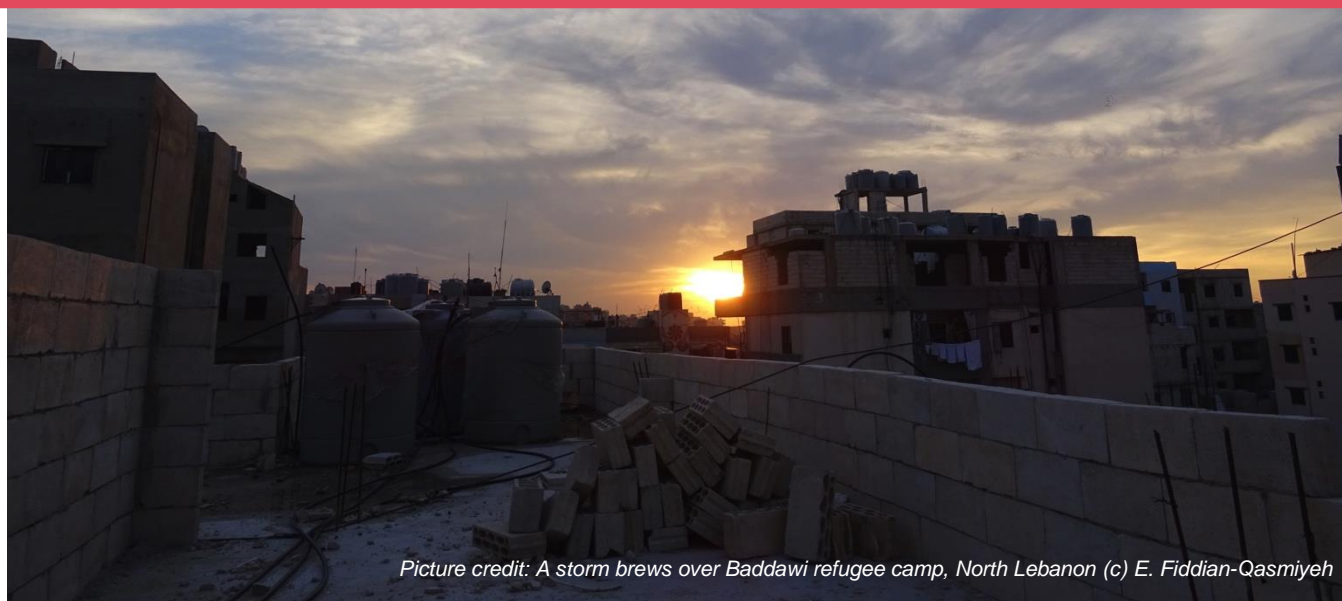# REFUGEE HOSTS

LOCAL COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES OF DISPLACEMENT FROM SYRIA

Newsletter No. 1 Spring 2017

Picture credit: A storm brews over Baddawi refugee camp, North Lebanon (c) E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

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About the Project

Over 4.6 million refugees have sought safety across Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey from the on-going Syrian conflict, with local communities, civil society groups, established refugee communities, and faith-based organisations providing essential assistance, solidarity and support to refugees. However, little is known regarding the motivations, nature and impacts of such local level responses to refugee flows from conflict. *Refugee Hosts* - a 4-year project funded by the AHRC-ESRC as part of the PACCS programme of research - aims to improve our understanding of the challenges and opportunities that arise in local responses to displacement, both for refugees from Syria and for the members of the communities that are hosting them in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Working closely with local community members in a participatory and creative manner – including by working with local researchers as integral team members – is key to exploring the challenges and opportunities of local responses in such challenging situations. Through ethnographic research in and with 9 local communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey in 2017-2018, this project aims to fills a major evidence gap about the roles played by local communities – including those that explicitly or implicitly identify with and are motivated by faith – in supporting, and/or undermining, people affected by conflict and displacement: refugees and hosts alike.

Complementing 500 interviews with refugees and hosts and a series of participatory workshops across these three countries, we will interview 100 local, national and international practitioners to identify the extent of national and international support for local community responses to refugees. To gain further insights, we will conduct creative writing workshops with refugees and local communities so that we can develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which encounters between different groups of refugees and hosts are perceived, traced and navigated.

Importantly, by examining local responses in countries that have hosted large protracted Palestinian and Iraqi refugee communities long before the start of the Syrian conflict, our project aims to disrupt the assumption that citizens are hosts and aid providers while refugees are dependent recipients of aid. We argue that exploring the agency of refugees engaging in under-researched processes of 'refugee-refugee humanitarianism' is particularly significant given the increasingly protracted, and often overlapping, processes of conflict-induced displacement in the Middle East.

Doing so will enable us to re-frame key public, political and academic debates about the roles and experiences of local communities and refugees in contexts of conflict-induced displacement in the Middle East and beyond.

Our Approach:

In-depth ethnographic research conducted in nine local communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey will be interwoven with interviews and participatory workshops with refugees, hosts and practitioners. 500 interviews with refugees and local community members and 100 interviews with international practitioners will be completed and analysed alongside extensive field notes.

We will also conduct a series of creative writing workshops with the residents – hosts and refugees alike – of nine local communities. These will explore the ways in which journeys, encounters and experiences of displacement are traced and resisted within different contexts, and how these stories connect – in time, style and motif – with those of others from the present and the past. These will then be followed up with a series of collaborative translation workshops in the UK.

Meet the Research Team

Dr Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (PI)
Department of Geography, University College London
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PROJECT ROLE: Elena is the project's Principal Investigator. As an expert on the lived experiences of, and diverse responses to forced displacement in the Middle East, Elena brings both her regional and thematic expertise to Refugee Hosts. In addition to leading the project as a whole, Elena will in particular be overseeing the research taking place in Lebanon, and will be working closely with Alastair to develop the fieldwork in Turkey.

Prof Alastair Ager (Co-I)
Institute for Global Health and Development, Queen Margaret University Edinburgh
@: aager@qmu.ac.uk Twitter: @AlastairAger

PROJECT ROLE: Alastair (Co-I) is an expert on health, development and humanitarianism who has an established record of working in the Middle East. For Refugee Hosts he will be leading the research taking place in Jordan, and working closely with Elena to coordinate the research in Turkey. Together with Anna and our project partner the JLI on Refugees and Forced Migrants, Alastair will be exploring the roles that faith implicitly and explicitly play in local community experiences of hosting refugees from Syria.

Dr Anna Rowlands (Co-I)
Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University
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PROJECT ROLE: Anna (Co-I) is a moral and political theologian with expertise in asylum and migration, and will offer the project a unique insight into questions related to faith-based and faith-inspired responses to displacement. Working closely with Alastair and with our project partner the JLI on Refugees and Forced Migration, she will lead on activities relating to the roles of faith in displacement and on the development of a Religious Literacy Handbook.

Prof Lyndsey Stonebridge (Co-I)
Department of History, University of East Anglia
@: l.stonebridge@uea.ac.uk Twitter: @LyndseyStonebri

PROJECT ROLE: Lyndsey (Co-I) is an expert on modern writing and history, and refugee studies, and will lead Refugee Hosts' innovative creative writing components - through convening both a series of writing workshops in the Middle East and a series of translation workshops in the UK, in collaboration with our project partners PEN-International, English-PEN and Stories in Transit. Alongside Anna, Lyndsey will be exploring the ways in which political philosophy and political theology bring particular insights into experiences of exile and hosting alike.

Aydan Greatrick
Project and Communications Coordinator

Aydan works closely with Elena, Alastair, Anna and Lyndsey to coordinate the different strands of the research project and ensure that the project's findings are widely disseminated, translated and accessible to the communities participating in this research project.

Contact him with any general enquiries on:
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Yousif M. Qasmiyeh: Writer in Residence

Yousif is a poet and translator who has regularly led literary translation workshops with student English-PEN groups. As our project's Writer in Residence, Yousif is writing creative contributions on our project's key themes, and will co-convene the creative writing workshops in the Middle East and the translation workshops in the UK with Lyndsey and our project partners, PEN-International, English-PEN and Stories in Transit.

Palestinian youth flying pigeons in Baddawi (c) E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

Refugees Hosting Refugees

By Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh University College London

It is often assumed that local communities are composed of settled groups of citizens. However, newly displaced people do not only share with or aim to integrate into communities of 'nationals' but also into communities formed by established or former refugees and IDPs, whether of similar or different nationality/ethnic groups. This is especially the case given three key trends in displacement: the increasingly *protracted* nature of displacement, the *urban* nature of displacement and the *overlapping* nature of displacement. I use the term overlapping to refer to two forms of 'overlap: firstly: refugees have often both personally and collectively experienced secondary and tertiary displacement; and secondly, refugees often physically share spaces with other displaced people. Given the protracted nature of displacement, this means that, over time, these refugee groups often become members of communities that subsequently 'host' other groups of displaced people.

Reviewing common approaches to hosts and integration

> *"Acknowledging the widespread reality of overlapping displacement provides an entry point to recognising and meaningfully engaging with the agency of refugees and their diverse hosts… whilse also recognising the challenges that characterise such encounters"*

The focus on 'local host communities' and the 'national population' is understandable on policy (and political) levels in contexts of protracted urban displacement. This is especially the case as integration is recognised to be a two-way process. It depends not only on the actions and attitudes of the incoming population but also on the "readiness on the part of the receiving communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse community". Reflecting this, most integration tools focus on the characteristics, experiences and integration outcomes of displaced people, which are then compared with the experiences and outcomes of national host populations. In addition to providing the framework to examine the similarity/difference between refugees' and hosts' socio-economic situations, diverse policy tools prioritise the importance of local host perceptions of their own and refugees' situations in the hosting environment and host country.

In the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, for instance, an increasing number of baseline attitudinal studies are underway in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. One objective of these is to identify communities where policy interventions are needed to defuse tensions between hosts and refugees as they compete (or perceive inequalities) over resources and services, and to develop programmes to promote social cohesion between hosts and refugees.

However, the overlapping nature of displacement leads to a blurring of the categories of 'displaced person' and 'host': hosts and refugees live in the same spaces, and in other contexts, communities which had once hosted refugees have themselves been displaced and are being hosted by others. In other situations the displaced then become hosts to newly displaced people.

The ongoing cycles of displacement and multi-directionality of movement create a methodological challenge for any estimations of the impact of displacement on local communities, as it is likely that the meaning of 'host population' will differ in every displacement context. This also raises questions about the extent to which policymakers and practitioners are aware of, or aim to address, the impacts that newly arrived refugee groups have on established refugee communities, whose protracted presence in urban spaces in particular may have rendered them invisible (or less significant) to donors and humanitarian agendas. Indeed, this highlights the need for strategies that can support newly displaced refugee groups while remaining sensitive to the socio-economic conditions of 'national' host communities; such strategies also need to avoid marginalising or compounding the existing social exclusion of established refugee-host communities.

Refugee Hosts

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 in North Lebanon examines encounters between established Palestinian refugees who have lived in an urban Palestinian refugee camp on the outskirts of the Lebanese city of Tripoli since the 1950s (Baddawi camp) and 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 found themselves refugees once more. Palestinians are now active providers of support to others, rather than merely aid recipients themselves, reflecting the extent to which urban camps can become shared spaces.

This is not the first time that Baddawi camp and its refugee inhabitants have welcomed 'new' refugees. Baddawi camp residents also hosted over 15,000 'new' Palestinian refugees who were internally displaced from nearby Nahr el-Bared refugee camp when that camp was destroyed during fighting in 2007. 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 community in Baddawi hosting 'newly' displaced refugees from Syria.

"This is not the first time Baddawi Camp and its refugee inhabitants have welcomed 'new' refugees Baddawi camp residents also hosted over 15,000 'new' Palestinian refugees who were internally displaced from nearby Nahr el-Bared refugee camp when that camp was destroyed during fighting in 2007."

Indeed, while highlighting the relational nature of refugeedom, and destabilising the assumption that refugees are always hosted by citizens, 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 members of the original refugee community towards new arrivals. Rather than viewing these tensions as inevitable, it is clear that certain policies and programmes activate resentment and insecurity among hosts, and there is therefore an increasing commitment to implementing development-oriented programmes that aim to support both refugees and host communities. In the context of overlapping displacement and refugees-hosting-refugees, these tensions may be the result of the uneven development of programmes for different 'generations' of refugees and for refugees according to their country of origin. This is particularly visible in Baddawi camp, whose established inhabitants have received limited assistance from UNRWA [the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East] since the 1950s while new arrivals from Syria receive support from an expanding range of international and national organisations.

The challenge that remains is for researchers, policymakers and practitioners to actively explore the potential to support the development, and maintenance, of welcoming communities, whether these communities are composed of citizens, new refugees or established refugees. Acknowledging the widespread reality of overlapping displacement provides an entry point to recognising and meaningfully engaging with the agency of refugees and their diverse hosts in providing support and welcome as active partners in processes of integration, while also recognising the challenges that characterise such encounters. At a minimum, new programmes and policies must avoid re-marginalising established refugee communities which are hosting newly displaced people; at best, they can be sensitive to supporting the needs and rights of all refugees, whether they are hosting or being hosted.

This piece is adapted from an article by Elena published in a special issue of Forced Migration Review *on 'Local Communities: First and Last Providers of Protection' (issue 53)*

Palestinian and Syrian refugees collaborate on a building project in Burj El-Barajneh, Lebanon
(c) S. Maqusi

Writing the Camp

By Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, University of Oxford

> "To experience is to advance by navigating, to walk by traversing."
> Derrida, *Points…*, p.373

I

What makes a camp a camp? And what is the beginning of a camp if there is any? And do camps exist in order to die or exist forever?

II

Baddawi is my home camp, a small camp compared to other Palestinian camps in Lebanon. For many residents, it comprises two subcamps: the lower and the upper camps that converge at the old cemetery. As I was growing up, it was common for children to know their midwife. Ours, perhaps one of only two in the entire camp, was an elderly woman, who died tragically when a wall collapsed on top of her fragile body during a stormy day in the camp. The midwife was the woman who cut our umbilical cords and washed us for the first time. She lived by the main mosque – *Masjid al-Quds* – that overlooked the cemetery. She would always wait by the cemetery to stop those who she delivered en route to school, to give them a kiss and remind them that she was the one who made them.

III

The camp is never the same albeit with roughly the same area. New faces, new dialects, narrower alleys, newly-constructed and ever-expanding thresholds and doorsteps, intertwined clothing lines and electrical cables, well-shielded balconies, little oxygen and impenetrable silences are all amassed in this space. The shibboleth has never been clearer and more poignant than it is now.

IV

Refugees ask other refugees, who are we to come to you and who are you to come to us? Nobody answers. Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, Kurds share the camp, the same-different camp, the camp of a camp. They have all come to re-originate the beginning with their own hands and feet.

V

Now, in the camp, there are more mosques, more houses of God, while people continue to come and go, like the calls to prayer emanating at slightly varied times from all these mosques, supplementing, interrupting, transmuting, and augmenting the voice and the noise simultaneously.

VI

Baddawi is a camp that lives and dies in our sight. It is destined to remain (not necessarily as itself) so long as time continues to be killed in its corners.
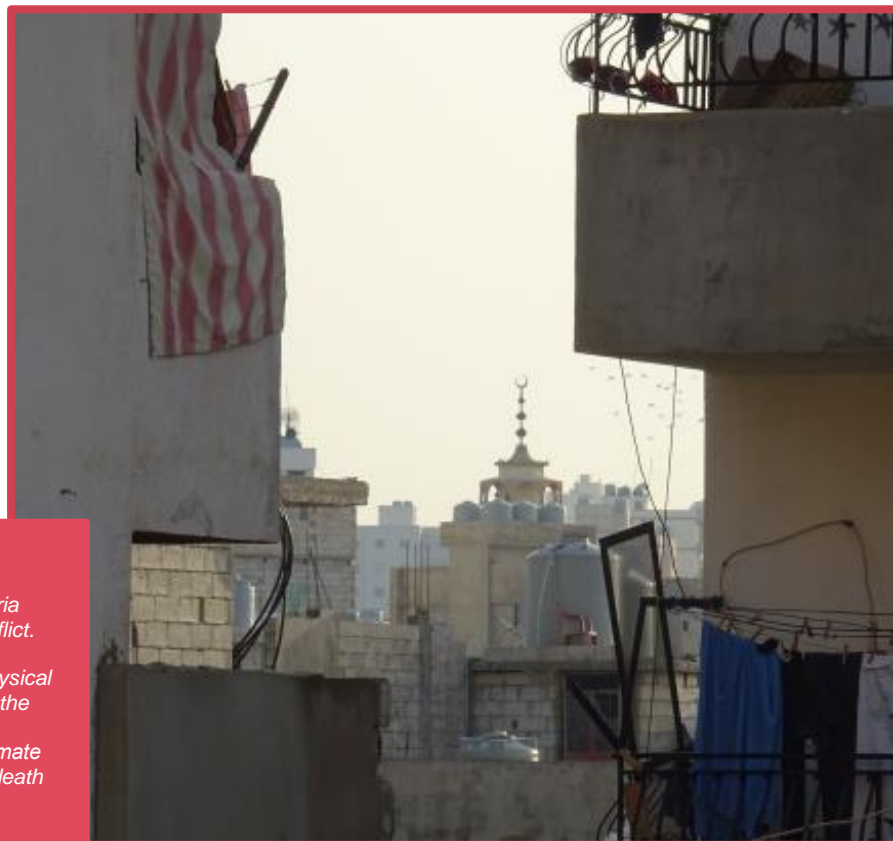
Baddawi refugee camp in North Lebanon has been hosting refugees from Syria since the outbreak of conflict. Masjid al-Quds – in the background – is at the physical and metaphorical core of the camp. It overlooks the cemetery, the camp's ultimate shared space in life and death for new and established refugees alike
(c) E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

Externalising the 'Refugee Crisis': A Consequence of Historical Denial?

By Aydan Greatrick, University College London

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, international institutions – including humanitarian ones – have been increasingly swept up in a narrative of historical modernity that no longer makes sense. The collapse of the Soviet Union appeared as the final, inevitable, victory of democratic capitalism over tyranny and oppression, allowing institutions and states to adopt a set of assumptions about the political directions of other states and societies, particularly in the Global South. At this juncture, some prematurely claimed that the world had reached the 'end of history', an interpretation that no doubt informed the assurances of policy makers and governments in the North who found ample motivation to intervene in the Global South, on both humanitarian and military grounds, in response to emerging threats to international peace and security. Subsequently, the Arab Spring was interpreted as the culmination of this trajectory in the Middle East and North Africa: Syria's 2011 to Berlin's 1989.

A new horizon, near the Turkish town of Çeşme
(c) Avicenna Hilfswerk E. V.

Since 2011 however, as the 'Refugee Crisis' began to arrive on the shores of Europe, such narratives of historical modernity lost their persuasive force. The complexities of the situation, and the hostile responses that greeted many refugees, revealed a Europe devoid of those very values typically used to justify foreign or humanitarian intervention: liberal compassion, universal human rights, international protection and – in some instances, particularly in Hungary – democracy. As such, the 'Refugee Crisis' is not a crisis sustained by refugee flows, but a product of the North's deeply entrenched pathology of historical denial that has made it difficult to produce policy solutions that fall outside of a narrow historical framework. As Reece Jones has argued, policy makers have subsequently worked to "limit the geographical and temporal scope of the discussion by focussing on the war in Syria and the migrants fleeing that conflict" rather than on a more structural, long-term analysis of our international systems of governance.

The tragic consequences of this trend are most clearly evident at the EU borderline, which has seen thousands of refugees perish in the Mediterranean, whilst others remain contained in their 'region of origin'. This more generally reflects the ways in which European states, in response to the 'Refugee Crisis', have earnestly externalised their responsibilities to states like Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan through deals like the EU-Turkey agreement. This has allowed EU states to push back refugees, breaching long-standing norms related to *refoulement*, producing a dangerous – and illegal – precedent in the management of human mobility.

Overcoming the deep historical contradictions that exist in the Global North – contradictions that must be meaningfully engaged with, so that international norms relating to displacement can be properly maintained and indeed expanded in response to new political challenges – is imperative for humanitarians. Ways forward can, fortunately, be gleamed from the work of numerous historians, most notably Jo Guldi and David Armitage, whose book *The History Manifesto* offers a number of striking examples of how history has been marginalised by short-termist, market orientated policy processes, often at the expense of more nuanced, effective decision making. Engaging with such approaches has also been prioritised in the field of refugee studies, where scholars are beginning to argue for more interdisciplinarity so that we might overcome the 'academic partition' that has been allowed to form between historians on the one hand, and social scientists on the other.

> *"Far from encouraging a sense of denial, history will help us to displace the narrow historical frameworks that have underpinned current policy responses to the 'Refugee Crisis'"*

Finally, as is the case with the *Refugee Hosts* project, efforts are being taken to demarginalise different histories of displacement within policy processes, providing opportunities to improve responses to forced migration that have otherwise relied on a short-termist and narrow historical mindset. To this end, academics are looking to engage with marginalised histories as a means of uncovering 'alternative humanitarianisms' – including diverse models of 'South-South humanitarianism' – capable of improving international and northern responses to displacement.

In this way, a deep engagement with history becomes an extremely valuable tool that may help to explain, understand and process the complexity of global politics which has otherwise been obscured by our premature conclusions about the best shape and form of our institutions. Indeed, that these institutions are also being undermined by other forms of bad history, such as the promise of nationalism in Europe, highlights the need for a thorough engagement with the past, lest we drift aimlessly toward a continued state of denial. To this end, historical approaches – as Lyndsey Stonebridge has argued – may become a means of tearing us from our "amnesia," allowing us to form new narratives and institutions that accurately reflect the complexity both of the crises in which displaced peoples and hosting communities find themselves, and the crises of thought that allows the EU and other institutions to respond to displacement in a way that is inconsistent with its norms.

Rising to this challenge will require us to produce knowledge co-productively, particularly with displaced and hosting communities in the Global South, an approach espoused by the *Refugee Hosts* project. Far from encouraging a sense of denial, history will then help to displace the narrow historical frameworks that have underpinned current policy responses to the 'Refugee Crisis', working to produce a system of historical knowledge within humanitarian thinking that moves beyond the not-so-post-colonial epistemes of the present.

Syrians in Akkar: Refugees of Neighbours?
Rethinking Hospitality towards Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

By Estella Carpi, University College London and Save the Children

The discourse of 'hospitality' has both informed and reinforced the international response to the mass influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict. However, while unprecedented in scale – by the end of 2016 UNHCR had registered over one million Syrian refugees in Lebanon – this is not the first 'encounter' between Syrians and the Lebanese population. Lebanon and Syria have a historically porous border, with towns and regions like Akkar in North Lebanon characterised by an ambivalent sense of Lebanese-Syrian nationhood, sharing moral, social, and political capital across the border. Nonetheless, a long-standing form of hospitality in such towns has paved the way for a process of differentiation from people who, until recently, were *not* "the Other." It is legitimate to ask why this differentiation process, in a sense, *needs* to happen.

Hence, what is the sociology underlying such a need to differentiate oneself from the economy of the Syrian refugee, while paradoxically making space for it? In essence, as Derrida has argued, hosts must have power over the domain in which they host, as well as power over the guest. The tension remains, and a people's collective morality is evaluated according to the accomplishment of charitable acts.

Historically, some Syrian nationals, in some ways, *were* also Akkaris, insofar as Akkaris themselves strived to get access to Syrian welfare, crossing the border to reach the nearby Syrian province of Homs rather than driving all the way down to Lebanon's Tripoli to benefit from a scant welfare system. The lack of hospitals, schools, and means of transportation in North Lebanon has long since rendered this region hostile to comfortable inhabitation and detached it from a modern state that was originally crafted as Beirut-centric.

Hospitality, when spontaneously offered in the first months of the Syrian crisis, was in fact conceived at a grassroots level as a religious and cultural duty, a "sacred commandment of charity" to assign strangers a place in a community whose functioning was already guaranteed by demographically hybrid forces of labour. Indeed, the Old and New Testaments and the Qur'an have many references to the commandment to shelter strangers, including refugees.

Since 2012, international humanitarian organizations have financed some local families to enable them to host the refugees temporarily. This has ended up "internationalizing" the historically unmediated Syrian-Lebanese relationship. With the intervention of the humanitarian agencies and the "neoliberalization" of local hospitality – by paying local families to host Syrian refugees for a limited period of time (usually over a maximum period of a year) -, hospitality has gradually become an aid toolkit item to be *temporarily delivered*. And yet, the sociological character of local hospitality does not fade away with the "humanitarianization" of the act of hosting, as the Albanian experience of hosting Kosovar refugees has proved.

Scholars and journalists alike have therefore used hospitality as a lens through which to understand the entanglement of Syrian-Lebanese relations over the past five and a half years. As such, it has repeatedly been defined as "limited" due to the massive influx of refugees, with Lebanon referred to as being "under strain." In turn, socio-economic accounts of the prosperity of Lebanese landlords and employers and the increase in productivity thanks to lower workforce costs have sought to turn blame toward Lebanese greed.

Hospitality is also the narrative that local and international media and the humanitarian enterprise weave together. The idea of a "hosting Lebanon" is positioned in the space between historical truth and the necessity to maintain social order. In this sense, the idea delivered to the international public is that of a Lebanon strained by the "refugee crisis" *per se*, where the humanitarian structures, in concert with the central government, are efficient actors calming local tensions and flattening historical complexities by promoting accounts of generosity and victimhood.

The international humanitarian machine, which represents the Geneva-based international community, has contributed to internationalizing[1] the Syrian conflict through programmes and policies.

Turkey's border regions with Syria share commonalities with Akkar, opening up both opportunities for refugees, but also new spaces of exclusion and exile. (c) C. Loris-Rodionoff

The idea of generosity, hospitality, and its limits implicitly accuses the Syrians of having overstayed their welcome: it foregrounds the chronic predicament of the Akkar region, the decrease in local employment due to the presence of cheaper menial labour, and the increase in the cost of living and housing owing to the newcomers' influx. Discourses of greed or grievance, as sparking enduring conflicts and war economies in the Middle East, are growing louder and louder, and have gradually silenced more important narratives.

> *"As a form of unwilling humanitarianism, hospitality made the traditionally porous borders between Lebanon and Syria socially meaningful"*

At a historical-material level, local communities, whatever their social status, attempt to protect wealth accumulation or basic livelihoods through the act of hosting, either for free or for rent to be able to host. That being said, in a country where intermarriage has always been a common social practice, why are Syrian nationals increasingly being mistreated, to the extent that they are now trying to change their accent in order not to be marked as "Syrian refugees" and undergo discrimination? In Lebanon, the process of "othering" the Syrians took place during the process of refugeehood, as an improvised way both of dealing with the influx and of marking the territory as theirs: to manage and control "the home."

In a geopolitical scenario officially declared to be a "state of emergency," safeguarding the home comes into play as an in-crisis strategy of local self-determination. This has led local Akkaris to reinvent their relationship to the pre-existing presence of Syrian nationals in response to the announced crisis.

In this way, in-crisis hospitality has produced spaces to which some inhabitants belong—insofar as their sense of belonging has been reinforced by their act of hosting—while others do not and instead are turned into temporary guests. Indeed, before the crisis, Syrian nationals used to inhabit the same space mostly in the capacity of unskilled cheap laborers, marking the continuity of the sovereign Akkari host-lord. In this sense, the social construction of hospitality has not only fed the political rhetoric of "Lebanon the bountiful" but has also acted as a force of societal fragmentation, undermining the previous relations that these laborers used to hold in Akkar before moving to Lebanon with their own families due to the full-scale conflict.

In other words, as a form of unwilling humanitarianism, hospitality made the traditionally porous borders between Lebanon and Syria socially *meaningful*. The collective act of producing an *outside* has served the purpose of Lebanese Akkaris to prevent the spillover of violence and preserve relative social order. The absence of a well-bounded "Syrian community" in Akkar, "melting like sugar in tea," has facilitated the task of "othering" the refugees.

- An expanded version of this piece, entitled Against ontologies of hospitality: About Syrian refugeehood in northern Lebanon, was first published by the Middle East Institute.

[1] In a speech at the Wilson Centre, Antoine Chedid, Lebanon's ambassador to the United States, rejected the specifically *Lebanese* responsibility of a conflict that is increasingly becoming regional by pointing out that the crisis is not of *their* making; rather, it is international.

Shadows of everyday life in Baddawi camp in Lebanon. Like Akkar, Baddawi is a space of both porous and well defined social boundaries: it is both a space of welcome and of exile.
(c) E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

Poetry as a Host

By Lyndsey Stonebridge, University of East Anglia

Earlier this autumn, I was fortunate enough to watch a film of a young poet recite a new poem. The poet currently lives in Palermo, Sicily, and is a student at a host school teaching young refugees and migrants. He recited his poem at the end of a *Stories in Transit* writing workshop, organised by the novelist and critic, Marina Warner, and the literature academic, Valentina Castagna. *Stories in Transit* is a key collaborator in our AHRC-ESRC project, *Refugee Hosts*.

'Migrant' boat spotted in Monreale Cathedral, Palermo (c) L. Stonebridge

The poem told how the poet had four brothers, and he was the fifth. When he is away from his brothers he asks that the moon be their guardian. The brothers are separated now because of money. And money, the poem concludes, is the mixer of souls – it sets one soul against another, soul against soul.

The poem tells us much about contemporary migrant and refugee experiences, about families living apart, and about the moon, which can be seen by everyone wherever they are. When you ask the moon to look after your absent brothers, you can also believe that the moon sees them too: a celestial guardian, mediating absence, a secure point in the sky when secure points on earth are scarce. Then there is the money, ever absent, ever present, cleaving souls.

There is a school of literary humanitarianism that believes poetry is primarily therapeutic; that poems allow *arrivants* to speak of lost homes, giving voice to trauma, healing wounds. This may be true in some cases, although sometimes one might wonder whose mind benefits most from the articulation of grief, the poet or the keenly sympathetic listener. Anyway, his wasn't this kind of poem.

It was, rather, a thoughtfully crafted verse of precise insight and deep emotion. At the workshop, the young poet recited the poem in Arabic. Another poet then translated into English, and a third into French. The poem was then recited again in Arabic, this time with most people in the room having grasped some of its meaning.

> *"Poetry is not therapy, and writing is only creative to the extent that can be accommodated between people. It is a kind of host"*

Qur'anic inscription on pillar, entrance of Palermo Cathedral. (c) L. Stonebridge

Spoken four times by three voices, this wasn't just one poem, then, but a poetry event, a conversation between tongues, cultures, hosts, travellers from across Europe, Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Egypt, Lebanon. Sound not suffering mattered most in this conversation: all three poets agreed the doubling of 'soul against soul' in the final line of the poem needed to be heard across all three languages. And so they were, in English, Arabic and French, the 'souls' resonating together and apart like the brothers in the poem.

When the young poet spoke the poem for the final time, everyone could hear that he was speaking from deep within that mixing of souls, separate from his siblings, but together in the art of his poem. He owned it, and his audience, as in the best recitations, with his words, breath, body and mind.

Poetry is not therapy, and writing is only creative to the extent that can be accommodated between people. It is a kind of host. We will be developing and exploring the kind of hosting that poetry and translation can make possible throughout *Refugee Hosts*.

> *"When the young poet spoke the poem for the final time, everyone could hear that he was **speaking from deep within that mixing of souls**, separate from his siblings, but together in the art of his poem."*

Prior Meltings

By Hari Reed, University of East Anglia

1

Next day Alexandru conjured up himself from sea-rim green. He conjured road, as we all do, in time. I walked behind, blended in to trace his spines, melted into path and paved all myself over. Gently rock hard; melting finger-first like tallow candles, lazy snake boughs sliding ice but shatterless. Two puckered pupils, spaceless blackstones. He knew he was the road that art had moved and paved and paced. Paint yourself as the only possible *this* in all of context.

2

Part-way through this introduction I begin to ask your questions: Unu, are those who buy concrete for personal use the most stable? Două, are those who buy envelopes for personal use the most hopeful? I do not wish to situate myself against a backdrop here for fear it is a greenscreen. Swallow or be swallowed, *prieten.* Then there are my questions. If one melts into the ether, what is a melting? Can I melt into significance, melt in the mouth of significance, melt into being? I do have examples, but you won't take them seriously and I haven't yet defrosted. My hands are numb and can barely communicate.

3

Learning is a melting, a bearing of the weight of the invisible. This makes it harder to calculate weight although machinery can help. If the weight of emptiness exceeds the weight of knowledge, knowing this will not en-lighten. I never promised not to be gratuitous; I never make gratuitous promises.

4

Your border home yesterday gated lent me its eyes and its discontinuity. I shuffle the knowledge up slow like a cargoship tacking its art to the wood walls to dry out the wording and flower press lust. I should have known that to scrabble for respect was self-effacing. When I face myself you take the mirror space.

5

Unu, I sometimes imagine myself grounded in sustained correspondence. Două, buying is contaminated hope. Ask anyone. I have a limited supply and it is contaminated. Exact measurements are yet to be made, but what worse byway to begin? *Zece din zece, prieten*.

6

You said 'I only loved you in the first world' I said walls in language can and maybe must be full of spiders. I dreamed my skin as sponge inside which spider's eyes were sprouting, snug in enclaves. Pregnant hungry. I can't bear to say this slow enough so you will never know. 'Also enough has already been said.'

7

You're too scared to fall and by fall I mean tomorrow. I have reached the sad conclusion I will not disclose to do with sex and power. Yes you know it. This is nothing, nothing else. If I lose I want it to be far from home. Black sea facts will freeze my melting memory but facts are hardly porous, hardly sponge. Science eats itself leaving nothing but an = which of course is a digestive system. Topit; Alexandru, if it mattered.

8

Transient pastfaces sicken and gone, are replaced with less dream. What are days with these days in mind? What do you crave but the slice between people and real people? Tell me of your accent; tell me of my accident. I'm guilty, I confess. Dripping with envelopes you slick on the languages. I never left you melting at the border. Your net worth will sink when you slip through the net. This is borderline out of control. I'm not a politician although, as I say, I am numb. Ghosts melt through borderlines. Ghosts melt through hosts. Truthless, they seep through my core. Where the hell is my core? One last thing you'll need shoes.

The Roles of Performance and Creative Writing in Refugee-Related Research

By Aydan Greatrick and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, University College London

The geodesic dome is under construction
(c) T. Bailey

On the 6 February 2017, Tom Bailey – the 2017 Leverhulme Artist in Residence at UCL Geography's Migration Research Unit, and founder of the Mechanical Animal Corporation – organised and led a "Refugee Theatre Workshop" at UCL. The workshop drew on his experiences working in 'the Jungle' camp in Calais, where he helped run a 'Theatre of Hope' established by Good Chance Theatre.

As part of his involvement with the Good Chance Theatre, Tom Bailey led performance workshops with refugees and asylum seekers. These focused on improvisation and physical theatre, rather than on scripts, encouraging an 'ensemble-led' approach. The idea was that, through the workshops, participants would perform their own stories – of their journeys and encounters. The shells of well-known myths, from Odysseus to fairy-tales, structured the workshops, yet the key narrative devices were the refugees' own stories.

What lessons might we learn about the viability of such techniques for our *Refugee Hosts* project, given our project's aims to meaningfully engage with diverse narratives around refugee-host encounters, including through creative workshops with members of diverse refugee and host communities?

During the UCL workshop, Bailey shared with us some of the particular challenges and opportunities that arose from the Theatre of Hope initiative in Calais. As an antidote to the everyday dullness, wetness and coldness of camp life, where few communal or social spaces exist(ed), the theatre – which took the form of a geodesic dome – offered some respite. However, the camp's internal political dynamics, as well as the external pressures placed on the camp's residents by the French authorities (and touring performance companies….), also made the space a frequently contested one. Access to the theatre space therefore generated unexpected tensions within and between groups, a well-documented if not unexpected outcome of many humanitarian initiatives.

This tension can, in many ways, be explained by the seemingly substantial significance many refugees and asylum seekers in the Calais camp attached to the space. This significance went beyond practical considerations, such as the availability of shelter (although even here, as Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh has argued, different forms of 'performance' are often helpful when it comes to refugees' attempts to secure practical humanitarian assistance). As Bailey explained during the workshop, the theatre space allowed those who came into it to engage in activities that encouraged "self expression where there is none". To paraphrase: the various performances expected of 'the refugee' in Calais have typically been pre-scripted – they are at any given moment presented as the indistinguishable mass of vulnerable 'women-and-children', as the 'bogus refugees' = 'economic migrants', as the would-be terrorists or the grateful receivers of aid. In the theatre space, by contrast, Bailey argued that those involved in different workshops or activities had a say over their own stories: they were able to express themselves, and their *self*.

This was reflected in the methods used by Bailey and other artists involved in the initiative. For many who came to the theatre space, theatre in the established sense of the word – scripts, rehearsals and so on – was not a priority. Physical performances and improvisation were preferred, in part because such techniques encouraged a more dynamic expression of self, or of *community,* free from the arbitration of a 'director' (or of an asylum official or border guard for that matter).

This point about self-expression, of the expression of a *community,* and transcending normative scripts certainly stands out, not least of all because of its relevance to the work of the *Refugee Hosts* project. We are interested in re-framing mainstream debates surrounding the 'humanitarian narrative', which typically results in the 'silencing of refugee experiences' and the 'framing of refugees as suffering victims'.

"How can we ensure the spaces in which the creative writing workshops take place are able to facilitate participants' 'self-expression'? What might this even 'look' like – or sound or read like?"

A performance takes place inside the Good Chance Theatre in Calais (c) Tom Bailey

Indeed, variants of Bailey's physical performance methods are often used as 'warm up' activities in creative workshops, and a number of improvisation techniques will invariably be incorporated into our project's writing workshops in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey over the coming months and years. In effect, one of our project's starting points is the following recognition: that by creating a critical space for participants to document, trace and resist experiences of and responses to displacement – whether through poetry, music and/or performance – nuanced and dynamic reflections about refugee-host encounters and journeys of displacement (and hosting) may be developed, and collectively explored with and by participants themselves.

Of course, consideration has to be given to the various challenges involved in putting such approaches into practice in a project such as *Refugee Hosts*: How can we ensure the spaces in which the creative writing workshops take place are able to facilitate participants' 'self-expression'? What might this even 'look' like – or sound or read like? Indeed, how can spontaneity and creativity be fostered, or 'hosted', in a workshop, irrespective of how participatory *we* aim to 'make it'? These are important questions, and thinking carefully about them now offers important opportunities for us as we continue to develop *Refugee Hosts*' approach to working with refugees and local hosting communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Ultimately, engaging with a range of theatre and performance techniques appears important in part because Bailey's experiences help to corroborate the value of a range of creative approaches to the study of conflict and displacement. For example, academics, researchers and artists who have explored the meaning of statelessness and exile through poetry and creative writing have helped to change our understandings of displacement, and engender a sense of 'self' that is often lost through the simple assumptions held by many when it comes to who is and who is not a refugee.

Indeed, as *Refugee Hosts*' Co-I Lyndsey Stonebridge has argued on this issue, poetry becomes a useful and profound means of exploring what it is to *be* displaced and stateless – poetry *is* self-expression: 'it cannot be ours to authenticate'. Such themes likewise run throughout the writings of Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, our project's writer in residence, whose poetry and academic work shed light on 'the face of the refugee' as an embodiment of absence and presence simultaneously: it is "the face that has no place to turn to and yet remains where it is, to feign its presence".

Ultimately, creative workshops – whether including theatrical, writing or drawing techniques – may enable a deeper understanding of what it means to be displaced, including through diverse acts of resistance. In effect, exploring what it *means* to 'be' a refugee or asylum seeker – and indeed, what it means to 'be' (o*r become*) a 'host' – may only be possible through a range of creative modes of enquiry. As Yousif M. Qasmiyeh writes here,

> *Refugees ask other refugees, who are we to come to you and who are you to come to us? Nobody answers. Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, Kurds share the camp, the same-different camp, the camp of a camp. They have all come to re-originate the beginning with their own hands and feet.*

Importantly, creative methods may enable diverse forms of 'self-exploration' and 'self-expression', but they can (and perhaps *should*) also simultaneously provide a space for participants to transcend and resist different forms of externally imposed expectations. This can include providing a space to resist the expectations inherent within the scripts referred to above – of the vulnerable/ violent/ bogus/ grateful refugee -, but also the very expectation that participants will (or should) be performing in an 'authentic' way and 'revealing' their 'true self' during workshops. Indeed, as Lyndsey Stonebridge has argued here on *Refugee Hosts*:

> *Poetry is not therapy, and writing is only creative to the extent that can be accommodated between people. It is a kind of host. We will be developing and exploring the kind of hosting that poetry and translation can make possible throughout Refugee Hosts.*

Meaningfully engaging with diverse narratives around refugees' encounters in different spaces requires us to continue thinking critically about the different roles that diverse creative practices can play when conducting research with people affected by conflict and displacement.

"Exploring what it means *to 'be' a refugee or asylum seeker – and indeed, what it means to 'be' (or* become*) a 'host' – may only be possible through a range of creative modes of enquiry"*

Hannah Arendt: On Displacement and Political Judgement

By Anna Rowlands, Durham University

In which material circumstances are the profound questions of human dignity posed? Hannah Arendt argued that it is the figure of the displaced person who poses the fundamental question of dignity over and again to the discomforted modern state. The urgent question whispered by the people who are on the edges of the modern state becomes: how do we, the displaced, realize dignity and human belonging in tangible political terms in a world where rights and liberties are attached to citizenship? Whilst this question does not go away, there are periods, so Arendt argues, when the ethical significance of these questions intensifies and the lack of morally convincing answers from the liberal state becomes increasingly disturbing.

A mural of Hannah Arendt painted in Germany (Wiki Commons)

The current, intensifying interaction of action, reaction and inaction in the politics of the West with regards to the situation of refugees would not, I think, have surprised Hannah Arendt. Across her writings Arendt meditated on the failures of judgement and responsibility that tend to beset modern states. In the final years of her life Arendt conducted a sustained study of the way in which moral and political judgments are formed and responsibilities are exercised within political communities. Arendt argues that out of the double moral failing (faith and politics) of the Holocaust emerge powerful and difficult questions about how political and moral judgements have come to lose their anchor points in older forms of moral reasoning. In the absence of regenerated and binding moralities, and through increased drives towards automation and consumption, states are at increased risk of viewing the world in largely utilitarian terms.

The shadow side of our technologically driven modernity is a corresponding tendency to render some kinds of people superfluous; and given the stateless position of many migrants, those seeking refuge are amongst the most vulnerable to such practices of superfluity. In the light of the economic and technical character of human exchange relations in late modernity we are called to exercise constant moral vigilance as the state creates and expels its superfluous other.

Arendt suggests that this wider crisis of moral norms to guide judgement is umbilically connected to a crisis of responsibility. In this context Arendt talks of a distortion of the *vita activa* – life-giving action which is the true task of government – into what she terms 'vitalist activism'. This 'vitalist activitm' distorts action trapping the decision maker and the subject in an automated way of knowing that focuses on 'calculating' without 'thinking', embodying a forgetfulness about what is lasting and durable in the good life.

Arendt draws a fundamental distinction between being 'rational' creatures capable of decision-making and action, and thinking persons capable of honouring life. Systems embodying 'vitalist activism' avoid posing the moral question: when I act, who am I acting in support of and who am I resisting; and therefore risk failing to relate judgement and responsibility. Under such conditions, the emerging forms of political speech and action lose moral and affective power.

The challenge is to identify the features of such cultures and to respond by being willing to jolt our cultures towards the possibilities of the 'vita activa': into 'thinking what we are doing'.

Refugee Hosts Co-I Prof. Lyndsey Stonebridge has recently contributed to a BBC Radio 4 "In Our Time" programme on Arendt (2 Feb 2017).

You can listen to the programme on our website.

Arendt thus offers the following as warning signs of political judgement that has lost its moral force. Firstly, in instances where the political system has become in some sense non-communicable – that is, the complexity and opaqueness of the system seems to defy the comprehension of those whose lives and well-being are dependent on it. Secondly, where individual human life comes to be treated as superfluity and artifice – where human life appears to be treated through a system of vitalist activism or automation where 'calculating' rather than 'thinking' dominates. Taken together these factors indicate signs of a crisis of judgement and responsibility with roots in a much deeper crisis of human value.

It is not difficult to see the ways in which Arendt's analysis offers us tools to diagnose the moral and political failures of systems of governance operative at national and regional levels. But in the context of our *Refugee Hosts* project I think Arendt can be helpful in pushing us to ask key questions about governance, responsibility and judgement in the context of the local too. Throughout our research with communities responding to refugees from Syria within the context of the Middle East, we will be looking at the formation of political communities – shared spaces and times through which a life together is negotiated – amongst refugees and 'hosts'. These are spaces and times in which citizenship takes on new dimensions which resist its stripping away, as well as carrying memories of former shapes and forms. These are contexts in which Arendt's 'vita activa' is reformulated rather than simply absent. In and through the negotiation of such relationships, practices of responsibility and judgement – inherently political categories – emerge anew.

Full list of Articles and Creative Pieces

We would like to thank everyone who has featured their research, photos and creative pieces on our blog. Below is a list of all of the blog submissions, creative pieces and photo galleries that have been published on our website since the project launched in September.

Articles:

Ager, A. (2016) "Refugee Youth, Conflict and Communities" (originally in *The Scotsman*)

Carpi, E. (2017) "Syrians in Akkar: Refugees or Neighbours?"

Davis, D. (2017) "Urban Warfare, Resilience and Resistance: Leila Abdelrazaq's *Baddawi*"

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2016) "Refugees Hosting Refugees" (originally in *Forced Migration Review* Issue. 53)

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2016) "Refugee-Refugee Relationality: Hospitality and 'Being With' Refugees" (originally in IJURR)

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2017) "Syrian Refugees in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon Face and Uncertain 2017" (originally in the *Conversation*)

Greatrick, A. (2016) "Externalising the 'Refugee Crisis': A Consequence of Historical Denial?"

Greatrick, A. and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2017) "The Roles of Performance and Creative Writing Workshops in Refugee-Related Research"

Greatrick, A. and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2017) "Travelling Fear in Global Context: Exploring Everyday Dynamics of In/Security and Im/Mobility"

Kwek, T. (2017) "Q&A with Yousif M. Qasmiyeh" (originally in Asymptote)

Loris-Rodionoff, C. (2017) "Loss and Everyday Life on the Syrian-Turkish Border"

Rowlands, A. (2017) "Hannah Arendt: On Displacement and Political Judgement"

Stonebridge, L. (2016) "Poetry as a Host"

Turner, L. (2017) "Who Will Resettle Single Syrian Men?" (originally in *Forced Migration Review* Issue. 54)

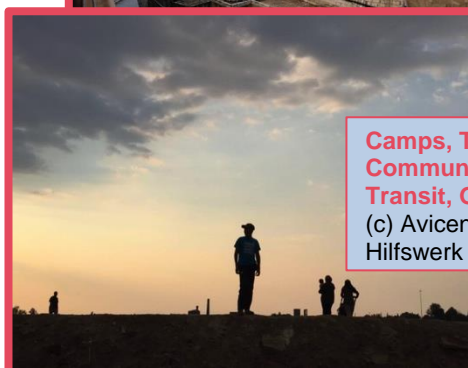## *Creative Submissions:*

Hoshyar Emami, T. (2017) "Alice's Alternative Wonderland: Chapters One, Two and Three"

Reed, H. (2017) "Prior Meltings"

Qasmiyeh, Y. M. (2016) "Writing the Camp"

Qasmiyeh, Y. M. (2017) "The Camp is Time"

Photo Galleries

Burj el-Barajneh Camp, Lebanon:
(c) S. Maqusi

Camps, Traces and Communities in Transit, Greece:
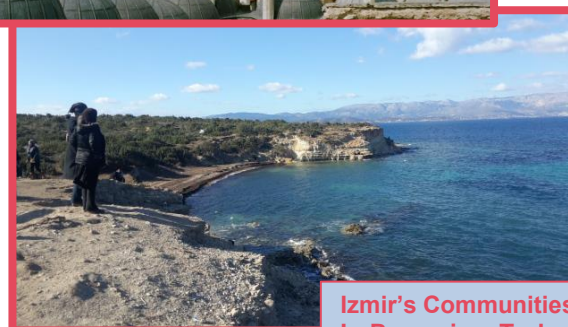(c) Avicenna Hilfswerk E. V

Baqa-a Camp, Jordan:
(c) S. Maqusi

Baddawi Refugee Camp, Lebanon:
(c) E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

Urban Refugees in Istanbul, Turkey:
(c) A. Greatrick

Izmir's Communities-In-Becoming, Turkey:
(c) U. Ozturk

Join the Conversation

Refugee Hosts aims to change the conversation about refugees and displacement. In order to do this, we are building a community of conversation, drawing on the experiences, research and opinions of different people, from practitioners to academics, displaced peoples and artists. We have already hosted a substantial number of interesting and thought provoking contributions on our blog: www.refugeehosts.org/blog.

We encourage submissions from anyone interested in contributing to our community of conversation. Where possible, submissions should be directly related to issues surrounding displacement. However, in some instances other topics may still be considered.

Themes that are of particular interest to our blog include:

Refugee/Host encounters: the dynamics of hospitality in local and inter-national contexts, and how these are determining responses to and engagements with displaced peoples

Everyday lives: explorations of the everyday that counteract narratives of migrant exceptionalism and refugee victimhood

Refugees as hosts: the role played by established refugee populations in responding to the needs of displaced persons

Humanitarianism: discussions relating to the politics of humanitarianism, the effectiveness of international humanitarian responses to refugees in both the past and the present, and alternative humanitarianism(s) typically overlooked by mainstream approaches

Narrative, literature and history: voices, stories and experiences of displaced and hosting communities in both the past and present, and how the past informs these stories

Policy processes: opportunities for improvement in policy processes, and evidence of good and bad practice vis-a-vis responses to and engagements with displaced persons

Intersections of gender, faith and secularism: building a deeper understanding of how these interact in relation to local community responses to and engagements with refugees

To submit a blog post, email Aydan on aydan.greatrick.15@ucl.ac.uk. We are especially interested in creative submissions. See our creative archive for more information: www.refugeehosts.org/creative-archive

Cheap and essential supplies are provided in this and other Syrian-run shops in Baddawi, contributing to the small camp economy
(c) M. M. Qasmiyeh

A wedding in the rubble, Nahr al-Bared Camp, Lebanon
(c) M. M. Qasmiyeh

Our Partners and Collaborators

This project will be working with a number of key partners and collaborators over the coming years. They will support us throughout all stages of our research project, from site selection and risk assessments to data analysis, from co-convening creative writing and translation workshops to jointly hosting policy roundtables and public events. We are extremely grateful for their support and commitment to this project.
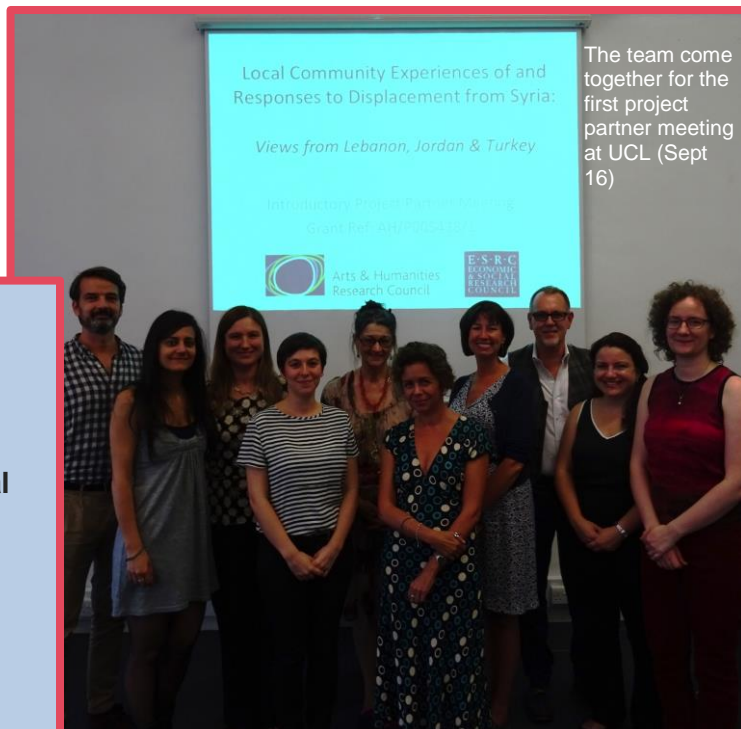

The team come together for the first project partner meeting at UCL (Sept 16)

Project Partners:

English-PEN and PEN International

Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities

Project Collaborators:

Save the Children's Humanitarian Affairs Team

Stories in Transit

Contact:

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For research related enquiries contact the PI Dr Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh on elena.fiddian-qasmiyeh@ucl.ac.uk

Check out our website: www.refugeehosts.org

Follow us on Twitter: @RefugeeHosts and subscribe to our mailing list http://eepurl.com/cz8eXT

The sun sets over Baddawi Camp, Lebanon (c) E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh
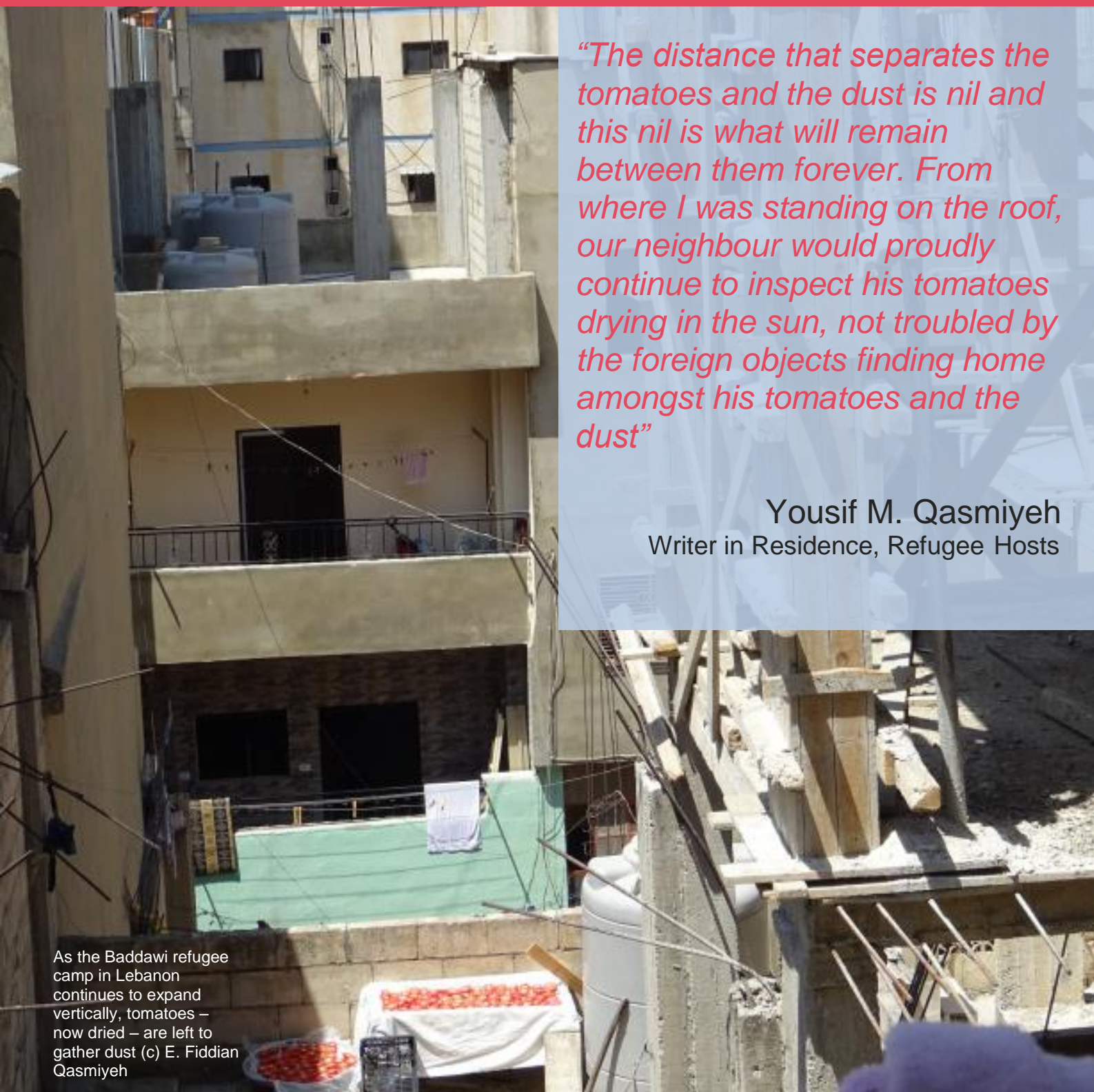
"The distance that separates the tomatoes and the dust is nil and this nil is what will remain between them forever. From where I was standing on the roof, our neighbour would proudly continue to inspect his tomatoes drying in the sun, not troubled by the foreign objects finding home amongst his tomatoes and the dust"

Yousif M. Qasmiyeh
Writer in Residence, Refugee Hosts

As the Baddawi refugee camp in Lebanon continues to expand vertically, tomatoes – now dried – are left to gather dust (c) E. Fiddian Qasmiyeh

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