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'State of exception' or 'state in exile'? The fallacy of appropriating Agamben on Palestinian refugee camps

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ABSTRACT

To refer to Palestinian refugee camps as states of exception, appropriating the paradigm of Giorgio Agamben, is definitely tempting. Agamben argues that in times of crisis, individual rights of citizens are diminished and entire categories of people kept outside the political system. Nevertheless, there are flaws in applying Agamben's perspective on Palestinian camps. It acquits the camp residents from the autonomy over their own political agency. Historically, in Lebanon, camp residents experienced an almost limitless access to free political organisation. But this access has not been converted into the development of representative, legitimate political structures.

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In 2012, a Norwegian master's student went to see the leader of a camp committee in the Shatilla refugee camp in Beirut. The student was studying internal political organisation in Palestinian refugee camps and knew that various camp committees were said to represent the refugees. At that time, the second year of the Arab Spring, calls for elections had also reached Palestinian refugee camps. Before having presented all his questions, the student found himself the target of an investigation and had his passport taken 'for inspection'. 'How is Norway's relation to Israel?' he was asked. Could it be that he was actually a collaborator, a spy for Israel? He was kept at the office for an hour before he was allowed to leave.[1]

Internal power dynamics are rarely inquired about in research on Palestinian refugee camps. Rather, this research tends to focus on the impact of *external* forces on the refugees' socio-economic condition and political situation. Recently, one research paradigm has conquered the field of refugee studies in general, and the study of Palestinian camps in particular, taking this to the extreme: *the state of exception* thesis of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Ramadan remarks that at the 2010 annual conference of American Geographers, one presenter said that he felt 'obliged' to mention Agamben in his presentation – and that 'almost every presentation began with or mentioned Agamben in some way'.[2] When it comes to studying Palestinian refugee camps, hardly a study has been published since mid-2000 that does not refer to the state of exception thesis.[3]

When dealing with paradigms, simplifications are forgiven. A theory must be better than its competitor, without having to explain every fact it may be confronted with.[4] However, I will argue that framing the understanding of the political reality of Palestinian camp refugees

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through the state of exception and *homo sacer* concepts (to be elaborated upon below) are not merely simplifications. Inside the camps, the problem is not external control mechanisms but the monopolisation of power by resistance groups afraid that democratisation might threaten their hegemony. A focus on *internal* political dynamics, including the high level of political autonomy the Palestinians have experienced in exile and the room for political organisation within the camps, is not compatible with the state-of-exception paradigm claiming that subjects are victims of a total deprivation of political agency. Applying Agamben to the Palestinian refugee camps therefor blurs more than it reveals on the political situation of Palestinian refugees.

The state-of-exception paradigm

According to Giorgio Agamben, the rule of modern states through regimes of state of exception increases in times of crisis as individual rights of citizens are diminished and entire categories of people excluded from the political system. The prototype Agamben refers to is the Third Reich where the suspension of laws within a state of emergency becomes a prolonged state of being. Agamben also refers to Guantanamo and the American war on terror. These are cases of camps where the inmates are excluded from the polity, and deprived basic universal human rights. The state of exception thus also, according to Agamben, has become a prolonged state of being in the contemporary modern democratic state, operating with a permanent zone of exclusion for those excluded from the law, the *homo sacer*, the ones who under ancient Roman law could be killed without punishment.[5]

Before one year had passed since the publishing of the state of exception in 2005, the conference Palestine as a State of Exception – A Global Paradigm was held in Dublin. In 2008 the edited volume *Thinking Palestine* was published, based on the conference. A year later came *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion*, also an edited volume analysing the Palestinian case through the prism of Agamben's perspective. Accompanying these was a forest of academic articles where the situation described through the *homo sacer* and the state of exception concepts were appropriated on the Palestinian case.[6] 'In short, it seems that most of the Palestinians are for all intents and purposes placed in outlaw situations. To borrow Agamben's words, Palestinians seem to be regarded as *homo sacer*', writes Tosa Hiroyuki.[7] 'In Gaza and the West Bank the Palestinian population is treated as *homo sacer*', writes Sahd.[8] 'The Palestinian State of Exception entails all aspects of life', writes Abujidi.[9]

When it comes to applying Agamben's perspectives on the Palestinian case, one author in specific distinguishes himself. The professor of sociology at the American University of Beirut, Sari Hanafi has published and co-written more than 20 articles and reports on Palestinian camps, analysing them through the 'state of exception' or '*homo sacer*' concepts.

For Hanafi, Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon constitute a 'space of exception, a space out of place' under 'disciplinary power, control and surveillance'.[10] Equally, West Bank camps are regarded as 'an experimental laboratory for control and surveillance' where the occupier rules through 'the normalisation of a state of exception'.[11]

Hanafi further refers to the Palestinian refugee camps as 'humanitarian space' where refugees are 'transformed into bodies to be fed and sheltered'.[12] This humanitarian space is part of the overall 'care, cure and control' system, and humanitarian organisations and United Nations (UN) through its special agency for Palestinian refugees, The United Nations Work

and Relief Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), have 'transformed refugee camps into disciplinary spaces'.[13] That the camps are spaces devoid of laws and regulations is not understood as implying an absence of governance. It is indeed a form of governance, but one where people are deprived of the right to political participation. A Palestinian refugee 'has no say in either the Lebanese or Palestinian political processes which affect him or her', Hanafi and Long assert.[14] The Palestinians' status is indeed one of *homo sacer*, they elsewhere claim: 'There is no more telling marker of the refugee's status as homo sacer than the unregulated, urban and prison-like conditions of his or her life in a camp'.[15]

In this article, the theoretical premises of Agamben's paradigm are not questioned per se.[16] The question is how this paradigm fits the Palestinian situation, especially the situation in the Palestinian refugee camps. The *homo sacer* concept is an illuminating point of departure. As referred to in the section above, the concept has been integrated into an academic discourse where Palestinian refugees are seen as pacified and incapacitated while UNRWA is regarded as the 'sovereign' behind this incapacitation. Clientification of humanitarian aid recipients may be a challenge in the humanitarian aid sector in general, and for the most prolonged refugee situation in the world, donor dependency would apparently be unavoidable. Nevertheless, as will be elaborated upon below, scholars of UNRWA's history tend to point to the political *empowering* of Palestinian refugees under UNRWA's administration as a distinctive feature of its years of operation. This is by all means the *opposite* of the version presented by the *homo sacer* and 'bio-power' narratives.

UNRWA's empowering of the refugees

There is no scholarly disagreement on what the basic development lines in UNRWAs history are. After its first decade of operation, from 1950, when UNRWA focused on providing the refugees with essential services, primary health care, relief and social services, a new strategy emerged: to develop mobile, Palestinian human capital through investing in education. This proved to be a highly successful strategy. Today, UNRWA, through its more than 21,000 educational staff ,runs 689 schools and 10 vocational and technical training centres, attended by half a million students.[17] More than 99% of the staff are Palestinian refugees themselves, or from the host country. 'Never before in the Arab Middle East has there been as inclusive an educational system as that of UNRWA; reaching as it does to all classes and both sexes', a study found.[18] Regionally, the UNRWA schools gained a reputation for being of good quality.[19] In the 1950s, UNRWA had US $27 per individual to provide for its services to the refugees.[20] In spite of this, by the end of the 1960s this poor population turned out to be the most educated one in the Arab world.[21] This was the most significant transformation UNRWA was responsible for. It was in fact quite an achievement, because UNRWA thus through their strategy largely avoided the clientalisation and passivisation of refugees that protracted refugee crises tend to produce. UNRWA schools were well reputed on the basis of the high quality of services they provided, according to Bocco.[22] In the 1960s and 1970s one-third of the Palestinian work force found work in the Gulf, after being educated through the UNRWA system. This had tremendous economic and political impact on the Palestinian camp societies. Not only did transfers back to the families left in the camps improve the living standards in camps,[23] the Palestinian guest workers also paid an income tax of 5% of their salary to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) via their Gulf host country. The money was further redistributed to the PLO member factions and their fighters, being in fact the most important income of the Palestinian national movement.[24]

To sum up: In addition to shelter, nourishment and protection, UNRWA provided the refugees with education. With the investment in education, UNRWA contributed to *free* the refugees from clientelism rather than create it. The human capital thus produced eventually became indispensable for the economy and political independence of the PLO. Appropriating the *homo sacer* concept for UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees, referring to the refugees as left 'to be fed by UNRWA and guarded by the army', existing 'only in biological capacity',[25] leaves the crucial point of political empowering out of the equation. UNRWA did not deprive refugees of political agency, but facilitated it, enabling the refugees to fund their own liberation movement in a way that made the PLO largely independent from external attempts of co-optation.

As will be further discussed below, the challenge of the Palestinians in Lebanon was in the formative years of the PLO an *excess* of power rather than political alienation and deprivation. Scholars appropriating Agamben on the Palestinian refugee situation should keep in mind, as will be elaborated upon below, that what came to mark PLO's history in Lebanon was a state-in-exile in all but the name with the camps as the power centres, not camps where refugees were reduced to bodies to be fed and sheltered as implied by the *homo sacer* narrative.

The PLO state in exile

Refugee camps are invaluable for rebel groups. They provide shields against attacks, pools of recruits, sources for food and medicine, and sometimes also military bases for attacks across the borders. This is why protracted refugee crises of refugees gathered in neighbouring countries correlate strongly with regional instability.[26]As Lischer has outlined, there are basically three categories of refugee groups: situational and persecuted refugee groups and the refugee state in exile. Situational refugees flee to escape intolerable conditions and general destruction at home, and persecuted refugees flee to escape oppression or persecution. The state-in-exile refugee groups are distinguished by being refugees with highly organised political and military leaderships, as became the case for the Palestinian refugees. State-in-exile refugee groups are specifically prone to political violence. In the Palestinian case, the strategists of their national movement reckoned that they would not manage to liberate Palestine on their own. As they saw it, attacking Israel from host countries would stir things up in these countries; their attacks would spark a reaction that would awake the Arab masses of the host countries, also forcing their governments to take part in the struggle on the Palestinian side.[27] Experiences from Jordan and Lebanon proved this to be a disastrous strategy.

In Jordan, the Palestinian refugees, half the population of the country, were granted Jordanian citizenship in 1950. Despite Jordan's initial generous treatment of the Palestinian refugees, the PLO built up a military capacity in the camps and nearly toppled the regime of Jordan's King Hussein in 1970, sparking a civil war.[28] Subsequently, Palestinian national identity in Jordan was suppressed and the camps put under increased surveillance, but the refugees did not lose their citizenships. Today, the Palestinian refugees in Jordan 'do not want to be represented by the PLO nor the PLO would dare to represent them', said Asad Abdul Rahman, who was a member of PLOs executive committee until 2014 and based in Jordan.[29]

As Palestinian refugees in Jordan have full citizenship and Jordanian passports, and regularly participate in national and local election, the state-of-exception thesis does not fit their situation. Jordan is, in fact, rarely referred to by proponents of Agamben. Rather, the case most referred to is Lebanon, which I will deal with at some length below.

After 1948, in the UNRWA area of operation (Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan), Lebanon was where the Palestinians had the strongest restrictions on employment and political organisation compared to native citizens. A 1962 decree banned Palestinians from working in 70 specified jobs. In 2005 the decree was amended, but still Palestinians were banned from 20 jobs, mainly professions demanding higher education, such as law, medicine and engineering.[30] When it came to the restrictions on political organisation, though, these were all but removed with the 1969 Cairo agreement between the Lebanese armed forces and the PLO, representing the Palestinians, granting the Palestinians an astonishing degree of autonomy inside the refugee camps. The agreement said that the Palestinian armed struggle served Lebanon's interests 'for it serves the interests of the Palestinian revolution and all the Arabs'. The Palestinians in Lebanon were permitted to 'participate in the Palestinian revolution through the armed struggle and in accordance with the principles of the sovereignty and security of Lebanon', as stated in article 4.[31] Accordingly, the Palestinians were granted full autonomy over the camps, thus establishing their long-lasting pattern of camp governance with the Popular Committees (*al lijan al sha'biya*) acting as the political authority of the camps, and the Security Committees (*qiyadat al kifah al musallah*) as the police force of the camps.

The agreement was an implicit capitulation to Palestinian military power. PLO and its dominant group, Fatah, developed enormous power in parts of Lebanon, 'Fatah-land' as the south of Lebanon came to be called.[32] Their military strength at one point stood at 25,000 fighters, equipped with tanks, heavy artillery and rockets, by far exceeding the strength of the Lebanese army of some 17,000 men.[33] Additionally, various PLO non-military institutions employed as many as 40,000 of the 350,000 Palestinians in Lebanon.[34] The PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat was 'a head of state in all but name, more powerful than many Arab rulers', Rashid Khalidi notes.[35] The PLO even issued their own passports, counting as regional travel documents.[36] In 1973, the Arab states at the Arab League summit meeting in Algeria recognised the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and the following year Arafat was invited to speak in the UN General Assembly.[37] The PLO budget in Lebanon was larger than that of the Lebanese state itself, said an American intelligence report.[38]

PLO's deadly mistake in Lebanon was arrogance.[39] Lebanese civilians had been strong supporters of the PLO as the organisation had filled a vacuum after the Arab defeat to Israel in 1967. In 1969, as many as 85% of the Lebanese stated that they supported Palestinian commando operations.[40] When Israel drove PLO out of Lebanon in 1982, this support was all gone. The people who had once supported the Palestinians now saw the Israelis as saviours.[41] Occupation of land and houses, confiscation of properties, blackmail, theft, 'protection money', threats and physical mistreatment became part of the daily life in Lebanon during the civil war. The Palestinians had an army, a police force, a crude judicial system, and an educational and welfare system. The Lebanese in Fatah-land found it increasingly humiliating to be stopped at PLO checkpoints, having to prove their identity to armed Palestinians who on a bad day would also confiscate their car.[42] One day, the owner of a small garden found a 10-year-old Palestinian boy cutting the flowers in his garden, according to a *New*

York Times article. When the owner asked the boy to stop, he answered: 'We'll blow up your house'.[43]

PLO also severely alienated the international community. In July 1981, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the second largest PLO member group, lined up men they had hijacked from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and killed two of them in cold blood while they still had their hands raised above their heads. 'They used methods against the UN peacekeepers more brutal than ever seen in UN's history', said the head of the UNIFIL forces on PLO's policy in South Lebanon.[44]

This is not to ignore the fact that from 1948 to 1969 the Palestinian camp refugees found themselves under the harsh control of Lebanese security forces, and that refugees suffered horrific atrocities during the civil war, from Tel al Zatar in 1976 to the Sabra and Shatilla massacres in 1982 where thousands of Palestinians were killed. But the point in this article is to challenge the applicability of a paradigm. The 'bare life' narrative is challenged by the fact that from 1969 until 1982 the Palestinians in Lebanon found all they had wanted while in diaspora: an independent Palestinian polity, an autonomous territorial base free from eternal interference and a basis to cultivate their Palestinian national identity.[45]

PLO evacuated Lebanon in 1982, following Israel's invasion. Furthermore, the Cairo agreement was formally repulsed by the Lebanese parliament in 1987. However, the agreement has been de facto operative until this day, with the Palestinians themselves being responsible for political representation and security inside the camps, and representatives of Lebanese authorities not entering the camps. Only in one serious incident was this status quo broken: the mini-war in the Nahr-al Bared camp in 2007. One academic response to the events in the camp was to regard its destruction as related to the state of exception of the camps. However, in the aftermath of the battle, it emerged that for camp residents the main challenge was their lack of internal political representation.

The Nahr al-Bared disaster and the call for democratic representation of camp refugees

In June 2007, the Lebanese army surrounded and attacked the Nahr al Bared refugee camp in northern Lebanon. For more than three months, battles endured. By September nearly 500 people had been killed, mostly militants in the camp and Lebanese soldiers. The camp was in ruins. Thirty thousand Palestinian refugees were, for the second time, displaced.

The background for the conflict was al-Qaida-affiliated Salafist Jihadist groups, mainly the Fatah al-Islam group, working to establish a caliphate in Lebanon. Fatah al-Islam robbed banks, planted bombs, and eventually, in one attack, killed 27 Lebanese soldiers in their sleep before returning to their base in Nahr al-Bared. After the mass killings, the Lebanese army cracked down on the perpetrators.

Sari Hanafi afterwards wrote that the destruction of the camp showed that Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, in line with the *homo sacer* concept, 'can be 'eliminated' by anyone without being punished'.[46] According to Are Knutsen:

> Nahr al Bared was destroyed to protect the nation from its 'others': only in a refugee camp could the army exert its full powers, only in a refugee camp could the refugees' existence be reduced to 'bare life', and only in a refugee camp would a humanitarian disaster be hailed as a victory.[47]

However, among the refugees themselves, discussions emerged on their own representation. Some asked how it had been possible for Fatah al-Islam to build a military base in the middle

of the camp without the popular committee of the camp acting against it. Others asked why the camp committees set to represent the camp residents could not be elected. [48]

So, what was the internal Palestinian organisation of the camp? In a kind of modus vivendi, the camps of Lebanon have become divided between the popular committees of the PLO controlling parts of Beirut and South Lebanon and the so-called Alliance of Palestinian Forces (APF) controlling the rest, while in the largest camp, Ain al Hilweh, there has been a joint committee. The APF was established after PLO changed its charter in Gaza in 1996, abolishing the armed struggle and recognising Israel at a disputed Palestine National Council (PNC) meeting. APF is thus an alliance of Palestinian groups – including Hamas and Islamic Jihad – opposing the Oslo accords and the connected amendments to the PLO charter recognising Israel and abandoning the armed struggle. When APF did not arrest and hand the culprits of Fatah al-Islam over to Lebanese authorities, this had reportedly more to do with their motivation than their capacity. The International Crisis Group wrote that APF had allegedly regarded Fatah al-Islam as good for the Palestinian resistance.[49] This proved to be suicidal political thinking. The relationship between the APF and Lebanese authorities was ruined. The Lebanese government refused to negotiate on rehabilitation issues with those they regarded as the source of the problem (the APF), instead referring to UNRWA as the representative body of the camp residents. UNRWA refused to take such a role: 'Regarding who is in charge, that discussion is between the Lebanese and Palestinians', an UNRWA official said.[50] Gradually, calls for having elected camp representation entered local discourse. 'The Popular committee in Nahr al-Bared [should be] elected by the community and be composed of qualified people representing all sectors of society. It should not be hijacked by the factions', a camp resident said.[51] Also, UNRWA acknowledged the importance of having an elected popular committee in order to cooperate with them: 'At the moment the factions are sidelined. Where's their mandate? UNRWA would have to pay attention to elected popular committees, we wouldn't be able to just job them off, as we do sometimes do', said an official from UNRWA.[52]

Even Palestinian factions of the popular committees later claimed to be in favour of elected camp leaderships. Muhammed Yassin, leader of the Mar Elias popular committee from the Palestinian Liberation Front faction, said: 'We believe that it is urgent to have elections. Now, when I meet representatives from the Lebanese authorities, they say: "We cannot do anything because we do not know who represents the Palestinians"'.[53]

Saleh Saleh, the head of the refugee committee of the Palestinian National Council of the PLO, said that there was no way out of the crisis over Palestinian representation but to elect their representatives:

> The only way is to make elections. The so-called popular committees are not popular committees. The people inside the committees represent the Palestinian factions, not the people. It should be real people committees representing the people in the camps, it is the only way. Then they can elect a body representing the leadership for the Palestinians in Lebanon.[54]

The leader of PFLP in Lebanon, Marwan Abdel Al, equally favoured camp elections: 'I live in a refugee camp, I know how important it is for people in the camps to have an elected leadership. First and foremost, to have popular committees which are elected, not only representing the factions'. The problem was that neither Fatah nor Hamas really wanted to have elections asserted Abdel-Al: 'People in the camps want an elected leadership, but Fatah and Hamas are obstructing the process'. Hamas and Fatah representatives denied the accusation. 'We are not in principle against holding elections anywhere at any time where it is possible',[55] said the Palestinian Ambassador to Lebanon, Abdullah Abdullah. 'We want within

a year or two to have elections for the popular committees within all the camps in Lebanon, and to have an umbrella organisation representing all these elected camp committees', said the Hamas leader in Lebanon, Ali Barakah.[56]

These views on camp elections were collected through interviews in Lebanon in October 2011 when the democratisation wave of the Arab Spring had not yet faded. But as the Arab Spring imploded into internal violence and civil wars, to have elections in the camps disappeared from the agenda of the Palestinian factions. And, thus, the problem over what constitutes legitimate camp representation remains in Lebanon.

The gatekeeping concepts of Palestinian refugee camps

In September 2015, though, Palestinian democratisation activists initiated a new campaign in Palestinian camps in Lebanon, *tabbiq niẓāmak* ('implement/apply your political system'), calling for people to organise to reform the local political system in accordance with what was actually provided for in the rules and regulations of the PLO. This predominantly referred to having elected camp committees. But as the so-called 'knife intifada' in the West Bank escalated at the same time, factions in the camps started a campaign to have attention on the intifada, putting huge posters of knives around the camps, among other things. Why *tabbiq niẓāmak* when the rebels of the knife intifada needed the solidarity of the resistance, they asked.[57] In a peculiar way, their message mirrored Agamben's paradigm: diverting attention away from internal, local affairs to external factors, to the big picture.

Arun Appadurai's discussion of 'gatekeeping concepts' here comes to mind. Appadurai observed that within anthropology, gatekeeping concepts were limiting 'theorising about the place in question' while defining 'the quintessential and dominant questions of interest in the region'.[58] For India, 'caste' was the gatekeeping concept for decades; for Mediterranean countries, it was 'honour and shame'. Such gatekeeping concepts contributed to narrow theoretical and conceptual approaches within a research field. Consequently, attention would not be paid to other topics.

This fits well into my understanding of the appropriation of Agamben on Palestinian refugees. My assertion is that there are in fact two different sets of gatekeeping concepts at work in contemporary studies of Palestinian refugee camps. First, there are the ones of the academic discourse. With the discursive hegemony of Agamdem's paradigm, Palestinian refugee camps are repeatedly analysed through the lens of 'bare life' and 'state of exception' concepts. There are several problems with the use of these concepts, as have been outlined above, concerning the historical accuracy of appropriating these concepts for the Palestinian refugees as the camps have been politically autonomous since 1969, and since the camps for more than a decade were part of a state in exile, comparatively much more powerful than the indigenous inhabitants in the area. The main problem with applying these gatekeeping concepts to the camps is nevertheless the inattention that inadvertently is paid to other issues.

And it is here, if we allow ourselves to push the concept beyond the academic field, that a second gatekeeping concept comes in. This is the concept of 'resistance' of the hegemonic Palestinian factions. The concept is central to their local, hegemonic political discourse. The factions pretend that they are the sole protectors of Palestinian resistance. Calls for internal reforms, elections, or questioning the legitimacy of the power of the factions are consequently ignored, or worse, met with alleged suspicion, as referred to in the introduction.

Focusing on internal affairs takes away attention from the resistance; any inquirer may thus be presented as ideologically or politically suspicious.

The two discourses equally divert attention away from internal political organisation. Neither focuses on the political representation of camp residents: in the first discourse such organisation is by definition lacking, while in the second it is politically taboo.

Conclusion

During the first year of the Arab Spring in Syria, when protests spread to the largest Palestinian refugee camp, Yarmouk, there was a notable difference in the slogan chanted in the camp compared to elsewhere: The people want the fall of the *factions*', chanted the protesters, while elsewhere the chant was 'the people want the fall of the regime'.[59] Regime (*an-niẓām*) was replaced with factions (*fasa'il*). If anyone, following Agamben's paradigm, should be against the political system/regime (*an-niẓām*) it should be the refugees, who were left outside the polity as postulated by the state of exception thesis. But the camp refugees protested against their own Palestinian factions, the unrepresentative leadership of the resistance groups.

Although the situation differed in Syrian camps concerning the political autonomy of the camps, the factions there were more or less the same as the ones dominating the camps in Lebanon, save Fatah. It was a rare expression of deep frustrations against the factions' monopolisation of power without a popular mandate. In fact, during the Arab Spring, calls for establishing political structures that made refugee representation based on a popular mandate were heard from camps in Gaza and the West Bank to Lebanon.

This indicates the shortcomings of appropriating the paradigm of Agamben for Palestinian camps. *Tumultus*, suspension of law, *iustitium*, laws that do not apply, or *homo sacer*, a category of people outside the law, implies that they could be killed without punishment. Palestinian camp refugees are reportedly 'fed by UNRWA and guarded by the army', existing 'only in biological capacity'.[60] This is a distortion of historical reality. UNRWA in fact empowered the refugees by providing them with education, an education that was converted into work, work which again enabled the Palestinian workers to pay tax to the PLO. This secured the organisation an economic basis and consequently an unprecedented political autonomy, first and foremost, within the refugee camps.

Also, using a model where it is inapplicable does not only water out its explanatory power. It also serves as an academic form of gatekeeping that inadvertently precludes alternative understandings of local realities. Students and researchers leaning on Agamben's paradigm when studying Palestinian refugee camps should be conscious about what they thus risk overlooking, such as questions on internal power dynamics, hegemonies and political strategies. They should keep in mind that such questions are incompatible with Agamben's paradigm because it presupposes the absence of autonomous local political agency.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on Contributor

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Notes

1. Personal communication with student, December 2013.
2. Ramadan, "Spatialising the Refugee Camp," 67.
3. See for instance Hanafi, "Governance, Governmentalities"; Ophir, *Power of Inclusive Exclusion*; Misselwitz, "Refugees Plan the Future"; Kortam, "Politics, Patronage and Popular Committees"; Khalili, "Incarceration and the State of Exception"; Korn, "Ghettoization of the Palestinians."
4. Huntington, "If not Civilizations, What?"
5. Agamben, *State of Exception*; Agamben, *Homo Sacer.*
6. See note 3.
7. Hiroyuki, "Anarchical Governance."
8. Sahd, "Worthlessness of Palestinians."
9. Abujidi, "Palestinian States of Exception."
10. Hanafi, "Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon."
11. Ophir, *Power of Inclusive Exclusion*, 23.
12. Hanafi, "Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon", 88.
13. Ibid, 88.
14. Ibid.
15. Hanafi, "Governance, Governmentalities," 15.
16. See Fitzpatrick, "Bare Sovereignty"; Gregory, "Black Flag"; Mitchell, "Geographies of Identity," for but three critical assessments of Agamben's theoretical assumptions.
17. Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees," 234.
18. Quoted in Migdal, *Palestinian People*, 235.
19. Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees."
20. Cleveland, *History of the Modern Middle East*, 347.
21. Fargues, "Changing Hierarchies," 185.
22. Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees," 246.
23. Ibid.
24. Rubenberg, "Civilian Infrastructure," 60.
25. Hanafi, "Governance, Governmentalities," 23.
26. Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries*.
27. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 120.
28. Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries*, 27.
29. Interview with author, Amman, April 2011.
30. Amnesty International, "Exiled and Suffering," 19.
31. For the full agreement, see: http://www.lebaneseforces.org/lebanon/leb_agree_cairo.php
32. Shiblak, "Palestinians in Lebanon," 268.
33. Hijazi, "Lebanese Scrap PLO."
34. Hudson, "Palestinians and Lebanon," 254.
35. Khalidi, *Under Siege*, 174–5.
36. Shiblak, "Palestinians in Lebanon," 268.
37. Ibid., 265.
38. Quoted in Hudson, "Palestinians and Lebanon," 254.
39. Tveit, *Nederlag*, 118.

40. Hudson, "Palestinians and Lebanon," 252.
41. Ibid., 244.
42. Tveit, *Nederlag*, 118.
43. Shipler, "Lebanese Tell of Anguish."
44. Tveit, *Nederlag*, 114.
45. Brynen, "PLO policy in Lebanon," 59.
46. Hanafi, "Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon," 93.
47. Knudsen, "Insecurity," 99.
48. International Crisis Group, "Lebanon's Palestinian Dilemma."
49. Ibid., 10.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid, 9.
52. Ibid., 10.
53. Interview with author, Beirut, October 2011.
54. Interview with author, Beirut, October 2011.
55. Interview with author, Beirut, October 2011.
56. Interview with author, Beirut, October 2011.
57. Personal communication with PhD student, 8 September 2015.
58. Appadurai, "Theory in Anthropology," 357.
59. Napolitano, "Hamas and the Syrian Revolution."
60. Hanafi, "Governance, Governmentalities," 23.

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