

# Introduction

## The Social Ordering of Space

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A relocated caravan, a piece of tent, a window removed from a caravan, a few concrete blocks taken from a communal latrine, a water pipe found near a communal kitchen, an electric cable detached from its place, few metal sheets removed from a warehouse, wooden beams found near the entrance and a smuggled bag of cement. These are the elements of a dismantled camp such as Zaatari. The original layout of the camp and the spatial arrangement of its elements were dismantled from their initial composition, and now it is time to recompose them.

Reassembling comprises the process of re-ordering the space of the camp. Dwelling as an inevitable need, and the social spaces around it, start to slowly distort the homogeneous and disciplinary order of the camp. The elements dismantled from the camp are then used to create porches, seating areas, guest rooms, curtains, bedrooms, bathrooms and gardens. The dismantling and reassembling enable the tracing of the physical-spatial transformation of the camp; a process led by the need to dwell. It puts the camp and the dwelling into a conversation with each other. The disciplinary nature of the camp aims to keep the space manageable, controllable and following standardized logic and a universal order, whereas refugees want to make the space liveable, and therefore diverse, meaningful, more humanized and possibly less orderly. Dismantling and reassembling the camp allows us to establish an analytical spectrum, a field of vision, a range of movement; between the camp — as the end of life, the biopolitical, the static — and the dwelling — as a manifestation of life and being, of politics, and of the lived and dynamic. The resulting structures echo the intensity and strength embedded in each side of the spectrum.

Dismantling and reassembling the camp are complimentary processes, and thus inseparable from each other. In the previous chapter, the focus was on how Zaatari camp was dismantled, and which aspects of its planning were affected. In the current chapter, the transition from shelters to dwellings will be focused on. Each attempt to dwell, to relocate a caravan, to expand a living space, to construct a bathroom and so on, means dismantling and reassembling the camp simultaneously. The intensity of these practices differs from one context to another, as they

are mostly dependent on the level of control and discipline enforced in a camp. Dismantling and reassembling produces a rupture in a camp's static, disciplinary and homogeneous spatial order. Thus, the conversation between the camp and the dwelling is permeated by power. If the efforts to control and manage the camp are at their full capacity, the dismantling process will be harder; conversely, the process will be easier if the control and management is weaker. The strength and intensity of the disciplinary machine of the camp can also vary over time, even within one camp. Nevertheless, dismantling and reassembling are always interlinked. In light of that, and for refugees to dwell in a camp, the camp must be dismantled and gradually dissolved. The elements resulting from this process are then utilized by refugees to construct new dwellings. By doing so, refugees begin to formulate new spaces, and to present a different spatial order; one centred around the needs and demands of social life.

## Reassembling and the social space

The practices of reassembling a camp reveal the significance of a buried and almost oppressed notion in their planning: the *social space*. In this book, I generally follow Lefebvre's reading of the social space — perceived not as fixed or static, but in constant movement and motion; like waves that vary in their intensity and spread, and therefore continuously overlap and conflict (Lefebvre 1991). The process of dwelling, perceived as an inevitable form of being (Heidegger 1971b), is interwoven with social space, and in turn, shaped by it. Changes within the social space induce changes within the dwelling structure and vice versa. Dwelling as a need to settle, to sleep, to store belongings, to socialize, to eat and so on, is no longer a static plan or a standardized layout implemented by engineers and the construction. Instead, dwelling, in the same way as the social space, is in constant flux. The transition from shelters to dwellings in Zaatari camp reveals the dynamics of self-building and how they are dictated by social space; dynamics that are less visible in cities today. Looking at the camp from above — using Google Earth for instance — shows a body in constant, subtle movement. The dwellings are continuously being built, re-built, extended, shortened, relocated, rearranged and redesigned, and so are the social spaces around them.

Dwelling in the camp is a process of reclaiming the body that was initially disciplined. The planning of the camp space and its shelters enforce a re-organization of the body and its social life. It separates this life and puts it into parcels, containers, shelters and infrastructures that are manageable and controllable. Therefore, dismantling and reassembling the camp is a revolutionary act; sometimes violent and often conflictual. By seeking to reclaim, to reassemble the pieces into func-

tioning compositions and to give social life its meaning, the space of the camp is reproduced. The camp is being dismantled and reassembled.

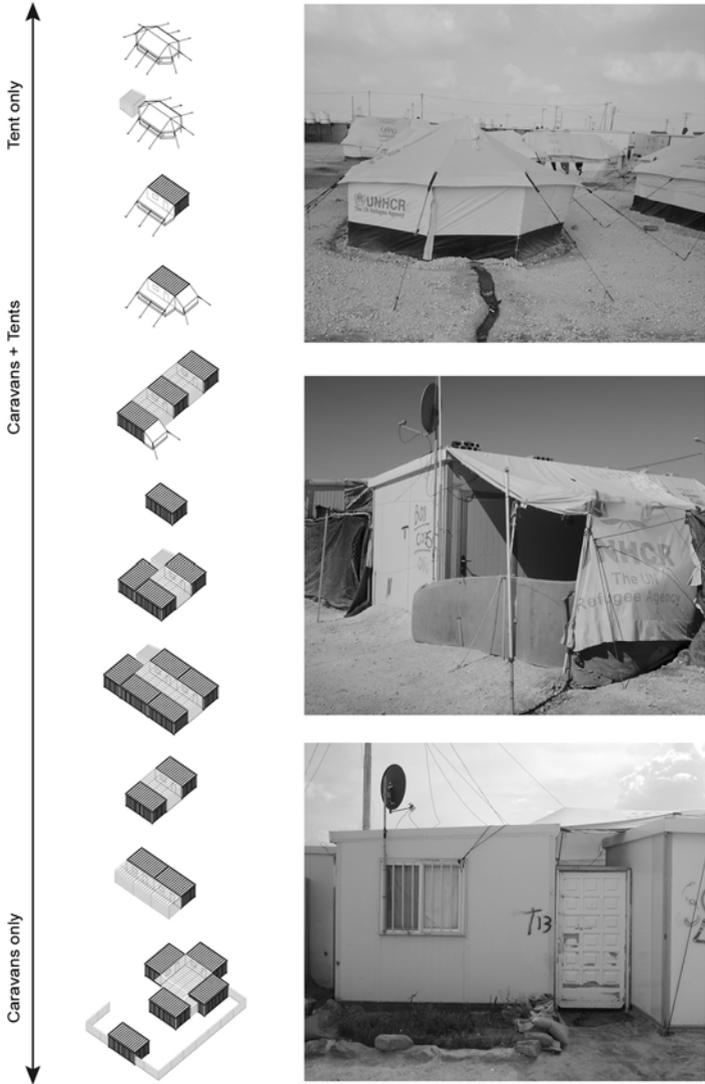
Just like the body, the process of dismantling and reassembling is never detached from the dynamics of everyday life. Politics, economics and social dimensions influence the ways in which dwelling occurs within a camp. The following two chapters focus on the politics and economics of reassembling, whereas the current chapter focuses mostly on the social dynamics. Nevertheless, as will be seen, social dynamics cannot be entirely separate from politics and economics.

To reassemble the camp, both the dwelling and the social space are informed by the practices, behaviours and preferences of the dwellers. This means that while some social dynamics may be seen as universal, such as the need for private space, these dynamics need to be understood as part of the unique social experience of the refugee group in the camp. Moreover, these dynamics are influenced by the tensions, similarities and contradictions between the social groups accommodated in these camps. Therefore, this chapter is directed towards the experience of Syrian refugees in Zaatari camp. The social dynamics generated in this camp — that have significantly influenced the practices of reassembling and dwelling — are tightly linked to the way of life, ideals, aspirations and means of communications established among this group. It is also linked to the differences apparent among refugees in Zaatari camp, such as class and urban origin. Accordingly, explaining the social dynamics of reassembling needs to be more detailed.

*An unusual dwelling arrangement in Zaatari camp, formed around the concrete foundations of what had previously been a water tower*



*The composition of dwellings in Zaatari camp in relation to shelter typology*



## The social dynamics of reassembling

The social dynamics of reassembling differ from one camp to another, and from one refugee group to another. In Zaatari camp, the dynamics have been influenced by aspects related to the unique social structure there. For instance, gender played a significant role in directing the process of re-ordering the space of the camp. Privacy was not simply a matter of visually separating spaces, but was a means of introducing a hierarchy of space, which is argued to be a common feature in Arabo-Islamic cities (J. Abu-Lughod 1987). The reassembling practices thus produced a spectrum of spaces, ranging from the private (the inner space of the shelter), to the semi-private (shared streets and alleyways) and to the public (the main markets, streets and *Souqs*). These spaces are actively demarcated and physically shaped through the arrangement of elements such as water tanks, washing lines, thresholds, doorsteps and even the gardens and gravel around dwellings. The abstract space of the camp and the shelter are dismantled and reassembled as social spaces. The reclaiming of visual privacy in Zaatari camp may be one of the most common dynamics with regard to the social sphere, but is not the only one and cannot be simply generalized. Producing visual privacy and the semiotics of space in Zaatari camp were influenced by gender, religion *and* the psychodynamics of the family.

In my research, I stumbled across the family — not as a rigid institutional entity, but as a socio-spatial composition that had a major influence on the dynamics of reassembling. The co-mapping method I introduced earlier (see Introduction), always resulted in steps in which the dwellings were reassembled; most frequently, based on changes occurring within the family. The arrivals of large and extended families in the camp meant that the standardized spaces of the shelter needed to be used and arranged to accommodate the socio-spatial relations within the family. The ways in which mothers and sisters, parents and children, aunts, uncles and so on, used the space, was reflected in the composition of the dwelling and its layout. One of the most striking aspects in this regard was that marriage always led to the *enclosure* of what appeared earlier as a very dynamic and fluid structure. In other words, marriage justifies the separation of a married couple from the ‘social body’ of the family, spatially speaking, leading to the emergence of new socio-spatial compositions within the dwelling. Similarly, aspects such as the death of a family member or the arrival of distant relatives also resulted in changes within the dwelling and how the camp was reassembled. To understand these dynamics, I relied on Suad Joseph’s notion of ‘patriarchal connectivity’, which explains the relations, psychodynamics and boundaries established in Arab families (Joseph 1999). These are then articulated on space and practices of reassembling.

The last form of social dynamics that influence practices of reassembling in Zaatari camp are those associated with the reconstruction and representation of identity. How can people express themselves in an abstract space such as the camp

and the shelter? Culture, memory and urban identity offer some answers. They provide the dweller with models that can be restored. However, to what extent can refugees completely restore the old? Practices of reassembling stand on the verge of what is new, what is old — and most importantly, what is possible. The refugee who performs the process of reassembling, becomes a creator; a painter. Some may be inclined to reproduce images of dwellings they are already familiar with. Others utilize a reservoir of knowledge about space that becomes a toolkit, from which refugees are inspired to paint new pictures, to produce new forms of dwellings. This *knowledge about space* is crucial in the ways refugees reassemble the camp. The connection between the dwellers and their identities, cultures and memories, are permeated by knowledge. Through knowledge, refugees begin to express the social dynamics related to their own story and personal experiences. In other words, knowledge may not at first appear to be strongly connected to the social dynamics of space addressed in this part of the book. However, the fact that refugees *re-assemble*, which is an act in space, means that the dwellers bring with them a set of socio-spatial dynamics that are not necessarily shared in common. This is because reassembling is a creative act that is influenced by the reservoirs of knowledge to which the dwellers are connected. For instance, it was widely common and acceptable to suggest that Syrian refugees reproduced dwellings resembling those in which they had lived before, but one of the striking findings in this research is that refugees do not necessarily reproduce replicas of their previous dwellings. Instead, they utilize various forms of knowledge, whether *implicit*, such as that learned through being embedded in a certain culture and identity, *subconscious*, such as that generated by the memory of the dweller, *borrowed* from different contexts, such as wanting to construct an ‘American kitchen’, or even *emergent*, such as hands-on solutions that are locally disseminated. Knowledge about space becomes a tool in reproducing *difference*; that is, an important dimension for shaping and using social space.

## Introduction to case studies

The following case studies present a rich ethnographic account of how refugees in Zaatari camp transformed their shelters into dwellings. The social dynamics of reassembling described above are apparent in all the case studies. Nonetheless, each of the three is used to represent the complexity of the process, and to highlight one of the social dynamics addressed earlier. In that sense, the case studies are not necessarily intended to create a clear distinction between the dynamics, but to situate them in conversation with each other by pointing out the specificity and the conditions of each.

While each of the cases seeks to underline one of the social dynamics that influence practices of reassembling and dwelling, they also aim to shed light on refugees' narratives, and to give them a voice in the process. Accordingly, instead of presenting these social dynamics as separate categories, I chose to place the emphasis on refugees' socio-spatial experiences. Each case study tells the story of a person, a family or a group of people, and their struggle to dwell. It also sheds light on specific spatio-temporal conditions in the camp, and the challenges engendered by them. For example, arriving at the beginning when the camp was newly opened left many refugees facing the challenge of dwelling amidst dense spatial and physical environments. The 'old camp' offers a good example, showing how navigating visual privacy within clusters led to different reassembling practices than those encountered in the 'new camp'. Similarly, arriving at the peak of the refugee influx in the camp during 2013 differed greatly from attempting to dwell in the least populated part of the camp after it had been closed to new arrivals. Issues such as the scarcity or abundance of resources and infrastructures were also intersected with the social dynamics. Therefore, each case study not only sheds light on one of these social dynamics, but also illustrates the challenge of dwelling in Zaatari camp at a certain point of time, and in a certain place.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that while aspects such as economics and politics appear through the case studies here — which will be explored in depth in the following two chapters — these case studies can be intense to read. Due to the richness of each case, and the complexity of the socio-spatial dynamics, I have tried to summarize various steps through graphics, which aim to provide a visual element to facilitate explaining these densely packed case studies. In addition, the case studies are meant to function as *openings* into the dynamics of reassembling. These dynamics portray the struggle of *bridging the gap between the shelter and the dwelling*. The results are not only hybrid — the outcome of reassembling all these social dynamics merging with the camp itself, but also continuously changing, shifting between infrastructures and shelter forms.

