in which socio-economic relations and the limited capacity of the state can produce other kinds of refugee spaces. Here, the debates on informality, borrowed from urban studies becomes useful in unpacking the ways in which the privatized responses have emerged in a context of deregulation and crisis, thus producing spaces that are transient, flexible, and marginal. The paper elaborates on these ideas, challenging the dichotomy between cities and camps in studies of refugee spaces and argues instead that spaces of refuge lie on a spectrum between the two. Paying close attention to how different politics of humanitarianism, hospitality, economics, informality and security intersect in these spaces can help us understand the ways in which different forms of refuge may evolve in the future as displacements and crises become more complex and protracted.

In considering the relationship between the settlements and host communities, it is important to consider geography and scale in this analysis. As Landau (2003) demonstrates from his work on Tanzania, refugee influxes into a country and into specific regions can lead to geographical variance in governmental practice as well as the relationships between citizens, refugees and the state. Despite the fragmentation of state authority and its responsibility towards citizens, the influx of refugees and perceived hardships resulting from them affects the ways in which local residents construct ideas of 'us', 'them', citizenship and belonging. Like in Tanzania, in Lebanon, not all parts of the country have been equally affected by the Syrian crisis. It has been most prominent in the Bekaa, Beirut and North Lebanon (Fawaz et al., 2014). According to the statistics reported by UNHCR in June 2015, there were 655 informal settlements with 74,450 of registered Syrian refugees in the Bekaa governorate in Eastern Lebanon alone. I thus focus on the Bekaa as this it has one of the largest populations of Syrian refugees and informal settlements and because of its closeness to the border.

The fieldwork is part of a larger project that took place over a two year period between summer 2014 and summer 2016 and looked at the urbanization of the Syrian crisis in Lebanon. I was interested in understanding how the Syrian crisis had affected the infrastructure and urban governance in urban and peri-urban regions in Lebanon. In conducting fieldwork in Bar Elias, it became impossible to ignore the presence of informal settlements that so strongly affected the issues of development and governance in the municipality. Thus we included interviews and field visits to the informal settlements as part of our research plan.

The data used here is gleaned from policy papers, NGO reports as well as fieldwork in the informal settlements in the municipality. I undertook field visits to the Bekaa with my research assistant and she continued many of the visits to the informal settlements after I left. The discussions used are therefore gleaned from the visits we undertook together as well as ones where my research assistant undertook them on her own. Our interviews involved a range of stakeholders, from NGO workers, municipal authorities, landowners on whose land these settlements are hosted, to the refugees themselves. Our visits to the informal settlements were always facilitated by members of the municipality or the Regional Technical Office (RTO) or NGOs. It is important to acknowledge here that having members of the municipality, particularly police, who accompanied us to several of the settlements, clearly affected the people we were able to access, the kinds of interviews undertaken and data that we gathered. These were often people in positions of power in the settlement and very often men. Hence, on the one hand they enabled us to gain access to the settlements fairly easily, but on the other hand, our relationship with them undoubtedly modified and muted many of the criticisms that Syrians living in the settlements would have otherwise expressed. However, we were not entirely sure if it was possible to access these spaces without a gatekeeper-be they municipal workers or NGO workers-as these settlements are located on private land, and had security set up at the entrances to several of them. It appeared to be problematic (though perhaps not impossible) to simply walk into one of these places and do research, especially as both my research assistant and I were outsiders in this context.

The paper is divided into four parts. In the first, I draw upon the literature on refugees and specifically refugee camps, self-settlements urban refugees and informality. I also look at a brief history of Palestinian camps in Lebanon that have played an important role in determining the no-camp policies towards the current Syrian crisis. In the second part I discuss two settlements in the Bekaa Valley to highlight the varied nature of these spaces both in terms of their physical spaces, and also the kinds of security they are subjected to. I then unpack the implications of informality and informal settlements on the politics and governance of refugees before concluding.

Spaces of Refuge

Geography has been particularly attentive to the unfolding of humanitarian crises in different parts of the world and the impacts these have had on migration, borders, detention, and the encampment of some of the most vulnerable people. Scholars have engaged in critical analyses for example, on the condition of asylum seekers and migrants attempting to cross over to First World countries in Europe, or to Australia and the United States. They have discussed the deeply problematic ways in which asylum seekers for example are intercepted on land and in the sea, and detained. This research has thus highlighted the violence of borders, the practices of sovereignty outside of the boundaries of the nation-state, the production of extra-state spaces that in effect become 'waiting' rooms for those fleeing desperate situations be they poverty or war, or both. (Andersson, 2014; Hyndman and Giles, 2011; Hyndman and Mountz, 2008; Mountz, 2011; Mountz et al., 2013; Mountz and Loyd, 2014).

With regards to those fleeing war or humanitarian crises- otherwise labelled 'forced' or 'involuntary' migrants'- the literature has expanded beyond detention centres in First World countries to refugee camps in Third World countries. In fact these spaces are deeply intertwined with each other. As Malkki aptly noted in her earlier work, the refugee problem is a Third World problem, but it is so because the First World keeps the masses of displaced persons away from its borders, through border control, the policing and incarceration of migrants and the financial maintenance of vast refugee camps in the Third World that often house hundreds of thousands of people (Malkki, 1995). If the First World detention centre holds thousands of people in indefinite detention until resettlement or deportation, the Third World refugee camp holds tens of thousands, or sometimes hundreds of thousands of people in equally permanently temporary conditions. As Richard Black (1998) notes, host governments are keen to put refugees in camps to separate them from local populations for security reasons. The language that is invoked however is that of efficient aid delivery and protection.

From Dadaab and Kakuma in Kenya, to Shatila in Lebanon or Zaatari in Jordan, camps that hold refugees over increasingly long periods of time also bring about profound spatial changes. Developed as an emergency response, as the refugee situation becomes more protracted, tents begin to give way to more permanent structures, informal economies begin to flourish, and camps often develop into important economic spaces that knit together humanitarian aid, and local, national, regional and international economies in complex ways (Jansen, 2016; Newhouse, 2015; Werker, 2007). This phenomenon of protracted displacement and the expansion and evolution of camp spaces have led many within the social sciences to query how to theorize and understand the political, legal, social, economic and material conditions of camps. The unique socio-legal conditions of the camps have played key roles in the debates around how to develop appropriate socio-spatial theories. Are these exigent cities? Is this emergency urbanism? Are they cities or camps and how do these spaces challenge our ideas of both (Agier, 2002, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Malkki, 2002; Montclos and Kagwanja, 2000)?

The language of camps draws heavily on the philosophy of Agamben, noting the continuities between colonialism and encampment. These analyses see camps as spaces where the world's most marginalized people are warehoused and 'managed' through humanitarian care and control. Hence, refugees are reduced to bare life, awaiting release from a space that offers survival, but not political voice or community (Hyndman, 2000; Minca, 2015). Critical geographers have challenged this rigid application of Agamben's work to the understanding of refugees and refugee camps. Noting the complexity of lives of refugees and the ways in which spaces of refugee camps are developed and modified, they have shed light on the different ways in which actors, materials and aid intersect to create unique forms of politics in these spaces (Darling, 2009; Katz, 2015; Newhouse, 2015; Ramadan, 2013; Sanyal, 2014). Scholarship has also questioned the intersections where camps meet cities or camps become parts of cities and these exceptional spaces bleed into their surrounding environments (Martin, 2015; Sanyal, 2014).

 While much of the scholarship on refuge focuses on camps formally established by the UNHCR and/or the host government, it is important to pay close attention to non-camp spaces of refuge. This

is increasingly significant as first, critiques mount against camps and second, the reality that most refugees are not living in formal camps anymore becomes further apparent (Bakewell, 2014; Kihato and Landau, 2016). Some of this literature has looked at the challenges of self-settlement of refugees outside of camps in both rural and urban areas (Bakewell, 2014; Hovil, 2007; Kaiser, 2006). Self-settlement is thus a broad category that covers different geographies and leans on a camp/non-camp binary. Examples of self-settlement vary from Burma (Bowles, 1998), to Uganda and Zambia where refugees have lived in self-settled spaces with varying degrees of state support and acquiescence over different periods of time, to urban refugees in different parts of the world. In the Middle East self-settlement has also been fairly common - Iraqi refugees fleeing the US invasion in 2003 or Lebanese fleeing to Syria during the 2006 war between Israel and Hizbullah have not been encamped (Gabiam, 2016). Palestinians in Lebanon have lived in 'informal gatherings' for many years (Doraï, 2010; Martin, 2015). These informal spaces, as Elsayed-Ali, (2006) points out, lie outside of the jurisdiction of UNRWA and are therefore bereft of their services, but registered Palestinians living in these places are allowed to access UNRWA services in official camps. They are thus seen as occupying a grey space between the official camp and the city as neither the host state nor the camp officials provides assistance to them. As Doraï (2010) notes, the conditions in these spaces appear to 'blur' the distinctions between the formal and the informal as these spaces appear to become increasingly camp-like. Bakewell (2014) notes that those who choose to self- settle may forego the aid safety net of the camp, but self-settlement may provide livelihood opportunities that may not be available in camp spaces. He further notes that there is a need to recognize the flexibility between camp spaces and spaces outside as people move between the two. There is, thus, a need to rethink spaces that emerge in-between.

Within the self-settlement discussions, there has been a growing interest in urban refugees (Fabos and Kibreab, 2007; Sanyal, 2012). As Darling (2016) points out, the discussion of urban refugees has been relatively new as UNHCR has only recently acknowledged the growing numbers of refugees in cities in a productive manner. However, different disciplinary approaches have explored various facets of urban refugee experiences. Within this literature, scholars have examined: livelihood opportunities, constraints and exploitation of refugees (Campbell, 2006; Grabska, 2006; Jacobsen, 2006); the production of informal social networks that enable refugees to cope in insecure and unstable urban and national contexts (Palmgren, 2014); urban informality (Darling, 2016; Sanyal, 2014) social practices and mobilities across urban space (Fábos, 2015); the role of different actors in policing, controlling refugees and citizens and their access to material and symbolic resources (Fiddian, 2006; Landau, 2006; Pasquetti, 2015); and the practices and politics of hospitality including around ideas of the city as sanctuary (Bagelman, 2016; Darling, 2010; Squire and Darling, 2013). Building on the relationship between camps and cities, scholars have also asked questions about the assumptions made about the urban as a political space, about citizenship rights, and drawn comparisons between camps and other (urban) socio-spatial formations built around different types of urban outcasts (Pasquetti, 2015; Picker and Pasquetti, 2015; Sanyal, 2014).

The literature on refugee camps and non-camp spaces have thus provided a rich empirical and theoretical foundation that has highlighted the highly ambiguous and shifting nature of refuge and the stakeholders involved in its production. Drawing on both bodies of scholarship, I wish to explore informal settlements in Lebanon as spaces that emerge in the place of formal camps - through a collusion of private interests, state acquiescence and humanitarian aid. Here, the usage of the term 'informal' is particularly important as it enables us to draw on the debates around urban informality to unpack how the relationship between regulation by the state, informal moral economies and humanitarian crisis helps produce these settlements. Critical discussions challenging the binary between formal and informal and instead focusing on the politics of regulation has helped untangle the workings of the state in the production of space and everyday life, including economic and other activities. Rather than earlier accounts of informality being tied to sectors, groups or territories, scholars have argued that informality - a contested term - is a system of deregulation where the state sanctions what is legitimate and authorized. Thus, the territories of informality extend beyond the slum to include wealthy, yet unauthorized buildings and suburban developments, that sport a 'world class aesthetic' (Ghertner, 2008). Such a relationship is ever-shifting, often used by the state as a tool of accumulation and authority, enabling the production of zones of exception and collusion of private and political interests in producing large scale infrastructure and developments for the benefit of the wealthier classes. The suspensions of laws and regulations have permeated urban planning in many contexts and has arguably become the mode of urban life in cities across the world (McFarlane, 2012; McFarlane and Waibel, 2012; Roy, 2009, 2011). Expanding on this work, scholars have explored other means by which the state functions, the ways in which it entangled with informal moral economies[4] (Gandhi, 2012), and how it becomes a necessary mode of operation in circumstances where the state's ability to extend hegemonic power over territory and population is limited. For example, in contexts where state power is more fragile, and where it shares power with non-state actors or a range of other stakeholders who act as brokers between the state and the masses (Kreibich, 2012).

These debates are useful in analysing how the state can, through the suspension of the law, and through the negotiations with local power brokers, enable the production of self-settled , non-camp spaces, and in this case, informal settlements in Lebanon. Informal settlements in Lebanon have emerged out of the tacit approval of the state- under the conditions of a 'crisis' where the state is both unable and unwilling to shoulder the burden of refugees. The settlements are also hybrid spaces that weave together informal moral economies and limited capacities of local governments. Thus, these deregulated, private spaces form new spaces of refuge assembled through traditional and new networks of actors. They are inhabited by refugees, and, in many instances, regulated, controlled and segregated like camps through private actors, be they landlords, charitable organizations or other entities. Because the response is deregulated and settlements emerge out of private negotiations

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[4] Gandhi defines informal moral economies as "unwritten but dense exchange of protection, favours, information, and money that often dictates how state policies are implemented or not implemented." He gestures to the role of community sentiments and informal brokers in certain states that enable the urban poor to engage in considerable negotiations with state institutions (Gandhi, 2012: 52).

between different actors, they are also highly uneven in terms of their size, level of support and protection.

The deregulated informal status of settlements, and their emergence out informal, often, privatized responses offers possibilities of how informal refugee spaces can link humanitarian interventions on the one hand and the economic and political needs of local areas on the other. These informal settlements signal forms of refuge that sit uneasily between the camp and the city as being both part of the 'campscape' (Martin, 2015) and the cityscape. They can be flexible to meet the exigencies of the situation, and simultaneously, deeply marginalizing. In the next section I provide some historical background as to how the current policies around informal settlements in Lebanon came to be.

The Spectre of Palestinians and a no camps policy

The management of the Syrian crisis in the Middle East is very much informed by previous experiences with refugees in countries such as Jordan and Lebanon. In both countries, the histories of the Palestinian situation in particular have had profound impacts on the ways in which refugee policies have been crafted. Both countries, for example, argue that they are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention because of the lack of resolution of the Palestinian situation. Like other Arab countries, they limit the rights of Palestinian refugees purportedly to support the Palestinian demand of the right of return (Allan, 2013; Moghli et al., 2015). Added to this are complex histories of violence, instability and the protracted nature of the Palestinian situation in both countries. The current rhetoric about refugee rights relives the anxieties about repeating this troubled history in the current context. Government officials are quick to point out that they do not want another Palestinian situation developing in their country out of the Syrian crisis. This then feeds into the reticence of these countries to craft laws towards refugees more generally and the securitization of their borders. Palestinians from Syria have faced some of the worst consequences of the Syrian crisis. Lebanon has turned Palestinians away from the border, although it has not deported any from the country itself (Bidinger and et al, 2015). Most Palestinians from Syria have moved into the already overcrowded refugee camps or live in informal housing. As a doubly displaced population, they face the trauma of losing much of their standard of living, including rights which they enjoyed in Syria as well as having fewer rights than Palestinians in Lebanon, or Syrian refugees making them particularly marginalized.

The spectre of Palestinians has also played a key role in the development of a 'no-camp' policy in Lebanon. Here, nearly 450,000 registered Palestinians live in camps or informal gatherings in different parts of the country (UNRWA, 2014). The camps themselves have existed for over 68 years. In this time, they have shifted from being controlled by the police and state security forces, to being politically galvanized by the PLO. Between the 1970s and 1982, when the PLO were in Lebanon, the camps, and Palestinians more generally shifted from being poor, marginalized and under surveillance to becoming economically and politically active and engaging in institution building (Allan, 2013; Peteet, 1991). Palestinian resistance, especially, guerrilla warfare that they launched against Israel from Lebanon led to further destabilization of the host country. Ultimately, the fifteen year civil war that ensued ravaged the country including the refugee camps themselves. Many struggled with large scale

destruction of both lives, and homes. The war itself has often been blamed on Palestinians by much of the Lebanese society. This scapegoating of Palestinians in turn has translated into the marginalization of the Palestinian population through the revocation of their rights to work in numerous professions, their right to own or inherit property (Sayigh, 1995) as well as their inability to access to civil or political rights (Allan, 2013; Ramadan, 2009).

Today, these camps have been reduced to marginalized spaces once again and they continue to operate outside of the control of the Lebanese state (Peteet, 2005; Sayigh, 1984). Most Palestinians either rely on the informal sector or on the services of UNRWA (Allan, 2013; Ramadan, 2009; Sanyal, 2011). In the 12 remaining camps, tens of thousands of Palestinians face overcrowding and poor living conditions, facing demographic pressure both from natural population growth and influxes of foreign migrants and other marginalized populations looking for cheap accommodation (Allan, 2013; Martin, 2015; Peteet, 2005; Sanyal, 2011) in tandem with substandard housing and infrastructure. For the Lebanese, however, the Palestinian presence continues to cause anxiety for their fragile political equation. The presence of Palestinian camps and their histories bring about fears of recreating militarized, radical non-state spaces with the Syrians as well (Turner, 2015).

As a result, unlike Jordan, Lebanon has no refugee camps for Syrian refugees. It has flatly refused to allow the creation of them. Rather, two types of geographies have emerged in relation to shelter for Syrians and both are informal. One is private, informal housing in urban and semi-urban areas in Lebanon (Fawaz, 2016). The majority of the Syrians (about 60%)[5] live in this kind of private housing, either in flats, or in other (often substandard) accommodation in rural, semi-rural and urban areas using informal contracts in a country already lacking affordable housing for its own residents (Fawaz, 2016).

The other kind of accommodation for Syrian refugees is informal settlements on agricultural land predominantly in the Bekaa Valley, Baalbek-Hermel and Akkar. As noted earlier, these settlements are defined as being set up in an unplanned and unmanaged manner, and are unrecognized. Most of these settlements are established through private negotiations between the landowner and a Syrian representative or a *shaweesh* (always male) (Fawaz et al., 2014). The *shaweesh* is often someone who has worked for the landowner or has ties with the area as a seasonal/regular worker. They negotiate access to the land, rents, management and so forth and often act as a liaison person between the municipality, the security forces and the community living in the settlement. In other words, the settlements emerge out of a patron-client relationship that can be less transparent and participatory than more traditional forms of managing humanitarian aid (Chatty, 2016). This also accounts for the highly uneven landscape of settlements, where some are better supported than others. Living in these settlements can also be fairly costly. Families are expected to pay several hundred dollars a year in rent for a tent or shack in one of these settlements. As (Fawaz et al., 2014: 37) point out, "Two forms of leases exist: the first and most common involves individual families

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[5] Figure taken from: http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/RegionalShelter3RPDashboard-July2016.pdf.

renting access to the property, with each family paying a monthly fee to the landowner… the second rental arrangement, the entire land parcel is rented out for a monthly or yearly fee to a group of refugees, represented by a community leader." The amounts vary from one camp to another, and in some cases refugees pay for electricity that is also provided by the landlord. As employment is precarious and for most people in the settlements it is illegal to work, affording rents can be difficult. Although most interviewees indicated that landlords were flexible with payments, the fact that we were present with municipal authorities and were talking often to key members of the community no doubt affected the veracity of these statements. Indeed Fawaz et al., (2014) do note evictions taking place if rents were not paid on time. It is likely that such issues are addressed in a highly contingent and informal manner.

The no-camp policy and the production of an informal shelter landscape has created particular challenges for international humanitarian organizations working in the country as they attempt to provide infrastructure, support and other basic services for the million-plus refugee population while negotiating a complex socio-political landscape. The increasing restrictions and marginalization of Syrians have also led some working within the humanitarian sector to suggest that a camp policy would be a preferable option to what is unravelling currently[6].

Variations of Informal Settlements

Informal settlements for Syrian refugees have been widely covered in the media often highlighting the terrible conditions inside them and the unending civil war next door. However, it is important to move away from a homogenizing narrative reducing all camps to spectacles of poverty and deprivation, and pay attention to the variations that exist amongst settlements. The deregulated response to the crisis and the private negotiations that take place around the establishment of informal settlements accounts for their spatial and social unevenness. Paying attention to this enables us to understand the different ways in which these spaces are produced by various stakeholders, their political, financial power and access to humanitarian aid. It was evident from our fieldwork that ISes range in size, securitization and in amenities. This is because some of them were directly and more robustly supported by charitable organizations and international NGOs while others had more limited or fragmented support. Landlords also provide varying degrees of support. This extends from physical spaces to infrastructures as well. For example, the landscape of water and sanitation remains fragmented within this context with some settlements receiving more support than others. Generally, we were told that water trucking and dislodging of septic tanks is undertaken by NGOs on a fairly regular basis. In some cases, landowners have also worked to provide water and sewage infrastructure for the refugees, but this is not the case for all settlements. To highlight these differences further, I draw on our fieldwork and look at an organized informal settlement and a completely informal settlement in the Bekaa Valley.

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[6] Interview with UNHCR, March 2015.

Our first visit to an Informal Settlement (IS), as noted earlier, was in August 2015 in the municipality of Bar Elias. By then we had interviewed a number of NGO workers, municipal workers and officials. After an interview with the municipality, one of the staff members from the Regional Technical Office and one of the municipal police officers offered to give us an initial tour at a number of the settlements. We were able to visit two fairly organized informal settlements and one completely informal settlement[7]. In one of our first visits to the Informal settlements, we were taken to Awde camp[8], run by the organization Al Barr. The organization used the land to develop and manage this settlement for the refugees to live on. Al-Barr is part of "Ittihâd al-jam'iyyat al-ighathiyya w-al tanmawiyya" or the union of the organizations for relief and development [9]. Two young men who looked like guards were standing at the entrance of this huge built-up settlement and asked us a few questions before letting us in. We walked inside an open yard with buildings around it. On our right, propped against a grey wall, we saw a big placard with the names of many organizations, some of which seemed unfamiliar to us. We later found out that these were the NGOs that worked in the settlement. The director of the organization that manages the settlement welcomed us inside his small air-conditioned prefabricated office, which sat right at the entrance of the settlement. Our visit began with a detailed discussion with him about the settlement and its operations. Awde is an extremely ordered settlement. The organization and outward appearance of rows of prefabricated cabins and tents certainly closely resembled a formal refugee camp. The director intimated that the Minister of Interior visited the settlement and the site seemed to enjoy a degree of semi-formality[10]. He claimed that Awde camp is the only settlement that was actually allowed to expand. He noted that a second settlement was under construction and was meant to shelter those with mental health issues. The director said that this will be the last settlement they will build. After the crisis is over, he suggested the settlements would be turned into resorts[11].

The settlement itself stood out in terms of the infrastructure and amenities it offered the residents. These far surpassed several of the other settlements that we visited. It had everything from a communal bakery equipped to provide bread for approximately 1,400 people or 350 households, a shop, a health clinic, a school, a playground for children, barbershop, as well as a guest house for visiting NGO workers. A large, modern bakery was under construction at the time of our visit. We also saw the big shared kitchens located in separate pre-fabricated houses. These were apparently used in times of feast like during Ramadan when *iftar* is served to all the refugees. Tents themselves were marked with numbers.[12] Every five housing units share a kitchen and a laundry room but every household had a private toilet. This was different from many other settlements where toilets are

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[7] We were able to visit several more informal settlements and talk to refugees, landlords and shaweeshes either together or later separately by my RA alone.

[8] As its referred to colloquially as *mukkhayyam* Awde, I am translating this into its English "Awde camp", though technically it is not a camp.

[9] Translation by my research assistant

[10] There were rumors of some settlements having more stable statuses in several other meetings. However, as these are informal discussions and narratives, they cannot be verified, lending further credence perhaps to the informality of governing the crisis.

[11] The land was initially purchased for building resorts according to our interviewees.

[12] The policeman accompanying us claimed to have personally done the numbering on the tents.

usually shared with other families, hence making their living conditions harder[13]. We were also told that Awde had a water filtration system and approximately 18 nurses in settlement, indicating attention given to managing health in the settlement.

A number of organizations finance and support Awde. Considerable funding, including for education for example comes from GCC countries- which also funds another 33 such settlements- while various international NGOs helped develop some of the settlement infrastructure.

Awde stands in stark contrast to the settlement of Tal Al-Sarhoun just down the road from it. This settlement was Bar Elias's biggest *completely,* informal settlement. In other words, it was not managed or controlled by a dedicated organization. Rather, the *shaweesh* managed the rent and when approached by NGOs, manages the distribution of aid. The settlement was divided into three parts and we were able to visit one of these which was reachable through a dirt road that sloped up a sandy hill. Garbage sat outside the entrance to the camp. There were no checkpoints, or security to stop us as we went in. The *shaweesh* of the settlement welcomed us into his tent which was noticeably larger than the other residents. We made our way to it past a group of women who were socializing outside a tent in the hot afternoon sun. The *shaweesh* told us that his family came from Aleppo in 2011 and settled in the settlement. He noted that 185 families, about 1200 persons, live in the settlement. They were the first four families and the rest started to settle bit by bit. Most of the residents come from the suburbs of Aleppo.

The *shaweesh* complained of the lack of support and irregular distribution of aid by NGOs. While the settlement fell under the mandate of some of the international NGOs, and their banners were plastered across the entrance of the settlement, many had apparently stopped coming or providing much assistance to the residents. One NGO had however organized them into committees to better manage the settlement, and provided two phone lines to report problems and improve communication, while another NGO provided medical assistance. The *shaweesh* raised concerns about security and the problems with solid waste management by the municipality. The informal dump of Bar Elias is also located close-by so refugees suffer from the constant generation of carcinogenic toxins in the air. Living conditions in the settlement were visibly poor. According to the *shaweesh*, there was one toilet for every fifteen people. While it is difficult to assess how little organizations were doing to help them, there was no doubt, looking around the settlement, with its unpaved roads, its canvas tents, an open septic tank emitting a putrid odor, that the settlement was considerably more deprived than its more privileged, and more organized counterparts down the road.

Security negotiations

Security plays a key role in the social and physical lives of Syrians both within and outside settlements (HRW, 2016; Nassar, 2014). In fact, the ways in which security arrangements are placed around these private, informal settlements blurs the boundaries between an informal settlement and a

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[13] The observation comparing these sanitation facilities with other settlements was made by my RA who has had previous experience working on the refugee crisis through an NGO in the Bekaa.

camp. It draws together confinement that is a key feature of camps together with the precariousness of informality. Indeed there appears to be a delicate relationship between security considerations of the state, economic considerations of landowners and human rights considerations of the settlement residents themselves that play out in how the settlements and settlement lives are reproduced. Settlements are subject to degrees of control exercised by different assemblages of actors, and are confronted by varying levels of security raids by the army. The Lebanese Army often engages in raids into and evictions of informal settlements in different parts of the country. These are often done with security concerns in mind (Fawaz et al., 2014). Evictions for example take place if settlements are considered to be too close to an army encampment, army security zones or border areas. In a humanitarian bulletin issued by UNOCHA in October 2015, they noted that a regulation had also been passed requiring all settlements to be at least 700 meters away from any primary roads (UN OCHA, 2015). In certain instances, the army have destroyed entire settlements and removed the residents if they felt it necessary for security. Warnings are issued by the army to residents about the impending eviction before it takes place. In addition to evictions carried out by the army, land owners may wish to re-acquire their properties for alternate uses or families may be evicted for non-payment of rent (Fawaz et al., 2014). Between January 2015 and September/October 2015, UNOCHA noted 115 informal settlements or 18,000 individuals being evicted throughout Lebanon with 51% or 9,276 individuals being affected in the Bekaa alone (UN OCHA, 2015).

The effects of security and precariousness of being in an insecure position thus has profound effects on the lives of Syrian residents of ISes themselves. Because of the policies of the Lebanese government, to insist on renewal of paperwork, raids can sometimes also turn into the arrest and detention of refugees found without papers. In Tal al Sarhoun for example where the security was more lax, the *shaweesh* complained of detentions by the General Security, but noted that residents were generally released a few days later. He said that he himself had been arrested and detained before and the municipality had to intervene for his release and protect him from getting beaten by the security forces. He had been fined for stealing electricity twice before as well. Arrests and detentions become particularly problematic as more and more refugees become illegal in Lebanon. Many often hide in the camps to avoid being arrested. Often it's the women and children who are sent out to work instead as they are less at risk of being arrested at checkpoints and they also work for lower wages (Amnesty International, 2016; NRC ICLA, 2013, 2014). Performances of security that exploit the vulnerability of refugees thus also exacerbate already existing gender, age and other inequalities and profoundly impacts the futures of Syrian refugees.

Degrees of control also extend to the ways in which refugees are profiled, monitored and disciplined, mirroring in many ways, the conditionality and biopolitical governance that is the hallmark of formal refugee camps. Here, landowners, organization directors, the *shaweesh* and other people in charge of managing the settlements are deeply implicated in how security is exercised within the boundaries of settlements. To begin with, they often have criteria for selecting refugees who will live there and they also keep a close eye on the behavior of the residents. Security offices such as in Awde are set up at the entrance to monitor the passage through its boundaries. We were told that the army had

inspected the settlement twice before, but found nothing worthy of concern or suspicion. This strengthened trust between the army and the settlement's management according to the director. Al-barr has, according to our interview, created a profile for each refugee living in it. The latter have to sign a one-year contract to abide by the rules of the settlement and respect its laws. One of the clauses states that the refugee is given a fifteen-day warning period before being evicted from the camp. In another settlement, an interview undertaken by my RA revealed that the landowner himself had set up cctv cameras in the IS to monitor the activities of the refugees. He argued that it enabled him to keep a close eye on the residents and intervene if there were any inappropriate activities such as refugees 'stealing' rations, or congregating in large groups. He first argued that the residents were not aware of the cameras being used to spy on them, and upon being pressed on the subject he claimed that they were grateful for them as it kept them safe. His arguments highlighting his benevolent control of his residents indicate a deeper issue with the exercise of control and lack of accountability in informal settlements that is yet underexplored.

Formal refugee camps are critiqued for the ways in which they control and contain and exclude refugees from the surrounding community while offering securitization and support. While the exclusion and containment within informal settlements in Lebanon are certainly more blurred, boundaries do exist in varying degrees. Although the Lebanese state exercises the ultimate authority through the security apparatus, especially the army, the exercise of control and surveillance over displaced populations by landlords and charitable institutions suggest the walling off of space create conditions similar to securitized refugee camps or gated communities. The production of informal settlements through patron-client relationships on private land together with private forms of control raise important questions about the ways in which private practices can also become deeply exploitative. In doing so, they produce an even more troubled and less transparent form of humanitarian management than is found in spaces of formal camps (Chatty, 2016). Here perhaps the question of accountability becomes more complex. Although NGOs and humanitarian organizations can be questionable and controversial in terms of how they manage refugees, how do we begin to engage with the questions of management when the spaces and people involved in the process are private and informal? The camp may not be present in its official form, but its spirit in many ways exists in different forms and scales.

Interrogating the 'Informality' of Settlements

This brief glimpse into the variations of informal settlements in the Bekaa, Lebanon has shown how a deregulated, 'privatized' response can produce highly uneven spaces that are simultaneously visible, tolerated, authorized, securitized and yet unrecognized and informalized. These controlled, often securitized spaces that nonetheless operate through private, individualized or collective rental agreements thus blur the boundaries between the camp and the city. As such, they embody characteristics that are both flexible and deeply marginalizing and raise questions about the place of informal settlements in the studies of refugee politics and management. Here I offer two suggestions

in thinking about the effect of informality on these emerging humanitarian spaces. The first is to consider the relationship between space and social category, in this case between refugee camp and refugees and informal settlements and displaced persons. The classification of people and place as falling into distinct categories worthy of compassion and protection plays a crucial role in how they are legitimized and forms the basis of humanitarian governance (Fassin, 2012). Thus refugee camps operate as humanitarian spaces dedicated to the survival of particular groups classified as refugees. It thus confers recognition to a distinct set of people: refugees, and a distinct problem: their displacement and need for protection. Camps become spaces where protection and welfare of the most vulnerable people are exchanged for their for mobility and rights (Hyndman, 2000). However, such trade-offs, as noted earlier are never quite as clear-cut as camps exceed their boundaries and refugees circumvent regulations over time. The refugee camp, as Ilana Feldman recently noted, has had different meanings ascribed to it, from spaces of deprivation, detention, of protecting or eroding rights of refugees and have thus affected the strategies of humanitarian intervention (Feldman, 2015). Thus, even if the boundaries get blurred and activities in camps change over time, the formal classification of camp as a distinct space thus remains important in articulating refugee politics and claims for those living both within and outside its boundaries as well as judgements about capacities, characters and futures of refugees by various stakeholders (ibid).

In the case of informal settlements, no such recognition of a humanitarian problem is formally conferred. Because these spaces emerge out of informal negotiations and private agreements, Syrian refugees are essentially private tenants being hosted on private property. The assistance provided to them by humanitarian organizations may vary from being significant to being severely limited and fragmented as I have shown. This creates uneven and opaque geographies of aid on the ground producing further inequalities between different groups of refugees. But the question of assistance is only part of the puzzle of thinking about the futures offered by informal settlements. How does the production of 'informal settlements' affect the legitimacy of refugee lives? I argue that it reinforces the stance of the government that Syrians are 'displaced persons' or de facto refugees and thus strips them of rights and protections that may come with the latter category, while also denying them rights available to citizens. As noted earlier, these categories carry no legal protection in the country and Syrians can hence be subject to eviction and deportation at the whim of the government, local power brokers, landlords and other actors, especially if they have not renewed their permits for legal stay. So can the informal settlement become performative spaces of refugee politics, claims to rights and entitlements? In this instance, it is a qualified "no"- qualified because it may still be far too early to tell. However, the lack of recognition of refugee status or formal refugee spaces from where to launch critiques against displacement and against humanitarian governance does not offer a promising picture for the future.

Expanding on the above, my second provocation is to engage in a closer critique of informality, especially one that highlights the ways in which it can oppressive and restrictive. As Darling (2014: 165) aptly points out, "informality represents the anonymity of presence, of individuals and groups who are not recognized as "guests" to whom hospitality is either due or denied." The anonymity born

from the deregulated system of managing the crisis in Lebanon has created a complex and profoundly disempowering situation for refugees who can and are exploited. The raft of policies depriving Syrians the right to live and work without proper permissions (while loosely and ad-hocishly enforced) creates a deep sense of vulnerability and precariousness amongst refugee families. This makes them continue to depend on humanitarian organizations to provide them with basic needs- from rations to medical care, education, water and sanitation. Thus while refugee camps can be critiqued for their cultures of dependency and abjection, narratives that celebrate the informality of non-camp settlements need to consider how such flexibility too can produce forms of marginality. This point is further examined in on-going research. (Pasquetti and Picker, 2017: 535), for example probe the relationship between confinement and informality. They argue that we need to think about informality and confinement relationally - that spaces of confinement produce informality and informality also produces confinement. They note that "informal urban spaces can be experienced as confining not only physically but also at the level of cognition, emotions, and temporality."(ibid) Thus the threat of eviction, deportation and detention can produce a sense of emotional insecurity that can limit the activities of people, including their mobility therefore producing forms of confinement. Indeed as this case demonstrates, informal settlements not only reproduce confinement in physical ways, but the precarious legal condition of many refugees living in them also reduces them to state of anonymity and marginality that is confining. Syrians find their mobility confined to particular trajectories- within confined spaces of informal settlements or other housing, clandestine movements forward to Turkey, Europe and other host countries, risky and shadowed movements around Lebanon itself or back to Syria[14]. Informality here offers choices almost as bleak as encampment.

Conclusion

The Syrian Crisis and its effects particularly on Lebanon offer important ways into expanding our understanding of refugees and refugee spaces. Too often, the literature around refuge has concentrated on the duality of camps versus cities as spaces within which refugees are either sequestered or engage in place-making. However, the landscape of refuge within a global context is far more complex than that. As has been discussed in this paper, one such space is that of informal settlements. Although not interrogated with the same vigour as camps or cities, such spaces offer possibilities of challenging our spatial theorizations of refuge. Informal settlements symbolize the limits of the state's ability and desire to manage the crisis, its negotiation with local communities and power brokers who both benefit and suffer from having to carry the burden. These sites, as I have demonstrated in this paper, blur the boundaries between camps and cities, being private and informal on the one hand, and yet incorporating degrees of control and care that are omnipresent within formal camps as well. These degrees of difference between them are also important as they write against homogenizing narratives of spaces, and highlight instead the distinct ways in which settlements are

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[14] Several news articles have talked about how Syrians frustrated by host country restrictions have gone back to Syria despite the ongoing war. Interviews with refugees in the Bekaa have suggested that several families have moved onto Europe or gone to Turkey.

linked to humanitarian aid, securitization, social and political networks. Such sites challenge our ideas of the kinds of actors that are involved in humanitarian governance such as private landlords. They challenge our ideas of informality because these informal spaces also spaces of containment by different and often private actors. They raise questions of the kinds of spaces that may emerge as a result of privatizing a response and enabling exploitative relations to emerge that mimic some of the more problematic practices of camps. These considerations become significant as we write against camps and consider other ways in which refugees inhabit space and the kinds of political subjectivities that emerge from them. This is not to produce a debilitating critique against informal settlements but to raise the caution that the inequality, securitization and confinement in such spaces must be critically analysed.

Although I have been unable to fully explore this in the paper, an analysis of informality and refugee spaces- be they formal or informal also needs to account for its relationship with host communities and local context. These are not straightforward, as they oscillate between sympathy, hospitality, profit and hostility, insecurity and frustration. The politics of hospitality are very much intertwined with the politics of humanitarian intervention and the role of the state. How a crisis is managed, by whom and whose narratives and positions are privileged are integral to the ways in which humanitarian management unravels. Deregulating a crisis response thus significantly impacts the ways in which such relationships materialize and modify over time as they test the authority, legitimacy and capacities of different sets of actors. Informal settlements must be seen as being embedded within these larger structures of hospitality, governance and humanitarian intervention that stretch beyond the private plot of land. Indeed it becomes incumbent for researchers to not only place the politics of refuge within its local context, but critically analyse the role of the state and the forms of governance that unfold and shift in the process.

In closing, I argue that we perhaps need new vocabularies to discuss the varied spaces of refuge, and perhaps new ways of thinking about them. While the work on camps and on cities have been productive in pushing us to think about the ways in which governance and politics of the displaced and marginalized have evolved, we need to move beyond these dualisms and consider the myriad ways in which crises produce spaces, spatial politics and political subjects. Such work is increasingly crucial for politically responsible scholarship in a world where the language of 'crisis' seems to take on greater currency.

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