Camp Utopia: Pre-Casting The Future in Nahr El-Bared.

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After its destruction in 2007, the Nahr El-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in Northern Lebanon became the centre of an ambitious reconstruction project. In the meantime, some residents were placed in barracks on the side-lines of the rubble, in terrible living conditions. In this apocalyptic setting, what catches the eye, are a series of solar panels mounted on the roofs of the barracks to provide electricity. The dystopic image of the barrack superimposed with the utopic idea behind the solar panel as a green and endless source of energy begs the question: Why are solar panels to be found in a camp, among some of the world's most marginalized populations, and not in downtown Beirut which also suffers from electricity outages and was simultaneously being rebuilt after the 2006 Israeli attack? If, as Mary Douglas argues, pollution designates that which is out of place, what hints can be drawn from those donated panels on the biopolitical currents underlying the reconstruction of Nahr El-Bared?

Based on fieldwork conducted in the camp and building on research carried out among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (Sayigh 1994, Peteet 2005, Hanafi 2010, etc.), I will reflect on the kind of "utopia" the camp invokes, considering the violence that underpins the history of the camp and the current global context that is marked by the search for 'purity' through the increasing militarization of societies in the North (Goldberg 2008, Graham 2010).

I argue that for countries that live under a state of law, and its constraints, particularly in the global North, the permanent loophole in which the camp and its residents are caught (Agamben) provides a golden opportunity: It is the perfect setting to pre-cast the future unpolluted metropolis.