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The refugee camp as urban housing

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ABSTRACT
This paper is a call to examine refugee camps and urban housing as interlinked phenomena. By comparatively examining the spatial-material arrangements of three Syrian refugee camps in Jordan, it suggests that the 'how' question (or how to plan refugee camps) has invited the housing agenda to appear spatially. In the Jordanian case, this has led to the production of three distinctive models of camps-housing namely a ghetto, a gated community and a mass housing project. In the German context, it has led to the production of camps phased into permanent and hybrid models of housing. Finally, and by underlying that the camp is first and foremost a form of urban housing, it suggests that the concepts, themes and analytical tools developed in housing studies has the potential to unpack the complexity of the camp and how it interlinks with our cities and urban realities today.

Introduction

It is unquestionable that, despite their intended temporality, refugee camps represent a form of housing. Many camps around the world have developed into complex urban environments that are difficult to be distinguished from cities. Some have been fully integrated into the city and its structure, offering accommodation for thousands of refugees, migrants and even city dwellers. Other camps on the opposite are rather visually noticeable, newly established and less integrated. In both cases, the refugee camp accommodates refugees and displaced persons, and thus, represents a form of urban housing. But, the ways in which the 'refugee camp' and 'housing' meet are rarely explored.

In literature, forms of urban housing such as ghettos and gated communities were sometimes assimilated to camps. For instance, Michel Agier (2011) noticed that camps and ghettos evolve similarly because both are distanced from the state and attached to the human experience of 'refuge', therefore, camps and ghettos are parts of a global matrix of marginalized spaces (Agier, 2009, 2016). Similar arguments were made by other scholars as well. For example, and building on the notion of urban

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citizenship and adopting a historical view to urbanization, AlSayyad & Roy (2006) suggested that the camp is similar to ethnic quarters in medieval cities. They say that: 'like today's camp, the ethnic quarter of the medieval city was a space of exception, one in which urban citizenship was suspended through the flexibility of sovereign power' (ibid: 15). Other scholars, extended the assimilation between camps to gated communities and ethnic quarters of today (Dikeç, 2009; Diken, 2004; Flint, 2009; Picker, 2017; Wacquant, 2004). While these arguments are valid and important; the relationship between 'camps' and 'urban housing' is reduced to its political dimension. In particular, the politics of exclusion and the camp as a 'state of exception' (Agamben, 1998), are used as conceptual articulations on the city and its different quarters. This result into parts of the city's urban housings and quarters considered similar to camps in their marginalization – spatially, politically and socially. But is this the only way in which refugee camps and housing are interlinked?

This paper has two objectives. The first is to show that the relationship between 'urban housing' and 'camps' is a quintessential one, deeply rooted in architecture and space, transcending the politics of exception. And building on that, the second objective is to call for a new research agenda that examines 'camps' and 'urban housing' as interlinked and intertwined phenomena.

To do so, the paper will explore the spatial-physical layout of three refugee camps that were built around the same time, for the same displaced population and within the same host country. These camps are Zaatari, the Emirati-Jordanian, and Azraq that were built between 2012 and 2014 to accommodate Syrian refugees in Jordan. By examining the distinctive spatial layout of each camp, and the planning process that led to its production; the paper argues that the 'how' question – particularly: how to build refugee camps, which is both theoretical and practical, has opened up the door for different housing agendas to manifest spatially and materially. It also suggests that the actors in charge have a big role in shaping the spatiality of the camp, and these spatialities may vary from a ghetto-like camp, into a camp with high quality services that resemble a gated community, to a mass-housing-like camp. To support this argument, the paper brings further examples from the German context to show how the planning of refugee camps is increasingly merging with the housing agendas producing hybrid 'camp-housing' realities.

Methodology

The analysis and argument of the paper follow an inductive approach that aims to generate 'claims' from 'observations'. While the use of inductive reasoning means an indefinite gap between 'claims' and 'observation' (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010), this paper does not intend to generate an ultimate truth that delude the ambiguity of reality (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Nor does it intend to claim that refugee camps represent a specific form of urban housing without the other. Instead, it is used according to the 'explanationist' school which gives credibility for inductive reasoning when it is able to provoke thought and open new fields of inquiry (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010).

The argument of the paper is structured using a comparative case study approach. This approach is suggested to be most suitable for spatial studies that aim to address

process-oriented phenomenon across sites and scales (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). In this case, it supports the examination of both: the planning and spatializing of each camp, and the physical-spatial analysis of its final layout.

To do so, the paper relies on both qualitative and quantitative data. It includes statistics, documents and reports produced by humanitarian agencies and local news, which are contrasted with personal observations, walk-alongs and in-depth interviews from the field. Particularly, the paper builds on the author's extensive research in Zaatari camp between 2014 and 2017 and on a field visit to the Emirati-Jordanian camp in April 2016, followed by frequent visits to Azraq camp during 2017 and 2018. During this period, several interviews were made in Zaatari camp with refugees and its site planner in 2014 and 2016; one interview with a refugee in the Emirati-Jordanian camp; and two interviews regarding Azraq camp: one with a refugee and one with a site planner.

The empirical data discussed in this paper is gathered by the author during his PhD at the Technische Universität Berlin and work as a researcher for the project 'Architectures of Asylum', based at the Collaborative Research Center 'Re-Figuration of Space' (SFB 1265). Funded by the German Research Society (DFG), the project looks at process of spatial appropriation in refugee camps in Jordan and Berlin, and thus utilizes further observations obtained from the field to support the arguments made in this paper. Before starting with the analysis, however, the paper will give a short introduction about the relationship between camps' planning and housing and then proceed to the case studies.

Refugee camps' planning and the housing question

Interest in refugee camps' spatiality and planning has increased significantly within the last ten years. In social sciences, on the one hand, addressing camps' spatialities is often utilized as a way to address (bio)politics and agency (Hyndman, 2000; Martin, 2015; Ramadan, 2013; Sanyal, 2011), or to provide an ethnographic account on how camps evolve and become spatially complex over time (Agier, 2002; Peteet, 2005). Architects, on the other hand, paid attention to how camps are being planned, designed and built.

James Kennedy (2004, 2005, 2008), for instance, criticized the design of camps as suggested by the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Based on clear calculations, he proved that the available planning standards are not sufficient and will become problematic as soon as refugees start to expand slowly beyond the space given initially for them. While Kennedy's critique to camps' planning was pragmatic and practical, Manuel Herz was more critical. In particular, he connected camps' planning with colonialism, suggesting that 'it mirrors the mechanisms and patterns of 19th-century colonialism that intended to bring the values of the Enlightenment to *wild* or *savage* Africa and the Orient' (Herz, 2008, p. 285, emphasis in original). Thus, the UNHCR planning model was criticized for being 'naïve' and not practical enough, but no alternative solutions were offered.

Few years after, the notion of 'participation' was gaining momentum in the field of planning and architecture, and therefore, made its way to the camps. Stevenson & Sutton

(2011), for instance, suggested that the active participation of refugees into camps planning can provide a better layout arrangement, spatial organization and sense of ownership. To do so, the camp management needs to offer refugees a spatial framework and equipment to work with, and they will be constructing the camp. This utopian image of 'participation' as catalyst for camp's planning was challenged as soon as it hit the ground. Refugees in Palestinian camps looked skeptically at projects that used the notion of participation to improve the spatiality of the camp. As explained by a refugee in the West Bank: 'why do we need planning, we are a refugee camp! Camps do not need playgrounds or parks … This is something for cities. Do you want to transform the camp into a city?' (Misselwitz, 2009, p. 371). Beyond the discourse on camps and cities (Agier 2002; Grbac, 2013; Petti & Hilal, 2013); this has proven that the deeply political connotation of camp space cannot be simply overlooked. Other scholars working in camps through participation realized how quickly camps' turn into complex networks of power-relations that are also neglected in camps' homogenous planning (Al-Nammari, 2013, 2014; Hanafi & Misselwitz, 2009; Hassan & Hanafi, 2010; Oesch, 2014). Based on that, attempts to improve the camp spatially, or even reconstruct it (Hassan & Hanafi, 2010), proved to be highly political and power-related.

Current literature on camps' planning seems to be more captured by this nuanced notion of power. While it appears earlier in the writings of Foucault (2007, p. 31) where he draws on the similarity between the 'Roman camp' and city planning; other have investigated its impact on the planning of camps today. Irit Katz (2017), for instance, and looking at how refugee camps in Northern France are arranged spatially, suggested that power could give the camp two visual appearances depending on the source of power. She suggests that the camp will look 'formal' when reflecting the disciplinary power of bare life, and 'less formal' when it is structured by the power of refugees' everyday life. While this observation remains very general and difficult to explain the situation of camps in-between; in previous work and building on the Lefebvrian perception of 'far' and 'near' orders (1996), I suggested that camp's planning and spatiality is the result of two conflicting orders: a techno-managerial humanitarian order obsessed with standardization and homogeneity, and a socio-cultural order that stems from refugees' understanding to the world spatially and socially (Dalal, 2013, 2014). While the use of 'orders' here helped understanding how the camp spatiality changed over time –as will be explained in the case of Zaatari camp; the notion of 'power' was investigated further. In a recent article that compares the 'innovative' planning practices in Jordan and Germany, we noticed that planning is used as a tool to camouflage control over refugees while claiming the opposite (Dalal et al., 2018). This shows that power and politics are intrinsic parts of camps' planning and spatiality, but what about 'housing'? How come that the housing agenda do not appear in camps' planning although the camp is, first and foremost, a form of 'temporal' urban housing?

It is difficult to say that a committed analysis of camps spatiality and housing exist. However, recently, camps and housing were juxtaposed in a historical search of the meaning of refuge and its architecture. In his book *Displacement Architecture and Refugee*, the historian Andrew Herscher followed the evolution of shelter design and the humanitarian architecture to suggest that it is highly intertwined with the '*Wohnungsfrage*' or the 'Housing Question' proposed by Friedrich Engels (1970).

Although that this juxtaposition followed a series of dispersed events from all over the world and across history -such as the labor workers housing in industrialized London; displaced accommodations in Greece; the architecture of Le Corbusier and Alvar Aalto; and the colonial camps in Africa and Nazi camps in Germany-Herscher's argument helped to provoke the long forgotten links between camps and housing, but failed address it clearly. In his book, Herscher suggests that: 'when the state imagines refugees as members of the labor force, architecture for refugees is oriented toward *cities*; when the state imagines refugees as members of its citizenry, architecture is oriented towards *housing*; and when the state cannot imagine refugees as either citizens or workers, architecture is oriented towards *camps*' (Herscher, 2017, p. 8 emphasis in original). This means that the 'camp' is used as a way of distancing refugees, and 'housing' is built only for those who are considered relevant for the state. It also builds on a distinction between camps as temporal structures, and housing as permanent structure. But how do these distinctions apply in urbanized camps that house thousands of displaced populations worldwide?

At the end of his book and based on recent developments in camps and the humanitarian system, Herscher makes a shift in his argument. Particularly, he observes that the agendas of the neoliberal economy, housing and humanitarianism are colliding through architecture. He says that:

> While the accommodation of refugees can be at least notionally distinguished between housing, camp, and city over the course of the twentieth century, the distinctions between these architectures is collapsing in contemporary humanitarianism. Contemporary refugee spaces are increasingly housing refugees, locating housing in camps, and connecting camps to urban labor markets all at the same time (2017, p. 119).

These observations end here, and no further arguments are made. Thus, based on this provocative account, I will argue that the 'how' question (how to build refugee camps) have opened up the door for the housing agenda to manifest spatially and materially. By comparing the spatial arrangements of three refugee camps that were built around the same period (between 2012 and 2014), for the same population (displaced refugees from Syria) and in the same host country (Jordan), I will show how the involvement of the housing agenda has led to the production of refugee camps that are so different spatially, presenting three forms of urban housing: one that is complex and spatially challenging that is similar to a ghetto; one that is carefully planned and supplied with high-measures and top-end services that is similar to a gated community; and one that is planned collaboratively with the hosting state resembling a mass-housing project. Moving forward from the Jordanian model, I will also show how this discourse extends to the European context through the camp models developed in Germany. Finally, I will argue for the need to open develop new research agendas that are committed to understanding the spatiality of the camp through the conceptual, analytical, and empirical tools developed in housing studies.

Syrian refugees in Jordan and the production of camps

The abrupt of the Syrian war in 2011 has led millions to be displaced worldwide. In Jordan, UNHCR suggests that about 650,000 refugees are registered. The majority of

these refugees live in cities and only 20% (120,000 refugees) are hosted in camps. While Jordan is not a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention due to its sensitive demographic balance (Al-Kilani, 2014), Syrians were welcomed in Jordan as guests without any juridical conditions (Achilli, 2015; ILO, 2015). However, the situation became more complex with the increasing influx of refugees to Jordan, and especially, the arrival of Syrians without legal documents. Those were placed in a series of small transitional camps such as Al-Bashabsheh complex, the Stadium and Cyber City. Over time, these camps were closed and only four remained: Zaatari (opened in July 2012), King Abdullah Park (opened in April 2012), the Emirati-Jordanian camp (opened in April 2013), and Azraq camp (opened in April 2014). While the King Abdullah Park was built over a small fenced park hosting few hundreds of Syrians, it will not be considered for this comparison. Instead, attention will be given for the other three camps since each camp has influenced the planning and the spatial organization of the one that was opened after – by that each of the camp makes a spatial experiment linked to the previous. The following section will examine the spatial organization of the first camp, Zaatari.

Case study 1: Zaatari camp as an informal settlement

In contrast to other camps, the planning of Zaatari was very experimental. Not only due to its expansion in size and becoming a site where refugees and infrastructure accumulates; but particularly because of its shifting power structure. Early images of the camp show rows of tents placed on a deserted land near small village called Zaatari as well. During this phase, namely between July and December 2012, the planning of the camp was rather improvised – especially that Zaatari camp had only 19 days before its opening in 28 July 2012 (Al-Rai, 2012; UNHCR, 2012a), and the space was actually being co-produced. For instance, while refugees were settling in space, relief organizations were simultaneously implementing the infrastructure necessary for the camp like communal latrines (WASH) and kitchens. However, the increasing waves of refugees arriving to the camp exceeded the initial plan of 15,000 persons (UNHCR, 2012b),[1] and could be perceived as a fluid shelter-space was gradually expanding.[2]

Under these conditions, UNHCR and relief organizations were losing control over the camp space (Dalal, 2015a; cf. UNHCR, 2014a). To regain their sovereignty, Zaatari was extended and planned using the *Handbook for Emergencies* (UNHCR, 2007). According to the UNHCR site planner during 2014: 'the handbook is our bible … It is however our responsibility to respond to challenges as they happen on the ground'. Consequently, and in contrast to the fluid shelter-space that was evolving organically around the camp's entrance and Main Street, humanitarian disciplinary planning was imposed as a mean to organize the chaos and create an alternative order. The camp was divided into districts with clear boundaries each demarcated by a wide asphalted street. Districts contained blocks equally situated in space. Each block was composed of a matrix of shelters (caravans), placed in order, and surrounded by communal latrines, kitchens and multi-use spaces.[3] Finally, a holistic

| January 2013 | February 2013 | July 2017 |

Figure 1. The spatial transformation in Zaatari camp from disciplinary planning to informal urbanism (Source: Author based on Google Earth).

vision of how districts, services, blocks, accesses and infrastructures are linked together were expressed in a Master Plan (UNHCR, 2013a, p. 9).

The Master Plan shows two distinctive areas – a planned one (diagram-like) and an abstracted zone with artery streets (organic-like). The newly planned part was set to accommodate refugees as they arrive to the camp, and to assist in relocating those living in the organic part (UNHCR, 2013a, p. 9). Yet, this strategic plan collapsed against the changing dynamics that has changed the surface of the camp every day. Not only refugees were able to move their shelters around the camp in response to socio-cultural relations (Dalal, 2014, p. 57); but the camp has seen an unprecedented rise in refugee counts. In a short period of time, numbers jumped from 50,000 in January 2013 to 200,000 in May of the same year (Dalal, 2014, p. 57). Careless of the humanitarian vision of the camp, refugees squatted everywhere: between and inside the planned shelter units (prefabs), in schools, they created markets, made riots and demonstrations, and made use of all available resources (including communal infrastructure and electricity) to plan the camp differently. Eventually, an alternative spatial structure appeared (Figure 1) – one that responds to socio-cultural beliefs and fulfils daily needs (Dalal, 2014, p. 57). Throughout this process, and because these shifting power relations allowed refugees to 'occupy' the camp (cf. Agier, 2011a, p. 180); Zaatari camp was transformed into one of the 'largest urban centers in Jordan' (UNHCR, 2013b).

Yet, this urban center and its residents were not praised for their resilience and ability to convert the camp into a more humane and livable environment. On the contrary, Zaatari camp was perceived as 'chaotic', 'out of control', and resembling a 'major urban disorder' – which is exactly how informal settlements are often described by technocratic and state institutions (Bayat, 1997). This applies visually

where the 'informal' nature of Zaatari camp is almost unmistakable: Houses made out of metal sheets, canvas bags, Styrofoam, wooden pieces, metal nets, water tanks, tents and caravans settling over a sandy layer of mud and swaps; massive amount of electricity cables tapped into the lighting poles; small alleys and cul-de-sacs not easily accessible by cars and big vehicles (Figure 6).

However, is that enough to assimilate Zaatari camp to an informal settlement? In his fascinating writings, Asef Bayat (1997) associates urban informality with a process of 'quiet encroachment'. He explains that

> … the disenfranchised groups carry out their activities not as conscious political acts; rather they are driven by the force of necessity—the necessity to survive and live a dignified life. Thus the notion of 'necessity' and a quest for dignity justify their struggles as 'moral', 'natural' and 'logical' ways to survive and advance their lives (Bayat, 1997, p. 58).

This was exactly how refugees described their need to take action in Zaatari camp during a field visit in 2014. While UNHCR provides a one-space shelter unit for a family of five persons to live in, many expressed their discomfort: 'imagine that because we all have to live in this room, my young daughter has to change her clothes in front of her brother!! What a shame!! We never did that in Syria'. This has legalized their need to take action, in particular to create homes and social spaces that challenge the humanitarian order.

Additionally, the camp developed one of the most robust economies in the surrounding area. However, while concepts like ownership might not apply legally in the framework of camps; refugees developed their own system. As expressed by a shop owner during a field visit in 2014: 'once the shop is here, nobody can take it'. What if someone wants to occupy this place, he replied 'nobody will let him do that' he answers. While these actions extend to housing as well (Dalal, 2015b, 2014), they make Zaatari camp an informal settlement similar to other contexts. Drawing on his experience Bayat (1997, p. 55) explained that:

> … the same sort of phenomenon occurs in the Asian setting. In South Korean cities, for example, almost anyone can easily set up a pushcart on a vacant street area, but once a spot is taken and business established, it is virtually owned by the vendors.

Moreover, and during 2013 and 2014, Zaatari camp had a ghetto-like territorial hierarchy known as street leaders. Those were mainly in charge of communication with relief organizations and distributing goods to the street inhabitants in which they live (Dalal, 2014, p. 121). While this system was substituted by the authority of tribe leaders today, it resonates similar structures that can be found in slums in Cairo for instance (cf. El Mouelhi, 2014).

Based on the previous, Zaatari camp – like any slum in the world, was not only rendered as dangerous environment full of criminals, mafias and prostitution; but has rendered authorities – whether the state in the case of slums, or humanitarian organizations in the case of the camp as 'irrelevant' (Bayat, 1997, p. 67). This makes Zaatari camp similar to an informal settlement per excellence. Yet to assume that all camps are informal or ghettos is very misleading, especially when we examine the following case.

Figure 2. The site plan of the Emirati-Jordanian Camp showing its spatial arrangement (Source: Google Earth).

Case study 2: the Emirati-Jordanian camp as a gated community

The conflictual planning patterns and strategies that were applied in the case of Zaatari camp have given rise to the question, which has become more compelling than ever: How refugees should be accommodated in camps? In other words: *how a refugee camp should be planned?* This question has opened up the door for new agendas to appear between the lines of traditional camps' planning. In April 2013, and in the attempt to supporting in managing the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan, the Emirati government decided to open up a new camp following up its *own* standards. To elude the awkwardness that might result from naming it after the Emirates only, the camp was named the Emirati-Jordanian camp (EJC) as a gesture of collaboration. As its name implies, the camp is fully run, managed and operated by the Emirati government which covers up 'all the expenses of *hosting* the refugees at the camp, including food, clothing, basic goods and medical aid' (The National, 2013 emphasis added).

Despite the fact that EJC was built shortly after Zaatari (around 9 months after); its spatial organization and management reveal a different approach to camps' planning. For instance, the size is much smaller. According to one of its residents during a field visit in 2016; EJC is composed of 12 zones each including around 120 caravans and was extended by the end of 2013 to include additional 140 caravans (Figure 2). Thus, it could be comparable to one of Zaatari's planned district in regard to size; yet far from comparable in terms of spatial organization. For instance, the entrance – or the 'base-camp' in UNHCR's language, is constituted by two connected spaces: one small court surrounded by prefabs for Jordanian officers and a well-decorated spacious area for the Emirati Red Crescent (ERC). Its streets are clean, proportional to

Figure 3. Impressions from EJC showing the different approach to the camp space.

its surrounding, paved with asphalt, demarcated with colored bricks resembling a 'sidewalk', and equipped with trash pins and signs. Whereas these streets delineate 'residential zones'; facilities like shared kitchens, multi-purpose halls, wedding halls, stores, schools, mosques, playgrounds and a park with a landscape design are located in proportional distance to refugees accommodated in the residential zones, makes it well-planned and fitting to the human-scale (Figure 3). As described by the humanitarian news agency IRIN (2013):

> There are none of the normal sounds you would associate with a refugee camp – construction, sizzling pans or hawkers' cries – and apart from the rumble of the garbage truck and the periodic call to prayer, an almost muffled silence hangs overhead … There is no smell of sewage either, no open drains; the sturdy power lines and satellite dishes dotted around give the air of an established town, not a refugee camp in the middle of the Jordanian desert …

Indeed, walking in the Emirati-Jordanian camp generates the impression of being in a small resort, holiday camp or a quiet village; except that refugees living in those 'residential zones' are destined to remain there until repatriation is possible.

One of the aspects that limit the margins of informality in EJC is the small size that makes it easily manageable and controllable. Families of five members are entitled with only one private space, which is the fixed, about $15\,\mathrm{m}^2$, space of the caravan. Within these spaces, refugees' identities, culture and spatial expressions are compacted and made only visible through the openings of the caravan – its door and two windows. While this affects intimacy levels of privacy among families; it also

produces tensions and encourage sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) (UNHCR, 2013c). Therefore, their spatial agency is reduced to wooden seats built near by the doors. Additionally, and unlike Zaatari camp,[44] caravans and families are associated and linked directly through an electronic addressing system. As expressed by Malik, male in his 40 s, from Daraa and worked previously in Saudi Arabia before ending up in EJC: 'this camp is very well managed and controlled … Nothing is informal here at all'. Yet what brought people to this camp, which is far from any traces of urban life, is the need for security. According to him,

> people living in this camp are among the poorest Syrians in Jordan … Here you find those who couldn't cope with life outside [the camp], and very little from Middle class … Timing and situation brought these people together to this camp … the target was to find security and safety at any cost.

In addition to its friendly scale, high security, and clean space; EJC is known for its amenities which makes it resemble an oasis of services in the middle of the desert. According to IRIN (2013):

> Unlike Jordan's main Zaatari camp, there is no over-crowding at EJC, currently home to around 3,600 residents. All the refugees have caravans instead of tents, and enjoy hot showers, electricity and street lighting … Every refugee receives three hot meals a day, carefully cooked on-site by a private Jordanian catering firm. The aluminium take-away boxes are delivered direct to people's doors and those with dietary requirements for conditions like diabetes are given special meals. There are tea and coffee buffet halls where refugees can help themselves 24/7, TV rooms for men and women, a children's playground, a football pitch, a supermarket and a mosque.

This combination of enclosure, amenities, and the 'alternative' identity revolving around high standards and services is exactly what makes the Emirati-Jordanian camp similar to a gated community. While refugee camps have been long assimilated to gated communities due to their function as spatial enclaves producing new types of urban citizenships (Alsayyad and Roy, 2006; Diken, 2004; Grant & Mittelsteadt, 2004); their planning i.e. spatial organization and management were rarely referred to. According to Blakely and Snyder (cited in Grant & Mittelsteadt, 2004), the production of gated communities revolves around three main ideas: Life Style, Prestige and Security. These appear strongly the planning of EJC. For instance, according to IRIN (2013), the staff of the EJC constantly referred to it as a 'five-star refugee camp' dedicated to 'the most vulnerable', including women, orphans, people with disabilities, and big families, but at the same time, excluding single males (The National, 2015). Therefore, in the case of EJC it is not only its fences that make it a gated community, but its underling 'aspirations for higher social status and social distinction within particular social groups' (Roitman, 2010, p. 34). This does not only support the argument that gated communities have different urban forms and levels of gating (Grant and Mittelsteadt, 2004), but clearly shows how they intersect with refugee camps spatially beyond the usual discourse on exclusionary politics.

Case study 3: Azraq camp as a mass housing project

In order to face an expected 'mass displacement' towards Jordan (Al-Rai, 2013), and in March 2013, the Jordanian government approved the plan to build a new camp in

Figure 4. A plan of Azraq camp showing its spatial arrangement and plots design (Source: Author based on Google Earth).

Azraq area where EJC is located (UN, 2014). While this decision was taken in response to the waves of refugees arriving to Jordan on a daily basis, 2013 have seen a gradual decrease in refugee counts. Therefore, the camp was kept in a 'state of readiness' until the decision to officially open it in 30 April 2014 (Jordan Times, 2014; UN, 2014, p. 4). In contrast to the stereotypical case where refugee camps are built and planned rapidly and in an emergency situation, Azraq camp took around a year of 'careful planning and attention' (Jordan Times, 2014). According to the UNHCR representative in Jordan, Azraq camp was perceived as a role model in camps planning and implementation. He described literally as 'one of the best planned refugee camps in the world' (Jordan Times, 2014).

Thinking about *mass* displaced populations, the camp was *massive* in size. It stretches over a vast area of about 14.7 km² in which the model of sub-camps (villages), or districts in the case of Zaatari camp, was finally implemented. As it stands now, Azraq camp is composed of five sub-camps or villages: four dedicated for the residence of refugees, and one is used by the management as 'base-camp'. Connected to the main road between Zarqa and Azraq in the middle of nowhere, the camp is planned over a clear network of roads and infrastructure. The four villages are divided by clear hierarchical order: each village is composed of districts; each district is made of plots; and each plot is composed of two rows of 6 identical shelters (Figure 4). Additionally, the villages are planned as sufficient and self-contained entity, each containing services like schools, NGO sites, a community center (Makani enter) and a market space composed of planned rows of stalls.

As repeated constantly, the planning of Azraq camp was informed by 'lessons learnt' from Zaatari camp (cf. UNHCR, 2014b). These lessons however manifested themselves spatially in two aspects: disciplinary planning and shelter. Disciplinary planning has always been a form of managing camps and their population through

strict spatial arrangements that were mentioned earlier in this paper. However, in Azraq camp the planning paradigm enforced control over its population and ensured that the police and the humanitarian organizations are, in contrast to Zaatari camp, in full charge (cf. Hoffmann, 2017). This appears in the arrangement of villages that were placed in considerable distance from each other as if they are attempting to prevent 'groupings', 'riots' or 'contact' among refugees in a bigger scale, which makes them more controllable. Similarly, external visitors, like researchers, cannot simply access the camp by walking. A police officer at the check point answered while I attempted to access the camp by foot in 2016: 'no one is allowed to enter the camp without a car … It is impossible to reach the villages by walking from here. You don't imagine how far they are'. Additionally, the base-camp is placed as far as possible from the villages so they cannot be disturbed, manipulated, or attacked like in Zaatari camp (cf. UNHCR, 2014a). This is while the entrance of refugees and their guests was separated by a far access point near the highway and closer to the villages (Figure 4). All these aspects indicate a clear interest in maintaining control over the population of the camp throughout planning. Within these settings, informality flashed back resistance to disciplinary power, and thus was reduced to minimum through policing. As expressed by Abdullah, 25 years old who lives with his family in Azraq camp: 'we cannot move caravans like people did in Zaatari … Imagine, the manager of the camp once said: I want to stand between the houses and be able to see the end of the camp!'. Yet, margins of informality were still negotiable in Azraq camp. According to an engineer in the NRC team for shelter, refugees used to dismantle parts of the empty shelters and use them to build parts of their homes or connect the empty spaces between the shelters. The police would warn them if change is majorly visible so they would fix it in the fear of forced repatriation, but still, people would do it in the next day.

This takes us to the second 'improvement' that occurred in camps' planning patterns, which is the design and provision of a special type of shelter, called the transitional shelter or T-Shelter. The new accommodation type resembles a big metal hut with one door, fixed to the ground, and comprised of one space including a small toilet and a kitchenette (Figure 6). In addition to its tilted roof that would resist the impact of occasional rain and snow, and taking cultural aspects of privacy into consideration – which appears in the indirect door proposed for the shelter yet not implemented for economic reasons; the T-Shelter is interesting for several reasons. Not only due to its semi-permanent state, but also due to the ways it has managed and produced.

According to UNHCR's statistics, 36,605 refugees were living in Azraq camp in January 2018, out of 53,782 registered there. It also mentions that 8,823 shelters were occupied out of 10,479 that already existed in the camp. Prior to receiving a shelter, refugees are registered on an online system that connects refugees with their residence place in the camp. This makes them easily locatable in the vast space of the camp through their address which constitutes of digits and initials reflective of the spatial hierarchy in which they live (for instance V03/D02/P10/S05). In a striking contrast to Zaatari camp, and in order to acquire a shelter, refugees need to sign an agreement with UNHCR and the SRAD stating the duties and responsibilities of each

Figure 5. An example of the certificate for receiving a temporary shelter in Azraq camp.

party (Figure 5). For instance, it declares that refugees should be in charge of clean-ing, whereas UNHCR should handle maintenance. It also claims that refugees leaving the camp should hand on the keys of the shelter back to UNHCR and that while they are residents in the camp, they cannot sell or rent out the shelters in which they live. These aspects show a drastic shift in the understanding of what a shelter in a

Figure 6. A comparative view on size and urban fabric of the three camps from the top: Zaatari, EJC and Azraq (Source: Author based on Google Earth).

contemporary refugee camp means. This shift is not only concerned with the shelter itself, but with its modes of production.

According to Ruwa Al-Abweh who worked with UNHCR on the design and implementation of the T-Shelter: 'I was surprised that the government agreed to build a transitional shelter in Azraq although … not permanent, but semi-permanent'. This marks a transition in the understanding of time and the intention to integrate a long-term perspective into the camp and shelter design. But what stands out here is the process itself. As she explains:

> My manager was thinking: how this shelter can be first standardized for the Jordanian companies to be easily manufactured and built? How can the local economy benefit from it? We were discussing the details of the materials and their specifications …. More than once, we met with companies that work with metals and caravans and showed them the design with dimensions and technical drawings, so we consulted with them, on how to minimize waste and on what is most efficient way for manufacturing the sheets. They had also opinions about the shelter designs: how to close the corners … the best insulation, the budget as well … all that … At the end there was a call for bids, and we got different proposals [offers], so we had to assess the company and its capacities and see if they can deliver … Afterwards, the implementation phase started

Based on that, UNHCR has been taking up a new role in the process of planning and implementing refugee settlements beyond its classical approach. In fact, in Azraq camp, it has operated as a hybrid entity between a real-estate company and a planning agency, dealing with governmental sectors, manufacturers, designers and companies to deliver an accommodation solution for refugees. This solution with its

standardized design units, big scale, and repetitive implementation resembles a mass housing project. However, to put this into perspective, it is important to mention that this new role corresponds to a structural change within UNHCR itself. In June 2014, UNHCR released a new policy called an *Alternative Policy to Camps* in which it obliges its staff to avoid building more camps, and to 'phase out' existing camps or transform them into 'sustainable settlements' (UNHCR, 2014c, p. 12). This is because refugee camps can have 'significant negative impacts over the long term for all concerned' and can turn into a holding facilities for refugees that are exhausting to finance and maintain (UNHCR, 2014c, p. 4). Acknowledging that camps might be taken as a solution by the hosting countries, UNHCR (2014d) introduced a new *Global Strategy* for shelter and settlement design. In this policy UNHCR no longer sees the camp as a temporary arrangement of shelters conducted via humanitarian codes, but as a planning projects where UNHCR is required to deal with actors, associating camps to national resources and development plans, producing comprehensive master plans, and expecting to deliver flexible formats of housing options beyond the traditional camp (UNHCR, 2014d). While this policy is set within a short time frame (2014–2018), it represents a paradigm shift in the way refugee camps are perceived, and thus planned and built.

Looking at Azraq camp, one could immediately think of mass housing projects: a vast area of land, filled with the same repetitive housing typology, placed carefully in space through extensive planning; resulting, nonetheless, with a monotonous look which lacks vitality and creativity. In her research on mass housing, Juliana Maxim (2009, p. 8) suggests that the global transition towards mass housing occurred in the 1950s during the rise of socialist regimes and was essentially induced by a shift in thinking towards 'mass' scales. Therefore, the individual house was replaced with collective mass housing, the architectural design was replaced with urban planning, and the architect was replaced by collective of entities (including architects) often led by the state. In Azraq camp, not only a sense of a mass housing project can be noticed visually – almost immediately, but the way in which it was produced makes it very similar to any mass housing project. First, it was built to accommodate a 'mass' group of displaced people; second, the use of urban planning prevailed over the usual distribution of shelters; and third the camp was built with the extensive involvement of the state in collaboration with UNHCR and other ministries. All these aspects make Azraq camp similar to a mass housing project par excellence – not only visually, but also in ways it was produced and constructed.

Reflections on case studies: from Jordan to Germany

Refugee camps have been associated with ghettos, gated communities and mass housing before. These associations however were the result of articulating the politics of exception on the city and its diverse quarters. In this paper, I tried to go beyond this socio-political assimilation, by looking at the spatial organization of three refugee camps that were built around the same period of time, within the same host country, and for the same population. First, it is clearly obvious, that while each of these camps is structured around the same shelter policy (a family of five is hosted in one

Figure 7. Visual comparison between the Emirati-Jordanian camp on the left and a migrant camp in Oman on the right (Source: image on the left by the Author; image on the right by Leon Faust/ETH Studio Basel, 2013).

shelter space), the overall spatial organization of the camps are very different (Figure 6). For instance, the informality of Zaatari camp can be overwhelming. Walking inside the camp, one would see prefabs (disassembled and reassembled in all possibilities), washing lines, plastic sheets, blocks, wooden beams and palettes, old tents, small gardens, electric cables, clothes, mattresses, bicycles, colorful flip flops (of all sizes), water tanks, pipes, small seating areas, house and shops, boxes, birds, sounds and smells – all contested and assembled in one place. Azraq camp on the other hand is very spacious and well organized. It appears as an industrial settlement, built with metal huts and planned neatly on the hills, surrounded with wide asphalted streets, and separate areas for amenities and services. As explained by an Egyptian colleague when looking at its maps: 'this looks exactly like the housing projects built in the deserted areas around Cairo'. In contrast to the above, the Emirati-Jordanian camp looks like neither of both: it is moderate in size, planned to maintain a human-scale, with caravans placed in close distance to each other, surrounded by smaller asphalted streets with signs, mosques, a park and mini golf-carts driven by Emirati volunteers. While this reminds with vacation camps or small chalet resorts built next to the sea, the insistence of the Emirati aid provider to rank the camp as 'five stars' and 'vulnerable only' reflects an identity dimension that makes it similar to a gated community. Yet, beyond this comparative approach to camps spatiality and housing, the following can also be noted.

First, the spatial arrangement and layout of Syrian camps in Jordan was strongly influenced by the actors in charge. In Zaatari camp, for example, refugees' autonomy has led to the transformation of the camp into an informal environment that is difficult for humanitarian actors to navigate. In the Emirati-Jordanian camp, the layout of the camp reflected principles of 'aid' and 'humanitarianism' developed in the Arab Gulf. These are not only focused on serving 'high quality' services for its 'beneficiaries', but seem to be informed by the planning of migrant workers' camps due to striking visual similarities (Figure 7). Azraq camp on the opposite was planned by UNHCR when a paradigmatic shift was introduced. In particular, when camps were for the first time equated with 'sustainable settlements' and the need to collaborate with different actors was conditioned to any camps' planning. This led to visible

Figure 8. An image of the new accommodation provided for refugees in Berlin as part of the integration ladder known as the Modular Accommodation or the MUF (Modular Unterkünfte für Fluchtlinge).

'housing' characteristics in Azraq camp that are different from any other camp UNHCR has produced before.

Second, and in addition to the impact of the actors in charge, the camps' spatiality was influenced by a transitional shift in the Jordanian context. The question was not 'where' to host Syrian refugees, but 'how'? In other words, the question, 'how to accommodate refugees in camps' or 'how to plan refugee camps' has opened up the door for the housing agenda to manifest. This has resulted into hybrid spatial arrangements of camps-housing as described above.

The impact of the 'how' question on camps' planning and spatiality was not restricted to the Jordanian context. It appears in the German context as well. For instance, the refugee accommodation in Berlin started in hotels and abandoned buildings. With the increasing influx of refugees during 2016, new camp typologies were developed, namely the Container Village and the Tempohome. Both models resemble camps similar to those found in the Global South, built using temporal shelter units designed especially for each typology (Kreichauf, 2018). Since 2018, however, the German government in Berlin became more interested in providing long-term solutions for refugees. This has led to what is called the 'integration ladder' which practically aims to merge camps gradually with housing (Darweesh, 2019, p. 24). The suggested typology for this resembles a complete shift in the spatiality of the camp towards housing: multi-storey buildings, with rooms and shared areas (kitchens and

common rooms); yet fenced, controlled by security and access-restricted (Figure 8). The accommodation of refugees in Tempohomes also includes economic cycles as these housings are provided on the condition that refugees would pay the monthly rent suggested by the government. This rent is covered for refugees by the Agency for Work. While this might appear as a normal procedure among German bureaucrats and camp managers, it implicitly suggests that the merger between camps and urban housing is beyond spatial, extending to economy and touching upon the challenges of housing provision in the city context. This shows a different face to Engle's 'Housing Question' that is worthy of investigation.

Conclusions

This intention of this paper was not to question whether or not refugee camps resemble a form of urban housing. It also did not intend to show that camps' spatiality should resonate with a form of housing except the other. On the contrary, this spatial exploration of refugee camps was meant to suggest that camps and urban housing are merging today more than any time before. It argued that the resonance between housing and camps is not simply political, but extends to the spatial-material composition of camps and their different arrangement.

Based on that, this paper is a call for a new research agenda that is committed to exploring refugee camps as forms of urban housing. By that it is meant to deploy research techniques, strategies and concepts to examine camps thoroughly as an urban housing dilemmas and unpack the complex ways it is intertwined with housing prophecies and challenges facing our cities today. These examinations could extend from spatio-political topics to traditional housing themes such as housing economics, gentrification, ownership and property, real-estate market, affordability, housing policy, housing provision and typologies.

Cities will always be challenged by migration and displacement, and camps will always be built. Agamben warned that the camp will manage to disguise itself in ways that we will need to learn. In order to respond to Agamben's call, it is of utmost urgency to emphasize on 'housing' and 'dwelling', not only as a cross-cutting themes between camps and cities, but as the main underlying concepts behind the production of all camps – whether planned or unplanned, and whether in their emergency, transitional or urban forms.

Notes

1. Some relief organizations reported about 1000 refugees crossing the borders every day, mostly transferred to Zaatari (JRC and IFRC, 2012; UNHCR, 2013d).
2. During this period, tents were not the only shelter typology in Zaatari camp. Prefabs (or caravans) were entering the camp as donations by different actors.
3. For a detailed description of the planned and unplanned parts of the camp check: (Dalal, 2014, pp. 59–62).
4. In 2015, a structuring plan has taken place. This implied families to have an address and remain 'fixed' in place in order to construct a sewage system (UNHCR, 2016).

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