Space of Refuge - A Spatial Installation & Symposium about the Palestinian refugee camp
Post-Event Report

‘Space of Refuge’ was an installation and symposium event initially erected within the Baqa’a refugee camp in Jordan in Summer 2015, and Burj el Barajneh camp in Lebanon in Summer 2016 as part of extensive research fieldwork by Samar Maqusi, a PhD student at the Bartlett School of Architecture; in essence, this provided an opportunity to investigate processes of spatial production inside Palestinian camps since the 1940s, while concurrently mapping these processes against Host Country policies and spatial practices incurred on these camps.

Building on the concept of transferring “spatial knowledge” from inside the camp to other cities, the event in London took place from March 10-15, 2017 at the P21 Gallery in Somers Town, co-convened by Professor Murray Fraser (UCL Bartlett School of Architecture: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/architecture/prof-murray-fraser) and Dr Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (Reader in Human Geography and Co-Director of the Migration Research Unit, Coordinator of UCL’s Refuge in a Moving World Research Network, UCL Department of Geography: http://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/people/academic-staff/elena-fiddian-qasmiyeh). The installation, developed by Samar Maqusi, was also made possible thanks to a number of volunteers from the London community who donated physical materials such as wooden beams, and helped Samar construct the large-scale installation inside the gallery. The event was generously funded by UCL’s Grand Challenges and UCL’s Institute of Advanced Studies, as well as being supported by UCL’s Refuge in a Moving World network and the HUB Collective.

Following, are descriptions, images, and feedback excerpts from attendees to both the Installation Opening Night and Symposium event.

Installation Opening Night

*Description:* By bringing this spatial installation into P21 Gallery’s space, the exhibition engaged in both “space and knowledge transfer” between refugee camps in the Middle East and London as a wealthy global city that is one of the key destinations for migrants today. The installation physically superimposed a part of Burj el Barajneh’s camp-space (depicted in grey in the map below) with P21 Gallery’s space (in blue), creating in turn a hybrid third space which acted as an innovative form of public engagement with academic and non-academic partners, by passing on research data, fieldwork documentaries (including films and sound pieces) and refugee testimonies about issues of space and refuge. The installation illustrated some fascinating scenarios of resilience and adaptability within the constrained conditions of the camp, whilst also exposing feelings of hostility and aggression that a conflictual state of inhabitation has created with the host governments and host communities.

*Installation diagram showing the literal superimposition of the map of Burj el Barajneh camp (grey) in relation to the P21 gallery (blue) in London. The act of superimposing one space over another reveals the various methods that inhabitants adopt to create their spaces within their host geography, thus highlighting the precarious geography Palestinian camps are situated within, and the resulting intensive forms of socio-political co-existence. ©Samar Maqusi*
The Installation Opening Night proved to be a great success, and was attended by a large group of visitors with diverse backgrounds from around London, and even beyond. The visitors vigorously engaged with the installation itself, challenging their own perceptions of space and movement, as well as pondering over the visual and audio pieces to be able to better situate their experience of the installation and materials within the real spatiality of the refugee camp. In addition, Ahmed Tobasi, a Palestinian refugee actor, director and theater writer from Jenin camp, spoke about his experience of growing up in Jenin camp and witnessing its destruction and reconstruction, as well as his determination to use art as a medium for his own emancipation, and that of others.

To view more images and video pieces of the event, please visit:
@RefugeeHosts: https://refugeehosts.org/2017/03/11/space-of-refuge-opening-night/
@samarmaqusi.com: http://samarmaqusi.com/index.php/work/space-of-refuge-london/
Quantitative and Qualitative Measures re Public Engagement and Impact (all figures accurate on 20 June 2017):

- The Announcement for the installation and symposium on the Refugee Hosts website was viewed 232 times.
- Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh’s write-up and images reflecting on the Opening Night were viewed 284 times on Refugee Hosts (available here: https://refugeehosts.org/2017/03/11/space-of-refugee-opening-night/)

From Feedback Forms

**What was the most effective part of the installation?**

“The use of space. It was especially effective the entry passage way that narrowed to give the feeling of compactness that one would experience inside the camp.”
“All of it was very effective – especially the thin passage, and the film shown through the wood broken on the back wall – giving the feeling you could not quite get to it, and capture the whole picture – I thought that really got the sense across. The movement through the camp on foot, on bike/moped – was really great.”

“The rooftop conversation was particularly engaging.”

**What was the most challenging part of the installation?**
“Navigating the narrow alleyways.”

“In terms of challenging – as in it challenged what you thought – I felt that the constraint of the space – and the very different living environment that it created – really challenged ones perception of what it means to inhabit such spaces.”

**What three words would you use to describe the installation?**
“Powerful, revealing, constraint”

“Provocative, thoughtful, meticulous.”

“Claustrophobic (this I think was intended), enlightening, humbling.....being grateful for the freedoms one has simply by the virtue of where one was born.”

From Tweets:
"The physicality of design of Space of Refuge @P21Gallery evokes deep emotional insight into displaced living"

"a brilliant exploration of spatial construction in exile"

"powerful and generous exhibition on #space and the Palestinian #refugeecamps"
‘Space of Refuge’ Symposium

Description: The one-day symposium which was housed within the larger spatial installation, situated the issue of Palestinian refuge as a precursor of urgent matters of ‘refuge’ on a wider scale around the world. The symposium brought together various academic scholars working on refugee issues from UCL, LSE, and Birmingham University to construct a truly interdisciplinary dialogue concerning questions of refuge, spatiality, and protraction, each within their own research area. This conversation was further expanded through interactions with the audience, including discussions of conflict, resolution, protracted refugee status, host country policies, relationships between refugees and host communities and host countries, spatial production within refugee camps, socio-economic behaviour, cultural practices, and such like.

Space of Refuge Symposium Programme
15 March 2017, 10.00-17.30
P21 Gallery, 21-27 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD, UK

The ‘Space of Refuge’ symposium will situate the issue of Palestinian refugees as a precursor of urgent matters of ‘refuge’ on a wider scale around the world. The latter will include discussions of conflict, resolution, protracted refugee status, host country policies, relationships between refugees and host countries, spatial production within refugee camps, socio-economic behaviour, cultural practices, and such like.

10.00-11.00 Introduction & Welcome
Prof Murray Fraser UCL Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment
Guided tour of the installation ‘Space of Refuge’ as idea and reality

11.00 – 12.30 First Session – Departure
Session Chair: Giovanna Astolfi (UCL DPU)
This session is concerned with discussing the ongoing movement of refugees globally, and the material, social, political conditions that contribute to refugee, and thus become attributes of refugee itself.
Dr Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh UCL Department of Geography
Dr Romila Sanyal LSE Department of Geography and Environment
12.30 – 13.30 Lunch break

13.30 – 15.00 Second Session – Spatiality
This session will analyse scenarios of refugee space, historically and currently, spatially and politically (especially refugee-host country relations), and showcase the material realities that exist today.
Session Chair: Murray Fraser (UCL Bartlett Architecture)
Huda Tayob UCL Bartlett Architecture
Dr Camillo Boano UCL Bartlett DPU
Samir Maqusi UCL Bartlett Architecture

15.00 – 16.30 Third Session – Protraction
This session discusses spaces of refuge at the crossroads of space/time, whereby the former becomes a product of the latter, both being victims to a lack of political will. The question to be asked, however, is what would a political resolution really mean to a protracted space of refuge?
Session Chair: Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh
Dr Estella Carpi UCL Bartlett DPU
Dr Adam Ramadan Birmingham University
Film Screening/Skype with Waleed Jum’ah & Mohammad Al Nabulsi, Baq’a refugee camp, Jordan

16.30 – 16.45 Coffee Break

16.45 – 17.30 Open Discussion

This Symposium is funded by UCL Institute of Advanced Studies
Supported by
UCL Institute of Advanced Studies
UCL Grand Challenges
UCL Refuge in Moving World

Image of the Symposium Flyer showing the Symposium programme, sessions, and invited speakers.
The event was successfully attended by a large group of different London communities, including students, academics, local neighbours, artists, NGO representatives, etc.—most of whom attended the whole day's activities—thus engaging in a truly diverse dialogue about refuge which transcended the usual academic conversation, challenging each one of us to confront questions of refuge, space and displacement beyond research and theory, and relate our experiences and knowledge empirically.

Furthermore, two refugees from Baqa’a camp, Waleed Juma’a and Mohammad Nabulsi, who have been involved in Samar’s fieldwork research from the onset but were not granted visas to enter the UK, connected to the Symposium utilizing a digital platform, allowing the attendees to engage in a unique space of sharing knowledge and concerns directly with refugees in their camp-space.

To view more images of the event, and to listen to audio recordings of each presentation, please visit:
@RefugeeHosts: https://refugeehosts.org/2017/03/20/space-of-refuge-symposium-report/
@samarmaqusi.com: http://samarmaqusi.com/index.php/work/space-of-refuge-symposium--london-/
Quantitative and Qualitative Measures of Public Engagement and Impact:

- The follow-up Symposium Report published on Refugeehosts.org (https://refugeehosts.org/2017/03/20/space-of-refuge-symposium-report/) has been read over 360 times, and includes presentation podcasts and additional photographs.

From Feedback Forms

**Have the Symposium and Speakers enabled you to form a deeper understanding of a) the installation, and b) the subject of refuge?**

“Absolutely – really most excellent!!”

“a) Yes, the guided tour was particularly valuable. b) Yes, I found the architectural perspectives intriguing as I have held a theoretical interest in architecture.”

**Other comments**

“The descriptions of everyday life in refugee camps was a very moving and accurate description of how inhumane these particular spaces are but also remain places of life and home for refugees.”
"The mission of the Space of Refuge is important. To bring attention to the public of conditions inside the many refugee camps. It is a sad commentary today that the refugee population is expanding at an alarming rate. The critical issues of the future of the “camps” and the men, women and children living in them needs to be understood and resolution to their displacement need constant attention."

From Tweets:
"amazing symposium"

**Future Activities**

*Publication Activities:* As part of dissemination activities to further reflect upon and share the outcomes of ‘Space of Refuge’, hosted within London as a city and community, we plan to include such insights within both Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh’s upcoming UCL Press edited volume, *Refuge in a Moving World: Interdisciplinary Conversation*, as well as, producing an article for the online Open Access peer-reviewed *ARENA Journal of Architecture (AJAR)*, and which Prof Murray is the Editor-in-Chief.

Furthermore, Samar was invited by one of the Symposium attendees, a professor of Ancient History and Place at the University of Exeter to contribute to the open-access journal *Humanities* as part of a special issue titled *Displacement and the Humanities: Manifestos from the Ancient to the Present*. The contribution will be in the form of a photo-essay, and will showcase ‘Space of Refuge’ as a spatial concept and intervention.

*Other:* Samar was also approached by the representative of a large British-registered charity, *Interpal*, who attended the ‘Space of Refuge’ event in London, and works on Palestinian issues in the Near East, to contribute to their exhibition space within the upcoming Palestinian Expo event in London— the largest Palestinian event in Europe—, July 8-9 2017. Unfortunately, and due to Samar’s thesis-writing schedule, she had to pass on this opportunity, but she was able to connect *Interpal* with other volunteer-colleagues who have been working with Samar in the field and on the London installation to contribute in other ways.

*Future Field Research and Funds:* Future initiatives emanating from ‘Space of Refuge’ have been in consideration to ensure the spatial installation continues to travel to more sites, both within other host countries and global cities. We are also very interested in further tackling other issues which arose from the event, such as investigating and documenting the production of space inside Palestinian camps which cater to non-Palestinian refugees who reside in the Palestinian camps as their space of refuge, manifested mostly in Syrian refugees. These inquiries are already taking place as part of Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh’s AHRC-ESRC funded Refugee Hosts research project which “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”, and whose blog I have already contributed to through pieces on Burj el-Barajneh and Baqa'a camps in Lebanon and Jordan.

We plan to take this interdisciplinary collaboration further as we realize there is a real shortage of spatial documentation inside Palestinian camps, especially data relating to the nature and
transformation of spaces of refuge over a protracted period as these spaces begin to absorb new and overlapping groups of displaced people in the Middle East. Tentatively, we imagine hosting another event in London aimed at expanding the discussion on refuge and hosting to include questions on spatial behaviors in camps inhabited by multiple groups of refugees, as a stepping stone towards a larger bid. We will be preparing an application for submission to the UCL’s Grand Challenges to help us host another refuge-focused event in London in 2018. In terms of larger bids, we mainly plan to apply for external research funds, with the support of the wider UCL Refuge in a Moving World research network, We envisage targeting the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) since it has recently signalled its interest in supporting research projects that focus on the role of architecture within conflict zones, in addition to other relevant research councils, such as the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).