



## Rethinking urban interactions from the margins: Palestinians and Syrians between refugee camps and the cities

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### Introduction

Contemporary migrations decentralize the international order and shake the principle of territoriality (Badie, Smouts 1996) with the emergence of interacting territorialities and transnational connections. However, as social and migrant networks have become increasingly dominant in migration studies, this effect risks eclipsing the significance of space, borders and legal documents. As stated by Samers “one might get the impression that migrants are unproblematically connected across the globe without the impediment of distance and borders” (Samers 2010: 35). In this context, the condition of refugees and stateless persons urges scholars to reconsider mobility and its own legal implications at a socio-political level as well as the dimension of the “representative ideoscape” (Coutin 2003). Contextually, we should include the question of immobility, since processes of mass displacement and ongoing displacement are simultaneously characterised by different stages and spaces of immobility (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2018; Hannam et al. 2006).

Palestinian refugees represent one of the most relevant subjects in terms of mobility and immobility, as they carry a transnational “travelling discourse” that has endured since the beginning of their exile in the 1948 Nakba<sup>1</sup> (Said 2000). Over their decades of exile, Palestinians have endured a progressive reconfiguration of spaces in the region in the aftermath of diverse conflicts and displacements in and from numerous countries, such as Kuwait in 1991, Libya in 1996 and Iraq in 2003 (Erakat 2014). Just recently, the Palestinian community of Syria have experienced mass displacement and paid a heavy toll in loss of life and socio-economic damages due to the destructive dynamics of the ongoing war. More than half of circa 600,000 Palestinians living in Syria have been internally displaced due to the violence and the extension of the conflict and more than 100,000 have found refuge in one of Syria’s neighbouring countries. Until May 2014, when arbitrary and cumulative restrictions<sup>2</sup> on the entry of Palestinians from Syria were imposed and at the same time tens of thousands left the region for Europe<sup>3</sup>, Lebanon has been providing sanctuary to at

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<sup>1</sup> Palestinians refer refers to the mass exodus of at least 750,000 Arabs from Historical Palestine as “Al Nakba”, which literally translates as “The Catastrophe”.

<sup>2</sup> Check Amnesty International’s report: “Denied Refuge: Palestinians from Syria Seeking Safety in Lebanon” (2014). <https://www.amnesty.at/media/1243/amnesty-international-libanon-denied-refuge.pdf> (accessed 15 April 2021).

<sup>3</sup> According to the “Action Group for Palestinians in Syria” (AGPS), a monitoring group based in London working on different levels with regards to Palestinians of Syria. Over 79,000 Palestinian Syrian refugees fled to Europe until mid-2016. <http://www.actionpal.org.uk/> (accessed 15 April 2021)

least half of these “double refugees” (Sachs 1989). According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 31,500 Palestinians from Syria were recorded in Lebanon during June 2016.

They inherit the “special” institutionalised policy implemented for the circa 300,000 Palestinians living in Lebanon, thus becoming an integral part of a problematic relationship between the state and the Palestinian community (Meier 2015), especially since most of these “double refugees” settled in or around the twelve Palestinian camps established across the country in 1948. Subjected to a “regimen of socioeconomic strangulation and the denial of basic human rights” (Khalidi and Riskedahl 2010), the presence of the refugees is reduced to counterinsurgency policies which treat the Palestinians as ‘security’ subjects, and refugee camps as *juzzur amniyyat* (security islands) (Hanafi 2010).

Historically, Palestinian camps - as “extraterritorial spaces” (Siklawi 2010) resulting from the Lebanese legislation- have kept on performing as safe places for thousands of undocumented migrants, in addition to people wanted by the mukhabarat (intelligence agency). Benefiting from the porous and transnational familiar connections spread between Syria and Lebanon (Carpi 2017), thousands have found shelter within the Palestinian camps. Numerous Syrian families attested that, beyond the economic convenience of cheaper living costs, the choice of moving inside a Palestinian camp is due to the provision that Lebanese military authorities do not usually exercise their coercive power inside the perimeter of the Palestinian camps<sup>4</sup>. Following the current influx of thousands of Syrian and Palestinians of Syria inside the camps, the social effect of “freezing the camp” for people without legal documents additionally has extended to thousands of newly displaced people.

While labelled for decades as marginalized “spaces of exception” (Agamben 2003), recent literature has focused on investigating how Palestinians transcend the link between the host state and the homeland, extending to a plurality of spaces, with ‘home-camps’ turning into spaces of belonging and longing even after refugees have relocated elsewhere (Gabiam and Fiddian Qasmiyeh 2016; also see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011). Among others, Peteet investigated Palestinians’ political sense of place through culturally grounded practices of daily living aimed at imposing their social organization and cultural maps on the camps (Peteet 2005). Moreover, Palestinians in Lebanon experience different scales of mobility and develop a wide range of practices that extend beyond the camp’s boundaries on an everyday basis (Dorai 2010).

With the arrival of numerous newly displaced people from Syria, the already-overcrowded Palestinian camps in Lebanon have once more turned into new spaces of encampment (Janmyr and Knudsen 2016). Within the current landscape of “overlapping displacements” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2012), the interactions between Palestinians and Syrians on the Lebanese territory are spatially materialized through

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<sup>4</sup> Internal security management is exercised by the Palestinian military forces linked to the PLO, that in some cases collaborate with the Lebanese Army patrols located on the outskirts of the camps in case of military joint operations.

the new geographies and mental configurations of the camps. In this situation, the social relations with the “other refugees” deeply intertwine with the peculiar daily practices of mobility that implicate exteriority and co-presence (Dorai and Puig 2012).

Specifically, newly displaced people in Lebanon have to deal with institutionalized practices that increasingly render migrants ‘irregular’ or ‘illegal’, making their access and permanence in the country insecure and in turn putting their mobility patterns at risk. Specifically, Palestinians from Syria in Lebanon have to deal with further obstacles as regards their legal permanence in the country: at the end of 2016, more than 80 percent of the Palestinians (Chabaan et al. 2016) and 78,7 percent of Syrians (Alsharabati et Nammour 2017) were staying in Lebanon without a valid residency permit.

Strictly connected with the spatial organization of bodies imposed by authority in and around the camps, this leads to the question: how does the legal status of refugees condition their socio-spatial organization in Lebanon? In the face of evolving securitization policies and further local arbitrariness applied around most of the Palestinian camps in Lebanon, the paper sheds a light on how refugees constantly negotiate their practises and trajectories by mobilizing a wide spectrum of resources and networks along diverse translocal settings in order to elusively trespass the contracting spatial dimensions in and around Bourj el-Barajneh camp.

Inspired by the research cited above, my paper investigates how the recent arrival of newly displaced communities into spaces inhabited by and labelled for decades as “long-term refugees” sheds an alternative perspective on the morphology and socio-spatial dynamics of Palestinian camps in Lebanon. The guiding question that I aim to address is: how are socio-spatial relations altered with new groups of people entering and settling in a particular geography such as a previously established refugee camp? The daily refugee-refugee relations (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016) constitute new spaces of recognition (Carpi, 2016) and alternative practices in respect with the institutionalized paradigm of hospitality as mediated by the State institutions.

Inspired by scholarship on the potentials of locality in elucidating transnational phenomena and dynamics (Levitt 2003), the paper focuses on the interplay between the host country’s heavy institutional discrimination and the agency of social actors who transgress structural constraints through their mobility. After providing a reflection on the methodology underpinning my research, I start by shedding light on how Palestinians from Syria and Syrians navigate an adverse system by reorganizing the camps through new and alternative translocal networks. I initially set out the complex barriers to movement in Ein el Helweh camp in the South of Lebanon and Nahr el-Bared camp in the North before focusing in particular on the case of Burj el-Barajneh camp. Throughout, I explore how such hyper-mobile spatial practices transcend institutional discriminations, contributing to the re-elaboration of the Palestinian refugee camps into what I conceptualise as “meaningful places of elusive contestation”. Specifically, I aim to expound how the newcomers switch strategies for protection by reinterpreting boundaries between camps and cities through a wide spectrum of implicit but widespread material and mental daily practices.

## **1. Inside the (football) field**

In contrast with most research on Palestinian camps filtered through the overwhelming presence of NGOs (Hanafi and Tabar 2006) and other organizations that usually deal with foreign researchers, the informative and relational potential usually provided by established networks had to be replaced through an alternative methodology of research. As a result, the informative and relational potential usually provided by established networks had to be replaced through an alternative research methodology that implied the necessity of freely communicating without any kind of linguistic intermediaries. Benefiting from my ability to speak the Lebanese dialect together with a long-term passion and interest in football, during the first months of 2016 I began engaging with several people gathering in the only football pitch inside Bourj el-Barajneh camp.

Just after several months of preliminary work, I decided to focus my research in Bourj el-Barajneh camp in the southern area of Beirut, since it combines relatively easy accessibility together with a strategic and significant spatial dimension in terms of interconnectivities with its neighbouring areas. After playing for several months with tens of young Palestinian and Syrian males informally gathering at the pitch, I deepened my presence and connections in the camp by becoming part of Al-Aqsa Team, that regularly gathers four times per week and compete for the Football Refugees' League of Beirut. Established in the Eighties by Palestinians based in Borj el-Barajneh, Al-Aqsa football team is not currently organized on an exclusive national base, as many Palestinians from Syria, Lebanese and Syrian players - as well as me - were officially members of the roster.

Throughout my fieldwork, the football sphere was critical in facilitating my access to informants while at the same time overcoming relational, linguistic and logistic obstacles (Rookwood 2010). While initially intended as mere moments of fun, the participant observation I conducted among and alongside my teammates and other players at the pitch became the core of my research. In this situation, football was not conceived as a "modern sport" tied to a system of global institutions, rather as a daily "simple playing of games" (Bourdieu 1978) linked to the need for creative activity, the imaginary, and play according to the "right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1996).

Just recently, many recent researches about play and the production of public space have been currently focusing on Beirut, a city that provides little space for the practice of sports and is probably one of the most unfriendly playful cities. Among them, Al-Masri's ethnography (Al Masri 2016) into Beirut-based football clubs from a socio-spatial perspective shed light on the negotiation and the reformulation of the city's spaces, images and identities within the city. Through examining the sets of relations within Nejmech club - the most famous and supported football team in Lebanon -, her research show how identities over spatial boundaries are negotiated in a city where you can hardly find very few public play for the capital's two-million citizens.

Play initiates both to negotiation and conflict, thus making the dynamics of the playing incredibly valuable, as they reveal the way in which the players (the community

individuals or groups) relate to one another, their hierarchies, power struggles and frustrations or preferences (Charif & Hafeda 2017). Football teams and tournaments offer a liminal social arena that questions most of specific literature and even the popular belief in the country, which presents clubs as internally unified communities with well-defined political if not sectarian identities (Al-Masri 2016). Throughout my fieldwork on the move by observing people's movements while simultaneously conducting ethnographic research (Urry 2007), I underlined how the complexity of the entanglement of sports and politics and the negotiations over how they are defined show broader networks beyond the conventional national, political and religious allegiances

My paper is thus mainly based on informal conversations that took place before and after football practices, in visits to my teammates' households and during matches outside the camp. Moreover, I conducted several interviews with my teammates' family members – including women – when visiting private households. These informal conversations revealed particularly relevant throughout my life and fieldwork inside the camp: my feeling of “familiarity” inside their houses especially revealed decisive to share our respective past biographies, as well as to frame the relationship outside the football sphere.

Beyond numerous informal conversations with teams' managers and coaches, I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews with Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian teammates and former players. In order to reconstruct a broader picture out of the peculiarity of my fieldwork, I conducted tens of semi-structured interviews with members of the Camp Popular Committee, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and local associations.

## **2. Bourj el-Barajneh and Dahiye: socio-spatial hierarchies in motion**

Established in 1948 to host a few hundred refugees on the land of a small village on the southern outskirts of Beirut (Gorokhoff 1984), the camp underwent several transformations until it was heavily damaged during the Lebanese Civil War and the War of Camps (Shafie 2007). As a consequence of the Ta'if Agreement (1989) signed at the end of the Civil War, the further restrictions on the territorial expansion out of the boundaries of the camp forced Palestinians to extend vertically in order to accommodate the dramatic increase of the population.

Migration played a crucial role in the social evolution of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon (Dorai 2010: 11). A number of poor Lebanese families and migrant workers - mainly Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans and Sudanese, as well as Egyptians and Syrians - settled in the camps for their cheap rents and accessibility to the main cities (Latiff 2008).

Similarly to other Palestinian camps in Lebanon, recently Borj al-Barajneh has been providing refuge to a huge number of refugees from Syria. While numbers may be misleading in such a cluttered situation, several local and international sources unofficially estimate that 20,000 Palestinians and around the same number



newcomers from Syria (including 3-4,000 Palestinians from Syria) currently reside within the camp's parameter. The camp is currently demarcated by a road system that separates it from the surrounding Shi'a dominated neighbourhoods known as al-Dahiya (Habib 2012). All the main roads thus constitute a fundamental way to the city for the camp inhabitants: the urban margins, where refugees and migrants settle, are not disconnected from the urban dynamics of the surrounding cities (Dorai 2010).

However, through the asymmetric relation between the individual and the national institutions exercising their performativity of power at the checkpoints, refugees' agency and mobility is primarily determined by their ID status. Since most refugees from Syria have been living in Lebanon without legal residency, the pervasiveness of checkpoint starts far beyond the crossing momentum. Due to the fear of being detained or arrested at the checkpoints, many people constantly reshape and modify their own movement patterns even before performing it: "a border is not simply a physical line [...] but an interactive space whose form is determined by the person crossing it" (Allan 2014: 182).

Strictly connected with the spatial organization of spaces imposed by authority, the different legal status of "historical" and "newly displaced" refugees thus has important implications on the socio-spatial organization of this community in Lebanon (Dorai 2010: 6). My research mainly expounded the northern and eastern parts of the camp, where its margins merge with the Shia suburbs of Haret Hreik. The post-Civil War period saw more construction and an increase in population and urbanization - trends that rapidly expanded in the aftermath of the reconstruction following Israel's destruction of many areas during the 2006 war (Saksouk-Sasso 2015).

Such quarters are recognized and detected in Lebanon as Hezbollah's stronghold, where the "Party of God" acts as a para-state pervading public landscapes, organizing spaces, and controlling movements through a hyper-visible multi-level presence. Since most of my team's football matches were held in a football field located at the core of Haret Hreik, the daily trips from the camp to the stadium in the company of my teammates were particularly relevant for investigating practices of mobility in the context of permanent strong securitization policies around al-Dahiya. Around such a super-securitized area, refugees' socio-spatial practices significantly contribute to reveal the articulations between the camp and its surroundings.

Of these occasions, the days of Aashura - one of most important Shia celebrations - traditionally constitute the epitome of these measures, with checkpoints by Hezbollah and the Army pervading the whole area. During one of these days in October 2016, I was moving from the camp to the training field in Haret Hreik with Abu Ahmad, a 31-year Palestinian from Syria who fled to Lebanon at the end of 2012. Right after crossing the footbridge over Al-Amliyah Road just beyond the entrance to the camp, a Hezbollah guard stopped us, asking: "Ento suriyeen aw falastiniyeen?" ("Are you Syrians or Palestinians?"). Beyond the guard's initial surprise once I showed my Italian passport, Ahmad declared being Palestinian and we were immediately released. Informal discussions following that episode were particularly relevant in

shedding light on people's daily hurdles in a context of what I conceptualise as "hierarchical spatialities" imposed by Hezbollah around the camp.

The insights just described give leeway to formulate a notion of how performances of space excel in time and space through practices of control and regulations and de facto make borders pervasive for disadvantaged populations (Heide-Jørgensen 2014). In the specific situation of Lebanon's Palestinian camps, refugees from Syria state how they are constantly forced to reshape their own mobility patterns according to any specific location they cross. The checkpoints around the camps represent the material and psychological boundary between an inside "safe place" that risks being "frozen" from an outside that rather treats these spaces as "islands of insecurity" (Sayigh 2000). In this case, the control of the camp materialized by the physical presence of the army overlaps with Hezbollah's militias in the area, pervasively conditioning refugees' life far beyond their ordinary activities.

Numerous interviewees confirmed that the ongoing Syrian war constitutes a turning point in the relational landscape around such a peculiar area. Souheil El-Natour, a Palestinian lawyer and researcher, explained:

Before 2011, Dahiye was perceived as a "friendly space" for Syrians moving around that space; Syrian citizens at Hezbollah checkpoints were privileged above Palestinians because [they were] considered "natural political allies". After the flow of about one million of mainly Sunni refugees, Syrians somehow turned from allies to potential enemies, especially in the aftermath of the recent terrorist attacks striking al-Dahiya. In order to regain a favourable equilibrium and minimize the dangers, Hezbollah is currently investing in its relationship with Palestinians living in the camp to prevent them affiliating with Sunni extremist movements. Among the measures adopted, Palestinians are barely stopped at the checkpoint since Hezbollah does not want to have any problems with the Palestinians as happened a few years ago<sup>5</sup>.

Souheil refers to an armed clash in 2013 between members of Hezbollah and Palestinian young men near the refugee camp after a wedding convoy refused to allow their cars to be searched by a Hezbollah checkpoint. After one Palestinian man was shot dead by another young Hezbollah guard, the situation was pacified when some local leaders of the Party apologised to the victim's family and paid an indemnity (Rowell 2013).

### 3. Fostering connections around a football pitch

While allegiances and affiliations among regional actors are reshaped by the events of the Syrian war, daily mobility has been hierarchically reframed according to the national and at times sectarian membership of individuals. Palestinians of Syria stand in an equivocal situation, as they find themselves at the boundaries between a

<sup>5</sup> Souheil El-Natour (October 2016, 26). Personal interview, Mar Elias camp.

subjective reformulation of historical, cultural and political belonging in a precarious context dominated by institutions and authorities arbitrarily reformulating their dispositions. How do individuals navigate this system in such an entangled situation? Ahmad's personal biography sheds a light on the gap between institutional categorizations and the daily practices on the ground:

After being stuck for two years in an unfavourable condition preventing me from working with football and creating problems for me at the checkpoint, a teammate informed me about the possibility of buying a new identity card from a Palestinian of Lebanon who left for Europe a few months before. Just through sticking my picture instead of the original one, with my documents I can now move more easily than before. Moreover, according to these new documents I am 25 years old and being younger also means that I got more chances to be employed by Lebanese teams. A few weeks ago I signed a contract with a team playing in the fourth division: 1,000 dollars every three months. It is not that much but, together with the job as a trainer, I can maintain myself just through football<sup>6</sup>.

Although addressed from a biographical point of view, the subjectivity is not limited to an account of the person's intimate or private dimension but becomes the pretext for illustrating the structural dynamics that produce exclusion, vulnerability and marginality (Pinelli 2017). Ahmad's biography shows how "refugees creatively impose their own imprint on the space and meaning of the camps in a manner that, if not oppositional to the apparatus of control, at least serve as obstacles to its full realization" (Peteeet 2005: 94). In this sense, their imaginative and practical work of transgressing the hierarchical spatialities imposed by the local authorities is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation (Appadurai 1996).

Ahmad's trajectory contributes to enlighten practices and narratives of transcending the spatial marginalization imposed by both state and non-state actors. Within this process, the reformulation of his own legal position within the socio-spatial landscape does not univocally depend on individual solutions: most of the decisive contacts for the new documents unavoidably passed through his teammates. While much of the literature conceives the Palestinian camps as spaces exclusively socially organized through familiar and political relations, my fieldwork has insisted on examining alternative dimensions such as local leisure activities situated in a spatial perspective.

In this way, a football team is organized around live ritual events happening at a specific moment that generate intense moments of bodily co-presence around a specific place (Urry 2007: 234). A number of Syrians regularly frequents the football field where Al-Aqsa team usually trains inside Bourj el-Barajneh camp, together with Lebanese men mainly from al-Dahiye who choose to play there due to the cheaper rent. As stated earlier, this sport pitch became one of the most relevant areas of

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<sup>6</sup> Abu Ahmad (October 2016, 10). Personal interview, Bourj el-Barajneh camp.



research for me. Due to its openness and relatively friendly atmosphere in such an overcrowded camp, it turned into a meeting point and a resource for a huge number of people.

I could observe to which extent inside this space, inaugurated in 2015, people have fostered their own social connections under the informal landscape of football. Compared with the tens of cafés and kiosks spread all over the camps, its larger spatial extension together with the “global language” of football are decisive in gathering people with diverse economic, political and social backgrounds. In this way, we are able to trace a mushrooming of translocal and cross-generational networks between “historical” and “newly” displaced people. Activities performed during leisure time often overlaps with the other daily life dimensions, providing contacts and resources going far beyond mere leisure spatio-temporalities.

While the majority of the Palestinian teams are affiliated with the local Palestinian factions and reclaim their attachment with homeland within their denomination, all of them present inside their rooster an important number of players recently came from Syria. I have focused on how the “foreign element” - namely the Syrian players who are supposed to be mostly out of the intra-factional dynamics of competition and control- shape their presence inside a Palestinian team and how such a relationship extends to the other dimensions of their daily life

Playing football inside a dynamic of football team turned into the pragmatic anti-reductionist alternative to a narrative around refugee camps mainly structured around nationalistic claims and humanitarian narratives. Focusing on the coping strategies of survival emerging between the “local” Palestinian community and the newly displaced refugees from Syria, I underlined such practices of spatial appropriation, social interaction and production of new meanings and relations starting from the margins of the camp and from the marginal aspects of ordinary life such as playing a sport in a team. At a broader level, a deeper understanding of self-organized sport activities turned into an alternative point of observation that slips away from the prevailing directives of institutional governmentality imposed upon refugee camps.

#### **4. “I feel safe here”: extending the virtual space of the camp**

The dynamics evolving inside Al-Aqsa football team have shed a further light on the functionalities of such networks: for instance, about half of the team’s players work together in a factory managed by Rami, the current Al-Aqsa coach. While four members of the team had already been working in Rami’s factory for a long time, another four found employment right after meeting the owner on the training field. Khaled, a Syrian young man living in the camp and playing for Al-Aqsa, explains:

Once I arrived from Damascus in 2013, I knew just a few Syrians living in the camp. After I moved to an apartment close to the football field, this has become my second home. I started playing with the Nash’iin (Youth Club) while my father was appointed as Vice-Coach of Al-Aqsa. I found a job in Rami’s factory around al-

Dahiya: he picks me up at 7.30 in the morning and I return to the camp in the afternoon. Even if we have never renewed our papers, once I started working with Rami I have had no any problems while moving outside the camp<sup>7</sup>.

While Palestinians from Lebanon have historically developed diverse social relationships inside Dahiye, newly displaced refugees from Syria barely move around the southern suburbs due to their precarious legal status. Throughout my fieldwork, I investigated how the multi-dimensional networks developed inside a football team extend their potentialities beyond the boundaries between the camp and the neighbouring areas. In this case, the newcomers switch strategies for protection (Hajj 2016), transcending the nexus between legal vulnerability and mobility practices through a wide spectrum of communal practices of “taking the space” grounded on translocal informal networks.

For instance, numerous camp dwellers refer to al-Dahiya as the privileged area for their socio-economic activities:

I buy just a few things in the small shops of the camp while purchasing most of the items outside: food in Dahiye is so much tastier and healthier than here<sup>8</sup>.

Hussein’s accounts configure a polycentric conceptualization of the city, reconnecting several in-between localities to other urban spaces and neighbouring areas with the social life of the camp. In this realm, as these practices of spatial rebordering contribute to reshaping “intimacy” with different places, newly arrived refugees from Syria are able to reinterpret the category of “familiar and unfamiliar spaces” (Migdal 2004).

While investigating feelings of belonging through the margins of the camp, my participation in the football teams once more contributed to shedding light on how people perform mobility and reshape commitments to a plurality of spaces. Through these lenses, outdoor-play practices should be observed as forms of spatial appropriation and reproduction (Hatem 2016) moving from marginalized and securitized spaces. In this way, beyond transcending forms of spatial marginalization, these practices contribute to reconsidering how places outside the camp interconnect with other forms of home-spaces (Gabiam and Fiddian Qasmiyeh 2016).

While assisting a match from the bench, Khalil, a Palestinian from Aleppo in his thirties, explains how:

Despite the five-minute driving distances from my house, this field to me is like part of the camp. I work in a factory around Sabra -very close to here- and that place to me is like a camp because I feel safe here<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Khaled (March 2017, 21). Personal interview. Bourj el-Barajneh camp.

<sup>8</sup> Hussein (October 2016, 20). Personal interview. Bourj el-Barajneh camp.

<sup>9</sup> Khalil (October 2016, 23). Personal interview, Beirut.

By recreating a feeling of translocal familiar belonging, even outdoor activities introduce unpredictability and consequently new possibilities of reshaping the map of the city. Indeed, through a redefinition of spaces according to their own perceptions and daily mobility patterns, refugees from Syria recreate a whole translocal area that blurs physical boundaries while moving away from the pervading and ontological “ethos of insecurity” (Gulick 1976). By rather emphasizing an effective feeling of refuge, Khalil reshapes the map of Beirut according to familiar and unfamiliar places, extending the mental space of the camp and going above the spatial marginalization intrinsic to his legal status in the country.

### Concluding remarks

While most Palestinian refugee camps and their neighbouring areas have moved spatially closer due to synchronic urbanization processes, Palestinian camps have typically been analysed as physically and psychologically besieged areas. Most of the actors involved in migration issues tend to conceptualize a clear spatial distinction between so-called national spaces and refugee camps, with the latter effectively labelled as “spaces of the displaced.” The production of locality in these urban formations thus faces the related problems of displaced and deterritorialized populations, of state policies that restrict neighbourhoods as context producers, and of local subjects who cannot be anything other than national citizens (Appadurai, 1996). However, throughout my work, I expound on how the arrival of “newly displaced” people from Syria within the already overcrowded Palestinian camps highlights further national hierarchizations in the link between spatial marginalization and precarious legal statuses. In this realm, the presence of Palestinians from Syria, who experience the most troubling aspects of being considered at the same time both Palestinians and Syrians, further complicates the picture and highlights new patterns related to the link between mobility and territoriality. Specifically, besides their peculiar historical connotations and current contingencies, the interconnectivities between camps and other forms of camp-spaces reveal dynamics that may be retraced in the many poor suburbs that have recently sprung up around cities in the region and beyond.

By looking at how refugees organize diverse places around the camp as a whole territory, I have aimed to illustrate the extent to which translocal networks contribute to reshape how daily practices blur boundaries between the camp and its margins. This article, and the research it draws upon, is part of the recent literature that aims to analytically de-exceptionalize the narrative about Palestinian camps in Lebanon through the subjective perspective of people inhabiting them on a daily basis (Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska 2017).

Throughout my fieldwork, my teammates helped me to enlighten how camp dwellers expand the physical and mental space of the camp far beyond the official boundaries of the camp. Such accounts push the discourse far beyond an abstract category of spatiality that seems discrete and self-explanatory between “the space

of the camp” and “the space of the city”. In this instance, “space is produced by a sovereign refugee subject whose action is intentional, volitional, agential; the connection between subjective action and objective consequence is direct and causal” (Abourahme 2015: 213) and assumes what I dare to define as a collective, elusive and transgressive dimension.

While camps turn into what I defined as “meaningful places of elusive contestation” in light of international gaps in protection, national securitization policies and arbitrary measures by local non-state actors, refugees invisibly “appropriate” access to diverse locations that have been reshaped in the same manner as familiar spaces. In such a politicized and securitized context, mobility is not explicitly claimed as a political common right but, rather, is daily conquered by “just” performing everyday activities. I argue that translocal informal networks transgressing urban boundaries effectively contribute to rethink the ambivalence of reified border spaces of exclusion (Agier 2002) and consequently introduce new possibilities of reshaping the broader map of Euro-Mediterranean space. In particular, the dimension of leisure and play constitutes an alternative perspective to examine practices of spatial appropriation and the (re)production of new meanings starting from the margins.

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