'Homeland Sacer': A Nation to be Killed[1]

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In this paper, presented at the 2010 workshop, Laura Adwan, a Ph.D. candidate at Bergen University, proposes a new concept –homeland sacer – as the context for understanding the situation of both Iraqi and Palestinian refugees. Here she is both using and extending Agamben's concept of homo sacer– those who may be killed with impunity – which has been increasingly deployed by scholars to understand the workings of sovereign power on stateless people, colonial subjects, refugees and all those who fall outside the boundaries of citizenship. Adwan explores how Iraq was turned into a homeland sacer – a nation where another sovereign power operates and destroys with impunity -- and details is consequences. In a parallel, "softer," operation she argues that refugees have been turned into humanitarian victims without context.

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I only left Iraq in 2007 when life in Baghdad became unbearable. We didn't want to leave. Amjad, my son, used to repeat that he won't leave Baghdad, he'd say that this is my home and I'll die here… until that black night, I named it 'Al-Layla Al-Laylaa'. It was one of those horrible nights, we were ready and dressed like every night, since the first days of the invasion of Baghdad, we'd never wear our pyjamas at night to be ready in case the Americans and the Iraqi militias supported by them come into the house…. That night, we saw the troops raiding every house in our neighbourhood, we could clearly hear everything, we heard them breaking into our house, we were told that if the American soldiers come in the house you have to freeze: make no movement, and bend your heads down, if you ever raise your heads and look at them, the soldier's normal reaction will be to open fire and kill everyone standing in front of him. Whatever movement you attempt to make might be misinterpretated by the American soldier, he might suspect that you want to harm him and he is ready, the soldier will keep his finger on the trigger and he'll shoot … we were completely silent; I, my son and his wife, we all sat on the floor in the corner of our sitting room, turned our heads to the wall and didn't look at them. They searched every room in

> *the house, every single corner, and we were trembling. My son told me,*
> *if they put the bag over my head to arrest me, don't resist them and don't*
> *try to remove it, just remain silent. We spent the whole night sitting on*
> *the floor while they turned the house upside down and left at 4 a.m.*
> *We waited till the morning came and took our already packed bags -*
> *we always had our essential things packed in case we had to flee to our*
> *relative's house which is in a quieter neighbourhood in Baghdad - but*
> *this time we headed towards Syria.*

This is how Um Amjad described what she called in Arabic "Al-Layla Allayla'a", her last night in Baghdad. I met Um Amjad in Amman in November 2010 where she came as a refugee waiting for "resettlement to a third country",[2] she described vividly the invasion of her home by the American soldiers, with a trembling voice she moved twice from the sofa, where we were sitting in her tiny rented apartment in one of the poor districts in the so-called 'Eastern Amman' to show me in action how she, her son and her daughter-in-law spent that night squatting on the floor in the corner of the sitting room of their big Baghdadi house. While her son returned to Baghdad with his wife last year in spite of her numerous pleas to him not to go, she is still afraid to go back and witness the daily scenes of death, killings, fear and loss narrated by other Iraqis who, like her, were forced to leave Iraq and join more than two million Iraqi refugees in the nearby countries after the invasion of their homeland by the US-British led troops. Every refugee I met has her/his story to tell about the reasons that forced them out of their homes; stories of killings, kidnappings, torture to death, bombings, threatening letters and bullets to leave their houses and country, not only the horrible techniques that are aimed at the 'destruction of their bodies',[3] but also massacres and acts of ethnic and cultural cleansing that is destroying the space that had been their homeland.

I discovered from my meetings with both Iraqi and Palestinian refugees that 'Homeland' is one of the main characters in their narratives. I thus wanted to understand the meaning of this violent uprooting of people from their homeland by means of military occupation and colonial control of the land and everything on and inside it, in the two cases mentioned here, the uprooting of what used to be the State of Iraq and the Palestinians' homeland.

Homo Sacer, Homeland Sacer

The refugees in these two cases became refugees as a result of being expelled from their homeland. The homeland was not only turned into a war zone, but a death zone where crimes against people and their belongings constituted the norm. These crimes "constitute the original exception in which human life is included

in the political order in being exposed to an unconditional capacity to be killed" (Agamben, 1998: 85). Agamben's concept of the state of exception, is a state where sovereign state representatives may commit crimes against humans who no longer qualify as citizens and thus are pronounced homines *sacri* or 'sacred' human(s); i.e. a person who may be killed by anyone with impunity but not sacrificed, as per the use of the term in ancient Roman law.

I am extending this concept of Agamben here to refer to a larger state of exception that is imposed on a whole nation through an act of military occupation by foreign forces. It is a state where no rule is applicable, where ordinary order is suspended by a violent attack of a 'sovereign' power exercised against the homeland of another nation that no longer is deemed to be sovereign., The explicit justification to justify the act of homeland sacer may vary; it could be *"a land without a people for a people without a land"*[4] or a land of *"rogue states"* or *"axis of evil"*,[5] being named so, it will become the *sovereign sphere* and can be destroyed:

> 'The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life – that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed – is the life that has been captured in this sphere' (Agamben, 1998: 83).

Agamben's description of the acts of killing in the sphere assigned by the sovereign as a space of exception - where there are two sides: human life (homo sacer) and the sovereign state power - is exemplified in the cases of Palestine and Iraq where two nations were destroyed; their territory and everything on and in it controlled by an external sovereign who destroys and ruins by different means, resulting in people emptied from their political agency, that is bare life.

The 'sacredness' and 'bare life' here is not of an individual 'man' or 'woman' refugee, it is rather of his and her 'homeland' in which everything is put to death: the landscape, archeology, nature and people are named 'sacred' in the Roman legal sense of the word; they can be killed, destroyed or eliminated and reproduced in a new shape that serves the new sovereign needs. Iraqis and Palestinians will not necessarily face physical death; the war machine may kill, expel or imprison the bodies of the 'sacred'.

I thus introduce the term *homeland sacer*, not to coin a term beyond Agamben's as explained above, but in an attempt to bring the refugee problem into its relevant historical and political contexts. The events that culminated in mandatory Palestine in 1948 and those in Iraq in 2003 exemplify a clear case of homeland *sacer*, transforming existing nations' homelands into 'sacred' and hence killable by a colonizing occupation power that excludes and replaces the original nation sovereign powers. The homelands of Palestinians and Iraqis are transformed into war-lands where nothing feels as it used to feel; a state of exception that throws human lives into an endless cycle of violence, reducing their lives to the space

between two words 'Leave or Die'. Two choices: the sweetest of which is still bitter. To leave would only mean to extend the state of exception, as Um Amjad describes how she was forced to leave her home by the invading soldiers; one leaves what he knows and loves for an unspecified place and uncertain future. Yet, the alternative life is overshadowed by death. I am using the term homeland sacer to explore the relation between the sovereign free states, the 'free' *People* living in their 'normal' ordered world whose leaders *took the decision* to use the force of law to 'defend their society' from *people*[6] whom they announced as breakers of international law, terrorists, evil, non-democratic or even non-existent and thus are excluded from sovereignty and put to die. I have chosen to present here the Iraqi case as an example of this homeland sacer.

Iraq 2003: the spectacle of the guillotine

When 'modern' nation-states *decide* to exercise their sovereign power to protect their 'free' citizens from a potential evil enemy in another land, presented as being the homeland of a primitive and evil people who are far beyond citizenship and civilization, they (the modern States) turn the clock back several centuries to the pre-modern age when sovereign power was realized by death; dying, as Foucault (1977) said, 'the Damiens' way' referring to the 1757 public spectacle of the torture and execution of the regicide Damiens in France. The primitiveness and evil of the enemy remove him from the sphere of modernity and allow the use of the old violent and savage display of power that will serve to punish the condemned, as well as deter the rest of the primitives who are potential criminals, so re-assuring the public of modern nation-states that everything is under control.

The primitive body to be punished is presented as being too dangerous: it needs to be tamed, reduced to a bare body on which the sovereign will use corporal punishment, the form of punishment that can deter a primitive evil. The punishment of the Iraqi body did not only start in 2003, it was established by the sovereign law, UN resolution 661, issued on 6 August 1990 imposing sanctions and exposing the Iraqi nation to death,[7] disease,[8] rapid economic decline and nearly an end to any sort of human development. The invasion of 2003 then brought the excessive bombing and destruction of the institutions of the previous regime, exposing the inhabitants to atrocities that included death, expulsion and the systematic torture of prisoners, in addition to the escalating economic, political and environmental costs.[9]

One does not need to have a vivid imagination to picture Damiens of 1757 coming back in the 21st century: in the latest televised wars on Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), Lebanon (2006) and Gaza (2008) where entire countries and their populations were sentenced to death by the so-called 'sovereign' modern leaders, who issued their orders for a modern performance of a tragic

war spectacle. The Bush Doctrine may be read as a declaration of the need to 'bring back death into play in the field of sovereignty' (Foucault, 1977: 144). U.S. President George Bush, in his address to future U.S. military leaders said that they must be prepared to launch preemptive strikes to keep "terrorists and tyrants" from obtaining weapons of mass destruction. 'We face a threat with no precedent,' Bush told the first class to graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point after the 11 September attacks:

> "We cannot put our faith in the words of tyrants who solemnly sign nonproliferation treaties and then systematically break them. If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered the only path to safety is the path of action and this nation will act, all Americans must be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives".[10]

Although Bush did not mention Iraq by name in this speech, it was the second stage, after Afghanistan, where the modern-day Damiens spectacle was released with a powerful opening scene of air bombing that set the nights of Baghdad into flashing lights, marking the invasion of a sovereign country once called Iraq to be punished as a preemptive action to defend the sovereignty of America, in case that country proved to have access to WMD,[11] weapons of mass destruction.

Damiens was back, but this time in March 2003 he is not the man who threatened the sovereignty of the king. Damiens of the 21st century is a whole nation sentenced to die by the 'Shock and Awe' doctrine of the Anglo-American led invasion of April 2003 announcing the return of the old guillotine to the public scene.

Shock and awe?

It is the name given to this military attack, the signifier signifies the intention of bringing an overwhelming sense of fear through a shocking war spectacle. It is the 'civilized' mode of controlling the 'uncivilized' in a civilizing intervention (Badiou, 2001: 13).

From the beginning of the invasion, we have been bombarded by a performative display of power exercised by the heavily-armed multi force army against Iraq: the country and people. It was not just the Iraqi capital; the destruction and bombing extended to all the symbols of the ex-sovereign state; not only the state, but Iraq's historical archaeological artifacts and cultural treasures were also destroyed, looted and set on fire (Baker, Raymond; Shereen Ismael and Tareq Ismael, 2010). These

scenes of excessive armed terror bring back Foucault's description of the public execution scene: 'a policy of terror to make everyone aware through the body of the criminal, of the unrestrained presence of the sovereign. The public execution did not reestablish justice it reactivated power' (1977: 49). The power that Slavoj Zizek described in his presentation on the underlying reasons for the US attack on Iraq is the power that will serve to: 'brutally assert and signal unconditional US hegemony and foster its belief that the destiny of the United States is to bring democracy and prosperity to other nations in addition to the need to control Iraqi oil reserves' (2004: 44).

The result was chaos, a state of exception that became the normal scene projected daily from Iraq:[12]

- 1.2 million Iraqi civilians people have been killed in this attack and in daily unidentified events of explosion and assassination.[13]
- Four million and a half inhabitants were exiled and displaced, atomizing the Iraqi social network.
- Kidnapping became a lucrative industry.
- Trafficking in human beings and organs and prostitution became an underground industry in Iraq and nearby countries.[14]
- Dismemberment of Iraq by dividing the country into small manageable pieces by walls and military checkpoints forcing the people to relocate.
- All the national state institutions, figures and symbols were eliminated in the process of de-Baathification'; governmental institutions were burnt and looted in what appears to be random sprees of violence, and representatives of former Iraqi regime were portrayed in the famous 'deck of cards' spectacle to nullify Iraqi sovereignty.
- Destruction and demolitions of old city centers and the conversion of ancient cultural patrimony, Babylon, Kish, Ur and Samarra, to military encampments.[15]
- Destruction of the education system that was estimated in the eighties as being the best in the region:[16] houses of hundreds of professors have been stormed and hundreds of them have been arrested, the rising violence has forced 'thousands' of Iraqi professors to flee the country to different parts of the world.[17] A senior Iraqi academic now living in Amman said: "They [the occupation authorities and the Iraqi government] don't want us. They say that they'll prepare a new generation of academics and professionals, people of our own coloring. In order to understand why we [refugee academics] are here [in Amman] you need to know that it's a clear-out of people like me, for whom there is no place in the new Iraq" (Baker, Raymond; Shereen Ismael and Tareq Ismael, 2010: 212).
- A systematic cleansing of Iraqi human capital in order to get hold of the

material capital. The population of teachers in Baghdad has fallen by 80% Up to 75% of Iraq's doctors, pharmacists and nurses have left their jobs since the US-British led invasion in 2003.[18] This led to deterioration in the provision of health services.[19]

A whole nation is facing a *homeland sacer*, meaning that this homeland with all its material and symbolic components can be destroyed, dismembered and ethnically cleansed by anyone with impunity. The killing does not only affect humans, turning them into *homines sacri* through enforced uprooting, their lands are also a target of place annihilation;[20] not only exposed to physical destruction, but also rich historical and national symbols were pulverized by the machine of war and the chaotic violence it created to control the Iraqi people and their land. In their discourse, representatives of the US occupation forces explained the killings of Iraqi people and destruction of their state 'as an act of democratic freedom by a previously oppressed population', or with expressions such as 'freedom is messy' or 'the messy birth pangs of democracy' this is how US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld described the acts of looting of the museums and torching of the libraries in his speech for the Bush administration in 2003 (Bahrani, 2010: 76, in Baker and Ismael).

The question then arises *what is meant by a free Iraq*? Does it mean that the country is free and Iraqi people enjoy sovereignty on their lands and resources? Does it mean free access to Iraq by Iraqis who were refugees for decades being in the opposition, is their homeland today a freer and a safer place? I would say that 'free Iraq', in today's reality, means free access to the country resources by the new sovereign powers controlling it today. Free Iraq = free oil.

No wonder that the US troops protected only one Iraqi national institution from looting after the invasion: the oil ministry.[21] To ensure free access to oil, there is a need to sweep all the obstacles in the way, and humans appear to be the biggest obstacle, especially the educated and those capable of educating the rest to revolt against the homeland sacer. This homeland sacer ended up turning the Iraqi people into *homines sacri* who can be killed without considering this act of killing a homicide: hundreds of thousands Iraqi people died, others disappeared or were imprisoned, while 4,2 million Iraqis were turned into refugees after 2003 (2 million inside their homeland and 2.2 million in neighboring countries according to the UNHCR estimates).

Refugees as part of the homeland sacer

The Iraqi refugee experience commenced before 2003; many Iraqis were forced out of their country over the past three or four decades and large numbers of Iraqi civilians have been forced from their home areas by wars, uprisings and

government-sponsored policies.[22] However, by 2006, there was a mass movement of Iraqi refugees encompassing all religions and sects (Sasson: 2009).

An ethnography aiming to present the Iraqi refugee experience without placing it in the context of the events above that turned them into refugees , as well as the continuing war situation that is prolonging their exile, will only serve to objectify refugees as humanitarian victims whose survival is bound to the new sovereign forces who control their exile. That is why it is essential to analyze the refugee experiences addressed here in the context of the homeland sacer. Iraqi and Palestinian refugees did not become 'refugees' because they were announced as homines sacri and thus objectified as bare life that can be killed as individuals. The homeland was the target, leaving people with two choices: 'leave or die'. Death might put an end to the suffering while leaving will not. It is, rather, a start of a different phase of bare life that will necessitate another intervention from the white-Man to save the victim-Man, the intervention, this time, will be a softer one and the tools will be humanitarian organizations.

Being excluded from the sovereign sphere where the homeland sacer is taking place does not mean that Iraqis and Palestinians have escaped the 'sacer' situation completely. The double action of uprooting exercised by a colonizing power, uprooting the people from their homeland and uprooting their homeland from its original existence, render them vulnerable to new 'sovereign' forces that will put their bodies under strict control:

- *Occupation controlling forces* that imposed the homeland sacer and uprooted the people and destroyed their homes will prevent refugees from going back to their homeland and prolong their state of exception. Neither case of refugees, Iraqi or Palestinian, can be studied without taking this into consideration.
- *The hosting state* with its apparatus and other controlling bodies including political parties and NGOs that will fight for their share of controlling positions among refugees to secure their interests using ethical or religious or national ideologies.
- *International (and local) humanitarian organizations* that are many times the sole provider of living needs especially in those cases where the hosting state resources are scarce.
- *Media* which on many occasions is controlled by the powerful sovereign.
- *The refugees* themselves who in their attempt to survive, will try to resist the continual homeland sacer situation they were forced into. Yet their space of resistance is limited and will be confined between the pushing and pulling forces of the above mentioned forces.

The above mentioned forces will contribute to construct and reconstruct different representations of refugees, the most common of which is *the image of the victim* in its several layers: survivors, poor women, children and men in need of food and help. When it comes to war refugees, the image of the victim is further stressed due to the palpable degree of physical violence projected around refugees' lives in the homeland sacer process.

Liisa Malkki shows in a review she did of refugee studies how the discourse on refugees presented by anthropologists and international organizations and human rights agencies contribute to the production of this victimization of refugees:

> 'People who are refugees can find themselves quite quickly rising to a floating world either beyond or above politics, and beyond or above history - a world in which they are simply "victims". It is this floating world without the gravities of history and politics that can ultimately become a deeply dehumanizing environment for refugees, even as it shelters'. (Malkki, 1995b: 518).

What Malkki describes can be seen as the epistemological limbo in refugees' studies which mirrors the real limbo in their lives. It is true that refugees are victims of various atrocities committed against them as individuals and against their societies at large: this is a fact that no one can deny. However, by emphasizing this victimization of refugees at the expense of revealing the forces in the field that reproduce this victimization, and by using the ready-made terminology and measures of international agencies and ignoring the larger political and historical contexts, a researcher can only produce a reductionist reading of the field; similar to what Nietzsche described in his criticism of the simplification of reality through 'reducing something unknown to something known (which) calms the mind and also gives a sense of power' (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 1991: 25).

While media plays a representational role in presenting refugees as bare bodies, the UN and other international NGOs and humanitarian organizations will make use of the images presented by the media in the operational role they play in the refugee sphere. This will reduce the refugee cause from the collective homeland sacer case I have described above to a humanitarian problem of individuals.

This type of humanitarian discourse ironically serves to dehumanize those homeland sacer's survivors who are deprived of their homeland and their national identity and thus 'expelled from humanity' according to Arendt's expression (1951: 295) in a world where human existence is bound to nation-states. The danger of this new sovereign power stems from the fact that refugees had no choice but to accept the welfare services that are offered by international organizations because they would normally have no other means for survival. Their bodies will become a fertile soil for those international organizations to exercise their power through the hegemonic individual rights' discourse. Eventually refugees would reengineer

their existence and views of the conditions that produced it to suit the strategic objectives of those bodies, and we will see them contributing to the production of 'bare life', reproducing themselves in the image of the passive and helpless victims that will make them deserve these welfare services.

Exploring the refugees representations in other studies, I'll argue here against reducing 'war refugees' to victims or homines sacri in the absolute sense of Agamben.[23]

The construction of refugees as victims is the most common tendency in refugee studies as concluded in Malkki's review. This can be very much attributed to the main forces shaping the experience of the uprooting, namely international agencies and organizations. Actually, the meaning of 'a refugee' has been made available to us through the fields of international law, political science and human rights. The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR)[24] provides the following definition borrowed from the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees from 1951:

> "*A refugee* [25] is a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country…".

One can see from the definition the emphasis it puts on the identity of the refugee as an individual despite the fact that the refugees for which UN organizations cater are usually groups, masses and communities of people who fled or were directly forced out of their homeland and became homeless. If one has the space and time to do a discourse analysis of the UNHCR and the UNRWA[26] publications, and I have been following the latter, one can notice that they construct refugees as a humanitarian problem, reporting numbers of children suffering from acute malnutrition, underweight and stunting, the numbers of widowed women, casualties among men, food shortage and problems in water and electricity supply. This discourse contributes to uprooting refugees' lives from their political and historical contexts and restricts them to creatures who are in urgent need of humanitarian help to survive, reducing them to animalistic life. Refugees in the discourse and activities of International Organizations are continually constructed and reconstructed as rootless humanitarian objects that require aid to avoid a 'humanitarian crisis'.[27]

The definitions and reports presented by the international bodies - who constitute in many cases the sole supporting system for refugees - imply certain symbolic power over the refugees' own definition of their situation. This symbolic power, carries within it certain political functions, as per Bourdieu (1977: 115) that serves to legitimate domination by the imposition of the 'correct' and

'legitimate' definition of the social world (Harker, Mahar and Wilkes, 1990: 5).

Badiou, in his turn, showed how the legitimacy of the humanitarian discourse is further strengthened by the fact that it is built on the assumption of the existence of a universally recognizable human subject possessing natural rights. He explored critically how this claim of a 'universal human subject is capable of reducing ethical issues to matters of human rights and humanitarian actions, the thing that will serve at every point to annihilate any attempt to invent forms of 'free thought' (ibid.: 10). When 'universal' ethics are legalized and reduced to Human Rights ideology and humanitarian actions that is, conceived as *a priori* ability to discern the evil of the Other, then the notion of 'universality' should be questioned. *Is there one human? Or a human and the other?* Reality proves that the human is split into People\ people as termed by Agamben or victim-Man\ good-or-white-Man as termed by Badiou. While the victim, in Badiou's *Ethics*, was named "a victim" by western humanitarian ideology, the victim here is his Other, the passive subject who suffers, he is the animal on the TV, 'the uncivilized demanding from the civilized a civilizing intervention' (ibid.: 13). The universal humanitarian language does not weigh all humans using the same scale; if we look at the laws (*droits*) concerning refugees, we can easily notice how refugees are represented as being mere victims in need of laws to protect them. While there is the other human who is taking the role of the protector and law implementer, yet, "the barbarity of the situation is seen only in terms of 'human rights' while in fact we are always dealing with a political situation" (ibid.: 13).

If we go back to the Iraqi example of war refugees, I would argue that failure to consider the Iraqi political scene when dealing with refugees has a dehumanizing effect that is often practiced by international humanitarian organizations; thus the humanitarian principles that are forced into the situation in the claim of bringing justice and human rights, many times do not do any justice to the refugees' cause as the unjust situation they face occurred as a result of political interventions in the first place (and not humanitarian). The Iraqi case I presented earlier in detail clearly demonstrates this: the sanctions, the military invasion in the name of democracy and freedom and the chaos that this created. Ignoring all these aspects of reality when dealing with Iraqi refugees in favour of the humanitarian aspect alone imprints refugees into one still image; the image of victims suffering effects of trauma and loss of land and belongings, deprived of 'citizenship' and their rights, being reduced to the minimal survival needs: food, health and education. By this, refugees remains deprived from their ability to judge the 'homeland sacer event' that transformed them into victims or bare life, preventing them from envisioning other potentials of existence apart from the bare life or victim existence.

It is difficult to think of ways to subvert the current dependency on humanitarian aid as a means to transform the 'bare life' status of refugees into a 'qualified life' or simply 'meaningful life', especially when this aid is still needed

for the survival of the refugees in a situation of non-equality created by the imperial capitalist control of human bodies. The suspension of the provision of basic humanitarian aid might end up in the suspension of the 'refugee' existence even as 'bare life'. Instead I will argue, borrowing from Badiou,[28] for introducing other truths in the field that will contribute to the subversion of the one western hegemonic truth of universal human rights; this could be possible when refugees and other victims of the homeland sacer extract their right to restore the historical and political dimensions to the refugee case that will eventually serve to subvert the representation of the refugee problem as a problem of individual victims or *homines sacri* into the original problem of homeland sacer.

It will not be easy to get beyond the bare life status with the presence of the sovereign forces and the power they exert to control and discipline refugees' lives, yet this is not impossible. But I will argue here that it is possible to subvert this reality by making use of the 'void' in it, the void here is the situation of limbo in which refugees are kept. Refugees experience a triple limbo: of place (being in the middle of nowhere, in-between), of time (waiting for an end of their refugeeness is like waiting for a Godot that they do not know if or when it might come and what it will) and of identity (being an outcast between animal and man). Refugees can make use of this 'void' that gives them more freedom away from the controlling disciplinary power of modern states' apparatuses. And this is something that international organizations have realized; as appears in the objectives outlined in the Preamble of the UNHCR Convention and Protocol relating to the status of refugees, the fifth objective of which states: 'Expressing the wish that all States, recognizing the social and humanitarian nature of the problem of refugees, will do everything within their power to prevent this problem from becoming a cause of tension between states'. Refugees here are not only reduced to a humanitarian problem but they are also seen as potential source of tension. However, there must be some space to escape the bare life or homo sacer fate. My argument is based on my readings in the field and on the research I carried out in two Palestinian refugee camps in addition to my personal experience of living in a refugee camp for more than 14 years.

If we look at the life practices produced by Palestinian refugees during the last 62 years of refugee-ness, we can depict moments of hope of a lost-regained land and dreams of a future when refugees will be able to restore the purity of past days. Reading through Palestinian refugees experience in oral history works and listening to their words today and observing their living experiences since 1948, we can see that they oscillated between the *homo-sacer* and *anti-homo-sacer* positions; from being humanitarian subjects of UNRWA to political activists and revolutionaries and to returnees (as we witnessed on 15 May 2011).[29] These positions are affected by the main actors in the field representing the role of the sovereign, whether it is the colonial occupation force, the hosting country government apparatus, international organizations and NGOs working in the

field, the media and the refugees themselves and the political bodies representing them. All these forces will affect the refugees' position and their will and ability to escape the *homo sacer* fate that they were sentenced to when their homeland was occupied.

I will conclude with the case with which I began, Um Amjad and many other Iraqis who became refugees while they were trying to escape death in their homeland. They might succeed, as individuals, *to escape death* with the assistance of the different new sovereign powers they are encircled by. Refugees will be moving between the different positions imposed by the forces described above, sometimes they are forced to accept what is there (accepting the fate of being turned into humanitarian objects or naked life) and other times they might be able to save their bodies and souls or what is left of their souls after all the losses and torture they have been through, they might be able to dream of a different reality and try to rebuild their national identity and their homeland in works of art or through a political project to achieve what Badiou calls as 'the possibility of the impossible, which is exposed by every loving encounter, every scientific re-foundation, every artistic invention and every sequence of emancipatory politics …' (2001: 39).

But the 'sacer' body, whose reality(s) are still undissected, despite the numerous epistemological digging operations performed by researchers and thinkers from various disciplines, is Iraq and Palestine: the homeland, the nation with its people, heritage, culture and nature. Will they be able to escape the homeland sacer?

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Endnotes

1 This article is part of a larger paper I have written during my coursework at Bergen University to prepare for my PhD research project among Iraqi refugees in Jordan. The paper was presented at a joint workshop between Bergen University and Birzeit University held in November 2010 at the Women's Studies Institute in Birzeit University. I would like to thank: Prof. Thorvald Sirnes for his knowledge and insightful discussions during the Philosophy of Social Sciences course, my friend Sarah Philpot for reading the essay and reviewing the language of the first draft, and Penny Johnson for editing this version of the essay

2 The majority of Iraqis whom I have met in Jordan consider Jordan as a transit station from where they will head to a more permanent place. As explained by Chatelard: "Jordan has adopted what can be deemed a "semi-protectionist" policy towards Iraqi forced migrants, i.e. letting them in but depriving them of a status, of protection and of means of livelihood. The border with Iraq has always remained open, and Iraqis can enter on a temporary visa and stay legally up to 6 months. After that period of time, they become illegal aliens and are under risk of being expelled back to Iraq. (Chatelard, 2002: 7).

3 As Lisa Malkki presented in her study *Purity and Exile* 1995a: 89-99

4 The origin of this phrase is debated, although it was used by Zionists leaders, such as Chaim Weizmann in 1914, yet it is argued that the phrase 'was coined by 19th century Christian (European) writers, see Diana Muir's article on the origin

of this phrase in Middle East Quarterly, Spring 2008, pp. 55-62 http://www. meforum.org/1877/a-land-without-a-people-for-a-people-without

5   'Rogue states' was used by Madeleine Albright who was the United States Secretary of States to refer to North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Libya during the late 1990s. Bush administration later replaced the term by 'Axis of Evil' to refer to Iraq, Iran and North Korea.

6   I am using 'People' and 'people' intentionally, borrowing from Agamben's distinction between different functions of the concept; on the one hand the *People* as a whole; an inclusive concept that pretends to be without remainder and as an integral body politic and, on the other hand, the *people* as a subset and as fragmentary multiplicity of needy and excluded bodies known to afford no hope. According to Agamben, modern biopolitics is supported by this division of People (in capital P) representing the total state of the sovereign and integrated citizens and people (in small p) the banishment _either court of miracles or camp_ of the wretched, the oppressed, and the vanquished. (From Agamben's article 'What is a People?' available online at http://www.16beavergroup.org/mtarchive/archives/000939.php, accessed on 14 June 2010)

7   By mid-1990s half a million children had died. When confronted with such statistics in 1996, Madeleine Albright, then U.S. ambassador to the U.N., [told Leslie Stahl in an interview on "60 Minutes"] that "the price was worth it" to change the Saddam regime. For further details check the interview with Iraqi author Haifa Zangana on 11 July 2010 at http://www.iacenter. org/iraq/zangana071410/, accessed on 28 July 2010.

8   Health reports show increase in cancer cases and birth defects in the aftermath of the 1991 bombardment of depleted uranium by the US-UK. See http://news. bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1910980. stm, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8548707.

stm, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/8589734.stm, accessed on 28 July 2010.

9   For further details check the interview with Iraqi author Haifa Zangana on 11 July 2010 at http://www.iacenter.org/iraq/zangana071410/, accessed on 28 July 2010.

10 "Bush Says US Must Prepare For Preemptive Action", by Adam Entous, Rense.com, June 2, 2002. WEST POINT, N.Y. (Reuters) from the site: http://www. cuttingedge.org/news/n1750.cfm accessed on 14 July 2010.

11 Seven years have passed now since the war on Iraq began and still no evidence came of WMD. On 27 July 2010 former chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix testified at the British inquiry into the Iraq War stating that he found the evidence for war "weak" back in 2003. For further details check:
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/28/world/europe/28blix.html
http://www.france24.com/en/20100727-former-iaea-chief-blix-iraq-war-uk-usa-military. The US-British troops are still in Iraq and 'we are being told repeatedly that the main story in Iraq is that Iraqis are killing Iraqis by hundreds each day, and that the main question is whether it has yet become a sectarian civil war or not, and more recently: "Why do they hate each other?" Blaming the victims has become the widely accepted rationalization for foreign troops to remain in Iraq indefinitely'. From an interview with Iraqi author Haifa Zangana on 11 July 2010 http://www.iacenter.org/iraq/zangana071410/ . This link and the links above were accessed on 28 July 2010.

12 The chaotic bulleted points were collected from articles and news items I have been following in addition to articles compiled in the book titled 'Cultural Cleansing in Iraq' edited by Raymond W. Baker, Shereen T. Ismael and Tareq Y. Ismael (2010).

13 British Agency for measuring public opinion (ORB) in the statistical study

published in March 2008. Source:Iraq in Fgures After five years of occupation, prepared by Ikram Centre for Human Rights.

14 See for example: http://www. counterpunch.org/mcnutt07112007.html accessed on 12 August 2010.

15 For details see Baker and Ismail 2010.

16 In 1982, UNESCO awarded Iraq a prize for eradicating illiteracy. At the time, Iraq had one of the highest rates of literacy for women – by 1987 approximately 75% of Iraqi women were literate. In 2004, UNESCO estimated that the literacy rates for adults-after a year of Anglo-American occupation and twelve years of UN-sponsored sanctions – stood at 74%. Three years later, in June of 2007, Education International estimated that only 65% of adults were literate (54% of women and 74% of men). From (Baker and Ismail 2010: 131).

17 Refugee academics report receiving explicit threats of death in the form of letters such as: 'you cost us just one bullet, no more, so shut your mouth' or 'it's better to leave your job or you will face what you don't want' some got a bullet, that has become itself an effective shorthand, calling the names of professors from a list and threatening them with death if they show up in the college or posting the list of names of people scheduled for death on public walls. Implicit intimidation has been reported as another drive of forced exile: calls to professors and professionals at their houses and offices asking personal questions often end up in leaving the country (Fuller and Adriaensens, 2010: 157).

18 According to a Medact report of 16 January 2008, roughly 40% of Iraq's middle class are believed to have fled the country by the end of 2006; most are fleeing systematic persecution and have no desire to return. 'In January 2005, Charles Crain remarked in *USA Today* that in a country with distinct political, ethnic and religious fault lines, the university killings seem to follow no pattern. The dead have been Shi'ites and Sunnis, Kurds and Arabs,

and supporters of various political parties' (Adriaensens, 2010: 124-125, in Baker and Ismail).

19 In the early years of Saddam Hussein, the health care system in Iraq was a showcase, with most Iraqis receiving excellent, inexpensive care. Iraqi doctors often studied in England, and Iraq's medical schools, based at hospitals, had high standards. From http://www. nytimes.com/2005/05/30/international/ middleeast/30doctor.htm?_r=1, accessed on 6 July 2010.

20 As termed by Kenneth Hewitt (1983) in his article: 'Place Annihilation: Area Bombing and the Fate of Urban Places'.

21 See http://endthewarfirst.org/oil.html , accessed on 12 August 2010.

22 The first waves of Iraqi refugees were in the 1970s and 1980s, many of those were Sunnis who opposed the Saddam Hussein regime. Others were Shi'a fleeing persecution. The second wave of Iraqi refugees began in 2003 as a result of the US invasion and it is composed of Iraqis belonging to various religious sects (Al Khalidi, Hoffmann and Tanner, 2007).

23 See Agamben's (1995) article titled We Refugees http://www.egs.edu/faculty/ giorgio-agamben/articles/we-refugees/ . Sari Hanafi also explores Foucault's notion of control by biopolitics in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon in 'Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon: Laboratories of State-in-the-Making, Discipline and Islamist Radicalism' a chapter in *Thinking Palestine* edited by Ronit Lentin (2008).

24 See http://www.unhcr.org.au/basicdef. shtml#def01, retrieved on 26 May 2010.

25 The emphasis is mine.

26 The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

27 To see examples of these reports, visit the following link of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)-Occupied Palestinian Territories: http://www.ochaopt.org /?module=displaysection&section_ id=97&static=0&format=html

There is a clear sense of euphemism in these reports which the UN bureaucrats attribute to the fact that they are a humanitarian international organization and therefore are supposed to be neutral, but careful reading of their reporting of the daily humiliation, exploitation and killings which people face in Occupied Palestine shows that these reports are entirely one sided under the appearance of neutrality. One can also notice the ambiguous use of words when, for example, the apartheid and segregation wall turns into a "barrier" and the excessive use of "passive voice" tense when describing the atrocities committed by the Israeli army that makes the reader feel that there is a ghost behind all the killings and destruction of Palestinians' lives. These UN reports present an apolitical, ahistorical, dehumanizing and violent description of life under occupation and colonial regime that is not less violent than the reality created by the Israeli military occupation itself. And the worst thing is that all this is covered behind a humanitarian mask.

28 Badiou refuses this claimed truth of the 'universality of Man rights'. He suggests that there is no ethics of truth. For him 'the only genuine ethics is '*ethics of truths*' in the plural – or, more precisely, the only ethics is of processes of truth, of the labour that brings *some* truths into the world'. For Badiou there is no ethics in general. 'There is only the *ethic-of* (of politics, of love, of science, of art).

29 See: "The Palestinians and the Right of Return .. 15/5/2011 as a Model" by Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations. Source: http://www.alzaytouna.net/arabic/?c=1530&a=146661 accessed on 2 July 2011.