"Freedom from Camps": Housing and Power in the Experience of Sri Lankan Long-term Refugees in India

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My research investigates the ways in which the long-term refugee camps have been structured in India. It asks the questions: “How does the structure of warehouse refugee camps shape the life choices of refugees and produce multiple marginalities in exile?”; “How do the refugees resist and respond to the structure of warehouse camps in order to carve out new lives for themselves?”;and “How has encampment influenced the ways refugees construct an ideal future?” I was particularly interested in how the refugee housing has been the root of the social, economic, and cultural problems in the Sri Lankan refugee camps in Tamilnadu. For instance, refugees use the word “kalasra seeralivu” (cultural degeneration or destruction of culture) to describe how encampment has negatively influenced Sri Lankan Tamil cultural values and norms in exile. Rather than treating the encampment of the Sri Lankan refugees in India in isolation, in my research, I am trying to show how the historical, political, economic, and social forces of Sri Lanka and India have shaped the structure of warehousing of refugees and the everyday life choices of the camp refugees. I argue that along with the historical, economic, and political background of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and the politics of India the actual structure of the encampment is a form of structural violence which results in the suffering of the refugees in the camp housing and their longing for a home.