Chapter 3
Family Relations

The transition from shelters to dwellings in Zaatari camp was strongly influenced by transformations occurring within the familial sphere. In contrast to the static image that caravans and tents can engender, these initially homogeneous shelter units were altered in response to transformations and events within the family: arrival, departure, marriage, divorce, death, birth, maternity, puberty and so on. Before embarking on this analysis, I should underscore the fact that my training was as an architect and not as an anthropologist; yet I find myself obliged to speak of how I saw dwelling in Zaatari camp respond and adapt to these changes in family circumstances. According to William Young and Seteney Shami (1997), one can easily be challenged when attempting to speak of an 'Arab family', due to the diversity of existing structures and practices: families characterized by shared residence, common descent, extended, nuclear, rural, urban structures and so on. In other words, there is no *one* family structure in the region. Thus, discussing the idea of the family is itself contested and challenging. However, what needs to be addressed here is a particular mode of social organization that dictates and distributes certain responsibilities and roles among family members — as encountered in Zaatari camp. Some of these roles and responsibilities appear in Abu-Lughod's reading of the Arabo-Islamic city and the idea of visual privacy that gave direction to the way space was divided and architecture was used, within the dwellings of the old Medina. Accordingly, there may indeed be an Islamic dimension inscribed into the ways in which gendered relationships are dealt with socially, and thus spatially. The construction of the *Maḍāfa*, particularly the separation of men and women within the dwelling, contributed to shaping its spaces. However, these interpretations are not enough to describe what happened in Zaatari camp. Sometimes separated into different shelter units, families were not necessarily only concerned with notions of privacy. Instead, they were tied together in ways that appear to be psychological, related to the understanding of the self, a mode of *being*, and thus a mode of *dwelling*.

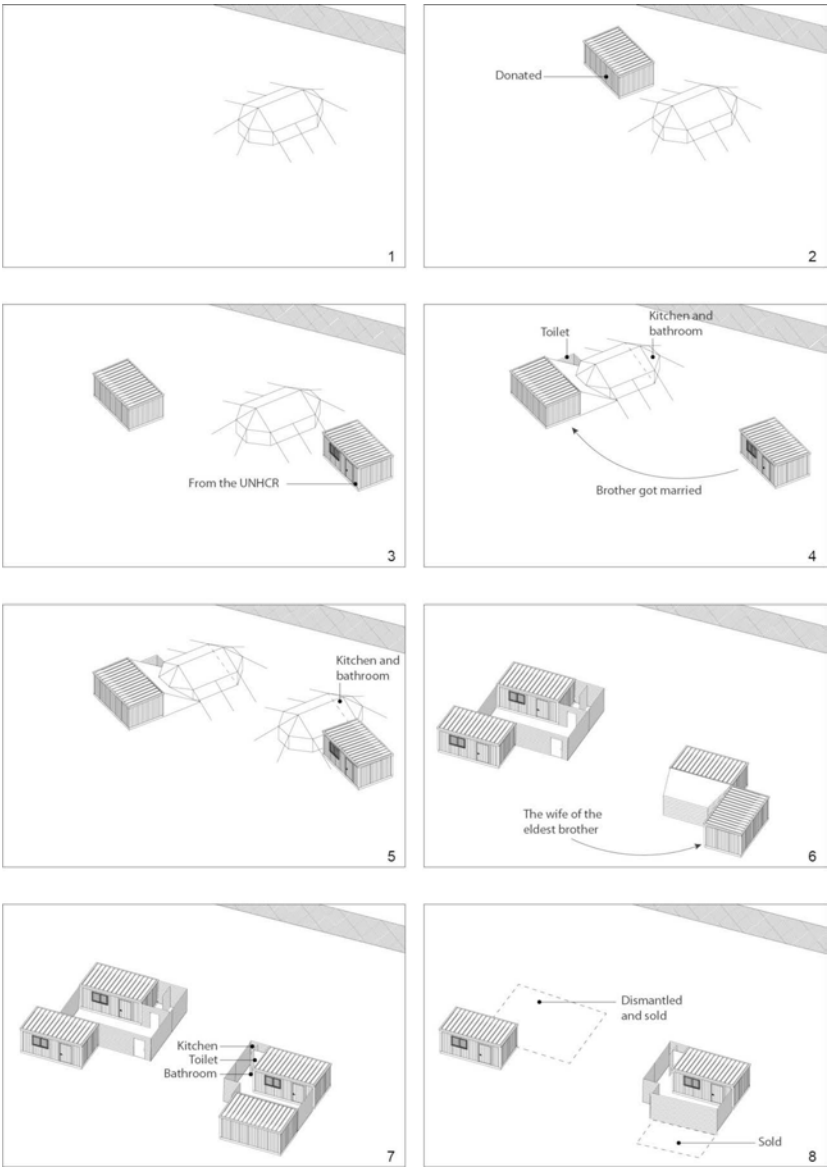
In the following, I rely on Suad Joseph's idea of 'intimate selving' among Arab families, and particularly the notion of 'patriarchal connectivity'. With this con-

cept, Joseph tried to trace the psychodynamics through which members of Arab families operate. The idea is based on two intertwined notions: The first is *patriarchy*, suggesting that men or fathers have a leading role and can speak on behalf of other members in the family. The second is *connectivity*, which indicates that the identities (though they could be seen as either dominant or submissive) are in fact very fluid and shifting, and operate in ways that ensure the success and survival of the family. Although this idea is not explored spatially, I suggest that it has spatial implications on dwelling practices. Tracing these spatial-psychodynamics was possible in Zaatari camp, because dwelling emerged from the socio-spatial practices of the dwellers and was solidified over time. One of the spatial implications of this 'patriarchal connectivity' can be seen through the patrilocal patterns of residence among Arab families — especially in marginalized areas such as slums and camps. In Palestinian camps, for instance, the initial dwelling practices evolved into what could be called 'growing housing' (Misselwitz 2009, 222), best captured by the image of open-ended columns with exposed metal structures on roofs, awaiting expansion as soon as a son gets married. Yet while the patrilocality of Arab families is questioned for its inability to be generalized (see Young and Shami 1997), the notion of 'patriarchal connectivity' offers a wider perspective, through which the socio-spatial practices and dynamics between members of Arab families can be traced, especially through dwelling, as we will see.

To reiterate, what I am trying to address here is a mode of socio-spatial organization that allows members of a family to act collectively or individually, but first and foremost, tactically, to ensure that the transition from shelters to dwellings is manageable. During my research, I came across several examples that reflected such a process, but the following case is probably the one in which these tactical, and psychodynamic, aspects of patriarchal connectivity appear most starkly.

This case study concerns Eyad, a 22-year-old male refugee who arrived at Zaatari camp with a large family of ten (including his parents, his eldest brother, and the brother's wife and children). The family originally came from As-Sanamayn, which according to Eyad is a large village made up of ten smaller settlements and with around 25,000 inhabitants. When the village was bombed in 2013, people started to flee to the south. The family initially spent a month in a smaller village near Daraa called Said, which is the hometown of Eyad's mother. Then they continued to Jordan. On arrival at the informal check point, they were received by the Jordanian military and escorted directly to Zaatari camp, which, at the time, was heading towards its peak in terms of size, availability of shelter and population count. Thus, the area they settled in, located in the middle of the camp, was densely populated. Today, however, its average density is much lower in comparison to what one would have encountered in the 'old camp'.

An additional example, showing how changes in social relations among a small family from Rīf Dimashq (Rural Damascus) had a direct impact on the dwelling structure



A street view of an area in the middle of Zaatari camp during May 2016

On arrival, Eyad and his family were given two tents, because they had registered as two families, each of five people: The first family comprised Eyad, his parents, his younger sister Rasha and his younger brother Hasan; the second family consisted of Eyad's oldest brother Yaseen, with his wife and three infant children. When they were taken to the area where villagers from As-Sanamayn had settled, the families initially could not find a place for their tents. Eyad recalled, 'The district was full of tents, so we placed them next to the street where the water tankers used to pass by'. At that time, both families used the communal kitchen and latrines located nearby. To dry their clothes, they extended a washing line between the two tents, which could also be understood as a visual sign of connectivity and relatedness. Living in the tents was frustrating for both families, but this situation did not last long. Two weeks after their arrival, they were given a caravan by the UNHCR, since the father was severely ill and thus registered under the 'vulnerable' category in need of prioritized assistance. However, the caravan — which had been funded by a Saudi donor — was placed 1.5 kilometres away. The family therefore had to use a caravan carrier to move it to the site, and one tent was subsequently returned to the UNHCR.

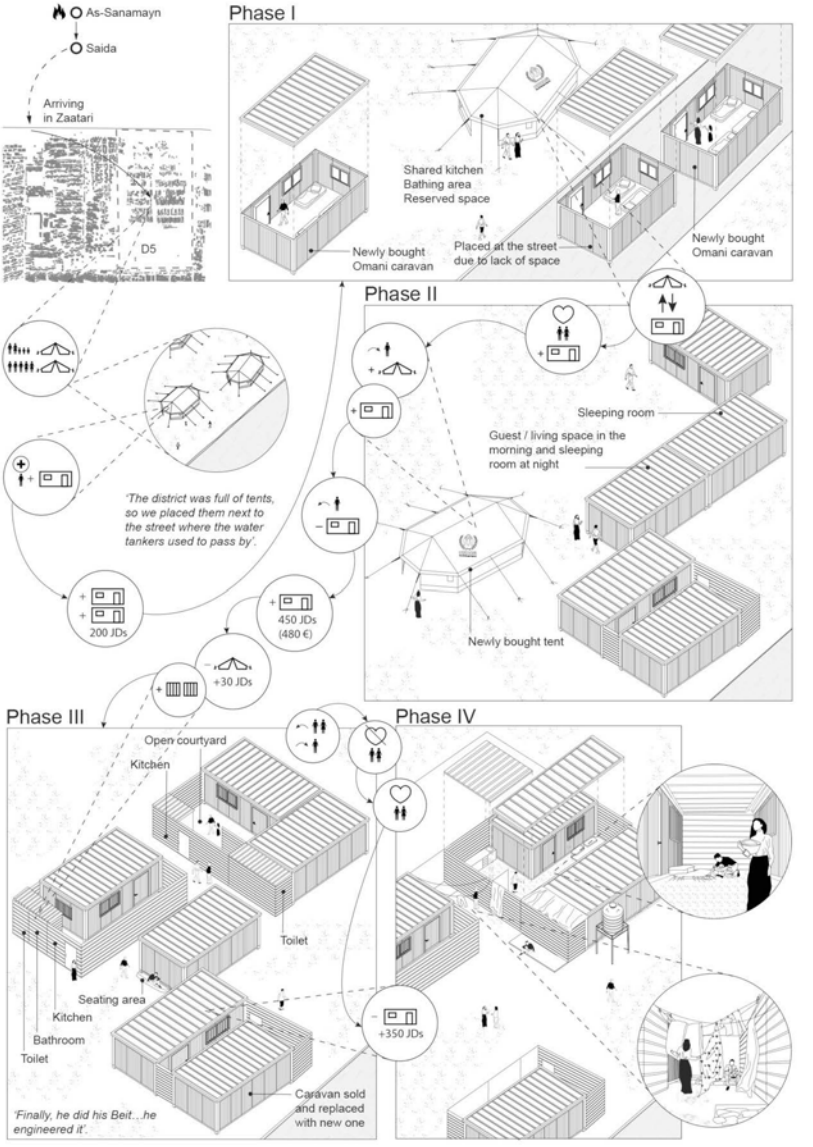
Having the caravan increased the family's sense of safety, especially for the older parents, but it was not sufficient for them to create a dwelling, as more shelters were needed. Thus, Eyad and his elder brother Yaseen covertly left the camp to work illegally in the construction industry for about two months. After that, they

were able to purchase two caravans for 100 JDs (around 80 euros) each. In this way, the family ended up with three caravans and one tent.

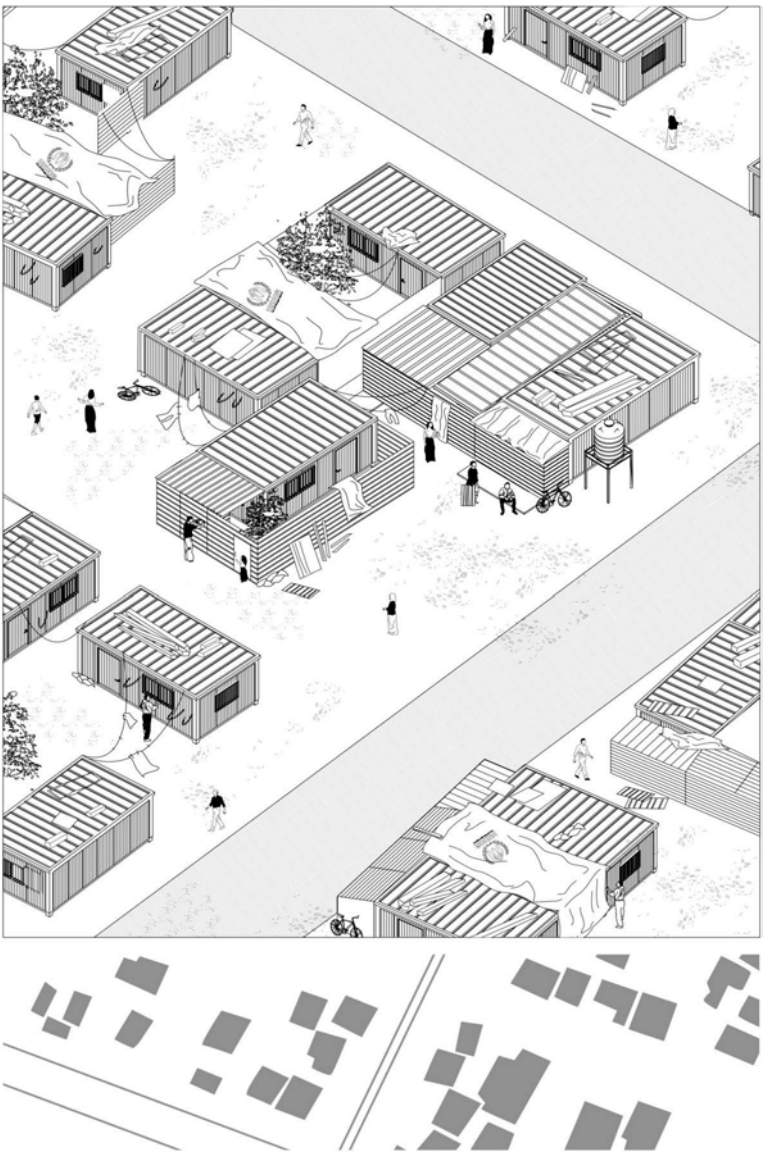
In the case of extended families such as Eyad's, dwelling was often practiced differently among the different family members. For instance, the older brother, Yaseen, was given a caravan and a tent to create a gradient of spaces: a caravan room functioned as a private space, and a tent, attached to the top of the caravan door, created a semi-private space. Meanwhile, Eyad, his younger sister and brother, and their parents shared two caravans lined up next to each other. Although considered almost adults, Eyad and his younger siblings all slept in one caravan, while their parents slept in the adjacent one that was used as a *Maḍāfa* in the mornings. In front of them, they placed a tent that was 'not suitable for living', as Eyad explained, and that was utilized as a shared storage space, kitchen and bathing area for all the family members. The resulting arrangement could be summarized as follows: Yaseen, his wife and their children lived in a separate and *enclosed* dwelling (a caravan and a tent), while Eyad, his parents and two siblings stayed in an *open* dwelling arrangement (comprising two caravans and a shared tent). One could wonder why Eyad's parents did not make a dwelling space by placing two caravans opposite each other and covering the resulting space with a tent. It seems that marriage implies the need for clearly formed boundaries to demarcate a social unit — a distinct entity — and this in turn facilitates the enclosing of dwelling spaces. Eyad's parents accordingly left these boundaries open, as they were soon expecting their sons to get married within the camp, as will be shown.

The lack of space in that part of the camp prompted the family to place their tent further out into the empty area in order to 'reserve space', as Eyad suggested. 'We were waiting until our neighbours left so we could shift our caravans up away from the street', he remembered, which they then did. Around that time, Yaseen was given a caravan from the UNHCR as a replacement for his tent (caravanization). He placed this caravan directly in front of the old one that he had bought, and he then added a bathing area and a kitchen, and closed off the space using zinco sheets. 'Finally, he did his *Beit*…he engineered it', Eyad recalled. Again, there is a notable connection between dwelling and privacy here: the construction of dwellings in Zaatari camp was an act of *reclaiming lost privacy*. This was a pattern repeated by many interviewees, who would often finish the co-mapping process by referring to the moment the dwelling's boundaries were finally closed, adding: '…and like this, we had a *Beit*'. In other words, the formation of a family encouraged the construction of a dwelling. However, the way in which dwellings were constructed — detached, adjacent, or extended — depended on the social characteristics and circumstances of these families; that is, the nature of the relationships they had with each other in combination with the availability of resources, spaces, materials and shelters.

The transition from shelters to dwellings (the case of Eyad)



A perspective of the resulting dwellings and urban fabric (the case of Eyad)



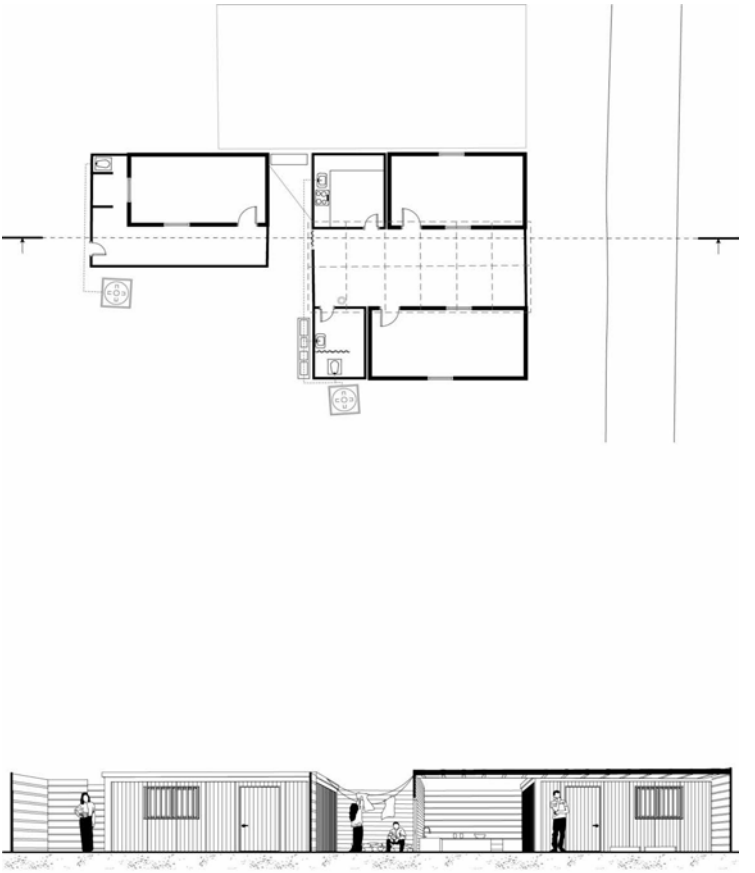
For instance, Eyad's younger brother, Hasan, got married and thus became eligible for a separate shelter unit according to Zaatari camp's regulations — a rule that, intentionally or not, encouraged early marriages in the camp. He was given a caravan, which he placed in the corner of the family's space so that their neighbours could no longer extend their dwelling rearward. Meanwhile, Eyad's mother went back to Syria to collect her other son, Samer, who was about to be enrolled into military service.[1] She bought him a tent, which he placed next to the *Maḍāfa*. Samer got married to a distant relative in the camp, and began living with his wife in the tent. This meant that the family now consisted of twelve people using four caravans and three tents. However, instead of creating a new family dwelling for the youngest brother, Hasan, they instead decided to construct a 'family house' — a space in which the shared tent (the bathing area and kitchen) would be replaced by constructing a kitchen and a separate bathroom. As he explained, 'Everyone would meet here at night. Meals are also prepared and served at our house everyday … It was *Beit el-'Ayleh* [a family house]'. The construction of the shared family dwelling here highlights Suad Joseph's reading of the psychodynamics of Arab families. Emphasizing connectivity, she suggests that 'the fluidity of boundaries, the affiliative proclivity, the sense of responsibility for and to others, the experience of one's self that has been entailed in connectivity has not been gender or age specific', thus, 'connectivity has reinforced family solidarity where solidarity was necessary for social, economic and political survival' (Joseph 1999, 13).

The family house comprised two caravans: the new one given to Hasan and an old one that belonged to the parents. The area between them was then cemented, and a kitchen and bathing area were added on the side. To build the kitchen, Eyad bought shelves, a sink and a water tank. The bathing area was separated from the open courtyard by hanging clothes. It was also equipped with an in-ground toilet and a plumbing trap connected to a pipe in the ground, leading to a septic tank. One of the caravans was used by Hasan and his wife, the second one by Eyad and his sister, and the parents slept in the *Maḍāfa* at night. In this respect, the *Maḍāfa* was kept as a central semi-private space for receiving guests, located between three newly formed dwellings and utilized as a sleeping room for the parents at night. To accentuate the social nature of this space, small porches were added to the side, creating another layer of social space — a semi-private space where neighbours and acquaintances could meet outside whenever the weather was pleasant. As Eyad explained: 'We people of As-Sanamayn like to socialize a lot! You would see us often with a teapot, sitting outside and chatting with neighbours. The *Maḍāfa* was a great

1 Military service in Syria is one of the main reasons for young men to leave the country, especially during the war. In Zaatari camp, it was noticed that mothers played a role in bringing their sons (who were under threat of being captured by the military) to Jordan, and in this case, to the camp.

spot for that, so we added a seating area on the side, no, on the two sides … one for the morning, that was shaded by the caravan, but it was facing the inside, so we added another one facing the street, which we sit in in the afternoon'. At this time, Samer was given a caravan by the UNHCR that he placed in front of the *Maḍāfa*, installing the tent in front of it at the entrance, thereby creating a semi-private space in the same way that his brother had done before.

A detailed plan and section (the case of Eyad)



Dialects of mobility: disappearance and presence

Dwelling in Zaatari camp responded to changes and transformations in family compositions. In addition to marriages and arrivals, departures and relocations also played a role in how families inhabited the available shelters. For instance, in January 2016, Yaseen (Eyad's eldest brother) decided to move to the Emirati Jordanian camp, hoping to secure better services for his growing children. The Emirati Jordanian camp was known for its facilities, which saw it referred to as a 'five-star camp' (see Dalal 2020). The caravan Yaseen had been given by the UNHCR was returned to the camp's management as per the regulations. To avoid destroying the structure of the dwelling, the family then bought a used Saudi caravan for 450 JDs (about 480 euros) and placed it in the same spot as the returned one. At the same time, the youngest brother, Hasan, was having trouble with his wife, particularly about sharing space with the rest of the family. Therefore, the family suggested that he move to the newly empty house where Yaseen had lived — which he did. During this period, Samer sold his tent for 30 JDs and bought zinco sheets to construct an enclosed dwelling. The door was placed on the side, to divert away from the entrance of the *Maḍāfa*. Next to the door and the caravan, a corridor containing a kitchen and a bathing area with a toilet was added. The floor was cemented with Eyad's help to cut the costs.

Around March 2016, the re-structuring plan (the so-called *Ṭanzīm*) reached the district. The family was asked to move their caravans to the left so that the sewage system could be installed. Their neighbour was also asked to move his caravan away; thus, the house was 'destroyed', according to Eyad, as the neighbour's caravan had been used as a wall. He recounted, 'Suddenly the toilet was on the street, and we were exposed because the neighbour took his caravan away'. To overcome this, Eyad placed the two caravans parallel to each other, creating more space for the kitchen, and used zinco to construct walls and roofs. The bathing area and the kitchen, meanwhile, became connected with pipes to a central sewage system.

In September 2016, Samer decided to move back to Syria, so he left the camp together with his wife. Faced with having to return one caravan because of Samer's repatriation, the family decided not to destroy the house but to give back the *Maḍāfa* instead, as this had remained separate and detached from the dwellings. Tensions between Hasan and his wife continued, so they divorced. The parents then asked Hasan to live in what had previously been Samer's dwelling. He agreed after getting remarried. A few months later, Yaseen, who was by then living in the Emirati-Jordanian camp, asked the family to sell the caravan he had left behind in the camp for him. They managed to sell it for 350 JDs (about 390 euros), even though he had bought it for about 100 JDs (about 80 euros) three years earlier. This exemplifies the impact of the caravan economy on the construction of dwellings. Thus, by mid-2017 the parents were living in what had been Yaseen's dwelling (one caravan), Hasan

and his new wife were living in what had been Samer's dwelling (two caravans), and Eyad and his younger sister remained in what was originally constructed as the family dwelling (two caravans).

Dwelling as a 'family business'

Dwelling is an inevitable phenomenon that cannot be suspended in refugee camps, or reduced to the spatial boundaries of the shelter. The manifestation of dwelling, or 'inhabiting' (Lefebvre 2003), seems to correspond to the nature of social relations within each sociocultural context. In Zaatari camp, changes within family relations and boundaries — attachment or detachment through marriage and divorce, and the need to accommodate the arrival and departure of other family members — created a socially fluid body, a force almost like a hidden biological structure, that resulted in shelters being rotated, combined and isolated. The body, to which here we can add the *social body*, that the machinery of the camp aimed to control and discipline, turned into an invisible yet vivid structure that gave meaning to the set of homogeneous empty 'containers' of the different shelter units. In Zaatari camp in particular, the idea of 'patriarchal connectivity' — which has been described as characteristic of Arab families — appears helpful in understanding the fluid, yet connected nature in which Eyad's family managed their need to dwell while accommodating the changes that were occurring within the relations and boundaries between different family members. This transformation, from two tents in March 2013 to three households composed of five caravans in 2017, was not linear. Instead, it encompassed many social events in between. The elemental nature of shelter facilitated this process, and eventually the family members found themselves in a position where they had to manage various assets, including spaces and shelter units. This points to the complex forms in which dwelling, or inhabiting, was taking place.

One key aspect was the need to manage the different shelters. For instance, while Eyad and his family acquired two UNHCR tents at the beginning of their stay at the camp, the construction of their dwelling overall involved *being given* three caravans from the UNHCR, *buying* two Omani caravans (for 100 JDs each), a Saudi caravan (for 450 JDs), and two tents (for 20 JDs each), and *selling* one tent (for 20 JDs) and one caravan (for 350 JDs). Therefore, the shelter itself did not always function as planned. Instead, its spatial and physical characteristics and economic value were utilized to create socio-spatial compositions that responded to each phase and the related challenges (the lack of space, shifting familial boundaries, financial means, etc.). In other words, shelter was never in itself an end product, but a means to create a suitable socio-spatial arrangement of the dwelling.

In addition, the *connectivity* between family members enabled them to be fluid in terms of the use and reuse of emerging spaces. The parents would use the *Maḍāfa* as a sleeping room at night and a guest room in the morning, and one dwelling was dedicated to family gatherings, cooking and eating during the day, while being used for sleeping at night by Eyad, his younger sister Rasha and later on by Hasan and his wife. Yaseen and Samer both constructed separate dwellings before leaving the camp (the former moving to the EJC and the latter going back to Syria). These spaces were subsequently redistributed among the remaining members of the family. Interestingly, Eyad and his family did not reproduce a dwelling similar to the one they had owned in Syria. Based on their description, this had been a vernacular dwelling built from black lava stone found in the region. Instead, they engaged in the process of managing resources in ways that responded to a particular social structure, as well as fluctuating needs. The result was not necessarily a single, ordered area featuring a gradient of spaces with regard to privacy, but a flexible, shifting, almost floating, arrangement that responded to the family's social needs as they changed over time. The following case, by comparison, reflects the opposite situation: the inability to dwell in a state of financial scarcity and sociocultural difference.