

“Temporarily Permanent: Agamben and Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon”  
Submitted by: Sarah Jamal and Adam Sandor

This paper is an attempt to bring to light the weaknesses in Agamben’s conceptualization of *bare life* and the camp structure, specifically through the examination of his lack of attention and space for resistance and agency. Specifically, we highlight the shortcomings in Agamben’s theories through an examination of the notion of *temporariness*, as evidenced in the living spaces of the Palestinian camps in Lebanon. Agamben posits that the camp is a depoliticized space where its occupants, the *hominus sacri*, are understood as devoid of all political rights, included only by virtue of their political exclusion, what he has termed ‘bare life’. For Agamben, those subjected to the structure and logic of the camp experience their lives as a lack, a time where the political is no longer possible as a result of this sovereign classification of the *homo sacer*, the latter reduced to both a subordinate non-political juridico-political status and its physical and locational mirroring in a space that is equally in/between- residing both inside and outside the sovereign state (Agamben 1998). Thus, the *homo sacer* is incapable of defining the value of its actions, the value of its life, and notably the additional meanings associated to living in the camp. We contend that the existence (both in time and space), in and of those spaces in/between, key to Agamben’s theorization, needs to be complicated in a way that allows for an understanding of the political not exclusively bound to the officiality of sovereign power, but to the contestedness of the *homo sacer* classification by the latter’s resistance and agency as the *homo sacer* living in the space of the camp.

Using a Foucauldian understanding of the interconnectedness and mutuality of sites in the application of power and resistance, this paper examines spaces which have been created to be both simultaneously inside and outside of the juridico-political space of the sovereign, and asserts that these spaces in/between are not only an indication or instantiation of sovereign power, but simultaneously exhibit and produce sites of resistance to that power in its inception. We focus on how Palestinian refugee camps exist in a zone of indistinction, where they exist outside the juridical reach of the Lebanese government and law enforcement, yet are consistently controlled and disciplined through the threat of violence and surveillance (Hanafi 2008). Agamben’s analysis of Nazi Germany determined these criteria as ways to eliminate juridical protections of those people who were the target of the Sovereign; “(w)hoever entered the camp moved in a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer made any sense” (Agamben 1998, 170). It is suggested here that it is not just from these categories of rights and protection that the ‘zone of indistinction’ is defined, but should also take into account its nature as a space *in between* the temporary and the permanent. In other words, inhabitants of the zones of indistinction exist not only in a space that is not defined/confined by the rigidities of law enacted upon or by citizens as rights bearers, but they also exist in those spaces in a way that is neither permanent nor temporary. The camps’ very existence in a state of “temporariness”

is one that functions not only as a force that defines the refugee as *bare life* but it also functions as a method of resistance for the Palestinian population. This is evidenced by the way in which pressures to assimilate and emigrate are denied by many in favour of an existence of the 'temporary'.<sup>1</sup> It is exactly in these spaces in/between that resistance to subjugation is performed with notable effects/consequences to Palestinian subjectivity. In other words, living in the zone of indistinction, regardless of whether or not one wields political rights, constitutes the possibility for contestation and therefore a reconstitution of social space and the political. In this way, contrary to what Agamben would have us understand as the camp being a space that is void of the political and completely under the control of sovereign power, we highlight the contested temporal nature of the camp and the political meanings associated to it by its inhabitants.

#### METHODOLOGY

This paper analyzes the work of Foucault and Agamben and their engagement with the concepts of resistance and biopolitics and their relationships to space, through an examination of the refugee camps in Lebanon. This will be done with a particular attention to camp structures and the complexities that notions of temporality bring to this specific case, building on the work of Hanafi, Sayigh, and Peteet. For the purposes of this paper the Palestinian refugee camp dwellers in Lebanon, particularly the camps of *Sabra* and *Shatila* will be addressed. The challenges in addressing a narrative of a population of this nature are numerous. There are Palestinians who live in different areas under very different conditions and legal circumstances. While the individuals in and between these camps differ in many respects and by no means constitute a homogenous group, these particular camps share in a history of a specific violence, notably the massacres of 1982. These camps also share many humanitarian resources and NGO programming due to their geographic proximity.

It is important to note here that many of the studies being used for this research are derived from existing ethnographic studies, many of which draw on oral histories. We accord this methodological choice its place of prominence from our epistemological understanding concerning the nature of discursive forms of power. Specifically, we find that coming to understand resistance cannot solely be sought through a deconstructive analysis of the discourses of those exercising domination. Significantly, following Zureik, understanding forms of resistance through discourse analysis must be coupled with the testimonies of those marginal groups whose self-understandings are hidden from official accounts of their plight-

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<sup>1</sup> *Though the concept of 'choice' is a problematic one to apply to refugee populations because they are making 'choices' under extreme constraints (juridically, economically, socially, etc.), the goal of this paper is to show that life in a camp can be embraced in a way that can be understood as resistance. An evaluation of 'choice' is beyond the scope of this paper but needs to be kept in mind so as to not glorify or mythcize the conditions of the camp or the individuals relegated to the conditions there, not to mention essentialising those who would choose to have their political rights increased in their host countries.*

or those “unrecorded’ histories as experienced by the less powerful, those in whose name intellectuals and governments speak” (Zureik, 2003, 154). This understanding is also consonant with the seemingly large importance placed on the tradition of personal narratives in Palestinian culture, and more particularly oral histories and accounts of resistance. We note the ethical dilemma of (re)appropriating historical research, from a hyperpoliticized/minioritized group, and the challenge of ascertaining permission where the method of application being used here has not been conducted by the original researchers who have undertaken those studies, and with the methodological genealogy that led them to their conclusions. In addition, many researchers of Palestine emphasize the challenges of collecting, verifying and drawing from reliable samples with the hopes of aggregating individual responses to represent a collective, as this population and the records of it are not only inaccurate and problematic, but highly politicized based on the group/organization/country collecting the information, especially in this cases Israel and Lebanon (Zureik 2003, Peteet 2005). This paper unfortunately participates in the conundrum of academe when not collecting first hand research. While these limits are noted, the unfeasibility of conducting the research first hand for obvious logistical reasons, results in few options. Careful consideration of the researchers who were used in this study with attention to their particular epistemological standpoint, it should be noted that their approach is generally consistent with the views of this study, thereby allowing for a coherence between methods.

It is important in this depiction and unpacking of resistance not to romanticize the exile and the experience of the Palestinians when seeking possibilities of expressions of agency (Peteet 2005, 28). Resistance in its variety of forms has the tendency to be romanticized, which can take away from the very real and deplorable human condition that refugees face in their day-to-day lives (Morton 2007). We have attempted to be sensitive to Said’s articulation of the Palestinian two faceted struggle of the exiled population struggling to maintain its identity with regard to both the loss of the Palestinian homeland to the Israeli occupation, and the lived experience of constraints inherent to living as refugees in various states of residence (Said 1992: 121). This is done so as to avoid glossing over the harsh and multi-layered realities that are faced by Palestinians around the world.

#### *HOMO SACER AND THE CAMP*

Agamben argues that contemporary power relations have been accentuated in and through the capacity of the sovereign to classify and make distinctions with regards to forms of life, where juridico-institutional power over death converges with the biopolitical power over life (Agamben 1998: 6). Specifically, Agamben analyzes the subjectivity of the ‘homo sacer’- the ‘sacred man’ in Roman law who lost all rights of citizenship, including protection from the sovereign, and could be killed by anyone, save for the purpose of ritual (Agamben 1998: 8). The homo sacer, according to Agamben, was included in the juridical order of Roman society “solely in the form of its exclusion”, or in its capacity to be excluded by arbitrary violent death (ibid, 18). The revocation of the rights and privileges associated with citizenship is executed by the sovereign, spoken in Schmittean fashion, he “who decides upon the

exception” (Schmitt 1985: 5).

The Sovereign embodies a legal and institutional paradox, wherein it creates the law or the subset of normal standards for a citizen’s conduct as an evaluation of efficiency against chaos, and is meant to be the power by which that law is upheld or overturned through its capacity of legitimating actions of last resort (Agamben 1998: 16-18). Thus, the sovereign is simultaneously capable of suspending the law at any given moment. The exceptional decision is therefore always made in relation to a normal standard, residing both inside and outside of the juridical norm that it serves to constitute, “not the chaos that precedes order but rather the situation that results from its suspension” (ibid.: 18). In this way, for Agamben, modern politics couched in sovereignty result in the production of a zone of indistinction inhabited by the exceptional subjectivity- the homo sacer.

For Agamben, the sovereign instantiation of the camp structure is born not out of ordinary legal norms, but out of a state of exception, creating a non-political space which facilitates the biopolitical management of life as animal, naked or bare (*zoé*) (ibid.: 166-67). This is what he refers to as ‘bare life’- a life lived void of political choice or value (killed but not sacrificed). As the exceptional practices of the sovereign constitute the norm in the space of an instant, or in the moment of the classificatory decision, the camp becomes the permanent spatial instantiation (or norm) wherein those categorized as the homo sacer become no more than a biological beings to be enacted upon by the sovereign’s agents- its citizenry. However, the capacity of the sovereign to classify one as homo sacer is immanently possible for all. Thus, for Agamben, all citizens are subjected to the possibility of the sovereign ban and as a result all maintain a relationship to the space of the camp- “a hybrid of law and fact in which the two terms have become indistinguishable” (ibid.: 170). To varying degrees, for Agamben, we are all bare life and inhabit the zone of indistinction due to the sovereign’s power to decide the inside from the outside, the *bios* from the *zoé*. This is regardless of our own understanding of the political, of the struggles over our own subjectification, and the meanings that individuals associate with structures of meaning operating alongside the sovereign ban like the possible classification of the outside over the inside due to dissident narratives of identity construction.

#### AGAMBEN: RESISTANCE AND THE CAMP

Agamben’s lack of attention to agency and resistance is a common point of contention and opposition. Edkins and Pin- Fat take a similar position in pointing to the lack room that is allowed for agency in Agamben’s ideas “both Foucault and Agamben are gesturing toward the conclusion that bare life (as) a power- less life and, correspondingly, that life constituted within biopolitics cannot be a political life” (Edkins and Pin- Fat 2004, 7). Even considering a Foucaultian understanding of resistance where every point of power allows for the possibility for a point of resistance, it seems that there are spaces where resistance is absent to both Foucault and Agamben. According to Agamben resistance is not possible from within the structure of the camp, as life in the camp is only *zoé* and never *bios*. For Foucault there is no possibility of resistance from and within a relationship of violence. This relationship is one that includes a structure that does not constitute the exercise of power but one that involves coercion or violence, which Foucault

sees as separate from his notions of power (Foucault 1982, 790). The lack of agency allotted to individuals by both of these scholars is troubling, as even in the most violent circumstances individuals have exercised agency and resistance. While Edkins and Pin-Fat discuss the possibility for resistance and the room to contest the Sovereign lies in Agamben as the refusal to draw lines, or “resistance as the refusal of sovereign distinctions” (Edkins and Pin-Fat 2004, 13), the argument that these two present leave us with the space to explore the possibility of agency from individuals who exist in a state of *bare life*.

In resisting the categorization to be considered as a temporary space or a permanent space, there is an inherent dynamic of resistance in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Edkins and Pin-Fat state that there can be resistance in the acceptance of *bare life*, they evaluate as an example of this, U.K. asylum seekers who hunger strike through sewing their eyelids and lips shut. Through this embracing of bare life, he exhibits the violence that the sovereign imposes on him, this is his political voice (2004). Edkins and Pin-Fat feel that this case “is particularly effective in showing clearly that sovereign power does not willingly enter into a power relation, but rather survives through relationship of violence” (Edkins and Pin-Fat 2004: 17). This is similar then to the relationship that the Palestinians in the camp have with the international community in general and the Lebanese and Israeli governments in particular. As their continued existence in the camps can be seen as a refusal to accept Israeli occupation, they ‘accept’ these circumstances and seem to reclaim their condition in a way that enables messages of resistance. The refusal to make one’s existence in a certain place/space and circumstance, one that is permanent in order to deny and the treatment and relegation to that circumstance being protested, however, is the key dynamic of time that is left out by Edkins and Pin-Fat. Applied more particularly, the denial of the right of return and a Palestinian state is countered by not “settling,” but rather existing in-between the temporary and the permanent in space that is both inside and outside sovereign control.

Foucault, in contrast, examines the appearance of resistance in various manifestations, and recognizes resistance as something that takes different forms throughout history and circumstance. Foucault addresses the importance of the examination of resistance as a word and a practice, as a way to understand power and how it functions. Using it as what he calls a starting point to “bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies” (Foucault 1982: 780). Foucault insists that the term “anti-authority struggle” is insufficient, because the main objective is not simply an attack to a particular “institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but rather a technique, a form of power” (Foucault 1982: 780-1). In *Security, Territory, Population* we find Foucault toying increasingly with the concept of resistance and what it not only entails but what the word itself means. He combines “resistance” with points of “refusal” deciding to use the term “counter-conduct” instead of “dissidence” or “disobedience”. He does what seems to be a brief etymological deconstruction while relating his particular genealogical study (Foucault 2007: 200-2). Here, Foucault’s

novel methodological conception of resistance serves the function of explaining the necessity of seeing power through its coupling with the former, something which is missed when understood by a purely Agambian evaluation. In other words, the importance to understanding mechanisms and expressions of power cannot be performed without an evaluation of resistance, showing the incomplete assessment of Agamben's understanding of Sovereign power.

How resistance can be evaluated becomes the complicated task, as an evaluation of what it is and how it looks is generally missing from the literature. This is an area that requires further evaluation; this needs to be combined with a consideration of the implications for resistance and agency that Agamben's caution of the expanding "zone of indistinction" has on the political. As spaces outside the camp increasingly come to function as camps, Agamben observes that "(w)e have all become *hominus sacri* or bare life in the face of biopolitics that technologizes, administers and depoliticizes, and thereby renders the political and power relations irrelevant" (Edkins and Pin-Fat 2004, 9). The way that this functions for the individual and their agency is an important angle that requires further research and explanation.

#### *PALESTINIAN CAMPS: TEMPORARILY PERMANENT*

There are two dimensions to theme of permanent temporariness that exists in the case of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon: the Palestinian perspective wherein not integrating into the host community and remaining in the camp is maintained as a political choice of the continued resistance and struggle against the Israeli occupation and is linked to their demand for the right of return. This is contrasted to the position of the Lebanese government whose goal in regard to internal political 'stability' is to maintain the demographic "balance" that exists within the Lebanese politico-religio dynamic (Petee 2005, Said 1992 and 1994). In this case, there is an active policy by the Lebanese government towards the Palestinian refugee population, as maintaining the Palestinians in camps, segregated from the general Lebanese population serves as a mechanism of demographic control, the assimilation of the former which would result in a shifting of population and political power. Therefore, there is a 'necessity' for the Lebanese government to advocate for the right of return for Palestinians, as the alternative of integration is not a viable option for their current political agenda (Ramadan 2009), as it would upset the political "balance" in Lebanon. This dynamic is vehemently protected by the Lebanese government to the point of numerical construction, where an official national census has not been conducted since the 1930s in order to maintain the percentages of religious affiliation that is associated with political power (Zureik 2001: 212).

Having initially been established as a temporary space and set of structures for the incoming Palestinian refugee community, the refugee camps in Lebanon have increasingly lost any understanding of its transitory nature: they are perceived as temporary spaces that are permanent resulting from the continued intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the involvement various international bodies. For example, organizational groups like United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for the Palestinian population of the Near East have been involved in providing humanitarian services for camp inhabitants for over fifty years, which has

contributed to the camps' continued functional existence, therein cementing the camp structure further away from a temporary understanding of its purpose as a social space. Even if juridically the spaces of the camp exist only in their temporary status within Lebanon, in practice, through partial reliance on UN resources, or through establishing makeshift settlements within the camps, or what is perceived as such, indications of permanence occur through necessity regardless of any legal classification of their temporariness. This has had a unique effect on the subjectivities of those Palestinian refugee populations residing in enclosed camps, the former considering these spaces as a means of maintaining a Palestinian identity distinct from those communities of the surrounding Arab host countries (Hanafi 2008: 94).

Living in the refugee camps is also complicated in terms of a temporary permanent existence due to the actions of the host Lebanese government. In most cases, with their exclusion of the Palestinian population from various privileges and rights that are afforded to Lebanese citizens, camp occupants are increasingly removed from the political sphere of their 'host' countries as they are excluded from the ability to find employment, limited in their rights to move between camps, kept apart from the Lebanese community through camp enclosure and separation from Lebanese urban areas, to participate in civic decision-making and voting, etc (Al-Natour 1997). In this way, as the Lebanese state maintains its rule of law over Lebanese territory and its citizens, apart from the refugee camps, but leaves the internal governance of the camps to its own devices, the camps remain exceptional spaces that are defined increasingly by permanence: "This subtle use of law and its suspension justifies the use of the space of exception to understand the relationship between the camp and the Lebanese space" (Hanafi 2008: 90-1). The space of the camps are maintained in exception to Lebanese legal standards to their own citizens, further sedimenting the norm of exceptionality.

This exceptional normality exhibited by the Lebanese government is indicative of how the maintenance and control of individual bodies becomes not only the function of the state but also a necessity for the Lebanese state to continue. The dehumanization of Palestinians in Lebanon is maintained as refugees are collected "in a centralized and controlled place where they can be under constant surveillance... under the pretext of facilitating service provision, the camp is conceived as the only possible space" (Hanafi 2008: 88). The closed camps in Lebanon are exceptional spaces, ones that are subjected by many (PLO, UNRWA, Lebanese Authorities, etc.) to biopolitical control (Hanafi 2008: 89-90).

Though this might exhibit support to Agamben's notion of *homo sacer*, the contestation with Agamben here is that he ascribes a lack of capacity for political life to those occupying that category. Political life, according to Agamben, is one that is defined by Sovereign parameters and does not have space for resistance, in any form. However, the "political zone of indistinction" for the Palestinians exists because it is regarded by many as a temporary situation. As temporary permanence actively pursued in the practices of survival, for example, when the camp dwellers begin to set up infrastructure and establish routines, the camp is often disturbed or comes under attack (Sabra, Shatila, Nahr el-Barid, etc.), which functions to maintain the exceptionality and temporality of these spaces as these acts of violence against

the Palestinians are not persecuted.<sup>2</sup> The reaction to the embracing of their temporary permanence by government forces only stresses how the camp populations challenge the sovereign ban, and reassert their political values such as the right of return.

Diken and Lausten also address the zone of indistinction where the refugee exists- excluded while simultaneously being included, as objects that are regulated through law yet restricted by it, even in their private lives (Diken and Lausten 2005: 80). While they discuss the refugee camps (both 'open' and 'closed') as existing as non-places, through a reading of Augé, they see refugee camps as places that "do not integrate other places, meanings, traditions, and sacrificial, ritual moments still remain, due to the lack of characterization, non-symbolized and abstract spaces" (Diken and Lausten 2005: 86). We contend that this is not the case where the camp represents and is set up in a framework of spatial resistance and maintained with similar structures, street names and landmarks as Palestinian territories as a form of denying the appropriation of their land and collective memory (Sayigh 1994: 32; Peteet 2005: 94). Place is not only a link to an identity in the sense of origin but it is also a form of identity on the most micropolitical level, in that even one's name becomes associated or identified with a village name and less a family name (Sayigh 1994: 27). The Palestinians have used the camps as a way to silence the colonial voice that insists on relegating them to what Gregory calls a "mute *object* of history, people who merely have things done *to* them, and never recognized as one of its active *subjects*" (Gregory 2004b: 79). Actively striving to survive in the Lebanese camps, (re)appropriating cultural insignia such as maps designed over with the Palestinian flag, providing support for the various resistance forces operating across the camps all demonstrate how an embracing of their legal indistinction is synonymous to a contestation over their current plight, and embodies the political. Gregory convincingly reminds us how "the Palestinian people had most of their land taken from them, but in a host of ways –from poetry to politics – they have retained their memories of the Palestinian past... These retentions are profoundly spatialized, not only in the sense of the space of Palestine itself but also in the intimate microtopographies of homes, fields, and cemeteries", and we might add, in the space of the refugee camps (Gregory 2004b: 88). Instead, Agamben continues the very thing that Gregory warns us about by removing the agency from those who are in the position of *homo sacer* by naming them non-political and no longer subjects.<sup>3</sup>

The difficulty with Agamben's categorization comes from a root contention with the way in which he derives the concept of Sovereign. He problematically

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<sup>2</sup> It will be interesting to see what comes out of the inquiry of the recent bombing of Nahr el-Barid, hopefully the situation Belgium inquiry into Sabra and Shatila does not serve as an example.

<sup>3</sup> "This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power, which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to." (Foucault 1982: 781)

values a sovereign state system of status categorization, for him existing outside the state, yet inside it is a status that comes with it an inability for agency. This reduces agency to a state based framework, removing the capacity for resistance away from the individual or community, where resistance is often found.

Peteet on the other hand, counters an Agambian notion of citizenship, stating that the notion/definition of citizenship can be defined by the individual and not necessarily by the state, as

Palestinians in Lebanon can conceive of alternative forms of citizenship and thus modernities that extend well beyond a nationalism tightly bound up with particular territories. Their identities are not affixed to *singular* places but are embedded in trajectories of exile, which have a point of origin in Palestine. Their notion of citizenship is postnational in the sense that national boundaries need no longer contain the citizenry. (Peteet 2005, 26)

As we can see, what Peteet calls a 'postnational sense of citizenry' is not compatible with Agamben's notion of Sovereign based categorization, as it seems for Peteet citizenship can be self-determined. This notion challenges not only what the classification of one into a particular national identity but in addition, how one allows one's self to be categorized by the Sovereign power has a noteworthy effect.

While it is too early, and perhaps impossible to figure out the extent of the effects that occur because of any categorization by Sovereign power, geographic and structural upset is a common occurrence to the refugees in question. Sayigh, while acknowledging deficiencies in the accessibility of information, finds that the level of displacement in the Lebanese case is outrageously high in comparison to other situations. For Sayigh "(t)he effects of the refugee displacement in Lebanon on health, educational levels, and family relations have not been fully evaluated, but are still manifested in housing that defies all acceptable norms" (Sayigh 1994: 22). This is not a newly occurring phenomena as Palestinian refugees have been dealing with what Ramadan (1998) calls 'urbanicide' for more than thirty-five years, where "...several camps have been completely razed, others severely damaged. Originally fifteen, the refugee camps today number twelve. Some camps, for example Shatila have been destroyed more than once" (Sayigh 1994: 22). The constant destruction of places of residence not only serves particular functions for the Lebanese and Israeli governments, but is identified as a specific form of resistance for the Palestinian people as they continue to rebuild these areas despite the increasing hardships, which will be examined further down in this paper.

Hanafi (2008) identifies a form of *double alienation* that is the result of keeping the camps maintained and functional but "keeping them in a state of double alienation, both from their place or origin and from the urban and social domains in the host society" (Hanafi 2008: 89). This *double alienation* occurs in the Palestinian population as not only a majority of Lebanese citizens oppose their permanent resettlement into the country, but also many Palestinians who remain committed to their 'right of return.' Unfortunately, the practical result of this feeling "translates to discriminatory policies with regards to the social, economic and civil rights of the Palestinians" (ibid.: 87). Those living in the camps then are suspended both spatially and temporally, in what is characterized by the French anthropologist

Michel Augé as “frozen transience’, an ongoing lasting state of temporariness ... (as)... camp dwellers ‘learn to live, or rather survive, in the here-and now, bathed in the concentrate of violence and hopelessness brewing within its walls’” (Hanafi *ibid.*: 89). While Hanafi addresses the dual functioning of existing in a state of temporariness and relates it specifically to our case, he too does not see this as a space for agency or resistance. It is a place for the continued poor treatment of Palestinian people and a mechanism for increased biopolitical control and competition between multiple sovereign actor competing in the space of the camp. This state of temporariness does have a place for appropriation by the Palestinians as a form of resistance as we have seen, rather than regarded as a space for the maintaining the ‘collective identity’ of Palestinians as what seems to be a more passive form than what we are arguing here.

#### *CONCLUSION: TEMPORARY CAMP AS RESISTANCE*<sup>4</sup>

The Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon are spaces where notions of boundaries and spatial temporariness are complicated and interwoven with questions of human condition and political interests. The political consequences to refugees when the notion of the temporariness of space and the camp are naturalized to that of a possibility of permanence has lasting implications on both the identity of the camp itself and that of its dwellers. This exhibits that resistance can be found not only in these spaces but that the spaces that exist in these places in/between can function in and of them selves as resistive. Resistance then does not have to be simply performed in these spaces but are performed by the very existence of these spaces.

This paper questions the accuracy of Agamben’s account of spaces of exception, arguing that spaces of exception and the state of *homo sacer* can be one that is not a passive experience/categorization but can in fact be an active/resistive one. Remaining in situation of the refugee camp, maintaining it and continuing to reside in it, despite the destruction (*urbanicide* of Nahr el-Bared (Ramadan 2009) and violence, massacres at Sabra and Shatila, etc. (al-Shaikh 1984, King-Irani 2006, Ramadan 2009)) is where this resistance can be found. There are political acts by those *hominus sacri*, as they rebuild and resist micropolitical efforts of control subjected by the Lebanese government. The purpose here is not to romanticize the lack of rights and regard that is given to these populations, the dire humanitarian conditions or to advocate for the continued segregation of these populations into camps. Rather, an alternative deconstruction as to some of the variety of sentiments towards the assimilation of the Palestinian population into their ‘host’ countries.

As the refugee camps become a place where the Palestinian collective memory is expressed and expanded as “(d)isrespect toward the dead and acts of political and religious sacrilege are intended to humiliate and isolate the

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<sup>4</sup> Resistance is of course not limited to the particular face, vision or interpretation evaluated in this paper. For some resistance might be living away from the camps in the “best” way possible, living in a way that you have the freedom to determine yourself becomes resistance. For the purposes of this paper we focus on a certain expression of resistance, one that is not exclusive but one that is a particular deconstruction of the actions of life in the camps.

Palestinians in Lebanon. But the very act of marginalization results in the solidification of the community bonds in the face of exclusion and offense" (Khalili 2005: 37). The Palestinian body becomes that of *homo sacer*; their lives cannot be mourned. Though their lives are not ones that lack resistance not are they unpolitical beings, in the zone of indistinction. Hanafi sees the camp as a place where resistance can occur and agency as capable to be expressed in the *state of exception*. For him though resistance is found in the exceptional status that is insisted on, deconstructing this position as a refusal "to submit them to Lebanon's commissars to keep their authoritative power without elections" (Hanafi 2008: 91). This becomes problematic as it often reifies the existing structures of power that are dominated by the already existing Palestinian factions (ibid.: 92). While Hanafi argues similarly to Edkins and Pin-Fat by acknowledging the existence of resistance from within the camp, and from the acceptance of the exception they miss the location in time that is key to this paper which is an existence in the temporary.

There is no single criteria for Palestinian resistance, or resistance in general. It is not uniform, nor does it have a manifestation. Resistance is something that differs across time and space. But the question that we ask is what resistance looks like, in the Palestinian case resistance is something that is the existence in a transitory space/place. It is, in this case at least the rejection of setting up "home" in favour for living in a "house" as looked at by he contrast in these terms is looked at by Sayigh (1994). Rejecting a settled life, an assertion of a determinable homeland, one that will someday be/should be returned one that one will return to, "(w)hen the 'beit' loses all sense of security, the human need for stability that it represents appears to be replaced by a sense of 'homelessness' so deep that many in the camps assert it to be part of the modern Palestinian identity." (Sayigh 1994, 24) Even considering that these relationships of power and resistance are ones that exist in spaces of violence, spaces that that Agamben and Foucault might have us believe are void of agency and action, but this is a counter to that position. Agency is possible, and this possibility can lie in the acceptance of ones status as *homo sacer* and using your non-status as a status for a political agenda. Existing in a space that is deemed to be temporary, when you have pressure to resettle somewhere else, and refusing to give up your collective voice in doing that becomes a political act by those "nonpolitical" *homo sacer*.

As the deplorable qualities and conditions of these spaces illustrate, and not to delimit the function of juridico/political inclusion and protections, these spaces are not purely resistive. They exist in a complex milieu/interplay of resistance and power. This paper examined some of the ways in which resistive spaces exist and are performed even within and as spaces that have been designed under the pretence of exclusion. The Palestinian camps in Lebanon function as a multi-layered space for exertion of power, resistance, and violence (or what Foucault calls coercion). They are exceptional in that they are simultaneously inside and outside, they are included and excluded but they are not non-political spaces, they are not outside resistance. They are resistive in a way that is not stagnant as the battles over sovereignty of the space continue to occur. These struggles are minimized by an Agambian notion of power and resistance, but are recognized in a Foucauldian one. The refugee is never non-political, just like the refugee camp is never outside

the political, as their very existence assumes some interplay with the political. This interplay is not always defined by the sovereign, as Agamben would have us believe. Instead, it is more fruitful to consider the ways in which the political is enacted through resistance in relation to a structure of power. It does not require an assessment from power or the latter's ascription as such, as Agamben's elaboration of sovereign power seems to assume. Resistance does, instead, imply a requirement for the meaning given to the act by the individual actor and those others in similar positions of alterity to those structures.

It is important to ask ourselves the implications that Agamben's concepts have on agency more generally before we are to adopt his method of viewing those that are included and those that are excluded from the political. This paper presents specific epistemological goal, one that desires to bring light resistive performances (and performances that function as resistance) that may not be necessarily identified as such by the discursive tactics of those who are more fluent in the exercise of power. Through a critique of Agamben's lack of space for agency and resistance in the camp by those *hominus sacri* this paper articulates methods of resistance that make what he claims to be a non-political space into an inherently political one. Resistance exists and functions in ways that are not always identified as such by both those performing the actions of resistance and those being resisted against. This is not to say that these categories do not overlap, but it is rather to state that resistance exists in a multiplicity of places and in a variety of concentrations. While an act is not reducible to a 'pure' resistive act, we follow Foucault important injunction that there is space within every power structure for actions of resistance to occur.

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