

Chapter 6

Tents, Zinco and Cement

Temporariness and the Politics of Materiality

‘Is building with rammed earth possible?’ a British man, fully dressed in a suit, asked an NGO worker, wearing a vest, in Azraq camp. The British man was working for an organization specializing in safeguarding cultural heritage threatened by conflicts. The question came with the backdrop of a proposal to build a Syrian cultural heritage centre in the camp. Although this was not in Zaatari camp, the debate captures the essence of this chapter, which concerns temporariness and the politics of materials. The NGO officer working in Azraq camp was perplexed by the question, and could not find suitable words to express his confusion: not only because the British man was insisting on constructing a building in the camp, but also because it was not clear what material was suitable for the purpose. Is building with rocks possible? Should the building maintain a temporary appearance through the use of metal sheets, tents and caravans? Is rammed earth a material assigned with temporariness or permanency?

On materiality and temporariness

Materiality and temporariness in camps seem to be interlinked, yet only a few scholars, such as Lucas Oesch (2018), have paid attention to this relationship. Through his work in Al Hussein camp in Jordan, Oesch showed that temporariness should be understood as a fluid concept. This allows it to be manipulated and dealt with differently over time, and means that it was within these shifting boundaries of temporariness that the camp was able to structurally evolve and turn into a part of the city: Amman. The politics of temporariness nevertheless lie in their connection to the dispositive functioning of the camp. This dispositive aspect, as Foucault explained (see Bussolini 2010), comprises written and also unwritten rules. As Oesch (2018, 244) noted: ‘the impossibility to bring about changes, and especially material changes, in the Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan due to their

temporariness is not a written rule'. The vagueness of temporariness, vis-à-vis permanency, keeps the camp in a constant state of material fluidity. For Oesch, the camps 'are not frozen places, but spaces of active waiting whose materiality is constantly being changed according to the changing conceptions of temporariness held by multiple actors, such as inhabitants, state authorities, international organizations, landowners, and political movements' (2018, 245).

In addition to Oesch, other scholars, such as Nasser Abourahme, have used the materiality of the camp as a starting point to unpack the complex nature of its structural evolution over time. Using the case of Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank, Abourahme argues that the bio-political approaches to camps 'never come to grips with the practices and built structures of everyday life through which subjects and objects, people and things come into mutually constitutive relations'. For that reason, and according to him, 'they miss an entire level of materiality that comes to "mediate" subjective action, but over which refugees have limited authorial power' (Abourahme 2015, 3). The importance of Abourahme's (2015) analysis lies in its ability to reveal the material layer, or what he calls 'the world of objects in camps [which] refuses to remain silent'. The relationship between cement and the camp — which is to a large extent particular and special in the Palestinian case — allowed him to trace the camp's vertical expansion and reveal the nuances involved in this process at the level of the everyday life, and through regarding the camp as a constantly changing political project. For that purpose, Abourahme (2015, 4) seeks to present the camp as a 'kind of assemblage — that is, both object and *process*'. While the connection between temporariness, politics and materiality requires further investigation, and is itself worthy of a book, I will pick up on the last quote and try to expand more on the relationship between the camp and the assemblage theory.

Assembling, or 'dismantling and reassembling'?

Since the publishing of *A Thousand Plateaus* by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), geographers and social scientists have been inspired to articulate this theory on multiple aspects of urban life, such as the city and the dwelling (cf. McFarlane 2011c, 2011a). In addition, and as mentioned above, Abourahme and others (for instance Meiches 2015) have suggested that the camp is an assemblage. The nature of the assemblage and the assembling, allows us to reflect on the core of this current book: politics.

In the first chapter, I illustrated how the planned camp — which is an important distinction here from other spaces — is structured to form a disciplinary machine in which refugees are controlled and managed. From the outside, the camp remains an assemblage of people and objects, and thus complements what has been written to date by Abourahme and even Collin McFarlane, who brilliantly argued

that dwelling is a process of assembling. Yet what remains absent from these views, is the distinctive nature of the space and how it affects assembling. To clarify this point, McFarlane (2011c, 649) suggests that through dwelling, people assemble elements ‘from the sea of the everyday life’. He gives an example of a dwelling created in a favela, in which different elements were used to compose the space. Similar examples can be seen in *unplanned* and *spontaneous* refugee camps, where refugees tend to bring together elements — both given to them by relief actors, and from the surroundings — to create dwellings. Thus, dwelling indeed has an ‘assembling’ element to it that cannot be denied. However, to accentuate the political nature of dwelling in planned camps — camps in which dwelling is unwished for, and unwanted — I alternatively use the terms *dismantling* and *reassembling* in this book.

My intention here is nevertheless not to coin new terms or enter a maze of jargon, but instead to highlight the political nature of dwelling in camps in the first place. Planned camps are disciplinary places, where elements, infrastructures and materials are pre-given. It is a politico-material system in which refugees are ‘stored’ and ‘warehoused’ temporarily, until a solution is found. Within such distanced spaces, physically and symbolically, we cannot simply speak of assembling without exploring the ways in which refugees first dismantle the camp. Once dismantling begins, assembling and reassembling also start to unfold. This chapter clearly shows how the three processes intertwine. For instance, while specific materials such as textiles and plastic sheets were often taken from tents, and concrete blocks were dismantled from communal latrines and kitchens, other elements including cement and metal sheets were not actually dismantled from the camp. They were brought from the surrounding villages and thus only *assembled*. However, to maintain clarity in the text and to accentuate the political nature of this assembling — which at its core resists the politico-material order of the camp and its disciplinary machine — I will continue to refer to these practices as *reassembling*.

Time and politics as material dynamics of reassembling

So far, what we have called the ‘material dynamics of reassembling’ has examined the various dimensions embedded in the material; dimensions that refugees had to negotiate while reassembling. The economics of the caravans, their exchange market, and their architectonics, sizes, structures, components and quality were all aspects that had to be considered while reassembling the space of the dwelling. In this chapter, I expand the analysis by revealing two other dimensions that were strongly assigned to the materials in Zaatari camp: politics and time. As mentioned in the anecdote at the start of the chapter, temporariness and its politics pose unforeseen questions about the nature of *building* in camps. Any attempt to construct, becomes a question about the durability of the materials used, their height, and

their structural ability to be more permanent or to allow vertical expansion. In this analysis, I focus on key elements that contributed to the construction of dwellings in Zaatari camp and complemented the role of the caravan mentioned earlier. These are the tents (including textile and plastic sheets), metal sheets (zinco), concrete blocks and cement. On the one hand, and as Abourahme suggested, the purpose of this chapter is to reveal and give voice to the materials that were reassembled in the dwellings and played an important role in its progression and construction. On the other hand, the aim is to show how the dimensions of time and politics were negotiated, and how that affected the material order of the dwelling. Here, it is important to note that all the materials in the camp are affected by the various dimensions mentioned in this and the previous chapter. Therefore, elements such as tents and zinco, for instance, also have economic and architectonic dimensions that had to be considered, whereas the caravan represents a non-enduring material that is suitable to represent and symbolize the temporariness of camps. The dimensions explored in this chapter, thus apply to the previous one as well, and vice versa.

To begin with this material analysis, I start by looking at the role of the tent, and how it was transformed from a shelter into a building material, and thus, how it was dismantled and reassembled.

Tents

In comparison with caravans, tents are easy to dismantle and reassemble. Their lightweight structure, movability, versatility and basic form — which is made from canvas, and thus similar to textile or plastic sheet but heavier — made it an excellent component to facilitate the process of dwelling throughout the different stages of the transition.

In Zaatari camp, refugees were given traditional UNHCR family tents: a ridge, double fly tent with elevated walls. According to the specifications found in the UNHCR *Shelter Design Catalogue*, the tent has a floor area of about 16 square metres plus two 3.5 square metre vestibules, making a total area of 23 square metres. Each of these tents costs 420 US dollars, excluding transportation costs, and can last for about one year (UNHCR 2016, 9). This type of tent, however, is not the only one used in the camp. Some sources suggest that 160 tents were also distributed by the Saudi National Campaign in December 2012 (Al-Rai 2012b). These tents were mentioned during some interviews, and were claimed to be larger in size (about 6 x 8 meters) and to have stronger fabric.

Over the period from August 2012, to September 2012 and to February 2014, the overall number of tents increased from 1000, to 2400 and to 6500, respectively (UNHCR and REACH 2014). However, these numbers subsequently decreased, as

tents were gradually replaced by caravans, and in November 2015, the camp was declared as 'tent free' (Al-Shawabkeh 2015). This does not mean that tents entirely disappeared from the camp, but instead that tents are no longer used for sheltering refugees and for accommodation purposes, and that the camp has been completely caravanized. The utilization of tents for purposes other than accommodation was observed at an early stage. A survey conducted in the camp during February 2014 found that 70 per cent of the tents in the camp were being used for other purposes: 32 per cent were used to provide additional space (for example, storage), 20 per cent as a living space and only 18 per cent were used for sleeping. The utilization of the shelter in ways that contradict its initial purpose is a form of dismantling. The dismantling of tents meant that they were transformed from a shelter unit into an auxiliary building material, from a container space into a textile, from a whole into a component, and ultimately, from an emergency substitute for a lost dwelling into an element of a newly composed and reassembled dwelling.

Tents, in addition to textile and plastic sheets, were easy to utilize for the purpose of dwelling. They were initially given to refugees as part of the camp, and its 'material assemblage'. The availability of these tents has facilitated the practices of reassembling, since it allowed the emerging dwelling structure to be camouflaged with textiles, covered with logos (UNHCR, WFP, SNC, etc.), thereby giving the impression of being 'temporary'. Using the tent as a 'veil' to cover solid constructions underneath has also been observed earlier as a dwelling tactic in Palestinian camps, where temporariness was enforced by policing practices. In these camps, refugees would use the tent as a cover and gradually build solid dwellings underneath using concrete blocks (see Sanyal 2010). In Zaatari camp, however, the caravanization process has given less dominant role to tents over time; thus, they were expected to be used differently. Yet for a longer period, the tents, plastic sheets and textiles have been used as wrapping around the dwellings, hiding what was emerging underneath, and simultaneously giving them a temporary and humanitarian appearance.

At a later stage, the role of tents, textiles and plastic sheets started to crystalize. They became a flexible, temporary and cheap substitute for walls, especially in the absence of caravan sheets, which are more expensive, or metal sheets, which are the common option. The possibilities of reassembling with tents are innumerable, especially due to the elasticity of this material and the creativity of refugees. One example concerns a refugee family of more than five people, who were given two tents: a traditional UNHCR tent and a larger one donated by SNC. Instead of living in two separate tents, the smaller one was placed within the other to create a space that added a new layer, protecting the visual privacy of the family and allowing for new functions of the space. As the interviewee explained:

The Saudi tents were more beautiful than those of the *Mufawadiyh* [UNHCR]. They were also bigger and stronger ... this one was about the size of two caravans. So, we built the smaller tent inside the big Saudi tent, and the remaining space between them we used for storing stuff like spoons, dishes, stoves, mattresses, and for washing.

In this case, the material dynamics of reassembling not only included the political, but also the architectonic. The presence of two different types of tents — with different material qualities and dimensions — allowed the refugees to create an ‘onion-like’ dwelling with two layers. This also shows that the purpose of reassembling was to dwell, and not to simply reproduce familiar or inherited dwelling designs, for example a courtyard house. Dwelling was about negotiating the social and material dynamics at the same time.

Gradually, the number of caravans started to increase, which gave the tent a new role. The material qualities of both the tent and the caravan were considered during the reassembling practices. The tent became a supplementary element for whatever compositions the caravans were used in. In the case of single caravan unit, tents were used to create additional spaces around it. The most common use being a semi-private space in front of the caravan entrance, where guests could be received and where the visual privacy of women could be protected. Less common was to add a side room for raising domestic animals or constructing a bathroom. The tents would be attached to the top of the caravans using stones and tyres, and then stretched to the ground where they could be fixed, and sometimes cemented. The tent was used to create another layer of visual privacy around the dwelling and to protect its residents. This layer could be vertical, thus substituting a wall or a fence, or horizontal, substituting a roof, or a combination of both. In addition, tents were sometimes used as spatial components when dwelling arrangements endured change or were not complete. For instance, in Eyad’s case, an additional tent was placed in the middle to be used as a shared kitchen and bathing area, and sometimes to reserve a space. The flexibility of the tent allowed it to play the role of a facilitator, assisting refugees in reaching more stable socio-spatial arrangements, and thus solidifying dwelling structures. The characteristics of the tents (and similarly, textiles and plastic sheets) in terms of their strong association with temporariness, their cheap prices, and flexible material quality and sizes, constitute some of the dimensions that had to be considered during the reassembling practices.

A tent and plastic sheets (with the UNHCR logo on them) used to construct a wall and a roof supported by a structure made from wooden beams



Corrugated sheets (zinco)

Corrugated metal sheets, locally referred to as ‘zinco’, are the second most used element in the construction of dwellings in Zaatari camp after caravans. At the beginning, zinco was distributed by relief organizations as part of winterization kits so that refugees could create extensions to their tents to be used for cooking and to place heaters in. Shortly after, the presence of zinco in Zaatari camp started to increase. It was brought from the surrounding villages and smuggled by refugees commuting between the camp and the villages. The gradual accumulation of zinco in the camp was later facilitated by the emerging workshops and realtors around the camp. As part of their profession, realtors would usually be able to construct and alter parts of the dwellings using zinco, which was also sold there.

The use of zinco changed over time. Initially, it was used to create small extensions to the tents, but the gradual provision of caravans made it an important element in the reassembling process. By relying on the caravan as the main unit around which dwellings were constructed, zinco functioned as a substitute for walls to delineate boundaries. Usually, walls are built from durable materials such as concrete blocks, cement or wood, but in Zaatari camp, such elements were prohibited. Instead, zinco was used to create external walls, kitchens, bathrooms,

extensions, roofs and fences. To support its lightweight structure, other elements including metal and wooden beams were used as weight bearers.

The structural qualities of the zinco allowed it to complement the caravan in many ways. If the caravan layer were to be hidden in the camp, one would be more likely to encounter pieces of zinco than anything else, in all possible forms and locations. In that regard, in places where caravans were densely packed such as the old camp, zinco was scarcely used, and vice versa. In the new camp where caravans were sporadically distributed, and thus needed support, zinco was utilized to complement the role of the caravan. Here, it is important to note that constructing with zinco was also associated with economics. Although its demand and availability did not generate a market in the way that caravans did, some families were not able to afford to buy zinco, and thus to build with it. One family accordingly explained the use of sewn pieces of textile to construct an awning: 'here, we don't have zinco like others do'. In that sense, the structural and economic qualities of the zinco affected the ways in which it was reassembled within the dwelling.

Zinco being used by a professional craftsman to construct a fence as an extension to a shelter



A falafel kiosk constructed entirely with zinco



Zinco is associated with temporariness. Therefore, it was tolerated as a building material in Zaatari camp, even though the material was brought from outside the camp and was not distributed internally or provided to refugees for free. The temporariness of zinco is reflected in its material characteristics: a thin, fragile, removable, lightweight structure with poor insulation qualities. The temporariness of zinco, and thus its political dimensions, explains why it was tolerated by the camp management, allowing refugees to use it extensively for markets and for completing the main parts of their dwellings. The politics of zinco were also extended to another Syrian camp in Jordan: Azraq. Here, shelters were already built with corrugated metal sheets, in the form of huts, and as ‘lessons learnt’ from Zaatari (see Dalal et al. 2018). However, the political dimension of zinco seems to transcend the Syrian experience in these two camps, and dates back even earlier to Palestinian camps, where building was controlled, and thus ‘permanent’ materials such as concrete blocks and cement were prohibited. While these politics of temporariness were negotiated over time, refugees had to endure living with zinco for long periods. This is best captured in the way a Palestinian artist from the Shatila camp in Lebanon described his relationship to zinco, saying:

We live in the shadow of ‘zinco’; it has been with us for more than sixty years under the same conditions and hardships. With time I discovered that there are many shared characteristics between us and ‘zinco’...And so all my shapes and characters

gradually began to be made of 'zinco'. I'm a 63-year-old youth and I'm made out of 'zinco' and will remain 'zinco'. (Cited in Abourahme 2015, 10)

The presence of zinco in some Palestinian camps is still evident. One of them is the Jerash camp for ex-Gazan refugees, where building with cement had long been prohibited in order to prevent the vertical expansion of dwellings. Although many families replaced the initial zinco sheets of the shelter with concrete blocks, the zinco roofs thus stand as clear evidence of the political nature of temporariness and its impact on materiality in refugee camps across the world. In Zaatari camp, using concrete blocks is still prohibited and controlled. Yet refugees found ways to utilize it while they reassembled their dwellings.

Concrete blocks

Unlike the corrugated zinco sheets, concrete blocks were directly dismantled from the camp. As mentioned in the first chapter, between 2012 and 2014, relief actors were building communal latrines and kitchens for refugees as part of their programmes. These were located across the districts, and were densely built between shelters in the old camp. However, from 2015 onwards, these facilities were removed by the camp management. This was partly because refugees were constructing their own toilets and kitchens, and partly because these facilities were being heavily vandalized.

Tracing the concrete blocks in Zaatari camp gives a clear example of how dismantling and reassembling operate. It also highlights the contradiction within the spatial logic of each actor: relief organizations were building communal facilities and complementing the layout of the camp (its politico-material order), while refugees were simultaneously dismantling them and reassembling them to construct their dwellings (following a socio-spatial order).

Reassembling with concrete blocks in Zaatari camp meant negotiating the political and temporal dimensions assigned to them. As is widely known, concrete blocks are among the most common building materials used for construction today. Their material qualities include a small size, scalability, movability, relatively low price, and most importantly, durability and high insulation quality compared with tents and zinco. These qualities explain why concrete blocks are considered a favourable option in terms of construction; however, they also make the concrete block suggest 'permanency' in every aspect.

The relationship between permanency and concrete blocks made the latter prohibited to build with in Zaatari camp. Although this is not a written law, refugees and UN actors are aware of the politics assigned to the material, and aware of the consequences that may follow from attempting to build with it. During a visit to

Zaatari camp in 2015, I was accompanied by one of the site planners in the camp, where we encountered a dwelling that used a few pieces of concrete block to support a zinco wall. The planner's comment on this practice was:

It is forbidden to build with concrete blocks here ... If the police saw it, they would demolish it. One day the camp management found out about a man who had built parts of his dwelling with concrete blocks. Guess how? ... They saw it on the cover of a news report. The poor man! The next day, the dwelling was gone.

This example of building with concrete blocks in camps, which are managed as disciplinary machines, highlights the difference between *assembling* and *reassembling* explained earlier. In this context, although refugees assemble materials to construct their dwellings, the process is politically contoured. In other words, introducing concrete blocks to the realm of the dwelling in such camps means negotiating the politics of temporariness assigned to it. The notion of *reassembling* underlines these negotiations as part of the everyday practices and attempts to dwell in a camp. To emphasize the role of reassembling more, it may be worth looking at how refugees negotiated the political and temporal dimensions of the concrete blocks.

In Zaatari camp, concrete blocks can be found in almost every dwelling. However, since they have not been used to build walls, they are tolerated by the management. According to observations and interviews, concrete blocks were first introduced as part of the ad-hoc kitchens and bathing areas constructed nearby the tent and the caravan. Their use was to delineate the boundaries of the septic hole or to raise parts of the area few centimetres above the ground for sanitary purposes. At a later stage, concrete blocks were used to delineate parts of the dwelling, such as front and back gardens, and as steps placed in front of the caravan doors. In that regard, the concrete block was used as supplementary element, and was never given a leading role in the reassembling process.

Negotiating the politics of temporariness in camps also has a great deal to do with visibility. In Palestinian camps, especially those that were heavily policed during emergency phases, building with concrete blocks was also prohibited. To overcome the political limitations imposed on using the material, refugees would build inside the tent, and thus use it as a 'veil' to cover the structure emerging behind (see Sanyal 2010). In a similar manner, refugees in Zaatari camp sometimes use concrete more extensively when it is hidden inside the dwelling. This is especially the case when constructing a working space inside kitchen or bathing areas.

Not all families were shy, however, about using concrete blocks. Strolling around the camp, one is likely to notice parts of the external walls built with rows of concrete blocks, stacked on top of each other. In such instances, the height of this structure plays a role: is it a 3 metre wall built with concrete blocks, or just a 1 metre support? In other words, what physical dimensions are assigned

to temporariness and permanency, and how does that affect building in camps, as well as reassembling practices? Tracing the concrete blocks in Zaatari camp allows us to explore the fluid boundaries between temporaries and permanency. It also shows us that the position and size of the blocks matter, and affect the way they are politically perceived. The refugee camp sheds new light on the politics of a material such as the concrete block that is so common and so negligible, yet has a significant role in the urbanization of camps, as well as in revealing the contestation between temporariness and permanency, and between dwelling and the camp.

To reassemble with concrete blocks in Zaatari camp, refugees had to negotiate the shifting boundaries between temporariness and permanency. While these practices remain 'hidden' or 'flattened' on the ground, and therefore discreet, refugees have not hidden their desire to transform their current dwelling structure into something more permanent. Whenever this point was raised during interviews with refugees, the immediate answer would be: 'Are they going to do it, *finally*?' 'They', of course, refers to the management of the camp. The question is posed to me, as I am perceived as someone who may have a connection to the relief actors, and thus, knowledge about the subject. Further, 'do it' refers to replacing caravans with concrete blocks. However, what is interesting here is the hope that was shared among all interviewees: of transforming the temporary dwellings into permanent ones. Such hopes are often contradictory and contested, especially when they relate to the notion of 'home'. In this regard, I remember a discussion with an old man in Zaatari camp, who, despite the immense heat within the caravan and the hardships imposed due to the poor material quality of the dwelling's structure, expressed with anger: 'no, I would never replace this caravan with concrete blocks, because I want to go back to Syria! This is not my home!' Here it is worthwhile to again highlight the distinction between on the one hand, the *home* as an idea and a concept attached to a person's perception of where he or she 'belongs', and on the other hand, *dwelling* as the immediate practice of living, settling and being. It is also important to mention that this quote did not emerge during a discreet and anonymous interview, but was stated during a film shooting session, and thus, in front of a camera. What I am trying to express here, is that notions of home, belonging and permanency are all illusory. They can always change and shift according to the context and one's own opinion. Nevertheless, what remains is the immediate practice of dwelling; that is, not a desire but a need, and not a concept but a reality. As shown so far, this practice unfolds as refugees begin to dismantle and reassemble the camp, and by doing so, negotiate the dynamics of the social and material realm. To complete our analysis, one important material remains: cement.

Cement is used as a flooring element connecting caravans and creating smooth surfaces that can be cleaned and used for seating, especially during summer



The 'sixth façade' (cemented floor) becoming visible after a dwelling had been removed or relocated



Cement

Cement is another material that is ‘prohibited’ to use in Zaatari camp. Although this has not been explicitly stated anywhere, cement is perceived as a counter-element to the temporariness of the camp, and therefore a threat. During 2014, local authorities disrupted the smuggling of ‘large amounts’ of cement to Zaatari camp, claimed to have reached ‘10 tons’ (Al-Dustour 2014). Such events were perceived as a local ‘success’ (Al-Rai 2014), showing the clear association between cement and national politics. Preventing cement from arriving in Zaatari camp is considered a Jordanian success, in making sure that the camp remains temporary, and is not transformed into a permanent settlement — a scenario that Jordan has witnessed before.

Cement has the capacity to complicate the relationship between temporariness and permanency in camps. The threshold between the two becomes unclear, and a state of ‘permanent temporariness’ prevails. Cement, in contrast to other materials, glues the camp together, and its incremental, informal, progression and growth becomes in one way or another fixed, and thus irreversible. Building on his experience in Palestinian camps, which represent an extreme case in which cement was used, Abourahme (2015, 15) notes ‘It is cement that “concretizes” presence in the camp, and welds futures and fates into its built environment, exacerbating tension between rootedness and return’. Indeed, cement complicates the relationship between temporariness and permanence. The boundaries between the two blur and merge into each other, and the space of the camp becomes more paradoxical than ever.

In Zaatari camp, the use of cement was negotiated. This again underlines the importance of what is referred to in this part of the book as the material dynamics of reassembling. Although the camp has only existed for about eight years, refugees have nevertheless remained aware of the politics of cement and its connotation with permanency. On the one hand, the local authorities prohibit the use of this material for building, yet on the other, refugees have negotiated the politics of cement during their reassembling practices. This was clearly evident in a camp survey during 2014, showing that cement was the most commonly-used material to modify shelters in Zaatari camp (UNHCR and REACH 2014, 16). Nevertheless, if cement is prohibited, then why is it the most used material in the dwellings?

Cement was not given to refugees, or dismantled from the camp. It was smuggled in small quantities by refugees commuting between the camp and the surrounding areas. The acceptance of cement, in Zaatari camp, began with its association to hygiene. During the first years, it was obvious that refugees’ reliance on and acceptance of the communal facilities (WASH) was declining, and the tendency to build their own toilet and kitchen next to a shelter became more prominent. While the camp management did not interfere directly in the process (as a site planner

put it ‘we did not tell people what to do, but we were watching what they did and followed them’), Zaatari was gradually turning into a swamp. This may sound like an exaggeration, but during 2014, the most common image of the camp was a tent or a caravan surrounded by muddy sand. According to interviews, and as shown in the first case study, an emerging practice was to cement the septic hole and the area surrounding transitory spaces used for bathing, washing and waste. While dwellings were being socially shaped, cement was ‘reassembled’ on the ground, creating an auxiliary extension of the space. The presence of cement on the ground made it appear less threatening. Cement was turning from a threat to the national politics of Jordan, into a subtle extension of the shelter, used for hygienic purposes.

The use of the cement evolved with the growing complexity of the dwelling space and the advancement of the reassembling practices. Cement gradually found its way inside the dwelling space, forming one of its most important faces: the floor. If Le Corbusier considered the rooftop the fifth façade, we could consider the floorings of the dwellings in Zaatari camp as the ‘sixth façade’. The humanitarian actors and the Jordanian police had no objection to this façade. In fact, it is most likely that such utilization of cement was welcomed by relief actors, since it improved the hygiene standards of the shelter. As a housewife explained:

Of course, we have cemented floor! It is very important, especially for me. I can wash it so it stays clean and prevents sand from entering our Beit ... you know, otherwise, we will be living in sand! And the kids play outside every day ... they keep coming in and out ... so I must wash the floor because my daughter has asthma ... Oh and I forgot!! Cement pavement is necessary to prevent rats from entering underneath the caravans ... the other day our neighbours killed one. Oh, they are becoming so big these days!

The flexibility of using cement, and its ability to be easily cast and removed, allowed it to be used even during transitional phases, when dwellings were composed of a caravan and few tents. With the replacement of tents, the cemented floor inside the dwelling became the lively core of the dwelling, as the quote shows. Family members would gather there during summers, as it was slightly cooler than the caravans, and people could even install a small fountain in the middle, as witnessed in some rare cases. The physical qualities of the cement — including its flexible use, hardness, smooth surface, ability to insulate the ground, be expanded as needed and even improve the thermal conditions of the dwelling — mean that it gained significant importance in Zaatari camp. Cement also had financial dimensions that had to be negotiated while reassembling. Although tracing cement may warrant a study of its own in the camp, its prices reached about 150 JDs (200 euros) according to interviews. This, of course, includes the support of ‘professionals’ from the camp, who would be responsible for casting the floor and ensuring that the finishing was well executed.

Cement allows us to trace the shifting contours of temporariness and permanency in Zaatari camp. On the one hand, it was tolerated for being connected to refugees' hygiene and well-being. Thus, its presence in the dwelling was perceived as a *necessity*, just as dwelling itself is a necessity, unfulfilled by the shelter, and therefore tolerated and allowed in the camp, even though it violates the initial planning regulations. On the other hand, this does not mean that it could be used extensively around the camp. In fact, to reassemble with cement, refugees had to use it *discreetly*, and in areas where it is least visible. This means mostly inside the dwellings, and sometimes in common areas — for example the cul-du-sac shown in the first case study — where it creates a smooth surface that can be washed and where children can play. Yet most importantly, it must stay away from the eyes of the police officers and relief workers and be used in moderate amounts.

Another important dimension that refugees had to negotiate when reassembling was *form*. Cement can be used as long as it remains close to the surface of the earth, but should not be used to construct columns, roofs or walls. In fact, the absence of this concrete structure became a symbol of temporariness. A cement frame, such as in Le Corbusier's Dom-Ino house, became the 'spine' of modern housing today. Yet it seems to have disappeared in many dwellings constructed by displaced Syrians, in Jordan near the camp, and in Syria all around the borders. As the urban planner of the municipality pointed out during a visit to the informal housing constructed by Syrians around the camp: 'Look. Whenever you see a building built with concrete blocks, but without a concrete structure, then you will know that it belongs to Syrians'. In this case, the physical qualities of the cement that had to be negotiated are not only related to its pure and immediate form, but to the ways in which it is structured and formed.

Lastly, despite the discreet and subtle use of cement within the dwellings in Zaatari camp, one could say that it differs from all other materials. This is because using cement has an irreversible impact. Its solid structure remains evidence of a certain socio-spatial and politico-material composition within the space of the camp. A manifestation of this point can be seen in the remnants of the dwellings that one can come across in the camp. As shown earlier, refugees often relocate and change their residence area in the camp, or even return to Syria.¹ Being 'on the move', and having to live in the camp and reassemble dwellings using cement, shows the liminality of dwelling under such circumstances. In such instances, one is likely to encounter the 'sixth façade' on the ground of the camp: a concrete surface vaguely marking what used to be on top of it (rooms, caravans, zinco walls and so on), and looking like ruins or an archaeological excavation site where dwellings of previous civilizations had been built. Indeed, if cement is the 'binder that brings

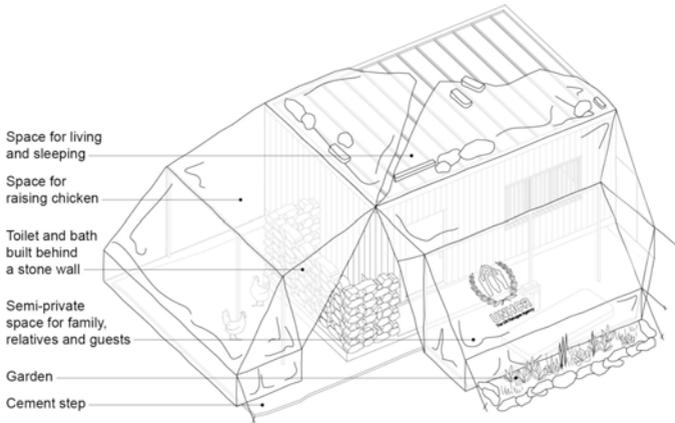
1 Mostly voluntarily, but sometimes involuntarily, especially when breaking the law or being suspected of having connections to ISIS or other terrorist groups in Syria.

and then holds the built assemblage together' (Abourahme 2015, 11), it may be worth looking at how it captures, records and allows us to trace the transformation of the camp through dwelling, and how the boundaries between what is temporary and what is permanent start to blur.

Concrete blocks used to construct different parts of dwellings



An example of a dwelling in which tents are used as walls, cement is utilized for flooring, and stone and concrete blocks are used to demarcate the garden and construct a low-height wall



Cement is used inside the dwelling to create a front yard and a garden



From the material to the synthesis

Dwelling in a temporary space, such as a refugee camp, poses a 'material question'. What materials are available on site? What elements can be used for that purpose? And what qualities do these materials possess? And consequently, where and when should these materials be used while dwelling? Materials are part of the dispositive of the refugee camp. Their physical qualities, and fragile presence, remind refugees of the exceptionality of that space. It reminds them that camps are never the norm, but the deviation; not the permanent, but the temporary. To start dwelling, refugees begin to *negotiate* and *explore* the qualities of these materials vis-à-vis the politics of the camp that they find themselves in. The main focus remains the reproduction of social space in camps, but materials serve or hinder this process. Politics begin to emanate from materials that are deemed 'normal' for us, such as cement and concrete blocks. Others, such as canvas, zinco sheets and caravans become the norm in the camp. The use of these materials, although it could occasionally be based on aesthetics, is directed to serve one purpose: to make dwelling possible. However, in this process, materials and social needs sometimes become conflictual. In the following, I will highlight this point, paving the way towards the conclusion of this book.

