Constructive Exceptionality
Spontaneous urbanization and recovered agency in Zaatari refugee camp

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Abstract

In the increasingly urbanized Zaatari refugee camp, one prominent market street, Al-Souq, stands out as contributing to the creation of a camp city, thereby challenging the view of camps as temporary settlements. While the spatial transformation of Zaatari is indisputable, there has been little investigation into how such a transformative process has taken place. This paper questions how the interplay between human agency and structure produces space in the camp, and, eventually, the city. To this end, Al-Souq, the main market street in Zaatari, has been chosen as a case study. Employing an explorative narrative approach, the main findings denote a constructive exceptionality that facilitates space creation as well as a consequential inclusion of refugees in the camp. Furthermore, the spatial construction of Al-Souq shows that refugees are in fact active agents. Therefore, the paper concludes by offering an alternative conceptualization of camps, i.e. that they are not necessarily temporary, as well as refugees, i.e. that they are not aid-dependent victims. These notions contradict traditional humanitarian perceptions.

1. Introduction

Agamben (1998) has designated camps as exceptional zones of *indistinction*, where the discrepancies between inclusion and exclusion are blurred. In his conceptualization, camps are perceived as static zones in which the primary characteristic is the maintenance of bare life. This perception is often extended to viewing refugee camps as an agglomeration of helpless victims. Yet the spontaneous urbanization of the Zaatari refugee camp (see Figure 1) suggests an entirely different situation. Today the camp exhibits multiple urban features that materialize the permanent temporariness which defines its character. For example, it features identifiable districts and neighbourhoods; streets are paved and connected to an electrical grid; households are personalized and vary in size; there are makeshift street markets offering a variety of products and services. In view of these factors, the pigeonholing of refugee camps as temporary settlements occupied by idle, helpless victims is restrictive and inadequate, specifically in regard to urban-type refugee camps.

Figure 1. A satellite image illustrating the location of the Zaatari refugee camp near the Syrian-Jordanian border – provided by Google Maps (Google).

The scenario whereby camps gradually transform from tent-exclusive spaces to emergent urban settlements in order to accommodate the needs of refugees, which in turn evolve to reflect the longevity of the camp itself, is neither novel nor uncommon. Nevertheless, there is a general tendency – particularly from a humanitarian standpoint – to conceptualize camps as

temporary, since acknowledging their permanence is misguidedly associated with the promotion of suffering and deprivation. In fact, the policy of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR 2014) is to pursue "alternatives to camps"; when established, such camps should remain temporary, as they constitute a violation of refugees' freedom and rights.

Thus even when camps persist for decades, they continue to be perceived through a paradigm of temporality, which in turn is extended to the perception of refugees and the life they lead inside these urbanized settlements. This recursively produces a culture of dependence (Agier 2002; see Malkki 1995; Sanyal 2014). Living in a state of continuous temporariness is inextricably accompanied by the spatial transformation of camps. While these may have some resemblance to urban informalities, they are distinctive in their own political situation, challenges and consideration. Hence, we require an alternative conceptualization of camps and refugees (Hartmann, Laue & Misselwitz 2015). Sanyal (2017) points out the need for a new vocabulary to formulate our thinking about refugee spaces beyond the mere "language of crisis".

In this paper I argue that by exploring the way camps urbanize and by considering how the resulting spatiality is constituted, we can establish a useful lens to peer into the everyday lives of refugees inside such camps as well as discern how they counter the typical dependence, inactivity and dissociation arising through encampment. This proposition entails an alternative conceptual understanding of the camp as a socially-produced space. More specifically, by tracing the creation of Zaatari's main market street (Al-Souq), this paper investigates the produced spatiality of the camp, seeking to understand its transformation from an assembly of tents to the produced urbanity it is today.

2. Conceiving urban-type refugee camps

The standard discourse around refugee camps poses a problem of conceptualization, both as applied to theory and practice. Hence, it is necessary for us to discuss how the concepts of *the camp* as well as *space* are perceived theoretically.

Beginning with the first concept, a basic problem in theorizing about refugee camps can be attributed to the grouping of all types of camps into a single category, namely *the camp*. Discussions about detention or concentration camps are thus often extended to urban-type refugee camps, generating an overwhelmingly critical perception of those camps as well as their inhabitants. This lack of conceptual distinction unavoidably leads to shortcomings in the description of how refugees reconstruct their lives after displacement.

The common extension of biopolitics to conceptualize camps illustrates the point. While Agamben's (1998) initial thesis was a criticism specific to concentration camps, he nonetheless states that the camp has replaced the

city, allowing the adaptation of his biopolitics to a wider range of spaces, most importantly refugee camps (see Diken & Laustsen 2002; Elden 2006; Minca 2006, 2015; Oesch 2017). Within this approach, the camp is perceived as an *exception*, whose inhabitants are *homo sacers*, namely individuals stripped of their basic rights and reduced to *bare lives.* This view is not implausible if we think of refugee settlements, especially during the initial phases of their inception when suffering is the rule. Biopolitics and the concept of bare life are also aligned with the humanitarian perception of camps as temporary settlements inhabited by victims. Such a view, however, breaks down when we attempt to account for refugees' productive activities in camps that are urbanizing.[1] A criticism of the narrowness of the humanitarian paradigm has been reported in various accounts for this very reason (see also Malkki 1995b; Agier 2002; Sanyal 2014).

Clearly, we require an alternative approach that recognizes the produced spatiality of the camp. Specifically, an approach that brings *space* to the fore in any investigation of refuge, perceiving this as the basis and result of refugees' actions (Abourahme 2015; Abourahme & Hilal 2009; see Al-Qutub 1989; Grbac 2013; Hartmann et al. 2015; Jansen 2016; Katz 2015; Martin 2015; Peteet 2005; Ramadan 2013; Sanyal 2014). Reading camps as socio-spatial phenomena, the aim is to explore the everyday lives of refugees, the way they start over and reconstruct their lives in their new settlements. All these insights are crucial in order to remedy the flaws in our current understanding of camps and their inhabitants. Remarkably, this lens is contentious even though displacement is, by definition, about losing one's place and *ipso facto* is concerned with issues of replacement, space and place.

Both biopolitics and socio-spatial considerations are in fact appropriate to describe different aspects of the transformation of refugee camps. While the shortcomings of Agamben's thesis are increasingly criticized in the literature on spatial camps, this criticism still revolves – as Oesch (2017) explains – around an "exclusionary paradigm". Specifically, the notion of exception can be read inversely. For instance, while Turner (2016) conceptualizes the camp as exceptional, according to him its exceptionality does not produce bare life. Fresia and Von Känel (2015) suggest that normalization follows exception during and not after encampment. Similarly, while critical of biopolitics and the term "exception", Sanyal (2014) points out that the "exceptional category of being a refugee" is employed by camp residents to enhance their situation. Evidently, the whole picture is too complex to be captured by one or another individual approach. For this reason, I argue here for a re-engagement with Agamben's notion of exception in my exploration of Zaatari as a

1 Numerous examples of urban-type refugee camps exist around the world. Well-known cases of what has been often termed "camp cities" include the Dadaab camp in Kenya, the Palestinian camps absorbed within major cities such as Shatila in Lebanon and Wehdat in Jordan in addition to the most recent make-shift camp Kutupalong-Balukhali for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

socio-spatial phenomenon, i.e. a constructive exceptionality.

Turning to the concept of *space* in relation to camps, we note that it is through the understanding of space as socially produced that the *temporary* perception of the camp falls short. Lefebvre's (1991) and Löw's (2008) accounts of space are fundamental here, the former for his triad of space and contribution towards the role of everyday life and the latter for her reformulation of Giddens' (1984) concept of duality. It is through Lefebvre's (1991) approach that we understand space beyond the perception of a mere "container" as socially produced through the interaction of three aspects, namely the physical, the mental and the *lived*. Löw (2008) extends the central contribution of Lefebvre while placing equivalent weight on the role of action, perceiving space as a duality of action and structure.

As Löw's (2008) duality will prove fundamental for our exploration of the production and constitution of space in the Zaatari refugee camp, it is valuable to provide a summary here. This duality encompasses an element of agency: repetitive daily action is crucial for the constitution of space and is motivated by knowledgeability (practical and discursive). The fact that space is produced in the camp in a simple bottom-up, unplanned manner helps to portray refugees as active subjects rather than helpless victims. Moreover, structure is provided by the rules and resources that are embedded in institutions of action.[2] Resources (material and immaterial) and rules (formal and informal) enable and restrict space for constitutive action. The two elements of action and structure recursively reproduce each other. Finally, along with this premise of duality, Löw (2008, p. 36) adds a third symbolic element to identify three dimensions that constitute space:
-The routinized paths of *action*;
-The *structural* dimension of spatiality;
-The constitution of places and the development of *atmospheres*.

These space-constitutive dimensions inform the overall investigation and structure of this paper. Additionally, by adopting Löw's spatial concept, I perceive Zaatari as a problem of agency vs. structure, thereby providing a standpoint from which to investigate the production of Zaatari's main market space: Al-Souq.

3. Site selection and methodology

Site selection in the large and volatile Zaatari refugee camp is far from easy. Not only is the size of the camp daunting[3] but also the appropriations of space taking place are numerous and diverse in scale. While some of these transformations are harder to trace than others, street markets in Zaatari form a physical space that is the sole result of refugees' actions. This is con-

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2 As originally defined by Giddens (1984).

3 The camp covers an area of 5.3 km2 (UNHCR 2017b).

firmed by the UNHCR standardized camp layout, which only specifies one marketplace per 20,000 inhabitants or one per settlement (camp), as opposed to a multi-use market street of privately-owned shops (UNHCR 2018).[4]

Zaatari currently has four street markets (see Fig. 2). The two main streets forming *Al-Souq* (Arabic for market) are the central *Saudi* (running left to right) along with the oldest and most famous street known as *the Champs-Elysées* (running top to bottom). All sorts of shops exist in Al-Souq selling basic foodstuffs, domestic supplies, pet food and even bridal dresses. It is important to note that Al-Souq is not only a space of transaction; it is the main space of interaction in Zaatari, a place where refugees socialize and interact, protest to voice their claims, celebrate Eid or Ramadan and even go on dates (for more on the significance of street markets, see BorkHüffer et al. 2016).
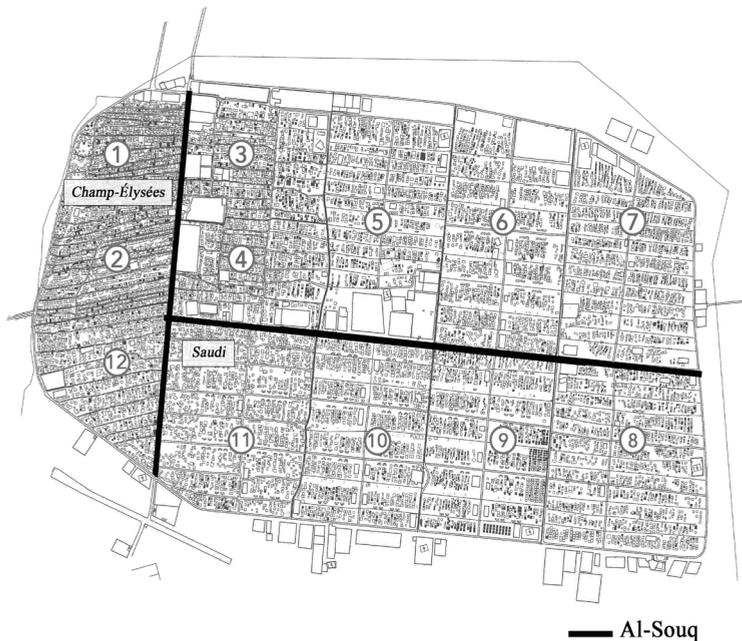
Figure 2. The main market streets in the Zaatari Refugee Camp; Al-Souq.
AutoCad-generated map of Zaatari by the author based on a UNHCR map collected during fieldwork.

In the following, I employ a narrative approach to explore the way in which Al-Souq was produced[5] (for the connection between space, the everyday and narration, see Fischer-Nebmaier et al. 2015). The narratives of 44 shopkeepers with stores in both Saudi and Champs-Elysées were collected during a field

4 Zaatari has two supermarkets, Safeway and Tazweed (both run by the World Food Programme), together known as "the mall".

5 The narrative approach was chosen for theoretical and logistical reasons, namely in order to obtain the security permit needed to access the camp.

trip in July 2016. The concrete situation in the camp necessitated the application of three interviewing strategies to enable both structureless and semi-structured narratives [6]. The aim was to link the individual and collective narratives in order to construct what May (2002) calls a "public narrative" of the whole market. In what follows, I explore the three dimensions that constitute Al-Souq (as identified by Löw) in order to understand how this thriving market came to be, how individual actors chose to sell specific products within clear spatial settings and what facilitated and constrained their actions.

4. From helpless victims to active agents

In a broader sense, refugee camps that undergo some spatial transformation tend to follow the same path: Refugees acting as agents to reconstruct their identities, agencies and spaces, thereby gradually turning camps into emergent cities. The eloquent description by a UNHCR Zaatari site planner recorded during my fieldwork recounts how this scenario takes place:

"We always follow them. They start the thing and we follow. Seeing them digging cesspools outside their houses, we built the whole sewage treatment plant project; they created a street module (each row of houses with a street), and we made a replica of that; they started decorating and drawing on their caravans, and we responded with the graffiti project. They come up with the ideas. Essentially, they are way ahead of us, in many ways."

If we consider that Al-Souq is solely the outcome of refugees' actions, then its very existence denotes active agents behind its production, challenging the humanitarian and biopolitical perception of refugees as mere victims or bare lives. This lends plausibility to the suggestion that the socio-spatial transformation of the camp inevitably materializes through the presence of certain levels of agency. Such a view is crucial in the quest to conceptualize camps.

While refugees are initially perceived as an undifferentiated mass of humans in need of help, on the ground they eventually recover their agency and reconstruct their lives. The management of refugees during the emergency period of arrival ignores their individuality since the main concern is to provide urgent humanitarian aid. This inevitably results in a loss of identity and agency, at least temporarily. Maintaining the helpless victim as the refugee archetype is, however, self-defeating since it leads to a vicious cycle of dependency, thereby hindering recovery. Agier (2002) describes this predicament as "a *problématique* of identity", albeit solely focused on identity (the same argument can be extended to agency).

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6 The strategies are semi-structured interviews with narrative elements, exclusively narrative interviews as well as narrative interviewing by external interviewers.

This initial state of dependency and victimhood is overcome by prospects of recovery through the gradual production of space. In fact, the collected narratives all exhibited a pattern of transition from passivity and helplessness towards activity.[7] What starts as a crisis of loss, whether of identity or agency, ends up setting the conditions for their reestablishment. On similar grounds, Ghorashi et al. (2018) suggest that refugees be perceived as "sources of agency", since this facilitates their inclusion in the new environment. Moreover, Wille (2011) stresses that the acknowledgment of people's agency is crucial for their integration and to foster a sense of belonging. Refugee camps are thus not merely spaces of suffering and marginalization; they are spaces where human agency becomes possible.

5. The structural dimension of Al-Souq's spatiality

While Al-Souq is the sole responsibility of the refugees running it – meaning it does not rely on humanitarian aid and donations – it comes as no surprise that its transformation mirrors the changing conditions of the camp. For example, once certain material resources became available in Zaatari, the refugees bought or exchanged the same resources to improve Al-Souq, materializing their permanence each step of the way. The shops were transformed from floor mats (hasira in Arabic) to tents, then to Zinco[8] (known locally as tuti) and finally caravans[9]. This mat-tent-zinco-caravan transformation, either wholly or partially, is a part of each collected narrative. The transformation was not limited to the structure of the shops; remarkably, the products offered and hence the variety of business types present in Al-Souq also evolved greatly over time. In the following, we explore the specific resources (material and immaterial) as well as rules (formal and informal) that structured refugees' actions in creating their shops.

5.1 Resources

When Zaatari was originally established, refugees arriving at the camp had limited resources. This was the spark that ignited Al-Souq. We can narrate the wider transformation of Zaatari's flourishing market by detailing the specific material and immaterial resources that were drawn upon to produce the individual shops.

First, the material resources used to create Al-Souq were the essential aid packets, distributed debit cards (known colloquially in Zaatari as "the visa"), electricity as well as caravans. In fact, results show that these resources worked as a counter-encampment response, as follows:

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7 This was identified through the performative analysis of the narratives.

8 A generic term for metal-roofed (or metal-walled) housing (Knudsen 2016, p. 443).

9 "Caravan" or "Karavana" is the term used in the camp to refer to prefabricated housing (prefabs). Unlike the common understanding of caravans, these structures are in fact immobile.

Aid: Counter dependence response

Initially refugees received aid either as packages of essential items for daily survival or through debit cards with limited funds that could only be used in the WFP supermarkets ("the mall"). It quickly became apparent that neither could meet the evolving needs of refugees. While essential aid packages can ensure survival when emergencies erupt, it is unsustainable to exclusively rely on these over longer periods of time. Refugees unanimously reported their aversion to continually eating the same pre-chosen meals. Similarly, the debit cards that could be used in "the mall" limited refugees' budget as well as choices.

Refugees commercialized their aid items through direct sale or by exchange with Jordanian workers in order to obtain essential products unavailable in Zaatari at the time such as fresh vegetables and fruit. As a result, the first shops to open in Al-Souq were small, makeshift *convenience stores (dokkanas)*, where refugees took charge of the basic items that constituted their everyday life, countering the *culture of dependence* that living on aid generates.

Electricity: Counter idleness response

At first there was no electricity in the camp. The original aim of connecting Zaatari to a power grid was to facilitate the work of the humanitarian agencies on-site. Nonetheless, it proved to be yet another crucial resource, informally supplying energy to refugees' shelters and, later, to shops. This was done by directly connecting electric cords to streetlights. In fact, at that time, "*bring your own cord*" was standard advice given to refugees about to move to Zaatari. This significantly altered the quality of refugees' lives and eventually led to the general supply of electricity to all camp residents.[10]

In addition to the problem of aid dependency, life without electricity in the newly established Zaatari camp entailed long periods of inactivity and waiting. The arrival of power countered this state of idleness, creating a demand for electrical devices and encouraging the establishment of shops in Al-Souq to meet this new demand. Makeshift *electric appliances* shops selling television and satellite dishes were the second in line to appear. Furthermore, other household devices could be sold (such as refrigerators, ovens or hairdryers), whose availability then paved the way for the establishment of spice merchants, bridal shops, bakeries and other shops.

Caravans: Counter displacement measure

Living in tents or zincos entailed certain levels of instability due to their fragile and mobile nature. Caravans, on the other hand, are stable and private structures that provide a form of longer-term housing. Supplied by donations

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10 The informal consumption of electricity left the UNHCR with a bill of $8.7 million, necessitating the regulation of electricity inside Zaatari (Lahn 2015).

only, the slowly rising number of prefabs in Zaatari gradually transformed the camp. This in turn made prefabs a precious resource for trading and renting; they were even burgled (see Ledwith 2014).

Another significant role played by prefabs was to provide a home-like structure that allowed refugees to administer their own space. Refugees modified the layout of their shelters, adding a second space, building a fountain or designed an exterior access to the toilet. The more the prefabs looked like homes, the higher the demand for materials necessary for this enterprise. This resulted in the emergence of makeshift *building supplies* shops (*mahalat sehhiya*), *fabric shops* to furnish the newly established homes and, finally, *shops selling domestic supplies (asrounyeh)*.

Once these material resources became available, Al-Souq offered a fertile ground for all sorts of businesses to grow. With these growing opportunities, refugees started drawing on their *immaterial resources* to start businesses. More specifically, interviewed shopkeepers specified that their previous skills or "schemas"[11] were factors influencing their actions in creating a shop (Sewell Jr 1992). The reasoning is easy to infer: The arrival phase in Zaatari was associated with various instabilities, which is why refugees built upon their trusted repertoire of previous skills in reconstructing their lives. Interviewed shopkeepers all listed their previously acquired skills (or those of a relative) as an essential motive behind their choice of business type.

5.2 Rules

In addition to resources, the structural dimension of spatiality is determined by rules. Of particular interest to our investigation of Zaatari are the formal (man-made) rules that govern the opening of shops or the nature of employment. These rules are merely regulatory (limited to the issuing of permits to allow products inside the camp) and were devised in a general spirit of facilitation. An in-camp and out-of-camp disparity stemming from this attitude has brought challenges to refugees who are non-camp dwellers searching for work outside Zaatari. In fact, there exist multiple narratives, included some refugees who have moved from urban settlements to Zaatari. Such reverse migration seems counterintuitive as the expected flow is in the opposite direction.

The possibilities of finding work in non-camp settlements are more complicated. Until the establishment of the Jordan Compact Plan in 2016, only 4,000 Syrian refugees working in Jordan had a work permit, a figure that has since grown to 40,000 (ILO 2017). However, this figure does not represent the <u>actual number o</u>f people in work. Evidently, many hurdles still exist for newly

11 In his discussion on duality, agency and transformation, Sewell Jr emphasizes mental structures, which he calls "schemas". Along with rules, he identifies these as functioning like prior scripts according to which an agent acts. As he puts it: "agents become agents because of these mental structures" (Sewell Jr, 1992, p. 12).

arrived Syrian refugees who wish to integrate themselves into the Jordanian workforce. These attempts are usually coupled with protests from pressure groups representing unemployed Jordanians.

Within Zaatari, employment is either self-created (refugee-owned shops) or offered by organizations working in the camp. According to multiple UNHCR factsheets (2015, 2016; 2015b, 2015a) around 60% of working-age refugees in Zaatari generate revenue. No official rules govern the establishment of a privately-owned shop in Zaatari; this also means that no work permits are required. While general guidelines do exist to regulate employment with the NGOs present in Zaatari, their sole purpose is to ensure equality of opportunity (UNHCR 2017). That is to say, none of the rules inside Zaatari concerned with securing a livelihood and work is related to permission for refugees to work. The fact that such permits are generally assumed eases the overall process of becoming independent and recovering agency.

One reasonable question to pose at this stage is why work-related rules are more flexible and productive within Zaatari than in the host community? To further illustrate my point, I return to Agamben's (1998) notion of exception. At the same time, I refer to a dissimilar exception, one that facilitates action as opposed to constraining it. More specifically, it appears that the exceptional history of the establishment and development of Zaatari as a city of refugees is responsible for the disparity highlighted above. The refugees in Zaatari built a city of their own; they constitute the local community as opposed to being the new arrivals amongst Jordanian workers outside. While following an overarching system of rules (regarding, for example, safety and good conduct), the camp functions as a separate entity with its own logic and its own specific rules solely concerned with refugees in Zaatari.

The emergence of some Zaatari-exclusive rules is highly distinctive. As mentioned above, work-related rules have proved beneficial to both refugees and the host country. Hence, they were selected for. It is important to point out that when speaking of exceptionality, I do not mean to establish a generalizable expectation regarding all camp-related matters. A case in point is the predominance of early marriages inside the camp. Thus I do not argue for the uncritical acceptance of Zaatarian rules as a whole, but wish to shed light on a facilitating factor that happens to be camp-exclusive in comparison with other non-camp refugee settlements.

6. The atmospheric quality of Zaatari

The above-mentioned disparity between out-of-camp and in-camp conditions can be extended to a discussion of the refugees' feeling in this spatial setting. In Zaatari camp, refugees expressed a sense of belonging to the place and the community as opposed to the intense feeling of exile experienced outside, where they constantly bear the stigma of being labelled a refugee.

Therefore, another example of Zaatari's exceptionality can be traced in the last dimension constituting space, namely atmospheres.

According to Löw (2008), atmospheres are instantiated through perception. Evidently, perception is not easily generalizable due to the significant individual variation. However, we can uncover shared ideas, behaviours and experiences of those living in the camp, which, in turn, influence the generated atmospheres. By investigating these atmospheres, it is possible to infer processes of inclusion and exclusion as well as what follows from the identification and dissociation with space (see Hasse 2014; Löw 2008; Schmitz 2012).

Which expressions of inclusion or exclusion did interviewed refugees have in common? To what can we attribute the development of these expressions, and how does this discussion inform us about refugees' identification and association with Zaatari? I will answer these questions by investigating a translated excerpt from an interview with a refugee:

"Personally, I am against migrating out [of Zaatari]. I had a chance to go to Canada, but I didn't go because we are very well-adjusted here. And I don't like to go out… outside the borders of the Zaatari camp. Here I do not feel like an exile! It's true that outside people are like "our brothers", but here I feel that I've become accustomed to things and have grown to know everybody. It is true that I left Syria, but my whole family is around me! All the people are around me. I know that their accent is Syrian, their traditions and customs [...] what is different for me here is only the weather."

Of course, it is unsurprising that an atmospheric quality of *home* would stem from residing in one place with people from your home country. While home for most refugees in the camp was originally the city of Daara (UNHCR 2017b), now it is Zaatari. The fact that refugees commonly defend the reputation of Zaatari indicates that they feel represented by the camp or belong to a Zaatari-specific identity. While dissociation is an expected outcome of displacement, it seems that the spatial transformation of the camp has been accompanied by a reworked sense of identification. Once more, Zaatari appears as an exception to other refugee settlements. Urban refugees generally face various risks associated with being a minority group in an homogenous host community. In Zaatari, on the other hand, refugees not only come from Syria, but the majority from the same directorate in south Syria. Interviewees expressed a shared sentiment in the form of a minimal sense of exile inside Zaatari. They share an accent, their physical roots, their history as well as a common status rather than being newcomers amongst a host community. In short, Zaatari's exceptionality has also resulted in a counter-displacement or counter-exile atmospheric quality of belonging.

7. On exceptionality

Two questions arise from the conceptualization of Zaatari as an exceptional space:

First, am I promoting some political consideration of an autonomous Zaatari? The short answer is no. However, the discussion of self-governance is appropriate here. Officially speaking, Zaatari is under the joint administration of the Jordanian Government and the UNHCR (2018b). Meanwhile, various Zaatari governance plans have emerged at different times. For example, the Syrian Refugee Camp Directorate, (SRCD) implemented one plan to improve the inadequate administrative structure existing soon after Zaatari's establishment (UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, 2014). While Ledwith (2014) also reported on a self-governance plan being developed by a Netherlands-based association of municipalities, to date there is no follow-up reports on the initiative's progress.

Exploring space and its production involves a discussion of refugees' rights to manage and govern these produced spaces. In a discussion of non-camp refugees, Sanyal (2017) makes a similar point about the need to research governance and how it transforms refugee spaces. One point of departure could be Bulley's (2014) model of "governing through community" and his proposal of an ontological shift, whereby the community leads behaviour and enhances both agency and meaning.

Martin (2015) explains how ensuring refugees' right to self-administer spaces is key to the development of camps. The residents of Zaatari are allowed to modify their spaces, albeit within certain limits, most significantly regarding a ban on the use of cement.[12] As explained by Abourahme (2015), cement is crucial in that it materializes permanence and signifies a sense of staying. It is also associated with normalcy, something that prefabs and tents do not do. The narrative of one refugee illustrates this by looking at things from the point of view of his two-year old son:

"I regret and feel sad when I think of my son Husam, who's a little older than two years. I think that this kid has seen prefabs and tents but never cement. What can he do? I often go online or show him on the television."

Second, am I promoting the isolation of refugees in a refugee-exclusive space by conceptualizing Zaatari as an exceptional space? This, too, is a hasty conclusion. Now six years old, the camp encompasses a growing generation of native Zaatarians and has seen the clear establishment of spaces and identities. In this case, dissolving the camp is no longer the humane alternative. Thus, what I am suggesting is an acknowledgement of Zaatari's existence

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12While interviewed refugees indicated their desire to build dwellings in cement, it remains prohibited inside the camp, with the exception of flooring or to construct urban furniture.

as well as the cooperation it represents with the host country, taking into consideration the benefits afforded by its exceptional position. In fact, it is already true that the camp does not exist in complete seclusion from its surroundings, and some collaboration is already in place. Even though Zaatari's geographical location poses a challenge to a scenario whereby it follows the Palestinian-camp model, i.e. merging with existing cities, it is already connected through trade to various cities in Jordan. Interviewed refugees listed Mafraq, Ramtha, Irbid and Amman as the source of their goods. The UNHCR factsheet (2017) confirms trade-based cooperation between Zaatari and the Jordanian community. Further, refugees commute in and out of the camp for education and healthcare purposes. In this sense, Zaatari can be thought of as a *gray space*[13] in which refugees are defying their initial confinement and employing the exceptional nature of their space to recover and reconstruct their lives.

8. Conclusion

In this paper I have investigated the process by which Al-Souq was established in Zaatari. Structuration proved a suitable lens to read the camp's produced spatiality. The main findings indicate a constructive exceptionality of the camp that not merely facilitates the creation of space but also guarantees a consequential inclusion. Furthermore, the very production of space indicates that refugees are active agents and creators as opposed to aid-dependent victims, the status commonly attached to them. Encampment is ipso facto associated with produced exclusion and dissociation as well as a general state of helplessness. All of these seem to be countered and reworked by the spatial transformation of the camp. As a result, by recognizing the urbanity and exceptionality of Zaatari, we can open the door to more context-appropriate measures for improvements to similar camps to better meet current needs and allow for more efficient progress.

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13 A term initially coined by Yiftachel (2009) to describe the bottom-up processes of spatial production in urban informalities.

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