

**Beyond binary thinking:
*A spatial negotiations perspective on refugee tarries in South Lebanon***

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Context

Lebanon presents a game-changer for our thinking about and protection approaches to refugee hosting and settlement processes. In Lebanon, refugees from Syria do not live in large, formal camps, but reside scattered over the country in and around cities and villages, which affects relations between refugees, host communities and other actors involved in the country's hybrid political order. This research investigated how refugees and host communities negotiate the use and meaning of space with regard to the establishment and experience of refugee tarries, community formation, governance and livelihood strategies. The findings suggest that bureaucratic labels that reflect binary thinking, such as camp versus out-of-camp refugees or self-settled versus assisted settlement, should be perceived as extremes of a range on which refugees move strategically or subject to changing circumstances. This implicates acknowledging the hybridity, diversity and informality of the socio-spatial dialectic around refugee hosting. Consequently, academics, policy makers and aid workers should rethink the debate on displacement versus embeddedness into one about socio-spatial bordering, human immobility and hybridity of places, and adjust their interventions accordingly.

Aims

The main aim of this research has been to challenge essentialism and to contribute to a rethinking of refugee hosting and settlement processes by looking at spatial negotiations between refugees and host communities. This would involve an exploration of the following questions:

- How does identity relate to place-making?
- How are power and governance structures related to spatial ordering?
- How do livelihood strategies affect the settlement landscape?

Findings

The research uses the term 'refugee tarry' to describe refugee hosting locations, as it reflects a sequence of 'to wait, to be delayed and to remain' and as such covers a spectrum of people who choose a place to wait for their home country to become safe again, how this can be delayed for several years and may result in their remaining in a location, but also allows for the option of moving onwards.

- Social networks turned out to be key in the *establishment* of refugee tarries. All refugee tarries included in this research emerged out of social networks that were established before or after displacement. Most refugees followed friends or relatives, thereby building a process of chain migration. Contrary to our binary thinking of camp versus non-camp locations, the refugee tarries established in Lebanon show a variety of both spatial and social characteristics. Some consist of tents, others are large unfinished buildings or regular apartment blocks. Some did not exist before the Syrian crisis, others have hosted refugees or economic migrants for decades. They also differ from

one another in whether they have been rematerialized from their original spatial use into refugee territories via a formal or informal process. *Experience* of these places by both refugees and host communities further influences place-making as it shapes the way in which people socially and spatially border their society, which cannot be translated into a binary categorization either.

- Processes of identity-based *community formation* create implicit borders that influence spatial negotiations. Feelings of belonging and threat result in establishing imagined communities of self and other, which are strongly influenced by prejudices and moral classifications.
- Borders for inclusion and exclusion are also set more explicitly. They result from as well as influence the meaning, use and *governance* of space. This governance resembles a tug-of-war with multiple ropes in which a variety of actors contest each other over legitimacy and influence in spatial negotiations. Those actors who are strongest have most power to allow or restrain settlement and movement of refugees. Different forms of control are exercised, not only top-down by governmental and aid organizations, but also by individuals and groups from refugee and host communities. Refugees and hosts sometimes demarcate space by placing stones or building fences, thereby facilitating or blocking contact. Some of them build networks in which alliances are formed to undermine another actor's power. In addition, restrictions on mobility result in a higher degree of containment and force people to choose between places. As such, one could say refugees from Syria in Lebanon have become 'more' refugee because of containment measures.
- Spatial negotiations are also linked to *livelihood strategies*, because mobility on the socio-economic ladder interrelates with social and spatial ordering. Economic relations influence place as people that have good access to economic assets are able to reside in more upgraded living spaces by restructuring their settlement or moving to a better living environment. People that cannot find a stable job, often cannot improve their settlement or even have to move to a less comfortable place. Capacity to strategically create and use access to economic assets is influenced by personal abilities and the strength of someone's network. Not everyone is equally able to link his or her agency to opportunities, because of physical, financial and cultural constraints. Many refugees are hosted in the poorer areas of Lebanon, which creates frustration among hosts or competition with original beneficiaries. As Lebanon faces a hampered political system, an already damaged economy and increased insecurity at its borders, the unprecedented number of arriving refugees might continue to increase the risk of conflicts between refugees and hosts.

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