



The Cost of Life
Oppression, Exploitation and Struggle
in the Time of Monsters

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Title

Contemporary Migrant and Refugee Image and the Spatial Fix: Exploring Narratives of Racism and Guilt

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Abstract

Relying on extensive fieldwork, this article provides a summary of research exploring the interconnectedness of image, imagination, and space, with a specific focus on the experiences of migrants and refugees. It investigates the intricate relationship between economic development, geography, and narratives surrounding guilt and racism within a capitalist system. Through the analysis of political ideologies, media representation, social discourse, and historical experiences, the research sheds light on the social, economic, and political implications of the spatial fix. Drawing on the concept developed by David Harvey, the spatial fix highlights the reorganization of production, investment, and consumption patterns, often perpetuating uneven development. Furthermore, the study delves into how geography and economic development contribute to shaping place identity and social cohesion, particularly in the context of evolving economic landscapes and demographic shifts. By exploring a case study from Lebanon, the research underscores the context-specific nature of these dynamics and emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of their complexities.

In essence, the experiences of migrants and refugees are deeply entwined with the dynamic interplay of image construction, imaginative processes, and spatial configurations.

The theoretical foundation of the paper revolves around the spatial fix concept developed by David Harvey, a geographer, and Marxist scholar. The spatial fix denotes a process in which capitalist economies address crises and contradictions by restructuring the spatial arrangement of production, investment, and consumption. This concept holds particular significance in comprehending how economic restructuring fosters uneven development within and among regions. The spatial fix, as envisioned by David Harvey, is a dynamic process wherein capitalist economies reconfigure their spatial setups in response to economic challenges. This reorganization entails the relocation of production, investment, and consumption, thereby contributing to the uneven development of regions within the capitalist system. The spatial fix stands as an essential concept for elucidating the geographical dynamics of capitalism and the persistent disparities in economic development.

Historical experiences intricately contribute to the spatial fix and its implications, profoundly shaping the spatial dynamics of migration and influencing the development of spaces where migrants settle (Harvey, 2001; Jacobs, 1992; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005; Smith, 1984; Soja, 2011). The colonial legacy influences migration patterns, fostering the establishment of diaspora spaces in former colonial powers (Bhabha, 1994; Chakrabarty, 2007; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1993). Forced migrations and displacement, stemming from historical events like wars, contribute to the spatial fix, manifesting in semi-permanent or permanent refugee settlements (Lefebvre, 1991). Urbanization and industrialization, products of historical processes, concentrate economic activities in specific regions, creating distinct urban centers attracting migrants (Castells, 1983; Harvey, 2001; Jacobs, 1992; Lefebvre, 1991; Weber, 1986). Post-war reconstructions reshape urban and rural spaces, affecting settlement patterns. Historical trade routes and globalization establish migration corridors, forming well-trodden routes (Clifford, 1997). Cultural migrations and diasporas create areas with strong cultural identity, while borderland histories result in zones with unique characteristics (Anderson, 2006). Post-colonial nation-building concentrates populations in capital cities, and historical discrimination influences settlement patterns. The legacy of slavery and forced labor impacts demographics, and historical memory influences preferences for settlement. Post-conflict reconciliation efforts contribute to rebuilding social fabric and impact spatial organization (Balibar, 2002; Soja, 1996). In summary, historical experiences are integral to understanding the complexities of spatial arrangements, migration patterns, and their wide-ranging implications for social, economic, and political structures (Anderson, 2006; Harvey, 2001; Jacobs, 1992; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005; Soja, 2011; Wallerstein, 2004).

"With climate change we all become nomads" Hermann Josef Hack.



Figure 1. "World Climate Refugee Camp, 2007-Today" by Hermann Josef Hack, exhibited in "ETF EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW! expeditions' explorations in aesthetics and sustainability." Photographed in Berlin, 2023, by Ghada Waked. Copyright 2023 by Ghada Waked. Used with permission.

Refugees and migrants are integral components of the global landscape, representing a complex and multifaceted challenge that demands a comprehensive understanding of their definitions, historical context, and current realities. Gil Loescher's pioneering contributions, such as his influential work "Beyond Charity: International Cooperation and the Global Refugee Crisis" (Loescher, 1993) and "Refugees: A Very Short Introduction" (Loescher, 2007), have laid the foundation for the discipline of refugee and forced migration studies.

Refugees, as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention, are individuals who have fled persecution and conflict in their home country, no longer enjoying the legal protections afforded to citizens. This convention mandates that refugees should have access to national courts, employment, education, and various social, economic, and civil rights on par with host country nationals¹. The distinctions between refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are critical, collectively referred to as forced migrants. The historical trajectory of refugees' traces back to periods of human history marked by political, ethnic, and religious persecution, wars, and societal displacement. The contemporary global refugee regime, evolving since the late 1940s, is governed by the 1951 Refugee Convention, with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as its core institution.

Refugee movements are primarily caused by factors such as intolerance, changing conflict dynamics, misinformation, technologies of war, complex emergencies, famine, and international war crimes. The majority of global refugee movements result from internal conflicts, ethnic cleansing, socio-economic inequalities, and, increasingly, conflict-induced famine and climate change.

The global refugee system, anchored in the 1951 Refugee Convention and administered by UNHCR, faces challenges in responding to refugee movements due to the changing

international political system, expanding global mobility, and a diverse displaced population.

As of mid-2023, the global forced displacement figure exceeds 110 million, with over 36.4 million refugees². In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees, predominantly from Syria. Understanding the legal distinctions between refugees and migrants is crucial, as migrants move voluntarily to improve their lives. The refugee crisis, historically rooted, highlights the importance of shared responsibility, collective action, and the active participation of refugees in finding lasting solutions.

Symbolic Visual Representations: Narratives of Human Rights for Refugees and Migrants

Symbols and icons play a crucial role in conveying the profound themes associated with refugees and migrants, encapsulating narratives of survival, courage, and the fundamental principles of human rights. These symbols serve as powerful visual representations, transcending linguistic barriers to evoke empathy and understanding on a global scale.

The butterfly, for instance, has emerged as a symbol, signifying the inherent right of all beings to move freely, echoing the fluidity of nature unrestricted by borders. Little Amal, a puppet embarking on a global journey, takes on the role of a profound symbol, encapsulating the struggles and challenges faced by refugees, while embodying the essence of human rights³.

Blue ribbons, officially endorsed by the UN Refugee Agency, have become a universal symbol of global support for refugees and displaced populations, uniting people in a collective expression of solidarity⁴. In the iconic imagery of Lady Liberty welcoming immigrants to New York, the statue symbolizes hope and opportunity, portraying the aspirations of those seeking a new life.

A distinctive symbol emerges in the form of the brown and blue ribbon, strategically representing immigrant entry points. This symbolism emphasizes the themes of movement and transformation, encapsulating the journey undertaken by those in search of a better life.

However, amidst these symbols of hope and resilience, there exists the poignant narrative of "Refugee Blues," a poem penned by W.H. Auden during the 1930s. This literary work symbolizes the plight of Jewish refugees, vividly illustrating the struggles faced amid immigration restrictions, offering a historical perspective on the challenges of displacement⁵.

Delving into these symbols and icons reveals a visual language that highlights the shared humanity and underscores the motivation for solidarity and mobilization. Our research critically examines the mainstream narrative of racism and its biases as they circulate, acknowledging the potential influence they may have on shaping perceptions and producing places.



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Urban Dynamics: Mobility and Displacement

In the modern era, the fascination of distance and estrangement finds expression not only in personal experiences but permeates the strategies of the tourism market. The battle for growth and prosperity is evident in city branding initiatives like "I Amsterdam," symbolizing the open and welcoming culture of the Netherlands⁶. The tourism sector, boasting 3.5% growth, outpaces the global economy, as highlighted by the World Travel & Tourism Council⁷. Success stories like "Inspired by Iceland" and "Love Great Britain" underscore the efficacy of cultural asset leveraging and strategic partnerships in destination rebranding⁸. British Columbia's enduring slogan, "Super, Natural British Columbia," further exemplifies the enduring appeal of nature-centric branding over three decades⁹. This multifaceted exploration delves into the intricate interplay of notions such as home and away, placement and displacement, dwelling and travel, location and dislocation, revealing the evolving narratives shaping human connections and identities.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the flip side of the Return on Investment (ROI) in the tourism and branding industry. Touristification in cities signifies a process wherein spaces are purposefully transformed to cater to tourists, leading to a shift in their nature and usage. This transformation may result in displacement, evacuation through gentrification, or a complete metamorphosis of urban areas (Colomb & Novy, 2016; Gravari-Barbas & Guinand, 2017). Gentrification is the process of altering the character of a traditional neighborhood by the influx of tourists and tourism-related businesses (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008). The intersection of vacation rentals, tourism, and international migration further contributes to gentrification (Novy & Colomb, 2016). Direct displacement occurs when residents are compelled to leave their homes due to escalating housing costs (Atkinson & Bridge, 2005; Harvey, 2003; Sassen, 2014). Residents may also face forced relocation due to lease non-renewals, evictions, eminent domain, or deteriorating living conditions as investors await redevelopment opportunities (Novy & Colomb, 2016).

We can draw connections between the displacement caused by touristification and the displacement experienced by refugees. Both scenarios involve a fundamental transformation of spaces, impacting the lives of existing inhabitants. The common thread lies in the upheaval caused by these processes, whether fueled by tourism or geopolitical challenges, leading to the displacement of individuals and communities.

Virilio (2012) sounds an alarm, asserting that the city is the primary catastrophe in the contemporary world. The unbridled growth of urban areas on a global scale intersects with extensive migration patterns, resulting in a collision that has the potential to shake up the planet, leading to what he terms as "the geopolitics of repopulation."

The Global "Refugee Crisis" The Absolute Spatial Question

The global "refugee crisis" has surged to over 110 million displaced people worldwide, with the European refugee crisis notably intensifying in 2015 as the flow of migrants soared from 153,000 in 2008 to over 1 million¹⁰. By the end of 2022, the number of forcibly displaced and stateless people in Europe reached 21.8 million, encompassing nearly 12.4 million refugees, 1.3 million asylum-seekers, 7.2 million internally displaced people (IDPs), and 474,000 who were stateless, according to UNHCR Global Focus. This surge is predominantly fueled by individuals from Syria, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and Eritrea, highlighting the enduring and continuous nature of this crisis¹¹.

"There is absolutely a spatial question connected to this refugee problem.

*Our sense of who we are, where we belong and what our obligations encompass - in short, **our** identity - is profoundly affected by our sense of location in space and time.*

Crises of identity (Where is my place in this world? What future can I have?) arise out of strong phases of time-space compression. Some kind of crisis of representation in general, a crisis that is manifest in the contemporary world primarily by postmodern ways of thinking."

David Harvey (2012) explores the spatial dimensions of the crisis, underscoring how our sense of location plays a pivotal role in shaping identity and prompting questions of belonging. The experience of time-space compression and postmodern ways of thinking further exacerbate identity crises.

On the other hand, Marc Augé (1995) introduces the concept of "non-lieu" (non-place) to describe spaces devoid of meaningful, relational, or historical connections with individuals. These transient, anonymous areas, such as airports, shopping malls, and highways, lack a strong sense of identity. Augé contrasts non-lieux with "lieux" (places), which carry social, cultural, and historical significance, fostering community and shared meaning. Non-lieux contribute to disorientation and disconnection, prioritizing efficiency over meaningful interactions, leading to a loss of individuality and a sense of interchangeability.

Paul Virilio (2012), in his contemplation of contemporary living conditions, highlights the alarming proliferation of refugee camps, which have evolved beyond temporary spaces into sprawling urban entities challenging established urban centers. Delving into the impact of teleinformation technologies, Virilio reveals a transformative shift where the sedentary, empowered by technological advancements, can establish a sense of home

anywhere. In contrast, the nomad faces perpetual displacement with nowhere to call home. This dichotomy transcends international borders and manifests within homelands, giving rise to a transhumance, vividly evident in the alarming proliferation of contemporary refugee camps. Virilio aptly terms this precarious mode of dwelling as "unsanitary inhabitation," encapsulating the harsh realities of forced migrations, distant exiles, and relocations.

Unlike historical deportations, the present-day predicament signifies a subtler yet crucial shift—the externalization of the future beyond traditional city boundaries. This transformative process, identified as *geocide*, marks the twilight of established places and the depletion of Earth's geodiversity resources. Virilio underscores this spatial evolution with examples such as camps near Washington, now accommodating victims of subprime mortgages. However, this shift in spatial dynamics is not an isolated phenomenon; it is part of a broader transformation symbolizing the transition from suburbanism to exurbanism, a phenomenon that Virilio foresees as the unequivocal end of geography (Virilio, 2012).

The Problem: A Persistent Challenge

The issue of refugees and migrants remains an ongoing phenomenon, posing a continuous challenge intricately connected to spatial design and urbanism, influenced by prevailing mainstream narratives. In spatial terms, a crucial dimension associated with the refugee problem undeniably exists.

We live in an era where the difficulty of existence, *une difficulté d'Être*, often leads to discomfort and precarious situations, with racism and racial self-interest emerging as significant issues. This thesis contends that the mainstream narrative is rooted in racism, magnifying the plight of victims such as refugees and migrants. In design and communication, stereotypes and archetypes come into play, perpetuating absolute space designed by authorities, as seen in the construction of "storage facilities" by the humanitarian sector. This paper challenges the conventional portrayal of refugees as helpless victims, emphasizing their agency in establishing spaces of waiting and devising non-conventional methods within a system that can be corrupted and exploited. The narrative also explores how refugees construct parallel economies, alienate some, and capitalize on the guilt felt by their hosts to create a sense that these camps are permanent.



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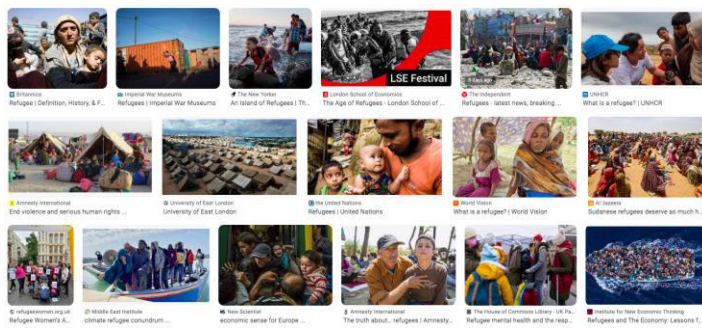
The Refugee Camps and Sustainable Livelihoods

Refugee camps, conceived as temporary havens during crises, now endure for years. These camps, offering vital services like water, food, shelter, healthcare, and legal aid, house approximately 22% of the global refugee population, totaling 6.6 million people¹². Notably, 4.5 million reside in planned camps, and 2 million in self-settled camps¹³. The largest, Kutupalong in Bangladesh, shelters over 800,000 Rohingya refugees¹⁴. While camps aim for self-reliance and education, many become semi-permanent, lasting up to many years. With over 70 million forcibly displaced globally, alternative solutions, like Kalobeyei's integrated development plan and Zaatari's organic urbanization, are challenging the traditional camp approach, advocating for sustainability and improved living conditions. Additionally, Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, established several decades ago, have inadvertently developed a form of sustainable livelihood dynamism despite challenging circumstances¹⁵.

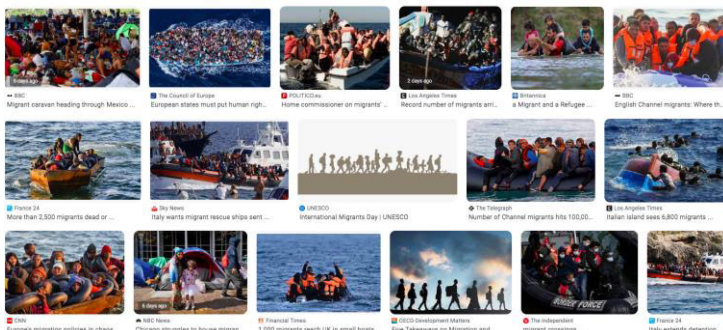
Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan and Kalobeyei Settlement in Kenya epitomize innovative approaches to refugee settlements. Zaatari, hosting 85,000 refugees, defies the traditional camp model, evolving into an organic city with streets, businesses, and a dynamic community. Residents adapt their surroundings for comfort and create a complex ecosystem. In contrast, Kalobeyei, designed by Shigeru Ban, emphasizes sustainable shelters and an Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan¹⁶. This 14-year initiative aims to reduce dependence on aid, offering better livelihoods and service

delivery through collaborative efforts. Both examples challenge the conventional notion of refugee camps, advocating for adaptable, sustainable, and community-centric solutions.

Media Influence, Racial Narratives, and Guilt Dynamics in the Perception of Migrants and Refugees



Screenshot from Google Images search for refugee



Screenshot from Google Images search for migrant

In recent years, there has been a palpable sense of creeping anxiety, reflecting the insecurities inherent in contemporary existence. Migrants, caught in the crossfire, are increasingly being manipulated by non-migrant political forces, driven by motives that extend beyond issues of racism. The pervasive categorization of migrants into 'good' and 'bad,' exemplifies a form of instrumentalization, fostering a fundamentally lazy approach to anti-racism. This oversimplified dichotomy not only perpetuates stereotypes but also cultivates a guilty feeling, contributing to a climate where migrants are used as pawns for agendas unrelated to their well-being.

Media representation and social discourse play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of migrants and refugees, with mainstream media often presenting a dichotomous narrative (Buckingham, 2008; Chavez & al., 2010; Damstra & al., 2021; Jackson, Esses, 2000; Lakoff, Ferguson, 2006). Portraying refugees as impoverished individuals seeking aid, emphasizing their vulnerabilities, the media concurrently perpetuates racist discourses, depicting them as violent thieves and societal misfits. This

dual narrative not only reinforces stereotypes (Georgiou, 2006) but also molds societal attitudes, influencing public opinion and policy debates (Boomgaarden, Vliegenthart, 2007; Lakoff, Ferguson, 2006; Parrott & al., 2019). The framing choices, language use, and visual representation by media outlets contribute to the humanization or dehumanization of refugees, solidified by the media's agenda-setting role and social media amplification (Buckingham, 2008; McCombs, Valenzuela, 2020). The narratives include discussions highlighting refugees as victims of war or conflict, framing them as potential threats to host countries or as economic burdens (Buckingham, 2008; Chavez & al., 2010; Damstra & al., 2021). These narratives evolve based on personal experiences, where encounters with guilt or racism shape individual perspectives (Georgiou, 2020). Media, through presenting contrasting viewpoints, contributes to the polarization of these narratives, emphasizing prevalent themes of barriers, xenophobia, discrimination, and stigmatization (Hall, 2021). In response, marginalized communities may develop narratives exposing systemic injustices, demanding accountability, while privileged groups create narratives to defend or downplay their role in perpetuating racism (Georgiou, 2020; McCombs, Valenzuela, 2020).

Shaw (2022) explores the semantical and conceptual dimensions, drawing from Max Weber's Weberian perspective. Weber (2012, as cited in Shaw, 2022) differentiates between instrumental and absolute racial ideas, categorizing racial self-interest as *Zweckrational*, marked by purpose-rational action instrumentally rational as a means to an end. Individuals holding racial self-interest cherish their country's cultural tradition, memories, adopting a legitimate defensive attitude often fueled by fears of criminality and law-and-order narratives. On the other hand, racism, characterized as *Wertrational*, involves value-rational action absolutely oriented to a value. It encompasses emotions such as fear, hatred, and disgust, perpetuating lazy stereotypes and shaping perceptions of the other as less intelligent.

In some instances, refugees may employ various tactics to manipulate the concept of racism and induce feelings of guilt in their hosts. One such tactic involves playing the victim card, exaggerating or falsely claiming victimhood to elicit sympathy. Additionally, some may misuse social justice language, employing terms like "white guilt" (Steele, 2007) or "privilege" to shame or guilt-trip others and establish a sense of culpability. Overgeneralization and stereotyping may be employed to induce guilt through collective responsibility (Allport, G. W., 1979). Emotional manipulation becomes another tool, exploiting guilt by highlighting instances of racism and appealing to emotions like empathy or a desire to rectify historical wrongs. Furthermore, guilt may be invoked by holding individuals accountable for historical injustices, attributing responsibility to those not directly involved, creating a sense of inherited or collective guilt based on shared racial or ethnic backgrounds (Allport, G. W., 1979).

The impact of populism further contributes to a distinctive affective economy (Ahmed, 2014), leveraging emotions like fear and anger. Populism, characterized by a discursive and stylistic repertoire valuing simplicity and firsthand experience (Brubaker, 2020), claims the necessity for exceptional measures in exceptional times. This phenomenon relies on affective investment in politics while simultaneously expressing a disinvestment from representational politics and a lack of faith in political systems, as highlighted by

Brubaker (2020). The interplay between media, racism, and populism underscores the complex dynamics influencing perceptions of migrants and refugees.

In the realm of refugees and space, authoritative entities on the supply side, such as governments, the UN, and NGOs, predominantly adopt strategic approaches aligned with de Certeau's (1998) concept of strategy. This involves intentional planning for the production of space, particularly through the establishment of infrastructures like camps and the formulation of guidelines for characterization.

On the demand side, individuals engage in conscious actions that align with de Certeau's (1998) notions of tactics, influencing the consumption or reproduction of space. These tactics are evident in citizen journalism, image circulation, and other intentional practices shaped by shared cultural and political understandings.

Unveiling Narratives: From Refugee Camp Design to Image Commentary

In my thesis exploration, I unravel the intricate connection between stereotypes and archetypes within the spatial and visual narratives of refugee camps. On the supply side, an unwavering commitment to the grid pattern across all camps intensifies a sense of standardized monotony. In the pursuit of innovation, disrupting this rigid design language through creative spatial alternatives becomes imperative, aiming to defy conventional norms.

Urban Planning Through Time: The Enduring Legacy of the Grid Plan

The grid plan emerges as a resilient and adaptable layout, weaving a tale of enduring influence from ancient Rome to contemporary cities (Stanislawski, 1946). Spanish colonization propagated the grid to the Americas, shaping urban layouts with regular, perpendicular streets (Stanislawski, 1946). The Commissioners' Plan of 1811 envisioned Manhattan's iconic grid, a lasting testament to ancient urban planning principles¹⁷. Modern cities like Chicago continue this tradition, demonstrating the grid's adaptability in contemporary urban design (Koeppel, 2015).

Despite organizational advantages, the grid plan faces critiques for potential monotony and challenges on uneven terrain (Koeppel, 2015). Yet, it endures, embodying timeless urban planning principles (Koeppel, 2015). Geoff Boeing's (2019) exploration of "Urban Street Network Orientation" enriches this narrative by categorizing cities based on predominant street direction, revealing how orientation influences transportation efficiency and aesthetics (Boeing, 2019).

In a celestial intersection with urban planning, Manhattanhenge¹⁸ captivates with the alignment of the setting sun and Manhattan's grid. Explored by the American Museum of Natural History, this phenomenon blends the celestial with the urban, showcasing the dynamic interplay between nature and city design.

A dive into ancient cities worldwide, designed to align with solar phenomena, unveils a rich history of celestial integration into urban layouts (Stanislawski, 1946). From Teotihuacan to Heliopolis, these structures inspire modern sustainable urban planning, offering a timeless perspective on city development (Stanislawski, 1946).

"Urban Planning Through Time" thus becomes a journey encompassing grids, celestial alignments, and the evolution of cities—a narrative where the past influences the present, and where the celestial dance intertwines with human-made landscapes (Koeppel, 2015). This narrative invites reflection on how ancient principles and celestial harmonies continue to shape our urban environments, connecting the dots across centuries and cultures (Koeppel, 2015).

Visual Narratives: Art, Refugees, and Societal Reflection

Examining visual narratives, the works of Ai Weiwei, Alfred Stieglitz, and Jacob Riis offer compelling insights.

In 1888, Jacob Riis, a pioneering photojournalist and social reformer (Yochelson, Czitrom, 2014), exposed the dire living conditions of impoverished New Yorkers through his groundbreaking work, *How the Other Half Lives* (Buk-Swienty, 2008; Yochelson, Czitrom, 2014). His photograph, "Five Cents a Spot," captured lodgers in a crowded Bayard Street tenement, emphasizing the squalor (Yochelson, Czitrom, 2014). Riis used these images and vivid explanations to shake the conscience of prosperous, native-born Americans (Yochelson, Czitrom, 2014). Embarking on a slum tour (Yochelson, Czitrom, 2014), he traversed neighborhoods, providing a detailed account of each ethnic group's living conditions (Buk-Swienty, 2008). Riis, essentially inventing a literary genre with entertainment value (Buk-Swienty, 2008), employed a slogan enticing viewers to "Come see the colorful Italians and the mystifying Chinese" (Buk-Swienty, 2008; Yochelson, Czitrom, 2014). While his work aimed at social reform (Buk-Swienty, 2008; Yochelson, Czitrom, 2014), critics argue it sometimes perpetuated stereotypes and racialized thinking of the era, adding nuance to his impactful yet complex legacy (Allport, 1979).

Alfred Stieglitz's 1907 photograph, "The Steerage," stands as an emblematic exploration of social class division (Francisco & al., 2012). Captured on a transatlantic voyage, it distinguishes itself through a stark departure from Stieglitz's earlier affiliation with the Photo-Secession movement (Frizot, 2001). This photograph goes beyond a mere commentary on economic disparities; it marks a pivotal shift in photographic aesthetics, embracing geometrical elements and the evolving spirit of the modern era. Stieglitz sought to elevate photography beyond the confines of traditional fine art, paving the way for a new phase in the medium's evolution (Francisco & al., 2012; Frizot, 2001). "The Steerage" remains a timeless testament to Stieglitz's bold departure and his profound impact on reshaping the trajectory of photography and reflecting the societal changes of the time.

Ai Weiwei's artworks, particularly "Law of the Journey"¹⁹ and "Human Flow"²⁰, engage with the refugee crisis, revealing a nuanced interplay between raising awareness and unintentionally reinforcing mainstream narratives. While these works highlight the plight of refugees, depicting them as vulnerable individuals in need, there's a risk of perpetuating stereotypes (Allport, 1979) that reduce their complex stories to one-dimensional narratives of poverty and desperation. The tragic image of Aylan Kurdi on the Greek shore, captured by Nilüfer Demir for the Turkish agency DHA, stands as an iconic and affective representation that adorned the covers of magazines and newspapers worldwide (Maria Mattus, 2020). Ai Weiwei

assumed a parallel stance, being photographed by Rohit Chawla for the magazine India Today while²¹ reenacting the poignant image of the lifeless child on the shore (Aguiar, 2021). This reenactment exposes the pitfalls in such representations, as they become co-opted into mainstream discourse, framing refugees solely as aid-seeking victims (Aguiar, 2021). Many critics argue that this act lacks ethical considerations²², contending that the reenactment delves into sensitive and tragic circumstances, thereby raising profound questions about the boundaries of artistic expression (Aguiar, 2021).and the potential exploitation of human suffering.

Moreover, the paradox of discussing money in the production of Ai Weiwei's work adds another layer. The art world, like any industry, is subject to capitalism and inequality (Kabanda, 2019). Nilüfer Demir remains anonymous when Ai Weiwei is a strartist. While Weiwei's intention may be to shed light on global issues, the very system supporting art production often perpetuates economic disparities (Kabanda, 2019).

These instances underscore the delicate balance artists navigate—raising awareness about humanitarian crises while being entangled in systems that may inadvertently contribute to the very issues they seek to address. It prompts critical reflection on the intersection of art, capitalism, and the complex narratives surrounding vulnerable communities.

The Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the production of space

Applying the perspectives of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Michel de Certeau to the situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon reveals a multifaceted narrative that challenges conventional viewpoints. In the context of Lebanon's financialized capitalism and rentier economies, the elite rentier class instrumentalizes state power, deploying regulations to extract rent and perpetuate economic disparities. Syrian refugees find themselves caught in a spatial fix, their spaces manipulated to serve elite interests. This imposition of political ideologies not only dictates rent extraction but also profoundly influences spatial dynamics for both Lebanese and refugees.

The complexity of the Syrian refugee situation in Lebanon defies simplistic narratives. Nearly a million registered refugees face employment restrictions²³, exacerbating economic challenges and leading to widespread poverty. Simultaneously, government actions against illegal Syrian-owned shops²⁴ aim to curb illicit businesses and local competition. Alarming studies highlight prevalent issues of slavery and exploitation within refugee camps (Jones & Ksaif, 2016), forming a parallel economy with echoes of Oliver Twist's narrative. These nuanced realities underscore the intricate economic dynamics and power structures within Lebanon's refugee community.

Contrary to the perception of temporariness, refugees actively transform their allocated spaces, denoting and organizing them in meaningful ways. Establishing mechanisms for long-term improvement, refugees demonstrate a profound connection to their space. Engaging in home-making, they build economic activities, generate income, and reinvest in living conditions. The creation of a micro-economy allows them to explore, produce, and exchange space within the camp. Utilizing small motorcycles and fostering strong social ties, refugees actively shape and capitalize on their surroundings, challenging the

imposed notion of temporariness. Evidence within the camps, such as shops within tents with multiple rooms serving various functions and the cultivation of flowers, reflects their commitment to personalization within the camp environment.

Mr. Ghaleb Al-Duwaihy²⁵ provides insights into the employment landscape of the Syrian community in Lebanon, illustrating various roles such as construction and agricultural workers with monthly incomes ranging from \$300 to \$1,200. These jobs, supplemented by international aid, sustain Syrians on Lebanese soil, offering an alternative despite the absence of conventional state structures.

However, my research and field observations within Syrian refugee camps unveil a contrasting reality. A parallel economy has emerged, marked by corruption and illegal activities outside the camps. Within this spatial fix, a capitalistic system fosters inequalities as certain individuals wield power, orchestrating instances of slavery and exploitation. The establishment of shops and cafes within the camps creates a hierarchy among refugees. To evade legal scrutiny, some engage in dubious practices, operating businesses under the guise of Lebanese ownership. This deceptive circumvention of the law is particularly notable in the Beqaa region, where numerous shops are exclusively managed by Syrian individuals. These findings challenge the mediated image and shed light on the complex economic dynamics and power structures within and beyond the refugee camps.





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Rethinking Racism: Embracing a Productive Imagination for an Ethical Future

In challenging the mainstream narrative on racism, it is imperative to embrace Toni Negri's concept of the productive imagination as a powerful force rooted in Spinoza's philosophy (Cadel, 2006). This ethical power, operating through continuous decentrings and displacements of ethical being, shapes the quality of existence and the tendency toward life or death. Negri's emphasis on the development of collective reason and internal articulation underscores the role of the productive imagination in the ethical determination of existence.

Crucially, the paradigm shift after 1968, marked by nomadism and a rejection of boundaries, necessitates a reconsideration of how we approach the imaginative construction of the future. The productive imagination is deeply intertwined with ethical considerations, contributing to the formation of critical citizens. By connecting the productive imagination to individuals' lived experiences, Negri underscores the ontological element of being alive and its material consequences, leading to objective outcomes.

In dismantling the mainstream narrative, it becomes evident that the drive for capital accumulation has played a significant role in shaping diverse cities and transforming ancient ones (Harvey, 2001, 2003). However, David Harvey's insight reminds us that capitalism thrives on the production of difference. To counter racism effectively, we must dismiss self-racial interests and guilty feelings, ensuring that the production of space remains inclusive and doesn't marginalize any group.

The conclusion invites a paradigm shift, urging us to leverage the productive imagination to create an ethical future that transcends traditional narratives on racism. By doing so, we can foster a society that acknowledges the productive force of difference without perpetuating harmful stereotypes or reinforcing systemic inequalities.

Notes

¹ United Nations. (1951). <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/1951-refugee-convention>

² UNHCR. (2023). <https://reporting.unhcr.org/globalappeal-2023>

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- ³ The official website: Little Amal Global Journey <https://www.walkwithamal.org/about-us/little-amal-the-walk/>
- ⁴ UNHCR UN Refugee Agency's Blue Ribbons Campaign <https://www.unhcr.org/>
- ⁵ Auden W.H., Refugee Blues Poem <https://allpoetry.com/refugee-blues>
- ⁶ "I Amsterdam" - <https://www.iamsterdam.com/>
- ⁷ World Travel & Tourism Council - <https://www.wttc.org/>
- ⁸ "Inspired by Iceland" - <https://inspiredbyiceland.com/> "Love Great Britain" - <https://www.visitbritain.com/>
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- ¹⁸ Manhattanhenge American Museum of Natural History <https://www.amnh.org/research/hayden-planetarium/manhattanhenge>
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<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/69774>

²⁴ Dignity at Stake: Challenges to Accessing Decent Work in Lebanon, Leaders for Sustainable Livelihoods (2019)

<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/69774>

²⁵ Ghaleb Doueihy, Octobre 2023,

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