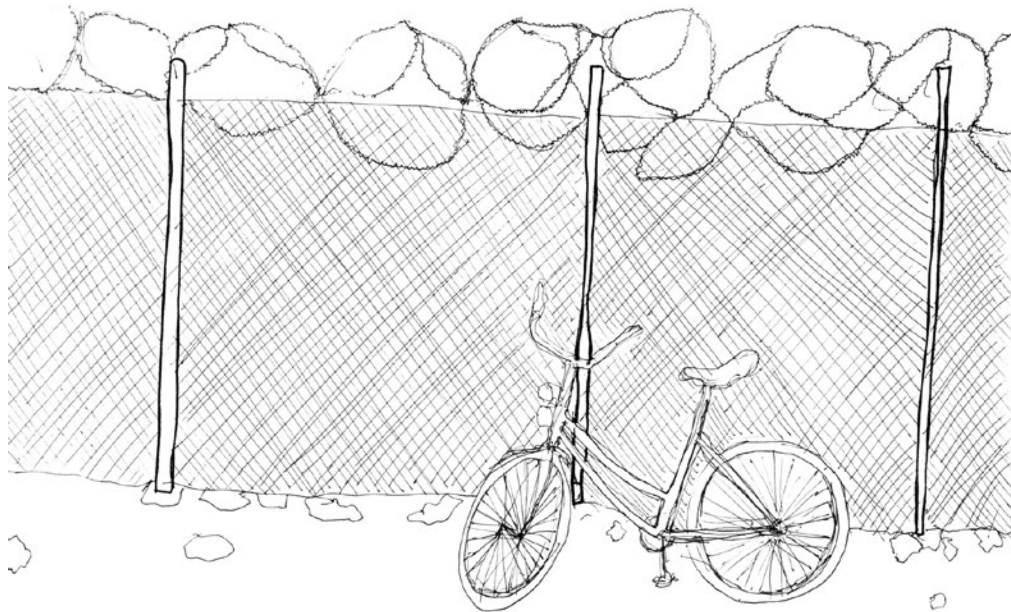

Figure 19.1 Za'atari refugee camp. © Mark E. Breeze, based on an image supplied by Diane Fellows.

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19

Social Media, Shelter and Resilience

Design in Za'atari Refugee Camp

Diane Fellows

If you search 'Syrian artists Za'atari' on the internet, you will find a photograph of Al Khidaiwi Al-Nabulsi in his casual cap alongside his fellow artists from Dara'a Province, southern Syria. In Za'atari refugee camp in northern Jordan, artists like Mr Al-Nabulsi paint and sculpt replicas of now-destroyed iconic monuments in the Syrian landscape: the ancient ruins of Palmyra, the ablution fountain of the Grand Mosque in Aleppo and the Deir ez-Zor pedestrian bridge over the Euphrates River, to name but a few. These clay and wood models are a remembrance of cultural spaces the artists want to 'never forget'. Among these objects of memory are also less grand historical designs such as paintings of familial village homes and courtyards filled with vegetable and flowering gardens, where family and friends chat and relax. These paintings portray a domestic calm, but they also present a future intentionally shaped by imagination, resilience and contestation. Syrian artists in Za'atari have painted cultural motifs on paper, canvas, metal caravan façades, flat metal fencing, on any surface that stands bare in the desert landscape. They paint to affirm their community's autonomy, as they are not in a refugee camp by inheritance or by choice, but to persevere.

Among the replicas of Syrian cultural monuments and traditional village housing are the pop-up books of Al Khidaiwi Al-Nabulsi. Mr Al-Nabulsi is best known for these paper sculptures, which he gifts to those who visit the Za'atari refugee camp. Al-Nabulsi's pop-up sculptures fold neatly into

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a book and then unfold to reveal a United Nations-issued tent shelter, or a gable roofed house, or a sculpture reflecting war's effect on his homeland. Mr Al-Nabulsi (although everyone just calls him Nabulsi) will tell you his brother immigrated to Raleigh, North Carolina, years ago. Nabulsi, though, is unsure of the plan for himself, his wife, his daughter, his son-in-law and the growing number of grandchildren that live in a series of 11 m^2 (118 sq. ft.) temporary metal shelter caravans, in the Za'atari refugee camp. In 2019, this supposedly temporary condition is in its seventh year, and 78,000 fellow Syrians also call it their home, at that time.

How does one determine a shelter to be a home, while displaced? A basic definition of shelter could be noted as a built or found environment that protects its occupants from the outside elements. In response to the many refugees who fled the Syrian Civil War, temporary shelters were placed within newly constructed refugee camps in areas of the Levant. How could a temporary shelter, a safe haven for protection, transition to a permanent space of residence? Would one characterize a space sheltering the many events of one's life over time a home? A home infers a space that may be adapted to the changing needs of its inhabitants, where personal recollections of places and people are often marked by familial objects. These objects of memory, of desire or of need project our personal identity and our sense of belonging to a community of shared values, as certain objects within our home may represent those values.

Could a home also be defined within a geopolitical framework, through property ownership that depends on regional laws, or cultural laws established through lineage, or from the perspective of gender? Laws related to the permanence of property ownership also project identity, as they belong to societal processes or particular cultural practices. However, what if a home could be defined without any physical references at all, where objects are presented or creatively invented through media, through which one's personal identity is projected? A borderless condition, such as a virtual space, where individuals share their story, connect socially and support each other's psychological wellbeing instils a sense of belonging. Can a community engaged virtually by connecting across physical barriers feel more sheltered, protected and emboldened than if it maintained a built environment in a specific geographical place, especially under dire conditions? Does physical shelter in a particular place, inclusive of the right to land for sustenance, become irrelevant as one's contemporary life on the internet allows for mobility and exchange of goods? Or is the development and connection of these two distinct conditions of sheltering – physical space and virtual space – essential for displaced communities to construct their future agency?

These are the contemporaneous concerns relevant to the Za'atari refugee camp, as the Syrian community adapts temporary shelters meant for safety

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to the more familiar experience of a home, while engaging the boundless space of the invisible walls of the internet.

Space-Making

Since 2011, the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, 630,000 Syrians have fled into Jordan, and since it opened in 2012, the Za'atari refugee camp has seen 450,000 people pass through its security gate. Those who fled the war and did not wish to live in a refugee camp surrounded by barbed wire made their way into neighbouring towns such as Al-Mafraq or moved towards Jordan's capital, Amman. By not staying in Za'atari, they gained a modicum of freedom, but with limited access to healthcare, education and employment. For those who stayed in Za'atari, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and over 300 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have supported rudimentary daily needs, educational activities for children and adults, and basic healthcare. In 2018, the ever-growing Za'atari population averaged eighty newborns per week (UNHCR 2018). The refugee camp is a 5.2 km^2 (2 sq. miles) sandy and rocky extent of desert ground with an infrastructure of streets and paths supported by four main north/south roads, an east/west axis at the centre of the site, and a paved perimeter ring road.

In 2012, when Za'atari opened, emergency tents were placed in the northwest quadrant. The tents were soon replaced by 11 m^2 (120 sq. ft.) prefabricated metal caravans intended to house a family of six. These caravans, organized in a linear pattern, resembled a mid twentieth-century suburban tract rather than the Syrian traditional pattern of familial housing around interior courtyards providing privacy and security. The caravan configurations formed blocks; sixteen blocks formed a single district, which consisted of 0.33 km^2 with approximately 6,500 residents. Managed by Jordan and the UNHCR, Za'atari was created with twelve districts, each with resident input for governance, often from the same families that oversaw governance in their home villages in Syria. The western part of Za'atari has become configured with caravans and private courtyard constructions; the further east one goes, towards the newer part of the site, the caravans lie in a linear pattern within the street grid, with noticeable open space between shelters. The orthogonal grid allows for efficiency: water is delivered to community area tanks and boreholes supply water to individual caravans. For electricity, Za'atari is connected to Jordan's national energy grid and has its own solar farm supplied by IKEA. The grid also allows for controlled security for the UNHCR and the host country, Jordan.

In 2013, along with the temporary caravans, community bathrooms and kitchens were constructed for expediency and cost-effectiveness. However,

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at night, community bathrooms became a safety concern for women and children. Within a few months, the refugee residents dismantled the bathrooms and kitchens, picked the caravans off the desert floor and placed them to form family groupings. With discarded corrugated metal and old emergency tent fabric, families constructed additional rooms and private outdoor spaces, taking clearer control over their environment. However, there are other forms of community space, most significantly a bustling Market situated along the east/west axis. Named the Champs-Élysées by the NGOs and residents, men, women and families shop at the 3,000 refugee-owned ventures established over the past six years. The Market exchanges about U.S.$3 million a month in goods such as vegetables, cooked food items, baked goods, clothing, furniture, toys, cellphones and SIM cards. Much of the merchandise delivered to Za'atari comes from neighbouring towns and Amman.

Shelter and Social Media

In Za'atari, to arrive at one's caravan home is a temporary reprieve from the blowing desert sand, the relentless summer heat, the winter's snow and the impossible events one can sometimes see and hear just 13 km north in Syria. For Za'atari residents such as Nabulsi, home is a constant re-adaptation of space, materials and objects. In addition, home has moved beyond the boundaries of the official UNHCR shelter, the confines of a refugee camp surrounded by wire, the trenches and camp bureaucracy, and the constraints of power politics as evidenced by ever-changing territorial boundaries. In other words, social media anchors Nabulsi to a world larger than the camp and his memories of Dara'a, larger than the built treasures of Syrian culture he carves out of found material can contain. Nabulsi sends messages to his global Facebook friends. Most mornings, his voice lands on my iPhone with a photograph and greeting; I click 'translation' to decipher the Arabic. Often, the photograph explains the event and Nabulsi's mood. His voice lands in all the smartphones of all those to whom he has told his story to and gifted his sculpture books. Now, in his adapted caravan, he offers advice for how to 'live through this mess' and how 'art can keep us feeling alive, to get us through'. In this time of global political madness, I want to believe him.

While every example of displacement is unique, the twenty-first-century refugee camps such as Za'atari are globally visible. Social media enables those displaced to experience shelter at multiple scales: from temporary emergency shelters to the virtual public space of personal experiences shared in real time. In a world of increasing uncertainty, social media is a means to build a personal presence out of a feeling of overwhelming

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anonymity: to share one's story and one's frustrations, and to network one's ambitions and hopes within a global community. Social media, a borderless space, offers emotional refuge and a personal address. Unprecedented in modern and contemporary refugee crises, conditions of displacement and refuge are observable in the moment.

Za'atari's internet presence can be experienced in a number of ways: UNHCR monthly reports that are posted online; visitors walking away with photographic and video recordings; bloggers keeping virtual diaries of their experience when working with the NGOs and residents; and, because many Za'atari resident adults have a smartphone, the Facebook pages of those living in the camp. In 2015, Facebook, Inc. with the UNHCR made Facebook freely available to the Za'atari residents so that families could connect from different global locations. Much of the social media activity occurs in the evening, when residents have more access to electricity and WiFi. During the day, teenage boys primarily are seen by the exterior fence of Za'atari's base camp where the onsite UNHCR and NGOs are headquartered. Crouching by their bicycles, siphoning UNHCR server signals, the boys browse for music, videos, games and retail, and check Facebook.

The Facebook platform enables Za'atari refugee residents to assert a global presence. However, social media is a complex space of engagement, incorporating the policies of governments influencing how refugees, migrants and immigrants are perceived and welcomed. A palpable tension exists between social media and the physical space of Za'atari, as the constraints of living in a refugee camp frames one's ability to act upon opportunities found on the internet.

In the Space of Engagement

Social media (primarily Skype) enabled the collaboration between my undergraduate architecture studios (MUHabitat, Miami University, Ohio) with Nabulsi and the other artists, designers and engineers residing in Za'atari during the spring of 2016 and 2017. The NGO International Relief and Development (IRD) and the UNHCR facilitated our collaboration; Laurie Balbo, a Miami University alumna working in Amman, introduced us to the multiple conditions of Za'atari in a November 2015 email. In January 2016, sixteen architecture undergraduates became Studio MUHabitat, and our conversation with the resident artists in Za'atari began. Generally, an architectural studio's academic focus may concern the process of design within theoretical, aesthetic and technological frameworks inclusive of environmental, economic and sociopolitical forces that shape people and place. However, the collaboration we embarked upon included many more concerns and unknowns than we could anticipate.

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During our first Skype session, through translators, we introduced ourselves and the students simply asked the artists: 'What do you need?' The artists responded with the following list: a new market area in the camp to resemble the Al-Hamidiyah Souk in Damascus, to replace the converted caravan storefronts; separate spaces in the caravans so that husband and wives could also have privacy, as the lack of privacy caused innumerable tensions within families; chairs and tables; gardens and trees; transportation for women and those disabled, and children's playgrounds with educational equipment. Through our virtual apertures, the artists showed us a tabletop model of the Umayyad Mosque, saying: 'This is important to us, especially the children. They need to know.' For the American students, the desire to effect change grew exponentially, but, within the design work requested, we really did not know what 'change' might mean or, ultimately, what impact it would have. What sort of change besides the constructed physical ones could we understand to consider? The question of what architecture can actually do to effect change, such as political change, or what could we do collectively when working 6,000 miles apart in a global and local political landscape continuously in flux did not deter the students or the artists from considering what could be proposed in the moment and actualized.

Our collaboration resulted in 138 pages of design documentation of sun shelters, transportation, furniture and beds for the disabled. All elements were detailed using recycled materials found in Za'atari, from the demolished bathrooms and kitchens using various-sized structural metal posts and kitchen-counter marble to plastic bags and old emergency tents. We tested similar materials in the MUHabitat studio as we wanted to be sure that any habitable element could be constructed with ease on site. Students learned to weld in order to understand materiality and constructability. They proposed a hybrid of aesthetics based on our collective conversations presenting contemporary modern design with traditional components responding to the Syrian culture and desert climactic conditions. We emailed the work to the IRD facilitator Mais Abu Laila, and the artists held their own workshop to critique the designs and make revisions.

From the many designs we developed, it was the need for publicly accessible sun shelters for the Za'atari perimeter ring road that was chosen as a priority concern. This ring road encircles the camp boundary and also serves as its main bus route; the sun shelters were necessary because the elderly, the disabled, women and children had no respite from the desert climate as they walked to various destinations within the refugee camp or tried to catch the bus around its edge. Using a collaborative design process, local construction materials, skilled labour provided by refugee craftsmen and a small UNHCR grant generated by our IRD facilitator, our team succeeded in having fourteen sun shelters constructed in August 2016 that are now public spaces (Kissel 2016). The design adapted was less complex than

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others and certainly did not need a whole design studio and our Za'atari counterparts to accomplish, but the shelters needed our collective connection, our visibility with each other, in order for the process to be realized. This may not be what one thinks about when imagining refugee shelter, but protection from the sun was clearly one of the most central priorities emerging from this particular process of design.

In Place

The virtual realm offers views into each other's worlds, although the lens is often narrowly pointed towards a specific view. Physically connecting, in the same geographical space, is therefore still key to any engagement. In November 2016, I travelled to the Za'atari refugee camp and was joined by Laurie Balbo. Facilitated by the IRD, we met Nabulsi and the other artists: Mohammad Almari, Ahmad Hariri, Mahmoud Hariri and Eyad Sabagh. Nabulsi gifted the MUHabitat studio two pop-books: a UN tent constructed from a tent that had burnt with catastrophic consequences, and a paper gable roofed house.

The IRD and the studio discussed connecting with women in our collaboration, but the men were our primary contact. It was difficult for the women to engage during our Skype conversation in the same space as the men, as they encountered cultural difficulties within their family to do so. When in Za'atari, Laurie Balbo and I conducted a design workshop with resident women engaged in the education of young girls in Za'atari. Back in Syria, the women were practicing nurses, engineers and teachers, as well as homemakers. For the workshop, the women created drawings and models recalling traditional and more contemporary homes in Dara'a and Damascus, and imagined ones shaped like moons and round sculptural forms. Noticeably, each drawing had a garden. We talked about life before the war and now in Za'atari. Yes, gardens were desired for practical reasons such as growing vegetables, but also for cultural reasons, to bring beauty to a life under pressure – to ease the heaviness of living in a refugee camp, in a relentless open desert.

Green spaces became an ongoing discussion with the IRD and the UNHCR throughout our collaboration. The increased population in Za'atari, and major cities such as Amman, has put an increasingly difficult load on most resources in Jordan, especially water. Za'atari refugee camp sits on one the largest aquifers in Jordan. As green spaces were highly desired, they were discussed in every community meeting. However, widespread green spaces had not been realized because the administration believed that facilitating a water reclamation system for irrigation would be too difficult.

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During the 2017 spring semester of the MUHabitat design studio, the IRD changed management as well as staff. Since 2016, the IRD management had changed four times. While this did not alter our engagement, it did shift the emphasis of the exchange from the artists to the NGO. The studio missed our direct discussions with the artists and, while we chatted on Facebook, the effectiveness of our collaboration seemed in doubt. However, the IRD directed the focus of work towards playgrounds, sports facilities and themed community spaces. Based on our continued Facebook connections with the artists, and images of their shelters, the studio also decided to engage housing, as well as consider a more hypothetical urban plan. However, addressing immediate concerns, the students asked: 'What can one do now with existing caravans, what could the future of housing look like with best material practices, and how could we introduce a low-budget, low-maintenance water reclamation system?' Based on the refugee practice of relocating caravans into courtyard configurations, the students proposed the rearrangement of homes into similar safe familial communities and, in the interior, building flexible furniture doubling as storage and room dividers. The students also suggested a rainwater collection system for potable water, and grey water recycling for courtyard gardens.

In May 2017, I visit Za'atari for the second time, and this time my colleague J. Elliott and two former students, Joshua Gabbard and Madison Scheper, joined me. We left another substantive design packet with the UNHCR and the IRD, and, at the behest of the IRD, we conducted workshops with the artists and other residents to review the second design packet, as well as working with children (we brought a suitcase of LEGO that proved to be a tremendous teambuilding event among the children). We also met with the girls' soccer team to consider a proper football pitch with an addition of bathrooms and viewing stands.

When I saw Nabulsi during this visit, he greeted me with the same warmth I had come to know through our Skype sessions. This time, however, his smile noted a slight disapproval. He asked: 'What happened to your hair?' I gave him a sidelong glance, shrugged and said 'American style'; the cut was short, but too short for women according to Nabulsi. Through his half-hearted disapproval, Nabulsi insisted we come to his home for coffee and to see his newly built furniture and his new kitchen. Walking through the Za'atari Market, we glanced down side streets towards informal courtyard arrangements of one-storey caravans. Additions had been constructed from corrugated siding roughly attached with old tent material. A few caravans had more elaborate additions. One family constructed a gable wood roof placed on top of the caravan's metal flat roof. The gable roof is not an additional space; it is a distinct beacon, an address among the sea of caravan shelters.

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Nabulsi at Home

In his caravan, Nabulsi, with design packet in hand, took one look, brushed the back of his hand across the pages and emphatically stated 'we have done some of this already', suggesting that he and his community are way ahead of any plans the studio had on paper. Accompanied by Loay Jalamdeh, an IRD staff member, Nabulsi then gave us a tour. He coughed a bit too much, blamed the cigarettes and told us he was still trying to quit. He proudly showed us the furniture he made from caravan floorboards; the kitchen he has culled together from recycled salvaged camp materials. In the kitchen addition to the main caravan, he pointed to the u-shaped shelving with sink and running water, and wryly said: 'You see, a modern kitchen.' The shelving was made from discarded weather resistant plywood, or marine board, and a two-burner counter-top stove was sitting on one side of the kitchen counter with dishes neatly stacked on the other. Nabulsi brought us to the main caravan space, to the large armoire and bed frame he and his son-in-law constructed from some of the original caravan floorboards with refurbished wood brought in from Al-Mafraq and the neighbouring towns. As he replaced his caravan floorboard with a concrete one, the retrofit caravan construction is not constructed as mandated by the Jordanian government. Shelter has to be temporary and not permanent, and concrete suggests permanence, but the UN and NGO administrative staffers do not interfere. After six years, repurposing materials to create a more habitable shelter occurs frequently, out of necessity.

Nabulsi came to Za'atari in 2013 and has made the UN-issued caravan a semblance of a place to settle in well, even if temporarily. When he showed us the armoire, he nodded assuredly. It is a beautiful piece of craftsmanship. With shelving, covered by decorative material, on either side, the armoire is separated from the main caravan by a makeshift wall. While Nabulsi's ability to repurpose materials to meet his family's needs is not so unique in Za'atari, many families, especially those headed by women, do not have the skillsets to create the sort of changes Nabulsi and his son-in-law can craft. Nabulsi told us he wants to return to his village and rebuild: to bring his grandson, born in the refugee camp, home to Syria. This guided our conversation over the next hour.

The IRD staffers, Zain Sultan and Mais Abdel Haleem, urged us to visit more caravans to better understand Za'atari. Nabulsi got on his motorized bicycle; we followed along through the sandy terrain of alley roads. The wind blew heat at our face; there was not a tree in sight. The four of us got into the NGO van and set out for the far eastern side of Za'atari, the newer area where rows of caravans still remain in a linear pattern. As we travelled along the perimeter ring road, we saw the fourteen bus shelters designed during our 2016 collaboration painted in different thematic motifs by the

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Za'atari artists: abstract Islamic designs, landscapes and even an aquarium motif.

Shelter and Culture

In the eastern part of the Za'atari refugee camp, we visited a builder, whose enclosed plot of land, with caravan and adjoining kitchen, contained a good-size vegetable garden, a pigeon coop with a roof made of reclaimed timber and metal, and, in one corner of the garden, a chicken coop with four chickens milling about. We entered a two-room caravan, created by a divider from floorboards; two children had been born in Za'atari since the family's arrival. He offered us coffee in the front room. We sat on the UNHCR-issued mattresses that his wife covered with beautiful grey cloth and rested our legs on brown patterned rugs bought from the Market. The builder told us that he had just finished building a house for his family in Dara'a when the war began. One day, an aerial bomb blew the house apart. The next day, the family fled to the Jordanian border, crossed and found their way along with so many others of his community to Za'atari. It is difficult in the camp, he said. The UNHCR and NGOs have meetings with community members about family relationships, regarding the UNHCR and the host country's policy about domestic violence and corporeal punishment of children. These meetings, he said, embarrassed him. He felt his privacy was being attacked, and he was uncomfortable listening to personal issues from governmental social service officials. When disciplining his children, he told us: 'I don't understand, now, what I should do.' We sat quietly, drinking our coffee. The social construction of Za'atari is as profoundly complex as its infrastructure and shelter needs. Many social services assist families, women, children and men to navigate not just a new physical landscape, but also new dynamics of social and criminal laws exercised by the international governing organizations.

We next visited the caravan next door to the builder. A woman greeted us, offering each of us a coffee. Her adult son, who had a learning disability, shook our hands and nodded his welcome. She motioned to us to follow her to the kitchen area, an attached makeshift space of corrugated siding attached with old tent material and sewn paper. She showed us the water drip under her kitchen sink, and then hurriedly ushered us to the other side of the kitchen wall to the main caravan. We could smell the problem before we entered: rotting floorboards. We went back around to the kitchen area and attempted to crimp the kitchen hose to stop the water drip, while one of our team completed some paperwork to solve this plumbing problem through Za'atari administrative channels. The paper trail underscored the incredible bureaucracy that has to be involved just to fix a leaking water

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hose causing the woman's caravan floor to rot away and become uninhabitable. The ability of neighbours to give mutual support, the very strength at the core of the Dara'a community, seemed not to be present. The IRD staffers and the UNHCR suggested that mutual community responsibility had broken down due to the war and prolonged exile. Families turn inward. Survival becomes foremost. Administratively, specific NGO organizations facilitate specific concerns, and paperwork ensues. I could not understand why a builder, and his neighbour, a single woman with a disabled son, with rotting floorboards due to a leaking water hose that could easily be fixed, weren't supported to assist each other. Frustrated, my colleagues and I noted that we came armed with the wrong tools. We came with a paper design packet; we should have come with plumbing gaskets and pliers.

Conclusion

For those residing in Za'atari, to take rudimentary shelters and adapt them to create liveable habitat is necessary. The majority of Za'atari people – 57 per cent in fact – are under eighteen. A generation will not know the Syria of their parents or grandparents such as Nabulsi. Building shelter constructs a future. The physical materials of this shelter are only one part of the process; social connections are in many ways just as important and the space of the internet empowers those who are displaced to construct how they wish to live.

Beginning in 2015, the internet became part of daily life in Za'atari. Due to these connections, a number of cultural traditions changed for those residing in Za'atari. Some experiences were culturally experienced for the first time, such as girls' playing football and celebrating their accomplishments through sports, while some traditions, separating women's and men's activities in the cramped quarters of Za'atari, upheld traditional cultural rules of decorum. The internet connected refugees to the world beyond Za'atari's boundaries. Through social connectivity, an emotional protective envelope was constructed within the tenuous conditions of the everyday, as the refugees' frustrations, desires and hopes became visibly palpable through internet exchanges. These global exchanges presented a powerful affirmation of the refugees resolve.

For a number of refugees, the return home to Syria is physically and politically difficult. Returning to a vastly transformed Syrian landscape, Syrians may find the internet's borderless and supportive social space not as accessible as it was in Za'atari. Because the internet's efficacy is contingent upon the governing politics of place, if monitored by governing entities, the internet may become less a means for free expression, yet a means to be easily situated at any moment within any geographical location.

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What does the future hold for Nabulsi and his community, and all who are born in the Za'atari refugee camp that, in terms of population, is Jordan's fourth-largest area? Does a temporary way station, with embedded infrastructure, a Market, emergency shelters becoming habitats and global communication, develop into a permanent space? Perhaps. If the region found it economically advantageous to develop such a permanent condition, undoubtedly policies would be structured to support such a development. On the internet, Za'atari is often referred to as a city because of its infrastructure and services. The studio explored the following question: is Za'atari a city? An affirmative answer, without clarifying the implications for cultural identity within the region, employment opportunities beyond Za'atari's boundary and governance structures, would be troubling. Displaced, the Syrian people are constructing their lives. However, the Za'atari refugee camp is not the new norm for social engagement, habitation or community permanence; no refugee camp is.

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Figure 20.1 Informal settlement in Kab Elias, Bekaa, Lebanon. © Mark E. Breeze, based on an image supplied by Faten Kikano.

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20

Confinement, Power and Permanence in Informal Refugee Spaces

Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

Faten Kikano

Media narratives and discourse emanating from the far right have engendered a politics of fear that feeds on negative representations of migrants and refugees. Through a strategy of delegitimization (Agamben 1998), refugees have become the 'others' that cause chaos and endanger the order of organized societies (Ahmed 1999; Arcimaviciene and Baglama 2018). This stigmatization creates a binary opposition between them and us, and initiates the separation of the world in two distinct parts: one for fortunate, regular citizens, and another, where undesirable populations, including refugees and asylum seekers, representing a threat to political, social, and environmental safety and balance, are excluded (Bauman 2007).

This exclusion is expressed through the will of most countries in the world to protect their territories from refugee influx. Countries of the Global North, due to their geographical distance from war-prone zones and the control they are able to enforce on their national borders, host a relatively limited number of refugees (Malkki 1995), whereas developing countries host almost 85 per cent of the world's refugees (UNHCR 2018). Most of these countries suffer from economic and political fragility. They perceive refugees as a security threat and an economic burden, and seek to implement policies aiming to prevent refugees' integration into the socioeconomic and the urban structure of the country (Agier 2010; Black 1998). Regarding

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refugee settlements, they are faced with two main solutions: settling refugees in organized camps or allowing them to self-settle.

Organized camps are often built in an emergency situation to shelter refugees temporarily and to provide them with protection and welfare. They are often built on a land provided by the host government. They are controlled by the country's authorities and managed by the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. Camps are usually located in remote areas leading to the isolation of refugees (Bernardot 2008). Some scholars theorize them as apolitical spaces that control, confine, and segregate refugees (Bauman 2007; Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005). In their view, encampment is a dehumanizing process wherein welfare is exchanged for mobility and in which refugees become passive recipients of aid deprived of their basic civil rights. But for host countries with fragile governance structures, organized camps are constantly at risk of devolving into self-governed spaces beyond state control and endowed with emerging implicit power structures. Such countries fear that the confinement of refugees might lead to the ghettoization and the permanence of their spaces (Doraï 2006; Sanyal 2011). To avoid this risk, they often allow refugees to self-settle.

Self-settlement solutions are often based on informal agreements between owners and refugees. They include rooms and apartments, nonresidential structures, tented settlements, unfinished buildings, etc. In such spaces, refugees lack humanitarian aid and protection (Bakewell 2014), which puts them at risk of evictions, exploitation and abuse (Jacobsen 2006; Landau 2014). But self-settlement also allows refugees to enjoy a certain degree of freedom and autonomy in housing and livelihood, and a chance to integrate into host communities (Agier and Lecadet 2014). Host countries balance this 'freedom' with institutional exclusion in order to keep the pressure on refugees and entice them to leave (Long 2013).

Based on the longitudinal case study of an informal settlement for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, this chapter challenges the paradigm that associates settlement policies with the evolution of refugee spaces. It helps to understand how refuges spaces, whether camps or noncamp solutions, are produced and transformed, and the limited impact of settlement policies on the complex process of their transformation and on their duration. It challenges the dichotomy between encampment and self-settlement by setting out the common patterns of both. It extends the analysis of refugee spaces beyond the spatial characteristics of each type of settlement solution. It shows that while encampment is based on spatial exclusion, self-settled refugees often face institutional and socioeconomic exclusion that limits their freedom of movement and the legality of their situation, and leads paradoxically to their spatial exclusion. It demonstrates that formal and informal refugee spaces evolve similarly along a continuum of vulnerability and power. Their evolution is the result of: (1) intertwined politics adopted by different sets

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of actors – donor countries, host governments, local authorities, humanitarian actors, formal and informal settlement managers, host communities, property owners and the refugees themselves; (2) the power structures that emerge in and around these spaces; and (3) the spatial, institutional and socioeconomic conditions of refugees that are often impacted by the dynamics of their inclusion/exclusion in the host state.

Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

The Lebanese government did not initially engage in the management of the Syrian refugee crisis. Lebanon's initial response was to keep the border with Syria open and – with a few rare exceptions – to prohibit organized camps. As a result, seven years after the onset of the Syrian conflict, Lebanon is now host to almost 1.5 million Syrian refugees, a number close to 30 per cent of the country's population.

At first, the Lebanese response was praised by the international community. Today, many describe it as a groundless policy that is not aligned with the country's governance and economic capacities (AUB/UNHABITAT 2015; El Mufti 2014). However, a thorough analysis of the political and economic context in Lebanon reveals that there are several reasons for the policy (Turner 2015). One of the main reasons is the fear that the experience of Palestinian camps, which evolved into self-governed, armed ghettos and became autonomous states within the state (Hudson 1978), will be repeated. In fact, several political parties, especially those representing religious minorities, feared that organized camps for Syrians would become permanent, adding a large Sunni population to the 500,000 Palestinians who have resided in Lebanon since 1948, thus constituting a threat to the fragile sectarian balance that characterizes the country. They also worried that the camps would become a haven for extremist groups and a site for the potential radicalization of refugees (Onishi 2013).

Moreover, Syrians have not been classified by the Government of Lebanon as refugees, a category that does not exist in Lebanese law, but as displaced persons (*Nazihoun*). As for the spaces they occupy, they were referred to as gatherings in official documents and reports (*Tajamouat*). The word 'camp' was completely banned from the government's lexis (Fawaz et al. 2014; Loveless 2013; Naufal 2012).

The disengagement of the government has resulted in municipalities becoming the principal authorities in the management of the Syrian refugee crisis. Municipalities adopted hosting policies ranging from complete exclusion to hospitality and the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees. Those policies were compatible with the sociocultural, economic and religious contexts of the regions that municipalities administered. The municipalities'

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varied hosting and settlement policies translated into significant differences in the numbers of refugees hosted, in the types and forms of sheltering and housing solutions adopted by Syrians, and in disparities in their evolution in terms of size, structure and durability (Sanyal 2017).

Without camps, Syrian refugees settled informally in more than 2,000 locations all over the country in several types of sheltering arrangements, ranging from apartments and rooms to informal settlements (Kikano et al. 2015). They concentrated in areas where the local authorities were lenient, straining service systems and infrastructure that had not been upgraded since before the Civil War. These areas are often the poorest and refugees compete with Lebanese for affordable housing and low-skilled jobs, a situation that generates significant tensions (Loveless 2013).

In 2014, with the crisis protracting, the Lebanese government adopted a drastic reversal in dealing with Syrian refugees. It issued a number of rules prohibiting Syrians from entering the country and exerted institutional exclusion on those who were already present. Expensive fees that refugees could seldom afford were required for the renewal of residency and work permits. For the latter, Syrians needed a Lebanese sponsor. The latest United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) census shows that, as a result of these measures, more than 70 per cent of Syrians have become illegal settlers in Lebanon (Janmyr 2016).

An Informal Settlement in Kab Elias, Bekaa

Between 2014 and 2018, I studied an informal settlement in Kab Elias, a city located in eastern Lebanon, in the district of Zahleh in the Bekaa valley. I chose to study a settlement in the Bekaa because it is one of the Lebanese regions with the largest number of refugees. Syrians settled in this area for several reasons. First, the Bekaa is located near the Syrian border. Second, it is a region with vast agriculture land and, prior to the Syrian war, it hosted a large community of Syrian temporary workers. To avoid commuting, workers lived in tents raised on the agriculture land itself. When the Syrian conflict erupted, they hosted family and friends fleeing the war in Syria. More tents were erected to shelter newcomers and most settlements developed rapidly. Third, the decrease in humanitarian aid forced most Syrians to work and, in the Bekaa, it was easier for them to find jobs, especially in agriculture.

Kab Elias is a town of 32 km^2 with a population of 50,000. It is the third-largest city in the Bekaa. Inhabitants belong to various religious groups, but an important Christian community resides in the city, imbuing it with Western culture and influence. It presently hosts 60,000 Syrian refugees (around 30,000 are registered with the UNHCR), some of whom rent

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apartments in the town centre, while others live in tented settlements on the outskirts of the town.

My fieldwork involved direct observation of refugee spaces, including pictures, plans, and drawings of the settlement and semi-structured interviews with ten stakeholders, including three ministers, the head of municipal councils, the informal camp manager or *shaweesh* and three humanitarian aid workers. The most important part of this information came from group discussions with refugees and host communities. Information was completed with a review of documents and reports produced by the UNHCR, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (the Norwegian Refugee Council, the World Bank, UN-HABITAT, UNICEF, the World Food Program, UNRWA and the Lebanon Inter-Agency) and the Lebanese government. These documents examined the legal, economic and social situation of Syrian refugees and the living conditions in various types of shelters.

The settlement I studied is built on 14,000 m^2 of agriculture land. It hosts seventy families (almost 350 people) who live in forty tented shelters. It is constituted of a series of heterogeneous, temporary self-built shelters, created from heaps of panels, tarpaulins and other recovered materials that cover precarious wood or metal structures. The dimensions of most shelters are 7 m x 6 m. The monthly rent for each tent is around U.S.$200, excluding the price of illegal electrical connections (almost U.S.$25 per month). Irregular passages between shelters form a labyrinth where, every now and then, lean plants grow sporadically in plastic containers and pots. White latrines marked with the UNHCR logo are located near each shelter. Electrical cables hang between makeshift wood posts, creating a scattered canopy covering the settlement.

Throughout my field visits that spanned over four years, I was able to observe the 'visible' and 'invisible' transformations of the settlement. The overall external appearance reflected extreme precariousness. Shelters deteriorated with the passage of time due to the harsh climatic factors that characterize the area. This significant deterioration is also due to the initial use of materials with a short lifespan. But it is also caused by the restrictions imposed by the Ministry of Social Affairs (the ministry assigned by the government to manage refugee spaces) on both NGOs' and refugees' improvements and modifications of shelters. Restrictions sought to prevent upgrading and the construction of permanent fixtures. Ministry representatives were tasked with periodically controlling shelter modification. They allowed only minimal maintenance such as waterproofing.

On the local level, the head of the municipal council, known for his support for the Syrian regime, expressed very little empathy towards refugees during our interview. Other sources of information such as group discussions with refugees and interviews with humanitarian aid workers show that he did not cooperate with international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs)

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and refugees claimed that municipal representatives slowed down and sometimes prevented them from receiving aid. Local authorities imposed additional restrictions. First, they prohibited refugees from building new shelters, with the result that the existing shelters became overcrowded since their inhabitants were forced to accommodate new dwellers who had either fled the war and had just arrived in the country or had been displaced from other areas in Lebanon. Second, for security reasons and for better control over refugees' movement, refugees had no right to change their location. Despite exploitative rents, they were obliged to remain on the land they had initially rented (Kikano 2017).

This led to the creation of a new category of actors exerting their control over refugees: private landowners. Every year, they raised the (informal) rent price of the land occupied by refugees, benefiting from the new regulation that forbade refugees from moving the settlement to a different location. Other implicit power structures developed in the settlement: the *shaweesh* protects but simultaneously exploits and controls refugees. He is usually Syrian himself with legal documentation. His legal standing gives him control and authority over the rest of the residents who are mostly illegal settlers. It is he who authorizes refugees to reside in the settlement. He often chooses large families with members who are young and willing to work in agriculture. This selection favours the employment deals he arranges with land managers and allows him to withhold around 60 per cent of workers' wages. He also negotiates the informal agreements concerning land rental with the Lebanese landowner and subleases parcels of the land to each household, extracting income from each of them.

Inequality in institutional, social and economic conditions between refugees translated into disparities in the interior settings of the shelters they occupied. While the external appearance of the settlement expresses generalized scarcity and poverty, the internal space of individual shelters expresses the social hierarchy that exists between residents. In fact, the *shaweesh* along with his family and relatives live in rather opulent conditions contrasting with the rest of the shelters. The floor is a concrete slab covered with carpets. The walls are covered with colourful sheets, decorated with drapes, thin cords and tassels. Cushions are placed on the floor as armchairs. Moreover, the flexibility of structures allows the creation of multiple and interconnecting rooms with wood separations and doors or with curtains and sheets, organized according to needs and the number of family members (Kikano 2018; Kikano et al. 2018). The result is a space furnished like any modest rural house. The largest and most luxurious tent is a U-shaped *majlis* where honourable guests are hosted in special occasions, with a stove for ceremonial coffee in the centre of the space, a testimonial to Syrian hospitality (Kikano 2018). However, most other shelters, especially those occupied by the elderly or by female heads of households, are in

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extremely poor condition. The single-spaced dwellings consist of a structure and a tarpaulin covering an uneven mud floor with none of the amenities described above (Kikano 2018).

The authority exerted by the *shaweesh* over refugees derives mainly from the illegality of the refugees' institutional status. Their movements were restricted and they feared arrest by the army. With little freedom of movement, the only jobs they could find had to be in close proximity to the settlement. Their large numbers increased the availability of cheap labour. Work conditions were exploitative and wages were very low. As in most Lebanese areas hosting large numbers of refugees, tensions between communities quickly spread. Refugees were often subject to violence and abuse, in which case they had little legal recourse. They were seldom accepted by the local community and their presence was usually unappreciated in town. This was rather surprising considering that the Sunni Lebanese shared the same religion as refugees. Refugees represented not only competition for housing and low-skilled jobs, but, as most of them came from the southern reef of Aleppo, a poor, isolated rural area, they were perceived as a threat to local social practices, culture and way of life. In sum, despite not living in an organized camp, refugees were confined to their own settlement.

Refugees' confinement generated in them a sense of fear, distrust and insecurity. Over the years, their good nature and their initial hospitality disappeared. Entering the settlement became difficult and strangers were not allowed in without being approved and accompanied by the *shaweesh*. Refugees were uncomfortable communicating with visitors and letting them enter their living spaces, especially the most opulent ones. It was only after many visits, for example, that I was allowed to visit the *majlis* and the shelters belonging to the *shaweesh* and his relatives. With difficulties for outsiders in entering and leaving the settlement, and with the emergence of power structures inside and outside the settlement controlling refugees, the Kab Elias settlement was imperceptibly and irrevocably being ghettoized.

Conclusion: Self-Settlement as an Implicit Form of Spatial Exclusion

The divisions between populations with different social and cultural categories have deepened in the past few decades, resulting in negative representations of the Other, whether this is a migrant, a refugee, a female, a Muslim or any other minority (Arcimaviciene and Baglama 2018). But if we distance ourselves from these representations, we realize that what really characterizes these populations is their status as noncitizens. In fact, their institutional status often deprives them of their basic rights, which are apportioned on the basis on citizenship, including the right to space (Kibreab 1999).

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When faced with a refugee influx, countries usually perceive encampment as a strategy that instigates refugees' spatial exclusion and weakens them. Yet, countries with fragile political systems perceive organized camps as a security threat, spaces of confinement at risk of becoming self-governed ghettos controlled by empowered refugee populations. This is the case for the Lebanese government, which, in response to the Syrian refugee influx, adopted a nonencampment policy, causing the emergence of several types of informal spaces.

Informality can be a kind of confinement: due to the refugees' institutional and socioeconomic exclusion by the Lebanese government and the control exerted by authorities on their freedom of movement, their informal settlements became spaces of confinement and segregation. While organized camps are usually controlled by government authorities and managed by humanitarian actors, with self-settled refugees, new categories of actors who control refugees and regulate their spaces are created: on the one hand, private landowners exploit them and extort excessive rents for the land where their settlement is built; on the other hand, the *shaweesh* or settlement manager empowered by his legal status and his socioeconomic wellbeing protects refugees, but also abuses and exploits them.

In conclusion, our study demonstrates the nondeterministic nature of settlement policies on the nature, evolution and duration of refugee spaces and on the living conditions of refugees. It extends the analysis of refugee spaces beyond the spatial characteristics generated by the contrast between encampment and self-settlement. From this perspective, this research argues that camps and noncamps evolve similarly along a continuum between vulnerability and power, depending on refugees' institutional and socioeconomic situation, on implicit and explicit power relations that develop in and around refugee spaces, and on the tangle of conflicting interests between different government and nongovernment actors. Kibreab (1999: 389) summarizes these recommendations, asserting that the refugee 'problem' cannot be solved unless host governments, host societies and refugees themselves cooperate to integrate refugees as members in their new environment and give them equal opportunities, allowing them to develop a 'feeling of belonging and identity that would benefit both refugee and host populations'.

Faten Kikano is a Ph.D. candidate in environmental studies at University of Montreal. Her research explores the implications of hosting policies on refugees' living conditions and on space appropriation in refugee spaces. Her findings enable her to set frameworks aiming at the implementation of appropriate living environments for refugees and sustainable solutions for host countries. Her thesis focuses on the case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

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Figure 21.1 Tempelhof Airport in Berlin, Germany. © Mark E. Breeze, based on an image supplied by Toby Parsloe.

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21

From Emergency Shelter to Community Shelter

Berlin's Tempelhof Refugee Camp

Toby Parsloe

Buildings often come to symbolize particular geopolitical moments. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's open-door policy famously allowed over one million refugees to enter Germany during the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015, and the emergency refugee shelters that proliferated throughout the country at that time became tangible structures that appeared to incarnate national ethical reactions in space. School gyms, military barracks, office blocks, town halls and many other structures were famously co-opted by state authorities to act as *Notunterkünfte* (emergency shelters). For some people, these shelters came to symbolize a profound moment of openness that gave hope to thousands of desperate people. For others, they were sites of squalor, neglect and mismanagement that could become breeding grounds for dissatisfaction and violence, or gateways into the country for the threatening foreign invader. Almost all of the emergency shelters erected since 2015 had closed by 2018 and were replaced by a new type of long-term shelter called *Gemeinschaftsunterkünfte* (community shelters). These have attracted significantly less attention than the initial shelters. However, they are equally as important symbolic structures, whose implications are arguably more profound and revealing as Germany addresses the complex long-term questions of hosting refugees.

Years after Merkel's historic decision, the supposed state of emergency is ostensibly over. The once prominent debates around refugee arrivals

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have receded and there is a sense that, for better or worse, the country has 'dealt with' the crisis. Public discussions now address broader questions and abstract concepts of migration, as tensions mount over refugee distributions and the responsibility taken by different European nations. Yet Germany stands at a critical moment where the sobering long-term realities of hosting already arrived refugees have become part of the country's everyday existence. The hospitable façade of the famous *Willkommenskultur* (welcome culture) quickly dissolved, as the major gains of the far right in mainstream politics suggest an increasingly polarized society (Lees 2018). Outbreaks of violence, such as those in Chemnitz in the summer of 2018, demonstrated that tensions rooted in asylum debates remain high (Knight 2018). Within this context, it is increasingly important to consider how cities provide long-term accommodation for the thousands who need significant support to establish their new lives in an unfamiliar country and culture.

Throughout Germany, finding available permanent housing proved difficult, but it is within major cities such as Berlin, on which this chapter focuses, where affordable housing pressures made the issue particularly acute (Katz et al. 2016). In 2017, Berlin experienced the greatest global increase in property prices and in 2018 it was ranked as the number one city for European real estate investment and development for the fourth year in a row (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2018). Refugees in 2018 had to contend with this often overpowering search for profit in the contemporary neoliberal city, and some 27,000 refugees still lived in institutionalized shelter provided by the Berlin Landesamt für Flüchtlingsangelegenheiten (LAF – the state office for refugee affairs) in August 2018. While the emergency shelters catered to the most basic needs in their provision of accommodation, meals and hygiene facilities to refugees as they applied for asylum, the new community shelters are instead intended to provide long-term shelter as refugees attempt (and mostly fail) to find their own accommodation. These new structures are neither refugee camps as commonly understood, nor can they be considered proper urban dwellings. Instead, they are a type of imitation home: an ambiguous space wherein refugees supposedly choose to live, but in reality have little choice as they attempt to establish themselves in the city.

This chapter seeks to provide insight into the development of refugee shelter in German cities by interrogating the spatial distinctions between emergency and community shelters. It focuses on one of the most problematic cities, Berlin, to explore the transition from one type of shelter to another, which has largely been internationally ignored. It examines the development of arguably the most iconic shelter in Germany, the former Berlin-Tempelhof Airport, which transformed from an emergency shelter to a community shelter, a *Notunterkunft* to a *Gemeinschaftsunterkunft.* In this chapter I explore the various architectural characteristics and fundamental

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logics that define these shelter typologies, examining their sociopolitical implications. In essence, I ask what do an emergency shelter and a community shelter look like and what do they mean? By examining the evolution of a single site, this chapter contributes towards a growing understanding of a broader urban process of shelter situated in space and developing over time, revealing the extent to which specific contexts create distinct spatialities, but also the challenges and meanings that are general to all the city's shelters. Approaching the refugee situation shelter by shelter, city by city and country by country will help to begin to disentangle and elucidate the complex web of camp-like structures that has proliferated throughout Europe since 2015.

Tempelhof: An Urban Spectacle of Asylum

Of all Germany's emergency shelters, none arguably captured the same level of imagination and international attention as the Berlin-Tempelhof camp. This was at one point the largest in Germany, but it was the context for which it became famous. The camp was situated in the hangars of the former Berlin-Tempelhof Airport: a building originally constructed by the Nazis, which went on to play a key role in providing supplies to the city during the Berlin Blockade in 1948–49 and acted as the iconic gateway for arrivals to West Berlin during the Cold War (Copley 2017). Because of its history, the entire site stands under *Denkmalschutz* (historic monument protection), meaning that nothing can be added that will permanently affect the structure. Refugees came to dwell behind the building's imposing neoclassical façades, which were made from scintillating Muschelkalk stone.

The building's monolithic architecture has long attracted film-makers; indeed, its aesthetics also became the dramatic backdrop to cinematic explorations of the German refugee situation in Karim Aïnouz's 2018 film *THF Central* and Ai Weiwei's 2017 film *Human Flow*. In 2008, the wider airfield became Berlin's largest public park after the airport closed, and it made headlines in 2014 due to a public referendum that legally protected this exceptionally popular place from future urban development (Fahey 2015). However, the camp forced the protective legislation to be overturned, causing significant upset for some locals as they feared this would open up the park to real estate developers. The building was chosen to host a camp because it was state-owned and offered a large area in which to temporarily house refugees; however, it came with historical, architectural and political baggage that produced multiple tensions (Parsloe 2017). The site may be vast and open with sparse material features, but it is strikingly dense in its associations. Through its context, the camp became an urban spectacle of Merkel's open-door policy, attracting international politicians, academics and journalists (Katz et al. 2018).

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Notunterkunft A Shelter of Emergency

The municipal government had already discussed the possibility of using the former airport to accommodate refugees in the spring of 2015, months before Merkel's open-door policy. Yet it was not until late October that year that the plans came to fruition. Like many other emergency shelters, the timescale between confirmation and opening date was exceptionally rapid. Tamaja, the social service company that ran the emergency shelter, were given a single weekend to prepare one of the hangars for its first residents. Arrival numbers into Germany had reached their peak by the autumn, resulting in a lack of resources and a situation of uncertainty that effectively shut down the city's administrative structures for refugees.

The emergency shelter established in Tempelhof's hangars had two primary functions: to sort refugees and to offer temporary shelter. It was a centralized site to concentrate a particular population, which could be registered and categorized under complex migration legislation and consideration of legal statuses. It was, in effect, a concentration of state power that sought to determine 'worthy' and 'unworthy' asylum seekers; it also became a space to house migrants who had been accepted for asylum, but were yet to be transferred to more permanent governmental accommodation or find their own accommodation in the city. Throughout its existence, the emergency camp was not a pleasant environment, and the earliest iteration was the most structurally basic and problematic. Tents, each of which housed six bunk beds, were hastily erected inside one of the hangars. Portaloos were placed outside on the airport apron due to the building's unsuitable ancient plumbing. Residents had to be taken by bus to nearby swimming pools to shower at designated times. The airport's similarly ancient heating system proved to be inadequate, as Berlin's infamous winter began to bite. Keeping the hangars at a habitable temperature was an impressive feat, though operating the new heating system would cost the Berlin government 20,000 per day (Smale 2016). In such difficult conditions, tensions ran high and culminated in a physical scuffle in a food queue in December 2015. The event was sensationalized by the international media, which took the opportunity to criticize the living conditions and highlight internal camp divisions (Hall 2015).

However, the quality of accommodation and facilities did improve as the geopolitical situation became more stable. Shelter structures became more formalized both in their administration and architecture: open-top living cubicles made of prefabricated boards quickly replaced the tents, while on-site shower facilities were constructed and the original toilets were refurbished in each hangar. Security checkpoints to the hangars were implemented with swipe-card access for the residents, as well as airport-style security scanning facilities. There was a noticeable dissipation of tension as

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