Refugee-Refugee Relations in Contexts of Overlapping Displacement

Displacement is increasingly common (affecting one in every 122 people) and also increasingly protracted (over half of the world's 14 million refugees in 2015 have been displaced for over ten years). Circa 90% of these refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) remain in the global South, and most of them, in turn, reside in urban spaces.[1] However, while it clear that we are facing a period of protracted displacement in (peri-)urban settings, it is less frequently acknowledged that this is also a period of *overlapping displacements.* This is the case in at least two senses. Firstly, refugees and IDPs have often both personally and collectively experienced secondary and tertiary displacement, as in the case of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees who had originally sought safety in Damascus only to be displaced once more by the on-going Syrian conflict, and of Sahrawi and Palestinian refugees who had left their refugee camp homes in Algeria and Lebanon respectively to study or work in Libya before being displaced by the outbreak of conflict in that country in 2011 (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2012). Secondly, refugees are increasingly experiencing overlapping displacement in the sense that they often physically share spaces with other displaced people in diverse spaces of asylum: Turkey hosts refugees from over 35 countries of origin, Lebanon from 17, Kenya 16, Jordan 14, Chad 12, and both Ethiopia and Pakistan 11 (Crawford et al: 2015). However, in spite of the widespread reality of these overlapping groups, and given the interest in 'superdiversity' and 'cosmopolitanism' in urban spaces across migration studies writ large (Vertovec, 2007; Derrida 2007), it is particularly notable that refugees' positions, identities, beliefs and behaviours in relation to other groups of refugees remain almost entirely unexplored to date.

Indeed, a large proportion of studies of urban refugees focus on one particular refugee group in one city (i.e. Lyytinen 2015; Bartolomei 2015), while multisited, comparative studies often focus on one group dispersed across a number of cities or divided across a city and a camp setting (i.e. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2012, 2013; and Malkki 1995 respectively), or compare the conditions and dynamics of one group of refugees in one city with another group in another city (i.e. Sanyal 2014). In contrast, only a small number of studies explicitly examine the experiences of different refugees in the same city (i.e. Brown et al 2004; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh 2010). Of particular relevance to the argument I make below vis-à-vis the 'relationality' of refugees in shared spaces of refuge, Buscher (2011: 21-22) analyses the relative strength of social ties and networks within Somali, Congolese and Burundian refugee communities in the city of Kampala. While Buscher's article thus recognizes the overlapping presence of refugees from different countries of origin in

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[1] There is a greater prevalence of encampment policies and refugee camps in Sub-Saharan Africa versus a greater tendency for urban settlement in regions such as the Middle East.

Kampala, it seemingly highlights both the relative isolation of Somalis and Congolese refugees from other refugee communities, and the extent to which fractures and mistrust characterize relations within the Burundi refugee community. This may helpfully demonstrate that segregation, rather than social integration via cohabitation, can maximize livelihood strategies for certain refugees (in this case, Burundian refugees), and yet this focus on nationality-based social networks continues to render invisible the *relationality* of refugees in spaces inhabited by multiple, and often overlapping, groups of refugees in urban contexts.

From Relative Isolation to Refugee-Refugee Relations in Urban Spaces

As academics, policy-makers and practitioners have aimed to understand and appropriately respond to the needs and rights of displaced people in urban settings, refugees have often been viewed in isolation, rather than in relation to other refugees. In effect, the *relationality* of refugees, and the extent to which they share spaces (physically, socially, emotionally) with others, has typically been viewed through the lens of refugee-host relations (in itself a notably under-researched area) in which the host is conceptualized as citizen-qua-host, hosting-the-non-citizen.

The focus on 'local host communities' and the 'national population' is understandable on policy (and political) levels in contexts of protracted displacement into urban areas. This is especially the case since integration is recognised to be a two-way process that depends on the "readiness on the part of the receiving communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse community" (UNHCR 2005). Nevertheless, the widespread reality of 'overlapping displacements' prompts us to meaningfully recognize that newly displaced populations do not only share spaces or aim to integrate into communities of 'nationals', but also into communities formed by 'established' or 'former' refugees/IDPs of similar or different nationality/ethnic groups (i.e. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2015, 2016a; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh 2016).

Ongoing cycles of displacement and the multi-directionality of movement deeply problematize the assumption that refugees are 'hosted' by settled national populations, highlighting the blurred nature of the categories of 'displaced person' and 'host' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager 2013; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016b). In some of these contexts, host communities are displaced by conflict or disaster and subsequently become 'the hosted,' while in others the displaced themselves become hosts to newly displaced people.

As I have argued elsewhere (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2015), refugee-led initiatives developed in response to existing and new refugee situations directly challenge widely held (although equally widely contested) assumptions that refugees are passive victims in need of care from outsiders. My ongoing research, for instance, examines the dynamics underpinning, and (re)emerging in, the encounters between 'established' Palestinian refugees who have lived in an urban Palestinian refugee camp in North Lebanon since the 1950s (Baddawi camp) as they have hosted increasing numbers of 'new' refugees arriving from Syria since 2011. These include not only Syrian refugees, but also Palestinian and Iraqi refugees who had been living in Syria at the outbreak of the conflict and who have find themselves "refugees-once-more" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2012). This encounter with refugees fleeing Syria

situates Palestinians as active providers of support to others, rather than as aid recipients, whilst, equally, reflecting the extent to which urban camps can become 'shared spaces', spaces to which 'new' refugees can head in search of safety (Qasmiyeh and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2015).

Indeed, my interviewees in Baddawi camp repeatedly reiterated that when they fled Syria, "we arrived in the camp" and just "passed through Lebanon." Having crossed the Syrian-Lebanese border, they were physically on Lebanese territory and yet explained that they had travelled directly to, and arrived in, Baddawi camp, where established residents and local organisations offered them shelter, food and clothes. In many ways, the urban camp has superseded the (hypervisible) Lebanese state, with many refugees from Syria explicitly stating that, from the very onset of their journeys, they had identified Baddawi refugee camp as their intended destination (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2015). This is in spite of the extreme poverty and armed clashes that take place between the Palestinian factions that compete to assert their presence and/or to control different parts of the camp; while recognised as "islands of insecurity" (Sayigh 2000), Baddawi camp continues to be perceived by many 'new' refugees as being safer than any of the ('national'/ Lebanese) spaces available outside of the existing Palestinian camps, as they are isolated from the national policies that increasingly restrict refugees from Syria in the country.

Importantly, this is not the first time that Baddawi as an urban camp and its refugee inhabitants have welcomed 'new' refugees. Previous instances include the hosting of over 15,000 'new' Palestinian refugees who were displaced from nearby Nahr el-Bared refugee camp when that camp was destroyed during the fighting between Fatah Al-Islam and the Lebanese army in 2007 (see Qasmiyeh and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013; Qasmiyeh 2016). With an estimated 10,000 refugees from Nahr el-Bared still residing in Baddawi camp, these 'internally-displaced-refugees-hosted-by-refugees' have in turn become part of the 'established' refugee community in Baddawi hosting 'newly' displaced refugees from Syria (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016b). This demonstrates the centrality of spatial and temporal dimensions in such contexts of overlapping displacements and vulnerabilities.

Whilst highlighting the relational nature of refugeedom, and destabilising the assumption that refugees are always hosted by citizens, however, the encounters characterising refugee-refugee hosting are not to be idealised, since they are also often framed by power imbalances and processes of exclusion and overt hostility by the refugee Self (the members of the 'original' refugee community) towards the refugee Other (the 'new' arrivals). In the case of Baddawi, these processes are further accentuated precisely by virtue of the overlapping, if temporally and spatially differentiated, experiences of displacement, dispossession and precariousness in this encounter and in the broader region.

Elsewhere (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2015, 2016a), I have examined this encounter through the Derridean lens of *hostipitality,* which, inter alia, recognises that hospitality inherently bears its own opposition, the ever-present possibility of hostility towards the Other who has, at one time, been welcomed at the threshold. In this regard, the inherent conditionality of hospitality is underpinned by the paradox that to offer welcome is 'always already' to have the power to delimit the space or place that is being offered to the Other (Derrida 2000a/b). However, a more productive theoretical lens for the purposes of this short reflection on

refugee-refugee relations may ultimately be that of Jean-Luc Nancy's "being together" and "being with".

For refugees from Syria, arriving in the camp – whether Baddawi or other Palestinian camps in Lebanon – and sharing its increasingly cramped space and limited resources has been an opportunity to form part of the broader 'refugee nation,' a space of solidarity in which refugees from Syria can, following Nancy (2000: 4), "be with" other refugees, rather than arriving as outsiders to a Lebanese city. Nonetheless, not all refugees in Baddawi are positioned equally, nor have they been equally welcomed, or had equal access to spaces, services and resources. Ultimately, it is clear that "togetherness and being-together are not equivalent" (Nancy 2000: 60), with a new hierarchy of refugeeness having emerged in this encounter.

These hierarchies and tensions are often presented as not only common but also potentially inescapable, including through the application of the Derridean notion of hostipitality. And yet, alternative modes of thought and action, including the framework for supporting "welcoming communities" for refugees (Bucklaschuk 2015), may also be fruitful for further analysis both in theory and practice. In essence, in light of the "everyday geographies" and "quiet politics of belonging" that characterise "ordinary" encounters, and ordinary 'being' in the world (and in the city) (Askins, 2015), the conceptual and practical challenges that emerge include recognising the realities of, and potential for, refugees and hosts (whether citizens or refugees themselves) both 'being with' and 'being together'.

This is, in essence, an invitation to researchers, policy-makers and practitioners to actively explore the potential to support the development, and maintenance, of welcoming communities and communities of welcome, whether these communities are composed of citizens, new refugees, or established refugees. Ultimately, a focus on overlapping displacement thus provides an entry point to recognise, and meaningfully engage with, the agency of refugees and their diverse hosts in providing support and welcome as active partners in processes of integration, whilst recognising the challenges that characterise such encounters precisely by virtue of a series of equally overlapping processes of marginalisation and precariousness.

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