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## Chapter 4

### Contained at the Margins

#### Syrian Refugees' Settlement Experience in Northern Jordan

*Kamel Dorai and Pauline Piraud-Fournet*

##### Introduction

Refugee camps today cover different realities in the Middle East, ranging from the last traces of First World War Armenian camps in the suburbs of Beirut, to the dense informal urban setting of the Palestinian camps all over the region. More recently camps have been set up in Jordan, Iraq and Turkey to host Syrian refugees. Refugee camps tend to become permanent structures and some of them turn into urban settlements (Agier, 2009). In the long term they tend to become spaces of marginalization, marked by high levels of poverty, but also places that symbolize and represent the specific history of the refugees in exile. This double dimension (material and symbolic) is inherent in the existence of long-term camps (Agier, 2002; Martin, 2015; Turner, 2016). Whereas Lebanon decided not to open camps for Syrian refugees, Jordan adopted a different strategy, based on opening a limited number of refugee camps in the northern part of the Kingdom, accommodating around 20% of the total Syrian refugee population. However, the vast majority of refugees (80%) live in cities and rural areas, to access resources and develop their own social and economic activities. Camps can be understood not only as a place in which to implement humanitarian policies, but as part of a broader containment policy developed by different actors, that has an impact on the settlement pattern of Syrian refugees. Jordan is no exception; this trend has already been analysed in other parts of the world. Jennifer Hyndman (2000: 140) noted that *'camps are, arguably, part of a strategy to contain refugee 'foreigners' enforced by the Kenyan government and administrated by UHNCR and its implementing partners'*.

Since the Gulf Wars of 1991 and 2003, Jordan has hosted several hundred thousand refugees from Iraq. With its long experience in hosting Palestinian refugees from 1948 and 1967, Jordan is one of the main refugee-hosting countries in the world, confirmed by the settlement of Syrian refugees since 2011. Jordan received assistance from many Arab countries for the settlement of Palestinians and support for its key role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a neighbouring state. For decades, the Jordanian authorities have developed policies to take advantage of the settlement of refugees on its territory and its role as a buffer zone between the departure countries in the Middle East and the European Union, by developing, among other

things, vast refugee camps for the Palestinians and, more recently, for the Syrians. This Jordanian policy of containment has, for several decades been based on the principle of an asylum rent: the country agrees to integrate refugees on its soil temporarily in exchange for significant international aid, which benefits its population and its economy. In this sense, the 2016 Jordan Compact can be understood as the extension of a system that had existed since the reception of Iraqis a few years earlier, which made it possible, among other things, to regulate resettlement flows to Europe and North America, while receiving funds dedicated to Jordanians. The refugee camps are therefore one of the mechanisms of this policy of containment, which aims to limit and control the mobility of refugees from Jordan to the European Union.

The objective of this chapter is to analyse the determinants of refugee settlement patterns in spaces with different constraints, related to different forms of containment: on the one hand, in a refugee camp where the humanitarian government imposes rules for the implementation of its action (Zaatari camp), and on the other a settlement in an informal urban space (Azraq city). Most studies make a clear distinction between refugees in camps and urban refugees. This contribution aims partially to deconstruct this dichotomy, focusing on the role of refugees in their settlement process in both contexts. Refugees, therefore, are not passive recipients of aid. Instead, they participate in shaping the urban reality of the camps and cities that host them. This chapter highlights the active contribution of refugees to the settlement process, focusing on the role that they play in the development of their housing and how they adapt to constraints (legal, economic, etc.). In other terms, how do containment policies – i.e. creating refugee camps and limiting the rights of refugees – impact refugee settlement patterns? Romola Sanyal argues that '*refugee spaces are emerging as quintessential geographies of the modern, yet their intimate and everyday spatialities remain under-explored*' (Sanyal, 2014: 558). Following the study by Cathrine Brun and Anita Fábos (2015) on 'making home', and based on the Syrian experience, recent studies focused on the role of refugees in shaping their shelter and how they contribute to improving their daily life and living conditions (Dalal, 2020; Hart et al., 2018).

In Jordan, a country that is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva convention on refugees, Syrian refugees have only a temporary residency status. The UNHCR give them an *Asylum seeker certificate*, while the Jordanian authorities give them a *Document of service for the Syrian community*. Refugees are then allowed to seek asylum and settle on a temporary basis in their reception country. Consequently, Syrian refugee camps are conceived and perceived by many actors (humanitarian and state actors) as temporary, as are other forms of settlement such as self-settlement. In a protracted situation, such as the Syrian conflict, refugees in Jordan are *de jure* deprived of the right to stay, which Susan Banki describes as *precarity of place*. '[...] the

*permission to remain in one's physical place is perhaps paradoxically at the core of a concept of national assignment of privileges and benefits. 'Precarity of place' describes the absence of such permission and can be defined as vulnerability to removal or deportation to one's physical location'* (Banki, 2013: 453).

This contribution focuses on the settlement patterns of two Syrian refugee families in Jordan. Based on interviews and architectural mapping, it traces the evolution of their housing since their settlement in Jordan in two different contexts: in the refugee camp of Zaatari and in a peri-urban space in Azraq. Together with their migratory itinerary and their biographies, we will retrace their refugee experience.

The methodology used during this research combines interviews with refugees and architectural surveys. This work required repeated visits to the same families in Zaatari camp and Azraq city over a period of two years. We spent full days with the families, sharing a part of their daily life, and this allowed us to link our questions to practical aspects and details of their life.<sup>1</sup> During each visit, we draughted a plan of the house and recorded the transformations. Such transformations are frequent in a context of migration, and this unsustainable architecture depends on available materials, and on very unstable and random incomes.

This method, using a drawing survey, is not new. It is widely used in archaeology to study the physical traces of material culture left behind by people in the past. The architectural remains are one of the material elements that give us information on the way people were living in the past. This analysis requires careful observation, carried out through drawing and description. In the field of contemporary social sciences, our aim was to combine the analysis of the material environment and interviews.

This drawing method is also used by ethnographers (and ethno-archaeologist). Between the 1970s and the 1990s, archaeologists, architects and anthropologists worked on many traditional and contemporary houses in Syria (Dufourg, 1951; Aurenche and Desfarges, 1983; Ajlundi, 1985; Aurenche, 1992; Veenhof and Aurenche, 1996; Roujon and Vilan, 2010; Léna, 2012). The objective of ethnographical and ethno-archaeological studies is to understand better the remains of the past through comparisons, and to highlight, through the architecture, changes in the attitudes and behaviour of the inhabitants. Our research, combining drawing and interviews, allowed us to compare the makeshift housing of the refugees, built in a new geographical and economical context, with their original homes.

### **From Palestinian to Syrian Camps: Refugees' Settlement in Perspective.**

As anthropologist Michel Agier points out, camps that are considered by many humanitarian actors as transit and waiting spaces, are indeed organized as *cities* without, however, being classed as an urban project, since everything is designed to be temporary. In fact, most of the camps around the world stabilize and persist (Agier, 2008). Based on this *de facto* reality – and following the mass arrival of Syrian refugees since 2012 – Jordanian authorities have decided to control strictly the forms of settlement of refugees on its territory. One of the objectives is to avoid repeating the Palestinian experience, which led to the permanent settlement of refugees in the main cities of the Kingdom, and generated pockets of poverty in and around the camps.

Palestinian refugee camps, most of which were created after the 1948 *nakba* (the Arabic word for ‘disaster’, usually used by Palestinians to name the 1948 exodus) and following the 1967 Six-day War, have by now been in existence for several decades (See Berg, this volume). From temporary settlement spaces, these camps have become real neighbourhoods integrated into the impoverished outskirts of the cities that host them (Destremau, 1994; Jaber, 2006). Meanwhile, camps symbolize the Palestinian right of return and the non-resolution of the Palestinian refugee question (Al Hussein, 2011). Following Oslo Agreements in 1993, Jordan was the first Arab country to integrate UNRWA camps in its urban renovation policy (Ababsa, 2012; Oesch, 2014). Today these camps differ little, morphologically, from their immediate urban environment, but they still have a higher level of poverty (Khawaja, 2013). The morphology of urban camps in the Near East, as a consequence of having become long-term settlements, is very far from the classic image of the refugee camp composed of white tents. In the Palestinian camps, the built environment gradually changed in accordance with the protracted nature of Palestinian exile, but also the political dimension of their presence. This double dimension is inherent in the existence of camps over the long term. The urbanization of the camps, and their sustainability, are therefore no longer perceived today as contradicting the exercise of the refugees’ political aspirations nor related to the preservation of their rights as refugees (Al Hussein, 2012).

In 1959 UNRWA reported that all tents were to be replaced with cement huts or shelters. This decision gradually to replace tents with solid constructions was met with resistance from residents who wanted to keep the temporary nature of their camps, to signify their desire to exercise their right of return. Originally built outside the cities, camps were overtaken by urban growth. Integrated into the city, the camps are connected to their urban environment through the mobility of their inhabitants (Doraï, 2010). Popular commercial spaces developed there which attracted customers from underprivileged suburbs. The Palestinian camps also play the role of reception and accommodation space for poor migrants and refugees from other countries such as

Iraq or, more recently, Syria. Far from only being places of relegation, the camps fit into the city and today occupy a unique space. They are places where the most vulnerable groups are concentrated, often poor workers, refugees, displaced persons or illegal migrants. But the dynamism of the informal economy that is developing there also makes them commercial centres for disadvantaged populations. Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan are therefore an integral part of the local urban landscape today. For example, many neighbourhoods of Amman, developed around refugee camps like Wihdat or Jabal Hussein, and are now real urban neighbourhoods and are now integrated into the urban planning of the Jordanian capital (Oesch, 2015).

While Palestinians, mostly underprivileged and from a rural background, settled in refugee camps in Jordan, others, of urban origin, settled in urban areas, contributing to the development, both urban and economic, of West Amman and the main cities in Jordan (Hanania, 2014; Alnsour, 2016). Today there is a similar ongoing process concerning Syrian refugees. While the most underprivileged, who come mostly from rural southern Syria, settle in camps, those with an urban background and who are better educated or have professional skills, manage to settle in cities. For example, in Irbid, Syrian students have contributed to the development of a new middle-class neighbourhood (Peaucelle, 2020).

The Palestinian experience is instructive for other refugee groups in the region. In exile, in addition to their residential function, the Palestinian refugee camps fulfil three roles within Palestinian society. They are places of expression of local forms of solidarity between refugees. They ensure the recomposition of the Palestinian identity despite the dispersion. In addition, they are spaces for political expression. These spaces therefore form the basic fabric of Palestinian society in exile. With the increase in demographic pressure, and the lack of financial means, infrastructure is inadequate, and homes are often in disrepair. The lack of funding from international aid and the specific status of camps in host countries, which tend to marginalize and stigmatize these spaces, are factors that contribute to our understanding of the situation in which the Palestinian camps find themselves today. Humanitarian containment, by creating refugee camps, tends to generate poverty and exclusion in protracted situations.

### **From Assistance to Containment? The Evolution of Jordanian Asylum Policy**

If Palestinian experience has strongly conditioned the current Jordanian response regarding the modes of settlement of Syrian refugees on its territory, Jordan has also adapted its policy with regard to the regional context (security threats) and Euro-Mediterranean relations (migration crisis), developing different forms of containment to control some refugee groups (opening camps) and preventing re-emigration (Jordan Compact). Jordan becomes then a central actor, in

cooperation with European states and international donors, in the implementation of containment policies based on tools to control the mobility of Syrian refugees both at national and Euro-Mediterranean levels. As noted by Kirsten McConnachie (2016: 398) *‘in refugee policy, the term containment has been used to describe a shift from asylum predicated on protecting mobility to asylum predicated on managing mobility, with the latter goal primarily achieved by containment in migrants’ region or even country of origin’*.

### **The Development of Refugee Camps for Syrians in Jordan**

Jordan has developed different kinds of camps since the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis. Two different kinds of formal camps exist: transit camps and settlement camps. Jordan has developed transit camps at the border, to select the refugees who will be authorized to enter Jordan. Rukban and Hadalat developed as transit camps after the closure of the border. Other camps, such as Zaatari, are both a transit camp and a settlement camp. Most of the refugees accepted in Jordan have transited through Zaatari, and the vast majority left the camp and were allowed to settle in urban areas. A small proportion have not been allowed to leave the camp, and have settled there. In urban and rural areas, informal camps also developed, where Syrian families decided to gather. Some, mostly in rural areas, are tolerated by the Jordanian authorities. Those who live in these informal camps have limited access to assistance.

In 2022, around 670,000 Syrian refugees are registered at the UNHCR in Jordan. Since December 2013, the vast majority of them live in urban areas, while around 20% are currently residing in refugee camps. Zaatari camp was created as a settlement camp but also as a transit camp. After its creation, most of the refugees had to transit through the camp upon their arrival in Jordan to be registered. In 2013, UNHCR estimated that 460,000 Syrians have transited through Zaatari camp, and in March 2013 it hosted 156,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2013). Most of them subsequently managed to settle outside the camp. Jordan has opened three camps on its territory (Zaatari, Azraq and Mrajeeb Al Fhood or Emirati Jordanian Camp), and two at its border (Hadalat and Rukban).

Jordanian policy towards Syrian refugees gradually changed over time, from an open-door policy, towards border and mobility control, then to a quasi-complete border closure. Camps play a central role in this process. After the open-door policy that ran from 2011 to the beginning of 2013, the growing number of people fleeing Syria to Jordan led the Jordanian government to implement drastic restrictions to the entry and stay of this population in the Kingdom, in four main steps. First, at the beginning of 2012, the government started setting up transit and refugee camps

in northern Jordan, in order to select those who would be allowed to enter and to decide where they could settle. Second, in May 2013, with the growing number of arrivals from Syria, Jordan closed all the official border crossing points to new Syrian asylum seekers. Third, during the summer of 2013, in the face of the growing flow of Syrians entering the country irregularly and the emerging influence of different Islamist rebel groups on the territory of southern Syria, the Jordanian authorities decided to close the western informal border crossings that had been used by most asylum seekers to enter Jordan since the beginning of the crisis. Fourth, in June 2014, when the Islamic State organisation took over Mosul in Iraq, Jordan finally implemented drastic restrictions on the number of new arrivals at the two remaining informal border crossing points that were still operating, at Hadalat and Rukban. Following this decision, only a very limited number of Syrian refugees has been allowed to enter the country each day (Lagarde, 2019).

Until 2015, containment was the result of a Jordanian national policy, to avoid the permanent settlement of Syrian and to show to its own population that the government was acting to take control of the influx of refugees. Refugee camps had the practical function of registering refugees and selecting those who would be allowed to settle in urban or rural settings. They also had another function: refugees who were working illegally in Jordan or who were considered as illegal migrants could be deported to one of the camps. Camps, therefore, can be understood as a tool to regulate the presence of refugees in urban and rural areas. It is also part of a Jordanian rent-seeking strategy: for international donors, the camps are the perfect model to determine humanitarian needs and the way funds are spent.

In 2014, security threats at the Syrian–Jordanian border had also contributed to a shift in Jordanian policy. As Sophia Hoffmann points out *‘the existence and shape of Azraq camp can be explained in reference to three security claims: the claim to secure Syrian refugees, the claim to secure the Jordanian state and the claim to secure aid workers themselves’* (2017: 100). Security was also at the core of the creation of two transit camps at the border (Rukban and Hadalat) to control the entry of Syrian asylum seekers. These camps were part of the Jordanian asylum policy, as a form of containment policy at the border. These camps have contributed to the drastic decrease in the numbers of Syrians entering Jordan. The Jordanian discourses shifted from the necessity of giving asylum to refugees in need of protection, to the necessary protection of Jordan from potential terrorist attacks. Following Sophia Hoffmann’s (2017) argument, securing the Jordanian state by containing asylum seekers in a camp at the border became the priority of Jordanian authorities.



## **Ten Years of Exile: Protracted Refugee Settlement in Different Contexts**

The Zaatari camp in northern Jordan, which has a population of nearly 80,000 today, is the best-known settlement area for Syrian refugees. Looking like a real city where the prefabricated houses (called *caravan* by the Syrian refugees) and a few more tents are juxtaposed, this space concentrates all the paradoxes of the Syrian presence in Jordan. Humanitarian organizations are omnipresent there, as a symbol of the vulnerability of an exiled population deprived of resources.

However, the decision whether or not to open refugee camps differs according to the nature of the crisis as well as the political objectives of the host state. For example, Iraqi refugees, like other groups of refugees in the Middle East, gathered in urban areas, most often on the outskirts. Since the 1990s, different groups of Iraqi refugees have settled in Jordan, but no camps were opened for them. Following the 2003 American-led occupation of Iraq, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees fled their country. Most of them were urban dwellers in Iraq and manage to settle in urban areas both in Syria and Jordan. At that time, *'the policy against encampment satisfied the needs of both the Jordanian government and the refugees'* (Kelberer, 2017: 151). Jordanian authorities were able to receive direct funds that could be used for the development of their public services, while refugees could integrate in the local economy. Unlike the Iraqi refugees who arrived in Jordan following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, who were mainly from the urban middle classes and settled in the Jordanian capital, a large proportion of Syrian refugees today come from rural areas, and are therefore more vulnerable. Less educated, the latter have limited access to the labour market, although measures to facilitate obtaining a work permit were put in place before the summer of 2016. Those residing in the camps must obtain a permit, granted for a fixed period, to leave the camps. More recently, Azraq camp, built in 2014 to accommodate up to 130,000 people while the number of refugees arriving was very high, is now largely empty. In February 2021, UNHCR registered around 42,000 refugees there, less than half of its reception capacity. The majority of Syrian refugees, when they have the possibility, settle in urban areas where the opportunities to find a job are higher and where it is easier to rebuild a 'normal' life.

### **Case study #1 – Self-Construction and Settlement in Zaatari Refugee Camp**

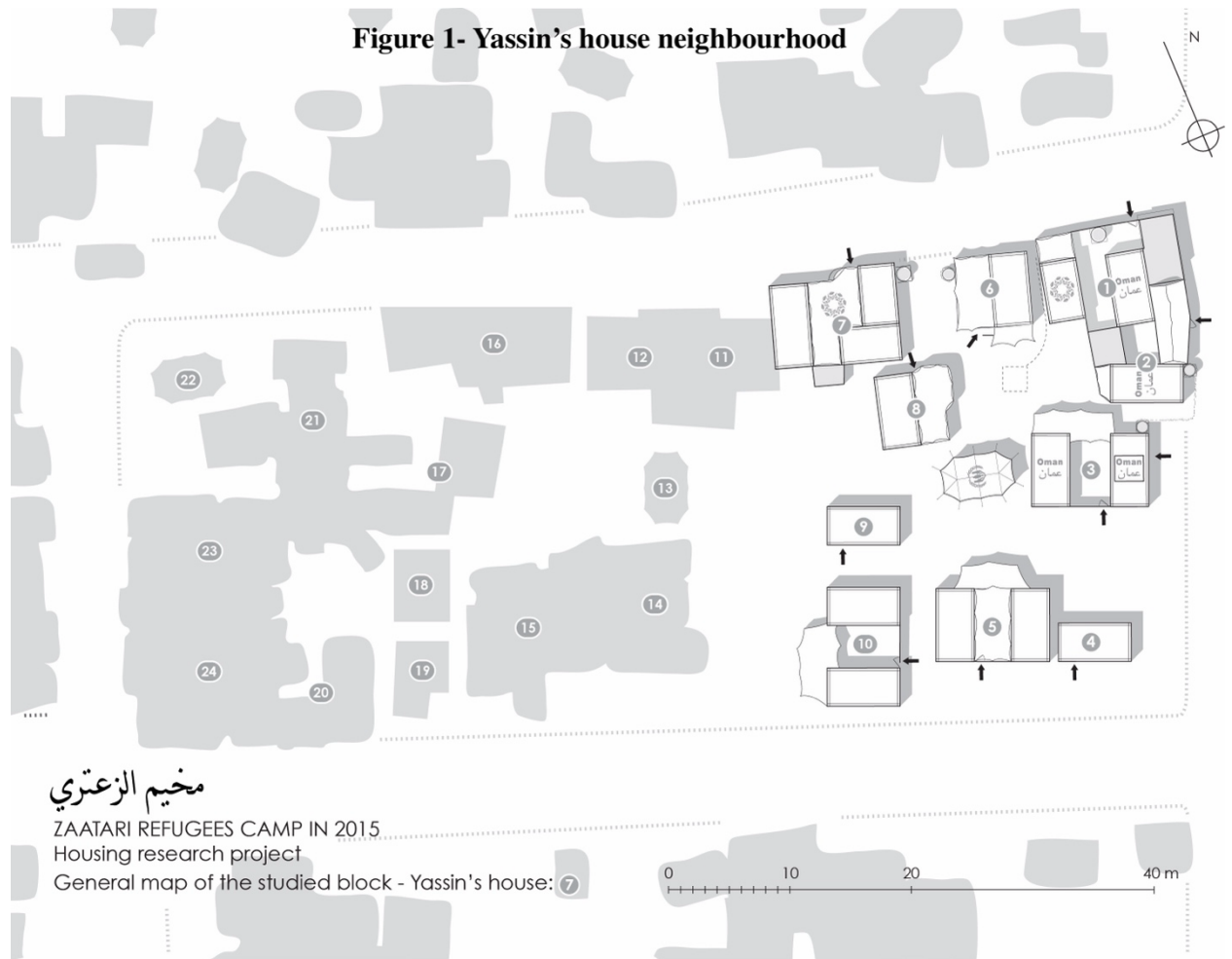
Refugees who settle in camps are usually the most vulnerable ones. They often have limited previous connections with their host country and the majority of them belong to the most underprivileged categories of their society of origin. They have limited transnational connections and lack resources to continue their journey to a third country to build a more stable future.

Zaatari Refugee Camp, Jordan's biggest refugee camp, was opened in the summer of 2012 to accommodate the growing number of Syrian refugees crossing the border between Syria and Jordan. The first refugees settled on a plot of empty land close to the Northern city of Mafraq. Tents were erected by international organizations, laid out on an orthogonal plan which was structured around the military hospitals set up by several countries (France, Algeria, etc.). Many refugees did indeed settle in the Zaatari camp to accompany a family member injured by the bombings or during the fighting. Refugees were then registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and were eligible for assistance. The refugees would then reorganize their lives in this isolated, arid space, not so different from the region they had left in southern Syria. They were therefore assigned a place by UNHCR with one or two tents depending on the size of the family. Sanitary facilities and collective kitchens were gradually built in an open-air concrete enclosure, in each neighbourhood of the camp. In the absence of night lighting, and as the refugees were in an unknown environment, the Syrians rapidly preferred to develop their own sanitary arrangements and kitchens in their tents or in their immediate vicinity. To create a private space they used to connect two tents with blankets distributed by humanitarian organizations. From a simple temporary reception area, built up to respond to a humanitarian emergency, the camp was gradually transformed into a piece of Syria in exile. Refugees reorganized and regrouped in each neighbourhood by village, city or district of origin. Families have also tried to reunite. The camp was reorganized and reshaped by the initiative of the refugees themselves.

Yassine arrived in Zaatari camp in 2012. He left Bosra in southern Syria at a time when crossing the Jordanian border was still possible, and even easy: at that time a thousand people crossed it every night. A place with a tent was allocated to him and his family by the camp authorities. Apart from a short period during which he tried to settle outside the camp, he has spent all his time with his family in the camp, where he was still residing in 2021. Since his settlement in the camp, conditions have changed significantly for him, due to the evolution of his economic situation.

Zaatari camp was originally conceived as a classic refugee camp. A plot of land and a tent was assigned to each refugee family by the authorities. Later on, prefabricated housing was granted to replace the tents. Families began to transform their housing, circumventing the strict regulation in the camps. Yassine first settled with his family in one tent allocated by the UNHCR. He spent one year and eight months in it before buying a prefabricated, corrugated iron shelter (called *caravan* by the refugees) for which he paid 225 Jordanian Dinars (approximately 250 €). Because he had health problem upon his arrival in Jordan, he was unable to work and save money.

As he had problems with his neighbours, he decided to move one street back from his shelter, onto an unoccupied plot close to some family members (Figure 1, House n°7).<sup>2</sup>



Map of the block where Yassine settled in Zaatari camp (T. Fournet)

One *caravan* was already set up on the plot of land, he received one from the UNHCR and he bought a third one for 300 Jordanian Dinars. He designed a house in a U shape with a courtyard in the middle separated from the street by a corrugated iron wall and a door (Figure 2). This form of housing is classic in rural Syria and in informal settlements in the suburbs of the main Syrian cities (Lena, 2012). It is usually called *bayt arabi* (Arab house) or *bayt reefi* (rural house). The distribution of the different rooms is organized around the central courtyard. In total, Yassine spent 1400 JOD to arrange his new shelter. He borrowed the money from one of his brothers who had savings. His brother used to work in Lebanon before being forced to emigrate after 2011. At the end of 2016, four years after his arrival, he still owed 250 JOD.

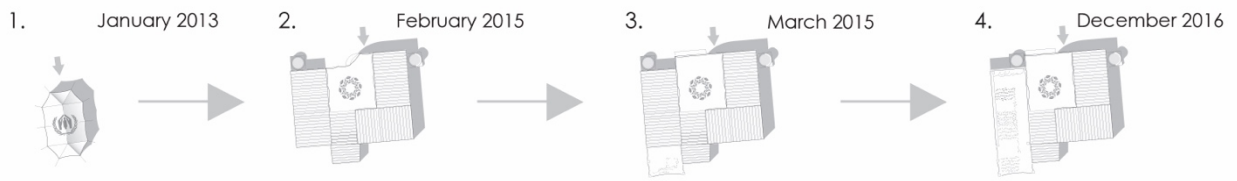


Figure 2 - Evolution of Yassin's house since 2013

### Evolution of Yassine's house since 2013 (T. Fournet)

As described earlier, he recreated by his own efforts the type of rural dwelling that is characteristic of southern Syria. The three *caravans*, the kitchen and the toilets were organized around the central courtyard. The latter was protected from the street by a metal wall. From starting out in a tent placed along the street without private space, he eventually managed to create a private space for his family away from the eyes of neighbours. In a context of high constraints he has recreated the premises of a normal life around his home. When Syrian refugees are asked about their priorities for transforming their living environment, different elements appears: 1. create a safe space for the children where they can play, 2. build a private bathroom to avoid using the collective one, 3. create a private space for the family and 4. arrange a place to receive guests, the *madhafeh*.<sup>3</sup>

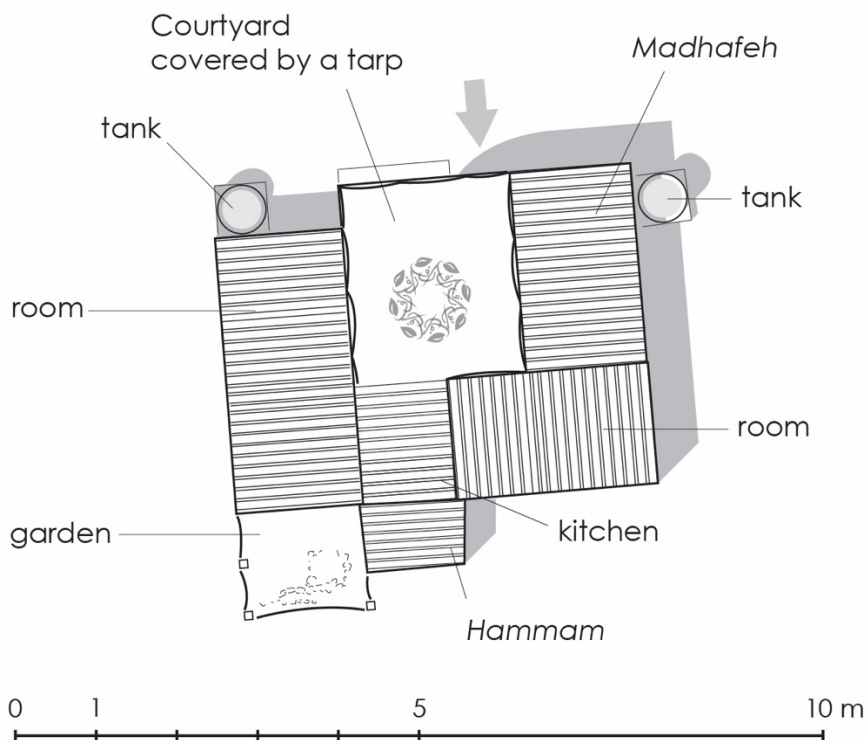


Figure 3 - Description of Yassin's house

### Description of Yassine's house (T. Fournet)

When they reorganise their shelter, refugees give a special attention to the *madhafeh*. Yassine, like other refugees, insisted on the central role of having a space dedicated to social life in his shelter. Life in the camp is regulated by international organisations and NGOs around humanitarian assistance. The social dimension of exile is not taken into consideration, except for specific categories of population (e.g. activities and training for woman, sports and art activities for children). The need to reconstruct a place to receive guests in a camp where public space is limited, even absent, and shelters are built only to meet humanitarian criteria, is central for refugees. At a time and in a context in which traditional social relationships have been destroyed and new relationships and alliances are to be built, the *madhafeh* and the image it gives of its owner appears very significant. It should be noted that international organizations were very little involved in this process, which is mainly based on the initiative of the refugees who transform and adapt the humanitarian material distributed to them.

Introducing building materials into the camp is forbidden by the Jordanian authorities, more specifically concrete or any form of permanent building material. Home equipment (plumbing accessories, electrical devices, wood, etc.) can be found in the camps, as they are brought in by Jordanian merchants and sold in small shops in the camp. A large part of the building material is therefore made of re-used humanitarian material. For example a *caravan* can be dismantled and all its components (wood panels, steel plates, window bars, tent covers, iron tent frames, etc.) are sold and used to recreate new forms of shelter. A building materials market developed autonomously in the camp as well as small workshops associated with their transformation (carpenters, electricians, ironworkers, etc.).

Yassine decided to leave the camp to try to find employment outside. He settled in a nearby village, Rawdha, a few kilometres east of the camp. Job opportunities are very limited in the camp and working outside while living inside the camp is difficult. Camp residents have to apply for an exit permit each time they need to go out. He rented a small house for 150 JOD in Rawdha but spent only 5 months outside the camp for various reasons. The Jordanian authorities changed the residency rules. First, Syrian refugees registered in camps had to have a Jordanian sponsor (*kafil* in Arabic) to obtain a residency permit outside the camp. Second, he had difficulties finding a job. When he was living outside the camp, he used to work as a daily worker in the construction sector, for very low wages. Third, the school for his children was a long way away from his house. Fourth, by deciding not to live in a camp, the refugees – and so too Yassine – on the one hand have to pay a rent for their home (as well as electricity and water), and, on the other hand, have to give up most of the assistance provided by the UNHCR.

He kept his empty shelter in the camp, either to house relatives who would have come to Jordan or to return to live in himself, in case of difficulty. Upon his return in the camp he managed to better his living conditions. He had been allowed to bring into the camp some of the furniture he had bought outside the camp (beds, sofa, house equipment). He also poured a cement screed in the central courtyard.

When Yassine settled in his new shelter he was planning to bring his parents from southern Syria, which is why he had decided to create a three-room shelter. Unfortunately, his parents were not able to join him in Jordan. His cousin, who also comes from Bosra, settled in the third room with his wife and children. At this time eleven individuals were living in this small shelter (about 80 square meters including a courtyard of 20 sq. m.). They stayed one year, and then the cousin and his family moved to another shelter in the same street. As they did not have enough space for the whole family, his nephews used to come and sleep at Yassine's house.

In April / May 2016 Yassine expanded the bathroom and the kitchen. This cost him 100 JOD. He created also, next to the kitchen, a small garden to grow vegetables and fresh herbs. In October 2016, he had to sell one of the *caravans* to reimburse his debt. However, he did not need the third *caravan* as his parents had not managed to come to Jordan and his cousin had moved out. On the empty part of this plot of land he expanded his garden to grow more vegetables. He also built, in a corner of his courtyard, a fountain decorated with a mosaic made of small stones and plastic flowers.

His experience shows, on the one hand, the importance of refugee initiative in a very constrained context such as the camps. On the other hand, it shows the limits of humanitarian intervention that fails to eliminate the economic hazards faced by refugees with very restricted access to Jordan's labour market. Julia Morris (2020) noted that '*The Jordan Compact, in particular, has been upheld as an economic development model that provides an 'innovative alternative' to refugee camps, as well as to protracted refugee situations. Yet, as much research shows, the direct economic gains from this trade concessions scheme have been limited*'. Yassine's example clearly demonstrates that economic integration in Jordan remains limited for camp dwellers. They hardly get better than daily jobs in the informal sector. Zaatari camp is located in a poor region with limited job opportunities both for Syrians and Jordanians. In this context, there is no other option for some refugees than living in a camp to secure access to assistance and reduce the cost of living. The strategy adopted by refugees is then to recreate in the camp what Ayham Dalal calls a *self-contained economic system* and develop income-generating activities (Dalal, 2015). Self-construction is one of these activities, taking advantage of all local resources and humanitarian material while improving living conditions, perpetuating Syrian traditional housing

patterns (central courtyard, decorative fountain), and recreating spaces dedicated to social life (*madhafeh*).

### **Legal Constraints and Precarious Integration**

Paradoxically, Jordan has welcomed refugees from across the region ever since its independence, yet the Kingdom does not have its own national asylum system. Jordan, like other Middle Eastern countries, is not party to the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees (Lenner and Schmelter, 2016; Zaiotti, 2006).<sup>4</sup> Only Palestinians are recognised as refugees by the authorities in the state where they habitually reside, and when registered with UNRWA (Akram, 2002). In the absence of any specific legislation to guarantee the registration and protection of refugees, UNHCR establishes asylum procedures and collaborates with the authorities of the countries involved through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding that clarifies UNHCR's mandate (Kagan, 2011: 9). These agreements are usually signed in specific contexts in response to particular crises, such as the post-2003 Iraq crisis, and are difficult to apply in new situations. Syrian refugees thus find themselves in a rather precarious legal situation. They must register with UNHCR in order to obtain refugee status while simultaneously fulfilling the conditions of residence as defined by their host state, which regards them as temporary migrants.

In Jordan, the Residence and Border Administration of the Ministry of the Interior issues Syrians with a special service card for the Syrian community, which is valid for one year and may be renewed. The lack of a specific legal status for refugees places them in a temporary situation that conflicts with the *de facto* prolongation of their exile. While refugee status in the industrialised countries that are signatories to the Geneva Convention provides long-term protection (a permanent residence permit and access to nationality), it only gives temporary protection in Jordan. It is similar to the forms of subsidiary protection that have been developed in Europe in recent years. This temporary status makes it difficult for Syrian refugees to make any medium- or long-term plans, knowing that they have little guarantee that their status will be renewed.

This particular status imposes restrictions on them with regard to the location in which they reside in Jordan. Refugees who want to settle outside the three camps that have been open since the middle of 2012 must have a Jordanian guarantor (*kafil*): this will qualify them for a residence permit. However, this does not give them automatic access to the labour market. Up to now, Syrians have had to get a paid work permit, as do other immigrant populations residing in the Kingdom. At the beginning of April 2016, UNHCR and the Jordanian government announced new conditions to facilitate Syrian refugees' access to the labour market, part of the Jordanian Compact

(Lenner and Turner, 2019). Integrating Syrians into the local labour market and giving them access to local structures (public schools and the health system) was conceived by the Jordanian authorities as a way of lobbying to get direct fund transfers from the international community (Kelberer, 2019).

Jordan's refugee rent-seeking strategy and its policy effects were on full display at the February 2016 London conference negotiations and in the subsequent Jordan Compact agreement. The London conference illustrated the competitive market for international humanitarian and development assistance. The negotiations highlighted Jordan's shifting rent-seeking strategy, as it correctly matched its strategy with the interests and needs of both donor states and international organizations, resulting in a higher level of per-capita assistance than either Turkey or Lebanon.

This agreement can be also understood as a form of containment policy developed by the EU following the 2015 refugee crisis, to avoid further Syrian emigration from Jordan towards EU countries. As R. Anholt and G. Sinatti, point out: '*the primary objective of the EU is to prevent migration to its Member States, making resilience-building above all a refugee-containment strategy*' (2020: 312). This shift from humanitarian-based policy towards the promotion of resilience in first-asylum countries, by giving access to the labour market for refugees, is thus a part of broader EU restrictive migration policy based on the following principle: Jordan will benefit from EU funds as long as it facilitates the local integration of Syrians on its territory.

There has been a gradual implementation of this policy in Jordan. Syrians were first exempted for a period of three months from the costs involved in obtaining a work permit. They were no longer required to have a valid passport because the residence card issued to them by the Jordanian authorities is sufficient. The primary sectors of activity are agriculture, construction and the food industry, where the majority of migrant workers are concentrated. The government also plans to promote the employment of Syrians in skilled industrial areas. At the beginning of the implementation of the program, Jordan announced a three-month suspension of legal proceedings against refugees working without a permit in order to give their employer time to regularise their situation. On a total of 200,000 expected work permits, only 38,756 were issued during 2020, quasi-exclusively for male workers (93,2%). Nearly half of them are in the agriculture sector (46.1%), 18.9% are in the construction sector and 10.4% in manufacturing.<sup>5</sup> This relatively low number of work permits can be explained both by the difficult economic situation in Jordan, and the importance of the informal sector.



## **Case study #2 – Contained at the Margins. From Forced Migration to Forced Mobility, Abu Yasser in Azraq City**

In Jordan, the physiognomy of the northern villages and towns was profoundly changed by the protracted presence of refugees. The coexistence between Jordanians and Syrians, although made easier by the historical ties (marriages, tribal networks, seasonal labour) between the inhabitants of southern Syria and the north of Jordan, is also marked by difficulties common to both populations. Refugees play a relatively important role in urban development, particularly in informal settlements. They also develop specific relationships with host societies, based on the supposedly temporary nature of their settlement. The massive influx of forced migrants into certain areas (such as towns and villages in northern Jordan) brings significant changes for the host societies at the local level. One of the main differences between settlement in camp and in cities is this: while in camps refugees are not allowed to build anything that could be perceived as permanent, outside camps self-settled refugees have to avoid using tents or any kind of temporary construction.

Abu Yasser's experience shows how refugees can develop strategies to circumvent legal constraint and rely on different kinds of networks (tribal, familial, professional) to adapt to exile. It also highlights the vulnerability of refugees lacking legal rights and protection.

His experience also shows that the distinction between refugees in camps and outside camps is not relevant. He had experienced short term encampment before being able to settle in Azraq city. Camp is not only a place of residence but rather a step in the settlement process of refugees in their host country.

Abu Yasser arrived in Jordan in 2013. He comes from the Homs region in central Syria. Before arriving in Jordan, he lived in Deir Baalba, an area northeast of the city of Homs. He used to work in the construction sector as a self-employed worker. Following his military service in Lebanon, he worked as a seasonal worker in several Lebanese regions, most often for periods of one to two months depending on economic opportunities, from 1993, when he finished his military service, until 2005, when Rafic Hariri was assassinated. The Syrian army withdrew from Lebanon that same year and the security situation of Syrian workers tended to deteriorate in Lebanon. Some of them were targeted, and this led to the return of many workers to Syria. Abu Yasser continued his activity in the construction sector in Syria as an independent worker. He lived with his parents and brothers in a self-built house and was travelling for professional reasons between Syria and Lebanon, as were many Syrian workers at that time.

At the beginning of the Syrian uprising, he was involved in the rebellion and was forced to flee with his family from his neighbourhood. He first fled to Qousseir (near the Lebanese border) to his wife's family for two months (Fig. 4). Then he moved to a safer place inside Syria, as the security situation on the Lebanese border was deteriorating. He bought a small piece of land with two of his brothers in Furqlus, a small town east of Homs on the road to Palmyra, where he first built a one-room house, with no electricity and not connected to the water network. Seven months later he was forced to leave again for security and economic reasons. He decided to leave Syria in March 2013. As the Western border with Jordan was closed, he headed first to Qaryatayn, a city further south in Syria, before heading to the Ruweished transit camp in Jordan. From there he went to another registration camp, Raba'a Sarhan, and then he arrived in Zaatari camp.

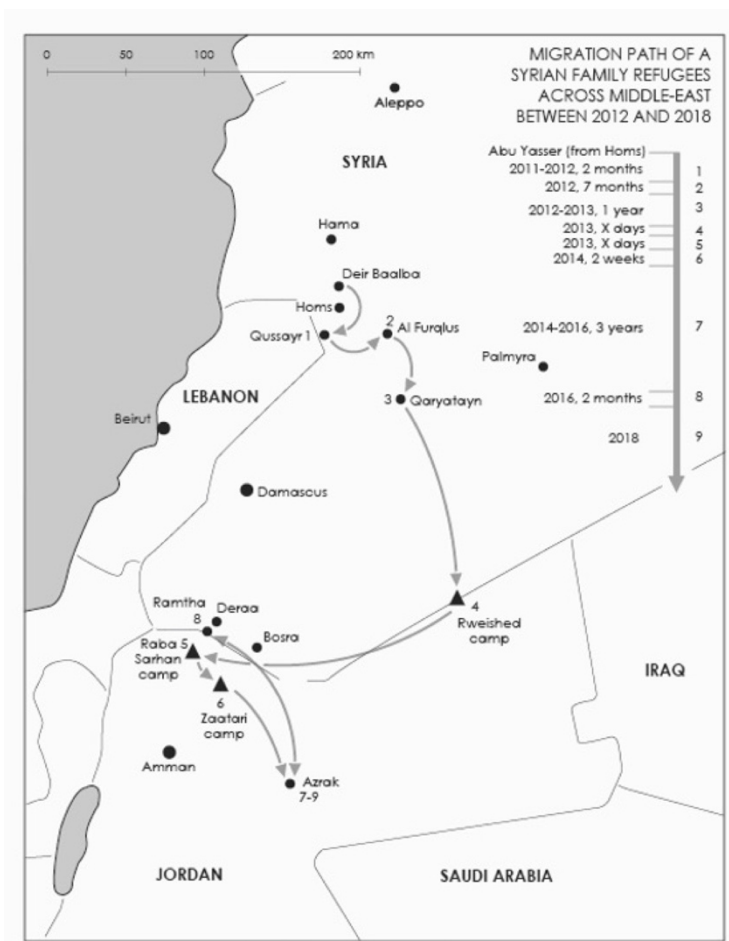


Figure 4 - Migration trajectory of Abu Yasser

#### Migration trajectory of Abu Yasser (P. Piraud-Fournet)

After twelve days in the camp, he decided to leave Zaatari to join relatives in Azraq. He left the camp illegally and settled in Azraq where three of his nieces were married to Jordanians. He rented a small apartment on the outskirts of Azraq before settling on a plot of land that his niece's husband lent him. He built up his own house with the money he earned by working illegally on construction

sites. He took the opportunity to build relationships with Jordanian builders' merchants who sold him materials at attractive prices. Mutual aid between refugees facilitated the construction as well as the assistance he received from his Jordanian family (free land, connection to electricity, help to find work).

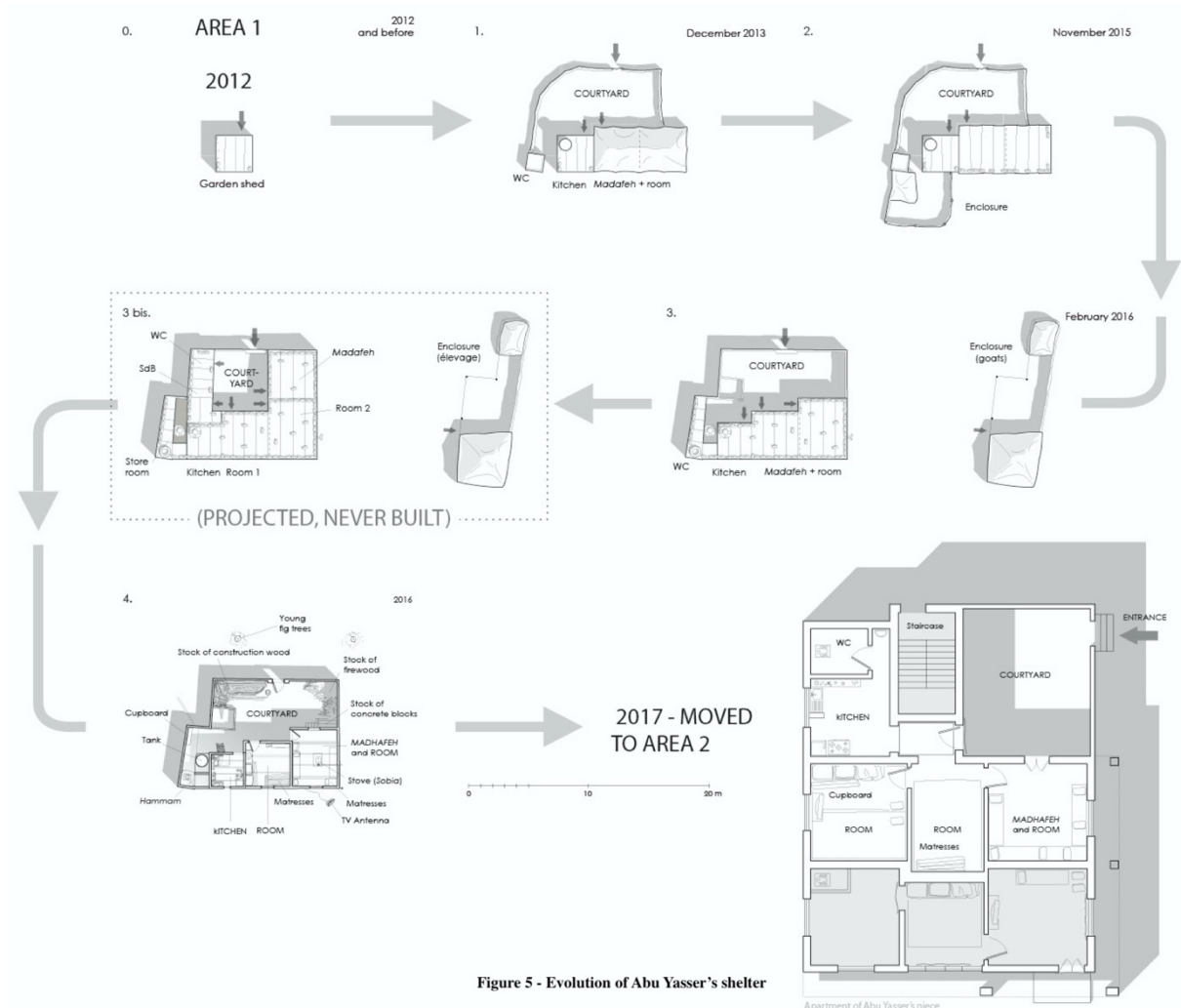


Figure 5 - Evolution of Abu Yasser's shelter

### Evolution of Abu Yasser's shelter (T. Fournet)

Against a small shed of breeze blocks and planks (Fig. 5, n°0) that had been used as agricultural premises, Abu Yasser set up a tent of 4m by 8, supported on a wooden frame. This vast room, separated in two by a curtain, was used both as a sleeping space and as a *madhafeh* to receive guests. A water reservoir was placed on the roof of the former small shed, which was used as a kitchen and bathroom (Fig. 5, n°1). Further west he built a toilet. These three spaces were surrounded on the north side by a courtyard delimited by a 2m high enclosure, made of wooden poles, tarpaulins and corrugated iron sheets (*zinc* in Arabic). The entrance of the house was

arranged in this enclosure and the courtyard gave access to each of the three rooms. They lived several months in this house that had very poor thermal insulation from wind and cold. As soon as he managed to gather enough money, Abu Yasser replaced the canvas that served as the walls of the only large room with *zinco* plates, and then the canvas that served as a roof was also replaced by *zinco* plates (Fig. 5, n°2). At this stage, the tent was replaced by a more permanent structure. The family bought goats and created an adjoining enclosure south of the house for them. Abu Yasser invested in young goats to sell them later on while using or selling the milk they were producing. He planned to buy the goats in order to have money a few months later to improve his living condition.

In the summer of 2016, the whole house was rebuilt. Instead of the large single room with *zinco* walls, Abu Yasser decided to separate the space into two smaller rooms, one for the children and one for the parents. The latter, the largest, is also used as a *madhafeh*. The building material also changed. The *zinco* was replaced by breeze blocks. Small storage sheds were built along the west wall in the courtyard and a second 2m<sup>3</sup> water tank installed on the roof. The enclosure of the house was also built of breeze blocks. The floor, which had remained as beaten earth up until then, covered with carpet, was also covered with a concrete screed (Fig. 5, n°3).

Earlier, in autumn 2015, or at the beginning of 2016, (Abu Yasser couldn't remember exactly the date), the family had moved the enclosure of the two goats and the hen house (in which were nine hens and a rooster) about twenty meters further east to avoid the bad smell. At that time, Abu Yasser was planning projects for the expansion and improvement of his living environment (Fig. 5, n°3 bis), imagining adding a room and moving the *madhafeh* towards the entrance, and surrounding the courtyard with rooms, WC, bathroom etc.

Following a family dispute in May 2016, Abou Yasser was expelled from his house by the owner (his niece) under pressure from other members of his family who had left Syria with him. He suddenly lost his home, and rented another shelter a few hundred meters away. As the family conflict was growing, he preferred to leave Azraq and try to settle in Ramtha, a border town in northern Jordan. He settled in downtown Ramtha but could not get used to the urban environment. Failing to find work and adapt to the city he returned to settle in another area of Azraq, assuming that he had better employment opportunities. At the time of our survey, in 2017, Abu Yasser has great difficulty finding work but still has to bear the cost of renting his apartment (Fig. 5 - area 2).

The building where he currently lives is shared by three Syrian families: Abu Yasser's family; a Syrian worker and his family who were already there before 2011; and a third family

that includes a woman member of his family (her husband is in jail in Syria and they do not have any news since he was detained). Abu Yasser is contributing to the development of a large garden (composed of an orchard and vegetables for their own consumption). He has also built a wall around the plot of land.

As mentioned previously, the Jordan Compact has placed limits on the majority of Syrian refugees regarding their access to the official labour market. Refugees integrate in the local informal economy and rely mostly on personal networks to find job opportunities or housing. Despite the direct funding received by Jordan to assist refugees outside camps, most of them still live in precarity. Living outside a camp gives better economic opportunities. As mobility is not limited for them (contrary to refugees in camp who must get a permit to exit the camp), they have much more capacity to find employment and develop their network of connections with the Jordanian society. However, while Jordan is facing economic difficulties, refugees are one of the communities most affected by the difficulty of finding employment. This is much more problematic for them, as return to Syria is still not an option and resettlement or re-emigration is limited by the local integration policy developed since the adoption of the Jordan Compact.

## **Conclusion**

Settlement patterns of refugees outside and inside official camps in Jordan is linked to policies developed by the Jordanian authorities (legal status, and access to the labour market) and by international organisations (access to assistance). Despite the singularity of each individual trajectory, settlement strategies developed by refugees are the result of both personal connections within the host society and legal constraints imposed by Jordanian asylum policy. Jordan has adopted a settlement policy whereby camps accommodate only a limited proportion of Syrian refugees. Most of the refugees are renting houses in the main towns and villages of northern Jordan and in the suburbs of Amman. A small minority have built their own house on lands belonging to Jordanian owners. Non-camp refugee trajectories are generally even more chaotic than their counterparts in the camps. They are very dependent on their own resources and on their work to meet their needs. They receive less assistance than the refugees in the camps, and have to pay all the costs of living in Jordan (rent, electricity, water, etc.). They are often forced to move to cope with an increase in rent or to be closer to their place of work. Most of them have also stayed, for more or less long periods, in one or other of the transit and registration camps opened by the Jordanian authorities.

Despite a context where humanitarian assistance imposes its rules and legal constraints are strict – both inside the camps and outside them – refugees like Yassine transform their accommodation according to two main criteria: first, to adapt to their changing economic situation, and second to try (and Yassine did eventually succeed) to recreate a private and personalized space, sometimes using traditional patterns, sometimes using new patterns, in spite of extremely strict legal constraints. The day-to-day evolution of housing reflects the vulnerability of the refugees despite the humanitarian assistance they receive. It also reflects the agency of refugees who use, transform and adapt humanitarian assistance to preserve a private space for the family and to recreate spaces more adapted to their customs and social life.

Since the beginning of the refugee crisis in 2015, *'makeshift camps appear and disappear in Rome, Berlin, Paris, Belgrade and other cities in Europe and beyond, but also in rural areas near the borders of inhospitable countries around the world'* (Katz et al., 2018). As these authors mention, if Europe is currently witnessing the emergence of new camps, this process was never interrupted in the Middle East where refugee movements have never stopped. The Jordanian authorities have attempted to prevent any form of durable settlement in official refugee camps, maintaining the temporary nature of the settlements. The restrictions on construction are therefore very severe inside these refugee camps. They all translate into the aim of preventing any form of habitat that could be considered sustainable. Outside the camps, the predominant objective of the Jordanian authorities is, above all, to make the Syrian presence less visible. The tented camps that emerged at the beginning of the crisis on the outskirts of towns or in villages close to Zaatari camp, have gradually disappeared from the urban landscape. This process is related to the durable settlement of refugees in Jordan, but also to the political will of Jordanians to limit the visibility of refugees in the public space. Concealing Syrian refugee settlement outside the camps might also be linked to the Palestinian experience in the country, where Palestinian gatherings are often visible.

This process is also related to the evolution of the containment policy developed by Jordanian authorities. Camp policy, that never concerned the majority of Syrians, was a tool for Jordanians to control mobility and select the refugees who would be allowed to settle in urban or rural areas. Setting up camps is also a signal to its own population that the government will not allow the permanent settlement of Syrian refugees on its territory, using the rhetoric of temporariness of such structures. By focusing on Syrians in the camps, those outside were less visible, at least in the public discourse. When the Jordanian Compact was signed, a shift in Jordanian policy occurred, towards integration of Syrian refugees and a development-oriented

approach. Containment policies therefore have an impact on settlement patterns. Syrian refugees for their part, adapt to this evolving context by developing strategies to recreate home, both inside and outside camps. Following French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, they adopted the position of a *bricoleur*, using material they can access, and have re-invented home abroad.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> All the drawings have been produced by Pauline Piraud Fournet and Thibaud Fournet, both architects and archeologists at the French Institute for the Near East - Ifpo in Amman (Jordan).

<sup>3</sup> Myriam Ababsa (2001) noted the importance of *madhafeh* in creating an urban social life in the northern Syrian city of Raqqa.

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<sup>4</sup> Israel, Egypt and Turkey are signatories to the convention but with reservations, which limits the scope of application of the convention.

<sup>5</sup> *Syrian Refugee Unit - Work Permits Progress Report December and annual 2020*, Jordan Ministry of Labour (MOL) Syrian Refugee Unit (SRU).